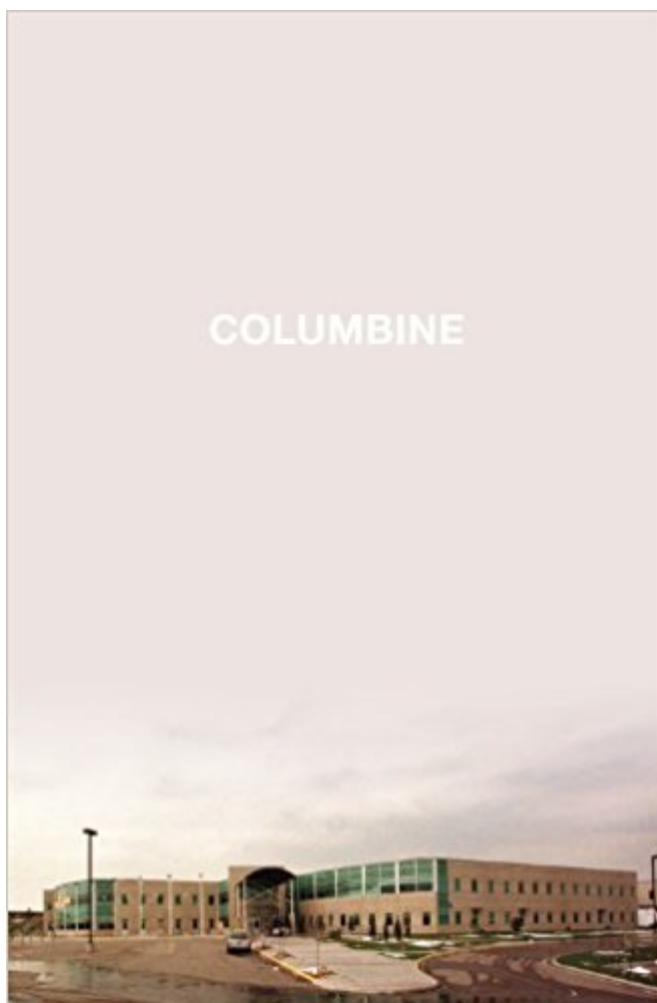


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# Columbine



## Synopsis

Winner of the Edgar® Award for Best Fact Crime Book New York Times: One of the 100 Notable Books of the Year Los Angeles Times: Favorite Nonfiction of the Year Publishers Weekly: Nonfiction Best Book of the Year Chicago Tribune: Favorite Nonfiction of the Year Salon.com: Nonfiction Best Book of the Year On April 20, 1999, two boys went to their high school with bombs and guns. Their goal was to leave "a lasting impression on the world." The horror they inflicted left an indelible stamp on the American psyche. Now in this definitive account, Dave Cullen presents a compelling and utterly human profile of teenage killers. With a keen investigative eye and psychological acumen, he draws on hundreds of interviews, thousands of pages of police files, FBI psychologists, and the boys' tapes and diaries. This close-up portrait of violence, a community rendered helpless, and police blunders and cover-ups is an unforgettable cautionary tale for our time. In the tradition of *Helter Skelter* and *In Cold Blood*, *COLUMBINE* is a revelatory work destined to be a classic.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In this remarkable account of the April 20, 1999, Columbine High School shooting, journalist Cullen not only dispels several of the prevailing myths about the event but tackles the hardest question of all: why did it happen? Drawing on extensive interviews, police reports and his own reporting, Cullen meticulously pieces together what happened when 18-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold killed 13 people before turning their guns on themselves. The media spin was that specific students, namely jocks, were targeted and that Dylan and Eric were members

of the Trench Coat Mafia. According to Cullen, they lived apparently normal lives, but under the surface lay an angry, erratic depressive (Klebold) and a sadistic psychopath (Harris), together forming a combustible pair. They planned the massacre for a year, outlining their intentions for massive carnage in extensive journals and video diaries. Cullen expertly balances the psychological analysis "enhanced by several of the nation's leading experts on psychopathology" with an examination of the shooting's effects on survivors, victims' families and the Columbine community. Readers will come away from Cullen's unflinching account with a deeper understanding of what drove these boys to kill, even if the answers aren't easy to stomach. (Apr. 6) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Many reviewers were more concerned with coming to grips with the attack rather than assessing the book, but their concern may be a testament to Cullen's work. His reporting fundamentally reframes the event: Columbine, he writes, should be thought of as a failed bombing rather than a school shooting. Furthermore, much of the conventional wisdom about how to prevent such attacks "essentially, watch out for pimply outcasts with a grudge" is confounded by an investigation into Harris's and Klebold's actual lives. Most critics, with Janet Maslin a notable exception, thought that Cullen's account helps us to better wring meaning from the tragedy. In sum, Columbine is an excellent work of media criticism, showing how legends become truths through continual citation. • (New York Times Book Review). Copyright 2009 Bookmarks Publishing LLC

Great Book! My husband and I are law enforcement officers. This book not only tells the story of what happened at the school. It explains why it was a turning point in how law enforcement officers are trained to respond to similar situations. In addition, it tells the background of the two boys and their families, in detail. Highly recommended.

This book presented the facts of what happened during Columbine by not only telling of the event, but by reporting on various people/groups responses to the build up, actual event, what happens afterward, and the policy implications around it. This book is very factual, but it reads smoothly and not like you are reading a textbook. I would highly recommend this book to anyone and encourage everyone to read it!

It took me a long time to finish this book, but not because it was written poorly but rather because

the topic is so disturbing. I thought Mr. Cullen's telling of this story was excellent, and despite the nay-sayers who gave this a bad review, it was very factual. Mr. Cullen spent ten years researching this book, so for those who say he was careless in stating facts are the ones lacking in information. I thought this was unbiased, factual and with just enough human element to the telling to make it ring home, but not seem overly emotional getting in the way of the facts of the story. I think the story itself is emotional enough without an author adding to it.

Excellent book, especially for those of us whose "knowledge" is largely based on media reports within the first year or so of the tragedy. Certainly the author provides a reasonable and supported opinion for the "why" question that some will not agree with, particularly anyone personally affected by the event. The whole bullying/outcast rationale always struck me as not that credible as a primary cause. The only issue I have with the book is the organization. I was fine with the timeline jumping around from chapter to chapter, but I did not understand the reasoning for how the story was told in some cases. Also, given the number of different people to keep track of, some kind of "who's who" reference in addition to the timeline would have been very helpful.

As Sandy at You've Gotta Read This remarked in her outstanding review of this book, "There are a handful of events in our lives that we use to mark time. When JFK was shot, when Lennon was shot, 9/11...and Columbine. We will forever remember where we were and what we were doing the moment we heard the news." When I heard about the events at Columbine, I was out-of-town at a work meeting. I clearly remember one of my co-workers rushing up to me saying "There's been this horrible shooting at a high school in Colorado. It's all over the news!" Later that night of April 20, 1999, we all huddled around the TV watching the footage and proclaiming our disbelief over and over again. In the end, 13 people were killed and dozens were seriously injured. Countless others bore psychological scarring that affects their lives to this day. And the killers? Well, they shot themselves in the school library--the scene of the greatest carnage--leaving the rest of the world to piece together the reasons for why they did what they did. Of course, school shootings happened before Columbine and they happened after Columbine, but Columbine seems to stand out as THE school shooting because of the sheer amount of news coverage that it garnered and the myths that grew up around it. For most school shootings, the event was over and done before any news cameras showed up--leaving us with only the tearful survivors to tell us what happened. With Columbine, the media coverage was immediate and ongoing. We saw the students fleeing the school. We witnessed the dead bodies laying outside of the school entrance. We bit our nails

anxiously as Patrick Ireland dangled from the library window. The reason Columbine was different was because we--the viewing public--became personal witnesses as the tragedy unfolded in real-time. As the Columbine story gathered steam in the passing weeks, a variety of myths grew up around the shooting. "The gunmen were bullied by jocks and were targeting jocks to get revenge." "The gunmen were influenced by the music of Marilyn Manson." "A group called the Trench Coat Mafia orchestrated the event." Other myths would take longer to develop but would prove just as durable, particularly the story of Cassie Bernall, who was allegedly shot in the library for acknowledging her belief in God to the gunmen. Eventually and inevitably, the news media moved on to other stories, and we were left with few definitive answers. In the 10 years following the Columbine shooting, Dave Cullen sifted through a mountain of information--conducting hundreds of interviews, reading thousands of pages of police files, consulting with FBI psychologists, and viewing the tapes and diaries left behind by Harris and Klebold--in order to write a definitive account of what happened that day at Columbine--including what led up to the shooting, what went wrong during the initial response, and the aftermath of the shooting in the community and those permanently scarred either by the loss of loved ones or injury. He also attempts to answer one of the biggest questions that lingers over the specter of the Columbine shooting: Why? Cullen meticulously documents his sources for each section of the book. When I read the book on my Kindle, the text stopped at 80%. The remaining 20% contained Cullen's documentation of where he got his information for each assertion made in his book. With this type of rigid reporting and documentation, I felt confident when I was reading Columbine that I was reading an account that was as accurate and true as it could possibly be. Yet although the book is meticulously researched, it reads like a novel. The writing is clear and precise but gripping. As you read, you're drawn in to the story. When Harris and Klebold are roaming the hallways in the aftermath of the first wave of shooting, you feel like you are walking alongside them. When frightened parents gather in the first hours after the shooting--frantically trying to locate their children--you feel their anxiety and stress. The book was emotionally powerful and affecting. When reading it, I dreamt more than once of being in the school with Harris and Klebold coming down the hallway. It was an uncomfortable read, and one that continues to haunt me. Unlike murder mysteries where you know the twisted psyche of a killer is simply the product of the darker corners of an author's imagination, Columbine tells a true story. The events of Columbine happened not so long ago in a place that is probably quite similar to where you live. Columbine haunts us because it reminds us that something like this could happen in our community, to our sons and daughters, in our schools. Cullen moves back and forth in time throughout the book--describing the myriad of information left behind by Harris and Klebold. As

Cullen develops their story, it starts to become clear why Harris and Klebold did what they did. These were not boys who impulsively decided to shoot up their school one day. The Columbine shooting was a meticulously planned campaign of death and destruction that was painstakingly planned and documented by Harris. It turns out that Eric Harris was the mastermind and impetus behind the entire event; Klebold was a reluctant participant who only fully committed himself at the final hour. Harris fully intended to explain what he had in mind and why he did it--leaving behind a huge assortment of material for his audience after the fact. When reading Columbine, one of the biggest shocks to me was that Harris never intended Columbine to be a school shooting. In fact, Columbine was really a bombing that went south. If things had gone according to plan, Columbine would have resulted in hundreds dead and the total destruction of the school. When I read the scope of his plans and just how much worse Columbine could have been, my jaw dropped to the floor. Although this isn't an easy book to read, I think that anyone who followed the Columbine story at any level should read this book to finally get an accurate accounting of the whos, whats, whys, wheres and hows of what happened at Columbine High School on that day in April. If you still think that Harris and Klebold were victims of bullying by jocks or that rock music somehow played a part in this tragedy, if you blame the shooting on the parents of Harris and Klebold for raising bad kids, if you wonder what happened in the community of Littleton in the years after the shooting when the cameras went away, you owe it to yourself and the victims of this tragedy to read this book.

If you think you know what happened at Columbine, think again. Much of the media portrayal of the shooters was either misguided or blatantly wrong. This book provides an in-depth look at the events in the years leading up to the shootings, and uncovers some details about the event itself that the general public is not typically aware of.

I would recommend to those interested in background stories of victims, as well as the mental illness of both Eric and Dylan.

It's so seldom any more that a non-fiction account of anything is presented with even a semblance of balanced reporting, but this book is all that and more. Kudos to the author for presenting an account of a tragedy in a way that feels informative and impartial. This book is proof that an excellent book can be written without grandstanding. I would give it 5 stars, but honestly I'm a little drained from the magnitude of the read. Buy this book. Just pace yourself--it's a lot of darkness to take in. But there's incredible light here too!

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