

Without social justice, the massacres will continue.

[Dorothy Q. Snyder](#) Feb 20

Even if we had sorely-needed gun control, the billionaire corporate theft of our democracy creates the toxic social conditions that result in school massacres like Parkland.



So. [This is what it looks like](#). Look at the photos of crushed parents, terrified children, the young bodies limp and bleeding, the hastily erected memorials to the dead, the votive candles guttering in an indifferent Florida breeze.

Look again. Look hard.

Another school massacre, destructive as a hurricane and just as predictable. This time, like so many times before, the victims are children. The people of Parkland, FL now share a wound with [Sandy Hook](#), [Las Vegas](#) and [Orlando](#), the worst mass shooting in American history. Do you even still remember [Columbine](#)? Just since Sandy Hook (2012), [more than 400 people have been shot in over 200 school shootings](#), according to *The New York Times*. Just the words “more than” and “over” are enough to appall: the destroyed lives and the shootings are becoming too numerous to count. The widening circles of pain of bereft friends, parents, siblings, grandparents and communities lap at the shores of every town, everywhere.

We learn [the shooter Nikolas Cruz](#) was neurologically atypical, possibly autistic. We learn he was bullied, we will never know how horribly or consistently. We learn his mother, his only ally, recently died, leaving him quite alone in the world, and his only social circle was formed by his colleagues at the dollar store where he earned minimum (not a living) wage and his foster parents. Apparently his foster parents didn't know there was a second key to the gun safe. Apparently, neither mother nor son were able to access the kind of assistance they needed to help Nikolas learn, teach him to control his fury, or to make him feel his life was worth living. Because, make no mistake: this was not just mass murder, it was also an attempted suicide.

This latest harvest of American blood is not just about “red flags” (and there were plenty that should have excluded Cruz from purchasing his gun legally, though under current law background checks are excluded from private sales and gun shows), or law enforcement. This cannot be fully blamed on the FBI, nor should it be cynically used to fire the FBI Director as part of the Trump administration's ongoing attack on the nation's highest law enforcement agency. Nor is it about parenting — who are we to judge? — or our video game

and movie culture. Because, though gun laws are much tougher literally *everywhere* else on the globe, video games and violent movies exist in other countries, too. Bullying is a worldwide phenomenon. No, it is more about how all of that combines with the crime of social injustice in America to make a toxic cocktail that causes such events. Our schools, medical system, social networks, and workplaces regularly fail and even torture the most vulnerable among us. Over and over and over again. This attack on American society by the corporate interests who openly purchase their influence at the highest levels, results in the quiet, everyday violence of poverty, hunger, desperation and loss all around America. The only difference: the poor, the sick, the black, the working poor, the unemployed and the desperate usually suffer their fates with incredible patience and silence.



Image by [Politifact](#)

The extended GOP attack on social programs, along with weak gun laws and the corporate takeover of our democracy, has created an environment in which the Parkland massacre was absolutely inevitable.

Our Senators, Congressmen, and Governors, so many funded by the gun lobby, make the conscious and cynical decision every single day they wake up to sacrifice American lives, including those of children, in exchange for the power they enjoy. Among these are my Representatives, Senator Thom Tillis and Senator Richard Burr of North Carolina, who have cheerfully taken in between them over [14.5 million dollars from the NRA](#). Just in 2016, [the NRA spent unprecedented millions to defeat Hillary Clinton](#) and put Trump into office, with \$19.7 million spent against Clinton, and \$10.6 million to directly support the election of Donald Trump. Among them is Senator Marco Rubio who, according to the [Daily News](#), “received \$90,205 in campaign donations from gun rights groups during the 2015–2016 campaign cycle and received an “A+” grade from the NRA. Rubio has received \$3,303,355 over the course of his career as an elected official.” In the 2016 election cycle, the [NRA poured no less than 54 million dollars into political advertising for GOP candidates](#).

President Trump and his GOP cronies are in power in Washington in part because of their Devil’s bargain with the NRA and gun manufacturers. Make no mistake: these destroyed lives in Parkland are on their heads.

Trump will no doubt make a big gesture now to distract the American people from these truths. He will promise to spend the problem away, declare a billion-dollar purchase from corporate cronies who will be panting to make the sale. He will say we must arm teachers, install metal detectors, build more walls, gates, and scanners. He will wave his arms, purse his lips and declare everything but the truth. He does not dare state the truth because he has been purchased by the Death Dealers: the gun lobby, the energy companies, the arms manufacturers, and the Russian and Middle Eastern oligarchs. Even if he even knows what the truth is, anymore.

And meanwhile, in America healthcare costs are through the roof. Proud elders buy their meds instead of food. Parents cannot afford childcare. Mental

healthcare is unaffordable. We work harder than ever and make less.

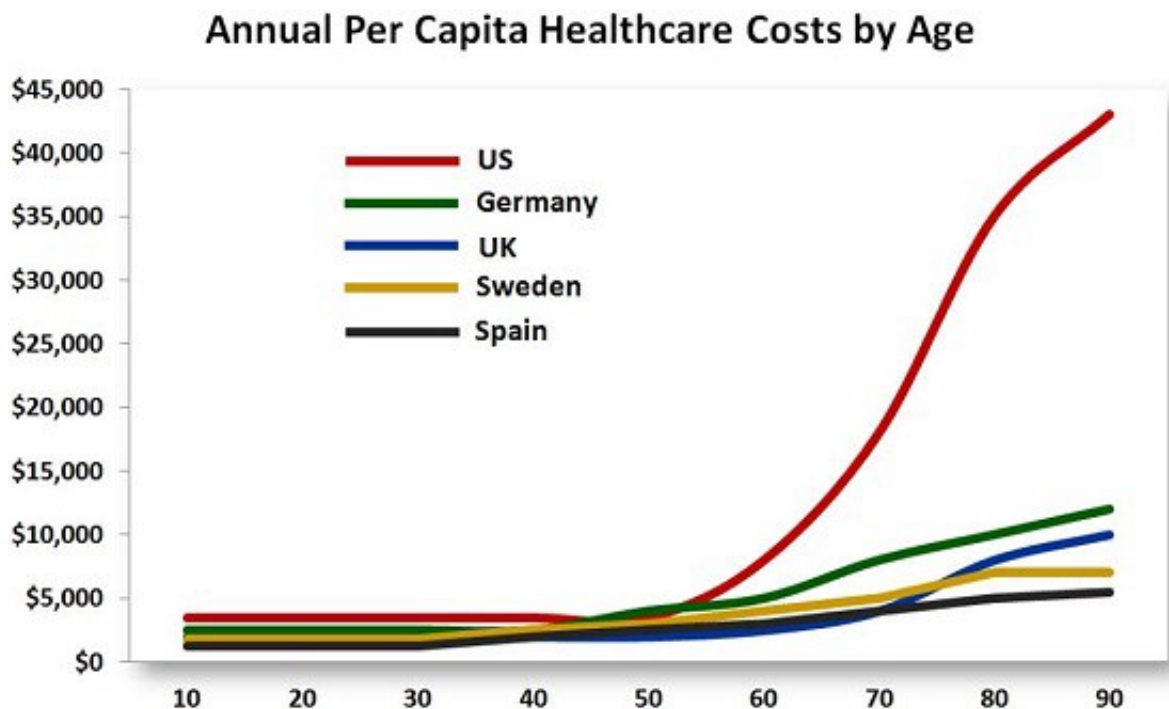


Image: Charles Hugh Smith, [Of Two Minds](#).

All this is as plain as the nose on our faces, but somehow we Americans figure we can get through each day by just avoiding looking in the mirror.

The buck doesn't stop only at the door of those corrupt politicians who owe their careers to billionaire businessmen. It stops here, in my house. And it stops in yours.

The Parkland massacre, like others in the past and those that will happen as surely as the sun will rise, is the grim harvest of pervasive American social and economic injustice.

The purposeful groundwork for these massacres is laid by large corporations and legislators who demonstrate a mind-bending level of cynicism and greed,

and whose willingness to sacrifice Americans for their personal economic benefit grows increasingly bold and shameless. The wealthiest 1% gives less of a damn, either materially or ethically, about the working poor, political and economic refugees, the fallout from automation and foreign adventurism, and the vast social damage the continues to snowball thanks to the privatization of the public good, and their purposeful accumulation of never-before-seen levels of material wealth at the expense of the rest of us and environment we inhabit.

Be sure that, at its very base, the super wealthy think they are better and smarter than you are, and that they have a right to the decide the fate of your parks, your resources, your air and water — and the lives of you and your children.

What will we do differently to combat the social injustice that is at the root of these very loud tragedies and the millions of quieter ones going on every moment in this land?

A new strategy is needed.

First, we could stop taking the easy way out by blaming victims like Nikolas Cruz, and start staring into the face of the abyss. There is a segment of American society who believes that their personal comfort and the so-called “right” to own — whether it is weapons of mass destruction, land, or money — is more sacred than the right of a young man not to be turned into a mass murderer by free access to guns and condemned to a poverty-wage, dead-end job at a dollar store — or the right of his former teachers and classmates not to be gunned down in cold blood. This irrational, individualistic mentality argues against a social safety net that actually functions for the benefit of all, ironically declaiming a rhetoric that is against its own best interest. The faltering social system in America goes hand in hand with guns to cause these

tragedies, because it breeds hopelessness.

We must demand the right of children not to be terrorized and gunned down in their classrooms. The right of people to health care and freedom from the terror inflicted on them by pharmaceutical companies and hospital systems. The right to a simple, living wage. The right to a place to live. Food to eat. Clean water. Air.

But instead of looking into our own souls and taking enough meaningful action, we Americans have been gazing at our false gods for hope, our pasteboard superheroes. Trump will fix it! Bill and Melinda Gates will fix it! Jeff Bezos will fix it! Steve Jobs (almost) fixed it! We look to millionaires instead of philosophers, software engineers instead of the makers of things and the growers of food. We pin our hopes on people whose power emerges not from our democratic process, but from being the best salesmen. And the best liars.

When did we Americans stop being can-do people with principles and turn into the slack-jawed admirers of the rich? When did we become so spineless?

To every American who reads this column, I ask: when will *you* stand up for social justice? Because until you do, you are contributing to your own disenfranchisement, the suffering of millions who have less than you, and to the deaths of the next group of kids who will be mowed down in their classroom by a semi-automatic weapon, not to mention the ones who die in droves every single day just for being black or brown in America. Are you willing to lay more Americans lives down on the blood-slick altars of billionaires at the expense of the rest of us? At the expense of yourself and your own children?

Or will you stand up and fight?

[Dorothy Potter Snyder](#) is a writer, literary translator and proud member of [Hillsborough Progressives Taking Action](#), her hometown grassroots social justice organization that, in coordination with The Hate-Free Schools Coalition, succeeded in banning the Confederate Flag from Orange County NC schools in 2017.