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# Florida's Columbine: Youth Spirit More Powerful Than Guns

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By **Ji Strangeway**

It is a sad but inspiring day when children ask adults to listen for a change. They're doing for the nation what our leaders have failed to do.

After the Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) high school shooting in Florida on February 14, the voice of youth is finally being heard. They want to put an end to violence. Students are standing up to adults, pushing for change, not just prayers.

Their push for better gun laws is a remedial action. But gun violence is just a giant tumor of our society's cancer. The metastasis of this deeper problem has grown to beyond where the root cause can be directly determined.



Ji Strangeway

As with any disease, no symptom that's progressively getting worse should be overlooked. There are many tumors: the pharmaceutical and anti-psychotic drugs that suppress emotions and awareness of children; the viral violence of reality TV; the gratuitous violence in films (where women are largely victims), kids role-playing homicidal fantasies through virtual reality gaming; and finally, the gunning down of children by children - for real.

These symptoms address how our culture indulges in violence in entertainment to the point where reality is blurred.

The function of violence is meant to help us transform, to heighten awareness. In storytelling, it acts as a cautionary tale as it does in folklore, our oldest medium of entertainment. When this function of transformation is gone, violence no longer has a psychological container. With no mental protective barrier, it becomes a condition we live with - like an open wound that never heals.

When the death of children becomes less sacred, we become more than just "desensitized." We become insane. The mentally ill aren't the ones out there shooting people. They are too busy struggling with their condition. Instead, this "acting out" and rebellion becomes an outlet for the perfectly sane kid with a thing for violence.

Our patriarchal society creates rules while it exercises power and control. More prisons, more guns, more regulations. Meanwhile, this societal petri dish breeds the perfect means for manifesting psychosis.

Replay 1999 - Columbine. I saw it televised on CNN, as did everyone else. This was a pivotal time when our waking reality blurred with virtual reality, as kids escaped a building taken over by gunmen.

I grew up and went to public school in Denver, Colorado, where gang violence and daily fighting were standard. When I first saw the incident unfold on TV, I wondered if it was my high school. It was not.

I was shocked to find this happened at a prestigious, affluent school in the Denver suburbs. What were these killers protecting themselves from? Nothing. What happened didn't come from survival instincts, but from killer instincts. Never mind the possible symptoms that led up to it. In the end, this indulgence in total violence was their form of entertainment.

News reports unfolded with angles tackled by so-called "experts" - psychologists, theologians, and what parents had to say.

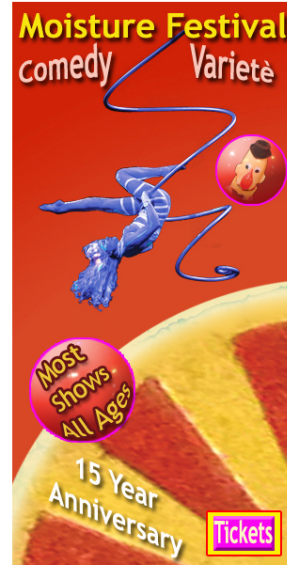
I felt angry as they stood on soapboxes, telling the world what was wrong with youth and its culture, while patronizing them. At that time did anybody ask the kids what they thought was wrong about the world they created for us?

The Columbine tragedy was so unthinkable that I thought it could never happen again. Instead what should have ended then became an epidemic across America, exploding until it became expected and worked its way into school drills.

The children of 1999 didn't have a voice. The experts had their say. No one questioned authority. Like many generations before, they were lulled into obedience to trust those in positions of power - those who shaped the world we live in.

In 2018, the children awoke. This generation is different. The Florida MSD massacre would not be another replay of Columbine. The kids realized our leaders don't deserve our trust.

Children were forced to socially raise adults since the Columbine shooting. With the Florida MSD shooting, they're raising the consciousness again. This is a leadership issue. Specifically, it's the failure of adults to



connect with the ailments, spirit and vision of youth who are processing their capacity to become leaders themselves.

Did any adult ever take a kid who had violent tendencies aside? Were they able to figure out if rage, bullying, or violent tendencies could be a sign of something deeper (such as leadership abilities that needed to be channeled properly)?

Did they give youth hope for a future based on their potential? Or did they leave them behind, alienated and singled-out because our ethos calls for kids who aren't smart (according to societal standards) to be treated as defective in some way?

Maybe, just maybe, our kids are brighter and have better methods of learning. Maybe their so-called "disabilities" and issues are meant to alert us about reforming our teaching methods because they are limiting and archaic.

When do we stop asking kids to tell us what they "want to be when they grow up" and instead ask, "What are you meant to be NOW?" Has anyone asked, "What purpose did you come into this world to achieve?"

If they did, I am sure no kid would answer, "To be a high-school shooter."

How has this answer replaced becoming a "firefighter, doctor, or president?" When do we remove our agenda and let our kids become who they already are?

I believe this Florida shooting will not go down as another senseless tragedy. It is living proof of the cost children have had to bear to redefine what true leadership is. Isn't it about time we recognized and listened to them?

—

*Ji Strangeway is the author of Red as Blue, a hybrid graphic novel and LGBTQ love story containing historical fiction about the Colorado Columbine shooting. Visit [Red as Blue](#) or follow the author on Facebook: [@redasblue](#).*

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