

## The New Children's Crusade

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Many groups in America have been victimized by discrimination, harassment, even violence. Over time, workers, women, minorities and other segments of the population became aware of their victimization as groups and demanded to be protected. Protection of classes of people has grown since the industrial revolution, when the first laws were put into place to restrict abusive labor practices, followed by civil rights protections and safeguarding groups, including women and LGBTQ people, from harassment, discrimination and abuse.

Now there is another group in America whose consciousness of victimization is coming into focus. Finally, after hundreds of school shootings, young people have realized that they, as a group, are being victimized. And in their case, gun violence at school presents the most extreme possible danger, that of being killed.

There have been 290 school shootings since 2013, and 17 so far in 2018 alone. Two hundred and ninety-seven people, most of them students, have been killed in school shootings since 1980, and many others wounded. All efforts to diminish this threat by calls to restrict access to firearms have failed, and the incidence of school shootings is on the rise. Until recently, the young people who are victims of school gun violence had not identified themselves as a victimized group.

It was heartening, therefore, after the recent Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Florida to see youth leaders stand up to demand that they be protected from gun violence. Led initially by students from Florida, young people have been meeting and rallying all over the country, from Florida to Chicago to Washington, D.C. to Helena, Montana.

They are working through churches, independent anti-gun-violence organizations, Jewish youth groups, even arts groups to insist on safety for themselves and their schools. "March for Our Lives" demonstrations were planned all over the country for March 24th, including more than 15 here in the Bay Area. More than 10 million students have signed a pledge against gun violence.

The question is, once the threat has been identified and students have mobilized, what should be done to protect young people from gun violence? Arming teachers and other school laypeople with guns is an absurd approach.

Clearly better security at schools is important, including physical security improvements to school campuses. A 2016 RAND Corporation study identified numerous technologies that could better protect schools, including entry control equipment, ID technology, video surveillance, school-site alarm and protection systems, metal detectors and X-ray machines, anonymous tip lines, tracking systems, mapping schools and bus routes, using violence

prediction technology, and social media monitoring. Every school should have such technologies, and voters in school districts should make sure the funds are available to procure them.

But other important steps are what we have been discussing at the national level for many years. We need to deal with the comprehensiveness of background checks, and the background checking system needs to have greater oversight and be kept up to date by law enforcement agencies.

We need to ensure that automatic or semi-automatic weapons, such as the AR-15 used in several recent mass shootings, cannot get into the hands of disturbed individuals.

I understand the Second Amendment gun rights argument. As a descendent of Revolutionary War militiamen, I believe it was important at that time for citizens to have the right to bear arms to obtain our independence and protect our liberty. But 228 years after the Bill of Rights was passed, the situation has fundamentally changed. Do we really think handguns or even assault weapons would be important instruments against potential oppressors that have nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and millions of people under arms? This clearly does not make sense. Obviously, we must rely on other ways of protecting our liberties, such as engagement in the electoral process and strong oversight of our leaders.

Guns for protection of one's home or for hunting are one thing. But the availability of assault weapons and not requiring effective background checks for gun sales simply fosters the kind of mass shootings we are currently experiencing.

We also need to take seriously the problem of psychotic individuals and their propensity for mass murder. There have been significant warning signs in the cases of nearly all the individuals who have committed school violence, and they have repeatedly been ignored. Psychosis, paranoia, delusions and other such disorders, plus guns, equals violence. Families, schools, the military, law enforcement and other institutions need to be more proactive with those who show signs of psychosis or extreme anger toward others.

Should America allow its children to be regularly killed, when we can reduce or prevent gun violence? No, we should not be that kind of society. Maybe America's youth will stand up and persevere with what needs to be done, since adults are not effectively protecting their safety.



Photo by James Meinert