

**Japanese Media versus American Media Coverage  
of the Virginia Tech Tragedy**

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## Introduction

Japan and the U.S. have a long intimate relationship. Both have a history together that has included some of the most epic clashes and collaborations of all time. It stands to reason that even though both countries differ markedly in culture, values, socially accepted norms and conventions, there exist similarities as well, especially in the way mass media texts are related to the social domains for which they exist. This critical analysis of two editorial news articles covering the tragedy at Virginia Tech in April of 2007 - one from a Japanese/International perspective and the other from an American perspective - will attempt to show, through critical discourse analysis, how the authors' texts, reflect and serve to at least contribute to defining the society for which they have been written (Coulthard, 1991).

Norman Fairclough, who is considered one of the founders of critical discourse analysis, lays the foundation upon which this analysis is built. This analysis will first identify five "aspects of textuality" (Fairclough, 1989) as they appear in the articles, and then will proceed with the Fairclough's "interpretation of the interaction" in part 2. Part 3 is devoted to explaining how the *identification* and *interpretation* above "are inserted in social action" (Fairclough, 1992a and b, 1995). How discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies will be brought to light in parts two and three through a critical analysis looking at the following five aspects: 1) visibility and invisibility, 2) consistency, 3) modality, 4) relational processes, and 5) common sense appeal.

## 1 Context (Situational and Cultural)

The two articles, which will be analyzed in this paper, present two opposing points of view. The first is an editorial article questioning why Americans do not pursue the firearms control debate more vigorously in light of the tragedy at Virginia Tech. The second presents the view that debating firearms control not debate worthy.

The article supporting the debate is written by a Japanese author for a Japanese and international readership, and the other, which denounces pursuing the debate, is written from an American perspective, generally for Americans in the U.S. so understanding both cultural contexts is crucial for establishing a starting point for critical analysis.

The Japan Times (JT), from which the first article comes, is a mainstream newspaper aimed at native as well as non-native English speakers mainly living in Japan, among which about half is Japanese and a

large percent of the remaining readers are long-term residents of Japan (Okadome, 2002). Their website states that their “editorials ... reflect Japanese public opinion” and that they “take great care to produce a responsible newspaper that is impartial and balanced” (Japan Times, 2008).

The second article comes from an organization called the Center for Individual Freedom (CFIF) whose mission is “to protect and defend individual freedoms and individual rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution” (Center for Individual Freedom, 2000). The CFIF “seeks to focus public, legislative and judicial attention on the rule of law as embodied in the federal and state constitutions” (Center for Individual Freedom, 2000).

From these website descriptions, it can be ascertained that both articles are intended for the general public of Japan and of the U.S.A. respectively and, in the case of the latter, legislative and judicial personnel are also among the intended readers. Socially, culturally and ideologically, Japan and the U.S. differ markedly in terms of the general public’s sentiments towards personal firearms use and possession. This point will be developed further in part 3 of this analysis.

The two texts will be critically analysed to examine how power relations and ideology shape the discourse in both cases (Coulthard, 1991). In a book by Paul Stapleton (2006) entitled *How Culture Affects Communication*, the author states, “As Japan tends to be a group-oriented culture, modesty is quite important in order to avoid standing out from the group.” Fundamental values that shape the ideological landscape in Japan include collective awareness and modesty. To add perspective to the current Japanese socio-cultural setting with respect to peace, examining the Global Peace Index (GPI) is very useful. The GPI is endorsed by distinguished individuals and organisations including Nobel laureates the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Amnesty International. The latest GPI ranks Japan fifth among 121 countries taking into consideration such factors as the number of homicides per capita, the level of violent crime and ease of access to weapons, all of which Japan ranks “most peaceful” (Global Peace Index, 2007). The Japan Times article reflects the prevailing values mentioned above (modesty, collectiveness, peace) in its argument and in its discourse.

Conversely, it is commonly known that individual rights, freedoms and liberty are treasured values that are deeply embroidered into the cultural fabric of the U.S.A. In a recently published article in *Critical Sociology* (2008) author William Greene describes the United States stating:

“The USA is individualistic. While tendencies toward individualism ‘exist within every individual and every society’ (Triandis, 1995), these tendencies are argued as being most prevalent in the USA (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1994; Vandello and Cohen, 1999). Deeply woven into American culture and social institutions, individualism often symbolizes the freedom of the American way of life. Cultural excesses of individualism, however, have been associated with such social problems as ... interpersonal violence (Hsu, 1983)...., high violent crime rates (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001).”

With respect to social attitudes towards firearms, people living in Japan tend to reject them believing they infringe on their rights to have a peaceful community whereas Americans tend to consider firearm possession to be an individual right.

Both articles have been written within the social contexts described above. Parts 2 and 3 will attempt to address “the constructive effects discourse has upon social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, neither of which is normally apparent to discourse participants” (Fairclough, 1992b).

## **2. Identification and interpretation**

### **2.1 Visibility and Invisibility: Using the first person narrative**

The notion of ‘visibility’ and ‘retreating into invisibility’ is a concept put forward by linguistics and communication expert Gunther Kress. He defines the “retreat into individual invisibility” (1985) as what a writer does when refraining from first person usage and thus becoming hidden to the reader. Both authors use the concept of ‘visibility’ differently. In the JT article, the author begins by referring to himself in the first person as in “so I wondered, once again, when I stumbled upon...”. The effect is to reach out to the reader on a personal level, as if to say ‘I’m just a regular person like you, who just happened to notice something’. There is personal connection established in the first paragraph. The main body of the article is a barrage of referenced facts and statistics, which are presented without a single use of the word “I”. He ‘retreats’ and gives the ‘facts’. This serves to separate himself, and thus his subjective opinions, so the reader is left with what appears to be a great deal of incontestable credible information. Although the author refrains from using the first person when identifying the facts, the personal connection is maintained with the reader by occasionally using the second person. Examples include “So, yes, **you** may say...”, “**You** may even

want to..." and "when *you* consider..." Once, in the middle of the fact stream, the author writes "so *we* are back to..." which serves to comfortably seat the reader next to him as they both look at all the 'facts' together. In terms of ideational meaning and transitivity, as described by Coulthard et al. (1991), with respect to the 'visibility' of the participants, the overall effect of the JT article is that the reader is invited to sit down with the author at the same level, to have a look at some information together.

In the CFIF article, the author consistently remains 'invisible'. This is useful in making the author's use of subjective vocabulary such as "useless", "incorrectly decried...", "bizarrely" sound less like personal ranting as attempts to jolt the reader into submission are pursued. Omitting the first person seems to mask subjectivity, however, blatant unapologetic sarcastic irony and exaggerations, which will be explored further in subsequent sections, rip this mask off rather violently. This author's strategy, which differs greatly from the JT article's inviting tone, is significant when considering the target reader.

Both authors seem to have carefully considered how their readers may respond and have chosen varying degrees of 'visibility' to maximize the extent to which they can win their readers over and perhaps even motivate them to contribute social change.

## **2.2 Consistency: formal vs. informal**

With respect to interdiscursivity, the articles will be examined for formal and informal use of vocabulary. Both authors use various discourse types (academic, casual, conversational etc.) in their own ways, to achieve desired effects. The JT article starts with formal vocabulary (numbing obstinacy, utter blindness, untrammelled gun ownership). These words are more likely to be found in an intellectual editorial magazine or some other formal text. After the first sentence, the author immediately switches to a conversational style using phrases such as "I wondered", "but anyone willing to pause and check would have...", "...in 'legal intervention,' that is, shot dead..." The phrases, 'I wondered' and 'I stumbled upon' have the effect of inviting the reader to explore some anomaly together and immediately soothes the harshness of the first sentence. It helps to make the author appear reasonable, perhaps on the same level as the reader, with a similarly inquisitive curiosity. The use of such phrases as 'but anyone...' and 'that is,' are also expressions used by the

author to impart information modestly. Modesty is of paramount importance in Japanese society will be explored further in part 3.

The CFIF article is more consistent in its use of discourse types limited to a type of written discourse that attempts to be logical and substantive as well as entertaining. Examining the sentence “Namely, these restrictions merely create sitting ducks for maniacal killers.” reveals the variety of discourse types that are present consistently throughout the text, often within the same sentence. It would not be strange to hear the phrase ‘these restrictions merely create...’ for example in a debate among university professors. However, the next phrase ‘sitting ducks’ is certainly vivid imagery that even appears on Laerte’s Cliché to Avoid website (Laerte, 2008). The text is interdiscursive in the sense that several discourse types (formal, informal etc.) are used. This ‘type’ of discourse may be identified as ‘consistent’ because a high proportion of the text is a blending of formal and informal types, not only within paragraphs but also at the sentence level as evidenced in the example above. This type of flamboyant yet at times, (*dare I say*) slightly donnish writing style is particularly appealing to the targeted readers for reasons that will be discussed further in the third part of this analysis.

## 2.3 Modality

For the purposes of this analysis, modality is described as “any unit of language that expresses the ...writer’s affinity with a position and evaluative structures” (Coulthard, 1991). Both the JT and the CFIF articles use modality to make their opinions explicit. Both use very strong lexical items such as “tired, misguided, useless”, and “numbing obstinacy, utter blindness to reality”, which have the effect of conveying a sense of urgency among the readership by grabbing attention. From the very first sentences in both articles, readers are overtly made aware of the authors’ opinions.

Modality is used by both authors, however they differ in some ways. The Japanese article begins with the modals mentioned above (numbing obstinacy, utter blindness to reality), however the rest of the article has few instances of this type of obvious disdain. The reader’s attention is peaked with the first sentence and then the author calmly proceeds to attempt to connect with the reader on a personal level. The CFIF article, on the other hand, is a deluge of modals that pepper the article from the first sentence to the last shown here. “We can only hope that accepting this unfortunate truth may help minimize future instances of homicidal maniacs preying upon disarmed, helpless victims.” This

contributes to getting the readers to conclude for themselves that the author is correct in saying that the right to bear arms is not debate worthy.

## 2.4 Relational processes

In both the texts, relational processes, which are “verbs/verbal groups which denote existence or states of being or having” (Halliday, 1985), play a role in winning the reader over. In the JT article, efforts are clearly made to establish credibility by presenting facts. The author goes to great lengths to present these facts in a logical way consistently referencing sources for almost every fact and statistic given. An example of the author’s use of a relational process is in the following sentence, “their arguments *are* often tortuous”. In this case, there is no reference or reasoning to explain this subjective comment yet it is well-placed after a series of solid referenced facts and statistics so it is unlikely that a reader would think to question whether or not the counter-arguments are in fact “tortuous” as is the claim. The cleverly placed relational processes serve to lead the reader to share the author’s belief that the American stubbornness regarding firearms legislation is, at best, difficult to fathom. There is a relatively low proportion of relational processes, in the Japan Times article, as compared to the CFIF article.

In this second article, the author makes use of relational processes in examples such as the following: “the sad reality, however, *is* that such measures...” and “the record... *is* replete with instances in which law abiding citizens possessing firearms have minimized or even ended similar killing spree.” In each of these examples, the reader is pushed into accepting the author’s point of view in an assertive way. This being an editorial article, this kind of use of relational processes, can be expected and perhaps only a wary reader will be able to recognize fact and distinguish it from fiction.

## 2.5 Questioning ‘common sense’

Both are editorial articles that attempt to persuade readers to accept a given point of view. Both authors make appeals to common sense by presenting facts and data that lead to a perceived logical conclusion. The manner in which each author chooses to accomplish this seems to reflect the readers and what they may perceive to be common sense.

Other than the first sentence, the Japan Times article is, for the most part, mild-mannered using a string of evidence to end with this final question. “If the accidental death of 46 people can prompt a national program, why is it that a single person deliberately killing 32 people... with a gun he acquired with no constraints cannot lead to a national reconsideration of the deadly situation?” The whole article leads the readers to use their common sense and conclude for themselves that, at the very least, the firearm control issue needs to be re-examined. Appeals to common sense are made throughout the article as evidenced by the train of facts linked together with second person counter-argument statements such as “you may say...”, “you may even want to add...”, “so you turn... to...”, “you surely find...”, “certainly looks inconsequential...”, “seems admirably safer...” and ends with “but...” He then proceeds to explain why the reader’s imagined arguments are not valid by adding more facts. This type of logical argument tries to address every possible argument for each fact presented in order to counter. After all the counter-arguments are made by the author, the reader is unlikely to think of reasons not to believe the author’s point of view to be true. This method of presenting the argument with research and citations, helps establish a personal connection with the reader in an informal yet credible discourse style.

The CFIF article’s tone is very different in that the author starts by assuming that the readers may be thinking about re-opening the firearm-control debate. The author ridicules this notion of debate to the point that the reader is almost bullied into siding with the author if they have any ‘common sense’. After reading the article, the reader may be manipulated to such an extent that they may feel that to pursue the firearm control legislation is non-sense. Aggressive wording forces the reader to use ‘common sense’. A typical example is “Even Britain’s Home Minister got in on the act, bizarrely calling for ‘a serious and reflective debate on gun issues and gun laws in the States.’ As if nobody ever discusses Second Amendment issues here in America, and as if Britain’s overreaching restrictions weren’t a disaster.” Using ‘even’ coupled with ‘got in on the act, bizarrely...’ has the effect of leading the reader to believe that the whole concept of firearm control is ludicrous, invoking images of a naive Minister playing a role in some strange circus. To the American reader, this may be a particularly powerful method of persuasion. The author is attempting to forcefully alienate the reader from the concept of firearm-control by using the jeer as the weapon of choice.

The appeal to common sense in the JT article is methodical and cogent while keeping a personal connection with the readers. By contrast, the CFIF article is aggressive and derisible.



### 3 Social Domain

#### 3.1 Japan

The general public's sentiment towards possession of personal firearms in Japan can be summed up in this statement made by a random citizen "...deep inside my heart, I don't want it to be legal to carry guns in Japan" (Japan Today, 2004). The author of the JT article, Hiroaki Sato is a Japanese writer who has been living in New York for several years. He is in a unique position because he has the luxury of having his native Japanese upbringing as well as real daily life experience in the U.S.A. While his writing style is not traditionally Japanese in the sense that it is informal, personable and direct, it nevertheless appeals to the readership which is also unique. It is an international readership of which roughly half are Japanese and half are non-Japanese. The Japan Times describes their diverse readership as affluent stating "Most are well-educated and enjoy high social status" (Okadome, 2002). In the same document, the non-Japanese readership is described as being mostly long-term residents (LTR). Being an LTR myself I can say that as time goes on non-Japanese people living in Japan generally need to assimilate to this very homogenous society. Consequently, LTRs naturally internalize fundamental elements of Japanese culture and social dynamics, often to the point of becoming similar to Japanese people in social interactions.

With respect to the 5 aspects examined in part 2, a good starting point for assessing how this article's discourse contributes to "social action" (Coulthard, 1991) is to compare Japanese language use verses English usage.

In a document describing how Japanese use their language differently than English speakers, the Japanese government Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2008) explains that "Japanese often omit the subject or the object—or even both—when they feel that it will be understood from the context." The first person is often omitted in Japanese conversations so it is not particularly notable whether the author uses the first person or not even though he uses conversational expressions identified in 2.1 above. However, it is notable when considering the Japanese concept of *honne to tatemae*, which is defined as "private vs. public stance in Japan." (Davies, 2002) This concept offers insight into how a JT reader might respond to the Sato article. Honna and Hoffer (1986) explain that *honne* and *tatemae* are "two words [that] are often considered a dichotomy contrasting genuinely-held personal feelings and opinions from those that are socially controlled. *Honne* is one's deep motive or

intention, while *tatemae* refers to motives or intentions that are socially-tuned, those that are shaped, encouraged, or suppressed by majority norms.” This concept, coupled with another “dichotomy in the Japanese way of thinking known as *uchi* [inside] and *soto* [outside]” (Davies, 2002) reveal reasons why people in Japan may feel a sense of attachment to the author of the JT article. As a result of finessing his way to the ‘inside’ of the reader, he can become, somewhat intimate without having met the reader. In normal daily lives, there are outside (*soto*) people with whom one’s public face is shown and thus the discourse of choice is *tatemae* which is suppressing one’s true opinions if they are likely to disturb the status quo. Whereas, discourse makes a dramatic shift to *honne* when one is among inside (*uchi*) people. “The dual concept of *uchi/soto* has had a great influence on Japanese society, especially in terms of human relations” (Davies, 2002). In Japan, it is quite typical to reserve *honne* for ‘inside people’ (family members intimate friends etc.) When the author becomes ‘visible’ to the reader, in the ... sense, he is able to cross the line from an ‘outside person’ to a kind of temporary ‘inside person’ so then the reader is open to listening his *honne* as if listening to a close friend giving his opinion. The author, in his use of the 5 aspects identified and interpreted in part 2, creates a comfortable feeling with readers which results in the impression that he is a peer, on the same level as the reader, looking at and evaluating information together. Community spirit, belonging and being able to see eye-to-eye, all work in the authors favour to achieve deep meaningful connections with the readers, which adds strength and credibility to his arguments.

### 3.2 United States

Having been brought up in a Canadian town bordering Detroit, Michigan, I have had a lifetime of experience with North American/American culture. Drawing upon my observations and experiences, I have noticed that unlike the JT article, there are different cultural forces working to try to win the reader over in the CFIF article. After having lived in Japan for the past 8 years, I have seen some similarities but also many differences between North America and Japan. Few are more conspicuous than the ocean separating the American independent/individualistic way of thinking from the Japanese collective/conformist way of thinking. The “concepts of equality and rights,... are closely linked to the idea of individualism. The values of equality and rights, are part of the ideology prominent in the United States ... embodied in important documents like the [U.S.] constitution” (Reed, 1996). I surmise that one would be arduously challenged to find a large group of Americans who do not believe that being number one (i.e. excelling in some particular field) is a great thing.

Looking at two particularly salient sayings makes the contrast between American and Japanese social consciousness even more lucid. These are ‘the squeaky wheel gets the grease’ and ‘the nail that sticks up gets hammered down’. These proverbs reflect what exists in the social consciousness of the two nations which is, on the American hand, the importance of individual rights verses the importance of the collective good of society on the Japanese hand, respectively. The CFIF article affirms and reflects American independent culture, not only in its position but with respect to its discourse as well. Identification and interpretation in part 2.1 showed that the author remained ‘invisible’ throughout the article. To the independent minded American reader, the author’s ‘invisibility’ allows the reader to feel as though she is looking at the facts and making a free decision to accept them. The author appeals to the need for readers to express their individuality by not using the first person. This may increase the possibility that the author’s views will be internalised by the readers thus shaping their opinions which, can serve to construct society. Use of modality and the way in which the author appeals to common sense as described in part 2.2 also reflect and contribute to defining American culture. The author’s use of relational processes as well as the other discourse items described above, is likely to appeal to an American public which has been shown to display more assertiveness (Bresnahan, 2002). The reader may be more likely to connect and support the CFIF article’s position, as opposed to a Japanese reader who would likely not be so accepting. The Japanese reader is more likely to succumb to a barrage of undeniable facts and referenced statistics especially when they reflect the general population’s attitudes or opinions. American society’s characteristic assertiveness is present in this article intended reach out and convince the American public of a point of view.

In the CFIF article, there is no ‘I’ and in an individualistic society, the use of ‘I’ usually leads to the question ‘Well, who are you?’ and thus credibility is downgraded to reflect that individual’s credentials which may or may not be reliable. Regardless, it takes credibility away from the article itself. The absence of ‘I’ has the opposite effect in that there is no ‘I’ to challenge so the author is protected. Also figurative language is a prominent feature of American discourse in general so an editorial article making use of it such as this one, is likely to strike a chord with American readers who typically want to be entertained and dazzled. Aggressive claims made by the author serve to create an image of an angry sharp-tongued debater who is on a mission to correct some injustice. This works in grabbing the attention of the American reader who holds to heart values such as individual freedom and liberty as evidenced by the U.S. constitution and its amendments.

## Conclusion

The ultimate goal of discourse analysis is to “deconstruct... hidden agendas and discriminatory practices” (Coulthard, 1991). As was the case in both the JT article and the CFIF article, the authors, through their discourse, not only reflected the societies for which they were written, but served to, at least in part, contribute to constructing them as well. The JT article, in its gentle, let’s-look-at-the -facts-together personal approach, attempts to form it’s modern forward thinking readership’s opinion in a non-obtrusive way. By contrast, the CFIF article’s markedly assertive way makes a considerably convincing case to the American reader. In both cases, perhaps only a reader well versed in discourse analysis, would be able to even perceive that a plethora of powers are at work to shape an unsuspecting reader’s mind.

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Monday, Aug. 20, 2007

THE VIEW FROM NEW YORK

Why can't Americans give up their guns?

By HIROAKI SATO

NEW YORK — Is there anything comparable to the numbing obstinacy, the utter blindness to reality, that politicians display toward the consequences of untrammelled gun ownership in this country? So I wondered, once again, when I stumbled upon President George W. Bush's answer to what some now call "the Virginia Tech Massacre" — the report that three of his agencies prepared on his orders. Here are some facts. The number of those shot dead by a mentally unbalanced student in "the massacre" that April morning was 32. The figure was thought large enough, even in this country, that The Washington Post prepared a profile of each person killed and serialized the sketches. But anyone willing to pause and check would have found a startling fact: That number is close to the daily average for killings by firearms in the United States.

According to the U.S. government's Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2004 — the latest year for which such figures are available — a total of 11,624 people were shot dead or murdered. That averages out to 32 a day. In the same year an additional total of 16,750 people shot themselves to death with firearms, 649 people died in gun accidents, and 311 in "legal intervention," that is, shot dead by police. Also, 235 people died for unknown reasons though it was clear that they did so of gun wounds. A grand total of 29,569, or an average of 81 people a day, were killed or died by use of guns. Thirty-two out of 81 is 40 percent. So, four out of 10 people who died with firearms were murdered. In the same year, the number of overall homicides — not just with firearms, but also with knives, "blunt instruments" and so on — was 17,357. That means 67 percent, or two out of three homicides in this country, were committed with firearms. Despite such figures, some Americans, mainly defenders of gun ownership, argue that the murder rate, the gun-murder rate, of this country is not particularly high, or that gun control doesn't really have much to do with murder rates. Their arguments are often tortuous, but let us compare the U.S. with other countries. In 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO) compiled a "World Report on Violence and Health." One of the tables in the report, "Firearm-related mortality, by manner of death and country," gives, among other things, firearm death rates per 100,000. It shows that in firearm death rates, Albania, at 22.1, tops the U.S., at 11.3; and in firearm homicide rates, Albania, at 17.6, and Estonia, at 4.9, top the U.S., at 4.4. So, yes, you may say the U.S. is less violent than Albania and Estonia. You may even want to add the deeply Buddhist nation Thailand to the countries more violent than the U.S. For, in the ratio of firearm homicides to total deaths by firearms, Thailand, at 89.7 percent, beats the U.S., whose rate is less than half, at 38.8 percent. For some reason, this WHO table does not include certain countries. So you turn, for example, to an "International Homicide Rate Table" in a Web outfit calling itself GunCite, and you surely find several other countries that are more violent than the U.S. The years for statistics cited vary from country to country, but compared with Columbia's firearm homicide rate of 51 per 100,000 (1996), the U.S. rate of 3.7 (1999) certainly looks inconsequential. Even with South Africa's rate of 27 (1995), the U.S. seems admirably safer. For that matter, in total firearm deaths, which include homicides, America's rate of 11.3 per 100,000 (1998) seems pretty bad. But when you consider the perennially conflicted state in which the U.S. is supposed to find itself for one reason or another, you may prefer to conclude that the firearm mortality rates of some other countries are more disturbing: Finland's 5.7 (1998), France's 5.0 (1998), and so forth. The rub is that in such countries most people who meet death with firearms do so by volition: suicide. So, we are back to the total of 11,624 people murdered with firearms in a single year. For comparison, the number of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq, at the time of this writing, is 3,700, or just about one-third of domestic murders with firearms. And that number is stretched over a period of four years and five months.

But numbers such as these do not faze politicians a bit. Immediately after "the massacre," Tim Kaine, governor of Virginia, famously declaimed: "People who want to . . . make it their political hobbyhorse to ride, I've got nothing but loathing for them." The "political hobbyhorse" here means talk of the need for gun control. Bush, who took the unusual step of flying to the bloodshed site the next day, refused to recognize gun ownership, untrammelled or otherwise, as the problem. Presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and John McCain, among others, followed suit. They would not meddle with people's "right to bear arms," they proclaimed. Still, for political reasons, Bush felt he had to do something. So he quietly ordered the secretaries of Justice, Education, and Health and Human Services (HHS), to look into the matter. They fanned out to a total of 12 states to hold hearings in hastily set up sessions. The result, posted on the HHS site in mid-June without fanfare, is the report I stumbled on recently: "On Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy." But it focuses on the difficulties in preventing mentally disturbed people from possessing guns. It is as if the three secretaries, along with Bush, took to heart what appears to be the credo of the National Rifle Association, which is famously dead set against gun control: "It's not guns that kill, but people." Not that Americans don't care about other people's deaths. They do. Just the other day, for example, apparently in reaction to the bridge collapse in Minneapolis, The New York Times carried an article on great improvements in bridge construction in recent years. One of the past incidents the reporter cited was a similar collapse in 1967. It killed 46 people, "one of the deadliest failures." But he added, it "prompted a national program of regular inspections."

The question is a simple one: If the accidental death of 46 people can prompt a national program, why is it that a single person deliberately killing 32 people, not to mention wounding 30 others, with a gun he acquired with no constraints cannot lead to a national reconsideration of the deadly situation?

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[http://www.cfif.org/htdocs/freedomline/current/in\\_our\\_opinion/Virginia-Tech-Shootings.htm](http://www.cfif.org/htdocs/freedomline/current/in_our_opinion/Virginia-Tech-Shootings.htm)

## In Our Opinion

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"...Virginia Tech prompted the instantaneous but typical, tired and misguided calls for increased infringements upon the Second Amendment's individual right to keep and bear arms."

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"Gun-Free Zones" = Sanctuaries for Maniacal Killers

Allowing Law-Abiding Citizens to Protect Themselves is the Best Solution to Killing Sprees

Question: What type of victims do homicidal maniacs like Cho Seung-Hui prefer?

Answer: Unarmed ones.

Like clockwork, this week's horrific murders at Virginia Tech prompted the instantaneous but typical, tired and misguided calls for increased infringements upon the Second Amendment's individual right to keep and bear arms.

For example, Newsweek's Howard Fineman hoped that it "might prompt a new wave of legislation - not just talk but legislation - to limit the sale of handguns in America," and the New York Times reflexively demanded more useless anti-gun laws. For its part, the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence incorrectly decried "how easy it is for an individual to get powerful weapons in our country," despite the fact that Mr. Cho used two commonplace pistol models and had no criminal record.

Even Britain's Home Minister got in on the act, bizarrely calling for "a serious and reflective debate on gun issues and gun laws in the States." As if nobody ever discusses Second Amendment issues here in America, and as if Britain's overreaching restrictions weren't a disaster.

The sad reality, however, is that such measures, however well-intentioned, have precisely the opposite of their intended effect. Namely, these restrictions merely create sitting ducks for maniacal killers. Such measures may feel good to pundits and liberals, but only serve to make society less safe, not safer.

Virginia Tech provides a perfect illustration of this fact. Under Virginia law, universities weren't required to be so-called "gun-free zones." Rather, university administrators are allowed to impose such firearms restrictions within their discretion.

Ironically, this past year, the Virginia legislature considered a bill to override university officials' ability to impose "gun-free zones" at public universities. It would have allowed faculty and students with concealed-carry permits to possess weapons on campus, under the justified belief that armed citizens are oftentimes the best defense against mass murderers.

Unfortunately, however, the bill died in committee, much to the celebration of naïve university officials. At the time, Virginia Tech Associate Vice-President Larry Hincker tragically proclaimed, "the university community is appreciative of the General Assembly's actions because this will help parents, students, faculty and visitors feel safe on our campus."

When student columnist Bradford Wiles wrote an opinion piece advocating greater concealed-carry rights on campus, Vice-President Hincker ridiculed him:

"The editors of this page must have printed this commentary if for no other reason than malicious compliance. Surely, they scratched their heads saying, 'I can't believe he really wants to say that.' Wiles tells us that he didn't feel safe with the hundreds of highly-trained officers armed with high-powered rifles encircling the building and protecting him. He even implies that he needed his sidearm to protect himself. The writer would have us believe that a university campus, with tens of thousands of young people, is safer with everyone packing heat. Imagine the continual fear of students in that scenario. We've seen that fear here, and we don't want to see it again. Guns don't belong in classrooms. They never will. Virginia Tech has a very sound policy preventing same."

Vice-President Hincker's mockery aside, the university's "gun-free" prohibition obviously meant nothing to a homicidal Cho Seung-Hui, who disregarded it and methodically murdered 32 people over a two-and-a-half-hour span. Witnesses report that Cho took his time, padlocked doors to trap victims and calmly paused several times to reload.



In other words, all that Virginia Tech's "gun-free zone" succeeded in doing was to render victims defenseless and create a safe haven for mass killers like Cho. The "hundreds of highly-trained officers with high-powered rifles" just couldn't get there in time.

The record of "gun-free zones" is no better in other locales. Homicidal maniacs have committed similar rampages in Winnetka, Illinois, Stockton, California and just last year in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In contrast, the record - conveniently ignored in most media discussions - is replete with instances in which law-abiding citizens possessing firearms have minimized or even ended similar killing sprees.

In 2002, a student at Appalachian Law School in nearby Grundy, Virginia ended a mass murder after retrieving a firearm from his car. Just this past February, off-duty police officer Kenneth Hammond confronted and stopped a shopping mall attacker in Ogden, Utah with a weapon that he possessed despite the mall's prohibition against firearms on the premises. In 1997, Pearl, Mississippi Assistant Principal Joel Myrick stopped a killer in after pulling his handgun from his car and confronting the shooter. Mere days later, in Edinboro, Pennsylvania, an armed citizen similarly stopped an attack at a school.

In a 1999 study, economists John Lott and William Landes established that states that allow citizens to carry concealed handguns suffer 60% fewer multiple-shooting attacks and 80% fewer deaths from such attacks. In other words, allowing citizens to carry handguns is the best measure to prevent armed attack.