

## *Assessing the Impact of Violence*

On August 26<sup>th</sup> of 1997 I visited the site of the 1995 bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. For blocks around there are churches, a Y. M. C. A., a newspaper building, etc. with sections missing, without windows – still boarded up with ugly sheets of unpainted plywood. A church is being built across the street out of virtually solid steel – a strange concept. The memorial itself is merely a city block of bare foundation cordoned off by chain link fence. The fence is decorated with T-shirts, towels, cards, photos, crosses, teddy bears, hearts and other memorabilia individually inscribed with personal epitaphs for the favored dead. Some are realistically bitter, others supernaturally placid – all moving. Reading these, men's throats tighten; women audibly sob.

There is an official plaque for the memorial which reads, "May all who leave here know the impact of violence."

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### *A Note Found at Columbine HS in Littleton, Colorado*

April 20, 1999

Attributed to Eric Harris, 18  
member of an outcast clique  
called the "Trench Coat Mafia"

"By now, it's over. If you are reading this, my mission is complete. I have finished revolutionizing the neoeuphoric infliction of my internal terror. Your children who have ridiculed me, who have chosen not to accept me, who have treated me like I am not worth their time are dead, **THEY ARE (expletive) DEAD.** I may have taken their lives and my own – but it was *your* doing. Teachers, parents, **LET THIS MASSACRE BE ON YOUR SHOULDERS UNTIL THE DAY YOU DIE.** You may think the horror ends with the bullet in my head, but you wouldn't be so lucky. All that I can leave you with to decipher what more extensive death is to come is '12Skizto.' You have until April 26th. Goodbye."

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### *What "The Note" Really Says*

Eric Harris might more ingenuously have written, "It won't be easy – after all I have done – to believe I just wanted love. You'll find it hard to accept me as the victim of obsessions of your culture – vacillations of your lawmakers, sadistic lyrics of songs your children hum, the games they play – a mere instantiation of your own vicarious lives. You will deny that the violence of *my* actions was *your* fantasy – that you implicitly condoned its public portrayal rather than that of love or the natural affections of the heart. *Violence* – the perversion of boredom – is the only basic instinct you allow legally depicted! You plead ignorance of the causes of hatred and methods of violence that you sometimes bemoan within the norms of political correctness but nevertheless support by all your actions and inaction. This may not be what you wanted. But you were so obsessed by it and addicted to watching it that you became too morally weak to say, 'No!' Real violence won't end till you forcefully reject your vicarious fascination and tolerance for instruments of violence!"