

Discussion Questions

Parkland by Dave Cullen

Source: UW-Madison and Madison Public Library,
gobigread.wisc.edu/resources/book-discussions/



1. Who do you think is the intended audience of *Parkland*, and why? How do you think the book would be different if it had been written by the students themselves, rather than a third party?
2. The conversation around media coverage of mass shootings starts with Columbine in 1999. By the Pulse Nightclub shooting in 2016, mass shootings had become common enough to take up much less media space. Media outlets would bring gun control issues into public discourse for 2 percent of their news stories for about 2 days (121). Despite this fact, media coverage of *Parkland* held steady at 2 percent for 2 months, with a peak at 4 percent 2 days after the shooting (121). How did March for Our Lives (MFOL) maintain media attention on gun control issues? How did social media interact with media coverage? What changed in media coverage throughout the immediate aftermath of the shooting, March for our Lives, School Walkouts, and #RoadtoChange Tour?
3. Within weeks of the shooting, plans for what would become the March for Our Lives began in earnest after smaller planned memorials and school walkouts proved to be well attended and impactful. How did the activists build upon the momentum created in these events to turn the March for Our Lives event into a movement? Why did they choose the events they did to make their statement? Why was this the first such organization to develop after a school shooting in the United States, despite the fact that school shootings are tragically common?
4. The students of *Parkland* used social media extensively to spread their message, from the first time Cameron used #neveragain (42) through regularly posting tweets that drew millions of impressions (176). What made their use of social media so successful, and what were the drawbacks? How did the newfound celebrity status of some of the students strengthen and/or complicate their social media strategies? How has social media changed activism?
5. Throughout the book, Cullen explores the different ways that *Parkland* students responded to the trauma they experienced. How did their responses vary? Cullen also discusses the “weird hierarchy of victimhood” (92) among both students and parents; why do you think this happens?
6. Though *Parkland* focuses primarily on the activism of students, Cullen also draws attention to adult activism targeted towards gun safety. How do the adult approaches to activism in

the book differ from the way that the Parkland students approach activism? How did the parents support their children's activism?

7. In the aftermath of Parkland, the MFOL students sought stronger gun reform legislation. At the same time, the National Rifle Association (NRA) was influencing legislation to weaken gun laws. Should any lobbying groups have the power to influence legislation to this extent? To what extent does money play into what actually gets legislated?
8. After the shooting, President Trump suggested arming teachers. The NRA supported Trump, but teachers pushed back, arguing that arming teachers was asking them to potentially kill their own students. How did school safety fit into the MFOL's gun reform agenda? Why didn't their agenda focus more on school safety?
9. In the Prologue, Cullen notes that "the Parkland kids talk passionately about mental health when asked, but it is not their cause" (11) despite the Parkland shooter's documented mental health issues. What role should mental health screening play in the process of purchasing guns and assault weapons? Why did the organizers choose to focus their efforts on gun legislation instead of mental health? How was their own mental health impacted as survivors?
10. The MFOL movement brought students together both in their activism and in their shared experiences with trauma. In healing from this trauma, some students found solace in their activism, which, as Dr. Alyse Ley says, serves as a way for students to regain some form of control over their lives and futures (213). Cullen mentions that activism can also function as a method of avoidance from dealing with fears (93). How did activism contribute to the students' collective healing or avoidance?
11. In the Epilogue, Alfonso reflects on his physical state after months of focusing on MFOL, saying "I had gained weight, I didn't shave for a while or cut my hair, I was wearing the same clothes... I was slipping in my grades, I had less energy, I slept in way more, working at the office more than doing homework, I looked like a shell of my former self" (304) Alfonso's experience is one of many, as the student activists found themselves overworked from devoting so much time to MFOL while still trying to maintain their grades and extracurricular activities. What internal and external factors made it so hard for many of the students to find balance? How did burnout affect MFOL as an organization? What needed to change to keep the organization moving forward with their mission?
12. The MFOL activists recognized that they were receiving heightened national attention largely because they were "privileged white kids" (101). How did they use their privilege to support their activism? How did meeting the Peace Warriors impact the MFOL organizers and the scope of the movement?
13. Tyah-Amoy Roberts, a Marjorie Stoneman Douglass (MSD) student, confronted David Hogg on Twitter for his comments about media "not giving black students a voice," saying,

“This is not the first time you have called out racial disparity, but you have yet to take tangible action to change it with your classmates” (244). Roberts later held a press conference with other Black MSD students to confront their lack of representation in the media and the movement. How did this series of events within the course of a week change MFOL? How did MFOL organizers respond to Roberts’ criticism?

14. Despite many being too young to vote, MFOL organizers made voter registration a priority at every event bearing their name. Just days before their national march, MFOL organizers attended a two-day seminar to learn about “young Americans’ attitudes towards politics” (186). Why did they take the time to attend this seminar, and what did they learn about the motivations of young voters? Why were the organizers focused on young voters?
15. With the 2018 elections approaching in a matter of months, MFOL decided to remain bipartisan and focus solely on gun reform and young voter turnout. Why did they choose to be bipartisan, and what barriers did they face as they worked to remain that way? How did the election shape the MFOL movement? What lasting impacts did the results of the election have on the movement and on individual members of MFOL?

About the Author

Source: davecullen.com/

Dave Cullen has been covering the blight of mass murders in America for two decades, first with [Columbine](#), now [Parkland: Birth of a Movement](#). Both were *New York Times* bestsellers. and *Columbine* is the consensus definitive account of the horror that inspired two decades of killers. *Parkland* takes a fresh approach, focusing on the response, and refusing to name the killer. It is story of hope: the genesis of the extraordinary March for Our Lives movement. Dave was with the MFOL students from the beginning, with unparalleled access behind the scenes.

Columbine made two dozen Best of 2009 lists and won [several major awards](#), including the Edgar and Goodreads Choice Awards. It has been translated into six languages, appears on several all-time True Crime Top 10 lists, and *Slate* named it one of the [50 Best Nonfiction Books of the quarter century](#).

Parkland has made ten major year-end Best Lists, been nominated for a [Goodreads Choice Award](#) (Best Nonfiction of 2019), and longlisted for the ALA's [Andrew Carnegie Medal For Excellence](#).

Dave [has written for](#) *New York Times*, *London Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *BuzzFeed*, *Politico*, *Guardian*, *Washington Post*, *New Republic*, *Newsweek*, *Daily Beast*, *Slate*, *Salon*, *The Millions*, *Lapham's Quarterly*, etc., and [has appeared on](#) most of the major networks in the US, and across Europe, Asia, Australia and South America.

Dave is a former gay army infantry grunt. *Parkland* struck while he was in year 18 of a book about two [gay soldiers](#). He will finish that soon. Dave wrote [Columbine](#) in Colorado, then moved to NYC. He is uncle to 11 cool humans and 1 adorable corgi, [Bobby Sneakers](#).

Book Review: *The Atlantic*

Source: www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/02/parkland-shooting-one-year-later-whats-changed/582610/

Dave Cullen's New Book on the Parkland Shooting Is Surprisingly Illuminating

With unrivaled access to the student survivors cum activists, the journalist brings new perspective to the massacre, one year later.

JAKE CLINE

FEBRUARY 13, 2019

After a gunman murdered 17 students and faculty on February 14, 2018, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Nicole Hockley was urging patience. Hockley had just flown to South Florida from California, where, as co-founder and managing director of the anti-gun-violence organization Sandy Hook Promise, she had been working to prevent the type of mass shooting that had just occurred in Parkland.

Hockley met me two days after the shooting, at a bagel shop in Coral Springs. I'd come to interview her for the *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, where I worked as an editor and reporter some 11 miles east of Stoneman Douglas. Patience, Hockley told me, would be crucial during the difficult time ahead for the shooting's survivors and the victims' families. Well-wishers and journalists needed to understand that grief manifests in innumerable ways, and that shared outrage and loss will lead to calls for action, some immediately, others gradually. Change will come, she insisted, though it likely will be at the grassroots level, small and incremental. Sandy Hook Promise, after all, spent more than a year researching gun violence, school safety, and mental health before implementing its platform.

“When the people are really ready to raise their voices and demand things, that’s when you’ll get change,” said Hockley, whose 6-year-old son, Dylan, was killed in the 2012 shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. “Until then, until people are really engaged, you’re not going to see meaningful change at [the state and federal] level.”

What Hockley didn't know—what no one did—was that a group of Stoneman Douglas shooting survivors was gathering that same day at the home of Cameron Kasky, a gregarious theater kid who would, like some of the other fed-up teenagers at that meeting, fast become one of the most

recognizable gun-control activists in the world. The speed at which Kasky and his friends created their movement, alternately known as #NeverAgain and March for Our Lives, and the conditions that allowed it to flourish, are the focus of the journalist Dave Cullen's book *Parkland*, published this week to coincide with the first anniversary of the massacre. It follows January's *Parkland Speaks: Survivors From Marjory Stoneman Douglas Share Their Stories*, a heartrending book edited by a Parkland English and journalism teacher, Sarah Lerner, and other works published last year that feature essays, speeches, and reportage by Kasky, David Hogg, Emma González, Delaney Tarr, and other students-turned-household-names.

Parkland is the first book about the shooting that's not marketed toward teens and young adults. It also may be the most optimistic of the bunch. Cullen is less concerned with recounting the horror that took place in the school's freshman building, and analyzing the institutional and societal failures that led to it, than he is in capturing the urgency that propelled the movement from Kasky's living room to voting booths across the country.

As Cullen illustrates how the teenagers braved intractable politicians, death threats, and their own traumas to pursue their mission, *Parkland* can be an inspiring read. His behind-the-scenes interviews and interactions with the group's leaders provide a lot of insight into their strategies and expectations—he spent 10 months texting and talking with the kids. As a clear sign of the students' trust in him, Cullen was one of the few journalists—in fact, he was one of the few *adults*—allowed into the movement's secret meeting place in “a nondescript strip mall” a short drive from the school. Here, he found kids being kids.

“There was a massive photo of Cameron's brother Holden in the hallway, nearly floor-to-ceiling, just his head with a huge grin,” Cullen writes. “On a front wall they'd made a photo montage from some of the favorite cards they'd received. A big close-up of Emma [González] had been accessorized with a curly mustache.” Best of all is the way the teens mockingly posted to a wall nasty notes they'd received via snail mail from a troll who went so far as to include his return address. Cullen obviously connected with the kids, and he movingly relays their confidence that real and lasting change is within reach. If only he had taken more time to tell their story.

His previous book, *Columbine*, a deep and impressive work of investigative journalism, was published 10 years after that school shooting. *Parkland* arrived just 363 days after the Stoneman Douglas murders. As such, the narrative often feels hurried, and Cullen occasionally succumbs to the first-they-did-this-and-then-they-did-that method of storytelling. His prose can seem unbridled. (“The kids were on a wild ride and their parents were buckled in with them.”) And one passage appears twice in the book: “Young voters have long been a sleeping giant of American politics, because most of them stay home. If they ever turned out in percentages to match their older counterparts, they could swing most elections.” Cullen swapped “most elections” for “many elections” in the repeated section, but every other word is the same.

Still, the author makes a strong case that America, after hitting “rock bottom” following the Pulse nightclub shooting in 2016 and the Las Vegas and Sutherland Springs, Texas, shootings in 2017, was ready for a movement on the scale of March for Our Lives. At the end of the book, he enumerates

MFOL's pre- and post-midterm wins, including the formation of nearly 100 chapters around the country, the "highest recorded turnout" (31 percent) of voters younger than 30 since 1994, and exit polls that "showed gun control as voters' fourth-most-important issue, surpassing any previous result." Progress continues beyond the book's pages: Last week, Congress held its first hearing on gun violence in eight years, and the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence issued Florida its first passing grade (C-minus) on the organization's annual gun-law scorecard, a feat that the center credits to "high school activists [who] stepped up and spoke out."

With the election behind them, and with some having graduated from high school or about to, March for Our Lives' core members have been reevaluating their long-term plans. The kids know that to keep saving lives, they must lead lives of their own. They were burned out, and some of them, such as Kasky, needed to deal with the depression and anxiety they had tried to suppress during the campaign season. "I have to apply for college; I have to get a job," the shooting survivor and activist Alfonso Calderon tells Cullen. Jaclyn Corin, the group's chief organizer, hopes to see gun violence eradicated by her 30th birthday: "We want [March for Our Lives] to demolish itself so it doesn't have to exist. It shouldn't have had to exist ever."

In the epilogue of *Parkland*, Cullen recalls seeing *Springsteen on Broadway* on the June night when the Boss broke from his script to praise March for Our Lives. Evidently still floating on the moment, Cullen closes the book with some hopeful, if romanticized, Bruce-like lyricism, an imagining of the kids waking up "weary, bleary" one morning on their cross-country Road to Change tour: "Time to stuff their suitcases, board the Bus to Somewhere, recharge each other with road giggles, and exhale that hope and wonder into another American town."

And yet, in Florida, where the movement began, hope remains tempered by present realities. On January 23, a month after Cullen finished editing his book, in a town 150 miles north of Parkland, a 21-year-old with a 9 mm handgun walked into a bank and murdered five women. Florida's Republican senators and its newly elected, NRA-endorsed governor offered little more than the usual thoughts and prayers. Less than two weeks later, U.S. Representative Matt Gaetz, a conservative Republican from the state's Panhandle, tried to expel two Stoneman Douglas fathers from a congressional hearing on gun violence.

The road to change might have gotten shorter in the past year, but even a book as ultimately optimistic as *Parkland* understands that much asphalt and many obstacles remain.

JAKE CLINE *is a writer and editor in Miami.*

Book Review: **The New York Times**

Source: www.nytimes.com/2019/02/13/books/review/parkland-dave-cullen.html

How the Parkland Shooting Led to a Generation's Political Awakening

By Hanna Rosin

Feb. 13, 2019

I was in the audience at the [March for Our Lives](#) last year when Emma Gonzalez, one of the Parkland, Fla., high school students, suddenly fell silent. [As the minutes passed](#), and she stared us down, her big brown eyes filling with tears, I had the same thoughts as probably every other protective adult in the crowd: Did she freeze? Forget her lines? Is she just overcome? Is this poor, brave kid having a public nervous breakdown?

What never occurred to me is what Dave Cullen was at that moment chronicling backstage for his book "Parkland": Everything about the moment of silence was choreographed, the culmination of weeks of planning by the most intrepid group of teenage survivors ever. These were not a bunch of kids fumbling onstage. Starting within hours after the Valentine's Day shooting, they had begun to assemble into a semiprofessional roving advocacy troupe, focused on moving the needle on gun control. As one survivor, David Hogg, vowed on TV only hours after 17 of his fellow students were killed: "I don't want this to be another mass shooting. I don't want this just to be something that people forget."

By the time the rally took place, barely six weeks after the shooting, [Emma was used to being referred to as "talent"](#), sitting for countless interviews and profiles noting her [shaved head](#) and those big eyes ("intense," "warm," "piercing"). She and a handful of kids from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School had already [faced down Marco Rubio](#), raised millions from a GoFundMe campaign, [beat back hundreds of trolls on Twitter](#), fielded legal advice from George Clooney and used their youth to try to silence the N.R.A. and guilt the nation. "We're children. You guys are the adults," Hogg said on CNN. "You need to take some action."

The Parkland survivors emerged at just the right time for Cullen. He wrote the book "[Columbine](#)," a deeply researched and thorough account of the 1999 massacre at a Colorado school that ushered in the era of school shootings. Years of covering shootings, being called as an expert talking head on shootings, writing and thinking about shootings have left Cullen with a diagnosis of "vicarious traumatization," he writes, and twice in the last seven years he's found himself sobbing and immobilized for days. Although he doesn't say it explicitly, following the Parkland kids seems like a form of therapy for Cullen himself, and, he hopes, the nation. "There were no vacant stares from the Parkland survivors," he writes. "This generation had grown up on lockdown drills — and this time, they were ready."

With "Parkland," Cullen aims for a straightforward inspirational story of a group of kids "healing each other as they fought." They knew one another from drama club, and instinctively understood how to position themselves on a national stage. At a candlelight vigil, one of them introduced herself to the Florida congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who connected her to a state senator, who helped the kids figure out [how to get floor time at the statehouse](#). Another came up with [#NeverAgain](#) while he was on the toilet in his pajamas. The hashtag went viral and landed him on "Anderson Cooper 360" and NPR. Basically every time Emma Gonzalez opened her mouth, [she went viral](#). And within a couple of weeks they had ambitions of planning a rally as big as the Women's March.

How or why these particular kids came to be so rapidly effective is not exactly clear from the book. Cullen partly chalks it up to generational wisdom. They understood news cycles and Twitter, viral videos and memes, and they set out to make themselves as relevant as possible. They understood they would be perceived as privileged white kids who live in gated communities, so they made alliances with groups that focus on urban school violence and shared the stage with them. They understood that no politician wants to be seen dismissing a kid who just saw [his or her friends shot](#), so they staged as many showdowns as possible. In retrospect it seems extraordinary that all the pieces came together so effortlessly, yet even after reading the book I'm not exactly sure why this group of kids, at this particular moment.

In "Columbine," Cullen punctured the lazy media narrative that the shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, were goth vigilantes, crusaders against bullies and mean girls. They were, he concluded, a psychopath and a depressive, and should be viewed through the lens of mental illness, and not school cliques and revenge — a point he's repeated about many school shooters since. And partly thanks to Cullen, the rules of covering shootings have shifted. It's become something of a taboo to spend too much energy on the psyche of the shooters, and definitely a taboo to glamorize their motives in any way.

In his new book, Cullen spends barely three pages on the Parkland gunman, giving just the barest biographical details, mostly about his depression, and referring to him only as the “mass murderer.” It’s a noble goal, [to refuse to feed our fascination with the deranged teenage killer](#) or provide the convenient horror movie plot. May every journalist follow his example so fewer mentally ill teenagers get the idea that shooting up their school will make them famous. But that commitment also presents a separate narrative challenge, which is how to create a story with drama and tension.

Cullen spent the 11 months after the shooting following the kids, which is enough time to plot the stages of their crusade but not necessarily enough to understand their internal struggles. He hints at possible tensions: parents worrying whether their suddenly energized kids were just suppressing trauma, kids getting used to their sudden fame, [kids getting hammered by internet trolls](#), facing death threats, losing their friends who were jealous that now they had thousands of followers on Twitter. He mentions a mother who went to a support group and was chided because her son wasn’t at school at the time of the shooting — part of what Cullen refers to as the “weird hierarchy of victimhood.” But Cullen breezes by these moments and quickly returns to the ticktock of organizing the big rally.

Maybe it’s unfair to place even more burden on this group of teenagers to become our perfect heroes. After all, at the time they were [facing down congressmen](#), they were still not old enough to vote. But I did find myself wishing for some more depth, detail or psychological complexity, something to cement these extraordinary kids in the public imagination so that we’d never forget what they somehow managed to pull off.

Hanna Rosin, a co-host of the NPR show “Invisibilia,” is the author of “The End of Men.”

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Book Review: **The Guardian**

Source: www.theguardian.com/books/2019/mar/01/parkland-dave-cullen-review

Parkland by Dave Cullen review – the shooting that led to change

For once the survivors became more famous than the shooter ... A hopeful study of March for our Lives from the author of *Columbine*

Lois Beckett

Fri 1 Mar 2019 04.00 EST

Twenty years ago, Dave Cullen was a freelance journalist who responded to reports of shots fired at Columbine high school. He drove towards a ring of helicopters hovering over suburban Colorado. The carnage he found there – 13 people dead, more than 20 injured – was hard to fathom. So was the reaction of the student survivors: the day after the shooting, they were numb, emotions muted. What was happening, the teenagers asked him. Would they get better?

Cullen spent the next decade investigating why two students had opened fire on their classmates, and what exactly had happened. His first book, *Columbine*, published in 2009, would become the definitive account, one that pushed back against many persistent Columbine myths, including a belief that high school outcasts had carried out the attack as revenge against the jocks who had bullied them.

Cullen's reporting made him the go-to expert on US mass violence. It also left him with post-traumatic stress. He eventually learned to set boundaries, promising his therapist that he would be careful with his coverage of mass shootings. It was not the stories about the perpetrators that left him shaken – he could follow those with professional distance – but the coverage of survivors.

The 14 February 2018 shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, which left 17 students and teachers dead, changed all that. For the first time, teenage survivors of such an atrocity reacted with fury. They demanded immediate government action and assailed adults for failing to protect them. The kids did not worry about “politicising” a tragedy: their friends' murder, they argued, was already political. “They say tougher

guns laws do not decrease gun violence. We call BS,” 18-year-old [Emma González](#) said in a speech, three days after the shooting, that went viral.

Drawn by the promise of real change, Cullen flew to Florida. Throughout the spring, as American teenagers staged waves of walkout protests at high schools across the country, he followed the Parkland students whose outrage had sparked a national movement. He reported from the tiny office they set up in a Florida shopping mall, where current students and a few recent graduates workshopped the memes they would use in social media warfare with the National Rifle Association, and documented their early protests. He saw how they were shaken by the counter-protesters who showed up at their events armed with guns.

Parkland focuses purely on the March for Our Lives movement, from the founders' first days organising in one student's living room, to a rally for gun control that drew hundreds of thousands of people to Washington and more than a million across the country, to their campaign to turn out young voters in the 2018 midterm elections. The book does not delve into the details of the attack at the school, the red flags law enforcement missed, or the partisan local debates over who was most to blame. It does not even mention the shooter's name. After 20 years of chronicling violence and failure, Cullen wants to tell a story of hope.

Unlike *Columbine*, his new book does not challenge the accepted narrative of the shooting or its aftermath. He believes the Parkland students achieved real change and are on their way to even greater victories. But he does not gloss over what was messy and painful about the movement's growth. He shows the simmering tension within the Parkland student body over how the media reaction to the shooting made just a handful of them internationally famous. The students who had spoken out most powerfully were not the ones in the freshman building during the attack. They were not the ones who had been injured, or who had just watched their friends get shot. The resentments and jealousies over who had been chosen to speak for the school would not go away. One of the students who appeared on the cover of Time tells Cullen she has lost many of her friends.

Cullen discusses the criticism the March for Our Lives founders received for not including any black Parkland students in their initial organising, and how the group would later publicly denounce the longstanding racism of the gun debate, which for years has placed more attention on the rare killings of suburban white children than the everyday deaths of young people of colour. Cullen describes the uncertainty a young activist from Chicago felt as he arrived at the wealthy gated community in Parkland for a joint meeting about youth gun violence activism. What would it look like to work together? The meeting with Chicago activists would mark a turning point towards a

more inclusive, national movement. It also provided a key strategic intervention at a moment when the Parkland students were facing increased public abuse, and were struggling to find the right tone to respond. D'Angelo McDade, part of Chicago's Peace Warrior group, taught the Parkland students Martin Luther King Jr's six principles of non-violence. Principle three, "non-violence seeks to defeat injustice, not people", Cullen writes, would prove influential in shaping the students' political response to their critics.

Cullen's experience covering school shootings is clear in his nuanced portraits of parents of victims, and survivors and their parents. "It's like she built herself a pair of wings out of balsa wood and duct tape and jumped off a building," González's mother "And we're just, like, running along beneath her with a net."

Cullen follows Cameron Kasky, one of the first Parkland student leaders, as he juggles his new national profile with his starring role in a student performance of *Spring Awakening*, a musical inspired by the Columbine shooting. He captures the organisational genius of Jackie Corin, the student government leader who served as a kind of chief operating officer for the March for Our Lives, setting up rallies and town halls nationwide, while still staying on track to finish high school.

The book portrays David Hogg, one of the movement's most fiery and combative spokespeople, as more playful and less angry than he appears on TV. Cullen shows how much Hogg was influenced by the devastation of his sister Lauren who lost multiple friends in the shooting. Over his weeks of reporting, Cullen sees how Lauren begins to recover, moving from ashen-faced and blank, in the first days after the shooting, to once again being able to show joy.

Some of Cullen's best portraits are of the less famous Parkland activists, including the recent graduates who joined the movement and helped define its deft and sometimes satirical social media presence. He presents [Matt Deitsch](#), the group's red-haired, 20-year-old chief strategist, as a major force, as if one of the [Weasley brothers](#) from Harry Potter had been given a crossover episode in [The West Wing](#).

There's no escaping the fact that *Parkland* has come out quickly, having been researched and written in less than a year. Cullen's closeness to the students is, at times, a disadvantage. He concentrates so narrowly on the movement's development that the broader political context rarely comes into focus.

The book also offers little perspective on how the Parkland students' successful use of Twitter fits into broader trends in social media activism, from [#BlackLivesMatter](#) to reactionary harassment campaigns such as [Gamergate](#). Cullen does not consider why

the March for Our Lives founders, hailed as heroes on the American left, were seen by some conservatives as rude, obnoxious children, mouthing off about policies they did not fully understand. He does not dig into the claims that the Parkland activists were “crisis actors”, or what that belief reveals about the troubling strain of conspiracy theory in contemporary politics. A survey of 800 American adults after the Parkland shooting found that 22% believed the young activists were fully “manipulated by outside groups”. Another quarter thought they were being at least partially manipulated.

The Parkland students’ prom was the same weekend as the National Rifle Association’s annual meeting in Texas – one of many contrasts that could have made the book a richer portrayal of the American gun debate as a whole, and provided a clearer view of the students’ political opponents. *Parkland* only documents what happened at prom, the strain of trying to celebrate a high-school milestone while still mourning lost friends.

It’s easy to understand how dazzled Cullen is by the toughness and political acumen of the teens who built a movement to challenge the [NRA](#). Many American adults share his gratitude at the students’ fearlessness in confronting one of America’s most persistent problems. For Cullen, who said in a recent interview that reporting on Parkland activism helped his post-traumatic stress, the gratitude is even more profound. “These Parkland kids literally healed me,” he told New York magazine.

Parkland’s insistence on hope, its deep identification with the movement, results in a book that feels smaller than Cullen’s previous work. A decade after it was published, *Columbine* is still revelatory – a clear-eyed document of how the “lessons learned” after each tragedy too often skip the real causes of violence, in favour of lurid, self-affirming lies.

One of the strongest threads through both *Columbine* and *Parkland* is how much the American media are implicated in the problem of mass shootings, and in the political stalemate on gun control. *Parkland*, Cullen writes, was the first time that survivors of such a mass shooting became more famous than the shooter.

This spring will mark the 20th anniversary of *Columbine*. It’s long past time, Cullen argues, for media outlets to own up to their role in giving killers the fame they crave – not just by taking more care in how they use the shooters’ names and photographs, but in considering how to scale back coverage of shootings altogether. “We did not start this, nor have we pulled any triggers. But the killers have made us reliable partners,” he writes in his new epilogue to *Columbine*. “These are ‘Made for TV’ movies, by boys desperate to be heard. Why do we keep handing them the mic?”

Book Review: **The Washington Post**

Source: www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/why-parkland-a-year-later-is-a-story-of-hope/2019/02/14/2d464e76-300c-11e9-813a-0ab2f17e305b_story.html?noredirect=on

Why Parkland, a year later, is a story of hope

By **Jill Filipovic**

Feb. 14, 2019 at 2:01 p.m. CST

Here is a sentence you would not expect in a review of a book on one of the country's most notorious school shootings: "[Parkland](#)" by Dave Cullen is one of the most uplifting books you will read all year. The United States is a nation pocked daily by gun violence; we are a nation desensitized by the magnitude of our national bloodshed, a place where there are people — multiple people — who are survivors of multiple mass shootings. In an era of Donald Trump and social media, we are also meaner, reactionary, deeply cynical, depressingly divided. At a time of such national exhaustion, a book about a school shooting may not be the one you're inclined to pick up off the shelf. Do it anyway. "Parkland" is a balm.

Cullen, also the author of "[Columbine](#)," has with "Parkland" carved out a macabre niche as the country's premier chronicler of mass school shootings. But "Parkland" is anything but dark. Very little of the book focuses on the six minutes and 20 seconds on Feb. 14, 2018, when a gunman walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., and killed 17 innocent souls. Instead, Cullen tells us what came next.

You know this story, but you don't. You have probably heard of the main players or seen their faces on television or read their missives on Twitter: Emma González with her big eyes and shaved head first calling BS on the many enablers of gun violence. David Hogg, a quick wit in 140 characters, taking on Laura Ingraham and the right-wing news machine. Cameron Kasky sending Marco Rubio stammering and stumbling over National Rifle Association money. The March for Our Lives, one of the biggest rallies in American history, when González gave a brief speech and then stared down the camera, tears streaming down her face, for four excruciating minutes — Was she breaking down? Cracking up? — before finally saying: "Since the time that I came out here, it has been six minutes and 20 seconds. . . . Fight for your lives before it's someone else's job."

Cullen was there for these moments, but he also describes the before, when Hogg, after surviving the shooting, rode his bike back to school to document the events as a journalist; when Jaclyn Corin, an organizational mastermind trapped in the body of a petite, soft-spoken high schooler, marshaled buses of students to head to Tallahassee to convince legislators that gun violence was a scourge worth fighting; when a ragtag group of drama nerds and student journalists got together in Kasky's living room, kicked out all the parents and decided something must be done. In Cullen's telling, the uprising was fast, organic and initially diffuse. The genius of the Parkland students came in coalescing around a highly disciplined core group while letting other branches grow where needed.

For a politics-hardened reader, stories of earnest activism and kids changing the world are boring at best, insultingly cliché at worst. Cullen deftly navigates what could have easily been a sentimental and patronizing story (not to mention a tedious one). He takes us shoulder to shoulder with his subjects, through their victories and their errors, drawing out the bits of their personalities that are flattened out on a TV screen — Hogg isn't angry but is a surprisingly good mediator of tense situations; González is both ethereal and tactical, a force Cullen calls “the head and the heart.” Both are just teenagers.

Cullen brings us a large cast of characters, spending more time on the central players but touching on the double-digit list of people who made the March for Our Lives the movement it became: those who worried for a group of kids who flew forward full-bore, and those who were spurred to their own actions after the Parkland shooting. Cullen does not bore us with banalities or mawkishness. He manages to use the word “resilience” only once.

Parents play virtually no role in the Parkland kids' organizing, other than offering role-appropriate demands for chaperones, mental health counseling and sleep. But they do serve as a kind of Greek chorus to Cullen's hero narrative of the students. We see, from his telling, why adults made more risk-averse by experience (and brain development) could never have built this movement, which required risk-taking as much as naivete and determination. Where the voices of the adults do creep in, they are crucial reminders that this is fundamentally a story about children — brilliant, fabulous, preternaturally mature children, but children nonetheless. “I'm terrified,” González's mother, Beth, tells Cullen. “It's like she built herself a pair of wings made out of balsa wood and duct tape and jumped off a building. And we're just, like, running along beneath her with a net, which she doesn't want or think that she needs.”

Among the most affecting are Manuel and Patricia Oliver, whose son Joaquin was killed in the shooting. “Tío Manny” becomes one of the only adults the kids will let into their

work; he also works on his own, painting enormous murals he calls his Walls of Demand, then taking a sledgehammer and punching one, two, 17 holes in each one. Inside the holes he places sunflowers, part metaphor and part memorial: On his son's last day on Earth, he brought Valentine's Day sunflowers for his girlfriend, Victoria. After Joaquin's death, Cullen writes, "Tori split the flowers in half, sealed them in epoxy, and made a necklace each for Patricia and Tío Manny, which they hold dear." Joaquin, Tío Manny insists, is right there, not a victim but a leader of this movement. "Parkland" is a story of large-scale action. It is also a story of art, of creating beauty and ruins, and of many, many small kindnesses.

But the real genius of "Parkland" isn't that it's an inspirational tome. Instead, it's practically a how-to guide for grass-roots activism. And most important, Cullen, and the students he writes about, situate this movement as one place on a longer historical arc toward justice. Early on, the Parkland students decide to make their quest about more than the suburban school shootings that dominate the news; they find common cause with teenagers in cities who face endemic violence not inside the classroom but often on their way to it, and whose realities are shrugged off as a predictable outcome of living in "bad" neighborhoods.

The most significant turning point in the story is when the Parkland students meet kids from Chicago who run similar anti-violence organizations, one called BRAVE (Bold Resistance Against Violence Everywhere) and one called Peace Warriors. Peace Warrior Executive Director D'Angelo McDade, then a high school senior in Chicago, introduces the Parkland kids to Martin Luther King Jr.'s principles of nonviolence, a framework that profoundly reshapes and guides their work going forward.

Later in the story, when the Parkland students are on a national tour, they refuse to be interviewed in Chicago unless a local kid is interviewed with them. And what the Chicago kids want is heartbreakingly simple. "I want to see happiness in my community," says one Peace Warrior, Alex King. "I want to see the next generation, I want to see them being able to play outside. Being able to sit on the porch and nothing happen to them. Being able to go to their neighborhood park, being able to go to a friend's house. Being able to go to church. Being able to go to school and be safe. I want to see that joy."

These are the most resonant moments of "Parkland": When we hear the students themselves. Luckily, Cullen is an adept storyteller, synthesizing a cacophony of voices and using his own simply to carry a reader cleanly through. He reacts to the story and the characters along with us, at times concerned, often awed, sometimes frustrated — for example, when the Chicago students, who are just as impassioned, bright and

organized as the Parkland kids, see their tragedies and demands ignored by media-makers and politicians alike.

This is a story just a year in. For all of their bluster and effectiveness, the children at the core of Parkland are still young people damaged by an act of horrific violence, savaged by an unforgiving and ideological conservative media, and sometimes sniped at and shunned by their peers. How will that change them? Cullen doesn't quite get there, perhaps because the students themselves haven't gotten there yet, and because this is a story about an evolution in progress, not a revolution complete. Cullen's tale, though, makes you hopeful for what might come next. Optimism about the future: It's a strange feeling.

"Parkland" is a story touched by trauma, but it is not a story of trauma. It is a story born of violence, but it is not a story of violence. Instead, it is something both braver and more precise: It is the story of a carefully planned rebellion.

Jill Filipovic is a journalist, lawyer and the author of "The H-Spot: The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness."

Interview with the Author: 

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Author Dave Cullen On Telling The Story Of The Parkland Activists

February 10, 2019 8:05 AM ET

Heard on [Weekend Edition Sunday](#)

Dave Cullen, the author of *Columbine*, tackles another high school shooting in his new book, *Parkland*. Cullen talks with NPR's Lulu Garcia-Navarro about the teen survivors who later became activists.

LULU GARCIA-NAVARRO, HOST:

This week marks the anniversary of the Parkland shootings. On Valentine's Day last year, a shooter murdered 17 people at a Florida high school. It also marks one year since the survivors of that shooting, teenagers, began a movement to combat gun violence, organizing the March For Our Lives demonstration with hundreds of thousands of protesters across the world.

(SOUNDBITE OF MONTAGE)

DELANEY TARR: I'm here today because I am a Marjory Stoneman Douglas student.

CAMERON KASKY: Welcome to the revolution.

JACLYN CORIN: Our First Amendment right is our weapon of war in this.

EMMA GONZALEZ: Fight for your lives before it's someone else's job.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: That was Delaney Tarr, Cameron Kasky, Jaclyn Corin and Emma Gonzalez at the protest. They're some of the Parkland kids that journalist Dave Cullen followed over the past year, watching their ups and downs as they dealt with the terror and tragedy of the shootings and became activists. Cullen is the author of the definitive account of the Columbine High shootings. And he's often one of the first people the media turn to when a school shooting is underway. So on February 14 last year, he looked at his phone and knew something terrible was happening when he saw the deluge of media requests.

DAVE CULLEN: That's how I know how bad it is by how many come in right away. That's how I know also how the media is going to cover it. The media has two speeds, either just wall-to-wall night and day or they kind of ignore some of these things, sadly. And I can tell by my inbox, within the first half hour, what the rest of the week is going to be like.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: One of the things you've always advised journalists covering school shootings to do is not to glamorize or name the shooter. And one of the things that you noticed right away with these kids was that they sort of accidentally solved the problem of celebrity shooters by becoming bigger celebrities themselves.

CULLEN: They really did because there's been this whole no-notoriety movement and trying to get the media to get away from glamorizing or spending so much time with these killers. You do that by being more interesting than that jerk who attacked you. And within 24 hours, David Hogg was the first person in the history of these mass murders that was more interesting and more famous than the person who attacked him.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: In fact, let's listen to some of the tape when he first addressed the media on CNN.

(SOUNDBITE OF TV SHOW, "NEW DAY")

DAVID HOGG: We're children. You guys, like, are the adults. You need to take some action and play a role. Work together. Come over your politics. And get something done.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: That was him on "New Day" - David Hogg. And you got into contact with him the weekend after the shooting. And you write, he was so strategic almost from the get-go about what needed to be done.

CULLEN: There's multiple sides to David Hogg. He comes across really angry. And there is an anger. But he's also this fun-loving, silly, playful guy. But yeah. The kids decided within, I think, the first 24 hours that they had to do a couple of things. One is speak with one voice. They had to choose what they were going to do and all do that collectively. And then also, they had to choose an agenda. They could talk about mental health. They could talk about the media. Or they could talk about guns. Or they could focus on whatever avenue. But they had to pick one and make it count because, otherwise, dilutes the message. And they decided guns are the enemy No. 1. They're the biggest problem. We're going to tackle that. And that's it. And I think that's the smartest thing they did.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Yeah. These kids - Emma Gonzalez, Jaelyn Corin, Cameron Kasky, the whole Never Again group - they not only focused on guns. But they aimed their comments at politicians.

CULLEN: They did. And they realized right away that to change the legislation, we need to change the legislators because the Democratic Party and a lot of moderate Republicans who quietly supported them had been basically chickening out on this and, in theory, supporting them but not doing anything. And so the kids were basically like, yeah. You need to become real supporters or get the hell out of the way, and we're voting you out, too. And those people got a backbone. A lot of people ran on it for the first time in - you know, at least since Al Gore lost the presidency in 2000, and guns were blamed on it. A lot of Democrats and some Republicans got a spine and really changed some things.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: And they learned a lot along the way. You know, the kids got called out by their black peers about being inclusive. And they thought about that and took that onboard.

CULLEN: They did. And that one hurt because they were really trying to. You know, we got girls and boys. We got straight kids, black kids, gay kids. We've got Latinos and whites. And, like, they thought that was pretty good. And they worked very closely with other African-American groups from other cities. And so they thought, like, you know, we really got that covered. Yeah. But what about African-American kids in your own school? Yeah. You're right. That was an oversight. We should have done better. And we're going to change that.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: We all were watching this at the time. And we were riveted by these kids and their voice and their quest to really change something after this terrible tragedy. And then you talk about the months after, the toll this took on them, the hate mail, the infighting, the burden.

CULLEN: To me the biggest surprise of these kids is what an odyssey it was because I think most of America sort of saw what they saw on television. And they think, OK. These kids, you know, did this amazing march on Washington in five weeks - the third- or fourth-biggest in U.S. history. That was kind of amazing. What they don't realize is, like, no. It was relentless. It was basically a nine-month marathon sprint doing one thing after another. I mean, they were doing it while sometimes falling apart.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: You write about this story as one of hope. It's almost the opposite of Columbine in some ways. Do you see these events as bookends?

CULLEN: To me, Columbine and Parkland are totally bookends - or, I guess, I have to say hopefully bookends. Parkland won't be the last one. It's already not the last one. But I think it may be the beginning of the end. Hopefully, 10 years from now, we'll look back and say, yeah. That's the moment where we begin to find our way out of this.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: So on this anniversary, what are the kids doing? Have you spoken to them?

CULLEN: They are spending time with their family and their friends. Anniversaries are really hard on victims and survivors, I think, in ways that most people don't understand. There are triggers all around us in ways we're not even aware. And so most survivors need to take some time. And I really respect that decision.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Dave Cullen's book is "Parkland." Thank you so much.

CULLEN: Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

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