

## The Buffalo, New York Tragedy - An Event Caused By A Number Of Critical Issues That Have Not Been Adequately Addressed In This Country ( by Bill Woods for StreetVibes)

The mass murder at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York on May 14th shocked and saddened many of us across the country. It also caused this writer to conclude that this tragic event was a result of some festering critical problems that have not been adequately addressed in this country. Surging domestic violence carried out by virulent white supremacists is obviously one of these problems.

What are some others? Inadequate to non-existent gun laws stands out as another factor that allowed the grocery store murders to occur. Next, the basically unregulated world of social



media feeds the false and hateful information that spurs on people like the Buffalo shooter. Further, the current political environment and certain news media stations such as Fox News create an atmosphere that promotes white racism and ideas that promote it like "the theory of white replacement."

On the surface, the event seems simple enough to explain. A

troubled youth with intensely racist views decides to take violent action against African-Americans. He drives two-hundred miles to a super market in a black neighborhood in Buffalo, New York. There he proceeds to use his gun to kill ten shoppers buying groceries on a Saturday afternoon. The police arrive and arrest the young man.

This tragedy, however, cannot be viewed as a unique event. Too many similar events have taken place in recent years, and they are related. When a tragedy like the one in Buffalo takes place, evidence usually emerges that shows that inadequate gun laws made it possible for the shooters to purchase weapons like assault rifles. Then for a few weeks there is a lot of talk about passing legislation banning the sale of military style weapons or more effectively regulating the sale of guns. However, when actual proposals are taken up by Congress or by State Legislatures, the gun lobby goes into action, and too few elected officials are brave enough to go against this powerful lobbying group. Further, the Republican Party has become the strongest advocate for gun rights, and many states in recent years have actually increased those rights with laws that allow people to conceal and carry guns everywhere they go.

The Buffalo shooter did not come by his racist views or his violent plans on his own. During the pandemic, he became immersed with groups on social media sites that advocated white supremacy and violent acts against African-Americans, and non-white immigrants. He became an active participant in these groups, and he absorbed hate-doctrines such as "the Great Replacement Theory." In his long screed that he shared on-line in order to justify his murder plans, he wrote that one of his models was the mass shooting in New Zealand. During his

shooting spree at the super market, he was actually live streaming his actions on-line. The case can be made that social media provided the training ground for this young man's eventual actions in Buffalo.

Once again, Congress has held numerous hearings on the subject of regulating the content aired on social media. Evidence of violent rhetoric during the lead up to the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol led to some voluntary actions such as barring former President Trump from using Twitter. Nevertheless, no policies that would effectively curb hate or the advocacy of violence from the Internet have been translated into legislation. Will the Buffalo tragedy trigger another effort to legislatively regulate social media content?

For several years, the F.B.I and other federal agencies focusing on identifying and preventing terrorism in the U.S. have testified that domestic terrorism is a much bigger threat to this country than attacks from Islamic hate groups. The second fact that they emphasize is that a majority of this homegrown terrorism is linked to racism and white supremacy. Such warnings were ignored by the Trump Administration, but the Biden Administration has taken this information seriously. The Administration, however, still needs to do more to monitor and prevent activities that lead to tragedies such as Buffalo. A domestic violence bill was just introduced in Congress.

What is probably the most difficult thing to deal with is the political atmosphere that currently exists. While President, Trump's rhetoric made racism and the white supremacy movement acceptable, and the Republican Party continues to accept this thinking as central to its white male base. Violence appears to be acceptable to the current GOP as long as it promotes its efforts to overturn elections or to return to power.



President Biden did give probably the best and most heartfelt speech of his Presidency when he was in Buffalo to mourn the loss of the victims of the grocery store shooting. Not only did he personalize the losses by talking about the ten people who were killed, but he called racism and white supremacy "a poison" that needed to be eliminated from American society. Of course, this goal is easier said than done! Nevertheless, it was refreshing to have him say these words rather than hear our former President further fan the flames of hate.