The Ballads of Tragedy: America’s School Shooting Saga

This just in:
Breaking news—
Three dead on a local college campus.
Now all rise for The Pledge of Allegiance.

I pledge allegiance to the guns of the United States of Shootings.

Drafted messages stay saved in my notes app on my phone.
If I am granted a few moments to send an “I love you” message to my parents
As I bleed away on a floor of other students
Whose eyes stare blankly into mine
As their final moments flash back to the best moments of their lives,
While mine remember how America never did anything to protect me.

As guns hold more popularity than the money in our pockets,
To be put towards the end of violence,
And as students in elementary school wave goodbye to their parents
At the morning bus stop to never come back,
I hold the same fate as I drive back to 2 Convent Road from visiting my hometown
On a Sunday night for a morning class, praying
I won't be on the morning news, but it won’t matter,
Because it’ll be another skipped episode of a student killed on school grounds,
Since this has been our daily broadcast news for the past years.

A female killed on school grounds,
A Black female killed on school grounds,
So my pillow kisses me to sleep as I endure the ticking clock of doom,
And I pray thee, Lord, my soul to keep.
For if I die before I wake,
I pray thee, Lord, to make the pain quick,
Because that was always my fate.

Debating to hold my nightly bathroom run,
As I hear unfamiliar sounds in the hallway as a resident student,
Until I realize that morning doesn’t guarantee any safety either,
Because "This Is America," as Childish Gambino assured.

I have never heard the sound of gunshots in real life,
But the sound of Fourth of July fireworks
Is enough to wake me from my dreams after laying my body peacefully to rest at 10 pm
In my O’Connor Hall dorm room, praying that the sound is just a hallucination
And not the alarm to trigger my “how to stay alive with a shooter present” plan.

As I bow for the home of the free and the land of the brave,
I wave my national anthem flag to my chest to be shot at as I walk outside,
To wrap the flag as the country it is over my wounded body in memory
Of not only the red stripes of the soldiers who fought and died for this nation,
But also the survivors of today's soldiers who are students protecting others
In school shootings whose tears bleed more blue than the red we have seen in years.

As gun laws weaken, the death toll for gun deaths rise.
The U.S. News stated that there were 346 school shooting incidents in 2023,
Which averages to nearly one incident every day.
California, Ohio, and Texas rank top for these incidents.

The nation must open its eyes to recognize that
Guns are the leading cause of death for American students
Before it is too late and we question where have all the children gone.

Every single human person has immeasurable dignity,
But our infinite worth is put to the test
Once a gun is pointed at our face,
And we finally know who is in control of our lives.
We claim that humans have unbreakable rights and significant responsibilities,
So give me a weapon and I will leave a legacy with some time to face,
But give me a pen only to plead for change to a nation that will do nothing,
And I will still wake up the next day with the same fate of being shot at school.

It’s terrifying to know that my last breath may be as a student
Who sent a saved message to my loved ones,
Because today I am more likely to get shot in school than die any other way.

I think about dying more than I imagine myself graduating from college.
Will my final hours be lying in a pool of blood struggling to hit send
On the "I love you always" text to my family group chat,
As they bite their fingernails watching the news for updates
On rather how many students were found dead than safe and alive,
Because we are trained to expect the worst than hope for the best in America.
Will I die alone in my dorm with my door busted down?
Will the bullets that break through my window hit my heart to let me go beautifully?
Will I be with my best friend walking to the cafeteria and we lay together on the sidewalk?
Or will I be in a classroom reapplying my second round of lip gloss as I take notes
With my glitter gel pen and unexpectedly taken out the traditional American way?

My search history for the past few years tops more for gun violence in schools
Rather than Taylor Swift because I must always be aware of my surroundings.
Not like the old school look both ways before you cross
Your grandparents taught you as you played ball in their driveway
Or the sidewalk rule your parents warned you about
With your crush to follow before a first date.
It's the how to hide and protect yourself
Or which body part is safest to get shot at to survive longer rule
Because this is America.

Turning on the news is a new fear in this generation.
I rather be uneducated on current events.
I only turn the news on when I feel like the world is at peace,
Yet I know it is too good to be true and death is lurking around the corner.
There is nothing we can do in this era to stop gun violence,
And the issue is not the government's lack of the ability to control who owns one,
But address the mental health of America to where people feel the need to react
With bad actions towards innocent people instead of receiving proper treatment.
The system is corrupted and has failed us while we sacrifice lives each day.

We cannot point fingers at the trends of gun violence
In comparison to the color of the person
Behind the gun because each race holds different cases.
But the rise in one is more significant than the other in this predicament.

Between 1982 and 2023, White people conducted 80 incidents of school shootings,
While Black people follow behind with 26 as indicated by the Statista Research Department.
The numbers don't lie and neither does the treatment toward both races.
White supremacist violence with the underlying cause of ideology is a trending death today.
Who will be the savior to open their arms to the suffering and let them hand over their guns,
And shoot anger with their tears and therapy instead of aiming on school grounds?

Yet, we still point fingers at our past because it’s tradition,
But we never look at the possibility of change,
And the silver lining of the chance that the color of our skin
Means nothing when it comes to gun violence, mental health, and racial matters in America
Because we are so rooted in living out our ancestors’ infamous legacies
That brought nothing but turmoil for more years of suffrage.

Drug-related crimes and firearm deaths
Have skyrocketed over the past decade.
As racial hate and terrorism dominate the nation,
Giving the side-eye to the Black community,
Because it is easier to blame traditions of the past
That align with the untold truths,
Than looking at other parts.

We rap about gangs, drugs, and money,
Dangling our crystal chains that bling real shiny,
Speeding in our all-black tinted Suburban,
Dropping bands on the latest kicks in the city,
Rocking them at night while running our streets,
Looking innocent with black backpacks,
Yet blamed with suspicion before conducting a search.
We shoot only in revenge,
Because the judge let the killer walk free,
And we took matters into our own hands,
Or for our protection if the gun is pointed at us.
Still, it wouldn't matter because regardless if we pulled the trigger,
The jury already knew our verdict.

The government keeps the same patterns marked day by day to never promise a change,
But act immediately when the gangs bring violence forth to the cities,
And when Black people are the first to run away from the scene for our safety.
You fear we are gathering our people to attack back,
Yet it was never even safe to stand up and be up front even on a bus like Parks.
And when we fight in fear just to catch a breath we can't even breathe just like Floyd.
Perhaps the Little Rock Nine would frown in shame as their legacy is just history.
As not only Black people but all races fear going to school in America,
Because a change that has never occurred is still a mystery.
We fear to walk with our backs turned yet still worry about which enemy to keep close,
But also find uncertainty in people we exchange smiles and waves to,
Each day as we pass without knowing what goes on behind the scenes.

April 4th, 2023. I saw my eyes flash before my eyes
As I excused myself from class to return to my dorm to study for an important test.
"Get back into the building now and go into lockdown,"
Yells loudly in my tearful eyes as a once Nursing student scared for an upcoming exam.
The adrenaline from my fight-or-flight mode kicked in.
It felt like one of those movie scenes

Where the character escapes a dark and traumatic event
And opens the doors to a bright light to guarantee better days to come with safety.
But it's only a plot twist to reveal there is more danger to come.
This is the part where you pause to catch your breath in preparation for what's to come.
And I had no time to reach for my remote

Because this was only the beginning of my hell.

Deafness marries my ears as I rush inside to the closest room.
As I had no time to debate running up three flights of stairs back to my classroom.
I lock the door behind me and find two of my classmates

Chilling in the lounge of an office,
Laughing with confusion as they stare at me,
As if I just saw a ghost as my hands point to the windows.
Because muteness has also married my lips.

I never bothered to text or call anyone "I love you."
I didn’t want to scare them but I am sure they knew what was happening,
Because of the broadcast on the news and an endless flood of digital notifications.
I don’t think I want those to ever be my final words in a school shooting situation.
Because I don’t want to have the same traditional ending as everyone else.
I rather have my legacy ended with "I am at peace" even though we know that is a lie.
Because I will never find peace with gun violence and the disruption of education.

Seconds minutes hours passed until this tragedy passed and we were set free.
And it wasn’t until then that I was able to open the doors to escape.
With the bright light finally allowing me to find better days ahead and feel almost safe.
Because we all know there is never any guaranteed safety as an individual
Who steps foot on school grounds in America.
As the credits roll and the character finds peace within the madness.
I can say the same as this situation luckily wasn’t like the rest on the news.
With the case of gun violence and rising death tolls.

Maybe in another lifetime our mental health will be worth more

Than the guns we possess,
And the government prioritized allowing all individuals equal access to healthcare,
To make our mental health a concern.
And maybe in another lifetime I wouldn't be scared to attend school,
Or be a Black female in America.
I would love to say that each day as I used to.
But there isn’t a guarantee in this country.

And maybe one day the stars will align once again on the flag.
To let us love each other more than killing.
But I will just have to wait as a Black female,
And hope my voice one day is loud enough to reach the right audience.
Who will stand by me and push for a change,
Not only for today,
But for our tomorrow,
And for justice for those who lost their lives.

This just in:
Breaking news—
Gun violence will still continue in America.
Stay safe, armed if possible, and God bless this nation.

Before the broadcast ends let us take a moment of silence
To remember our beloved and brave souls.

Columbine High School 1999
Virginia Tech 2007
Sandy Hook Elementary 2012
Umpqua Community College 2015
Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School 2018
Santa Fe High School 2018
Robb Elementary School 2022
Covenant School 2023
Huguenot High School 2023
Perry High School 2024

And to the graveyards for which it stands,
One nation under a corrupt government,
Our destiny,
With death and injustice for all.

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