

Gun Violence Created the United States

By [Mark Karlin](#)

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Featured image: The foundation of the United States is embedded in gun violence. (Photo: [Joe Loong](#))

It happens after every mass shooting. Corporate media outlets have a formula for coverage. They publish stories for a week or so ascertaining a “motive” for the shooter, talking about the details of high-tech — usually military-style firearms — used in the massacres and speculating on what gun control would have stopped the specific shooting of the moment. Of course, we can’t forget the pro forma, with rare exception, neighbor or relative who can attest that the shooter “was a wonderful guy and always helped when you needed him.”

According to [the Guardian](#), there have been 1,516 mass killing sprees in the US in the last 1,735 days. That’s a lot of fodder for the templated coverage of the mainstream media.

Generally, after a week or two, coverage fizzles out until the next mass shooting. Newspapers and other media generally accept the conventional wisdom that there is no one way the latest hideous outbreak of violence could have been prevented. Then, the business of protecting the manufacture and sales of any gun that the National Rifle Association (NRA) designates not only continues; it expands.

Right now, for instance, [there is a bill before Congress](#) that would allow the easy purchase of silencers without a special license. Yes, those are the mechanisms that muffle a gunshot so a person can be shot without making a loud noise. It was expected to pass Congress, but the GOP leadership [has now “shelved \[it\] indefinitely”](#) from consideration, fearing backlash after the Las Vegas massacre. However, it will be back, along with some other NRA wish list laws, when the Republican leadership believes massacres are crowded out by other news for a period, and they can slip it through.

The NRA must be held responsible for militarizing individual gun owners and creating the possibility for someone like the Las Vegas shooter, Stephen Paddock, to amass the arsenal found in his room. Paddock owned [over 40 high-tech](#) guns, many (23) of which he had with him at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino. He also had his sniper rifle equipped with a legal device, called a [“bumper,”](#) which effectively turned his firearm into an automatic weapon.

Demilitarizing the weapons that are for sale in this country would be a positive step. Yet beyond this, the frequent mainstream efforts to figure out what is behind the US’s gun massacre spree are highly flawed. This violence is often erroneously attributed to “mental illness,” exacerbating the stigmatization of people diagnosed with mental illness. Meanwhile, there is an overarching issue that is rarely raised in the media: the fact that gun violence is built into this country’s very foundation.

The United States is a country founded upon and sustained by gun violence. It was guns that were the primary weapon that nearly annihilated the Indigenous population of what is now the continental United States. It was guns that were used by Southern militias — slave patrols — that tracked down and terrorized fleeing slaves. Indeed, Thom Hartmann [made the argument](#) on Truthout that the Second Amendment was intended to help preserve slavery:

The real reason the Second Amendment was ratified, and why it says “State” instead of “Country” (the framers knew the difference — see the 10th Amendment), was to preserve the slave patrol militias in the southern states, which was necessary to get Virginia’s vote. Founders Patrick Henry, George Mason and James Madison were totally clear on that... and we all should be too.

In the beginning, there were the militias. In the South, they were also called the “slave patrols,” and they were regulated by the states.

The US army was primarily responsible for massacring Indigenous tribes and nations, and meanwhile, a group of Southern militias were armed to ensure slaves didn’t escape from their “owners.” This is a nation in which the lofty words of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution serve as a thin veneer covering a violent fury of conquest. This is the mirror held up to our history, which analyses of contemporary massacres and gun violence generally fail to see or acknowledge.

In Salon, journalist Chauncey DeVega [correctly identifies](#) gun massacres as “America’s white man problem.” He writes,

Whenever a white man commits an act of mass gun violence in America — politically motivated or otherwise — there is a cultural script that is closely followed by the mainstream news media, politicians and too many members of the public. This narrative is obvious and predictable. Alas, it provides some small measure of comfort to many, even if that familiarity is rooted in gross hypocrisy and flagrant contradictions.

Unlike the impulsiveness he has shown when Muslims are accused of committing a terrorist act, either in the United States or abroad, [Donald Trump will be reserved and careful in his statements](#). The American news media will respond by observing that Trump has now magically become “presidential,” as if his sins could be washed away by a chattering class desperate to make the abnormal into something palatable and routine.

The National Rifle Association and the Republican politicians whom they own will default to irrational talking points: “Now is not the time to politicize a tragedy” or “It’s too early to talk about gun laws.” Gun manufacturers will see their stocks rise in value. America’s addiction to guns will continue unabated even as it kills tens of thousands of people a year. Somehow the [gun fetishists like Bill O’Reilly](#) will mouth such absurdities as “guns are the price of freedom” without soiling themselves from uncontrollable laughter.

White male gun violence in the United States cannot be disentangled from the history of a nation that established “freedom” by using firearms to murder and control Indigenous peoples and slaves. Massacres are in this country’s DNA. Donald Trump, with his grievance politics and sanctioning of violence at his rallies, has freed up many white men to feel a

bolstered sense entitlement to their inner rage. With his scornful and incendiary comments, Trump has tapped into the vein of a long, deeply embedded violent tradition in US culture.

It would be wrong to say that none of the measures that aim to control gun manufacture and distribution would work. Some of them would, no doubt, be ameliorative (although we must be cautious, and ensure that these measures do not further criminalize and incarcerate marginalized people, particularly people of color). Nevertheless, until the US comes to terms with its historical embrace of state violence as the key to so-called "American exceptionalism," the horrifying nightmare of gun violence will continue in this country, as the result of white masculine rage and domination.

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