

3Ws

The 3Ws recorded in history:

Charles Joseph Whitman, a student of the University of Texas at Austin, shot and killed fifteen people and wounded thirty others atop the university's twenty-seven-story tower on August 1, 1966.¹ He was shot shortly after by the Austin, Texas, police. Whitman requested an autopsy in a suicide note, which revealed that he had a brain tumor. The question: What Went Wrong?

On August 20, 1989, Joseph Lyle Menendez and Erik Galen Menendez shot and killed their parents, Jose and Kitty Menendez, at their residence in Beverly Hills, California. The brothers drove away and dumped their shotguns on Mulholland Drive, purchased tickets at a local movie theater to use as an alibi, and later returned home to call 911.² "Somebody killed my parents!" Lyle cried. Both brothers were convicted of two counts of first-degree murder, plus conspiracy to commit murder, and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. The question: What Went Wrong?

The Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was the target of a terrorist attack on April 19, 1995 (known as the *Oklahoma City bombing*).³

¹ Info taken from Bio True Story *Charles Whiteman biography (1941-1966)*: <http://www.biography.com/search/article.do?id=11495598> and News8 Austin.com: www.news8austin.com.

² Info taken from CI Crime & Investigation Network, *Famous Criminals – Menendez Brothers*: www.crimeandinvestigation.co.uk/famous_criminal.

³ Info taken from CNN.com, *The Bombing*: www.cnn.com/us/okc/bombing.html.

The attack claimed 168 lives and left over 800 injured. Timothy McVeigh and his coconspirator, Terry Nichols, were arrested for the bombing. McVeigh was executed by lethal injection on June 11, 2001, and Nichols was sentenced to life in prison. The question: What Went Wrong?

On April 20, 1999, eighteen-year-old Eric Harris and seventeen-year-old Dylan Klebold carried out a “Trench Coat Mafia” shooting rampage at Columbine High School in Colorado, killing twelve students and one teacher and wounding twenty-four others before they both committed suicide.⁴ The question: What Went Wrong?

On October 2, 2006, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, a peaceful Amish community, a gunman took hostage and eventually killed five girls (ages seven to thirteen) at West Nickel Mines School (a one-room Amish schoolhouse), and then killed himself. Charles Carl Roberts IV, a thirty-two-year-old, milk tank truck driver, was from a neighboring village.⁵ The question: What Went Wrong?

Lisa Marie Nowak, an all-American astronaut with a master’s degree in aeronautical engineering, was arrested on February 5, 2007, in Orlando, Florida, and charged with the attempted kidnapping of a U.S. Air Force Captain, Colleen Shipman. Nowak was allegedly caught-up in a jealous love triangle.⁶ The question: What Went Wrong?

⁴ Info taken from the *New York Times*, *Columbine High School*, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/c/columbine_high_school/index.html.

⁵ Info taken from Nation Master.com, *Amish School Shooting*: www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/charles-carl-roberts-iv.

⁶ Info taken from Fox News.com, *NASA Astronaut Lisa Nowak Charged With Attempted Murder in Bizarre Love Triangle*: www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,250415,00.html.

On April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, Virginia, suffered the deadliest shooting in modern U.S. history, known as the *VTech massacre*.⁷ Gunman, Seung-Hui Cho—who was declared mentally ill by a Virginia special justice—opened fire on the Blacksburg campus, killing thirty-two people and wounding many more before turning the gun on himself. The question: What Went Wrong?

* * * *

As America and the media sit in disbelief of man’s capability to orchestrate and carryout such devastating and deeply troubling acts, they fail to give thought to all of the warning signs. Why didn’t anyone find it particularly alarming that Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris belonged to a group called the “Trench Coat Mafia”? Or that Seung-Hui Cho had stalked two women in addition to having a history of mental problems? Why didn’t anyone believe that the all-brilliant astronaut was capable of kidnapping—and possibly worse—given her involvement in a jealous love triangle? And surely someone must have known of McVeigh’s hatred for the government during his service in the army, which he cited as his reason for bombing the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. What about the Menendez brothers? Would you question the sanity of two young men who carefully plotted their parents’ deaths and concocted what they thought was a brilliant alibi that would spare them from being suspects while lavishly spending their parents’ money? So, why does

⁷ Info taken from CNN.com, *Witness survives by pretending to be dead*:
<http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/04/16/vtech.shooting/index.html>.

the media insist on asking the infamous 3Ws? Perhaps because they are fixated on painting an innocent picture of so-called all-Americans who become dangerous criminals.

Suggestion: We need to eliminate the “What Went Wrongs” and focus on the victims of tragedies. Let’s focus on repairing the damage, not on giving the perpetrators the attention they need—for some, even long after their deaths.

3Ws taken from: The Undisguised Truth (social and political commentary)

By Denrique Preudhomme Copyright ©2008