**Violence and wildfires**

[Robert C Koehler](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/robert-c-koehler)

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“They take advantage of that opportunity and they shoot into a crowd, no matter who they hit.”

The news this past weekend emerging from my fair city, Chicago, felt like news about wildfires sweeping across California: the sudden, hellish karma of climate change, that is to say, the gradual collapse of life-sustaining conditions on Planet Earth thanks to centuries of cluelessly exploitative human activity.

The news from Chicago was, of course, about gun violence: at least 74 people shot between Friday afternoon and Monday morning in a slew of unconnected incidents, including shots fired into large gatherings of people (at a funeral, at a block party). Eleven people were killed, including, in separate incidents, two 17-year-olds. An 11-year-old boy was among the injured.

Figuring in the totals from the weekend, so far this year the city has racked up more than 300 homicides, according to the Chicago Tribune. Something, as we all know, is out of control, in this city, across the country ... and across the planet.

The above quote was from the Chicago Police Department’s chief of patrol, Fred Waller, commenting on the recent mayhem at a press conference on Sunday morning. His words, I fear, came out a little too easily. It almost sounded like an official firefighter spokesperson accusing the wildfires of moral degeneracy rather than discussing their cause and the needed social change – rather than discussing, for instance, the self-reinforcing feedback loops perpetuating human violence, just as a recent report published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences addressed the feedback loops creating climate change and “Hothouse Earth.”

“In order to avoid the worst-case scenarios,” Common Dreams reports, “the researchers behind the study say that ‘collective human action is required’ to steer (the) planet’s systems away from dangerous tipping points. Such action, they write, ‘entails stewardship of the entire Earth System . . . and transformed social values.’”

I would extend this need for stewardship, this need to transform social values, beyond the biosphere.

For instance, as a report released last year by the Chicago-based Heartland Alliance points out: “Chicago is currently facing a devastating surge in lethal violence in addition to staggering rates of poverty across Illinois. Policymakers and community leaders are struggling with finding short- and long-term solutions to stem the violence and allow neighborhoods to heal. In the meantime, communities are fearing for their own safety and grieving over lost parents, children, friends, and leaders every day. The stakes for getting the solutions right could not be higher.

“Poverty and violence often intersect, feed one another, and share root causes. Neighborhoods with high levels of violence are also characterized by high levels of poverty, lack of adequate public services and educational opportunity, poorer health outcomes, asset and income inequality, and more. The underlying socioeconomic conditions in these neighborhoods perpetuate both violence and poverty.”

This article was excerpted from: ‘Poverty, Violence, and Spiritual Wildfires’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org