

COMMEMORATION, MEMORIALIZATION, AND MASS SCHOOL SHOOTINGS:
AN ANALYSIS OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY
AND POWER STRUCTURES

By

Crystal LaCount, B.A.

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Committee Members:

Nancy Berlage, Chair

Angela Murphy

Dan Utley

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DEDICATION

To all my former students who feared for their lives on a daily basis in class, and to every victim and survivor of gun violence. Together we can and will end it— The young people will win.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Gun violence is on the rise in America. As many as 39,773 Americans lose their lives to gun violence annually according to a study recently published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.¹ In 2019, a total of 418 mass shootings occurred in America. Of those, twenty-nine occurred in Texas. As past mass shootings demonstrate, no location is off limits. Places of worship, schools, workplaces, movie theaters, retail stores, homes, and even streets have all been locations of mass shootings in Texas alone. In fact, some of the deadliest mass shootings in America have occurred on Texas soil. Although it is apparent that the problem of mass shootings reaches far beyond schools, I have chosen to focus solely on mass school shootings for the purpose of my research.

This thesis examines the commemoration processes of the 1966 University of Texas (UT) Tower and 1999 Columbine High School (Colorado) mass school shootings in order to show stakeholders' ability to create false historical narratives and embed them into society's collective memory. This, paired with each shooting's larger historical context, shaped how society talked about and remembered each tragedy. The creation of such false narratives also affected how government officials chose to respond in the aftermath of these mass school shootings. Public policy debate and legislation stemmed from issues publicized by the media. As a result, society's collective memory of the mass school shootings became centered on all aspects of the perpetrators, leaving survivors and victims out of the narrative. Through the analysis of the UT Tower and Columbine mass

¹ "Underlying Cause of Death, 1999-2017," CDC Wonder Online Database (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 10, 2018), accessed February 1, 2020, <https://wonder.cdc.gov/controller/saved/D76/D48F344>. Gun violence, for the purpose of this paper, is defined as death by firearm.

school shootings' commemoration and memorialization processes, I display how the involvement of survivors and victim's family members in these processes act as a way to reframe society's collective memory of these mass school shootings while allowing them an opportunity to openly heal and turn their grief into action. By analyzing two specific mass school shootings' commemoration and memorialization processes, my objective is to fill in the gaps that currently exist in our understanding of memory, memorialization, and mass school shootings. In doing so, I contend that society can begin working toward taking control back from stakeholders and begin crafting more wholistic and humanized historical narratives that evoke substantial change.

In focusing on memory construction, rather than on "what happened," my thesis decenters the previous scholarship that tended to feature the perpetrators. For decades, the scholarly and journalistic discussion of these two mass school shootings has focused on the shooters for a variety of reasons. Some scholars have sought to better understand why the perpetrators decided to commit such tragic acts and thus, unwittingly, they made them central to historical remembrance. Others immortalized them by mythologizing their identities. In order to shift society's focus away from the shooters and onto the survivors and victims of these mass school shootings, this thesis utilizes the No Notoriety approach.² This means that the shooters are not named and their images are not shown throughout these chapters.³ Should readers be interested in learning more about the shooters, there is an abundant amount of information available through a variety of sources to explore independently. Instead, I will refer to them as the shooter, shooters,

² For more information about the No Notoriety approach, visit www.nonotoriety.com.

³ An exception is made when directly quoting newspaper and media headlines. Shooters' names are also visible in footnotes and the bibliography.

he/him/his, or they/them. For the Columbine chapter, I will refer to the shooters as Shooter K and Shooter H (the first letter of their last name) in order to differentiate between the two when speaking about them individually. Although this is a nontraditional approach when discussing mass school shootings, I believe it is necessary in order to begin reshaping their historical narratives to where they need to be, with focus on the victims and survivors.

Background

Historians have written little on the long history of mass school shootings in America, even though such events have been occurring since the nineteenth century. The topic was rarely discussed prior to the twenty-first century. In part, this is a result of the increasing professionalization of history during the early decades of the twentieth century. The creation of the university-based historian paved the way for many who worked in isolated institutions to remain academically and culturally conservative. According to historian James M. Banner, Jr., “Academic history gained the upper hand, if not among the public, then within the intellectual circles that would from that time forward largely determine the direction and nature of historical research and thought.”⁴ The establishment of history as a profession resulted in academic historians remaining stuck in a nineteenth century understanding of America’s historical past in the universe of discourse of understanding.⁵ Historical works of the time focused on the nation-state and its political and social institutions, policies, and practices, as well as intellectual history, which centered on the study of formal ideas. Moreover, the definition of the historian that

⁴ James M. Banner Jr., *Being a Historian: An Introduction to the Professional World of History* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 11.

⁵ Banner, 21.

emerged from the formative years of professional growth was one which stressed objectivity, research, the increase of particular types of knowledge, and employment within an academic setting.⁶ Academic historians remained isolated within their own educational institutions, usually only writing for one another and excluding the general public and independent historians alike. Moreover, the professionalization of history and monopolization of the subject within academia resulted in a precedent being set in terms of how history should be studied and written. Acceptable topics did not include issues of violence, nor issues of gun violence, such as mass school shootings. Hence, these issues fell to the wayside when recounting America's violent past in academic history, leaving violence to be discussed by fields outside of academia.

American violence began to be researched by government entities during the turbulent 1960s when unprecedented violence erupted. At the same time, the rise of social history became apparent amongst academic scholars, drawing focus toward issues involving the cultural revolution that was occurring. This form of history, one that involves multiple disciplinary perspectives, embraced the social sciences as a way to make sense of the past. However, issues related to violence received little to no attention from historians. Hence, mass school shootings remained uncharted territory until war, assassination of political figures, mass protests, mass shootings, riots, and racist hate crimes started occurring at high rates during the 1960s. In response, government officials began to fill in the gaps that existed in academia and publish works on American violence as a reflection of this turbulence.

⁶ Patricia Mooney-Melvin, "Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition," in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, ed. James B. Gardener and Peter LaPaglia (Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 2006), 8.

For example, President Lyndon B. Johnson created the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in 1968 via Executive Order 11412. The commission was directed to go as far as “man’s knowledge” could take it in searching for the causes of violence and the means of prevention.⁷ The commission enlisted academics from various disciplines including anthropology, industrial relations, law, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, history, and political science to conduct research on the long history of American violence. This task was more challenging than originally perceived due to the lack of existing scholarly work on the long history of violence in America. The commission’s executive director, Lloyd N. Cutler, expressed concern about the report’s final findings.

The task was much bigger than anyone had imagined. Man’s knowledge in this area had not gone very far. The commission could find no significant work on violence in America, much less any that would relate it to that in other countries. The scholars simply had not organized their work in that manner.⁸

Aside from the lack of scholarly information on American violence, the commission was also only allotted one year under Johnson’s executive order to complete its final report. In an attempt to fill in the gaps of American violence, the scholars secured to conduct the research on behalf of the commission focused on matters of frontier tradition, the labor movement, proliferation of vigilante organizations, the West, the South, and fragmented cultures that flourished in American literature.⁹ Several scholars who conducted research for the commission’s final report expressed feeling like their respective chapters were incomplete and tentative, but hoped that the finished product would spark more research

⁷ Graham and Gurr, xv.

⁸ Graham and Gurr, xv.

⁹ Ibid, xvii.

in such areas.

The commission's finished product, titled *The History of Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, consists of more than 800 pages of newly addressed data. Categorizing American violence into two forms, the report considered criminal violence, feuds, lynching, prejudice, urban riots, freelance multiple murder, and assassination to be negative violence. War and vigilante violence were considered positive forms of violence as they established order and stability on the frontier.¹⁰ The report's focus on school violence, or even guns, was minimal. It briefly focused on mass school shootings, but the report started with the UT Tower shooting of 1966. In doing so, it erased earlier mass school shootings experienced in America and skewed people's collective memory of the long history of violence in America in terms of mass school shootings. Earlier instances of such shootings date back to the late nineteenth century. For example, in Liberty, Mississippi on March 30, 1891, a gunman opened fire using a double-barreled shotgun into the audience at a school concert at the Pearson Hill schoolhouse. Fourteen people were wounded.¹¹ Following this incident, on March 26, 1893, four students were shot and killed at a Plain Dealing High School dance in Louisiana.¹² Another nineteenth-century shooting occurred on December 13, 1898 in Charleston, West Virginia at a school exhibition near Pocahontas County. Six people were shot and killed, while several others were wounded, when a group of young men attempted to break up a student performance resulting in, "one of the most terrible tragedies in the

¹⁰ Ibid, 46.

¹¹ Maria Esther Hammack, "A Brief History of Mass Shootings," Behind the Tower, 2016, <http://behindthetower.org/a-brief-history-of-mass-shootings>.

¹² "Shooting at a Negro Dance" *Los Angeles Herald*, March 27, 1893, Vol. XXXIX, No. 167, accessed November 16, 2019, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH18930327.2.4&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>.

county” according to one historical account of mass shootings.¹³ Hence, the report’s exclusion of late nineteenth-century mass school shootings in its research created a false narrative of the UT Tower shooting as “the first” school shooting. It also set a precedent for future academics, who followed suit and used the UT Tower shooting as the first instance when discussing the long history of mass school shootings.

Despite the gaps, the report sparked interest in the study of American violence amongst some historians during the late twentieth-century. An example is Richard Maxwell Brown’s *American Violence*, published during the 1970s, which traces violence back to the seventeenth century. But Brown only discusses violence in terms of wars, riots, slave uprisings, urban violence, and lynching. The discussion of violence during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is similarly limited. When discussing American violence in the twentieth century, Brown adds assassination, police brutality, and organized crime to his research. Yet, mass school shootings are not discussed as an independent matter of American violence. Brown briefly refers to the UT Tower shooting when discussing American’s shock resulting from a succession of mass murders during the late 1960s.¹⁴ However, he does not discuss them at length in their own section as he does other matters of violence. Moreover, in failing to discuss any prior mass school shootings, Brown’s work echoes the 1969 report’s claim that they began in 1966.

Other scholars writing around the same time period tended to address violence similarly to Brown. While historians Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace at least discussed mass murder in their research on American violence, they defined it in a

¹³ “Virginia Hoodlums” *Los Angeles Harold*, December 13, 1898, Vol. 26, No. 74, accessed November 16, 2019, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=LAH18981213.2.55&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>.

¹⁴ Richard Maxwell Brown, ed. *American Violence* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), 99.

limited way, pointing to rioting, genocide, and war. In *American Violence: A Documentary History*, Hofstadter and Wallace analyze four centuries of American violence through more than one hundred eyewitness accounts and commentary reports.¹⁵ Using a bottom-up approach, they provided the reader with firsthand accounts of well-known riots such as the 1863 Civil War draft riot in New York. Although their documentary approach adds new perspectives to Brown's claim that mass murder is not a new trend in America, Hofstadter and Wallace failed to mention mass school shootings as a form of mass murder in terms of American violence. Thus, even though historians began to expand their research on the long history of American violence during the 1970s, major gaps still existed in terms of mass school shootings.

In addition to blind spots in disciplinary approaches, the 1970s unemployment crisis also impacted historians' ability to thoroughly research American violence. It resulted in a whole generation of young historians being removed from the field due to lack of job opportunities. Already established historians began adopting social science methodology popular during the late twentieth century and produced only a handful of works in terms of American violence. A majority of focus was placed on topics in race, women's, social, and working-class histories. As a result, the history of violence in terms of mass school shootings remained stagnant and subjected to other disciplines' interpretations. For example, prominent criminology professor Gary Kleck, began researching American gun violence in general during the late twentieth-century. Raising awareness on the rising number of deaths by firearms, as well as firearm policies and public opinions on gun violence, Kleck's work expanded the research on American gun

¹⁵ Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace, *American Violence: A Documentary History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

violence. However, major gaps still existed in terms of understanding guns in American schools. As historians continued to ignore the topic up to the twenty-first century, other sociology, psychology, and media scholars began researching mass school shootings in America as an individual topic.¹⁶ Reflecting their disciplinary concerns, much of their focus has been on trying to understand why mass murderers kill, youth culture, and how the media's reporting affects society. Still, in using scientific and journalistic lenses, these scholars have failed to analyze many other aspects of mass school shootings such as their commemoration processes. Historians likewise have failed to publish in-depth research on mass school shootings that focused on memory or commemoration. Instead, they have placed their focus on researching the long history of American gun culture.¹⁷

Memory scholars have similarly ignored writing about mass school shootings and their commemoration processes prior to the twenty-first century. When discussing the commemoration processes of violence, memory scholars have chosen to research issues of war, race, and religious genocide.¹⁸ To illustrate, renowned memory scholar Edward Linenthal has written extensively on the commemoration processes of extremely violent events, including the Holocaust, Oklahoma City bombings, World War II, and the

¹⁶ Sources on mass school shootings in America from disciplines beyond history: Ralph W. Larkin, *Comprehending Columbine* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), Michael McCluskey, *News Framing of School Shootings* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), Benjamin Radford, *Media Mythmakers: How Journalists, Activists, and Advertisers Mislead Us* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003).

¹⁷ Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), Pamela Haag, *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

¹⁸ For representative works relating to public memory, see Mark Roseman, "Surviving Memory: Truth and Inaccuracy in Holocaust Testimony," in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Summer 1999), 1-20, Kurt G. Piehler, "The War Dead and the Gold Star: American Commemoration of the First World War," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, edited by John R. Gillis, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 168-85, Janet Jacobs, *Memorializing the Holocaust: Gender, Genocide, and Collective Memory* (New York: L.B. Taurus, 2010), and Lynnell L. Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory* (Durham: Duke UP, 2014).

Vietnam War, yet has failed to discuss mass school shootings.¹⁹ Those who have chosen to discuss memorials and commemoration processes of mass school shooting sites have focused on only certain types of memorials, leaving others out of their research. For example, the prominent memorial scholar Erika Doss argues in *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* that temporary memorials centered around therapeutic and emotional aims prevent the public from recognizing causes and determining preventative measures.²⁰ Moreover, she argues that temporary memorials centered on grief encourage individuals to be frozen in emotional catharsis and disengaged from the social and political initiatives that might check such violence.²¹ This thesis pushes past Doss' claim by analyzing how temporary memorials affect the ways in which government officials respond in the aftermath of mass school shootings. Memorials also act as gateways into the larger historical contexts of time and place. Moreover, memorials provide insight into what narratives dominate society's collective memory of tragic events. I also consider the benefits of creating memorials via communal efforts of shared authority between stakeholders and survivors.

Historians still rarely research mass school shootings. Instead, academics from other disciplines such as sociology, journalism, psychology, media, and criminal justice have taken the lead in analyzing modern-day mass school shootings through their

¹⁹ See Edward Linenthal. *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Penguin Group, 1995), *History Wars: The Enola Gay and other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1996), and *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁰ Erika Doss *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*. Chicago (The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 81.

²¹ *Ibid*, 115.

respective disciplinary lenses.²² The long history of mass school shootings in America has yet to be told from a historical perspective. The failure of historians and other memory scholars to research mass school shootings as a form of American violence that dates back to the nineteenth century has allowed the media and government officials to take historical representations and commemorations of the issue into their own hands. As a result, a false narrative claiming that the UT Tower shooting was the first mass school shooting in America arose and continues to dominate. Hence, society's collective and individual memories of mass school shootings have become inaccurate and, in some cases, forgotten. This thesis attempts to fill in some of the gaps that exist in research on the long history of mass school shootings, memory, and commemoration. By doing so, I hope to reframe society's collective and individual memories of mass school shootings to reflect a more accurate and inclusive history. This way, Americans will be able to look past controversies surrounding mass school shootings, acknowledge their long history, and realize the importance of commemorating the people and places affected in ways that reflect history accurately, and perhaps prompt a more sophisticated understanding of the historical contexts of gun violence in schools.

Methods of Research

This research utilizes oral history interviews to provide first-person accounts of the two mass school shootings analyzed. They shed light on individuals' vernacular and

²² Examples of works on mass school shootings done by academics outside of history: Jaclyn Schildkraut and Glenn W. Muschert, *Columbine 20 Years Later: Lessons from Tragedy* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2019), Dave Cullen, *Columbine* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2009), Glenn W. Muschert and Johanna Sumiala, *School Shootings: Mediatized Violence in a Global Age* (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2012), and Katherine S. Newman, Cybelle Fox, and Dave Harding, *Rampage: The Social Roots of School Shootings* (New York: Basis Books, 2004), and R. Murray Thomas, *Violence in Schools: Understanding, Prevention, and Response* (Westport: Praeger, 2006).

generational memories in relation to society's collective understanding of mass school shootings in America. Research on both mass school shootings' commemoration processes and memorials is vital to my analysis. They influence the construction of historical narratives, such as the dominant, but false, narrative portraying the UT Tower shooting as "the first" mass school shooting. Other primary sources like newspaper articles, live media coverage, police reports, and government documents provide a clear view of the larger historical context around each of the two mass school shootings analyzed. Data and statistics collected by various government and non-profit groups also play a vital role in painting a clearer picture of gun violence, specifically mass school shootings, in America's past and present times. Secondary sources are key for discussing the history of violence and memory in America. They allowed me to find gaps in academic research on the long history of mass school shootings and their commemoration processes.

Definition of Key Terms

In order for readers to have a clear understanding of how I am using various terms and concepts in the following chapters, I have provided a list of key terms and their definitions.

Mass shooting: I define a mass shooting as four or more victims killed or injured by gun violence in a single time frame, with no cooling down period, not including the shooter. Although several definitions of mass shooting exist that choose to ignore non-fatal injuries, I have chosen to include both deaths and injuries to better display the magnitude of the issue.²³

²³ "Mass Shootings in 2019," Gun Violence Archive, accessed November 16, 2019, <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/content/mass-shooting-methodology-and-reasoning>.

Mass school shooting: An incident with death or injury of four or more people that occurs on school property when students, faculty, and/or staff are on the premises.²⁴

Gun violence: The term gun violence describes the results of all incidents of death, injury, or threat with firearms. Violence is defined without intent or consequence as a consideration. Moreover, a shooting of a victim by a subject/suspect is considered gun violence as is a defensive use or an officer involved shooting.²⁵

Collective memory: A social construction wherein significance lies in the ways in which memory functions as a source for shaping national and group identity. Historical, false, and dominant narratives are forms of collective memory. For more info on the history of collective memory, I recommend: <https://memorialworlds.com/what-is-collective-memory/>. In addition, my use of collective memory is heavily influenced by the work of Maurice Halbwachs, who is considered by many to be a leading thinker on the concept of collective memory and one of the first to discuss it.²⁶

Individual memory: Memory constructed by an individual within the framework of his/her own personality and experiences. Individual memory can momentarily merge with collective memory based on the fact that an individual must reference society's larger historical context in order to function.²⁷

Generational memory: This form of memory refers to a collective understanding and acknowledgment of an event among a generational group (i.e., Baby Boomers, Millennials, Gen Z, etc.). It is created based on individuals' time and place in society's

²⁴ "General Methodology," Gun Violence Archive, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/methodology>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Janet Jacobs, *Memorializing the Holocaust: Gender, Genocide, and Collective Memory* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2019), xviii.

²⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (United Kingdom: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 51.

larger historical context.

Prosthetic memory: Emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past at an experiential site such as a movie theatre or museum. Individuals take on a personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. This form of individual memory has the ability to shape a person's subjectivity and politics.²⁸ It can also provide insight on the larger historical context of society's time and place.

Vernacular memory: Originates from people's lived experiences and are used to explain those events to others.²⁹

Mass media: The main means of mass communication via broadcasting, publishing, and the Internet regarded collectively.³⁰

Entertainment industry: Mass media companies that control the distribution and manufacture of mass media entertainment such as theatre, film, music, literary publishing, television, and radio.³¹

Memorial: A permanent monument or structure created to remind people of a person or event.³²

²⁸ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2. For more information on how a person's individual memory can provide insight into the larger historical context of society's time and place, see Lindsay Dodd, "Small Fish, Big Pond: Using a single Oral History Narrative to Reveal Broader Social Change." In *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as a Source and Subject*, edited by Joan Tumblety, ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 34-49.

²⁹ Dee Britton, "What Is Collective Memory?" June 27, 2012, <https://memorialworlds.com/what-is-collective-memory/>. See also the works of John Bodnar on vernacular memory culture in *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

³⁰ "Media," Lexico.com, accessed March 7, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/media>.

³¹ Inc. US Legal, "Entertainment Industry Law and Legal Definition," 2019, <https://definitions.uslegal.com/e/entertainment-industry/>.

³² "Memorial," Lexico.com, accessed March 7, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/memorial>.

Grassroots memorial: The act of placing memorabilia as a form of social action in public spaces, usually at sites where traumatic deaths or events have taken place, by the involved community. These memorials are makeshift, temporary, and aimed to invoke change.³³

Summary

Chapter two discusses the aftermath of the UT Tower shooting with regard to the university's attempts to memorialize and commemorate the victims and survivors over the years. I discuss how the larger historical context of the 1960s affected survivors' memories of the shooting as well as UT's memorialization and commemoration attempts in its aftermath. Dark tourism and the interpretation of sites associated with death are also discussed as tools institutions can use to counter shooter-centered narratives and shape prosthetic memories amongst society that places victims and survivors at the forefront via memorialization processes. The ways in which media-created false narratives shape how government officials respond to and talk about the tower shooting is discussed through the analysis of legislation passed or failed at the state and federal levels. Chapter three echoes this sentiment but with the 1999 Columbine High School mass shooting as the focus for comparative purposes. However, this chapter provides insight on how the media and government officials use religion as a tool to construct self-serving historical narratives and legislation. It also sheds light on the ability of trauma to affect a survivor's parents and siblings long after the occurrence of tragic events. Chapter four provides an overall summary of my argument and analysis centered on mass school shootings, memorialization, and collective memory. I provide recommendations for further work

³³ Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sanchez-Carretero, *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 2.

and public policy debates, as well as express the importance of uncovering the long history of mass school shootings in America. I also detail how society and institutions can work collectively to create memorials that enhance participatory democracy and memorialize victims and survivors in a way that allows for people to connect and empathize with tragic acts of mass violence.

II. THE 1966 UT TOWER MASS SCHOOL SHOOTING

Much can be learned from the ways in which the University of Texas chose to handle the commemoration and memorialization processes of the 1966 tower mass school shooting that occurred in Austin. While it was the first mass school shooting to be broadcast live via radio and television in American history, the UT Tower shooting is nevertheless often falsely identified as “the first” by historians, the media, and society alike. Much of this discourse stemmed from UT’s decision to not memorialize the shooting’s victims and survivors until fifty years after the fact. This chapter suggests that the university’s failure to create a permanent memorial that clearly outlined what happened on August 1, 1966, and to whom it happened, resulted in other stakeholders controlling the UT Tower shooting’s historical narrative. It examines UT’s handling of the tower in the years following the shooting such as the tower’s closure and reopening as well as the historical tours offered to the public. It explores dark tourism and the interpretation of death sites as a way to counter false dominant narratives and aid society in collectively remembering the tower shooting through victim and survivor perspectives.

The media’s reporting of the UT Tower shooting directly affected how society talked about and remembered it, with the shooter at the forefront. The media also affected the legislative actions in response to gun violence. The ways in which state and federal government officials responded to the UT Tower shooting provides insight into the larger historical context of the 1960s in terms of public policy debates and preventative measures established to prevent future acts of mass violence from occurring. This chapter analyzes those responses as well as what shaped them in terms of special interests, the media, and lobbyists. Moreover, this chapter shows the ability of stakeholders to control

the historical narrative and collective memory of tragic events. It outlines the dangers of institutions failing to memorialize and commemorate tragic events with victim and survivor memories at the forefront through storytelling and site interpretation.

UT's 2016 Memorial Rededication Ceremony

On August 1, 2016, the University of Texas held a rededication ceremony in honor of the victims and survivors of the UT Tower shooting in attempt to make up for earlier commemorative attempts that fell short. Unveiling a new and improved permanent memorial, UT president Greg Fenves openly addressed the university's long overdue need to properly acknowledge the victims and survivors through public grieving.³⁴ "Look, nothing like this had ever happened. We didn't know what we should do."³⁵ Leonard Schwartz, a ceremony attendee, remembers hearing this statement. Fenves also acknowledged the UT community's inability to fully grieve before trying to return back to normal in the immediate aftermath of the UT Tower shooting.³⁶ "In the ensuing decades, there was an instinct to shield the university by not associating it with a singular crime. To not allow tragedy to define the tower, the central symbol of this institution."³⁷ In the 1960s, people believed that traumatic events were best dealt with in the private sphere, not openly as a community. As a result, survivors were forced to get over any insecurities that ensued in the shooting's aftermath and essentially disregard their feelings. In turn, many survivors were left suffering alone with survivor's guilt for

³⁴ Complete footage of UT's 50th anniversary ceremony: KXAN, "Ceremony at UT marks 50 years since tower shooting," YouTube Video, August 1, 2016, https://youtu.be/Dvg_dFdLx6s.

³⁵ "Leonard Schwartz oral history interview conducted by Crystal LaCount in Austin, Texas, October 24, 2019." Personal collection.

³⁶ Students and staff were told to return to the UT campus on August 3, 1966, just two days after the mass school shooting.

³⁷ KXAN, "Ceremony at UT marks 50 years since tower shooting," YouTube Video, August 1, 2016, https://youtu.be/Dvg_dFdLx6s.

decades. After several years of silence, setbacks, and problematic memorial attempts, UT decided to install a more descriptive permanent memorial adjacent to the tower.

Survivors of the shooting, like Leonard, were happy to finally receive some acknowledgment by the university, even fifty years later.

They [UT] buried it in the same way I did until the 50th anniversary. There was nothing on campus, nothing that talked about it. They thought it was best not to talk about it. Obviously, things weren't ever the same that summer. By the fall we were back to school as if nothing had happened. It wasn't until a year or two ago that the school finally recognized that they should have done something. There was a new memorial with all the names of people killed installed and a dedication ceremony that my wife and I attended.³⁸

Survivors who were in attendance described the dedication ceremony as being a therapeutic process that they had not known they needed. Several, including Leonard, never even spoke about the shooting after the fact.

Until near the 50th anniversary and even at the 50th anniversary, I never talked about the shooting. My daughter never knew that I had been there until the 50th anniversary. I mean, I just buried it and so things that I tell you now, it's just very recent that I'd even talk about it.³⁹

UT's decision to openly address the UT Tower shooting through a public rededication ceremony provided an opportunity for survivors to openly grieve and reflect on their individual experiences together. The creation of a permanent memorial that fully acknowledged the victims and survivors of the UT Tower shooting allowed for them to feel like their experiences would be remembered. It also highlighted their existence, shifting the existing shooter-based dominant narrative to one centered on them.

³⁸ "Leonard Schwartz oral history interview conducted by Crystal LaCount in Austin, Texas, October 24, 2019." Personal collection.

³⁹ Ibid.

Memorialization and Commemoration; A Brief History

So why did it take UT fifty years to acknowledge the victims of the UT Tower shooting if it was clearly something that might help everyone heal? In order to answer this question, one must take into consideration the history of commemoration in America in relation to mass school shootings. When discussing commemoration, I refer to the act of remembering. A memorial can act as a form of commemoration, however not all memorials successfully humanize the victims they represent. The UT Tower memorial for example initially only provided a general list of victims' names with no mention of their individual lives prior to the day they were killed. Without context, the opportunity to allow visitors to empathize with victims and survivors is lost. This type of general memorial also fails to challenge false narratives which are usually perpetrator centered. American mass school shootings were not commemorated via permanent memorials until the 1999 Columbine shooting. In fact, grassroots memorials that allowed for the expression of individual memory as such were not common at American sites of mass violence until the 1980s. Subsequently, grassroots memorials constructed of memorabilia items such as teddy bears, flowers, and cards became a popular response. As a result, at the time of the tower violence, mass school shootings could only be "memorialized" collectively in society through the media's reporting, institutional responses (i.e., a memorial service gathering), and laws passed by the government.⁴⁰

America's failure to fully memorialize mass school shootings prior to Columbine resulted in their erasure in American's collective memory. Limited ability existed for

⁴⁰ For more information on temporary and informal grassroots memorials, see Joy Sather-Wagstaff, *Heritage That Hurts: Tourists in the Memoryscapes of September 11* (New York: Routledge, 2016), chapters 4-6 and Edward T. Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pgs. 119-21, 164, 166, 171-79.

later generations to be reminded of such tragedies unless experienced directly. Other than newspaper reports or radio broadcasts, Americans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were left with little physical evidence of mass school shootings. Hence, their ability to collectively recall America's "first mass school shooting" is dependent on each individual's memory of American mass school shootings. This in turn creates a form of generational memory, causing each generation to refer to the first mass school shooting as the first one *they* recall occurring during *their* lifetime. The lack of scholarly work written about the long history of mass school shootings and lack of site memorials also contributed to this deceptive "first" discourse. In truth, UT had nowhere to look for guidance on the matter of memorializing the UT Tower shooting. Most of America's memorials created during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were in remembrance of war dead and mass genocide (i.e., the Civil War, Holocaust, etc.). Moreover, because no roadmap or prior examples of such memorialization attempts existed, perhaps the UT community felt more comfortable refraining from taking action in working towards the permanent memorialization of the UT Tower shooting until other mass school shootings occurred and their respected institutions set a precedent.

UT's Early Tower Shooting Memorialization Attempts

It took thirty-three years, until 1999, for UT to attempt memorializing the mass shooting. The memorial effort resulted from continuous pressure on UT by community members over the years who felt that there was an overdue need for a memorial to provide closure and permanent recognition of the victims of the UT Tower shooting.⁴¹

⁴¹ Itza Carbajal, "I Choose to Remember; I Need to Forget: Memorialization and Healing from a Moment of Violence on a University Campus," *Behind the Tower*, 2016, <http://behindthetower.org/i-choose-to-remember>.

The 1999 efforts also stemmed from a 1995 prayer vigil memorial ceremony held by a group of faith-based groups, not affiliated with UT, as a way to attempt to heal and reclaim the violent space for the community.⁴² Pastor Larry Bethune, inspired by UT professor Rosa Eberly's course titled "The UT Tower and Public Memory," worked to lead this effort with the professor. Three years after the prayer vigil occurred, Larry Faulkner, UT's president in 1998, stated that, "The University's stance had always seemed to be to try to erase what happened, but with absolutely no success. It was like an injury that would never heal."⁴³ One year after Faulkner took office in 1999, the board of regents approved his request to initiate a planning committee whose focus would be creating a fitting memorial.

Instead of installing a permanent memorial, UT decided to hold a memorial service on August 1, 1999 in honor of those who lost their lives in the UT Tower shooting. During the service, the campus' flags were lowered to half-staff and the tower was darkened as is customary during moments of grief for the university.⁴⁴ Faulkner also dedicated the already existing university's Turtle Pond, north of the tower, to the victims in hopes that it would act as a place where people could reflect and find peace (see illus. 1).⁴⁵ Attendees were also encouraged to write down their thoughts and hopes for this

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Monte Akers, Nathan Akers, and Roger Friedman, *Tower Sniper: The Terror of America's First Active Shooter on Campus*, (Houston: John M. Hardy Publishing, 2016), 291.

⁴⁴ Itza Carbajal, "I Choose to Remember; I Need to Forget: Memorialization and Healing from a Moment of Violence on a University Campus," Behind the Tower, 2016, <http://behindthetower.org/i-choose-to-remember>.

⁴⁵ UT's Turtle Pond dedication ceremony reflects a larger societal trend in American memorial culture. During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, memorials were emotion centered. Memorials utilized nature, reflection, and emotion as ways for those affected by tragedies to heal and feel honored. Hence, UT's nature-based ceremony, with the opportunity to write reflection forms, is an example of this trend. Photo Credit: Itza Carbajal, *UT Turtle Pond*, in "I Choose to Remember; I Need to Forget: Memorialization and Healing from a Moment of Violence on a University Campus," Behind the Tower, 2016, accessed March 1, 2020, <http://behindthetower.org/i-choose-to-remember>.

newly dedicated space for future generations. They did so on special reflection forms, which were later deposited into UT's archives.

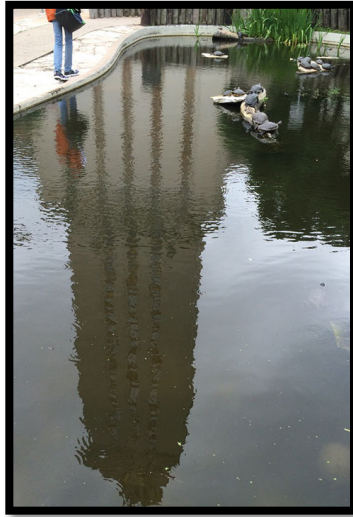


Illustration 1. UT Turtle Pond

Despite this effort, no actual plaque or monument was created detailing the events of August 1, 1966. No mention of the fifteen lives that were lost or the thirty-one others who were injured by the shooter's killing spree could be found. Instead, UT made sure no visible trace of the tower shooting remained. As a result, society's collective memory of the UT Tower shooting continued to be divided over the years as most individuals relied on the media's reporting of the shooting to establish individual memories. With no visual dedication or official statement on UT grounds, future generations who attended and visited the campus with no prior knowledge of the shooting had no way of knowing what occurred on campus. UT's failure to fully acknowledge the shooting via memorialization efforts left many of the survivors feeling unseen and angry.

No type of a permanent memorial acknowledging the UT Tower shooting victims was installed until 2007, shortly after the 40th anniversary, but this memorial was considered small and was easily missed due to its location. UT officials discreetly fastened a bronze plaque to the side of a large rock located in the Reflection Garden that

read, “To those who died, to those who were wounded, and to the countless other victims who were immeasurably affected by the tragedy”⁴⁶ (see illus. 2).



Illustration 2. 2007 Bronze Plaque Tower Memorial

Although the installation of the plaque was UT’s first step in working towards helping society to collectively remember the UT Tower shooting, survivors were not happy with the fact that it failed to list the names of those whose lives were taken. There was no acknowledgement of the mass murder that occurred on August 1, 1966. No call to action, nor mention of the countless others who were injured and affected by the shooting was found. UT’s decision to take the tower shooting memorialization process into its own hands resulted in survivors feeling like their need for acknowledgment and healing was disregarded.

A Living Memorial for the UT Tower Shooting

Hannah Whisenant, a radio-television-film junior, learned in 2014 that an official memorial service had never been held for the victims while working on an upcoming documentary film on the shooting.

The turtle pond is built as a memorial, but it’s a very tiny plaque, and a lot of people have been upset about that. With the recent shootings and with mass shootings kind of becoming a recurring problem, it seems like a

⁴⁶ Ibid.

good time to revisit that issue.⁴⁷

She decided to coordinate a living memorial service for the survivors in partnership with UT's documentary group, Students of the World, which handled the service's organization. Held in 2014, the living memorial started at the Main Mall and several survivors attended. Students of the World members held individual framed photos of the victims and gave a short speech about each one.⁴⁸ Following the speeches, the students and survivors walked to the Turtle Pond where Alfred McAlister, a UT Tower shooting survivor, made closing remarks. McAlister's comments were centered on the idea that survivor guilt begs memorialization. In order for a more substantial memorial to be created, he proposed the formation of the Tower Memorial Enhancement Group, which would consist of survivors. The living memorial sparked action amongst survivors to take the memorialization of the UT Tower shooting into their own hands. It also allowed for them to talk about their experiences publicly, which many found to be a good thing.

A New Permanent Memorial; A Collaborative Approach

The formation of the Tower Memorial Enhancement Group, a *survivor*-based one, represented a shift in power from the bottom up. No longer were survivors willing to sit on the sidelines and wait for UT to fully memorialize the tower shooting victims in a way that placed the focus on them. Because survivors mobilized and expressed the importance of a proper memorial, UT began working with them in an effort to create a more truthful account as a way to reshape society's collective memory of the tower. The collaboration was central to the creation of a meaningful memorial that challenged past historical

⁴⁷ "UT Students Remember Tower Shooting Victims," *The Daily Texan*, August 2014, accessed April 2, 2020, <http://www.dailytexanonline.com/2014/08/02/ut-students-remember-tower-shooting-victims->

⁴⁸ Ibid.

narratives centered on the shooters' identity. In collaboration with UT's Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, the Tower Memorial Enhancement Group proposed a new three-part memorial design to UT by December 2014. The proposed design consisted of installing etched granite disks where each victim fell, a natural granite boulder with the victims' names etched on a polished face, and a Bald Cypress tree placed at the head of the lower pond.⁴⁹ UT denied the granite disk idea, but approved the installation of the boulder and tree.

UT's Division of Diversity and Community Engagement group's willingness to involve the public and work with the Tower Memorial Enhancement Group displays the positive outcomes that are possible when organizations share authority. According to public historians Katharine Corbett and Howard Miller, sharing authority is a deliberate decision to give up some control over the product of historical inquiry and production.⁵⁰ In doing so, the existing bronze plaque was removed and replaced with an immiscible 11,700-pound boulder made out of local pink granite stone in July 2016 (see illus. 3).⁵¹ A bench was also placed in front of the boulder to provide a space for visitors to sit and reflect.⁵² Claire Wilson James, a survivor and member of the Tower Memorial Enhancement Group, stated that the new memorial represented an effort at peace and reconciliation.

⁴⁹ "New Memorial Honors Victims of UT Tower Shooting," *The Daily Texan*, July 2016, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.dailytexanonline.com/2016/07/31/new-memorial-honors-victims-of-ut-tower-shooting>.

⁵⁰ Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. Miller, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry" in *The Public Historian*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter 2006), 20.

⁵¹ Crystal LaCount, *UT Tower Permanent Memorial*, photograph, 2019, from personal collection.

⁵² Ibid. Rodney Molitor, President of the Cook-Walden Funeral Homes and Cemeteries paid for the boulder and bench. Charles Walden, the former owner of Cook-Walden, was present during the UT Tower shooting and used their ambulances and hearses to transport victim's bodies to hospitals.

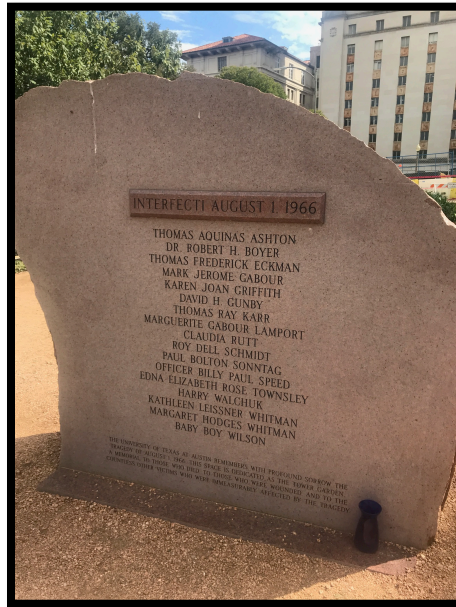


Illustration 3. 2016 Permanent Tower Memorial

More significantly, she expressed the importance of remembering the UT Tower shooting. “The sacredness is not the rock itself, but in the fact that people will remember.”⁵³ The work done by the Tower Memorial Enhancement Group displays the importance of opening up memorialization efforts to those who were affected by the event itself. By sharing authority, UT was able to finally create and install a memorial that properly acknowledged the shooting’s survivors. Moreover, the collaborative effort between the Tower Memorial Enhancement Group and UT’s Division of Diversity and Community Engagement group influenced and shaped society’s collective memory of the tower shooting, placing survivors front and center. For the first time in a half century, survivors would have the chance to find peace through a memorial.

There were some initial challenges though. The memorial’s wording received some criticism from three UT professors. They felt like the Latin word, “Interfectum,” etched on top of the list of victim’s names, was insensitive because it could be translated

⁵³ Ibid.

as “it was killed.” Not liking the fact that victims could be interpreted as inanimate objects, they felt like the word, “Interfecti” which translates to “they were killed” was better suited.⁵⁴ This change was implemented in 2017 as a collaborative effort between the Texas Tower Memorial Committee and UT’s Associate Vice President of Diversity and Community, Erica Saenz.

Aside from the discord caused by the Latin word, the 2016 memorial was UT’s most collaborative attempt at permanently memorializing the tower shooting victims and survivors. It provided a permanent space for people to visit. The collaborative approach taken to create this memorial allowed for survivors to turn grief into action. However, the memorial’s general inscription fails to promote visitor interaction and active commemoration of the Tower shooting. It does not humanize victims and survivors, which results in the inability of visitors to empathize with them.

The UT Tower; Tourism

UT’s handling of the tower in the aftermath of the shooting resulted in stakeholders’ ability to control its historical narrative. Following the mass school shooting, UT closed the tower and its observation deck. It reopened in 1968 but was the site of seven suicide leaps over a six-year period.⁵⁵ As a result, the tower was closed to the public for the second time in 1974. The university’s decision to close the tower for more than twenty-years did not set well with former and current students who regularly expressed want for it to be reopened. In response to the demand for the tower’s reopening

⁵⁴ “Latin Word on UT Tower Shooting Memorial Likely to be Re-etched,” *The Daily Texan*, August 2016, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.dailytexanonline.com/2016/08/05/latin-word-on-ut-tower-shooting-memorial-likely-to-be-re-etched>.

⁵⁵ Gary M. Laverigne, *A Sniper in the Tower: the Charles Whitman Murders*, (New York: Bantam, 1988), 289.

over several years, UT's President Larry Faulkner recommended reopening it to the board of regents in 1998. Faulkner stated that the tower's reopening would provide students the opportunity to create new and positive experiences associated with it. He hoped that by reopening the tower to the public, it would revert back to the campus' most important symbol of academic aspiration and achievement in Texas and continue uniting members of the university community.⁵⁶ At the same meeting, UT's board of regents also discussed the installation of iron barriers around the tower's entire observation deck as a way to prevent future suicide attempts and ensure tourists' safety. In 1999, the tower reopened.

Today, the tower is open for fifty-minute public tours at six dollars a ticket. Tourists are accompanied by two campus police officers for the entirety of the tour and are required to walk through a metal detector on the first floor prior to entering the tower elevators. Current UT students are tour guides, usually in groups of two, and relay historic facts about the tower's architecture and design. The 1966 tower shooting is not mentioned during the tour and no memorial or plaque commemorating the victims and survivors are present in the tower itself. Hence, UT misses out on an opportunity to create collective memories focused on the survivors and victims of the tower shooting. As a result, these tower tours fail to combat false narratives that are shooter centered. Moreover, UT's decision to not interpret the tower shapes how society individually chooses to remember the events of August 1, 1966, causing the shooting's narrative to remain disunited and dominated by media-created ones. How, then, could UT have gone

⁵⁶ "The Minutes of the Board of Regents of the University of Texas System," November 12, 1998, 51, <https://www.utsystem.edu/sites/default/files/offices/board-of-regents/board-meetings/board-minutes/11-98meeting917.pdf>.

about its handling of the tower in the shooting's aftermath to ensure a more humanized collective memory remains active amongst society? The next section explores how tourism associated with sites of death can provide an opportunity for individuals to collectively create a form of prosthetic memory that challenges shooter-centered narratives.

Dark Tourism as a Tool; Prosthetic Memory

Dark tourism, an individuals' desire to visit sites associated with death, became a topic of interest in academia during the late twentieth-century amongst sociologists and psychologists.⁵⁷ More recently, public historians have begun observing sites of death and attempting to interpret their complicated histories.⁵⁸ Being mindful to avoid creating narratives associated with ghost tours and the paranormal, public historians have centered their interpretations on educating visitors and encouraging interaction with one another while visiting sites of death. However, several gaps in research still exist in terms of interpreting mass school shooting sites. As a result of this lack of research, educational institutions that have experienced mass shootings are left to decide *if* and *how* to interpret these sites on their own. Most institutions have chosen to demolish, renovate, or patch up locations where death occurred on campus rather than preserving and interpreting them. This is true in the case of the UT Tower shooting, as the campus chose to patch up bullet holes in and around the tower in hopes of disassociating it with the shooting. This paired with UT's lack of permanent memorial for decades allowed for other stakeholder-created

⁵⁷ For the history of dark tourism see Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley, "Consuming Dark Tourism: A Thanological Perspective" (United Kingdom: University of Central Lancashire, 2008).

⁵⁸ Examples of public historians dealing with dark tourism include Hayley Noble, "Public History and Dark Tourism," April 30, 2020, <https://clioandthecontemporary.com/2020/04/25/public-history-and-dark-tourism/>, and Jacqueline Z. Wilson, "Prison: Cultural Memory and Dark Tourism" (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

myths and false narratives to transcend victim and survivor-based narratives.

According to sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, “Every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework.”⁵⁹ He argues that social groups are constantly involved in a process of implacement, aiming to reconstruct past events in current spaces which results in collaborative experiences. Moreover, landscapes and physical presence act as tools for society to connect past events and create collective memories through interaction with one another. Therefore, interpreting sites associated with death can work to counter false narratives that are shooter-centered through recounting the tragedy through survivor experiences in a collaborative setting. This way, society can begin creating a form of collective memory that places victims and survivors at the forefront. I contend that UT’s failure to interpret the tower and surrounding sites where death occurred as a result of the tower shooting allowed the media and government officials to control the narrative. The campus’ decision to host historical tours of the tower with no acknowledgment of the shooting affects how students and community members remember and discuss it. It allows for false narratives to be at the forefront of society’s collective memory and furthers the perpetrator’s mythology.

The interpretation of sites can also result in the creation of prosthetic memory collectively amongst society. According to memory scholar Alison Landsberg, prosthetic memory emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past at an experiential site such as a movie theatre or museum.⁶⁰ This form of public cultural memory allows for individuals to take on a personal, deeply felt memory of a

⁵⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 6.

⁶⁰ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.

past event through which he or she did not live. It has the ability to shape a person's subjectivity and politics as well as provide insight on the larger historical context of time and place. This is key when attempting to spark social change post traumatic events, as individuals must first generate empathy towards victims and survivors. Prosthetic memory allows for future generations who didn't experience the shooting firsthand to collectively remember it through engagement with a mediated representation.⁶¹ Additionally, if UT had chosen to interpret the tower in the shooting's aftermath, it could have acted as a site where individuals gather and formulate their own memories of the shooting rather than relying solely on the media's reporting.

Storytelling via the use of oral history can provide individuals the opportunity to resist the objectification of survivors and victims. The implementation of firsthand experiences in memorialization and commemoration practices can help humanize those affected by tragic events, creating a sense of empathy amongst society. It also allows for untold stories to be expressed, shedding light on issues of race, class, and gender. The creation of these intersectional memories can happen at interpreted sites of death, as long as the point of views of survivors and victims are told. Accordingly, I recount the UT Tower shooting through a survivor's perspective in the next section as a way to reshape the shooting's historical dominant narrative.

What Happened That Day; Individual and Collective Memory

For decades, the media's reporting on the shooter dominated the narrative of the UT Tower shooting. Survivors were ultimately left out of the big picture, suffering alone with their guilt. As a result, authors often recount with painstaking detail the events that

⁶¹ Ibid, 20.

occurred during the tower shooting and make the shooter as the focal point. One of the best detailed historical accounts of the shooting in its entirety can be found in Monte Akers' *Tower Sniper*.⁶² Instead of focusing on the event or shooter as others have, my work seeks to give agency to someone besides the shooter. I conducted an original oral history interview with one of the survivors fifty-three years later. The interview provides insight into what trauma survivors choose to remember and how that memory lasts over time. It displays how generational memory affects society's collective memory of the long history of mass school shootings in terms of when survivors think the first mass school shooting occurred in America. It also sheds insight into how survivors' vernacular memories of their lived experiences often times differ from the collective memory created by various stakeholders. By recounting the UT Tower shooting from a survivor's perspective, this chapter attempts to rewrite its narrative, making it more inclusive, personal, and cathartic.

“Oh no, it wasn't an ordinary day at all, from the beginning.” This was Leonard Schwartz's response when asked to recall his experience on August 1, 1966. Leonard made his way to UT's main campus early that morning, in order to take care of unpaid parking tickets. A law student at the time, Leonard was usually only on the east side of the campus where the Law School portion was located. Already off to an unusual start, he made his way to the first floor of the tower (located in the middle of the campus) where the bursar's office was. After taking care of his parking tickets, he proceeded to walk out of the tower through its east door and back to the Law School.

I had asked my wife [Sandy] to go pay them [the parking tickets]. She said, “You got them, you go!” She refused to pay them so otherwise I

⁶² See chapters four through nine in Monte Akers, Nathan Akers, and Dr. Roger Friedman, *Tower Sniper: The Terror of America's First Active Shooter on Campus*, (Houston: John M. Hardy Publishing, 2016).

wouldn't have even been there. The other thing is, she would never miss class unless she was really ill. That day she was. Had she would have been on campus, she would have been killed or wounded because at the time of the shooting, normally, she was going from one building across the mall to another building for two different classes.

Once Leonard walked out of the tower, he noticed a couple in front of him holding hands suddenly fall to the ground.

They were shot. I had just come out of the door, so he [the shooter] couldn't shoot me at the point where I was because I was too close to the side. I thought it was a lover's quarrel. It took a few minutes to realize what was going on after they were shot. It hadn't happened— Today, that's probably the first thing you think of is a mass shooter because it happens so often. Back then it hadn't happened, so it never crossed your mind that that's what it was.

As mentioned in chapter one, mass school shootings have been occurring in America since 1891. Leonard's statement that nothing like the UT Tower shooting had ever happened before shows how society's memory of the long history of mass school shootings in America is subjective. I contend that generational memory of mass school shootings was created as a result of America's failure to permanently memorialize them prior to 1999. Hence, society's collective memory of mass school shootings is inconsistent and malleable due to the fact that individuals label the first mass school shooting based on what *they* experience in *their* lifetime.

Realizing that the couple had been shot, Leonard ran to UT's School of Business to alert the dean, whose office was on its first floor, about what had just happened.

I ran into the dean's office and said, "Call an ambulance, two people just got shot!" They must have thought I was crazy. Then I turned and ran back to see if I could help them.

By the time he got back to the tower, police were on site. Knowing that the university's Computation Center was underground and out of the shooter's reach, Leonard made his

way there. He decided to take cover behind the wall of the center's stairs where bullet holes can still be seen on its outer portion today. Another young male and a policeman were also taking cover there. To Leonard's surprise, he was directed to run out into the line of fire and try to pull the couple into the Computation Center's window to safety. "In hindsight, I laugh about that. Here's this policeman— why would us go out and not the policeman? But that's the way it went. ⁶³ Luckily, Leonard and the other male were successfully able to put the couple through the window where they could safely await being taken to the hospital. "He was shot in the back. I always thought he'd be paralyzed for life. I forget where she was shot, but they were both bleeding pretty profusely."⁶⁴ For a detailed map of the exact locations Leonard was present at during the UT Tower shooting, see figure 4.⁶⁵

⁶³ "Leonard Schwartz oral history interview conducted by Crystal LaCount in Austin, Texas, October 24, 2019." Personal collection.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Monte Akers, Nathan Akers, and Dr. Roger Friedman, *The University of Texas as it existed on Aug. 1, 1966 in Tower Sniper: The Terror of America's First Active Shooter on Campus* (Houston: John M. Hardy Publishing, 2016), 167. The University of Texas and its surroundings have changed significantly since the Tower shooting. Above is a map showing the landscape of the university as it existed in Leonard's memory. It provides the names of UT's buildings in 1966, which have since been renamed for the most part. I have placed triangles in the areas where Leonard was present during the shooting. The bottom triangle is representative of the Business School's location.

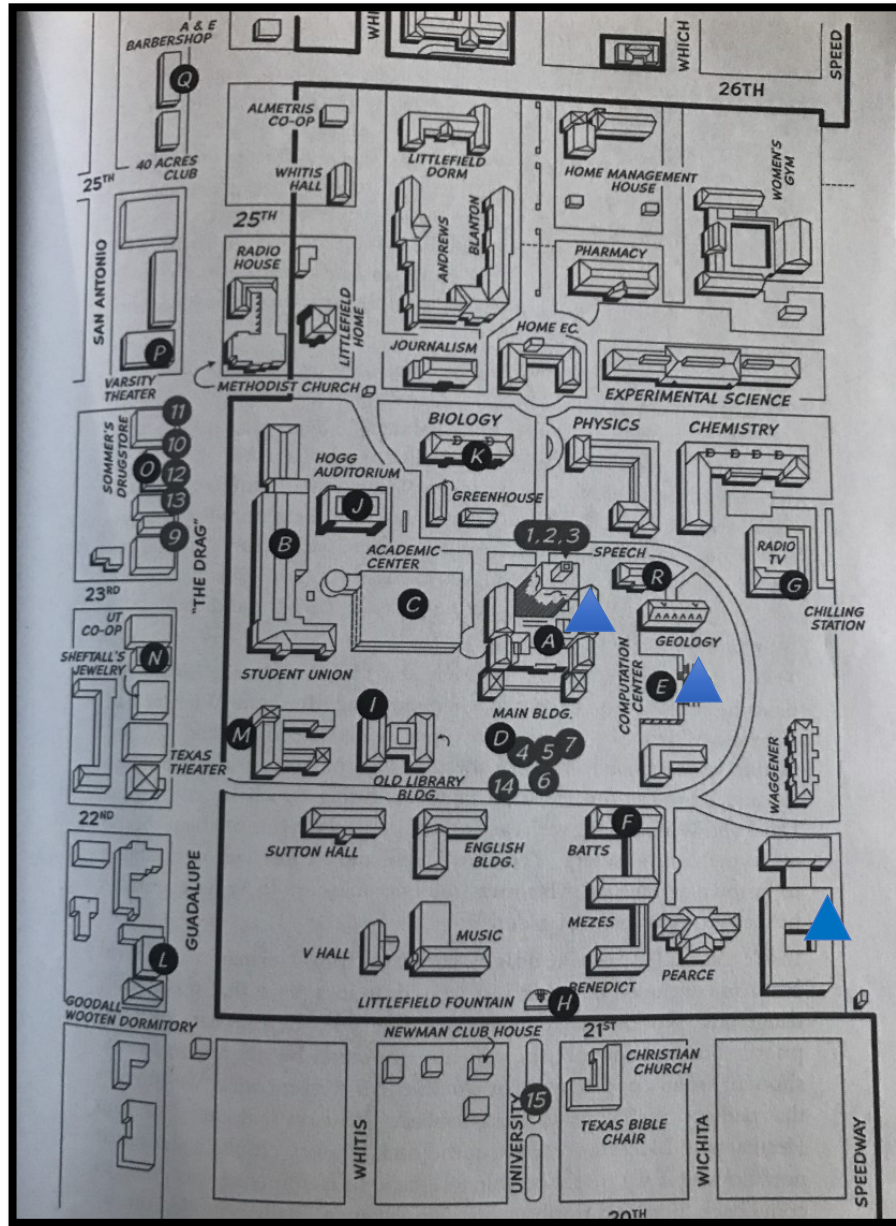


Illustration 4. UT Campus Map- 1966

It took decades for Leonard to learn small details about the couple he helped save. Adrian and Brenda Littlefield had gotten married a week before the tower shooting. Adrian was nineteen and Brenda was seventeen at the time of the shooting. Leonard learned that after a lot of rehabilitation, Adrian ultimately walked. In an interview done by *The Daily Texan*, Adrian Littlefield stated, “I still have a lot of pain from the injury. I’ve had thirteen major surgeries [since the shooting] and still go to the doctor once a

month to get around.”⁶⁶ Adrian became a minister and ultimately got a divorce from Brenda. Leonard tried reaching out to the couple through various intermediaries, unsure of how they would perceive him. “I wasn’t going to talk to him unless he responded. I didn’t know if he wanted to recall it or not but he never responded, it never successfully happened.”⁶⁷ To this day, he still doesn’t know what became of the woman (Brenda) who he pulled to safety. “She kind of just disappeared. I don’t know if she was institutionalized, or died early, or what.”⁶⁸

It’s unfortunate how the individuals who were present during the shooting, including Leonard, remained strangers to one another in the shooting’s aftermath. After experiencing such a traumatic event together, they ultimately all remained clueless as to what life after the shooting was like for each other. Not even the names of all the survivors were collectively known. This lack of public and concrete knowledge went on for several years until academics and journalists began writing about and publishing works about the UT Tower shooting, capturing survivors’ vernacular memories along the way. As a result of survivors’ memories being individualized for so long, shooter centered false narratives created by stakeholders in corporate America successfully controlled the shooting’s historical narrative. Rarely were survivors given the opportunity to express their lived experiences publicly, other than on anniversaries. According to public memory scholar Rosa Eberly, “... local talk radio once provided, and some believe still can provide, a means of forming or regenerating ephemeral local publics.”⁶⁹ When

⁶⁶ “Survivor Recounts his Experience During the Tower Shooting,” *The Daily Texan*, August 2016, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://thedailytexan.com/features/tower/Adrian-Littlefield.html>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Rosa Eberly, “‘Everywhere You Go, It’s There’ Forgetting and Remembering the University of Texas Tower Shootings,” in *Framing Public Memory: Rhetoric, Culture, and Social Critique*, ed. Kendall Phillips

reflecting on listening to the *Paul Pryor Show* on KLBJ-AM dedicated to the tower shooting's twenty-ninth anniversary, Eberly recalls how individualized and divided each survivors' memories were as they called in to discuss August 1, 1966. Referred to as a, "lack of any sense of publicness," tower survivors' memories were supported by individual psychological warrants rather than by any awareness that the event and its resonances might warrant public judgment and conjoint action.⁷⁰ She argues that survivors' individual memories have had nowhere else to go publicly, other than on local talk radio. Moreover, because UT failed to create a public place for storing and inventing memories of the tower shooting and its consequences, individual memory has been reenacted on local talk radio annually.

The tradition to discuss the tower shooting via mass media still lives on today. A recent example spearheaded by UT's news broadcasting radio show, *Texas Standard*, and the Briscoe Center for American History took place on the shooting's fiftieth anniversary in 2016. These two entities teamed up to conduct over ninety interviews with individuals who were involved in the shooting. Students, professors, people passing by, ambulance drivers, and individuals who watched the shooting unfold on live television were all interviewed. The finished oral histories titled, "Out of the Blue" conjoins these interviews into one seamless audio file that provides various firsthand perspectives as to what happened that day and the larger historical context of Austin's community in the sixties. Vivid oral history recordings, transcripts, correspondence, and ephemera created by the project can be found in the archives of the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at

(Tuscaloosa, AL: University Alabama Press, 2004), 68,
<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzl3OTgwMV9fQU41?sid=3037e15f-485a-4110-90dd-3cf4ad01f0e3@sessionmgr4008&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

UT.⁷¹

A majority of the “Out of the Blue” interviewees expressed feeling confused and vulnerable both during and after the shooting. “Suddenly there was a silence and he [Austin Police Department officer Billy Speed] got hit. We thought he was just wounded but no, it was a deadly shot. So, he fell there, died there, right before my eyes. I was still not a hundred percent sure what in the heck was happening or what was occurring.”⁷² Several acknowledged their inability to deal with, fully comprehend, and acknowledge what took place on that tragic day. “It was a challenge to walk across the main campus mall that first week after the shooting. I believe that we all felt quite vulnerable after the incident.”⁷³ Moreover, this project clearly shows the extent of tragedy, shock, and disbelief the UT Tower shooting had on society individually and as a whole. It also shows how survivors’ vernacular memories differ from society’s collective memory of the shooting’s dominant historical narrative.

UT’s failure to create a dedicated public place where survivors and community members could share, store, and create collective memories of the tower shooting ultimately wrote survivors and victims out of its historical dominant narrative. Hence, the aftermath of the UT Tower shooting becomes contested terrain between those who have firsthand lived experiences, and those who form memories based off of outsiders’ reporting. As the next section demonstrates, the media dominated the shooting’s

⁷¹ To view these materials, visit the Briscoe Center for American History. For more information on the partnerships which made “Out of the Blue” possible, see: https://www.cah.utexas.edu/news/press_release.php?press=press_out_of_the_blue.

⁷² Orazio Loayza, “What It Was Like on Campus During the UT Tower Shooting,” *Out of the Blue: A Texas Standard Documentary*, accessed on April 5, 2020, <https://towerhistory.org/category/archive/?post=33>.

⁷³ Carol Barwick, “Student Driving Through Campus,” *Out of the Blue: A Texas Standard Documentary* accessed April 1, 2020. <https://towerhistory.org/profiles/carol-barwick/>.

historical narrative in its aftermath. As a result, society's collective memories of the shooting become problematic as they stem from media-created falsehoods.

Media Response and Mythologizing of the UT Tower Shooter

Immediately following the UT Tower shooting, media outlets across the country began obsessing over the reasoning behind the shooter's mass murder and his identity. *The New York Times*, *Life Magazine*, and *U.S News and World Report* are just a few examples of the publications providing nationwide coverage of the UT Tower shooting and the gunman. Headlines like, "Charles Whitman: The Eagle Scout Who Grew Up With A Tortured Mind" and "From Toddler to U.S. Marine, He Showed an Easy Familiarity With Guns,"⁷⁴ became all too common in the aftermath of the shooting. Media outlets regularly reported on the shooter's childhood past, analyzing how it may have caused him to carry out the mass murder. Local news outlets began covering the shooting immediately after it happened with similar speculation. *The Austin Statesman*, *The Daily Texan*, and *The Summer Texan* ran several publications that revolved around figuring out what made the shooter "snap".⁷⁵ Headlines like, "Sniper Had a Tumor," and "The Psychiatrists: Right Before and After the Tragedy" dominated local news outlets, drawing the public's attention toward the shooter and away from the victims and survivors.

The focus was on almost all aspects of the shooter's identity. The shooter's suicide notes and personal diary made the front cover of *The Austin Statesman* just four

⁷⁴ "The Texas Sniper," *Life Magazine*, August 12, 1966, accessed on April 15, 2020, <https://towerhistory.org/category/archive/>.

⁷⁵ Cody Winchester, "Greatest Mass Slayer in History?" *The Austin Statesman*, August 2, 1966, Vol. 96, No. 6 edition, sec. Front Page, accessed on April 17, 2020, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2841373-Statesman-tower-coverage-Aug-2-1966.html>.

days after the shooting.⁷⁶ Images of the shooter as a UT student, marine, husband, and young boy were published, followed by images of him lying dead in his own blood atop the UT Tower. His medical history, grade point average, military service background, family history, and social life were all included in the reporting. Just six days after the shooting, *The Austin Statesman* published a nine-page expose filled with headers like, “Sniper on the Tower: Now the Tragic Drama is Over, What Happened? Why?” and “This Was Charles Whitman: Good Man, Good Husband, Good Citizen. He Was Everything a Young American Should Be Until One Sunday Night When He Became an Insane Killer.”⁷⁷ Initially, then, the shooter’s story was told as a tragedy of the downfall of a model citizen. But the focus on tragedy shifted rapidly after, and the media increasingly reporting mythologized his identity. He went from being portrayed as an all-American boy to being known as the “Sniper in the Tower,” the “Greatest Mass Slayer in History,” and a “Fine Sniper.”⁷⁸ Newspapers and media outlets continued to obsess over every aspect of the shooter in the months following the shooting.

At the same time, several elected officials suggested alternative interpretations where the shooter was a product of a broader problem of societal violence in America. Some used the tower sniping as an occasion to attack the prevalence of violence in the media, especially television. For example, U.S. Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas stated that television was building a Frankenstein, which if left unchecked would destroy

⁷⁶ Cody Winchester, “Sniper Notes Revealed,” *The Austin Statesman*, August 5, 1966, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2841376-Statesman-tower-coverage-Aug-5-1966.html>.

⁷⁷ Chris Whitcraft, “This Was Charles Whitman,” *Austin American-Statesman*, August 7, 1966, Vol. 42, No. 68 edition, sec. A, Richard T. Fleming University Writings Collection, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2841378-Statesman-tower-coverage-Aug-7-1966.html>.

⁷⁸ Cody Winchester, “Sniper Had a Tumor,” *The Austin Statesman*, August 2, 1966, accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2841373-Statesman-tower-coverage-Aug-2-1966.html>

America.⁷⁹ He also claimed that newspapers were no better because they reported kill-ratios for murders as routinely as traffic accidents. In 1965, a total of 9,850 murders had been committed in America. A large part of these murders were instances of domestic violence by “normal” people with little or no criminal record. Hence, the media’s obsessive reporting on the UT Tower shooting caused everyday Americans to begin questioning their safety in public places. It also allowed them to see the face of mass murder as an all-American guy with no criminal history. Yet, at the same time, they failed to emphasize that the site was a school.

Entertainment Industry; Historical Narratives and Collective Memory

The mythologizing of the shooter’s identity continued to dominate the UT Tower shooting’s narrative for years, helped along by the television portrayals. In 1975, the first attempt to dramatize the shooting through a made-for-television movie titled *Deadly Tower* was broadcast on NBC. It recounted the events that occurred on August 1, 1966 through the shooter’s eyes. The killings of his wife and mother earlier that morning are acted out, as well as his journey up to the tower with his arsenal of weapons. Only three real names, the shooter, Ramiro Martinez, and Allen Crum, are used in the movie, with the shooter as the star. It plays on the “Why did he do it?” narrative started earlier by the media, but ratcheting it up to speculation that mental health issues were in play by claiming that his headache spells caused him to be violent.⁸⁰ It also sparked controversy as to which officer, Martinez or McCoy, actually shot the fatal bullet that killed the shooter. The University of Texas refused to cooperate and forbade filming on campus.

⁷⁹ Lavergne, *A Sniper in the Tower*, 259.

⁸⁰ “The Deadly Tower,” IMDb (IMDb.com, October 18, 1975), <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072852/>.

Interim Pres. Lorene Rogers gave the following statement, “I did not want to bring back bad memories that are still vivid in the minds of many of our students, their families, and the people of Austin. It would just be opening up old wounds, and I did not want the university to be a part of it.”⁸¹ As a result, the tower scene was shot on Louisiana’s capitol grounds, which slightly resembled the Austin tower. With the shooter’s character as the star, *Deadly Tower* kept him at the forefront of the UT Tower shooting’s narrative. It also furthered society’s distorted memory of the tower shooting due to its inaccuracies. Described as, “... the powerful story of the 1966 event that was at the time the largest one-person murder spree in U.S. history,” *Deadly Tower* adds to the mythology of the shooter’s identity and kept the focus off the victims and survivors.⁸² But, *Deadly Tower* failed to accurately portray the tower shooting’s events and the individuals that were involved. Moreover, it also failed to give agency to those who were killed or affected by the shooting. It was not until 2016 that a more accurate attempt to truthfully portray the UT Tower shooting’s events was produced. Using animation, testimony, and archival video footage from August 1, 1966, the documentary *Tower* began to shift the narrative of the tower shooting away from the shooter and towards one that was more inclusive by including individual survivor experiences.⁸³

The media’s decision to obsessively report on the shooter’s identity, mental health, and reasoning behind the shooting in its’ aftermath ultimately resulted in society’s focus to be placed on the shooter, not the victims and survivors. As a result, the shooter, even today, dominates society’s collective memory of the UT Tower shooting. Moreover,

⁸¹ Laverne, *A Sniper in the Tower*, 277.

⁸² “The Deadly Tower (TV Movie),” WarnerBros.com, accessed April 16, 2020, <https://www.warnerbros.com/tv/deadly-tower-tv-movie>.

⁸³ “Tower Documentary,” 2016, <https://towerdocumentary.com/>.

because UT failed to take control of the tower shooting's narrative in its immediate aftermath through some form of official memorialization, the media's constant coverage of the shooting became the dominant narrative engrained in society's memory and furthered the mythologizing of the shooter. According to communication scholar Michael McCluskey, "News content influences audience perceptions of what matters, especially when stories highlight important public topics."⁸⁴ Since this was the first time American society ever experienced a mass school shooting televised live, it is not surprising that the coverage attracted local and national attention. Since most of the media's coverage in the shooting's aftermath focused on the shooter's identity, this inherently became etched into society's memory of the UT Tower shooting. What remains in question is why the media chose to report on the tower shooting in the way it did. Furthermore, to what extent did the media's reporting affect how government officials responded to the tower shooting? Historians have ignored these questions.

Media plays a critical role in American society. Our understanding of ourselves and our culture is based largely upon what we are told by the media.⁸⁵ In part, this is because society gathers the majority of their information, beyond personal experience, through media outlets.⁸⁶ Information about a plethora of life aspects such as the weather, politics, pop culture, and world events are gathered through television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet. Moreover, the media interprets the meaning behind such covered events in context for its audiences, with speculation provided on the consequences of such

⁸⁴ Michael McCluskey, *News Framing of School Shootings* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), 11.

⁸⁵ Benjamin Radford, *Media Mythmakers: How Journalists, Activists, and Advertisers Mislead Us* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), 11.

⁸⁶ Kimberly A. McCabe and Gregory Martin, *School Violence, the Media, and Criminal Justice Responses* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 6.

recorded actions.⁸⁷ As a result, the media becomes an agent of socialization through which individuals learn their basic values for acclimation into their culture. This becomes problematic however, when the media begins reporting unexamined myths and assumptions that then end up embodying an aspect of society's culture and memory. According to media scholar Benjamin Radford, "The news media pretend to give us useful information and warn us of pretend problems so that publicity seeking politicians can pretend to solve them with real-world legislation involving real-world consequences."⁸⁸ As a result, real problems receive little attention because society and government officials are focused on media-created myths, a topic I focus on in the next section.

Government Response and Media Created Myths

The UT Tower shooting is a perfect example of the media's ability to embed myths and assumptions into societal culture, which in turn influences how government officials respond. For example, the media's obsession with figuring out what caused the shooter to snap trickled into what lawmakers, including Texas Gov. John Connally (D), investigated following the tower shooting. In its immediate aftermath, Connally convened a thirty-two person expert committee to conduct an investigation—which culminated in the Connally Report—on the reasons behind the shooter's shooting.⁸⁹ One of the results was the finding of the shooter's pecan-sized brain tumor during the autopsy done by Dr. Coleman de Chenar (a controversial character, by the way; Google his name), a Connally

⁸⁷ Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics* (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1997).

⁸⁸ Radford, *Media Mythmakers*, 16.

⁸⁹ Rebecca Johnston, "A Fitting Memorial: The Mental Health Legacy of the Whitman Murders," Behind the Tower, 2016, <http://behindthetower.org/a-fitting-memorial>.

Committee member. Even though de Chenar publicly stated that the tumor had no influence on the shooter's psychotic behavior, the media continued to focus on the tumor as a possible explanation as to why he snapped. Hence, a media-created myth became imbedded into society's collective memory in terms of what made the shooter snap.

Another myth sustained by the media's reporting was that the shooter's drug usage caused him to carry out the mass shooting. The Connally Commission, along with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Texas State Board of Pharmacy, investigated the shooter's drug usage. In doing so, they conducted several interviews with his close friends and family members in hopes of getting a better understanding of the shooter's drug habits. Many of the informants openly disclosed his regular consumption of various amphetamines, including Dexedrine.⁹⁰ They also explained that his drug habits took a negative toll on his ability to sleep and think. After investigating several other factors of his drug usage such as his supplier, the Connally Report ultimately concluded that the shooter's drug usage was not a factor in causing him to conduct the mass shooting.

He took stimulating drugs to assist him in keeping academic deadlines, the net effect of which was further loss of efficiency and a decrease in clarity of thinking at these times. However, there was no evidence of acute or chronic drug toxicity on August 1, 1966.⁹¹

Although the Connally Report ended up ruling out drug usage as the reason behind the shooter's mass murder, headlines like, "Whitman Ate Drugs Like Candy" were still found in newspapers years after the shooting occurred.⁹² Hence, society's collective

⁹⁰ Rebecca Johnston, "The Little Metal Bottle: Substance Abuse in the Tower Disaster," Behind the Tower, 2016, <http://behindthetower.org/the-little-metal-bottle#fnref:22>.

⁹¹ "Report to the Governor: Medical Aspects, Charles J. Whitman Catastrophe," Austin History Center, 1966.

⁹² "Whitman Ate Drugs Like Candy," *The Austin Statesman*, March 7, 1967.

memory of the UT Tower shooting continued to revolve around the shooter and his drug usage. During the late 1960s, America was in a national crisis. A fully saturated black market of largely unregulated pharmaceuticals that caused dangerous side effects for abusers was prevalent. Knowing this, government officials still chose to keep the nation's substance abuse problem separate from the topic of mental health. Instead of taking steps to combat the nation's amphetamine crisis, government officials chose to focus on the expansion of mental health facilities and counseling services inside the University of Texas.

For the university student, undergoing one of the most stressful periods of his development, a mental health program is considered vital. Not only through implementation of known practices but also through ongoing research and application of new knowledge.⁹³

A new Student Health Center (SHC) was established by the end of 1966 along with counseling services expanded to dormitories.⁹⁴ A twenty-four-hour counseling hotline was also created for students, and the SHC's Mental Hygiene Clinic received additional funds. UT's efforts to expand their mental health services were well received and praised by students and faculty alike in the years following the tower shooting. Recently however, that expansion no longer meets the demands and ability to pay access has been met and exceeded. For example, waiting periods for a counseling appointment in 2015 stretched to over a month and fee hikes were implemented causing several students to no longer be able to afford care.⁹⁵ Moreover, because of the emphasis the Connally Report and the media placed on the expansion of mental health services such as

⁹³ "Ibid.

⁹⁴ Rebecca Johnston, "A Fitting Memorial: The Mental Health Legacy of the Whitman Murders," Behind the Tower, 2016, <http://behindthetower.org/a-fitting-memorial>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

counseling and therapy, issues of substance abuse and gun control fell to the wayside.

The expansion of UT's mental health services was seen as a one-step solution to prevent future mass school shootings from occurring. The media's reporting on the matter alongside the Connally Report's results created the "we don't have a gun problem; we have a mental health problem" debate that is still prevalent today.

The topic of mental health in relation to the shooter's brain tumor and the expansion of mental health facilities definitely outshined the amount of attention gun control measures received in the aftermath of the tower shooting. When talked about by the media, gun control measures were often minimized and viewed as unimportant because the shooter, who showed no prior signs of criminality, would have been able to purchase the weapons he used for the tower shooting legally.⁹⁶ In fact, he legally purchased all of the firearms used in the tower shooting.⁹⁷ To put things into perspective, in 1965 the only requirements for purchasing a gun were a name, address, and the age of the buyer. From January through July of 1966, 175,768 pistols had been sold in Texas. In the U.S., 100 million handguns and other firearms were already in the hands of private individuals and about one million additional "dangerous weapons" were being sold every year. Mail order purchases of firearms were also commonplace.

Policing Before and After the UT Tower Shooting

At the time of the shooting, UT did not have a commissioned police force. Its Traffic and Security Services (TSS) was the closest thing to a police force on campus.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 268.

⁹⁷ For a full list of the firearms and weapons the shooter purchased legally and used during the UT Tower shooting, see Isaac McQuiston, "Texas Gun Culture and the UT Tower Shooting," Behind the Tower, 2016, <http://behindthetower.org/texas-gun-culture-and-the-ut-tower-shooting>. Specifically, the third set of images consisting of primary source documentation via Austin Police Department, Austin Public Library, and the Austin History Center.

Mainly focused on writing parking tickets, supervising traffic, and providing day and night watch of the campus, UT's TSS was nowhere near being prepared to handle the tower shooting. No commissioned police officers were on the TSS, nor were any of its members armed.⁹⁸ In fact, Chief Allen Hamilton, leader of the TSS, was forced to reach out to UT's ROTC program to see if it had any available weapons to use during the tower shooting while they awaited a response from the Austin Police Department (APD). Unfortunately, the ROTC had no ammunition for the weapons the program possessed. As a result of TSS' unpreparedness, it was forced to sit and wait for APD and the Department of Public Safety to come and handle the situation. Other than warning students of what was unfolding via speakers, the TSS was virtually unable to aid in the stopping of the shooter's mass murder.

The Austin Police Department was equally unprepared to handle the UT Tower shooting situation in terms of firearms and mass-shooting procedures. The entire department only had fifteen 35-caliber Remington rifles, which had not been used for law enforcement for twenty years.⁹⁹ The rifles, if shot from the ground up at the tower, were inaccurate and could have resulted in collateral damage. APD mostly possessed its service revolvers and shotguns, weapons that were useless when it came to long distances. Another popular memory amongst the shooting survivors is how many civilians took matters into their own hands and shot up at the tower using their personal rifles. In a few instances, police officers drove civilians in their squad cars to purchase

⁹⁸ Justin Krueger, "Policing Before and After August 1, 1966," Behind the Tower, 2016, accessed April 1, 2020, <http://behindthetower.org/policing>.

⁹⁹ Lavergne, *A Sniper in the Tower*, 247.

ammo or to pick up rifles.¹⁰⁰ When civilians asked what they should do if they had a shot at the sniper, police officers said they should shoot to kill.¹⁰¹ Bill Helmer, a student at the time, recounted his experience on campus that day in *Texas Monthly*. When he first noticed civilians shooting at the tower he thought, “Just what we need, a bunch of loonies lobbing bullets all over the place, killing even more people.” He recalled seeing a man in full camouflage scouting out the best position from which to fire at the shooter atop the tower and claims that his friends saw a “good ole’ boy” with a rifle burst into the San Jacinto Café southeast of campus, grab a six pack of beer, and rush out.¹⁰²

APD’s inability to stop the shooter for 96 minutes cannot solely be blamed on its inadequate number of firearms. The department had no plans in place for handling a mass school shooting of that magnitude. The UT Tower shooting was not contained to a small portion of the campus. The shooter’s decision to climb to the top of the tower enabled him to have the ability to hit people in an area covering five city blocks and even beyond. The area included all of the UT campus, a substantial portion of some of the most congested parts of Austin, and every kind of landscape imaginable. The area in which the shooter could have inflicted injury has to be considerably larger than the actual crime scene—about 300 acres.¹⁰³ Moreover, because of the site’s uniquely large geographical layout and varied landscape, APD had no prior experience or reason to have a plan of action in place to put a stop to the shooter’s mass murder.

¹⁰⁰ Isaac McQuiston, “Armed Civilians and the UT Tower Tragedy,” Behind the Tower, 2016, accessed April 9, 2020, <http://behindthetower.org/armed-civilians-and-the-ut-tower-tragedy>.

¹⁰¹ Houston McCoy, “Record from Houston McCoy,” Archival document, AR.2000.002, Box 12, Folder 16. Austin History Center.

¹⁰² Isaac McQuiston, “Armed Civilians and the UT Tower Tragedy,” Behind the Tower, 2016, accessed April 9, 2020, <http://behindthetower.org/armed-civilians-and-the-ut-tower-tragedy>.

¹⁰³ Lavergne, *A Sniper in the Tower*, 246.

The response to APD's unpreparedness during the UT Tower shooting sparked a national consciousness about the need for specialized training and resources for responding to such situations. Across the nation, police departments reviewed their preparedness, training, and capabilities to effectively respond to mass school shootings. The Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams were established as a direct response to the tower shooting and are now found in almost every police department that serves a population greater than 50,000.¹⁰⁴ Senate Bill 162, which lays the groundwork for the establishment of the University of Texas System Police Department and Police Academy, passed the legislature and became law.¹⁰⁵ The idea was to provide institutions of higher learning with police forces that would be able to protect their students through the possession of firearms, something institutions could not do prior to the tower shooting. Currently, UT police officers go through a variety of training programs like the Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) to learn how to combat threats on campus and not have to wait for SWAT officers to arrive. Moreover, the combination of APD's inadequate firearms and mass shooting procedures during the time of the shooting alongside UT's TSS unpreparedness resulted in state officials expanding policing policies that involved more policing and easier access of firearms on higher education institutions.

Federal Public Policy Debate; Gun Legislation and the NRA

Talk of gun control legislation, as a response to the UT Tower shooting, was more prevalent at the federal level. Just two days after the shooting, the front page of *The New*

¹⁰⁴ Justin Krueger, "Policing Before and After August 1, 1966." (Behind the Tower, 2016), accessed on April 3, 2020, <http://behindthetower.org/policing>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

York Times’ displayed the headline, “Johnson Urges Gun Curbs To Prevent New Tragedy: President Asserts Texas Shooting Points Up Need for a Law.”¹⁰⁶ With gun control legislation having been stalled in Congress for many months, Johnson hoped that the tower shooting would be the final push they needed to take action on the matter. On August 2, 1966 Johnson stated,

What happened is not without a lesson: that we must press urgently for the legislation now pending in Congress to help prevent the wrong person from obtaining firearms. The bill would not prevent all such tragedies, but it would help reduce the unrestricted sale of firearms to those who cannot be trusted in their possession. How many lives might be saved as a consequence? The time has come for action.¹⁰⁷

It was not just the tower shooting that caused President Johnson to call on the Democrat dominated Congress for the passage of gun control legislation. The 1963 assassination of Pres. John F. Kennedy with a rifle purchased via mail order from the *American Rifleman* magazine resulted in the awareness for some form of gun control to be enacted. The National Rifle Association (NRA) and other gun club’s strong opposition towards the passage of restrictive measures, however, caused Congress to remain stagnant on gun control laws. It was not until the assassinations of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 that some form of gun control legislation passed in Congress.

President Johnson signed H.R. 17735, Gun Control Act, into law on October 22, 1968. Having been approved by the 90th U.S. Congress, the new law banned mail order sales of rifles, shotguns, and ammunition. It also prohibited most felons, drug users, and

¹⁰⁶ Robert Semple Jr., “Johnson Urges Gun Curbs to Prevent New Tragedy,” *The New York Times*, August 3, 1966, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/insider/1966-the-time-has-come-for-action.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

the mentally ill from being able to purchase firearms. Alongside an earlier piece of gun control legislation passed in 1938 (the Federal Arms Act), the Gun Control Act of 1968 created a system to federally license gun dealers and establish restrictions on certain classes and categories of firearms. Johnson made it clear that he felt the Gun Control Act did not go far enough in controlling gun ownership. He had proposed a national firearms registry that the NRA strongly opposed which got denied by Congress soon after. While signing the Gun Control Act into law, he stated, “The voices that blocked these safeguards were not the voices of an aroused nation. They were the voices of a powerful gun lobby that has prevailed for the moment in an election year.”¹⁰⁸

The 1960s set the precedent for how future gun control legislation would be handled federally with respect to the gun lobby. The passage of the 1968 Gun Control Act resulted in the NRA’s growing involvement of gun rights activists who, in 1975, would begin lobbying in politics like never before. The establishment of the NRA-ILA (Institute for Legislative Action) snowballed into the creation of their Political Action Committee (or PAC) just in time for the 1976 presidential election. This newly established PAC would begin channeling funds to legislators who supported as few restrictions on firearms as possible. Growing in its power, the NRA was able to amend the Gun Control Act of 1968 by lobbying for the passage of the Firearm Owners Protection Act in 1986. This act lessened the restrictions originally placed by the GCA by allowing the interstate sale of long guns and ammunition via USPS. It also removed the requirement for record keeping on sales of non-armor piercing ammo and granted federal

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

protection of the transport of guns through states where possession would otherwise be illegal.

State Public Policy Debate

The Texas Legislature passed the Safe Schools Act in 1995 which outlines procedures for school employees such as teachers and administrators to follow if the situation arises where a student needs to be removed from a classroom or school setting. The act states that a student who brings a firearm or any other prohibited form of weaponry into a school setting must be expelled to a Juvenile-Justice Alternative Education Program.¹⁰⁹ However, it does not address ways to prevent such instances from occurring. Moreover, passage of this form of legislation insinuates that such instances have occurred and will continue to arise. It fails to put safety measures into place that actually prevent students from bringing weapons into schools and instead deals with what actions to take in the aftermath.

Also passed in 1995 by the Texas Legislature was the Castle Doctrine, which guarantees Texans the right to defend their home or “castle” through the use of reasonable or even deadly force.¹¹⁰ A person is thus justified in using deadly force against a home intruder if the person believes that force is reasonably necessary to prevent the intruder from causing harm. The law also extends a person’s use of force to include their workplace and vehicle. Deadly force includes the use of firearms. Hence, if a person is feeling threatened in any way, shape, or form, they have the right under Texas law to shoot the threatening person if they have already attempted to retreat. Similar to the

¹⁰⁹ Texas AFT, “Safe Schools Act,” 2020, <https://www.texasaft.org/resources/safe-schools-act/>.

¹¹⁰ Chad West, “Explained: Castle Doctrine vs. Stand Your Ground,” Chad West, PLLC Attorneys at Law, December 19, 2017, <https://www.chadwestlaw.com/blog/explained-castle-doctrine-vs-stand-your-ground/>.

Castle Doctrine, Texas' Stand Your Ground law also permits Texans to use reasonable force, including firearms. Passed in 2000, the law allows a person to defend themselves when threatened with bodily harm or death without having to first attempt to retreat.¹¹¹ Unlike the Castle Doctrine, the law can be put into use anywhere a person may be, it is not limited to actions that occur in or on a person's property. Although some Texans feel these laws are substantial forms of legislation that ensure their right to protect themselves, others feel they disproportionately result in the deaths of minorities, specifically African American males.¹¹² The Castle Doctrine was expanded in 2007 by the Texas Legislature to include the right to use deadly force without attempting to retreat from anywhere a person has a right to be.¹¹³ It is no longer subjected to one's home, workplace, or vehicle. The existence of the two laws has recently sparked backlash against the state's gun legislation due to the death of Austin protestor Garrett Foster, who was shot to death by an armed driver with a handgun while protesting and openly carrying an AK-47 rifle.¹¹⁴ The shooter has cited the state's Stand Your Ground law as the reason for shooting; however witnesses claim Foster posed no threat to the shooter. The situation displays the problems that lie within Texas' gun legislation and raises awareness on how lax gun control laws can result in the wrongful death of innocent persons.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Eva Hershaw, "Coleman Aims to Modify 'Stand Your Ground' Law," The Texas Tribune, February 19, 2015, <https://www.texastribune.org/2015/02/19/rep-coleman-aims-modify-texas-stand-your-ground-la/>.

¹¹³ Explainer, "When Can Texans Use Deadly Force in Self-Defense?" The Texas Tribune, March 27, 2012, <https://www.texastribune.org/2012/03/27/explainer-when-can-texans-use-deadly-force-self-d/>.

¹¹⁴ Meena Venkataramanan, "For Austin Officials Investigating Garrett Foster's Death, a Key Question May Be Which Party Acted in Self-Defense," The Texas Tribune, July 30, 2020, <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/07/30/garrett-foster-austin-texas-stand-your-ground-self-defense/>.

More recently, the 84th Texas Legislature made gun laws more relaxed with the passage of Senate Bill 11 in 2015. Also known as the “Campus Carry Bill,” it requires that all Texas college campuses allow people over the age of twenty-one to carry concealed handguns on college campuses. The bill went into effect August 1, 2016, the fiftieth anniversary of the UT Tower shooting. During the signing of SB 11, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott stated, “The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”¹¹⁵ Abbott is a pro-gun Republican who is proud of his relationship with the National Rifle Association (NRA). Governor Abbott received an “A” rating from the NRA during the general 2014 election. According to the organization’s website, an “A” rating is reserved for, “pro-gun elected officials who consistently support the NRA’s position on issues of importance to gun owners and sportsman.”¹¹⁶

The implementation of campus carry at UT did not set well with all students, staff, faculty, and local residents. In fact, many stated that SB 11 was a main cause in UT’s mental health facilities becoming overcrowded due to elevated concerns of another mass shooting occurring on campus. SB 11 was also the cause of anti-campus carry groups, such as Gun Free UT, being established as a way to demand UT officials to reevaluate the level of resources devoted to mental health.¹¹⁷ Daniel Hamermesh, an economics emeritus professor at UT since 1993, ended up retiring over SB 11 and UT’s refusal to reevaluate its decision to allow guns on campus. He feared explaining a failing

¹¹⁵ “Campus Carry Remains Contentious Issue,” *The Daily Texan*, November 2015, accessed April 1, 2020, <http://www.dailytexanonline.com/2015/11/02/campus-carry-remains-contentious-issue>.

¹¹⁶ “NRA Endorses Greg Abbott for Governor in Texas,” *NRA-PVF*, September 2014, accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.nrapvf.org/articles/20140918/nra-endorses-greg-abbott-for-governor-in-texas>.

¹¹⁷ Rebecca Johnston, “A Fitting Memorial: The Mental Health Legacy of the Whitman Murders,” *Behind the Tower*, 2016, <http://behindthetower.org/a-fitting-memorial>.

grade to an angry student who was armed and could easily shoot him.¹¹⁸ The implementation of SB 11 at UT created a divide amongst students and faculty. Some felt that being able to carry handguns on campus makes them safer, while others felt it actually puts them in danger.

Bridging the Divide in Texas' Gun Policy Debate

The divide over gun control is not solely a UT problem, but rather a Texas problem in general. The actions of Texas government officials in the aftermath of the tower shooting, either directly or indirectly, shaped the public's collective memory in terms of how society discusses and handles mass school shootings in their aftermath. All too often, Texas officials have resorted to passing legislation that involves more policing and easier access to guns in response to mass school shootings.¹¹⁹ They have been more concerned with pleasing the gun lobby than with saving lives. This became apparent through the amount of money taken by various Texas government officials from the NRA in exchange for passing and supporting lax gun legislation in each election cycle. A student led activist group called March For Our Lives (MFOL) took it upon themselves to calculate the price of each student's life based on the millions of dollars politicians have taken from the NRA.¹²⁰ They did this by totaling up NRA donations to government officials in each state and dividing that amount by the total number of students enrolled in

¹¹⁸ "University of Texas Professor Quits Over State's 'Campus Carry' Gun Law," *The Guardian*, (October 2015), accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/oct/08/university-of-texas-professor-quits-campus-carry-gun-law>.

¹¹⁹ Justin Krueger, "Policing Before and After August 1, 1966," *Behind the Tower*, 2016, <http://behindthetower.org/policing>. The aftermath of the Tower shooting shows how Texas officials passed legislation involving more policing (SB 162 & SWAT est.), easier access to guns (SB 11), and mental health facilities.

¹²⁰ MFOL, "Print a Price Tag.," March For Our Lives, January 13, 2020, <https://marchforourlives.com/price-tags/>.

that state's public school system. In the case of Texas, each student life is worth three hundredths of one cent (0.03 cents). This means that if a mass school shooting were to occur in the state resulting in student/teacher deaths, each Texas government official would only hypothetically lose out on that amount per death.

Overall, the responses of federal and state government officials to the mass amount of gun violence America experienced during the late twentieth century shaped the public's collective memory in terms of what forms of legislation would be passed as a response. President Johnson's passage of minor gun control legislation, matched with the NRA's lobbying against such legislation, set the tone for how future gun control legislation would be handled. It created a dominant historical narrative within society centered on divisiveness. Anti- and pro-gun stances were created by state and federal government officials who remained focused on the passage or failure of legislation that aligned with their personal agendas rather than focusing on saving American lives. Hence, society's collective memory, since the 1960s, has been conditioned to expect such actions in the aftermath of mass gun violence in America.

The UT Tower shooting displays how stakeholders, like the media, have the ability to influence how state officials respond to mass school shootings. It also shows the ability of stakeholders to construct a problematic historical narrative. The media's obsession with the shooter's identity and brain tumor made the tower shooting an issue of mental health. This, paired with UT's failure to memorialize adequately the tower shooting with victims and survivors in mind, caused its historical narrative to be centered on the shooter for several decades. UT's decision to work towards the erasure of the tower shooting from society's collective memory resulted in other stakeholders being

able to control the shooting's narrative. Its' decision to not create a public place where people feel encouraged to share, store, and create memories of the tower shooting left survivors and community members to suffer alone with survivor's guilt for decades. The universities' early commemoration and memorialization attempts failed to generate political action amongst government officials to prevent future mass school shootings from occurring. They also caused survivors to be stuck in an emotional catharsis and did not encourage democratic processes.

In *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, historian John Gillis discusses the importance of the need for democratic societies to publicize rather than privatize the memories and identities of all groups so that each may know and respect the other's version of the past. "We need civil times and civil spaces more than ever, for these are essential to the democratic processes by which individuals and groups come together to discuss, debate, and negotiate the past, and through this process, define the future."¹²¹ UT's decision to finally share authority with tower shooting survivors during the creation of the shooting's permanent memorial allows for their expression of individual memories. It challenges false historical narratives centered on mental health and the shooter through the inclusion of survivors' firsthand lived experiences. This shift in power, one that occurred from the bottom up, places those who were affected by the tower shooting at the center of its historical narrative and assures that future generations remember the fifteen innocent lives lost and countless others who were affected by the shooting. No longer is the shooter at the forefront of society's collective memory.

¹²¹ John Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 20.

III. THE 1999 COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL MASS SHOOTING

The Columbine High School (CHS) mass shooting occurred thirty-two years after the UT Tower mass school shooting. CHS is located in Columbine, Colorado, an unincorporated territory in southern Jefferson County. Having begun around 11:15 A.M., twelve students and one teacher lost their lives on April 20, 1999 with twenty-four more being injured at the hands of two senior student shooters. The Columbine shooting involved more than firearms. Nearly one hundred explosive devices, in several forms, were also used and planted throughout the campus, delaying the entry of response teams. As a result, wounded students, teachers, and staff members helplessly waited for hours inside the high school for help to arrive. Stationed atop a roof of a house south of CHS, Jefferson County sniper Dennis Beery reported at 1:45 P.M. seeing a woman inside the school's science room holding a sign, "I BLEEDING TO DEATH."¹²² At about 4:45 P.M., CHS had been cleared of surviving occupants and the official death count was released. The Columbine shooting became the deadliest high school mass shooting in American history. It made apparent the unpreparedness and inability of police agencies, response teams, and government officials to successfully prevent and stop such tragic acts of violence from occurring. It also displayed larger cultural divides that were occurring in America during the late twentieth century regarding religion, youth culture, and school safety.

Similar to chapter two, this chapter analyzes the ability of stakeholders to create false historical narratives that impact society's collective memory of mass school shootings. However, this chapter provides insight relative to the Columbine mass school

¹²² William H. Erickson, *The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission*, 2001, 51.

shooting in regard to religion and the role it played in the Columbine community during the shooting's aftermath in terms of memorialization, legislation, and school safety. It also analyzes the media's effect on the responses of state and federal government officials in the shooting's aftermath and how those responses have led society to its current position on gun legislation. This chapter explores the ability of grassroots activism, concerning memorialization, to challenge media-created historical narratives that are false and shooter-centered. Moreover, this chapter highlights society's ability to shift the power away from stakeholders who try to control the historical narrative and collective memory of tragic events, like the CHS mass shooting, by being involved in their memorialization processes. The key differences expressed in this chapter indicate that mass school shootings' larger historical contexts shape society's collective memory and memorialization efforts of tragic events in their aftermath. However, as long as society is mindful of the role in which memory plays in shaping an event's historical context, they can work towards preserving a truthful and holistic collective memory of mass school shootings with survivors and victims at the forefront.

Thirty-one other mass school shootings had occurred in America between 1966 and 1999 at primary and secondary schools, as well as at universities, as shown in the table on the next page.¹²³ Shocked by the traumatic events that unfolded, the Columbine community banded together in the shooting's immediate aftermath with a focus on love and unity. Unlike the University of Texas, Columbine High School acknowledged the need for survivors to publicly grieve and mourn the losses experienced on April 20, 1999

¹²³ Table 1 depicts the thirty-one mass school shootings that occurred between August 2, 1966 and April 20, 1999. Info retrieved from "List of School Shootings in the United States," July 9, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_school_shootings_in_the_United_States_\(before_2000\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_school_shootings_in_the_United_States_(before_2000)).

in the shooting's immediate aftermath. In some measure, CHS' ability to publicly grieve the mass school shooting was a result of the times. Earlier acts of mass violence had occurred, such as the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and the Waco siege in 1993, creating a mental template for how society should react in the aftermath of tragic events. Unfortunately, the UT Tower shooting occurred during a time with less context of such acts of mass violence, causing the university to feel the need to sweep it under the rug and work to erase memory of its occurrence. It became clear in the CHS shooting's aftermath that the Columbine community was determined to remember what happened on April 20 and preserve that memory for future generations through first-hand memorialization and commemoration.

Table 1. American Mass School Shootings 1966-1999

Dates	City, State	School Name	Killed/ Wounded
12-Nov-66	Mesa, Arizona	Rose-Mar College	5,2
5-Oct-70	Pontiac, Michigan	Pontiac Central High School	0,4
11-Nov-72	Pontiac, Michigan	Pontiac Central High School	0,5
30-Dec-74	Olean, New York	Olean High School	3,11
11-Sep-75	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	Grant High School	1,5
12-Feb-76	Detroit, Michigan	Murray-Wright High School	0,5
12-Jul-76	Fullerton, California	California State University	7,2
17-Oct-78	University City, Missouri	Universtiy City High School	0,4
29-Jan-79	San Diego, California	Cleveland Elementary School	2,9
24-Feb-84	Los Angeles, California	49th Street Elementary School	3,12
18-Oct-85	Detroit, Michigan	Murray-Wright High School	0,7
16-May-86	Cokeville, Wyoming	Cokeville Elementary School	2, 74
4-Dec-86	Iewistown, Montana	Fergus High School	1,3
20-May-88	Winnetka, Illinois	Hubbard Woods School	2,5
22-Sep-88	Chicago, Illinois	Moses Montefiore Academy	5,2
26-Sep-88	Greenwood, South Carolina	Oakland Elementary School	2,9
17-Jan-89	Stockton, California	Cleveland Elementary School	6,32
1-Nov-91	Iowa City, Iowa	University of Iowa	6,1
1-May-92	Olivehurst, California	Lindhurst High School	4,10
11-Sep-92	Amarillo, Texas	Palo Duro High School	0,7
4-Nov-92	Detroit, Michigan	Finney High School	0,11
14-Dec-92	Great Barrington, Massachusetts	Bard College at Simon's Rock	2,4
17-Sep-93	Sheridan, Wyoming	Central Junior High School	1,4
7-Nov-94	Wickliffe, Ohio	Wickliffe Middle School	1,5
2-Feb-96	Moses Lake, Washington	Frontier Middle School	3,1
19-Feb-97	Bethel, Alaska	Bethel Regional High School	2,2
1-Oct-97	Pearl, Mississippi	Pearl High School	3,7
1-Dec-97	West Paducah, Kentucky	Heath High School	3,5
24-Mar-98	Craighead County, Arkansas	Westside Middle School	5,10
24-Apr-98	Edinboro, Pennsylvania	Parker Middle School	1,3
21-May-98	Springfeild, Oregon	Thurston High School	4,25

Columbine Remembrance Ceremony

On April 20, 2019, the Columbine community assembled to honor those who lost their lives twenty years previously. The Columbine Remembrance Ceremony, hosted outside in Clement Park, emphasized the need for society to remember, reflect, and recommit to turn grief into action for those who no longer could.¹²⁴ With the victims' names posted on a banner as the backdrop at center stage, the ceremony heavily focused on "never forgetting" what happened on April 20, 1999. With government officials present such as governors John Hickenlooper and Jared Polis, and a special video message from former president Bill Clinton, the Columbine Remembrance Ceremony showed a state's ability to openly honor and discuss the tragic events that unfolded. Sean Graves, a Columbine shooting survivor, spoke at the ceremony. Shot six times, he had been paralyzed from the waist down with a T12 incomplete spinal cord injury. After forty-nine surgical procedures, months in the hospital, and years of physical therapy, Graves eventually learned how to walk again. Although he survived such tragic physical injuries, he stressed that,

Not all scars are visible on the skin. On that day there was close to 2,000 people inside, students, staff, and teachers. On that day, those people walked into that building, but not a single one of us walked out the same. Everyone was broken, we all bled blue and silver (CHS' colors), but because we were broken, we were missing something inside. It was that something that we were all missing that allowed us to come together with the media looking to us for answers; we led the way. We showed them that we could overcome evil. We can love one another and become family.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ For a video of the full ceremony see Denver7, "Columbine Remembrance Ceremony," YouTube Video, April 20, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_CzGDQglvQA.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

The importance of unity, love, and memory were common trends in each of the survivor's speeches that spoke at the ceremony. The process of publicly grieving this mass school shooting resulted in the community coming together in its aftermath. As a way to combat the negative memories associated with what unfolded on April 20, the Columbine community worked together to shift the narrative from being shooter-centered to one focused on giving and spreading kindness. As a tribute to the thirteen lives that were taken at the hands of the shooters, April 20 is now officially known as the "Day of Service."¹²⁶ This form of annual public re-commitment not only helps to keep the memory of the victims alive, it also allows for survivors to turn their grief into action.

Grassroots Memorialization and Evangelical Christianity at Columbine

One day after the Columbine mass school shooting unfolded, grassroots memorials began sporadically appearing at several prominent sites near the campus, a recent trend in American society. Students and community members began leaving school-related items, flowers, candles, crosses, and notes, usually in groupings of thirteen matching items, on the cars of some of the victims and in other areas around the high school (see illus. 4).¹²⁷ The campus itself was temporarily off-limits since it was considered a murder site.¹²⁸ Word of these shrines began to spread due to onsite

¹²⁶ Officially declared by Governor Polis, the Columbine Day of Service aims to encourage people to perform public acts of kindness. To see the Governor's official proclamation and read more about the Day of Service, visit this website: <https://www.columbineserves.org/press-release>.

¹²⁷ Rodolfo Gonzalez, *Melissa Mack of Bennett, Colorado, and Her Puppy "Ivan", Pause near a Memorial Site for Victims of the Columbine High School Shooting at Clement Park in Littleton, Colorado, on April 27, 1999, One Week to the Day after the First Emergency Call Came across at 11:21 A.m. on April 20, 1999.*, *Denver Public Library Digital Collections*, 2009, <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p16079coll32/id/388969/rec/300>.

¹²⁸ Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sanchez-Carretero, *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 110-111.

newscasters using them as backdrops, resulting in people arriving by the thousands to add their own offerings from all over the nation.



Illustration 5. Visitor at a Columbine Memorial Site

Eventually, the shrines grew to the size of a football field, consisting of a plethora of various items. Media coverage began highlighting these grassroots memorials as the center of their broadcasts since they did not have much information about the mass school shooting in its immediate aftermath. Acting as a substitute to factual and detailed information regarding the shooting, these shrines became a medium for feeding public interests as to what happened at Columbine High School.

The Columbine shooting demonstrated that spontaneous shrines as an element of mourning at mass school shootings were solidifying into traditions. Indeed, the usual balloons, stuffed animals, photos, candles, and cards left at sites of mass murder, a trend that began in the 1980s, indicates an existence of a mental template embedded in society. However, the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 catapulted this form of public mourning in America. The amount of ephemera placed at the Mourning Wall (also known as the Oklahoma Fence) in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing by approximately one million visitors set the precedent for how society would react in the aftermath of future

acts of mass violence.¹²⁹ Moreover, this form of grassroots memorialization is meant to realize social action and express protest, actualized by posting symbolic objects or by writings or drawings. The actions taken by society in the aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing exudes their collectively felt need to leave something behind, resulting in the creation of a mental template that would continue to be expressed in the aftermath of the Columbine mass school shooting. One mourner at Columbine commented to a news reporter, “What’s really sad is that we already know what to bring.”¹³⁰

The mental template expressed at the Columbine shrines excluded artifacts that memorialized the shooters or expressed hatred towards them. They also failed to reference gun control and political action. Instead, they acted as a venue for expressions of grief and so-called portals for communication with the dead through written and printed messages, a huge percentage of which expressed overtly Christian content, such as, “Heavenly Father, hear our cry.”¹³¹ An overwhelming amount of evangelical Christian themed messages and artifacts were left at the Columbine shrines, a unique characteristic not seen at prior sites of mass murder (see illus. 5).¹³² In part, this was due to the larger

¹²⁹ Ibid, 25.

¹³⁰ *National Public Radio* (NPR) “Reflections on Columbine and Blacksburg,” *Morning Edition*, April 17, 2007.

¹³¹ Sylvia Grider, “Memorializing Shooters with Their Victims: Columbine, Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University,” in *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, eds. Peter Jan Margry and Cristina Sanchez-Carretero (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 112.

¹³² Patrick Davison, *A Prayer with a Portrait of Jesus Rests in the Snow at a Memorial in Clement Park for the students Who Were Slain at Columbine H.S. Denver, Co. - in Littleton, Colorado on Tuesday April 22, 1999.*, *Denver Public Library Digital Collections*, 2009, <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p16079coll32/id/389556/rec/273>.

historical context of the late twentieth century, a period during evangelical Protestant growth in America.¹³³



Illustration 6. A Portrait of Jesus at a Memorial in Clement Park

It also had to do with the large evangelical community located in Jefferson county and their public mourning of two female victims, Cassie Bernall and Rachel Scott, who allegedly were shot as a direct result of their Christian faith.¹³⁴ Evangelicals chose to organize around the globalized idea of “the persecuted church” as a way to push the false narrative of the martyrs of Columbine.¹³⁵

Similarly, religion was used as a tool by the media to tap into society’s interests by framing their Columbine coverage around broader ideas of religious values prominent in the community and in America. This in turn empowered evangelicals to continue

¹³³ For more information on the growth of evangelical Christianity in America, see Charles J. Conniry, “Evangelical Christianity in America” (Newberg: George Fox University, 2008).

¹³⁴ The myth that Cassie Bernall and Shooter H had an exchange about her faith prior to him shooting her has since been debunked by survivor’s testimonies. It turns out that the exchange occurred between Shooter H and another victim, Valeen Schnurr. At the time, this information was controversial due to the fact that Cassie had become a martyr for the Protestant faith in the shooting’s immediate aftermath. Once the facts were revealed, many were hesitant in accepting them. For more information on the topic, see: Dave Cullen, “Who said Yes?” *Salon*, September 30, 1999, <https://www.salon.com/1999/09/30/bernall/>.

¹³⁵ Elizabeth Anne Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 8.

pushing their religion-centered false narrative of the shooting, making it an issue of good versus evil. According to Wendy M. Zoba, a senior writer at *Christian Today*, Shooter H and Shooter K targeted evangelical Christians in their rampage, citing Cassie Bernall and Rachel Scott.¹³⁶ Basing her claim on the hostility they expressed towards evangelicals on the released Columbine tapes (also referred to as the basement tapes), Zoba argued that the majority of victims were killed because of their beliefs. This hasty generalization, created through a religious lens, has since been proven to be false as no statistics show that the shooters specifically targeted evangelicals. Based off of the shooters' original plans to set off two twenty-pound propane bombs in the school's cafeteria, it is clear that the shooters set out to attack targets of opportunity in mass quantity. Regardless, these kinds of false narratives become embedded into society's collective memory and affect how the Columbine shooting is remembered.

Perhaps the evangelicals looked outward as a way to make sense of how a tragic mass school shooting could occur in such a holy and God-centered community. They refused to acknowledge the effects in which their own beliefs and religious intolerance may have triggered the shooters to kill their peers, and immediately associated Shooter H and Shooter K with Satan. As a result, the shooters became inhumane agents of evil, mythicized and engrained in society's collective memory. Many of the local clergy were appalled at the behavior of some of the evangelical pastors in their attempts to grab the limelight, use public events for personal and political agendas, and exploit the death of children, all in the name of God.¹³⁷ The actions taken by the evangelical community in

¹³⁶ W. M. Zoba, *Day of Reckoning: Columbine and the Search for America's Soul* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2000), 91-92.

¹³⁷ Larkin, *Comprehending Columbine*, 204.

the shooting's aftermath provides a good example of how false narratives, such as the shooters being agents of evil, become prevalent in society. According to McCluskey, "Defining events like a school shooting take the problem issue out of the realm of traditional public policy in which institutionalized sources can control the discourse. Instead, the event itself, and how it is initially covered by news organizations, propels the range of discourse with institutionalized sources having a limited ability to influence the discourse."¹³⁸ Although political institutions can eventually begin to control mass school shooting's narratives, breaking-news coverage sets the initial impressions in establishing public opinion which, in turn, influence the debate among institutionalized sources. This topic is further discussed in the media portion of this thesis.

Grassroots Memorialization from an Outsiders' Perspective

Furthering the Columbine shrine's Christian theme, fifteen crosses were erected by Greg Zanis on the hilltop of Clement Park adjacent to the school grounds on April 27, 1999. Zanis, a carpenter from a suburb of Chicago, conducted a private ministry called "Crosses for Losses." He traveled to sites of violent death to erect memorial crosses for victims in a personal crusade seeking to bring comfort to friends and families of the dead and express his Christian love for them.¹³⁹ Having no prior connection to the Columbine community, Zanis was reportedly contacted by a CHS student requesting his services for fifteen crosses. He erected the crosses a week after the mass school shooting. Standing six-feet-tall, they were deliberately made on a much larger scale compared to other crosses Zanis created and erected at various sites of tragedy across the country. They

¹³⁸ McCluskey, *News Framing of School Shootings*, 47.

¹³⁹ Margry and Sanchez-Carretero, *Grassroots Memorials*, 113.

greatly outsized the memorabilia items left by community members at the already-existing shrines. Zanis chose to distinctly separate the crosses from the community-created shrines, placing them on an opposing dramatic hill. This contrasted to the traditional protocol that had developed for mourners and visitors to add to existing shrines, not create separate and distinct ones of their own.

This was the first time Zanis was ever asked to erect crosses for murderers as well as their victims alongside one another. His inclusion of crosses that symbolized the two shooters was eventually met with backlash and controversy from anti-Christian organizations as well as community members that criticized the shooters being memorialized with the victims. Zanis placed the shooter's crosses at both ends of the thirteen other ones and called them the "fangs."¹⁴⁰ He also told reporters he purposely selected a different font to write the shooters' names in on the crosses to, "disassociate them from Christ."¹⁴¹ The presence of these crosses intensified the Christian context of both the victims and their murderers. They caused division within the community between those who thought the shooters deserved forgiveness and those who thought they didn't deserve any type of positive public attention.

The divide was evidenced by the mixed messages that mourners wrote on the crosses that symbolized the shooters (see illus. 6).¹⁴² "Forgive them Father, for they know

¹⁴⁰ Grider, "Memorializing Shooters with Their Victims: Columbine, Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University," 115.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Patrick Davison, *Ellie Elmore, a Colorado Christian University Student from San Diego, Signs Cassie Bernal's Cross at the Columbine Memorial at Clement Park Wednesday, April 28, 1999, in a Group of Fifteen Crosses Erected for Each of the Dead, Including the Shooters*, Denver Public Library Digital Collections, 2009, <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p16079coll32/id/389567/rec/180>.

not what they do (Luke 23: 34),” and “I’m sorry we failed you” are some examples. Others wrote, “Murderers burn in hell,” and “Hate breeds hate.”



Illustration 7. Student Signs Cross

The dialogic nature of the controversy over memorializing the shooters turned the shrine on the hill into a performative memorial, distinguished by the interactions of visitors with each other and the crosses. Moreover, Zanis’ fifteen crosses became a forum in which visitors could express their viewpoints, for everybody else to see and react to, through the public placement of ephemera at the site. Local and national media outlets from across the nation, including CNN and Houston’s Christian-based KLTJ, broadcasted visitors’ interactions with the crosses that in turn intensified the performance aspect of the growing controversy.

On April 30, 1999, Brian Rohrbough, a father of one of the victims, tore down the two crosses that symbolized the shooters because he felt it was immoral to memorialize them alongside the victims. Zanis traveled back to Columbine once he heard of the two crosses being removed and took down the remaining thirteen crosses. This was met with mixed feelings amongst the Columbine community. Some wanted Zanis to reinstall them while others were happy to see them gone. Hundreds of people contacted Zanis asking for him to bring back the crosses, which led him to construct thirteen new and smaller

ones.¹⁴³ After the discourse the original fifteen crosses caused, Zanis opted to not memorialize the shooters this time around. The Foothills Park and Recreation District, which had jurisdiction over Clement Park, refused to allow Zanis to place the new crosses on its' property. As a result, he placed them in a parking lot near Columbine High School. Local government officials ruled that the new crosses could not reside on public property and Zanis was forced to move the second set of crosses several miles away to private property. On May 27, 1999, Zanis' new set of crosses were placed at Chapel Hill Cemetery in Littleton, Arapahoe County, Colorado but were eventually replaced with marble ones.¹⁴⁴

Overall, Zanis' decision to create a spontaneous memorial from an outsider's perspective ultimately caused the shooting's historical narrative to be centered on religion, division, and the question of whether or not to memorialize the shooters alongside the victims. The religious debate sparked by Zanis' crosses exudes the larger historical context of the 1990s. Instead of allowing the Columbine community to heal, which reportedly is what Zanis hoped his crosses would do, they made the religious divide that was growing in America apparent.¹⁴⁵ Many officials who dealt with the emotional and volatile issues surrounding the mass school shooting described Zanis' crosses as a major nuisance that took precious time away from more pressing duties and responsibilities of dealing with the aftermath of the shooting like moving the Columbine High School student body to other schools for the remainder of the school year.¹⁴⁶ The

¹⁴³ Grider, *Memorializing Shooters with Their Victims*, 118.

¹⁴⁴ For a video of the permanent marble crosses, visit this link: mwalters426, "Columbine Memorial Garden- Chapel Hill Cemetery in Littleton, CO- Part 2," YouTube Video, April 24, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_m5FkO319Wg.

¹⁴⁵ For examples of the religious divide caused by Zanis' crosses, see Grider 117-119.

¹⁴⁶ Grider, *Memorializing Shooters with Their Victims*, 119.

crosses also acted as a distraction, causing locals to refrain from pushing for political action in the shooting's immediate aftermath and instead place their focus on the debate surrounding the fifteen crosses themselves. It was apparent that Zanis' performative memorial was not what the Columbine community needed to begin healing.

Permanent Memorial

Talks of the need for a permanent memorial began in June of 1999 by various community leaders and members. As a result, the Columbine Memorial Committee was formed in an effort to plan and design a memorial where people could honor and pay respect to those affected by the mass school shooting. The committee members aimed to create a memorial that would evoke remembrance, peace, comfort, hope and spirituality. They also established the fundamental philosophy that they would always share authority with the victim's families, injured students and faculty, survivors, and the Columbine community in regard to the memorial's planning, design, and fundraising processes.¹⁴⁷ They did this by creating a clearly defined participatory process that followed a four-level tiered diagram.¹⁴⁸ These tiers of communal involvement resulted in the Columbine Memorial Committee's successfully sharing authority with those most impacted by the mass school shooting. Moreover, by including the public in the memorial's design process, the Committee allowed for the community to turn their grief into action. The involvement of survivors in the memorial's design process was a start to a shift in power.

¹⁴⁷ Columbine Memorial Foundation, "Overview: The Memorial," Columbine Memorial, 2007, http://www.columbinememorial.org/?page_id=42.

¹⁴⁸ The first tier involved the families of those who were killed working closely with the committee on decision-making and design. The second tier consisted of injured individuals and families who established the memorial's priorities. The third tier involved design workshops and surveying data collection with past and present high school students, staff, and faculty. Finally, the fourth tier brought community members into the memorialization process through surveys and an open house. Ibid.

The first-hand experience survivors utilized in the process of establishing the permanent memorial created a more holistic historical narrative of the shooting. It also placed the victims and survivors at the forefront, directly working to erase shooter centered false narratives.

Prior to the memorial's design plan being created and unveiled to the public, Columbine High School needed some major rebuilding due to the destruction caused by the mass school shooting. Parents of the victims and the injured joined forces to create the grassroots group named Healing of People Everywhere (H.O.P.E.) that spearheaded the high school's needed renovation and fundraising efforts. The original library located on the campus' second floor, where ten students lost their lives, was completely demolished and renovated into a new cafeteria space including a two-story atrium.¹⁴⁹ The atrium displays a mural of aspen and evergreen species native to Colorado, alongside thirteen abstract hanging clouds in memory of the victims. H.O.P.E. members stressed the importance of reshaping the campus' landscape so current and future students would not be left wondering where victims were targeted. This was done through the incorporation of nature elements intended to make students feel like they were walking through a forest.¹⁵⁰ It officially opened on August 20, 2000. Shortly after, a new library was unveiled on June 9, 2000. Now located on the grassy knoll near the campus' main building's west entrance, the New Hope Columbine Memorial Library design provided students with a new learning space while honoring the lives lost during the shooting. At

¹⁴⁹ Alvarado Construction Company donated their services to complete the renovations. Stacie Oulton, "'Boss' Fans Build Funds for Columbine," *The Denver Post*, June 6, 2020, <https://extras.denverpost.com/news/shot0330c.htm>.

¹⁵⁰ For H.O.P.E. members discussing the newly renovated cafeteria area and images of the renovations, see Reb the Juvey, "Columbine Atrium Opening (August 20, 2000)," YouTube Video, August 20, 2000, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hdr0giVICAs>.

its entrance stands a plaque that lists the thirteen victim's names. All in all, the renovations cost a total of \$3.1 million.

Three and a half years after the mass school shooting occurred, the Columbine Memorial Committee was able to unveil a conceptual design for the permanent memorial that exuded the overarching goals of those involved in the planning process and themes of nature. The design included an outer wall, the Wall of Healing, made of native Colorado red stones and shaped in an oval. As the largest part of the memorial, the Wall of Healing is intended to provide society with a place to remember and reflect on their personal experiences.



Illustration 8. Outer Wall of Healing

A grove of trees, low native plantings, and flowers are incorporated around the edges of the Wall of Healing to create an inviting garden environment. Quotes from the community, students, parents, first responders, and notable statements that were made at the groundbreaking of the memorial are etched along the backend of the wall (see illus. 7).¹⁵¹ This portion of the memorial was intended to honor all who were injured, first responders, and all who were touched by the mass school shooting. Benches can be found, encouraging visitors to sit in reflection and contemplation.

¹⁵¹ Darin McGregor, *Outer Wall of Healing*. Denver Public Library Digital Collections, 2007, <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p16079coll32/id/335702/rec/156>.

The center of the memorial, known as the Ring of Remembrance, is composed of an intimate oval shaped grove of trees and landscape accompanied by stone paving at the center of the oval (see illus. 8).¹⁵² Each of the victim's families provided a unique and



Illustration 9. People Visit the Columbine Memorial

personal text that would honor the loved ones lost on April 20, 1999 to the committee.

These words were then etched onto the tops of the stones found at the center of the memorial (see illus. 9).¹⁵³

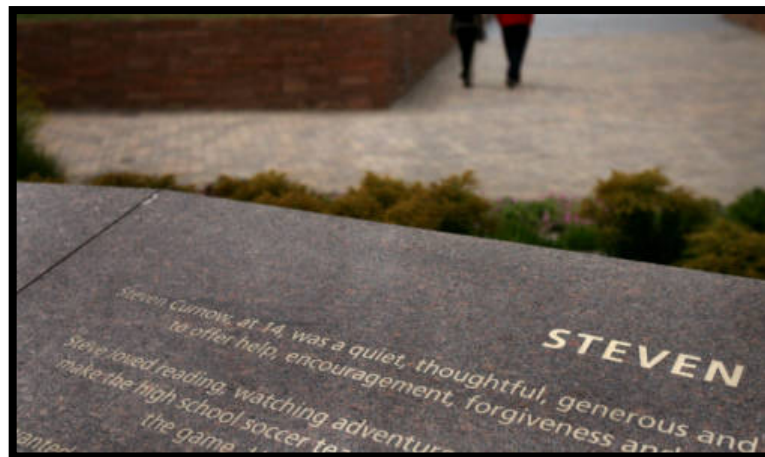


Illustration 10. People Visit the Columbine Memorial

¹⁵² Preston Gannaway, *People Visit the Columbine Memorial in Littleton, Colo., on Sunday, September 14, 2008*, Denver Public Library Digital Collections, 2008, <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p16079coll32/id/243425/rec/217>.

¹⁵³ Preston Gannaway, *People Visit the Columbine Memorial in Littleton, Colo., on Sunday, September 14, 2008*, Denver Public Library Digital Collections, 2008, <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p16079coll32/id/243426/rec/219>.

There is also an intricate ribbon design, created by victim Kyle Velasquez's parents, that fills the inner-most space of the Ring of Remembrance (see illus. 10).¹⁵⁴ The phrase, "Never Forgotten" is inscribed on the ribbon's tails as it frames a connection to the outer Wall of Healing and becomes a symbolic link between the community and the victims.¹⁵⁵



Illustration 11. Youth Group Cast Shadows at Columbine Memorial

Nature elements such as the sound of water coming from a nearby fountain at the entrance of the memorial, the overlooks of the Rocky Mountains, and the eastern plains of the Columbine community comfort visitors. The incorporation of nature into the Columbine memorial echoes the societal trend occurring in American memorial culture during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This trend was also apparent at UT's 1999 memorial service that centered on the dedication of the campus' Turtle Pond in honor of the fifteen victims.

¹⁵⁴ Matt McClain, *Members of a Youth Group from St. Andrew United Methodist Church in Highlands Ranch Cast Shadows While Visiting the Columbine Memorial at Clement Park Recently*, Denver Public Library Digital Collections, 2008, <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p16079coll32/id/373703/rec/88>.

¹⁵⁵ Columbine Memorial Foundation, "Overview: The Memorial," Columbine Memorial, 2007, http://www.columbinememorial.org/?page_id=42.

It took longer than expected to complete the memorial, in part because of the downward moving economy. Groundbreaking for the memorial took place on June 16, 2006 with construction beginning in August. It was officially completed in 2007, eight years after the mass school shooting occurred.¹⁵⁶ The long amount of time it took to complete the memorial was also due to financial reasons. Originally estimated to be a \$2.5 million project, fundraising for the memorial was slow due to the community's immediate needs including rebuilding the school library and cafeteria. The early twenty-first century also experienced economic downturn, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina, which inherently prolonged the memorial's fundraising efforts. In the end, the total project cost of the memorial was \$2.2 million.¹⁵⁷

The dedication ceremony on September 21, 2007, reflected the community's desire to remember the Columbine mass school shooting's victims and survivors. During the ceremony, speakers stressed the importance of remembering. Dawn Anna, victim Lauren Townsend's mother, spoke on behalf of the victim's families. She declared the memorial to be a place where those who were affected by the shooting could go to remember and reflect on the thirteen lives lost. Committee member Paul Rufien stated, "We're going out of our way to avoid the word closure, because closure sounds like we mean forgetting. This place is about remembrance."¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the committee and

¹⁵⁶ For a virtual tour of the permanent memorial, see Brent Johnson, "Columbine Memorial Photos- A complete tour of the Columbine Memorial by images," *Brentpix*, April 21, 2012, <https://www.brentpix.com/Colorado/Columbine-Memorial/>.

¹⁵⁷ Columbine Memorial Foundation, "FAQ," Columbine Memorial, 2007, http://www.columbinememorial.org/?page_id=61.

¹⁵⁸ The Associated Press, "'This Place Is about Remembrance:' Columbine Memorial Opens," *The Denver Post*, September 21, 2007, <https://www.denverpost.com/2007/09/21/this-place-is-about-remembrance-columbine-memorial-opens/amp/>.

community members involved in the memorial's design process intended for it to nurture memories, not erase them.

Erika Doss argues that temporary memorials centered around therapeutic and emotional aims prevent the public from recognizing causes and determining preventative measures.¹⁵⁹ She claims that temporary memorials centered on grief encourage individuals to be frozen in emotional catharsis, disengaged from the social and political initiatives that might check such violence.¹⁶⁰ The temporary memorials created for the Columbine mass school shooting were definitely centered on emotion and religion. Religion became embedded into society's collective memory of the shooting. In turn, religion became a tool for government officials to influence policies based off of their own personal views. Zanis' temporary memorial, centered on religion, alongside Columbine's large evangelical Christian community who turned to God for answers dominated the shooting's narrative. Religion became one of the leading preventative measures to implement inside public schools in hopes of avoiding another mass school shooting. Publicized by the many media outlets who covered the shooting, the topic of religion quickly trickled into political debates.¹⁶¹ Moreover, the Columbine community's creation of temporary memorials in the aftermath of the mass school shooting enacted legislative action centered on religion. Although religion may not be considered to be a preventative measure against future mass school shootings to some, for the Columbine community, it was. Hence, temporary memorials can provide insight into what narratives

¹⁵⁹ Erika Doss *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 81.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 115.

¹⁶¹ See ten commandment discussion in "Religion as a Tool of Division and Public Policy Debate" section of this chapter.

dominated society's collective memory of tragic events at the time of their occurrence as well as the times larger historical context.

What Happened That Day; Collective and Individual Memory

Similar to the UT Tower mass school shooting, the Columbine High School mass shooting narrative quickly became centered on all aspects of the shooters. As a result, the shooters and Columbine High School itself have become deeply imbedded in society's collective memory of the mass school shooting. In an effort to give agency to someone other than the shooters, I have chosen to outline the events that occurred on April 20, 1999 through the perspective of Rebecca, whose two sons attended Columbine and were present the day of the shooting.¹⁶² By describing the Columbine mass school shooting in this light, I display trauma's ability to extend beyond the memories of those who were inside of the high school that day. I also outline the differences between individual's vernacular memories and society's collective memory of the Columbine shooting in relation to the false dominant narratives created by stakeholders. In doing so, I intend to shift the Columbine mass school shooting's historical narrative to one that is focused on survivor's memories.

Rebecca disclosed her memories to graduate student Carolyn Lunsford Mears, also a parent of a CHS student survivor, via oral histories for Mears' dissertation project titled *Experiences of Columbine Parents: Finding a Way to Tomorrow*. Mears conducted three oral history interview sessions with six parents individually five years after the

¹⁶² In an effort to protect the confidentiality of the six parents and their families, all names have been changed. Details that might provide clues to their identities were also deleted and not used in the final narratives.

shooting occurred.¹⁶³ The final result of each parent's interview sessions are poetic representations consisting of direct quotes excerpted from their interview transcripts arranged into a narrative sequence.¹⁶⁴ I have chosen to use excerpts from the interviews conducted with Rebecca to illustrate how her individual memories of the Columbine shooting differ from the media created historical narrative centered on religion and the shooters themselves. I do this in an effort to humanize the traumatic experiences of survivor's parents and raise awareness about the widespread effects of trauma in the aftermath of tragic events. For a more detailed historical account of the shooting in its entirety, check out sections four and five of the Columbine Review Commission's final report.¹⁶⁵

Reflecting on the morning of April 20, 1999, Rebecca recalled being at work while her husband, Alan, was out of state on business. Having received a phone call from his sister where she made him aware that something had happened at CHS, Alan quickly called Rebecca.

He [Alan] told me to go to the school. At the same time, my boss came in. She asked me if my children attended Columbine. I said they did, and she said I needed to go home.

As she drove home, Rebecca turned on all the radio stations desperate to hear some news as to what was occurring at Columbine HS. Deciding to call a neighbor in search of details, she reached their son who said that there were people shooting in the school. Once she arrived home, there was a message from her older son, Brad, saying he was fine

¹⁶³ To see the other five parent's stories, see chapter four in Mears' *Experiences of Columbine Parents: Finding a Way to Tomorrow*.

¹⁶⁴ Carolyn L. Mears, *Experiences of Columbine Parents: Finding a Way to Tomorrow* (Denver: The University of Denver, 2005), 75.

¹⁶⁵ Erickson, *The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission*, 2001, pgs. 25-63.

and off campus at the time of the shooting, but did not know the whereabouts of his younger brother Nathan. After attempting to call several neighbors and her son's friends for information on Nathan, Rebecca was unable to get through due to the phone lines being jammed. She still had no information about her younger son who was a sophomore at the time of the mass school shooting. Deciding to go to a neighbor's house to see if Nathan ended up there, Rebecca saw the media covering the shooting on television. The neighbor knew where her own son was and aided Rebecca in trying to call around and see if they could find Nathan.

The media really didn't know what was going on, but they thought it could be a hostage situation. That was so frightening, I didn't know if Nathan was a hostage. I didn't know anything about him.

Rebecca decided to go back to her house once Brad was there. The television broadcasted that Columbine was bringing students in school buses out to two locations to be reunited with their families. Brad and Rebecca went to Leawood Elementary, one of the two locations, in search of Nathan.

There were so many parents standing in the gymnasium, waiting for their children to arrive. They had lists posted on the wall, but we didn't see any names we knew on the wall. There were a lot of neighbors and friends, and a feeling of extreme anxiety. Tons of media were outside, and more arriving.

Brad and Rebecca decided to check the library where they encountered a completely different situation than in the gym. The police were using the area to interview kids who had been present during the shooting and were restricting entry. Unable to enter the library, Rebecca and Brad decided to check the posted lists for Nathan's name.

Unfortunately, they did not see any names they recognized. After realizing there was not much they could do at the school, the pair decided to go back home to see if Nathan had

arrived. Brad turned to Rebecca during the car ride home and said, “Mom I hate to say this, but I think that Nathan may still be inside the school.”¹⁶⁶

Knowing that my child was in the school, either dead, or injured, or hiding somewhere, probably in extreme danger, that made it real.

After arriving back home, Rebecca eventually received a call from the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office informing her that Nathan was safe and out of the high school. He was put on a bus that was taking him to Leawood where she would be able to pick him up. Feeling relieved from the good news, Brad and Rebecca headed over to collect Nathan.

When I went back, I felt guilty. I knew my kid was okay, but these other parents didn’t know whether their kid was okay or not. It was terrible. Even though the sheriff told us he [Nathan] was okay, until you actually see your kid with your own eyes and touch him for yourself, you’re not convinced.

Rebecca went on to describe how once the kids got off the buses, they were walked across a stage where they could see their parents but could not physically touch them until the police had interviewed them.

People would scream out, “Oh there’s my son or my daughter!” Many of them broke down. Nathan was one of the last groups to come out of the building.

On their drive home, Nathan remained very quiet and shaky. Alan had a difficult time finding a last-minute flight back home that evening; however, he eventually arrived back home around nine o’clock. Rebecca, Alan, and their sons attended a service at the Light of the World Church that same evening. At the service, teachers and students were able to reconnect with one another. Teachers wanted to know which kids were okay because there was still no information about injuries or deaths.

¹⁶⁶ Mears, *Experiences of Columbine Parents*, 126.

It was amazing. One teacher saw Nathan and she came over and gave my husband this bear hug. It just about broke his back. It was just the strength of emotion. It was a powerful, powerful, moment. All these people who had been a part of this trauma— this moment of terror— to see them come back together and reconnect.

Having students return to Columbine after it had been repaired was overwhelming for many. For some, it was the first step towards returning back to life before the shooting.

Rebecca recalls Nathan's first day back to the campus as a, "moment of overcoming."¹⁶⁷

It was a huge step for those kids— to go back into that building that so many of them had run from in fear for their lives. For them to overcome that fear and go back there, it took incredible courage. I thought it was heroic.

Rebecca expressed her appreciation towards the district's decision to demolish the original library and create a new one in another location. This, alongside the new atrium and mural in the cafeteria, was therapeutic for the kids because the areas were completely redesigned, and officials made an effort to commemorate the thirteen lives lost. She also expressed gratitude towards the teachers for persevering, continuing to teach, grade papers, and doing their lesson plans. Several students gravitated towards teachers in the shooting's aftermath for guidance. "It was important to bond with people who were part of the experience."¹⁶⁸

The sense of community and support Rebecca received in the aftermath of the shooting from friends, family members, and community members alike played a major part in her ability to cope with the trauma she experienced.

If you are somehow connected to other people, then it helps you to get over your pain. I don't know how you could do it without other people. It was an act that violated the whole community, and I think individuals

¹⁶⁷ Mears, *Experiences of Columbine Parents*, 132.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

within the community have to heal with the others in [the] community or they won't really be that successful.

This sentiment is echoed throughout the other oral histories. The support survivors and their parents received from the Columbine community was something that those involved in the Tower shooting did not get to experience. Although both shootings created the feeling of survivor's guilt in those who lived through the tragedies, the Tower survivors were forced to be isolated in their trauma due to the lack of information and technology to allow them to connect with other survivors. The Columbine survivors had the opposite experience and banded together in the shooting's immediate aftermath to assure each other's well-being.

Media Response

The media's reporting shaped the ways in which the Columbine mass school shooting was remembered in its aftermath by creating false narratives centered on emotion, bullying, religion, and youth culture. This section aims to provide insight into the media's tactics in the aftermath of acts of mass violence and their standards to convey how their coverage shaped society's collective memory of the Columbine school shooting and its historical narrative. Immediately following the mass shooting, the media began focusing much of their coverage on survivor's reactions because very few facts were uncovered in the shooting's aftermath. This emotion centered technique is standard media protocol when reporting on acts of mass violence in the onset of their occurrence.¹⁶⁹ The shooting started at 11:19 a.m. MST and CNN began airing live coverage of it just before noon. Interrupting its current programming, CNN continued

¹⁶⁹ Radford, 91.

coverage for more than six hours.¹⁷⁰ At the local level, news stations like KUSA also pushed its regular programming off the air and began live coverage of the mass school shooting for ten hours straight.¹⁷¹ Various media outlets continued to arrive at Columbine High School for the next several days. According to Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, the peak of media interest was upwards of 500 reporters on scene, twenty news crews from other countries, between seventy-five and ninety satellite news trucks, and sixty television cameras.

The amount of media coverage the Columbine mass school shooting received at the local and national levels in its immediate aftermath paired with society's need to try and make sense of such a tragic event caused false narratives to spread quickly. Columbine was the most covered story on evening news broadcasts in 1999, with 319 stories aired. One week after the shooting occurred, ABC, CBS, and NBC collectively aired fifty-three stories on the Columbine shooting totaling up to nearly four hours of coverage. By comparison, thirteen other school shootings that occurred in close proximity to Columbine between 1996 and 2000 received slightly more coverage cumulatively than the Columbine mass school shooting did alone.¹⁷² According to media and mass shooting scholars Jaclyn Schildkraut and Glen Muschert, news producers make conscious decisions about how they frame mass school shooting stories in terms of format and content.¹⁷³ The ways in which the media covers traumatic events has a direct

¹⁷⁰ G.W. Muschert, *Media and Massacre: The Social Construction of the Columbine Story*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (University of Colorado at Boulder: Boulder, 2002).

¹⁷¹ A.C. Shepard, *The Columbine Shooting: Live Television Coverage, 2000*, accessed June 3, 2020. <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/j6075/edit/readings/columbine.html>.

¹⁷² Jaclyn Schildkraut and Glenn W. Muschert, *Columbine 20 Years Later: Lessons From Tragedy*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2019), 27.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29.

impact on how society makes sense of the provided information. Hence, the intense coverage and false information spread about the Columbine mass shooting in its' aftermath directly influenced the public's perception of the tragedy. The coverage also shaped society's collective memory of the shooting to include false narratives. As a result, survivors and victims' first-hand accounts were silenced or manipulated as a way to further the embedment of these false narratives into the shooting's historical narrative.

Emotion as a Memory Constructing Tool

Newscasters utilized their usual crime and crisis reporting questions, focused on thoughts and feelings, when interviewing survivors of the CHS shooting. Emotions essentially became the media's crutch in the Columbine shooting's aftermath, which only prevented the community from actually uncovering the facts. In part, the media focused on survivor's emotions because feelings require no fact checking. However, not all survivors were given airtime or deemed worthy of coverage. Those who chose to grieve quietly and acted indifferent to the shooting were not interviewed. Instead, students who grieved on cue in the "right" way to the "right" people were supported and seen on television.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, because the media placed so much emphasis on emotion, false narratives quickly became an issue in regard to society's collective memory of the Columbine shooting. One set revolved around tensions between student cliques within student culture. For example, one man who went by the name of Mike Smith, claimed to be the point guard for the high school's basketball team and shared several stories about

¹⁷⁴ Benjamin Radford, *Media Mythmakers: How Journalists, Activists, and Advertisers Mislead Us* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), 82. Reporters selected survivors who were more emotionally distraught to be interviewed and aired on live television as a way to play on viewers' emotions.

the culture inside Columbine High School. Claiming that the campus' male athletes and Trench Coat Mafia members had a tense relationship that school officials ignored, Smith's story aired on *USA Today* and the *Drudge Report*. Eventually, it was discovered that the man was not who he claimed to be and no student under the name Mike Smith attended Columbine High School.¹⁷⁵ However, because the media chose to give Smith's false statements airtime, the historical narrative had already begun shaping itself in society's collective memory.

Such misinformation also led to false narratives focused on religion. False information fueled the religious debate prompted by evangelicals who fixated on the supposed divisions and were thus able to associate the shooters with anti-Semitic groups, like the Trench Coat Mafia, and push their viewpoints onto the public through media coverage. Also, the above-mentioned myth of Cassie Bernall being shot for professing her belief in God was also another piece of false information that helped evangelicals push their religious centered narrative. Another set of myths focused on bullying. They emerged from the media's early reporting such as the shooters being bullied by athletes which caused them to want revenge. Yet, after analyzing the social context of Columbine High School, the Governor's commission (discussed more fully below) stated that it, "cannot assert that bullying at Columbine High School *caused* the homicidal attack on April 20, 1999."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Erickson, *The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission*, 99, footnote 212.

Youth Culture, Anti-teen Sentiment, and Bullying

Inevitably, youth culture took center stage in the media's reporting on the Columbine shooting. The shooters and their motives became a gateway for the media to portray the, "cruel and evil world of teens."¹⁷⁷ The misinformation obsessing on teen student culture spread quickly through the media and entered society's consciousness, adding to the anti-teen sentiment that dominated the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.¹⁷⁸ "Entertainment and news media both provide a negatively skewed perspective on youth, given the rapid media growth over the past five decades, there is an increase in the number of adults who view youth negatively."¹⁷⁹ This moral panic over youth delinquency resulted in legislators responding with restrictive measures towards young people as a way to gain social control. Some of these measures include the passage of parental controls and increase in youth being arrested for more minor offenses. Moreover, the media's coverage of the Columbine shooting resulted in other stakeholders approaching the shooting's aftermath through limited lenses. The media's ability to reach widespread audiences with its youth culture-centered coverage created a dominant historical narrative focused on unsubstantial storylines that acted as a distraction to society and government officials alike.

The excessive media coverage resulted in the embedment of false narratives into society's collective memory in terms of youth culture. The media used coverage of

¹⁷⁷ M. Males, "School Violence is Exaggerated by the Media," in *School Violence*, B.J. Grapes, ed., (San Diego: Green Haven, 2000), 22-25.

¹⁷⁸ For more information on the anti-teen sentiment experienced during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and the measures of social control taken by power structures, see pages 52-59 in Chelsea Daggett, *What We Don't Know: The Media Legacy of the Columbine Massacre and Present-Day Prevention* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 2017).

¹⁷⁹ Daggett, 50.

Columbine as a way to harness society's attention and appeal to anti-teen adults, who in turn raised the media's views. According to McCabe and Martin, "reporters related to child abuse, domestic violence, or gang warfare, quickly flocked to Columbine to discuss the youth culture of bullying, violent video games, and dressing in black."¹⁸⁰ Never in modern history had the media tried to link tragedy with teen violence like it did with the Columbine mass school shooting. The media's reporting following school violence reflects how society both articulates and understands mass school shootings.

The media's coverage on negative aspects of youth culture ultimately resulted in the shooters being placed at the forefront of the shooting's historical narrative. Hence, coverage of the thirteen victims and countless other who were affected by it began to lessen just two weeks after the shooting. As compared to the shooters, the victims received less attention by local and national media outlets alike. In fact, local newspaper *The Denver Post* mentioned the shooters just over twice as many times as the victims. At the national level, *The New York Times* mentioned the shooters six and a half times more for each individual reference to the shooting's victims.¹⁸¹ This pattern, as seen previously with the UT Tower shooting's coverage, would continue to be the case for future mass school shootings that have since taken place.

Grief as a Memory Constructing Tool

The media's focus on reporting the emotional toll the Columbine shooting had on society in its immediate aftermath has occasionally been met with criticism of grief-

¹⁸⁰ Kimberly A. McCabe and Gregory Martin, *School Violence, the Media, and Criminal Justice Responses* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 8.

¹⁸¹ G.A. Weatherby, E. Luzzo, and S. Zahm, Infamous Killer, Forgotten Victims: A Content Analysis of Print Media Coverage of Three Major School Shootings, *International Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 2016, 1 (1), 1-12.

chasing reporters being accused of exploiting survivors of tragic events. In their defense, the media claim that though their grief coverage isn't particularly informative, it helps victims express their pain and provides a sense of closure.¹⁸² In turn, the media's reporting helps both the victims and viewers. However, scientists have in fact found quite the opposite to be true. "Letting it out" is not an effective strategy for coping with stress and grief. According to a study done by the American Heart Association, "angry outbursts can more than double the risk of a heart attack in some people."¹⁸³ Despite these facts, calling for healing and closure is commonplace in moments of tragedy.

Referred to as the "closure movement," the need to publicize those affected by tragic events was a byproduct of the victims' rights movement that started in the 1970s.¹⁸⁴ Aimed at providing support for those affected by tragedy, the closure movement resulted in victim-assistance programs and psychological aid. In part, the idea that victims need to express their emotions stemmed from Sigmund Freud's theory of repression.¹⁸⁵ There is still no definitive understanding of closure in America, nor is there an official way to gauge whether a person has closure or not. Moreover, the media's claim that grief-based reporting aids survivors in attaining closure from the tragic situations is baseless. However, the closure movement's emphasis on the importance of survivors expressing their views and memories of their lived experiences of tragic events allows for outsiders to empathize and incorporate first-hand accounts into memorialization and commemoration practices. As a result, the firsthand accounts of

¹⁸² Radford, 92.

¹⁸³ Radford, 95.

¹⁸⁴ For more information on the history of the victim's movement, see Dr. Marlene Young and John Stein, "The History of the Crime Victims' Movement in the United States," Office for Victims of Crime Oral History Project, December 2004, https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/ncvrw/2005/pdf/historyofcrime.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ Radford, 93.

survivors and victims become tools to challenge false historical narratives, which allows for them to be placed at the center of society's collective memory of acts of mass violence.

Religion and Mythologizing as Memory Constructing Tools

The media and members of society also used religion to try and make sense of the Columbine mass school shooting by disassociating the shooters from humanity. This can be seen through the media's association of the shooters with anti-Christians and devil worship. The media attempted to make sense of the Columbine mass school shooting by associating it with larger religious contexts. In doing so, it furthered the false narrative that youth culture should be associated with negativity and evil, transforming the shooters from two teen boys into two murderous monsters through their reporting. Newspaper articles focused on what Shooter H and Shooter K wore, the weapons they carried, and their tactics. Statements like, "Two gun-toting teens were dressed in black trench coats, wearing masks, thought to be outcasts" were commonly made in both local and national newspapers.¹⁸⁶ Their journals and self-recorded basement tapes were published and transcribed by local and national news outlets like TIME, NPR, ABC, and 9NEWS which only strengthened the media created narrative centered on uncovering *why*.¹⁸⁷ It also resulted in society's collective memory of the Columbine shooting being centered on the shooters themselves.

¹⁸⁶ "As Many as 25 Dead in Colorado School Attack," CNN (Cable News Network, April 20, 1999), <http://www.cnn.com/US/9904/20/school.shooting.08/>, and Mark Obmascik, "Columbine High School Shooting Leaves 15 Dead, 28 Hurt," The Denver Post, April 15, 2019, <https://www.denverpost.com/1999/04/21/columbine-high-school-shooting/>.

¹⁸⁷ Radford, 151.

The immense amount of coverage the media placed on the shooters' identities ultimately mythologized them. No longer were they portrayed as average teenagers, instead they became inhumane mythicized monsters that received more attention than the victims and survivors. They were transformed into devil worshippers who reportedly listened to satanic music and used drugs heavily. They became tools for the media to capture society's attention and shape their collective memory. Although these accusations have since been proven false, the media's vehement reporting in the shooting's immediate aftermath caused these inaccuracies to be imbedded into society's collective memory of the Columbine shooting. Since the media chose to portray the shooters in a negative light in relation to youth culture, society was able to disassociate themselves from them in an attempt to make sense of why Shooter H and Shooter K decided to shoot and kill thirteen of their peers.

Copypat Attacks and School Shooter Stereotypes

The media's coverage of the shooters resulted in the occurrence of copypat attacks and school shooter stereotypes. One newspaper article stated, "investigator and bomb technician Rick Young and other officials are so worried the shooters' plans and arsenal could be used as a blueprint to launch other attacks."¹⁸⁸ In the weeks following the Columbine mass school shooting, the National Safety Center estimated that at least three-thousand copypat bomb threats were made as well as reports mimicking behavior at schools in nearly every state.¹⁸⁹ Since the Columbine shooting was given so much airtime, it sent the message to viewers that the crimes committed were worth reporting.

¹⁸⁸ "Columbine Attackers Had a Big Arsenal," *USA Today* (online, February 14, 2000), www.usa.today.com/news/index/colo/colo185.htm.

¹⁸⁹ For more serious copypat incidents that occurred after the Columbine mass school shooting, see Radford, 297-98.

The emphasis the shooters and their tactics received encouraged copycats to follow suit in hopes of receiving the same amount of media coverage and fame. The same pattern can be seen in the media's coverage of the UT Tower shooting aftermath. Similar to the Columbine shooting, the media's detailed and excessive coverage of the Tower shooter's identity and tactics resulted in several copycat killings. It also mythologized the shooter's identity. Thus, I contend that the media's reporting directly contributes to the influence of individuals to perpetuate copycat crimes in search of fame and notoriety.

School shooter stereotypes were also created as a result of the media's coverage of the Columbine shooting. After the shooting occurred, the FBI was enlisted to help schools with student profiling. Law enforcement agencies have since developed a list of traits to help teachers, parents, and others identify angry or maladjusted students who might be at risk for violence.¹⁹⁰ Students who fit broad profiles can be required to undergo counseling, be suspended, or be transferred to alternative schools. For example, in Columbia, South Carolina, police arrested three high school students after they were sent to the principal's office simply for wearing all-black clothes. In another case, an eight-year-old boy from Arkansas was suspended from school for pointing a piece of breaded chicken at a teacher and saying, "Pow, pow, pow."¹⁹¹ As a result, many civil rights groups have become concerned about protecting students' rights.¹⁹²

It is clear that the Columbine mass school shooting resulted in several "mass shooter stereotypes" being embedded into society's collective memory. This becomes problematic however, when these stereotypes result in an increase of school suspensions

¹⁹⁰ Radford, 288.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Amy Beth Graves, "ACLU Swamped with Complaints after Colorado Shootings," *Associated Press* (Online, May 10, 1999), www.copaa.net/newstand/acluboston.html.

and dropout rates. Is it really fair to suspend a student for wearing all-black clothes?

These cultural stereotypes have, in a sense, resulted in preventative measures becoming stagnant in terms of mass school shootings. When authorities become too occupied with stereotypes, they fail to make substantial change that will actually prevent future acts of mass violence from occurring. Just because people imagine a link between mass school shooters and black clothing does not mean there actually *is* one.

No Notoriety; Victims and Survivors at the Forefront

More often than not, people correlate each mass school shooting with the perpetrators and their death counts. This memory, focused on the shooters, overshadows those of the victims and survivors. As a result, the perpetrators are catapulted into infamy. The media's coverage of mass school shootings is a major cause of this regular occurring establishment of shooter-centered narratives. The emphasis and attention placed on shooter's identities by the media results in the embedment of their existence into society's collective memory. This is true for both the Columbine and UT Tower mass school shootings. It is also true that the Columbine shooters planned to create a chain reaction through their tragic killings, kickstarting some form of revolution.¹⁹³ Referred to as "expressive violence," mass school shooters usually use the act of killing their peers (and in most cases themselves) as a way to solve some type of dilemma. Tragedy did not end with the Columbine shooting. It continued just six months after the shooting, when a Columbine High School senior threatened to, "finish the job" that had been started months earlier.¹⁹⁴ The Columbine community continued to be struck by

¹⁹³ Schildkraut and Muschert, *Columbine 20 Years Later*, 145.

¹⁹⁴ Columbine Timeline, *The Denver Post*, April 16, 2000 <http://extras.denverpost.com/news/timeline.htm>.

tragic events as long as one year after the mass school shooting occurred.¹⁹⁵ Hence, the impact of the media's focus on shooter centered narratives extends way beyond the immediate aftermath. It encourages future perpetrators to follow suit in the wake of tragic acts of mass violence as a way to gain fame and notoriety.

Moving forward, it is vital that columnists, scholars, and reporters alike make a conscientious effort to amplify the voices of the victims and survivors of mass school shootings. In doing so, shooters will no longer be the center of attention. If this shift is made, society will be able to focus on matters of importance such as creating real preventative measures and legislation at the state and federal levels. Moreover, the “No Notoriety” approach I have chosen to utilize throughout this thesis can be used as a tool to counter pre-existing narratives dominated by the perpetrators. This approach also works towards undoing the fame and mythology associated with the shooters by shifting society's collective memory to focus on those most affected by the mass school shootings such as the victims, survivors, and community members.

Government Response; The Columbine Review Commission

The media's construction of narratives centered on religion and dysfunctional teen culture—and thus its crafting of the immediate shooter-centered memory of the event—shaped how government officials responded in the Columbine shooting's aftermath. As a result, a precedent was set for how future legislators would talk about and respond to mass school shootings in terms of legislation and public policy debates. Colorado's then Governor Bill Owens put together a commission in charge of conducting an independent review of the Columbine shooting. Established on January 28, 2000, the Columbine

¹⁹⁵ For accounts of tragedy occurring in the Columbine community post April 20, 1999, see Schildkraut and Muschert 134-135.

Review Commission researched six separate issues centered on law enforcement, safety protocols, rescue response, and prevention, echoing the lenses used by the media's reporting. The commission was made up of law enforcement officers, lawyers, academics, and government officials. Its assigned duties were to review the events that unfolded on April 20 and submit recommendations for preventing or handling similar emergencies should they arise in the future.¹⁹⁶ Members discussed the shooters at length in three sections of the commission's final report. They became a topic of analysis for the commission members to try and understand what factors influenced their tragic plot in aims of preventing future ones from occurring. The shooters were also at the center of society's collective memory because of the media's crafted historical narratives which emphasized all aspects of Shooter H and Shooter K. As a result, Governor Owens and the Columbine Review Commission approached matters of prevention as issues of religion, policing, and youth culture.

The Entertainment and Video Game Industries as Forms of Violent Youth Culture

The shooters' family backgrounds, social attitudes, and tactics were closely analyzed in the commission's report. Five self-documented Columbine tapes were used as sources of information by the commission to display the shooters hatred for society. The report also draws connections between the culture of youth violence prevalent in America during the late twentieth century and the shooters as a way to push the need for the establishment of social control measures amongst society. An aspect of troubled youth culture that received a lot of attention from the commission's report was the influence of violent first-person shooter video games, like Doom and Quake, on the

¹⁹⁶ Erickson, *The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission*, ix.

shooters decision to shoot and kill their peers. After the commission's report made most of the Columbine tapes' contents public, the media began to publicly discuss the shooters use of violent video games as a causation of the Columbine shooting.¹⁹⁷ This paved the way for state and federal government officials to use violent video games and the entertainment industry as reasons behind the Columbine shootings occurrence, citing the commission report's analysis. It also set a precedent for legislators to follow in the aftermath of future mass school shootings in terms of viewing them as issues of the entertainment industry and violent youth culture.

An example of this can be seen in the handling of the entertainment and game industries' marketing of violent movies, music, and video games to children by the Clinton administration who ordered a probe by the Federal Trade Commission.¹⁹⁸ The amount of attention violent video games received from politicians fits within a broader cultural context. Often times, societal elders are unfamiliar with new technology and are worried of youth rebelliousness, triggering moral panic.¹⁹⁹ American sociologist Karen Sternheimer contends that video games were particularly salient due to the demographics of most school shooters as white and middle class, which placed the shooters as victims of the power of video games; why else would boys from good neighborhoods turn

¹⁹⁷ Examples of media coverage in reference to violent first-person shooter video games, Shooter H and Shooter K, and the mass school shooting: Tim Radford, "Computer Games Linked to Violence," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, April 24, 2000), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/apr/24/timradford>. Mike Nizza, "Tying Columbine to Video Games," *The New York Times*, July 5, 2007, <https://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/07/05/tying-columbine-to-video-games/?mtrref=www.google.com>. Addictions & Answers, "What Role Might Video Game Addiction Have Played in the Columbine Shootings?" (New York Daily News, January 11, 2019), <https://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/health/role-video-game-addiction-played-columbine-shootings-article-1.361104>.

¹⁹⁸ R. Shogan, *War Without End: Cultural Conflict and the Struggle for America's Political Future* (Cambridge: Westview, 2002).

¹⁹⁹ C.J. Ferguson, M. Coulson, and J. Barnett, Psychological Profiles of School Shooters: Positive Directions and One Big Wrong Turn, *Journal of Police Crisis Negotiations* 11 (2), 2008, 141-158.

violent?²⁰⁰ It posed as an explanation as to why Shooter H and Shooter K, two young white middle class males from the suburbs, did not fit the description of juvenile criminals. This false narrative also resulted in several of the victim's families filing lawsuits against film producers, Internet sites, and video game makers. Hence, government officials focus on the entertainment and game industries as possible causes of the Columbine shooting acted as a distraction for law makers and society alike, preventing them from analyzing mass school shootings as a gun problem. As a result, matters of gun culture and substantial reform in America have been ignored in public policy debate.

Religion as a Tool of Division and Public Policy Debate

Larger societal and political divides became apparent by how government officials and institutions responded to the Columbine shooting. The political right and the evangelicals aligned their narratives to reflect anti-secular views in hopes of dominating the society's collective memory of the shooting as a way to use it to their political advantage and portray their own beliefs.²⁰¹ For instance, Ten Commandments legislation was proposed in ten states as of February 2000 that pushed for the incorporation of the Christian-God into the public-school system.²⁰² Commonly referenced as "Big Ten" bills, these pieces of legislation resulted in more of a divide between those who were in favor of religion being a part of public schools and those who felt it was a violation of the

²⁰⁰ Karen Sternheimer, "Do Video Games Kill?" Feature Article (Sage Pub, 2007), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1525/ctx.2007.6.1.13>.

²⁰¹ Larkin, 41. Provides a primary source example of how the evangelicals and political right lashed out at secular society.

²⁰² Radford, 249.

Supreme Court's clause that calls for a "wall of separation" between church and state.²⁰³

Colorado was one of the ten states to propose Ten Commandments legislation in 2000. It was introduced by John Andrews, Colorado's then republican senator, who cited the Columbine mass school shooting as the reason why the commandments needed to be posted in public schools.

Andrews expressed that although there are other ways to approach preventative measures to ensure another incident like the Columbine shooting does not happen again, the Ten Commandments was a step toward making, "students better citizens and making school a more civilized place."²⁰⁴ His proposed bill received backlash from several democrats in the Colorado Senate because it dictated the wording of the commandments to be displayed in classrooms. This was controversial because different religious denominations interpret the commandments differently. Moreover, by introducing a bill that reflects his *own* personal evangelical values, it becomes apparent that Andrews used the Columbine shooting for his own political advantage. Ten Commandments legislation didn't start at the state level. In June 1999, the topic of religion inside the public-school system made it onto the national agenda. The republican dominated House of Representatives in the 106th Congress voted 248 to 180 that the Ten Commandments could be displayed in public schools and other public buildings.²⁰⁵ Similar to Senator

²⁰³ Tiffany Danitz, "Push for Ten Commandments to Return to Schools," The Pew Charitable Trusts, March 2, 2000, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2000/03/02/push-for-ten-commandments-to-return-to-schools?amp=1>.

²⁰⁴ Mark Walsh, "Commandments Debate Moves to Statehouses," Education Week, February 23, 2019, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2000/02/16/23command.h19.html>.

²⁰⁵ Robert Parham, "Ten Commandments and a Number of Views," OrlandoSentinel.com, October 27, 2018, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2000-04-02-0003310445-story.amp.html>.

Andrews' rationale, the House cited the Columbine mass school shooting as a reason to pass this legislation.

The question of whether or not posting the Ten Commandments in public schools would prevent future mass school shootings from occurring received a lot of attention from religious conservatives. An example of this can be seen in the 1999 "Hang Ten" campaign launched by the Family Research Council. It insisted that a nationwide movement was occurring for the Ten Commandments and distributed 750,000 Ten Commandment book covers to the public.²⁰⁶ This triggered a counter movement led by civil libertarians and religious liberty advocates called Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. ACLU led the legal battle by filing lawsuits challenging the posting of the Ten Commandments in three states, arguing that the U.S. constitution prohibits government from favoring a religious viewpoint.

The political divide America experienced during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in terms of religion created a false choice for Americans. One is either for the Ten Commandments or against them. More so, to be against the incorporation of the amendments into the public sphere deemed one to be against high moral standards and God. In the end, Ten Commandment legislation never passed the Senate. However, the political and social divides triggered by this religious debate at both the state and federal levels resulted in the Columbine shooting's narrative to be centered on religion. It also resulted in society's collective memory of the shooting to be clouded by divisiveness, working against the creation of one centered on creating substantial solutions for mass school shootings.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

Gun Legislation, the NRA, and Constructed Memory

When gun legislation did receive attention amongst state and federal government officials, focus was placed on how the shooters were able to obtain the firearms used in the Columbine mass school shooting.²⁰⁷ This became a political talking point amongst both democrat and republican legislators. At the state level, Governor Owens introduced a five-part legislation proposal aimed at keeping guns out of the hands of criminals and children.²⁰⁸ This was somewhat a controversial move on Owens' part as he is well-known for being an NRA ally and pro-gun supporter. Although he introduced the package of gun legislation, Owens failed to lobby and advocate for its passage. According to his spokesman Dick Wadhams, "The gun proposals simply are not among Owens' top priorities which include education, tax cuts, and growth control."²⁰⁹ Wadhams even went so far as to confirm that the governor is a proud rifle owner who safely keeps the weapons stored away from his three children.

Despite Owens' lackluster response in terms of promoting his proposed gun legislation package, several measures aimed at keeping firearms out of the hands of criminals and under aged persons still passed. Colorado passed the Straw Purchase, Prohibited Purchasers, and Universal Background Checks laws in 2000 in hopes of preventing future mass shootings from occurring.²¹⁰ The NRA supported all of the bills and even sent several Colorado lawmakers \$16,950 more than usual one month before the

²⁰⁷ For information and images related to the weapons used in the Columbine mass school shooting released by the Jefferson County police department see Dave Cullen, "The Guns: The Columbine Attack," Columbine Guide, 2018, <https://www.columbine-guide.com/columbine-guns>.

²⁰⁸ Follow this link for a detailed breakdown of Gov. Owens gun legislation proposals: <https://extras.denverpost.com/news/leg/leg1226.htm>.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ For a detailed account of each reform see "Colorado Gun Laws Overview," Colorado Ceasefire, http://www.coloradoceasefire.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Basic.Colorado.laws_.pdf.

gun debate.²¹¹ According to MFOL's calculations, Colorado legislators who accept donation money from the NRA result in each of the state's public school students' lives to be worth \$3.94.²¹² The gun legislation passed was lenient enough to keep the gun lobby happy which results in fewer lives being saved from gun violence. The Concealed Carry Act (2003), Lawsuit Ban (2000), and Preemption (2003) caused many gun-control advocates to feel like legislators were more interested in pleasing the gun lobby rather than those affected by gun violence. Hence, these two opposing gun legislation viewpoints between the anti and pro-gun reform supporters became evident. This divisiveness acted as a distraction amongst society and government officials alike, causing unsubstantial forms of gun legislation to be passed.

The NRA's decision to host its annual convention in a downtown Denver hotel ballroom on May 2, eleven days after the Columbine shooting, highlighted another divide in American in terms of gun legislation. About 3,000 NRA members were in attendance alongside several thousand protestors who gathered on the steps of the Colorado state capitol four blocks away from the NRA's convention to oppose the meeting.²¹³ Tom Mauser, whose son Daniel was killed in the shooting, was one of the protestors in attendance and spoke at the rally. "Something is wrong in this country when a child can grab a gun so easily and shoot a bullet into the middle of a child's face, as my son

²¹¹ CBS Staff, "Colorado Kills Gun Laws," *CBS News*, April 17, 2001, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/colorado-kills-gun-laws/>.

²¹² MFOL, "Print a Price Tag.," March For Our Lives, January 13, 2020, <https://marchforourlives.com/price-tags/>.

²¹³ Tom Kenworthy and Roberto Suro, "Protesters Greet NRA Convention in Denver," *The Washington Post* (WP Company, May 2, 1999), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1999/05/02/protesters-greet-nra-convention-in-denver/752ea39c-cf27-4950-9157-f23c92f54110/>.

experienced.”²¹⁴ Mauser’s statement accurately captures the anti-gun sentiment expressed by those wanting gun control legislation in response to the shooting. On the pro-gun end, NRA president and actor Charlton Heston stated, “our mission is to remain a steady beacon of strength and support for the second amendment, even if it has no other friend on the planet” while addressing the crowd.²¹⁵ Heston was well known for his remarks at the NRA’s 2000 convention when he stated, “I’ll give you my gun when you take it from my cold dead hands.”²¹⁶ The NRA argued that guns were not to blame in the nation’s epidemic of gun-related deaths, despite the fact that in 1999 alone there were 28,874 gun-related deaths in America.²¹⁷ These two opposing opinions depict the larger historical context of the gun debate in America during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The larger societal and political divides made apparent in the aftermath of the Columbine shooting shaped society’s collective memory of the shooting. It created a roadmap in people’s minds in terms of how government officials should react in the aftermath of tragic events. The divisiveness eventually became center stage due to the media’s reporting on the handling of the Columbine shooting by government officials, acting as a cyclical pattern of events that reinforced false historical narratives. According to McCluskey, news attention provides political actors a chance to influence public opinion and policy through value framing.²¹⁸ Politicians strategically communicate their positions as a moral principal or basic value to mobilize adherents, influence potential

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Robert Berkvist, “Charlton Heston, Epic Film Star and Voice of N.R.A., Dies at 84,” *The New York Times*, April 6, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/movies/06heston.html>.

²¹⁷ Doss, 110.

²¹⁸ McCluskey, 55.

adherents, or demobilize opponents. Gun issues are often framed as political processes and portrayed as a clash of political interests and competing strategies. Hence, this divisive news content transforms into a public platform where politicians can debate on *how* to respond to school shootings and discuss what policies they feel are needed to prevent future ones from occurring. As a result, society's collective memory of how government officials should respond to mass school shootings is shaped. Moreover, the ways in which society and government officials discuss gun legislation today, with divisiveness at the forefront, is a direct result of how mass school shootings were discussed and dealt with during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

School Safety, Policing, and Surveillance

School safety also became a gateway for state and federal government officials to push their own political agendas as possible preventative measures in the aftermath of twentieth century mass school shootings, including the Columbine shooting. Public schools around the nation experienced a shift in their security measures after the Columbine mass school shooting occurred. An increased amount of visible security measures such as cops, school resource officers (SROs), surveillance cameras, metal detectors, armed teachers, entry control, and active shooter drills were implemented in suburban and rural public schools.²¹⁹ President Clinton allocated more than \$60 million in federal funding to hire 452 school-based security officers as a part of an initiative from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.²²⁰ It is important to note that these forms of security measures had already been implemented in inner-city public schools

²¹⁹ L. A. Addington, Cops and Cameras: Public School Security as a Policy Response to Columbine, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52 (10), 2009, 1426-1446.

²²⁰ J. Juvonen, *School Violence: Prevalence, Fears, and Prevention*, 2001, retrieved from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/issue_papers/2006/IP219.pdf.

prior to the Columbine shooting. However, the expansion of policing and security measures had not been viewed as a cause for concern in suburban areas like Columbine prior to the shooting.

These already existing measures, centered on more policing and restriction within campuses, are often times viewed as quick fixes or band aid solutions by those who believe common sense gun reform would be a more effective solution. There is no evidence to support that either SROs or surveillance cameras are effective in reducing school violence.²²¹ Despite the lack of evidence showing that such preventative measures work, America has seen a steady increase in the implementation of cops and surveillance cameras inside public schools.²²² The fact that government officials continue to push for safety measures that are not statistically proven to have an effect in the prevention of mass school shootings shows that they stem from personal agendas. Hence, it is vital for future generations to start electing government officials into positions of power who commit to viewing gun violence in America holistically, putting aside divisive narratives and personal agendas in the name of saving as many lives as possible.

Policing During and After the Columbine Mass School Shooting

Unlike during the 1966 Tower shooting, a commissioned police force and SWAT units already existed in Colorado's Jefferson County at the time of the Columbine mass school shooting.²²³ The high school also had an SRO, Sheriff's Deputy Neil Gardner,

²²¹ Ibid and H. L. Schwartz, Ramchand, R., Barnes-Proby, D., Grant, S., Jackson, B. A., Leuschner, K., Saunders, J. *The Role of Technology in Improving K-12 School Safety* (Santa Monica: The RAND Corporation, 2016), retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1488.html.

²²² Schildkraut & Muschert, *Columbine 20 Years Later*, 69. See figure 6.1 which displays the increase in cops/other security and cameras in public schools from 1999-2016.

²²³ As mentioned in chapter two, the Tower shooting is said to have lasted ninety-six minutes because of the lack of police enforcement on campus, sufficient firearms, and preparedness procedures the APD had at the time. Hence, the Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 162 in 1967, which allowed for universities to hire

who exchanged fire with Shooter H using his .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol. However, he was not wearing his prescription glasses which negatively affected his shot approximately sixty yards away.²²⁴ Gardner radioed for backup three minutes later, at 11:26 a.m., once the shooter proceeded into the high school. Andy Morton, the high school's unarmed security guard, accompanied Gardner at the senior parking lot. Ten minutes after Gardner called for backup, Jefferson County S.W.A.T. was on scene at the east side of the campus. It was not until approximately thirty minutes into the shooting that S.W.A.T. officers were given the clear to enter the campus, however the first team waited another fifteen minutes before entering. The shooters, who were located on the second floor inside the library at the time, committed suicide two minutes after S.W.A.T.'s entry around 12:10 to 12:15 p.m.

Other Denver S.W.A.T. teams and law enforcement officers from several jurisdictions and agencies also entered the campus in an effort to retrieve victims and survivors at varying times. Six officers from the Jefferson County's Sheriff's Office arrived on scene within minutes after the shooting began. In spite of this, it still took hours to search the campus in its entirety, causing several victims who had been wounded to bleed out and die. Jefferson County S.W.A.T. team officers were not able to enter the cafeteria until 1:09 p.m. due to the several explosive devices that were spotted on the lower hallway floor and in locked classrooms. As a result, Sergeant Barry Williams advised S.W.A.T. officers to, "keep a slow pace for safety reasons."²²⁵ Twenty to thirty students were found hiding in the kitchen area's storage room. They were reportedly

and commission police officers. SWAT units and expansions of police forces across the country were also established in hopes of preventing future acts of mass violence from occurring.

²²⁴ Schildkraut & Muschert, *Columbine 20 Years Later*, 40.

²²⁵ Erickson, *The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission*, 51.

hesitant to come out of hiding and obey S.W.A.T.'s orders to evacuate because of the black gear they were wearing that resembled the shooters.²²⁶ Bomb technicians reported to the scene at 3:39 p.m., around the same time S.W.A.T. teams did a second sweep of the campus and finally entered the library.²²⁷ There was also a lot of miscommunication going on between the S.W.A.T. members who entered the campus due to the loud noise of the activated fire alarm system, smoke, and fumes. The high school was declared safe at 4:30 p.m.

Despite the laws and procedures that went into effect after the UT Tower shooting as a way to prevent future mass school shootings from happening, Denver police, various S.W.A.T. teams, and first responders were unable to successfully stop the shooters from entering the high school. Although law enforcement officers were able to eventually gain access into the campus, several lives had already been lost. Moreover, because of the several explosive devices the shooters' used, it made it extremely difficult for law enforcement officers to enter the school early on and save more lives. Some victims remained trapped inside the school helplessly for four hours, long after the shooters had killed themselves.²²⁸ Hence, the Columbine shooting acts as an example of how more policing and surveillance doesn't always result in the prevention of mass violence in schools. It also clearly identifies three areas that law enforcement officers need to improve on, which are entry into the school, knowledge of the building, and communication.

²²⁶ Ibid, 50.

²²⁷ Schildkraut & Muschert, *Columbine 20 Years Later*, 41.

²²⁸ Erickson, *The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission*, 55, footnote 138.

Clinton's Response to the Columbine Shooting

How President Clinton responded to the shooting publicly in its aftermath shaped society's collective memory of how government officials should handle acts of mass violence. Lasting a little more than three minutes, His public remarks were largely centered on allowing the victims' families, survivors, and Columbine community to heal peacefully until all the facts were collected. He also made it a point to offer his prayers to all those affected by the shooting. At the time of Clinton's remarks, an official death count was still not released. He highlighted the need for all the *hows* and *whys* to be researched and discovered, while admitting we may never uncover an indefinite answer as to what caused the shooters to successfully kill so many of their peers. Youth culture and violence was also a main focus for Clinton, echoing the earlier established sentiment expressed by the media and the Columbine Review Commission in terms of the shooters being associated with evil.

Clinton stressed that Americans must do more to, "reach out to our children and teach them to express their anger and resolve their conflicts with words not weapons."²²⁹ When asked by reporters what he believes the country needs to see as a direct response to guns in public schools, Clinton responded by acknowledging that kids in America have easy access to several forms of weapons, not just firearms. Hesitant to call the issue of mass school shootings an epidemic, Clinton stressed that the Columbine shooting should not make people fear public school's safety across the country. He also advised for people to read the *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* handbook

²²⁹ Full video of Clinton's speech can be seen here; clintonlibrary42, "President Clinton's Remarks Regarding Columbine HS Shooting (1999)," YouTube Video, 2:45, April 20, 1999, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQX8KNXP14w>.

created by the U.S. Department of Education in 1998.²³⁰ Moreover, Clinton's refusal to discuss the endemic issue of mass school shootings as a gun issue paved the way for future politicians to follow suit and handle mass school shootings as issues of religion, policing, and youth culture.

Clinton's Actions on School Safety and Gun Legislation prior to 1999

Prior to the Columbine shooting, Clinton addressed the need to reduce youth violence. As part of his initiative to make American schools safe places, he enacted the 1994 Crime Bill which allowed for the Community Oriented Policing Services (C.O.P.S.) program.²³¹ This program funded 100,000 additional officers to be placed inside various jurisdictions as a way to lower crime. It also granted \$17.5 million from the Balance Budget Bill to be awarded as grants to communities, parents, and law enforcement groups as a way to put community policing strategies to work inside American public schools. As a way to outlay uniform disciplinary actions for students who bring a firearm onto campus across America, Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 into law on March 31. The act requires all states who rely on federal funds for educational needs to require schools to immediately remove students who bring a firearm to school from regular school settings for at least a year.²³²

Clinton also called for an annual report on school safety to be created at the beginning of each school year. According to him, "these reports act as a valuable tool for parents, principals, and law enforcements to track school violence, give examples of

²³⁰ See it here: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED418372.pdf>.

²³¹ For a full overview of the C.O.P.S. program, see Congressional Research Service, "*Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS): In Brief*," July 10, 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL33308.pdf>.

²³² Martin J. Dunn, "Security Solutions: Knowing Legislation," June 1, 2002, <https://www.asumag.com/safety-security/fire-life-safety/article/20851028/security-solutions-knowing-legislation>.

school programs that are working, and suggest actions parents can take to make their children's lives safer at school.”²³³ However, much of the reports' research in terms of youth violence is in relation to domestic abuse, gangs, and drug usage. Mass school shootings are not specifically researched in the annual reports. Instead, “Violent Death Incidents in Schools” are discussed in a very general manner. Firearms are specifically discussed in a section titled, “The consequences of bringing firearms to school” with no mention of mass school shootings. The 2000 report also discusses the Columbine mass school shooting as an “extremely rare event.”²³⁴ It continues by displaying graphs depicting the number of children and teachers who die at school declining annually, however, mass school shootings are not specifically called out or mentioned. Furthermore, none of these implementations stopped the Columbine shooting from occurring, nor did it slow down the rate at which mass school shootings continue to occur in America post-Columbine.

During his second term, the democrats lost control of Congress and therefore the ability to pass any form of gun legislation due to the Republicans' pro-gun stance. The 1996 Brady Bill and 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban passed in Clinton's first term triggered lobbying from the NRA-ILA against any future forms of gun control. The Brady Bill, which was previously introduced in congress during the 1980s and 1990s, was personal for Clinton because of his close political relationship with Sarah Brady. Her husband, James Brady, was Ronald Reagan's press secretary who was wounded during an attempted assassination of Reagan. Even with its passage, it did not prevent the

²³³ C-SPAN, “School Safety,” 18:20, March 19, 1998, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?102021-1%2Fschool-safety>.

²³⁴ Janet Reno and Richard W. Riley, *2000 Annual Report on School Safety*, Dept. of Education and Dept. of Justice, October 2000, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/193163.pdf>, pg.9.

Columbine shooters from legally obtaining four of the guns used in the shooting from a gun show.²³⁵ No background check was required, nor was there a record kept of the purchase. Since the sales were private, the Brady Act did not apply. Moreover, it is unknown if Clinton truly felt like the Brady Bill would prevent mass violence from occurring, or if it is another instance of politicians pushing their own political agendas. Due to the lack of bipartisanship in congress, Clinton decided to use his executive power to create two orders near the end of his second term, the 1998 Federal Assault Weapons Importation Ban and the 2000 Smith & Wesson Settlement. This was viewed as an abuse of power by the Republicans and those who were pro-gun. His successor, George W. Bush, undid the Smith & Wesson Settlement soon after taking office. The Clinton administration's handling of the Columbine mass school shooting and the school safety procedures they established prior to 1999 are examples of how government officials' decisions are directly or indirectly shaped by false media created narratives. In turn, society's collective memory of how government officials should respond in the aftermath of acts of mass violence has been shaped to expect divisiveness, self-centered agendas, and unsubstantial gun and school safety protocols legislation.

The Columbine mass school shooting provides insight on how government officials have the ability to use tragic acts of mass violence as a way to push personal agendas in matters of religion, gun legislation, and school safety protocols. A pattern can be seen in terms of state and federal government officials failing to actually address mass school shooting prevention based off of real evidence and statistics. The earlier mentioned gun reform laws that passed before and after the Columbine shooting at the

²³⁵ Schildkraut & Muschert, *Columbine 20 Years Later*, 110-111. See these pages for a more detailed account of the shooters' obtaining four of the firearms used in the shooting through private sales.

state and federal levels did not prevent it from occurring, nor have they stopped other mass school shootings from occurring. Too often, feel-good legislation is passed to create an illusion to the public that real change is occurring when, in reality, little progress is made.²³⁶ In order for real and substantial change to occur, legislators must put personal agendas and beliefs aside and analyze the issue of mass school shootings in its context, which includes understanding the relationship between mass shooters and firearm laws in America. They must also work to close the divide between pro and anti-gun supporters, both socially and politically, to pass substantial legislation that saves lives. If these goals are not attainable by legislator's in positions of power, society must work to elect officials that put lives over personal agendas. If such options aren't available, members of society should feel encouraged to run for office in order to begin undoing the dominant narrative of government officials' inability to properly respond in the aftermath of acts of mass violence.

²³⁶ Ibid, 119.

IV. CONCLUSION

This thesis has made apparent the ability of stakeholders to shape society's collective memory of the UT Tower and Columbine mass school shootings by creating false historical narratives. It has also displayed the media's ability to control how government officials respond in the aftermath of such tragic acts of violence through broadcasting false narratives that are shooter centered. I have argued that inclusive grassroots memorialization efforts have the ability to challenge false historical narratives by placing victims and survivors at the forefront of society's collective memory. Such memorialization efforts can utilize dark tourism via the interpretation of sites associated with death and storytelling through the incorporation of oral histories. These lived experiences, or individual memories, act as tools to encourage visitors to empathize and interact with one another while at the site. By shifting perspectives to include memories of survivors and victims, society can collectively begin working towards reshaping false historical narratives and inspire change through political action and public discourse. According to public memory scholar Ekaterina Haskins, memorials should work to enhance participatory democracy and push people to think about how to better society. Haskins states, "Citizenship is the relationship among strangers that is modeled by discourses of public culture and embodied through performance."²³⁷ She contends that the acts of memorialization and commemoration have the ability to provide society common spaces to participate in civic engagement and interaction with one another. Hence, the acts of commemoration and memorialization become an extension of one's own democracy and values, creating public discourse among strangers who otherwise

²³⁷ Ekaterina Haskins, *Popular memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 2.

would never have engaged with one another. This in turn works towards bridging the divides that exist in American society and promotes the creation of authentic collective memories of acts of mass gun violence from the bottom up.

The larger historical context of each shooting impacted how members of the community talked about and grieved in their aftermaths. It also affected how state and federal government officials attempted to implement solutions that would ensure future mass school shootings would not occur. My analysis of these two mass school shootings made the political divide that existed amongst government officials during the late twentieth-century evident. It displays how state and federal legislators' responses to these mass school shootings created precedents for how future legislators should respond. It provides background knowledge about each shootings' historical context and highlights issues and cultural norms that dominated public policy debate. It also displays legislators' ability to harness societal norms and trends as a way to foster support or opposition amongst society in regard to actions taken in the aftermath of both mass school shootings.

Today, matters of gun legislation and violence prevention are still largely apparent amongst government officials and community members alike. These matters tend to be catapulted to the forefront of public policy debate by the media in the aftermath of acts of mass violence. The media regularly reports on how both democrats and republicans are working to pass legislation that best aligns with their personal values and monetary donors' principles. As a result, the divide between anti- and pro-gun legislators and community members continues to grow. Instead of continuing to create a divisive environment around acts of mass gun violence by focusing on discordant rhetoric, I propose reframing the ways in which such matters are discussed and reported

on. This can be done by choosing to focus on the common ground that still exists in American society regarding gun violence and prevention facts. Such facts include that 40,000 Americans lose their lives to gun violence annually and ninety-seven percent of Americans are in favor of passing universal background checks for firearm purchases.²³⁸ When such facts are regularly presented to the American public via mass media, individuals have the ability to become more aware of the extent to which gun violence has on our nation as a whole. It also allows for individuals to become educated on important public policy issues which is useful when deciding on who to vote for in local and national elections. With that being said, it is up to stakeholders, like the media, to decide on what information is presented and how said information is delivered at the end of the day. However, this thesis has made apparent the value and power that lies within commemoration and memorialization processes of acts of mass violence that can be put into place by survivors and advocates alike. This form of grassroots movement gives individuals the ability to ignite empathy, relay the facts, and honor innocent lives lost to political discourse and inaction in the aftermath of acts of mass violence. It allows for survivors to take historical narratives into their own hands and create safe spaces where collective memories can be produced.

²³⁸ Kelly O'Meara Morales, "97 Percent of Americans Want Universal Background Checks for Gun Buyers. 67 Percent Want to Ban Assault Weapons.," *The Week*, February 20, 2018, <https://theweek.com/speedreads/756459/97-percent-americans-want-universal-background-checks-gun-buyers-67-percent-want-ban-assault-weapons>. The implementation of universal background checks would require most private purchases to run through the same background check process required for licensed fire-arm dealers such as gun stores and retailers by utilizing the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System on individuals purchasing a rifle and/or shotgun. Handgun purchases usually run through state systems. For more info on background checks, see Chris Haxel, "What Are Universal Background Checks? Here Is A Breakdown," *Guns & America*, August 13, 2019, <https://gunsandamerica.org/story/19/01/08/what-are-universal-background-checks-here-is-a-breakdown/>.

Memory plays a big part in working towards ending gun violence in America. When attempting to permanently memorialize acts of mass gun violence, it is important to keep survivor and victim-based memories at the forefront of each tragic events' historical narrative. This can be done through the establishment of safe spaces interpreted through firsthand accounts of mass gun violence. As a result, such acts of terror are humanized and a more authentic and personal narrative, which can then challenge false ones created by stakeholders, is created. It also reinserts individual narratives that have otherwise been lost or ignored and provides an opportunity for survivors to experience a cathartic release of emotions. This form of collective memory, with survivors and victims at the forefront, shifts society's attention away from the perpetrators and rewrites false narratives from the bottom up. However, the need for survivors' involvement in memorialization attempts must go beyond permanent memorials. Experimental sites such as museum exhibits or movie theatres can also be used as tools to express survivors' vernacular memories of mass school shootings. This way, others who have not lived through tragic events can still empathize with survivors as a way to understand the dire need for change. This form of prosthetic memory has the ability to shape a person's subjectivity and politics. It can also act as a roadmap for future generations to use when trying to discover solutions for gun violence and mass school shootings by solidifying concrete memories of such tragic events.

The issue of memorializing mass school shootings and their long history could still benefit from future research. Several questions remain unanswered in terms of foreign societies' memories of American mass school shootings. Does generational memory of the first American mass school shootings coincide with what other countries

think and remember as the first? What have other countries done in terms of memorializing mass school shootings and acts of gun violence in general? Similarly, what actions have their government officials taken in the aftermath of mass acts of gun violence that have proven to be successful? Furthermore, could the creation of a national museum which exhibits American mass school shootings throughout the centuries aid society in collectively realizing and remembering their long history? The trauma and memories of mass school shooting survivors' parents and siblings is also in need of more research. How can they begin working towards moving past their trauma amid supporting survivors who were actually present at the crime scene through their healing process? What are the extents of each individual's trauma and how long are they impactful on one's memory? The more research that is done on these matters and on American gun violence in general will not only benefit us in present times but will also be beneficial to future generations who will be left to deal with such living conditions.

The field of public history allows for such research to be done. In part, this is because public historians are taught to collaborate and share authority with stakeholders and community members alike when conducting research.²³⁹ As a result, the past becomes malleable through the inclusion of marginalized voices that have been historically ignored. This allows for non-historians to play a role in establishing definition, preservation, and interpretation of America's historical experience, creating a sense of connection to the past. By broadening the scope of history to include multiple viewpoints from ordinary people, public historians are able to challenge false historical

²³⁹ For more information on public history, see Thomas Cauvin. *Public History: A Textbook of Practice: Civic Engagement and Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2016) and Denise Meringolo. *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

narratives that were once viewed as fixed. This thesis acts as an example of public history's ability to allow historians to rewrite historical narratives collaboratively through the utilization of skills based in sharing authority. It has taken the historical narratives of two tragedies and analyzed them from the bottom-up, placing victims and survivors at the forefront.

Gun violence continues to rise in America. This year, more than four hundred mass shootings have already occurred in the country.²⁴⁰ This regularity paired with society's usage of smartphones and social media apps has resulted in many Americans becoming desensitized to their occurrence. As firearms continue to become more advanced allowing for high death counts to occur in minutes, more and more Americans lose their lives to gun violence. Amid having more policing and security measures passed at the local and federal levels, gun violence remains prominent in today's society. The recent "Defund the Police" movement triggered by the unjust killings of African Americans, such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, by local police officers exemplifies some Americans' desire for legislators to view the issue of gun violence differently.²⁴¹ This movement shows that not all Americans agree with legislators' decision to implement more forms of policing and reform in response to acts of violence as some believe that systemic racism prevents such implementations from succeeding. In order to work towards ending gun violence, it is important for society to acknowledge how long it has been an issue. In doing so, the long history of mass school shootings

²⁴⁰ Gun Violence Archive, "Mass Shootings in 2020," 2020, <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/query/0484b316-f676-44bc-97ed-ecfeabae077/map>.

²⁴¹ For more information on the "Defund the Police" movement see Sam Levin, "The movement to defund the police has won historic victories across the U.S. What's next?" *The Guardian*, August 15, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/15/defund-police-movement-us-victories-what-next>.

becomes apparent and awareness of how unsubstantial state and federal government responses have been is raised. However, this thesis barely scratches the surface of the amount of research still needing to be done on American gun violence.

Once society realizes the long history of American gun violence, they can begin focusing on electing people into positions of power who promise to enact substantial policies that create safer schools and communities. Becoming educated on issues that affect your daily well-being is important when deciding who to elect into positions of power at the local, state, and federal levels. Once voting has ceased and decisions have been made, it is up to the people to hold elected officials accountable to fight for the issues they campaigned on and assure that substantial change is made. Running in local and national elections yourself and raising awareness on such issues can also act as a way to achieve some form of common-sense gun reform from the ground up. This form of grassroots activism can result in the appointment of more electors into office who truly reflect society's needs and wants. It can also allow for society to begin working towards bridging the divide that exists between pro and anti-gun legislators to create a safer America.

The young people of today have already begun working towards establishing concrete measures in terms of substantial common-sense gun reform that can save lives. In *Glimmer of Hope: How Tragedy Sparked a Movement*, the MFOL activists lay out ten reforms and steps society can advocate for and politicians can implement as a way to save lives.²⁴² From calling for more gun violence research funding to requiring safe storage and mandatory theft reporting, these proposals clearly stem from wanting to save

²⁴² March For Our Lives, *Glimmer of Hope: How Tragedy Sparked a Movement* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 215.

as many lives as possible. More recently, MFOL activists created a Peace Plan for a Safer America which highlights racial and economic issues rooted in American gun violence. This plan proposes six bold steps focused on holding the gun lobby and industry accountable for weakening the nation's gun laws and for the illegal behavior of self-dealing (private sales) that has resulted in so many American deaths.²⁴³ It also calls for the next presidential administration and congress alike to address and put into action these six steps as a way to empower the next generation and generate community-based solutions. Because they were created by survivors of gun violence, specifically related to mass school shootings, these reforms set an example for how state and federal legislators should respond in the aftermath of acts of mass gun violence. They also show that young people have the ability to take charge of such issues and push divisions that currently exist in America's public policy debate.

²⁴³ MFOL, "A Peace Plan for a Safer America," January 9, 2020, <https://marchforourlives.com/peace-plan/>.

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