

# 2-2 Public Perception

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There are only a few documented public shootings in the history of 21<sup>st</sup> century America that left a mass of innocent people severely injured or dead. Out of all the massacres in the last two decades, one infamous incident occurred in Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado when two student gunmen opened fire in the school cafeteria using the semi-auto graphic guns. The result of this incident was a fetal self inflicted gunshot wound to the head by the aggressors Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris (CNN, 2014). Twelve people were killed and 24 others were injured from the outcome of this shooting. The media perceived these two gunmen as being troubled, misguided and only used this tragedy to protest against the “America life” back in 1999. It wasn’t until 2004 that an official memorial was built in the legacy of the victims.

Eight years later, during the anniversary week of the Columbine shooting, 23 year old student Seung-Hui became known as the deadliest single gunman that killed more people in one massacre than any other in U.S history. He was diagnosed with a severe anxiety disorder and was noted calling Klebold and Harris’ actions inspirational (HUN, 2007). Mr. Cho was born in South Korea and was a permanent U. S resident. The public relations surrounding this tragedy was more focused on profiling his ethnicity more so that the shootings at Columbine. Policymakers feared that this would destroy the relations and morale of South Koreans that reside in America. They also felt that the shooting would spark racial prejudice behavior or violent retaliation against South Koreans. Initially, the Board of Education fined the school for over \$50,000 for making the case appear too had been taken care of (HUN, 2007). The school didn’t specify that the gunman was still at large. Also, the perception of the media raising awareness to Mr. Hui having the highest death toll in history is irresponsible as it only sets the stage for any other assailant to break the record. (UTA, 2014)

Other Asian American groups took alternate and more proactive approaches to ensure racism didn't stem from the incident. The Asian American Journalist Association (AAJA) assured advisors to multiple media organizations to monitor their coverage preventing racial backlash (Chong, 2008). They avoided emphasizing his South Korean citizenship by claiming that he was just as American as he was Korean because he lived in the US since he was with years old. However, the emails received in response to this attempt were negative stating that they were perpetrating racism rather than preventing it. Bill O'Reilly also felt that the choice of avoiding disclosure of their ethnicity was not only unnecessary but suppressed relevant facts based on assumptions that were unfounded. . He continued by using the example of how American Muslims weren't harassed after the events of 9/11.

The school commemorates the anniversary of the incident each year by having a memorial service honoring the 32 victims that were lost in 2007. The Hokie Stones is where people visit to reflect and have a peace picnic by the corresponding stones that represent each victim. As memories start to fade; the amount of attendees at the memorial gets reduced each year. This is where the public relations start to fade and people begin to simply move on just as they did with the Columbine Incident and the killings at Sandy Hook elementary school. In fact, today the horror of the unfortunate event goes unspoken about Virginia Tech students. Others that don't attend the school associate with students by referring to the school as "The place where the shootings happened."

## References

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