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### **Introduction by Marc R. Sykes**

As we come to the end of the year (millennial hype aside), it seems likely that one of the events that will stay with us is the horrible tragedy that took place in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20<sup>th</sup>. The details are, of course, well-known—fifteen students dead (counting the two gunmen); a school shut down for months; a community devastated, and, in the words of an old journalistic conceit, "a nation searching for answers." Indeed, ever since the shootings occurred, everyone from politicians to parents to TV talk-show hosts has been voicing an opinion as to why they happened. It's part of the healing process, say psychologists. Moreover, it seems essential not only to remember the tragedy, but to explain it, in order to prevent it from happening all over again days, months, or years down the road.

In doing so, we've certainly found some familiar scapegoats. The most popular explanation, of course, is that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the teenaged perpetrators, were "psychotics" who should bear the full brunt of the blame, with the possible exception of their parents. Other commentators have pointed the finger, again predictably, at the orgies of violence that pervade our popular culture in the form of movies, television shows, and, especially, video games. This position recalls psychologist Fredric Wertham's denunciations of comic books during the 1940s and 1950s, and one has to wonder if the accusations being lobbed right now will seem as ridiculous to our grandchildren as Wertham's do to us. Finally, there's the faction that asks just how two teenage boys were able to get hold of such an impressive arsenal of weaponry, anyway. Could such incidents perhaps be curbed by stricter gun controls? The NRA and other pro-gun groups have even come up with their own nifty counter-argument to this proposal, claiming that the Columbine killers could have been stopped sooner if teachers were allowed, or maybe even forced, to carry concealed weapons. Misguided notions about more guns supposedly leading to less violence aside, however, this debate won't solve the problem of Columbine because it has virtually nothing to do with Columbine. Much like the pop-culture debate, it's simply an ongoing political battle that latches on to whatever current events might bolster one or more of its warring factions.

So when Nicholas Turse sent me a draft of his essay on the Littleton killings, I was understandably fascinated by its original, provocative, and analytical approach. Whether or not one agrees with Turse's argument, it's clearly something different from what's being offered in the mainstream media—or anywhere that the tragedy is being discussed, for that matter. His suggestion that Harris and Klebold may be the "Mark Rudd and Abbie Hoffman figures of their generation" removes the duo from what Rev. John Coleman termed the "cloud of unknowing" and places them squarely in the context of American political history. Harris and Klebold weren't psychotics acting alone; they were the heirs to a radical tradition that advocates revolution through violence.

Because of the essay's provocative nature, I decided to solicit the views of other academics interested in these issues, and have been lucky enough to recruit a prestigious panel indeed. Following Nicholas Turse's essay, "New Morning, Changing Weather: Radical Youth of the Millennial Age," you will find responses from Adam M. Garfinkle, senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and author of *Telltale Hearts: The Origin and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement*; David Farber, Professor of History at the University of New Mexico and author of numerous books on 1960s radicalism and protest; and Sam Smith, fellow at the Center for Mass Media Research, University of Colorado, and resident of the Columbine area. Finally, Nicholas Turse responds to his critics in a brief rebuttal.

As well, we're interested to hear your views, and we'll publish them as space permits. Letters to the editors can be e-mailed to [49thparallel@bham.ac.uk](mailto:49thparallel@bham.ac.uk)

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