

Some Link Economy With Spate Of Killings; In One Month, 57 Die In Eight Mass Murders - Correction Appended

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 **Correction Appended**

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Body

In Binghamton, N.Y., a Vietnamese immigrant upset about losing his job burst into an immigration center and **killed** 13 people before **killling** himself. In Pittsburgh, police said a gun enthusiast recently discharged from the Marine Corps opened fire and **killed** three police officers. And in Graham, Wash., investigators said a man whose wife was leaving him shot and **killed** five of his children in their mobile home before taking his own life.

The carnage that occurred during less than 48 hours last week capped a recent string of unusually brazen **mass killings**, which crime experts say have touched more people and occurred in more public settings than in any time in recent memory. Comparative statistics are difficult to come by, but during the past **month** alone, at least **eight mass** homicides in this country have claimed the lives of **57** people. Just yesterday, four people were discovered shot to death in a modest wood-frame home in a remote Alabama town.

The factor underlying the violence, some experts think, is the dismal state of the nation's **economy**. Criminologists theorize that the epidemic of layoffs, the meltdown of storied American corporations and the uncertainty of recovery have stoked fear, anxiety and desperation across society and unnerved its most vulnerable and dangerous.

"I've never seen such a large number [of **killings**] over such a short period of time involving so many victims," said Jack Levin, a noted criminologist at Northeastern University who has authored or co-authored **eight** books on **mass murder**.

The simple fact, criminologist James Alan Fox said, is that more Americans are struggling.

"The American dream to them is a nightmare, and the land of opportunity is but a cruel joke," said Fox, also of Northeastern, who has been dubbed the "dean of death" for his analysis of **mass murders**. "The **economic** pie is

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shrinking to the point where it looks more like a Pop Tart and some feel all they're getting is the crumbs. There's a combination of feeling despair and hopelessness at the same time as a certain degree of anger and blame."

Other crime experts caution, however, against drawing such conclusions.

"Because homicides are fairly rare, it is hard to see patterns even when ones exist," said Shawn Bushway, a criminologist at the University of Albany. "It's like reading tea leaves. I don't make much of it. I don't think you can say anything definitively one way or another."

Predictably, the carnage has focused attention on the nation's gun laws. Paul Helmke, president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, said it is too easy for dangerous people to acquire guns.

"The common denominator in all these is that they're all using a gun," Helmke said of the recent killings. "You don't see police officers in Pittsburgh being killed by people throwing knives at them. . . . We've always had violence, but in the old days you couldn't take out so many people so quickly. Now we make it very easy to do that."

The Rev. Jesse L. Jackson called the recent spate of killings "domestic terrorism" and said he hoped the slaughter would be a wake-up call for policymakers.

"You can't grow businesses in war zones," said Jackson, who recently visited cities beset by gun violence. "You can't go to school in war zones. You can't play in the park in war zones."

Experts agree that most mass murderers share one trait: a traumatic event such as a layoff, divorce or separation that sets off an internal rage and a desire for revenge.

"It could be the loss of a job, the loss of a lot of money in the stock market, the loss of a relationship as in a nasty separation or divorce, the loss of a child who is in a child custody battle," Levin said. "There are just simply more catastrophic losses than there were when the economy was in good shape."

Consider the case of Bruce Jeffrey Pardo, a 45-year-old electrical engineer whose life swiftly turned sour last fall. His wife divorced him and he lost his job and his beloved dog, Saki. On Christmas Eve, Pardo dressed as Santa Claus for a holiday party hosted by his ex-wife's parents at their home at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac in a Los Angeles suburb.

Pardo rang the bell, swung open the door and opened fire on the party guests with a semiautomatic handgun before dousing the home with gasoline and setting it ablaze, authorities said. He killed nine people, including his ex-wife, before taking his own life.

"He was looking for revenge, which is almost always the motive in these mass killings," Levin said. "It wasn't enough to get her, but he wanted to get everything associated with her, everything she loved, everything he identified with her."

Since then, mass shootings have plagued communities in all corners of the country. Late last month, a gunman barged into a nursing home in Carthage, N.C., looking for his estranged wife. Police say he killed seven elderly residents and a nurse who cared for them. His wife, a nurse's assistant, escaped by hiding in a bathroom.

Five days later in Binghamton, a man wearing body armor burst into a New York state immigration center where he had studied English and opened fire on immigrants taking an exam to become U.S. citizens, authorities said.

"The nursing home in North Carolina and the community center in Binghamton were not randomly chosen locations," Fox said. "It's not just some gunman walking down the street. They're very deliberate choices and reflect the anger and blame that the killer has."

Staff researcher Madonna Lebling contributed to this report.

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Correction

-- An April 8 A-section article incorrectly referred to the University of Albany. The correct name is the University at Albany.

Correction-Date: April 9, 2009

Graphic

IMAGE; By Daniel Giles -- Associated Press; Another in a string of mass slayings: Four people were found dead yesterday in this Alabama home.

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