Myron May

Descent into Delusions

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Family Background

Very little is known about Myron May's childhood, but it apparently was not stable. His parents were Lorenzo May, from Ohio, and Nadine Freeman (whose married name was May), from Florida. Myron was born in Dayton, Ohio.[1] His father was from a large family, with three brothers and five sisters.[2] Myron's father served in the navy,[3] and one of his father's brothers served in the marines.[4] Mr. May reportedly was addicted to crack cocaine,[5] and Myron reportedly lived with his mother.

For some reason, his mother was eventually not able to take care of him, so at age twelve he moved to Wewahitchka, Florida, where he lived with his maternal grandmother, Lillian Russ[6] (whose maiden name was Lillian Keith Freeman[7]). According to one source, he had been a foster child, presumably prior to moving to Florida.[8]

Adolescence and Adulthood

Information about May's adolescence is largely limited to his participation in high school sports, including basketball and track.[9] Following high school, he attended Florida State University, where by all reports he thrived. He was active in the Black Student Union and the fraternity Phi Beta Sigma.[10] Two minor issues during his undergraduate years involved the campus police. In 2002, he apparently was suspected of marijuana use but not charged, and in 2003 he was the victim of a vehicle burglary.[11]

May graduated with honors in 2005 with a degree in economics.[12] He then attended law school at Texas Tech University. He eventually was licensed to practice law in Texas and New Mexico. His career got off to a bright start, then quickly faltered. He had a position in Houston with an estimated salary of $150,000 to $160,000, but left after less than two years. He stayed at his new job for only six months. He got another

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MYRON MAY
Perpetrator Dossier

Attack date	20 November 2014
Attack site	Florida State University
Location	Tallahassee, Florida
Age at incident	31
Killed	0
Wounded	3
Outcome	Killed by police
Shooter population	Aberrant adult
Psychological type	Psychotic
Attack type	Random

one, but quit, reportedly to start his own business in Denver, but nothing came of that plan. He then got a job in New Mexico as a public defender, with an estimated salary of $48,000 to $55,000, but about eight months later he resigned and took a job with the district attorney's office. About nine months later, he left that job, and several weeks later he committed his attack.[13]

Similarly, his personal life seemed to be going well, but then this, too, fell apart. He met a woman online named Danielle Nixon who was a pediatrician. Their relationship went so well that they attended a ten-week marriage workshop and had looked at wedding rings.[14] In March 2014, however, she noticed changes in him. He complained of back pain, though there was no apparent cause. He became severely fidgety and couldn't sit still. Though he had been a regular churchgoer, he stopped attending services. He became convinced he had attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), but Nixon (who as a pediatrician was very familiar with the disorder) didn't believe this was the case and did not like that May took medication for it. He then had two panic attacks. Nixon was concerned about his deterioration.[15]

Eventually, May became paranoid. He slept fully clothed, with a knife, in case someone broke into his apartment. When he was driving and cars pulled in front of him, he thought that meant he was being followed. He told Danielle not to engage in conversation while in his car because they were being recorded.[16] After fifteen months, she ended their relationship.[17]

On 7 September 2014, May went to the local police station to report that he was convinced he was being watched through a camera in his house. He also reported hearing voices talking about what he was doing.[18] On 25 September, May voluntarily entered Mesilla Valley Hospital for treatment; he was released four days later.[19] May resigned from his job with the district attorney's office on 6 October; his resignation letter gave no reason for his decision.[20] The following day he showed up at Danielle's home, holding a piece of his car that he claimed was a camera that the police had installed to monitor him. She contacted the police to report her concern for him; they said they would check on him, but when they went to his home he was not there.[21]

A Targeted Individual

The extent of May's delusions did not become clear until after his attack, when his writings and videos were found. Police discovered three videos on his computer in which he discussed his experiences. He also had mailed a packet to multiple people to explain his view of what he had been going through. He believed he was the victim of multiple types of harassment, all centering around the concept of being a "targeted individual," i.e., someone who is selected by the government as a victim. He not only believed that people were following him and had broken into his apartment and planted cameras there, but that there existed secret technology to control people's thoughts and to shoot them with energy beams to cause them pain with what he called "directed energy weapons." He wrote,

> On November 14, 2014, I got hit with a directed energy weapon.[22]
>
> Right now I'm being hit [with directed energy] as I type this.[23]
>
> Through electronic harassment, these individuals convinced me that I was guilty of a crime.[24]
>
> Through electronic harassment, my life was constantly threatened.[25]

He not only believed that he was targeted by the government, but that people he knew personally and professionally were part of the conspiracy to harass him. He wrote that he resigned from one job because "I would consistently see individuals peeking around corners at me."[26] He recounted a series of interactions with colleagues and then concluded, "The situation was all a part of an elaborate scheme to put me in financial jeopardy, thereby making me more amenable to harassment and less able to fight the issue."[27] When he stayed with friends, he became convinced that the noise in their home was part of a "noise campaign" to break him down mentally and that the family had been recruited to join the conspiracy against him.[28]

The School Shooting

Why May attacked his alma mater is unexplained. He had traveled back to Florida not long before the attack and was staying with a family he had known in his youth. In the weeks and days leading up to the attack, May visited the campus of Florida State University, sitting in on a class one day and engaging in an odd conversation with students on another day.[29]

Then, just after midnight, in the early morning of 20 November, May approached Strozier Library and carried out his attack. Why he chose this site is a mystery — he reportedly had practically lived in the library during his undergraduate days and had loved his college experience.[30] In fact, the rationale for committing any attack at all is obscure. He wanted to bring attention to the issue of targeted individuals, but why did he choose to gun down innocent strangers rather than any of the people he was convinced were part of the conspiracy against him? For that matter, why kill anyone at

all? May was a deeply religious man, and on one of the videos he left behind, "he asked for forgiveness for his actions and to please let those who are harmed in any way by his actions to give them a spirit of contentment and peace and he is sorry."[31]

May apparently not only planned to kill people, but he also intended to die. His writings include a list of items for people to take care of after his death.[32] During the shooting, his actions made clear that he was committing "suicide by cop." When confronted by the police, instead of dropping his gun as they directed him to do repeatedly, he made comments like, "I'm gonna make you kill me," "You'll just have to kill me," and "Why don't you shoot me already?"[33] May ended up being gunned down by the police.

Comments

May's case resembles those of other school shooters in several ways, but it also varies from other cases. Like many perpetrators, May had relatives who served in the military. Unlike many other shooters, however, there is no evidence that he ever had military aspirations himself. Like most aberrant adult shooters, May was psychotic. Unlike other aberrant adult shooters, May was very high-functioning into adulthood, but then suffered a precipitous decline from what apparently was adult-onset schizophrenia.

Psychotic shooters typically follow one of two courses. In some cases, such as those of Seung Hui Cho and Adam Lanza, the perpetrators are clearly impaired throughout their lives, eventually becoming psychotic in early adulthood. In other cases, such as that of Kimveer Gill (as well as Jared Loughner and James Holmes, who did not commit attacks at their schools), the individuals apparently functioned well until the onset of schizophrenia as they entered adulthood. May's onset was later, and he went much further with his education and career than other aberrant shooters.

Though other aberrant shooters have attacked college campuses, all the others who did so had never attended the institutions. Though other aberrant shooters have returned to elementary or middle schools they had attended years earlier, May is the only one who attacked his alma mater years after graduating.

May's delusions apparently were shaped by books he had read on targeted individuals, including the work of Renee Pittman and Robert Duncan. It is not known when he first read these authors' books, but their ideas seem to have been woven into May's evolving schizophrenia. I have come across this dynamic in my private practice, where someone with emerging schizophrenia watched a movie about secret societies from the Middle Ages with the result that he subsequently experienced paranoid delusions about the secret societies. In addition to May's delusions, his experience of hearing multiple voices conversing with each other is a significant symptom of schizophrenia. These voices, too, were woven into his delusions.

One of the most disturbing aspects of May's school shooting is the utter lack of meaning in his attack. Whereas some shooters seek revenge against people with whom they have had conflicts, May gunned down innocent people he didn't know at the university where he had perhaps experienced the best times of his life. Even if he had been a targeted individual, his attack is incomprehensible. His writings clearly indicate his desire to bring attention to the secret technology he believed in and the government's program of targeting individuals. Committing a school shooting was a bizarre attempt to raise awareness about these concerns, and is further evidence of his psychological

deterioration. This lack of a coherent rationale is consistent with the attacks of other psychotic, aberrant adult shooters.

Notes

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27 "Florida State University Shooting," p. 31.
28 "Florida State University Shooting," p. 32.
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30 Waters and Dobson, "Strozier Library Shooter."
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