

# ***PERSONALLY SPEAKING***

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## **AMERICAN SNIPERS**

**Mayo Research Institute**

*Permission to quote is granted when the source is acknowledged.*

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Civilian snipers represent an ugly chapter in the long history of the American experiment in self-governance and freedom. The Las Vegas sniper is just the most recent instance of the slaughter of the innocent in which a morally twisted mind views killing as essentially good while the rest of us recognize it immediately for what it truly is -- inherently evil.

Though there are many others, two specific incidents come to mind; the Washington D.C. area sniper in 2002 and the University of Texas tower sniper in 1966. Both engaged in mass killing of the innocent from hidden positions where their warped personalities led them to a judgment in which murderous cruelty was seen as morally reconcilable. We need not go into the Chicago gang land killings during Prohibition and similar turf wars today in the same city over the distribution of drugs in order to make our point. The killers are human beings whose broken moral compass has misdirected them to unspeakable acts of viciousness and violence.

The perverted snipers who assassinated Martin Luther King in 1968 and John Fitzgerald Kennedy five years earlier were mass killers too. They not only took the lives of two of America's moral and political leaders but also shattered the human spirit and moral goodness that bind us together as a people. America cannot hold together as one people without the fundamental goodness of its citizens. The remarkable response to the victims of Hurricane Harvey by the Cajun Navy and many other private organizations and citizens is clear proof that all human existence is co-existence.

Nonetheless, there are other snipers roaming America today engaged in similar destructive acts. They too misconstrue the evil they do as good. Consider the heated spoken rhetoric all around us, amplified by tone, inflection, and the media.

“Lock her up. Lock her up.”

“Pigs in a blanket, fry ‘em like bacon.”

“... he didn't know any better than the simplistic boilerplate he regurgitated.”

“I don't see white police officers slamming the heads of little white boys into police cars.”

“It's a shame that the White House has become an adult day-care center. Someone obviously missed their shift this morning”

**“Liberals love America like O.J. loved Nicole.”**

**“Yes, I have thought an awful lot about blowing up the White House.”**

**The provocative rhetoric does not have to be spoken. Consider Kathy Griffin holding up a faked severed head of President Trump. Professional athletes kneeling during the national anthem to express their anger over racial injustice. Protestors tearing down monuments because they are considered symbols of white supremacy. School boards removing books from a school curriculum because they are offensive. The all-purpose third-finger salute suitable for any and all occasions.**

**Whether spoken or otherwise acted out, this red-hot rhetoric is the combustible material that all too many elected officials, notably in Washington, know how to ignite in order to fire up the base for more financial support and bigger voter turnout. The 24-hour cable news channels are only too eager to distribute this explosive stuff, time after time, day after day, across the airwaves because as they say in journalism “if it bleeds, it leads.”**

**There’s more to being an American citizen than just paying your taxes, voting, and minding your own business. John Kennedy said it best in just a few simple words. “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”**

**Even so, an estimated 45 percent of U.S. taxing units paid no federal taxes in 2016 and 39 percent of the citizen voting-age population did not vote last year. At the present time and excluding active-duty personnel, 84 percent of the entire population does not volunteer.**

**Sadly, these statistics alone don’t tell us what needs to be done. Cable news channels use hour-long opinion programming in which commentators justify their heated exchanges on grounds of their First Amendment rights but do not hold themselves accountable for what their often scornful rhetoric does to the UNITED States of America. They measure their success in terms of viewership and use those numbers to impress prospective advertisers.**

**Balanced news reporting means a lot more than inviting one Republican and one Democrat strategist to blast away at one another for political gain. It’s much more than inviting a provocateur as a guest to use as a punching bag to the delight of the host. The senior managers of those channels need to develop and enforce an on-air code of conduct in which verbal excess is replaced by moderation, where mocking and firing away no longer are tolerated. Speech matters.**

**Congressional leadership should demand that whenever a member appears in front of the camera or in public respectful discourse and agreement are the priorities. If the sniping doesn’t end Congress will remain stalemated and unable to act. To fill that vacuum the president, as we have seen, will resort to executive orders again and again. That’s not self-governance. It’s strong-man rule.**

**When the U.S. Constitution was completed in Philadelphia in 1787 and a citizens group asked Ben Franklin what the delegates had created, he replied “a republic, *if you can keep it.*”**

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