

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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OF REDWINGS, TYLENOL & OTHER DEADLY WEAPONS

How many remember Richard Reid? He's the British-born psychopath who, on December 22, 2001, failed in his attempt to detonate explosives packed into the shoes he was wearing while on an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami. Ever since, he has been known simply as "The Shoe Bomber." And ever since that day when he was subdued and overwhelmed by a handful of passengers and members of the flight crew, just about everyone boarding planes here in the United States, is forced to remove their shoes—along with keys, coins and other metallic objects on their persons - before moving through a metal detector. It's for the removal of our shoes, we have Richard Reid to "thank."



How many know the name Mary Kellerman? She's the 12-year old Elk Grove, Illinois youngster who died on October 29, 1982, shortly after taking a capsule of Extra Strength Tylenol laced with potassium cyanide. Over the next twenty-four hours, 6 additional Chicago-area residents would similarly die from taking capsules of Extra Strength Tylenol laced with potassium cyanide. Pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson immediately issued a nationwide recall of all their Tylenol products . . . approximately 31 million bottles with an estimated value of \$100 million. Additionally, big pharma responded to the seven murders (which have never been solved) by manufacturing tamper-proof packaging for all over-the-counter

products. The United States Congress got involved by swiftly -- and overwhelmingly -- passing anti-tampering laws -- which are still in effect and now cover everything from toothpaste and Oil of Olay to cottage cheese and sports drinks.



Anyone have the slightest idea who David Daleiden is? He's the gonzo videographer who works for the Center for Medical Progress, an anti-abortion group. Last month, he began releasing videos purporting to "prove" that Planned Parenthood affiliates illegally profit from selling tissue from aborted fetuses to researchers and, in some late-term abortions, prevent a possible live birth. Even before Planned Parenthood had their day in court, Republican members of Congress -and virtually every Republican presidential candidate - responded to the allegation, declaring that the 99-year old organization will be defunded. Indeed, Texas Senator (and GOP presidential hopeful) Ted Cruz has threatened a government shutdown unless Planned Parenthood is stripped of about \$500 million it gets annually, mostly to care for low-income Medicaid patients. Cruz and his ilk say they are seeking to defund in order to make sure Planned Parenthood will be incapable of performing even one more abortion . . . despite the fact that by law, public funds cannot pay for abortions. (n.b. An independent [inquiry](#) into the "thousands of hours" of videotapes has concluded that "manipulation" of undercover videos by abortion opponents make those recordings unreliable for any official inquiry.)

How many can identify - let alone know the significance of - 1989's "Stockton

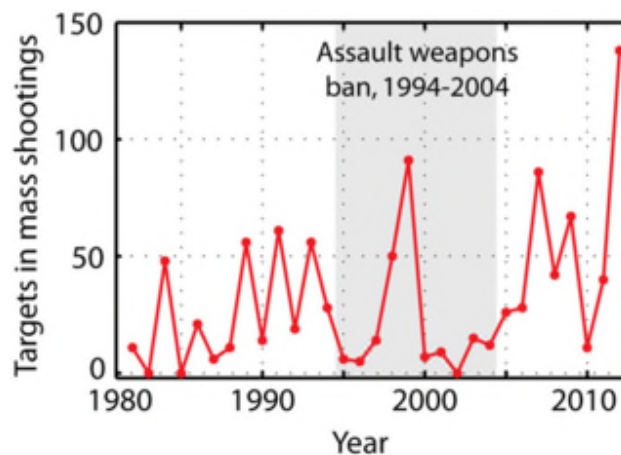


Schoolyard Shooting" and/or 1993's "101 California Street shooting?" As the names imply, these were two horrific mass killings. In the Stockton shooting, 5 children were killed and 29 wounded by a deranged gunman brandishing both a semiautomatic rifle and a 9mm pistol; the victims were predominantly Southeast Asian refugees. In the California Street (San Francisco) shooting, the gunman, brandishing 2 Intratec Tec-DC9 pistols and a Norinco M1911 pistol loaded with Black Talon hollow point

bullets and using the Hellfire trigger, system, gunned down 9 (including himself) and wounded a half dozen in less than 2 minutes. These two shootings were largely responsible for Congress passing - and President Clinton signing - HR 3355, the "Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994" (aka the [Assault Weapons Ban](#)) -- a law which had built into it a 10-year shelf life. As per law, it lapsed in 2004, and despite several febrile attempts, has never been reinstated -- even a severely watered-down version. God bless the GOP, the NRA and political cowardice . . .

Although the 1994 law was far from perfect, for the 10 years it *was* in effect it was illegal to manufacture assault weapons (as defined in the bill) for use by private citizens. The law also set a limit on high-capacity magazines: no more than 10 bullets. Admittedly, there *were* major loopholes in the law; most notably, that any assault weapon or magazine manufactured *before* the law went into effect, was perfectly legal to own or resell. (This was a huge exception, for at the time of its passage, there were roughly 1.5 million assault weapons and more than 24 million high-capacity magazines in private hands.)

And while one might can debate whether or not the ban was an effective means of curbing gun violence -- and whether or not it should be revived -- there can be no question that it *did* result in a significant decrease in mass shootings:



Without positing a rock-solid causal connection, mass shootings *have* been on a [severely upward sweep](#) ever since the Assault Weapons Ban went the way of the Dodo. We've fallen into a numbing cycle whereby as soon as we begin wrapping our heads around one horrifying incident (Tuscan, Virginia Tech, Fort Hood, Aurora) another even more grisly massacre occurs (Newtown, Charleston, Chattanooga and now Moneta, Virginia). According to the [GrC Community Mass Shooting Tracker](#), just this year -- between January 1, 2015 and this past Thursday -- there have already been 249 mass shootings in which 310 were killed and 931 wounded. And yet, next to nothing is being done; we are so numb that few are even talking about the need for new legislation -- the need to do *something*.

A single failed shoe bomber unalterably changes the nature of air travel; a half dozen die from ingesting poisoned Tylenol and virtually everything becomes tamper-proof; a video of questionable merit "proves" that Planned Parenthood is playing fast and loose with aborted fetuses and all hell breaks loose. And yet, despite [the fact](#) that over the past 45 years more Americans have died as a result of gun violence here in the United States than have died in all U.S. wars combined . . . and that's going back to the

Revolutionary War . . . nothing is done; the National Rifle Association (NRA) continues claiming that *"Guns don't kill people, people kill people,"* and *"The only thing that will stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."*

This week's atrocity, in which reporter Alison Parker and cameraman Adam Ward were shot to death has struck an even more resilient chord than the other mass shootings, for unlike the other 248 acts of mass carnage this year, this one took place on live television. The sights, the screams, the horrifying agony were all captured in real time -- and then shown over and over and over and over. In an interview with CNN, Ms. Parker's father Andy labeled politicians who don't tackle gun control "cowards." *"Look, I'm for the Second Amendment, but there has to be a way to force politicians who are cowards and in the pocket of the NRA to come to grips and have sensible laws so that crazy people can't get guns."* Parker told FOX News' Megyn Kelly that he would make it his "mission in life" to make sure "crazy people can't get guns." Interestingly, no one on Fox had anything to add; for once Megyn Kelly remained mute.



Inevitably, there are some renewed calls for background checks. Yes, more than a handful of Republicans are saying that fixing the mental health system will go a long way towards cutting gun violence. ("This is really a sick person," said the fellow-whose-name-I-swore-not-to-mention - the one leading the Republican presidential field.) *"This isn't a gun problem, this is a mental problem."* Ironically, a whole lot of people making this kind of proclamation voted *against* the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, which required most health insurance plans to start treating mental health services in the same way they treat all other medical care. Despite including exemptions for small businesses and those who opted not to cover mental health coverage at all, House Republicans still overwhelmingly opposed the effort, 145 to 47. So much for doing something - anything -- about rampant gun violence and mental health.

On a slightly positive note, earlier this week (days before the latest shooting) Walmart, the world's largest retail business, announced that it would no longer sell military-style semi-automatic rifles, including AR-15s. There's evidence that this move was already in the works. Walmart CEO Douglas McMillon foreshadowed the move just days after the May 17 Charleston shooting when he suggested *"Our focus as it relates to firearms should be hunters and people who shoot sporting clays and things like that."* He further added, *"So the types of rifles we sell, the types of ammunition we sell should be curated to those things."* Whether or not Walmart's decision will be copied by other retailers is highly doubtful; they can easily afford to stop selling semi-automatics -- it won't affect their bottom line.

And whether or not McMillon's decision was based on the realities of market share or moral scruple, is both unknowable and irrelevant.

So why don't politicians and industry respond to gun violence with the same purposeful alacrity as they do when it's shoes, over-the-counter drugs or Planned Parenthood? Why, when [ninety percent of the American public](#) and fully 74 percent of National Rifle Association members support universal background checks Congress and most state legislatures act like the Who's 'Tommy' - deaf, dumb and blind? Why, when in two separate polls, nearly half of all gun owners support bans on assault rifles and high-cap magazines do politicians sit on their hands? These are two questions with but a single answer: fear. Fear of what Wayne LaPierre and the National Rifle Association might do to them if they suddenly grow a spine. Fear that the "Duck Dynasty" element will think them to be a bunch of spineless wusses. Fear to open up the can of worms called "American the violent."

I long ago concluded that enacting new laws -- or "enforcing the laws we've got" as conservatives argue -- isn't going to change the culture of extreme violence that exists in America. It's going to take a multi-pronged approach in areas ranging from education and race relations to universal healthcare, a significant raise in the minimum wage and overturning Citizens United, to get us to the point where our elected officials discover that 30,000 annual gun deaths represent a far, far greater threat to America than a deranged man with an explosive device in his Redwings or a case of Tylenol laced with potassium cyanide . . .

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