

A time to grieve for lives lost in campus shooting

by *The Indianapolis Star*

As police sort through details of the horrific massacre at Virginia Tech, most Americans struggle to make sense of what appears to be a senseless tragedy. After all, reports of this sort are common from the war zones of Afghanistan and Iraq. Images of bombed-out buildings, smoldering Humvees and photos of fallen soldiers fill television screens and newspaper pages almost daily.

But this report emanates from the picturesque hills and valleys of central Virginia, from a college to which parents entrusted their beloved children - a place safe from faraway wars and even from dangerous parts of the nation's largest cities.

Until now, students and faculty at Virginia Tech surely felt the warm, secure feeling many of us feel on our home turf. Few, if any, would have cause to fear for their lives. But that security was abruptly ripped apart Monday in the deadliest shooting rampage in modern U.S. history. Repeated bursts of gunfire killed dozens of people on campus, including the shooter.

Shocking as it is, it is not the first time that a school campus turned into a killing ground. The worst incident before Monday occurred on Aug. 1, 1966, when Charles Whitman killed 16 people and wounded 31 on the University of Texas campus.

Since 1970, nine other shootings claimed lives at American colleges. Most of those targeted individuals involved in disputes.

In 1999, 12 students and a teacher were killed by two classmates at Columbine High School in Colorado. The shooters killed themselves.

As in 1966, 1970 and 1999, the Virginia Tech shootings leave survivors to grieve.

Loved ones of the victims face the saddest news one can ever face. For many, the depth of their sorrow is matched only by the strength of their anger. Sorrow often turns inward as those who suffer struggle to understand and reconcile their loss. Spirituality often plays a key role in that reconciliation process.

But what of the anger many feel? What or who bears the brunt of our outrage? The insanity or misplaced cause of an unknown shooter? A college's inability to protect its students from all possible risks? A nation in which firearms are abundant and easy to get?

Sadly, there seems to be no valid outlet for anger, at least at this point. It will take time to sort out possible causes for what happened, but today we all quietly grieve with the loved ones of the innocent people who were killed while doing nothing more than living their everyday lives.

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