Rhetoric Contributes to Mass Shootings

August 6, 2019

The nightmare continues: 20 dead in El Paso, 9 in Dayton and still counting.

As someone who has taught and studied rhetoric for over 40 years, what we say, what we don’t say and how problems are labeled matters. Enough with politicians calling for “thoughts and prayers.” That only eases our minds, assuages our conscience and normalizes violence. But it obscures the real problem. These are terrorist attacks and hate crimes from within—not committed by Muslims or Hispanics entering the country.

It is true that there always have been shootings and always will be. However, we must be honest that what has transpired in the last few years is unique and far different from the past. Let’s be candid about the contributory causes of this crisis—including easy access to high capacity assault weapons, increasing mental illness and, yes, the incitement of hate and fear spurred by the discourse of our President. The latter is called “stochastic terrorism.” Together these constitute the perfect storm.

One thing is clear: As long as we have a President of the United States who incessantly spews racist and hateful words that are applauded by white nationalist groups from whom he won’t distance himself—not to mention Republican leaders who are cowards and refuse to stop him—little progress will be made to ameliorate this dangerous problem.

Rick Cherwitz
Austin, TX