

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

## **Tragedies in Maryland and London: Not Letting the Exception Swallow the Rule**

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Two recent unrelated tragedies have been the focus of public, media, and political attention. One took place in my own community of Rockville, Maryland. On March 16 at Rockville High School, where my daughter is a student, a 14-year-old girl was sexually assaulted by two fellow students: ages 17 and 18. At least one had entered the U.S. illegally. And on March 22, in London, a 52-year-old British born Muslim man ran a car into a crowd of people, killing five (including himself) and injuring at least 50 others. One American died.

These are tragic and horrific events for the victims, their families, and friends. They deserve our compassion, comfort, attentiveness, aid, and more over, the protections found in our justice system. The incidents remind us of the uncertainty that we face daily where conflict and violence are all too common, and should cause us to cherish each other. We cannot whitewash the fact that these were heinous acts where the rule of law must be responsive.

Beyond that, there are the political ramifications of the tragedies and the seeming need by many to draw conclusions that generalize the alleged perpetrators. Since the rape, considerable vitriol as been directed to the greater community, the local school system, and the school's principal. Moreover, the incidents have been used by the Trump administration to justify its current aim to restrict and limit immigration to the U.S. embodied by the current Muslim ban and the plans to build a wall with Mexico.

In the law, rules that lead to specific results are developed to apply when the facts are applicable. But rules have exceptions, which are meant to be rare. At times though, too many exceptions can "swallow the rule." The Washington Post (March 24, 2017) cites a Cato Institute (a libertarian think tank) study that found that immigrants, including those who are illegal, commit crimes at lower rates than do native-born Americans. And the number of Muslims who hold extremist views is quite small as noted by a Pew Research Center poll in 2013. But even in face of research, the incidents in Maryland and London have been used to justify continuing efforts to curtail immigration to the U.S. Though our emotions might affect our views of these events, it is logic and reason that must govern our actions and policy.

In these cases, the exceptions must not swallow the rules. If what happened at Rockville High School was the rule, then criminal activities among those who are undocumented would be rampant and data would reflect that. And if most Muslims held radical views, then law enforcement would be overwhelmed with acts of terrorism to attend to. We need to recognize a criminal event for what it is. The young men in Maryland, now charged as adults, should receive the due process that any other alleged perpetrators would be entitled to, including a fair consideration of their actions. Likewise, the acts of the perpetrator in London should be examined, not as something that implicates an entire group, but as the action of one man. To evaluate them otherwise, would be little different than believing that an assailant's ethnicity or pedigree are the primary factors in their behavior.

In the U.S., we strive to treat all under the law equally. Likewise, the alleged assailant in Britain needs to be treated like any one charged with a heinous act. In both circumstances if convicted, those charged will receive as justice proscribes. But generalizations ascribed to groups they represent would be unjust.