



Andrew Golden, 11 (left)
Mitchell Johnson, 13

Jonesboro, Ark.
12:35 p.m., March 24, 1998

1 teacher and 4 students killed, 10 wounded

3 rifles, 7 handguns;
stolen from relatives

Westside Middle School, 250
students, no security guard

Johnson's parents divorced;
Golden's parents both at home

Johnson—a bully and aggressive;
Golden—tough and mean-spirited

Johnson—music: Tupac Shakur;
video game: Mortal Kombat

Both rejected by girlfriends,
Johnson teased for being fat

Both at Alexander Youth Services
Center, will be released when 21

Kipland Kinkel, 15

Springfield, Ore.
8 a.m., May 21, 1998

2 students killed and more than
20 wounded, parents killed

.22-cal. semiautomatic rifle,
2 pistols; presents from father

Thurston High School, 1,400
students, no security guard

Both parents at home;
smart, popular older sister

Depressed, took Ritalin, then
Prozac; loner; tortured animals

Music: Marilyn Manson, Nirvana

Expelled from school, about to be
sent to troubled-youth program

Lane County Jail, awaiting trial
in September

Eric Harris, 18 (left)
Dylan Klebold, 17

Littleton, Colo.
11:25 a.m., April 20, 1999

1 teacher and 12 students
killed, 23 wounded

Handgun, rifle and 2 shotguns;
some bought by friends

Columbine High School, 1,900
students, armed sheriff's deputy

Both from two-parent families;
Harris' brother good athlete

Harris took antidepressant Luvox;
Klebold shy and sad

Music: Marilyn Manson; hero: Hitler;
video games: Doom and Quake

Teased by jocks, labeled "Trench
Coat Mafia," called "faggots"

Both committed
suicide

Thomas Solomon, 15

Conyers, Ga.
7:55 a.m., May 20, 1999

6 students wounded

.22-cal. rifle; taken from
home cabinet

Heritage High School, 1,300
students, armed sheriff's deputy

Mother and stepfather

Depressed, taking Ritalin

Music: Tupac Shakur;
video game: Mortal Kombat

Girlfriend broke up with him

Being held at a juvenile
detention center

ASK A CRIMINOLOGIST ABOUT A REALLY offbeat crime, and there's a good chance he can tell you the year. Tylenol bottles laced with poison on supermarket shelves? 1982. Syringes planted in Pepsi cans? 1993. Letters purportedly containing deadly anthrax? 1998. Reason: those are the years when a wave of similar crimes suddenly began appearing across the country.

Ever since the Columbine High School killings, the copycat syndrome has been working overtime. In recent weeks hundreds of schools have been hit with threats of Columbine-like violence. In Wilkes-Barre, Pa., junior and senior high school classes were canceled after a bomb threat was reported in an Internet chat group. In Spotswood, N.J., an 18-year-old was arrested after he threatened to blow up his high school. According to a Gallup poll, 37% of 13- to 17-year-olds nationwide have heard of Columbine-style threats at their own schools, and 20% said their schools had been evacuated because of a bomb threat.

What causes the epidemic of imitation? "You need a cat to do the copying," says Harvard psychologist William Pollack. "It starts with kids who are already somewhere close to the edge." Copycats model themselves on crimes, both real and fictional, that grab a lot of attention. When the movie *Money Train* came out a few years ago, with a scene of flammable liquid being squirted into a New York City token booth and set on fire, real-life robbers duplicated the act and badly burned a token clerk. After the TV movie *The Burning Bed* aired in 1984, with Farrah Fawcett playing a battered wife who set her ex-husband on fire, a viewer in Milwaukee poured gasoline on his wife and burned her to death.



POWER TRIP: Jedaiah Zinzo and Justin Schnepf, both 14, were charged last week with planning an attack on their Port Huron, Mich., middle school

Sometimes copycats are just looking for pointers on how to commit a crime effectively—so-called mode copying. In Los Angeles in the mid 1980s, robbers started breaking car windows with bricks and snatching handbags—a bluntly effective technique that was quickly picked up by imitators and came to be known as the "smash and grab." But copycat criminals are often lured by the sheer thrill of making headlines. They see America in a furor over Pepsi tampering or high school shootings, and regard it as a quick way to achieve significance. It is a power trip for the powerless, those who feel they have nothing to lose.

What can be done to discourage copycats? Some say less attention should be given to notorious crimes when they happen. The Chicago *Sun-Times* notably broke ranks with most media last month and kept the Columbine shootings off its front page. But others argue that what's needed is not less coverage but more information about how these cases turn out. "We do a good job of showing the perpetrators at the time," says Pamela Riley, executive director of the Center for Prevention of School Violence in Raleigh, N.C. "But where are the Jonesboro shooters now? They're in detention, and their lives are ruined." That's the part of the story few copycats have in mind while daydreaming of their moment in the spotlight. —**By Adam Cohen**