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The New Normal

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The New Normal

Abstract

On September 19, 2013 an individual wielding a [military-grade assault rifle fired sixteen bullets into a Chicago park](#) harming thirteen individuals, among them a 3-year old named Deonta Howard who was shot in the cheek.

On September 16, 2013 a man by the name of Aaron Alexis opened fire on the cafeteria at the Navy Yard in Washington D.C. Thirteen people died, and eight others were injured.

On December 14, 2012 Adam Lanza shot twenty-six people—twenty of whom were children between the ages of 6 and 7—in Newtown, Connecticut. Barack Obama called it the “[worst day of \[his\] presidency.](#)”

On July 20, 2012, twelve people died and seventy others were injured at the hands of James Egan Holmes who entered a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado and proceeded to launch tear gas grenades and shoot from multiple firearms into the crowd. Investigators called it “[a scene straight out of a horror film.](#)” [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, school violence, gun control, gun violence, mass shooting

Disciplines

Community-Based Research | Criminology | Criminology and Criminal Justice | Defense and Security Studies | Educational Sociology | Education Policy | Second Amendment | Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

THE NEW NORMAL

September 23, 2013

On September 19, 2013 an individual wielding [a military-grade assault rifle fired sixteen bullets into a Chicago park](#) harming thirteen individuals, among them a 3-year old named Deonta Howard who was shot in the cheek.

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13. 8. 26. 12. 70. The numbers are starting to pile up.

And yet, as the mass shootings tick by, they're beginning to become just that: numbers. Somewhere along the way we've forgotten that these numbers are people dying at the hands of other people—other people wielding guns.

The Navy Yard shooting happened at 8:20 am, but I didn't even know it had happened until nearly nine hours later when I saw a passing comment on Facebook. I work at an elementary school. No announcement was made, and in the days to come no meetings were called. Security efforts remained the same. Because, in the words of our very own president, this was just [“yet another mass shooting.”](#) That's right, mass shootings have become commonplace enough that we can actually use “yet another” in reference to them. They happen so often that we don't count them anymore. This one was just “another.” Another tragedy that we as a nation will briefly mourn and then continue on with our lives.

The debate about gun control has remained hushed and almost non-existent in the news since the Navy Yard shooting, unlike the event at Sandy Hook which served to fuel the debate for months. In one of the more popular articles circulating about the Navy Yard shooting, statistics and data regarding previous mass shootings are



analyzed and predictions about the next one is provided. [As if mass shootings are simply necessary evils that we need to learn to live with](#). As if deaths of innocent people are natural, unpreventable events.

[In the eyes of policymakers and the American people, the gun control debate is over](#). Or at least, if the policymakers see value in stricter gun laws, they've certainly been swayed by the influence the NRA has on their political careers. Regardless of their reasoning, mass shootings continue to happen, and we are supposed to accept that as fact and continue on with our lives (or arm our workplaces and schools, depending on who you talk to). But this acceptance and ambivalence is pushing me in the opposite direction; the debate needs to be more alive right now than it ever has been. We can't let the perpetrators of mass shooting events win. It's time for debate. And it's time for action.

One of the more popular arguments used by pro-gun individuals is that no matter how strict we make gun laws, those who intend to do harm with guns will find a way to get them. Perhaps that is true. But, just because a terrorist organization will try to get its hands on chemical weapons, does that mean we should make them accessible? Just because a drug addict will do anything to feed his or her addiction, does that mean we should sell addictive pain medicine over the counter? Not every individual who owns a semi-automatic rifle intends to harm others, but is the chance that a few people might slip through the cracks really a risk we're willing to take? What if stricter gun laws and tighter restrictions had stopped just one of those shooters from getting their hands on the weapons that allowed for mass slaughter? Wouldn't those saved lives have been worth it to us?

The American public says "yes," but [the politics of money and power responded to that question with a resounding "no."](#)

Very few people engaged in the debate on gun control are arguing to do away with guns altogether. Although I grew up in a house with a gun, I've come to the conclusion that fighting guns with more guns isn't going to solve the problem. The solution to putting an end to school shootings is not arming teachers and putting more guns into the public, potentially making access to guns even easier. In the long term we need to address mental health in our country. The majority of the shooters have shown prior signs of mental illness, but our immediate problem is access. And the only viable solution is to limit that access.

The kinds of guns used in recent mass shootings were [various assault weapons including many firearms](#) with high capacity magazines. Of the 143 guns used in mass shootings over the last two decades, 48 of those weapons would be outlawed in the failed Assault Weapons Ban of 2013. Those are not all of the guns used in these shootings, but I ask you, are one third of those guns—and potentially one third of the deaths that have occurred at the hands of gun violence—worthwhile to us? Apparently it wasn't for our policymakers.

Maybe we can use Australia as a model as we go forward. [As a result of their strict gun control, deaths caused by gun violence have fallen by 50 percent](#). We could have done the same. Instead, since Australia enforced their gun laws [America has seen over 30 mass shootings](#). Last week after a gun rights group tried to [use the Starbucks store in Newtown as a gathering place for advocacy](#), CEO Howard Schultz took a stance, stating that guns are no longer welcome in his stores. Starbucks is known for its social consciousness and ability to shift culture. Perhaps its position can alter our thinking and be a step towards progress.

I'm repulsed by the notion that mass shootings and their victims are turning into predictable statistics.

I'm exhausted from the bombardment with interactive maps marked with little red dots that indicate the locations of [far too many mass shootings](#) around the world in the last twenty years.

I'm tired of reading headlines like, "Assault-style rifle used in Chicago attack that wounded 13" tucked back into the second and third pages of my morning newspaper.

I'm disturbed by the fact that we [mistake newspapers hitting the ground in Gettysburg for gunshots](#) because we now live in an age in which we are waiting to fall victim to the next inevitable tragedy.

I'm sick of the numbers. I'm sick of the death.

This can not be the new normal.

[I do care enough.](#)

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<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/09/23/the-new-normal/>