

OPINION & COMMENTARY

FROM DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW EDITORS & GUESTS

A Farewell to (Fire)Arms? Thoughts on the Tipping Point for the New American Revolution

Commentary by
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Preface: This follows the tragic Feb. 14 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland. As the world watched, yet another gunman entered yet another school, killing 17. The message that followed went beyond the usual "thoughts and prayers" rhetoric to which we have become accustomed. These are my personal thoughts.



Leighton

I cheer for these kids, these survivors from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the site of just the most recent mass shooting at an American school. I cheer for their families.

I cheer not because there is much to be cheery about. Not when a disaffected former student armed with an assault weapon ends the lives of 17 innocent people. Not when we witness the burials of 14 local children. Not when we see the damage a .223-caliber assault rifle does to a child's body.

I cheer not because a confluence of incompetence, bureaucracy, inertia and cowardice came together to allow this tragedy.

I cheer because we are seeing that rare point in America when logic, reason and passion bring about that most elusive event: the tipping point. Impossible to time, tipping points often never come. But much like the #MeToo movement, this tipping point comes on the heels of an America angry that a serious problem has existed for so long because inertia (and election dollars) have taken control of the political steering wheel.

I cheer because we see real strength from these Parkland survivors and their community. This strength focused them on their mission that this shooting — one of 17 school shootings this short year in America and 291st since 2013 — would serve to change the way we deal with guns in this country.

I cheer because the last time we saw this kind of passion was in the 1960s. America's young adults were fed up with the Vietnam war. They took to the streets. They protested. They used coffee houses and bulletin boards and underground newspapers and radio stations and music to share their message. This was social media in the '60s. Today, these young people are organizing. They are not backing down. They are marching. Unlike the '60s, we don't see police or National Guardsmen facing them down with water cannons or attack dogs. Maybe it's due to a 24-hour news cycle. Yet maybe it's because most of America recognizes what these students know: the laws need to change ... and we are way, way overdue.

I cheer for these kids because like

(and Columbine, Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech, etc.) were not wearing fatigues or carrying M-16 rifles.

I cheer for these kids because I, like many of my generation, resigned myself to the idea that if witnessing 20 elementary school children slaughtered at Sandy Hook couldn't move Congress, there would never be change. But I didn't foresee the tipping point. Just like Harvey Weinstein never anticipated that 84 women would come forward, which created a tipping point and gave birth to #MeToo. This created a sea change in entertainment, business and politics (though, surprisingly, much less so among elected politicians for some strange reason).

I cheer for these kids, who have buried 17 people they loved. In his book "The Tipping Point," author Malcolm Gladwell defines this point as "the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point."

I cheer because the Parkland students are articulate in their positions. They have a powerful drive created by the lifetime effects of a four-minute bloody confrontation with an AR-15 assault rifle.

I cheer because this school shooting splayed open for the world to see how many opportunities existed for the shooter to be stopped before he went on his spree. Rarely has a mass shooter telegraphed his plans more openly than this one. He might as well have had a T-shirt that read "I am going to

shoot up the school." The concept of "see something, say something" failed multiple times.

I cheer for them because they are where the rubber meets the road on the gun violence highway. America's affair with the assault rifle may be nearing an end. Will this movement eliminate the 300 million guns already in circulation? No. Will it stop the sales of most guns in America? No. Will it limit sales of the most casually-inducing weapons of war? Maybe.

I cheer these kids because the focus on this national problem might actually change the way politics is done. By recognizing the power of money in campaigns, and how much financial influence the NRA asserts over elected officials, the Parkland survivors have pointed the laser beam directly at the source of the political oatmeal which has been sitting static for decades.

Finally, I cheer for these kids because it gives me at least a glimmer of hope that they might actually get out and vote. They realize that the most effective power is at the ballot box. Young adult voting has stayed at or under 50 percent turnout in almost every presidential election year, and much lower in midterm elections. Perhaps this tipping point will ignite a change in voting behavior and an involvement in the national dialogue.

There are many miles to go on this political highway, much of it paved with special interest speedbumps if not whole

walls. But there is a glimmer of hope created by this movement that offers the chance to create meaningful change that will save lives.

Changing gun laws, enhancing background checks, eliminating any gun possession for those mentally ill or on watch lists, and increasing purchase age would go a long way to reducing these mass killings. So too would repealing the gun manufacturers' immunity from lawsuits, which this industry pushed through a collaborating Congress with the lubrication of the NRA's lobbying.

Most reasoned people do not suggest taking away guns from mentally capable citizens. The real changes that will need to take place begin in Congress and extend to the executive branch and the states as well. We will never see meaningful change without the continuation of this tipping point.

In the political gladiator fights, it's easy to forget that we are talking about real teens whose lives were snuffed out in our community. These were our children and teachers. They did not invite this. But now their community speaks for them.

I cheer for these survivors. And cry for these families.

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