

The Columbine Legacy

Rampage Shootings as Political Acts

Ralph W. Larkin

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the City University of New York

The purpose of this article is to explore how the Columbine shootings on April 20, 1999, influenced subsequent school rampage shootings. First, school rampage shootings are defined to distinguish them from other forms of school violence. Second, post-Columbine shootings and thwarted shootings are examined to determine how they were influenced by Columbine. Unlike prior rampage shooters, Harris and Klebold committed their rampage shooting as an overtly political act in the name of oppressed students victimized by their peers. Numerous post-Columbine rampage shooters referred directly to Columbine as their inspiration; others attempted to supersede the Columbine shootings in body count. In the wake of Columbine, conspiracies to blow up schools and kill their inhabitants by outcast students were uncovered by authorities. School rampage shootings, most of which referred back to Columbine as their inspiration, expanded beyond North America to Europe, Australia, and Argentina; they increased on college campuses and spread to nonschool venues. The Columbine shootings redefined such acts not merely as revenge but as a means of protest of bullying, intimidation, social isolation, and public rituals of humiliation.

Keywords: *Columbine; rampage shootings; school violence; bullying*

In the 1980s and 1990s, Americans witnessed a new and disturbing social phenomenon: school rampage shootings executed by disturbed and alienated present or former male students who had decided to settle grudges against peers, teachers, or administrators with bullets and sometimes bombs. Such shootings seemed to culminate with the Columbine High School massacre on April 20, 1999, which had a toll of 15 dead and 23 wounded. Although school rampages have abated somewhat, numerous serious conspiracies have been uncovered. Rampage shooters have chosen other venues, such as shopping malls and churches. In addition, rampage shootings have spread from North America to the Western world and from secondary schools to university campuses. In this article, evidence will be presented on how the Columbine shootings have attained a mythical existence and have influenced subsequent rampages.

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Rampage Shootings

What is a school rampage shooting? Muschert (2007b) described rampage shootings as “expressive non-targeted attacks on a school institution” (p. 63). Newman (2004) defined rampage shootings as follows:

Rampage shootings are defined by the fact that they involve attacks on multiple parties, selected almost at random. The shooters may have a specific target to begin with, but they let loose with a fusillade that hits others, and it is not unusual for the perpetrator to be unaware of who has been shot until long after the fact. These explosions are attacks on whole institutions—schools, teenage pecking orders, or communities. (pp. 14-15)

To further specify a school rampage shooting, I offer the following defining qualities: (a) A student or a former student brings a gun to school with the intention of shooting somebody, (b) the gun is discharged and at least one person is injured, and (c) the shooter attempts to shoot more than one person, at least one of whom was not specifically targeted. These specifications are in consonance with those of Newman (2004). The advantage of operationalizing the definition of rampage shootings makes it easy to distinguish them from other forms of assaults on schools and allows for classification based on the specific behaviors of the shooters. Muschert (2007b) included faculty, administration, and staff in his definition; however, for the purposes of this article, school employees will be excluded to distinguish school shootings from workplace shootings.

The specification of at least one injury is to distinguish rampage shootings from incidences where a desperate student brings a gun to school and discharges it as an attention getting device. It also excludes specifically targeted shootings, such as those that occurred at Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn, New York, in 1991 and 1992, in which students in two separate incidences brought guns to school to settle a conflict they had with another student (Moore, Petrie, Braga, & McLaughlin, 2003). Also excluded are incidences such as the 1988 school shootings in Pinellas Park High School, Florida, and in 2005 at Campbell County High School in Jacksboro, Tennessee, in which boys brought guns to school to show them off to peers without the intention of shooting anybody. When confronted by school authorities, a weapon was discharged, killing an assistant principal and injuring others (Journey, 1989; Lampe, 2005). Also excluded from the analyses are all shootings related to gang violence and school invasions.

Research Methods

A database was built beginning with lists generated by academic researchers (Moore et al., 2003; Newman, 2004; Vossekuil, Reddy, Fein, Borum, & Modzeleski,

2000). In addition, lists generated by various media outlets (Bower, 2001; Dedman, 2000) and Internet sites of violent school incidents were examined.¹ All documented school violence incidents were examined to see if they fit the definition of a school rampage shooting specified above. Once identified as a potential rampage shooting, the Internet was searched for information, including, where available, archives of local and regional newspapers. Potential rampage shootings were entered into an Excel database. All cases in the database were verified through media reports. In some of the more celebrated cases, books had been written about the events, which were read. In most cases, several sources were available describing the assaults on the school. It must be noted that different researchers and reporters used a variety of criteria in defining a rampage shooting, resulting in somewhat different lists among researchers and reporters. Incidences were winnowed down to a list of 55 rampage shootings worldwide engaged in by 57 shooters (Jonesboro and Columbine each had two shooters). The list begins with Charles Whitman at the University of Texas in 1966 and ends with Pekka-Eric Auvinen in Finland in November 2007.

In addition, several researchers (Daniels et al., 2007; Newman, 2004; Trump, 2006) supplied lists of "near misses" and "thwarted attempts" post-Columbine. This researcher also compiled a list of media reports of uncovered plots. Criteria were established to identify serious attempts from those in which there was no evidence of serious intent by the perpetrators. The culling of these lists resulted in the sample described later.

Although in nearly all cases data were able to be triangulated from several sources, in many cases, subsequent reports were based on an original news report, such as an Associated Press dispatch. Therefore, in some cases, although there were several reports, the data source was singular. The validity of the listings is based on the establishment of an objective definition and applying criteria from that definition to all incidences. However, the data are limited by virtue of lack of corroborative data and the lack of verifiability of some Internet sources.

The Cultural Significance of Columbine

Of all the rampage shootings, Columbine stands out as a cultural watershed. First, it was the second-most-covered emergent news event in the decade of the 1990s (Muschert, 2002), outdone only by the O. J. Simpson car chase. Second, at the time, it was the deadliest school rampage shooting in history. Third, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris were themselves quite media savvy. Harris posted his writings on the Internet, developed "wads" (shooting environments) on the Internet for *Doom* video game players, and constructed the Trench Coat Mafia Web site. There he posted rants, essays, descriptions of vandalism that were perpetrated by him and several friends, hate lists, death threats, and other miscellaneous documents. He and Dylan recorded their lives

Table 1
Characteristics of Pre-Columbine and Post-Columbine Rampage Shootings

Characteristic	Pre-Columbine	Post-Columbine
Motivation	Personal revenge Unknown and unarticulated	Personal revenge Revenge in the name of a collectivity Notoriety Desire to make a statement Memorialize Columbine Surpass Columbine in body count
Media awareness	Several influenced by media	Use of media to gain attention
Thwarted attempts	Rare if any	Many
Student responses to threats	Code of silence	Willingness to report

on video. They taped themselves testing their weapons in the Colorado mountains and made a film in which they starred as professional hit men who were hired by a bullied student to kill his “jock” persecutors. They recorded the so-called basement tapes, in which they revealed the reasons for the shooting, said goodbye to their parents, and vented their theories of revolution. Fourth, the shootings changed behaviors of school officials, police departments, students, and would-be rampage shooters.²

In the months following the Columbine shootings, many suburban and rural middle and high schools hardened their environments, strengthened their security forces, installed metal detectors and surveillance cameras, and instituted “zero-tolerance” antiviolence policies (R. W. Larkin, 2007). The American Civil Liberties Union was swamped with cases in which students were suspended or expelled for expressing sympathies with the Columbine shooters, joking about the Columbine shootings, or venting disapproval of administration security policies. Schools and police departments—including Columbine High School and the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Department—increased cooperation and shared information about students who had confrontations with the law. Students who had heretofore ignored or disregarded threats of violence by their peers have become more willing to report them. This phenomenon has been called “the Columbine effect” by the media (Cloud, 1999). The Columbine rampage has become a cultural script for many subsequent rampage shooters. For some, it was a record to be exceeded (e.g., Port Huron, Michigan); for others, it was an incitement (e.g., Conyers, Georgia; Fort Gibson, Oklahoma); for others, it was emulated in their own rampages (e.g., DeAnza College; New Bedford High School; Red Lake, Minnesota); for still others, it was a tradition to be honored in their own attacks (e.g., Virginia Tech). Table 1 lists differences in rampage shootings prior to and following Columbine.

In the basement videotapes, Eric Harris opined that their actions would “kick-start a revolution” of oppressed students who had been victimized and bullied by their peers (Gibbs & Roche, 1999). Although they did not kick-start a revolution, Klebold and Harris established a new paradigm by which all subsequent rampage

shootings must be measured. As shown in Table 1, motivations have become more complex and influenced by Columbine; rampage shooters have attempted to influence the media rather than merely be influenced by them. A plethora of thwarted attempts were reported post-Columbine, whereas they were absent from the media before. Students have shown a greater willingness to report threats by their peers, leading to a greater number of thwarted attempts.

Pre-Columbine School Rampage Shootings

Columbine provided a vocabulary and the rationale for future rampage shootings. Prior to Columbine, even though revenge was the overwhelming rationale, perpetrators oftentimes were uncertain of their motivations or could not articulate them clearly. For example, Michael Carneal thought that shooting students in the prayer group at Heath High School would give him credibility among the Goth students (Newman, 2004). Because the Goths did not take him seriously, Carneal felt compelled to shoot students; otherwise, his fate would be sealed as a blowhard nerd who could not follow through on his threats. The motives of Kip Kinkel were never adequately ascertained (Lieberman, 2006). In 1998, he killed his parents in their Springfield, Oregon, home and the next day invaded the cafeteria of his high school, killed 4 students, and wounded 25 others. Kip was a member of the football team; other students identified him as a member of the leading crowd. Many students at Thurston High School feared him for his sharp tongue and his aggressiveness. The rampage in the cafeteria may have been part of a psychodrama generated by family conflicts. Both of his parents were teachers, and his father formerly taught at that school.

Pre-Columbine rampage shootings focused on perceived injustices, petty hatreds, perceived female rejections of male advances, misogyny, and revenge for bullying and public humiliation (Moore et al., 2003; Muschert, 2007b). Motivations were personal. The closest to a political rationale that pre-Columbine shooters articulated were the justifications of Luke Woodham and Marc Lépine. Woodham wrote a "manifesto," a five-page rant that described his feelings of alienation, isolation, and persecution and his experiences of ridicule and humiliation (Bellini, 2001). In it, he stated, "People like me are mistreated every day. I do this to show society 'push us, and we will push back'" (p. 127). Lépine shot women as revenge for the feminist movement (Sourour, 1991). These two cases are the only known attempts by rampage shooters to put their motives in a larger context. Neither of these legitimations generated much interest; in the case of Lépine, it was used as evidence of his insanity. Therefore, Columbine became the new paradigm.

Post-Columbine Rampage Shootings

Of the 12 documented school rampage shootings in the United States between Columbine in 1999 and the end of 2007, eight (66.7%) of the rampagers directly

referred to Columbine. Table 2 contains a listing of the post-Columbine rampage shootings in chronological order by the perpetrator's age, racial-ethnic background, location, school, number of victims killed and wounded, whether the perpetrator committed suicide, and how he was influenced by Columbine. All rampage shooters were male. Ages ranged from 13 (Seth Trickey) to 62 (Biswanath Halder), with a median of 17. Of note is that during the year and a half between January 2002 and June 2003, the 2 rampage shootings that occurred were on college campuses; all 3 post-Columbine college campus rampage shootings were conducted by minority students, whereas only 2 secondary school rampages were conducted by minority students (John Wiese, Native American, and Alvaro Castillo, Latino). Of the 9 secondary school rampage shootings between Columbine and the end of 2007, 7 (77.7%) showed Columbine influences.

Columbine influenced subsequent rampage shootings in several ways. First, it provided a paradigm about how to plan and execute a high-profile school rampage shooting that could be imitated. Second, it gave inspiration to subsequent rampage shooters to exact revenge for past wrongs, humiliations, and social isolation. Third, it generated a "record" of carnage that subsequent rampagers sought to exceed. Fourth, Harris and Klebold have attained mythical status in the pantheon of outcast student subcultures. They have been honored and emulated in subsequent rampage shootings and attempts. In all cases, perpetrators either admitted links with Columbine or police found evidence of Columbine influences.

Shootings are identified in the table as "imitated" when the perpetrators copied aspects of the Columbine shooting in their own attempts. Imitations were evident in the attacks in Conyers, Georgia; Fort Gibson, Oklahoma; East Greenwich, New York; Red Lake, Minnesota; Hillsborough, North Carolina; and Virginia Tech University. Perhaps the most imitative shooting was by Jeffrey Weise at Red Lake Senior High School in Minnesota. This particular rampage shooting had several copycat earmarks. First, under the names Todesengel and NativeNazi, he posted rants and expressed admiration of Adolf Hitler on neo-Nazi Internet sites (Benson, 2005). Hitler was lionized by Eric Harris on his Trench Coat Mafia Web site. Second, he wore a duster of similar style to those worn by Klebold and Harris (Wilogoren, 2005). Third, prior to shooting a fellow student, Weise asked him if he believed in God. This last act was a reference to one of the myths that emerged from the Columbine shootings that Cassie Bernall was asked whether she believed in God, to which she responded "yes" before she was shot. Although there was no evidence that this confrontation actually occurred, it became an article of faith within the evangelical community and was reported as fact nationwide for several months before it was debunked (Cullen, 1999b; Muschert, 2007a; Watson, 2002).

In numerous cases, students admitted studying or becoming obsessed with the Columbine shootings, which was identified as "study." The Conyers, Georgia, shooter was obsessed with Columbine and studied it prior to his rampage (Sack,

Table 2
Post-Columbine School Rampage Shootings, United States (N = 12)

Date	Name	Gender	Age	Race-Ethnicity	Location	School	Killed	Wounded	Suicide	Columbine Influenced
5/20/1999	T. J. Solomon	Male (M)	15	White	Conyers, GA	Heritage High School	0	6	No	Imitated
12/6/1999	Seth Trickey	M	13	White	Ft. Gibson, OK	Fort Gibson Middle School	0	4	No	Studied and Imitated
3/5/2001	Charles Andrew Williams	M	15	White	Santee, CA	Santana High School	2	13	No	Referenced
3/22/2001	Jason Hoffman	M	18	White	El Cajon, CA	Granite Hills High School	0	5	Yes	No evidence
1/16/2002	Peter Odighizuwa	M	46	Nigerian	Grundy, VA	Appalachian School of Law	3	3	No	No evidence
5/9/2003	Biswanath Halder	M	62	Indian	Cleveland, OH	Case Western Reserve University	1	1	No	No evidence
9/4/2004	Jon William Romano	M	16	White	East Greenbush, NY	Columbia High School	0	1	No	Imitated and referenced
3/21/2005	John Wiese	M	16	Native American	Red Lake, MN	Red Lake Senior High School	10	7	Yes	Studied and Imitated
3/14/2006	James Scott Newman	M	14	White	Reno, NV	Pine Middle School	0	2	No	Studied
8/30/2006	Alvaro Rafael Castillo	M	18	Hispanic	Hillsborough, NC	Orange High School	0	1	No	Studied, referenced, and imitated
4/16/2007	Cho Seung-Hui	M	23	Korean	Blacksburg, VA	Virginia Tech University	33	28	Yes	Imitated and referenced
10/10/2007	Asa Coon	M	14	White	Cleveland, OH	Success Academy	1	5	Yes	No evidence

1999). The shooters in Reno, Nevada, and Hillsborough, North Carolina, intensively studied the Columbine shootings during the weeks prior to their rampages (Blythe, 2004; Rocha, 2007).

Columbine was “referenced” when perpetrators identified the shootings as an inspiration; referred to Columbine before, during, or after the attack as a target to be exceeded; or described their own shooting as an homage to Columbine. References were found to the Columbine shootings in the shootings at Fort Gibson, Oklahoma; East Greenwich, New York; and Virginia Tech. In the weeks prior to the shooting in Santee, California, the shooter claimed that he was going to “pull a Columbine” on his school (McCarthy, 2001). The shooter in Hillsborough, North Carolina, sent an e-mail confession to the principle of Columbine High School prior to his rampage (Rocha, 2007). In his manifesto, the Virginia Tech shooter praised the Columbine killers as martyrs to the cause of the downtrodden (Kleinfield, 2007).

Emergent Phenomena

The significance of the Columbine shootings needs to be explained in light of three emergent phenomena: (a) the dramatic increase of rampage shootings internationally, (b) the expanding contexts of rampage shootings, and (a) the large number of foiled attempts. Rampage shootings since Columbine have gone international, with school shootings modeling Columbine in Canada, Sweden, Bosnia, Australia, Argentina, Germany, and Finland (Table 3). Prior to the Columbine shootings, the only other country to have experienced rampage shootings was Canada, with two in 1975, in Brampton and in Ottawa. In 1989, Mark Lépine targeted women in the École Polytechnic massacre in Montréal. He killed 14 women and wounded 27 before committing suicide.

Of the 11 rampage shootings outside the United States, 6 had direct references to Columbine. The shooting at W. R. Myers High School in Taber, Alberta, Canada, occurred 8 days after Columbine. The shooter, who had been fascinated by Columbine, carried a sawed-off .22-caliber rifle to school under a winter coat (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999). When he was asked by other students who were talking about Columbine if he had a gun under his coat, he pulled the rifle out and began shooting (Lampe, 2000). In 2002, Robert Steinhäuser attempted and achieved a death toll greater than Klebold and Harris in a rampage shooting in Erfurt, Germany, which would be his claim to fame (Gasser, Creutzfeldt, Naher, Rainer, & Wickler, 2004; Mendoza, 2002). Unlike Klebold and Harris, his major targets were teachers; he killed 13 in revenge for being expelled from the school. Sebastian Bosse, who bombed and shot up his school in Emsdetten, Germany, kept a diary in which he praised Eric Harris (“Gunman Praised,” 2006).

Table 3
Post-Columbine School Rampage Shootings, Outside United States (N = 11)

Date	Gender	Age	Race- Ethnicity	Location	School	Killed	Wounded	Suicide	Columbine Influenced
4/28/1999	Male (M)	14	White	Taber, Alberta	W. R. Myers High School	1	1	No	Imitated
10/5/2001	M	19	White	Sundsvall, Sweden	Vaestermalms High School	1	1	No	
2/19/2002	M	22	White	Freising, Germany	Economics school	4	1	Yes	
4/26/2002	M	19	White	Erfurt, Germany	Johann Gutenberg High School	16	7	Yes	Imitated
4/29/2002	M		White	Vlasenica, Bosnia	Vlasenica High School	2	1	Yes	
10/21/2002	M	36	Chinese	Melbourne, Australia	Monash University	2	5	No	
7/2/2003	M	16	White	Coburg, Germany	Realschule II (High School)	1	1	Yes	
9/28/2004	M	16	Hispanic	Argentina	Islas Malvinas School	3	5	No	Imitated
10/13/2006	M	25	White	Montreal, Canada	Dawson College	2	19	Yes	Referenced
11/20/2006	M	18	White	Emsdetten, Germany	Geschwister Scholl School	1	8	Yes	Imitated and referenced
11/7/2007	M	18	White	Tuusula, Finland	Jokela High School	9	12	Yes	Imitated and referenced

In November 2007, Pekka Eric Auvinen killed 8 students and staff and wounded 12 at Jokela High School in Tuusula, Finland, before committing suicide. Auvinen was an outcast at his high school who was harassed and bullied by his peers (DeJong, 2007). He wore a T-shirt during his rampage that said “Humanity is Overrated,” mimicking Klebold and Harris’s wearing of T-shirts that sent messages. Klebold’s T-shirt stated, “Wrath,” and Harris’s said, “Natural Selection.” Auvinen, in imitation of Eric Harris, claimed that he was an advocate of natural selection and that he had the right to rid the world of unfit human beings. He also claimed that he was a revolutionary against enslaving, corrupt, and totalitarian regimes. Auvinen discussed the Columbine shootings on YouTube.com with Dylan Crossesey, who was arrested for planning a rampage shooting at Plymouth-Whitemarsh High School in the suburbs of Philadelphia (MacAskill, 2007).

Changing Contexts

The Columbine shootings changed the venue of rampage shootings. Rampage shooters beyond high school age attacked shopping malls in Tacoma, Omaha, and

Salt Lake City ("Omaha Gunman," 2007). The shooter in Tacoma claimed that he did not want to hurt anybody and that he was seeking media attention and wanted to be heard ("Ex-Girlfriend," 2005). Similarly, the shooter in the Westroads Mall in Omaha thought that his act would make him famous ("Omaha Gunman," 2007; "Westroads Mall Shooting," 2007). The shooting at Trolley Square in Salt Lake City had no visible relationship to Columbine.

In December 2007, Matthew Murray was rejected as a missionary from an evangelical organization known as Youth With a Mission. He shot and killed two persons at its headquarters in Arvada, Colorado; on the next day, he killed himself after a rampage attack on the New Life Church, an evangelical megachurch in Colorado Springs, where he killed two more (Meyer, Migoya, & Osher, 2007; "Killer's Rant," 2007). During his rampage, Murray posted a rant online under the heading "Christianity this is YOUR Columbine," in which he plagiarized Eric Harris's rants.

Failed Attempts

The problem with reported thwarted attempts is the ability to determine whether the plots were serious or they were student fantasies, police overreactions, or media hyperbole. Therefore, to be verified as a serious attempt, two criteria needed to be met: (a) Perpetrators had to have actually amassed weaponry, and (b) evidence of an attack plan had to have been uncovered. To illustrate the difficulties, Daniels et al. (2007) compiled a list of 30 thwarted rampage shootings between 2001 and 2004. Of those threats, only 2 met the criteria. Similarly, of the 12 "near misses" reported by Newman (2004) in the wake of Columbine, 6 met the criteria of a serious threat. For example, Newman listed a plot in Anaheim, California, that occurred on May 19, 1999, less than a month after Columbine. Police working on a student tip uncovered a cache of weapons and Nazi paraphernalia collected by two eighth graders (Gottlieb & Kandel, 1999). However, there was no evidence that they had planned a shooting. No charges were filed.

Although students have made thousands of threats, compiled hit lists, dreamed Columbine fantasies, and accumulated arsenals, they cannot be verified as rampage shooting attempts. This researcher has compiled 11 planned school rampage shootings that were thwarted in the days before they were to be executed. These 11 were selected because there was evidence indicating that the perpetrators actually planned to carry them out, despite the protestations of their defense attorneys. Verified attempts are listed in Table 4.

All 11 reported attempts had earmarks of the Columbine shootings. For example, the students at Hollins Woods Middle School not only imitated the Columbine shooters; they wanted to have a greater body count (Associated Press, 1999). The prospective shooter at De Anza College created a Web site memorial to Klebold and

Table 4
Post-Columbine Reported Thwarted School Shootings (*N* = 11)

Date	Number	Gender	Age	Location	School
5/13/1999	4	Male (M)	14	Port Huron, MI	Holland Woods Middle School
10/29/2000	5	M	14-16	Cleveland, OH	South High School
1/30/2001	1	M	19	Cupertino, CA	DeAnza College
2/6/2001	3	M	16-17	Hoyt, KS	Royal Valley High School
2/8/2001	3	M	14-15	Fort Collins, CO	Preston Junior High School
2/14/2001	1	M	18	Elmira, NY	Southside High School
11/24/2001	5	4 M, 1 female	15-17	New Bedford, MA	New Bedford High School
4/19/2004	1	M	17	Malcolm, NE	Malcolm High School
9/27/2004	1	M	18	Macomb, MI	Chippewa Valley High School
4/21/2006	5	M	16-18	Riverton, KS	Riverton High School
11/13/2007	1	M	14	Philadelphia, PA	Plymouth-Whitemarsh High School

Harris (Fayle, 2001; Gaura, Stannard, & Fin, 2001). One of the striking differences between reported thwarted attempts and actual shootings after Columbine is that all of the actual shootings were committed by individuals. Of the 11 reported thwarted shootings, only 4 were planned by individuals; the others were conspiracies that numbered between three and five students. As with actual shootings, perpetrators were overwhelmingly male, with the singular exception of a female in the conspiracy in New Bedford, Massachusetts (Butterfield & McFadden, 2001).

Reported thwarted attempts typically took their inspiration from Columbine. One or more students hatched a plan of attack on their school. In each case, with the possible exception of the De Anza College attempt, the motivation was to exact revenge against the jocks and/or “preps” that had bullied and humiliated them. In the case of Al DeGuzman at De Anza College, a 2-year institution in California’s Silicon Valley, his motivation was more complicated. It involved a generalized hatred toward peers because of his isolation and a desire to commit suicide by police fire (Gaura et al., 2001).

Potential rampagers would begin collecting a cache of weaponry that they would use in their attacks. In many cases, the weaponry clearly imitated that used by Klebold and Harris in Columbine (Smith, 2001). With the singular exception of the Port Huron, Michigan, attack, students had assembled large arsenals that included shotguns, semiautomatic weapons, bombs, and stores of ammunition. In the Port Huron case, students had stolen a single gun and were planning to use it to steal other weaponry (Bower, 2001).

The incidences at Port Huron, Michigan (Bower, 2001), and Hoyt, Kansas (Gale Group, 2001), were uncovered by anonymous tips from uninvolved students. More typical have been conspirators who have revealed themselves electronically. The

incident in Elmira, New York, was revealed when the perpetrator sent a suspicious text message to a female friend, who then alerted authorities. Others have revealed themselves on the Internet. Internet boasts thwarted the plans of the Riverton, Kansas, shooters (Kabel, 2006); the Chippewa Valley High School attempt (Kamarenko, 2004); and the Plymouth-Whitemarsh High School plans in the Philadelphia suburbs ("Police," 2007). The attempted shooting at Malcolm, Nebraska, was uncovered by school authorities (Agence France Presse, 2004). The New Bedford, Massachusetts, attempt was revealed by the female participant ("Girl Arraigned," 2001), who was afraid that her favorite teacher might be hurt.

Conclusion

Most rampage shootings are a form of retaliatory violence; they are revenge for perceived past wrongs. Columbine gave new meaning to school rampage shootings, especially to disaffected outcast students not only in America but throughout Western society. Rampage shootings were no longer the provenance of isolated, loner students who were psychologically deranged. Columbine raised rampage shootings in the public consciousness from mere revenge to a political act. Klebold and Harris were overtly political in their motivations to destroy their school (R. W. Larkin, 2007). In their own words, they wanted to "kick-start a revolution" among the dispossessed and despised students of the world (Gibbs & Roche, 1999). They understood that their pain and humiliation were shared by millions of others and conducted their assault in the name of a larger collectivity. Klebold and Harris identified the collectivity—outcast students—for which they were exacting revenge. That is what distinguishes Columbine from all previous rampage shootings.

The Columbine massacre, because of its spectacular and unprecedented nature, evoked a public awareness that included an address to the country by the president of the United States. It generated a national debate on numerous issues: school violence, gun control, bullying, child rearing, parental responsibility, school climates, video games, violent media, societal permissiveness, race, and religious values, to name the most obvious (Muschert, 2002). Muschert's (in press) data clearly show that the focus of media coverage of the Columbine shootings was on the *why* rather than the *what* of the shootings. The Columbine shootings opened a huge gap in the hegemonic ideology that major media attempted to fill. They violated assumptions about the peacefulness of suburban schools and communities. Earlier school shootings raised the issue; Columbine brought it to a head. Such planned violence was unheard of even in urban ghettos. The shootings also raised issues about the mental and moral state of the perpetrators. Prior to the shootings, they were average teenagers; afterward, they became evil, mentally unbalanced monsters; psychopaths; and instruments of the devil (Cullen, 2004).

The function of the news media was to “normalize” the Columbine shootings (Croteau & Hoynes, 2002). An event that was shocking, “senseless,” and seemingly incomprehensible to the public had to be explained. Within the evangelical community, the Columbine shootings exemplified their persecution and were defined as the intrusion of Satan into human affairs (Cullen, 1999a; Epperhart, 2002; R. W. Larkin, 2007; Porter, 1999). However, the rest of America had to be pacified. The problem was that the perpetrators appeared to be “normal.” Blame could not be attributed to broken families, because the Klebold and Harris families were intact and the parents were caring about their children. It could not be attributed to drugs because toxicology screenings on both boys came back negative. Therefore, the media focused on their prior brush with the criminal justice system and Eric Harris’s use of Luvox for depression, his declared hatred for other races and religious groups, and his admiration for Adolf Hitler. Harris was identified as the more culpable leader and Klebold as the desperate, socially isolated follower (Muschert, 2002). Contextual issues, such as bullying and the cult of the athlete, that pervaded Columbine High School were raised by some journalists (Adams & Russakoff, 1999) and dismissed by others (Cullen, 2004). Bullying and alienation were ignored by the evangelical community and relegated to secondary status by the corporate media, which adopted psychological pathology as the major explanation (Muschert, 2002).

After it was reported that Klebold and Harris had made the basement tapes to explain their motivations, the media clamored for a viewing. The sheriff of Jefferson County allowed major media journalists to view the tapes at a one-time-only presentation. A synopsis was then published in the December 20, 1999, issue of *Time* magazine (Gibbs & Roche, 1999). Consequently, the motivations and intentions of Klebold and Harris became subjects of intense debate on the Internet. Many of those who were blogging did not accept the corporate media’s definition of the situation. Neo-Nazi sites posited a Jewish conspiracy because of Klebold’s Jewish roots; however, many others spoke sympathetically of Harris and Klebold and viewed them as martyrs to the cause of outcast students who had been victimized by their higher status peers (D. G. Larkin, 2000). Students arrested in “Columbine-style” rampage shooting conspiracies began emulating the behavior of Klebold and Harris shortly after the publication of the *Time* article (“3 Charged,” 2001).

As an immediate consequence of the spectacular worldwide news coverage of the Columbine massacre, within days, students were phoning in bomb hoaxes to their schools, drawing up enemies lists, issuing death threats, and bringing guns to school to shoot their peers (“Summary,” 1999). Most of the thwarted rampages were conspiracies among a number of students who had grievances against the school. These grievances centered on bullying, harassment, and the usual predatory violence directed against outsider students. Prior to Columbine, there was no evidence of conspiracies to bomb and shoot up one’s school.

One of the cultural scripts that is a consequence of the Columbine shootings is that the shooters engage in their rampages to "make a statement." The body count, almost always innocent bystanders, exists primarily as a method of generating media attention. This was certainly the case in the most deadly rampage shootings of John Wiese at Red Lake and Cho Seung-Hui at Virginia Tech. It was also the case in 2007 with Robert Hawkins, who killed nine at the Westroads Mall in Omaha, Nebraska, and Matthew Murray, who attempted two rampage shootings on consecutive days in Colorado at Youth With a Mission and the New Life Church, both institutions of the evangelical community.

Killing for notoriety is the second outcome of the Columbine shootings. The media awareness of Klebold and Harris is discussed in detail elsewhere (R. W. Larkin, 2007). When a rampage shooting occurs in a community, it is overwhelmed by media (Lieberman, 2006; Muschert, 2002; Newman, 2004). The extent of media attention seems to be closely related to body count. The most spectacular shootings in Paducah, Jonesboro, Springfield, and Columbine and at Virginia Tech were characterized by media feeding frenzies in which news outlets oftentimes competed with police and emergency medical services for space and attention from victims. Local residents in Paducah and Jonesboro told stories of reporters who invaded their privacy, misrepresented themselves, and used various ruses to interview traumatized citizens (Newman, 2004). In the postmodern world, news has become entertainment. Tragedy has been converted to sensation and sensation is operationalized into viewership, Nielsen points, and market share, which is then materialized in advertising revenues. The communities in which rampage shootings occur are victimized twice: first by the shootings themselves and second by the media who rampage through their communities to get the story (Altheide, 2004). The sensationalism of a rampage shooting can provide headlines for 3 days of news cycles; Columbine was still headline news 3 weeks after the shootings, primarily because of copycat phenomena (Muschert, 2002).

Social structural and cultural characteristics that have led to rampage shootings, such as the toleration of predatory behaviors on the part of elite students, the lionization of winners and the punishment of losers, the male ethic of proving one's masculinity through violence, the easy availability of assault weapons to just about anyone, and the media fascination and exploitation of violence, go far beyond the communities that experienced rampage shootings. Rampage shootings can occur in almost any community. Violence down the social system, especially in America's high schools, is redefined as "fun" or "boys being boys" (Lefkowitz, 1997). Researchers have documented (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1996; Boulton & Hawker, 1997; Dukes & Stein, 2005; Kilpatrick et al., 2003) the deleterious consequences that the daily rituals of humiliation and bullying have on the victims. Klebold and Harris, in their spectacular assault on Columbine High School, gave

voice to outsiders, to loser students, to those left out of the mainstream, to the victims of jock and “prep” predation. Although there have been grassroots attempts to reduce violence in schools, since Columbine, the federal government has made assault weapons easier to obtain (Lawrence, 2004), and states have adopted more punitive juvenile justice sentencing guidelines (Mears, 2002). To a persecuted and angry student who wishes to attack his school and community, such social policies are an invitation and a dare. To such a student, payback consists of killing convenient targets, making a statement, and dying in a blaze of glory.

Notes

1. For more detailed information, the author can be contacted at rlarkin@cuny.jjay.edu.
2. Many of the facts reported on the Columbine shootings come from R. W. Larkin (2007).

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Ralph W. Larkin received his bachelor's degree at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in elementary education and taught elementary school for 5 years. He received a master's degree in educational psychology at California State University, Northridge, in 1966. In 1970, he was awarded his PhD in sociology of education from the University of California, Los Angeles. He is presently employed as an adjunct professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He is the author of three books: *Suburban Youth and Cultural Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 1979), *Beyond Revolution: A New Theory of Social Movements* (with Daniel Foss; Bergin & Garvey, 1986), and *Comprehending Columbine* (Temple University Press, 2007). He has also written on education, youth, sociology of religion, social movements, and rampage shootings.