

Mass-Marketing—Mass-Shootings

January 14, 2024

Only 14 days into 2024, there has already been 11 mass shootings in the US. Some ponderings from the violent signs of our times...

The other evening my wife and I tuned into a black and white movie from the 1940's about a cool-looking detective. He was dressed in a fedora hat and slick-looking suit, he asked probing questions of suspects he was interviewing and... and, he *smoked a cigarette* while doing so. To cast that primary figure as one who smokes seemed to convey that smoking was cool, witty and oh-so-fashionable.

Gosh, we've even seen Sheriff Andy Taylor smoke cigarettes on re-runs of the 1960's Andy Griffith show. Why was that? To convey that the Sheriff was a good-old-boy, a "normal" person, even so much as to casually drop his used cigarette-butt on the sidewalk in front of his office and instinctively step on it with his heel (never mind the littering).

What I'm trying to illustrate is that what was promoted, advertised and touted in former times...is now seen in most circles as repulsive as someone's fingernails raking across a chalkboard. After a direct link was made in 1964 connecting cigarette smoking and lung cancer cigarette ads were taken off of TV and radio in this country in 1970 and warning labels were put on magazine ads and on cigarette packages themselves.

Up until that time the tobacco industry had succeeded in pushing their product to soldiers in two world wars and to women in the 1920's (as a way to "*get out from under patriarchy*"). They made use of celebrities and doctors to promote cigarettes. The tobacco industry even marketed to *children* by way of "candy cigarettes" and by showing cartoon figures such as Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble lighting up and puffing away.

Insidious. How many lives have been cut short from becoming addicted to this product that was intentionally pushed? How many people have been sickened by its second-hand smoke?

How does the *mass-marketing* of tobacco connect with *mass-shootings* in our day and time?

Weapons manufacturers have borrowed a page from the tobacco industry in promoting their product (assault rifles) as cool, desirable and oh-so-fashionable.

Indeed, these weapons are promoted on the part of companies and politicians by utilizing images of toxic masculinity. Promotion of assault rifles has even been targeted at *children!*

After the Sandy Hook school massacre, I was at a Catholic school fundraising dinner in Missouri in 2016 and one of the auction items turned out to be an AR-15 rifle. During the auction, this assault rifle was brought on stage by a young man in his late-teens looking quite tough and posing menacingly in an attempt to jack-up the appeal for this weapon and increase the bids.

All at a...Catholic...school...fundraiser.

What part of the term “*assault rifle*” do we not get?

Or, are we deaf, not only to the term, but to the consequences of its allure and availability? It seems we have indeed grown callous, insensitive, numb----as if mass-shootings are now normal, just part of the background. Just as accepted, not-thought-about and viewed as normal as cigarette smoking and its effects once were.

Pope Francis has warned that we live: ***“in a world marked by a ‘globalization of indifference’ which makes us slowly inured to the suffering of others and closed in on ourselves.”*** (Message of His Holiness Francis for the Celebration of the 2014 World Day of Peace)

As Presentation People we are called to be just the opposite!

For ***“the compassionate heart of Jesus...conveys our call to live in mutual love and unity...to stand with people in their struggles; to speak and act for justice and healing in the Church and world”***. (Presentation Sisters’ “Our Way of Life” C10)

What would Nano Nagle do?

Let’s create a culture of *life*----where instruments of death such as cigarettes and assault rifles will be seen as repulsive...and certainly not viewed as fashionable nor as consumer products to be touted and pushed to others.