

2003

Columbine School Massacre

Eric S. Yellin

University of Richmond, eyellin@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/history-faculty-publications>

 Part of the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#), [School Psychology Commons](#), [Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Yellin, Eric. "Columbine School Massacre." *Dictionary of American History*. Ed. Stanley I. Kutler. 3rd ed. Vol. 2. New York: Gale, 2003. 305. Print.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

COLUMBINE SCHOOL MASSACRE. On 20 April 1999, in one of the deadliest school shootings in national history, two students at Columbine High School in Littleton, Jefferson County, Colorado, killed twelve fellow students and a teacher and injured twenty-three others before committing suicide. Eric Harris, age eighteen, and Dylan Klebold, age seventeen, used homemade bombs, two sawed-off twelve-gauge shotguns, a nine-millimeter semiautomatic rifle, and a nine-millimeter semiautomatic pistol in a siege that began shortly after 11 A.M. Mark Manes and Phillip Duran were convicted of securing weapons for the shooting, while Robyn Anderson, who also allegedly supplied one of the weapons, was not convicted of any crimes. Harris and Klebold, reportedly influenced by neo-Nazi dogma, were said to have targeted athletes and minority students for revenge against social exclusion they said they had experienced at the school of 1,870 students. While school violence in the nation had been in decline after the 1993–1994 academic year, the massacre occurred at the end of an apparent epidemic of shootings in the late 1990s.

Nine civil suits were filed against Sheriff John P. Stone and the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department for various acts of negligence, including failing to act on indications of the coming violence. In November 2001, all but one of the suits were dismissed in federal court. The judge ruled that while possibly negligent, officials were protected by governmental immunity unless their actions were "willful and wanton." The only case allowed to move forward involved a teacher who bled to death while waiting to be rescued. The Harris and Klebold families, Manes, and Duran also faced several wrongful death suits, one of which was settled in April 2001 for \$2.53 million to be shared by more than thirty families of victims. Lawsuits were also filed against school officials and the Tanner Gun Show, where Anderson bought her gun when she was eighteen years old. Watched by millions of Americans on live television, Columbine prompted a national debate on access to guns, school security, violence on television and in computer games, and child psychology. While several states, including Colorado, passed stricter gun control



Grieving. A group of students from Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, gather near a memorial to their fallen classmates to gain support from each other during their time of tragedy. © AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

laws in the aftermath of Columbine, gun control continues to be contentiously debated in the nation's legislatures.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aronson, Elliot. *Nobody Left to Hate: Teaching Compassion After Columbine*. New York: W. H. Freeman, 2000.
- Janofsky, Michael. "Year Later, Columbine Is Learning to Cope While Still Searching for Answers." *New York Times* (17 April 2000): A12.
- . "\$2.53 Million Deal Ends Some Columbine Lawsuits." *New York Times* (20 April 2001): A10.
- Verhovek, Sam Howe. "15 Bodies Are Removed from School in Colorado." *New York Times* (22 April 1999): A1.

Eric S. Yellin