

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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The Coward of Broward County

I guess there are two kinds of people in the world: those who step up and do what's needed; and those who don't.

Many people were outraged when they learned that the armed officer assigned to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, stood outside (with a gun) while Nicholas Cruz murdered students inside. After he resigned in disgrace, it was reported that there were several Broward County officers on the scene who also stayed outside while students were murdered inside.

This sounds outrageous to the general public but that is only because they don't understand the mentality of the average law enforcement officer. Their first rule is to keep themselves and their coworkers safe. In a shooter situation, no matter how many officers are on the scene, unless gunfire is directed at them, they are not going to put themselves in danger to save someone else. They will call for backup and sit there monitoring the situation until a SWAT team shows up. I assume that is what happened in Parkland.

Prosecutors and supervisors understand this attitude and support it. That is why you see so many killings by officers ruled as justified when any rational person looks at the same situation and sees a murder by a cop. Better an innocent civilian die a needless death than a cop suffer a scratch.

I don't see things changing. Police will continue to avoid putting their lives on the line even if it means that others must die due to their inaction. Police will continue to be exonerated in situations which would constitute murder if anyone else did it. And the general public will continue to be oblivious to what's really going on. Even though that is the general state of our police forces, let me clarify and say that there are many good and brave officers who will disregard their own personal safety to save others and some die in the line of duty. I applaud those men and women.

In my opinion, any person with a gun at that school who did not act to stop Cruz from murdering those kids is a coward. Sometimes you have to take risks and put your life on the line. Sometimes you have to do things you don't want to do for the good of others. Every one of us has the potential to be a hero. Most of us will never be in a situation where we will find out if we are a coward or a hero. For those who do, I hope you turn out to be a hero.