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Photo by Sailko

## Mentally Ill America

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Well, America has had one more senseless slaughter by gun. The Santa Barbara disaster will be discussed for a few weeks but, if the past is any guide, nothing significant will be changed in our gun-soaked society. As a result, I must agree with my Republican friends that gun violence is a mental illness issue.<sup>1</sup> There has been continuing debate about the intentions of those who wrote the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It states: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Was this intended to empower the states to have military forces available in case the Federal government became dictatorial, or was it intended to give all citizens a right, granted by that government, to keep and own guns? It's pretty clear that the citizen's rights meaning was the original intent of many drafters of the bill of rights, but that's now virtually beside the point in the face of the mental illness epidemic.

What *is* certain about the Second Amendment is that the "arms" the founders were talking about were primarily muskets, weighing around 7-10 pounds, with barrels about five feet long. Before firing the musket, a paper cartridge containing powder and a lead ball were taken from a cartridge box on the shooter's belt; the end of the cartridge was bitten off and a small amount of powder put in a little covered pan at the base of the barrel, below a spring-loaded "cock" topped by a flint held in a little vise. Then the rest of the powder was poured down the barrel and the paper and ball crammed in after it. The ball surrounded by paper was shoved home by a ramrod which then was replaced into sockets on the barrel. When the trigger was pulled, the flint was snapped against the plate cover, called the frizzen, exposing the pan and simultaneously generating sparks which ignited the powder in the pan. That flash traveled down a small hole at the base of the barrel, setting off the main charge of powder, which then propelled the ball out of the barrel. To load and fire one shot, accurate to about 25 yards, took

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.salon.com/2014/05/28/elliott\\_rodger\\_and\\_the\\_nra\\_myth\\_how\\_the\\_gun\\_lobby\\_scapegoats\\_mental\\_illness/](http://www.salon.com/2014/05/28/elliott_rodger_and_the_nra_myth_how_the_gun_lobby_scapegoats_mental_illness/)

a skilled shooter perhaps 30 seconds. And after a few shots the barrel got so fouled that it had to be cleaned. The whole process was in fact so slow that many considered the bayonet (which could be mounted on the end of the musket barrel) to be the primary weapon in combat.

One might guess that James Madison, George Mason, or their colleagues never even imagined that the right of Americans to “bear arms” would include a Glock 17 automatic pistol with a 33-round magazine – an easily concealed eight-inch-long weapon capable of killing 25 people or more in the time it takes to load a musket, with a killing range that exceeds a couple hundred yards. Or worse yet, a Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifle, capable of full-automatic fire, accurate to 300 yards with a 75- or 100-round drum magazine.

A person with severe schizophrenia might think she heard voices telling her that the authors of the second amendment would have given citizens the “right” to possess and use such weapons for self-defense in a crowded city. But, of course, today only crazy people, criminals, or law-enforcement officers would carry such a weapon for protection, and then justify doing so because of the access of the mentally ill to powerful infantry weapons that “outgun” the six-shot .38 revolvers traditionally carried by police.

But crazies are ubiquitous at all levels in our society. In Texas the governor, Rick Perry, is a caricature of a Texan who claims he carries a pistol when jogging to “defend himself against snakes.”<sup>2</sup> (Having worked with snakes extensively and encountered them around the world, I can testify there is almost no conceivable circumstance in which a gun would help “protect” you from a snake). In Perry’s state there is an “open carry” law that allows thugs to carry automatic weapons and intimidate people.<sup>3</sup> In Georgia, incompetent (and likely corrupt) Governor Nathan Deal signed a law that allows people to carry guns in security lines at America’s busiest airport.<sup>4</sup>

Mental illness in the U.S. is not restricted to officials in backward states. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia thought the court should examine the issue of whether the constitution protected everyone’s right to have shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles – since one could “bear” such a weapon.<sup>5</sup> The disturbed leaders of the National Rifle Association, the lobby for Murder Incorporated (also called the “arms industry”),<sup>6</sup> even opposed a ban on “cop-killer” bullets and automatic weapons. And NRA lobbying has been extremely effective in the United States Congress, which famously features “the best politicians money can buy.” Consider a nation that, on the basis of one failed “shoe-bomber” attempt, makes millions of airline passengers remove their footwear, but refuses to do anything significant about tens of thousands of annual gun deaths caused by an industry run by ethically-deficient individuals that

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/texas-gov-rick-perry-honored-new-coyote-special-pistol-gunning-wily-critter-article-1.446603>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/05/30/1303128/-Open-Carry-Texas-harasses-threatens-former-Marine-for-speaking-against-them?detail=email>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/23/us/georgia-governor-signs-gun-bill/>

<sup>5</sup><http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2012/07/29/602491/scalia-rocket-launcher/>

<sup>6</sup>[http://www.saneguns.org/gunlobby/nra\\_cops.html](http://www.saneguns.org/gunlobby/nra_cops.html)

have helped saturate the world with close to a billion small arms, and with almost one per person in the United States.

Of course the lack of gun control is only one area that illuminates our society's mental health problems. Other examples abound. Sarah Palin actually was nominated for a position that would have put her within the famous "heartbeat of the presidency." Rupert Murdoch's presstitutes struggle, using outlets like the *Wall Street Journal* and *False News Network*, to confuse people about the lethal threat of climate disruption that Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe still claims is a hoax. Most congress people still support fighting wars to control fossil oil and gas supplies, even though continued burning of fossil fuels might well bring down civilization. Neocons and other hawks justify the United States (and Russia) maintaining thousands of useless nuclear weapons at the ready, most of them far more powerful than the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>7</sup> Such "leaders" cannot see what is apparent to normal people –that their actions are severely threatening to society, their friends and descendants, and even themselves. One technical term for their mental deficiency is anosognosia<sup>8</sup>. Other terms for the mental defects that plague our nation are "greed," "cowardice," "ignorance," and "stupidity."

There are, after all, individuals so mentally confused as to believe that the American economy can grow forever, just as can America's (or the world's) population. Almost half of Americans haven't grasped that human beings evolved in Africa from other animals and that if they could meet their own ancestors of ten million years ago they would doubtless describe them as "monkeys." And society as a whole sees nothing wrong with the whole range of mental impairment. No sign, for instance, of an attempt to transition to an evidence-based world. The hallucinatory world invented by the Murdochians and the Limboids seems just fine to many, if not most, people. So I must agree with those who claim that the reason the United States differs from Canada, Australia, Western Europe, and Japan, by having roughly three times the gun violence per capita, is simply that we have proportionately many more crazy people.<sup>9</sup> The endarkenment is upon us.

*MAHB-UTS Blogs are a joint venture between the University of Technology Sydney and the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to joan@mahbonline.org*

MAHB Blog: <http://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/mentally-ill-america/>

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<sup>7</sup> E.g., <http://thebulletin.org/would-united-states-ever-actually-use-nuclear-weapons>

<sup>8</sup> Roughly recognizing that your brain doesn't function correctly.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., <http://cnsnews.com/mrctv-blog/matt-vespa/data-suggest-gun-violence-epidemic-actually-mental-illness-source-shootings>; <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/09/mental-illness-gun-violence-poll-97107.html>