Guns in America: Can We Have a Better Gun Debate?

Fall 2019
Tuesdays, 4-6 p.m.
09/10/2019 - 10/15/2019
The Loft Cinema

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Course Description

In 2000, Gallup asked Americans whether they thought having a gun made their homes safer or more dangerous. More than half saw a gun as dangerous, and only a third saw guns making a home safer. Within a decade and a half, though, those numbers dramatically reversed: by 2014, 63% of respondents said that guns make homes safer. As annual deaths from gunshot wounds in the US hover just under 40,000, these survey data point to a profound shift in the social life of guns in America. The goal of this course is to explore the historical, criminological, political, legal, sociological and cultural perspectives that can help make sense of the contemporary significance of guns as tools of safety versus objects of danger. Parsing out the profound changes in gun culture and gun law that have occurred in recent decades, this course will unravel the relationship between gun rights and gun rules; between crime and self-defense; and between the past and present politics of guns.

Schedule of Topics

September 10 (Week 1):
What is the Second Amendment? And Why Does It Matter So Much?

Recommended Further Reading:


September 17 (Week 2):
Gun Trauma: The Physical, Psychological, and Social Harms of Gun Violence

Recommended Further Reading:

Armstrong, M. & J. Carlson. Work in Progress. “Speaking of Trauma: The Race Talk, the Gun Violence Talk, and the Racialization of Gun Trauma.” (Will be distributed in class.)


September 24 (Week 3):
Gun Security: The Problems that Guns Solve

Recommended Further Reading:


October 1 (Week 4):
What Works? From Gun Law to Gun Law Enforcement to Gun Criminalization

Recommended Further Reading:


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**October 8 (Week 5):**

**The Politics of Guns: Why the Gun Lobby Wins, and Whether Parkland Changed Everything**

**Recommended Further Reading**


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**October 15 (Week 6):**

**From Gun Apathy to Gun Empathy: Outlining the Future of the Gun Debate**

**Recommended Further Reading:**


**Note:** This is *not* a book about guns, but about vulnerability. My challenge to course participants is whether this text can teach us anything about how to have a better gun debate.

Carlson, J. Work in Progress. “Gun Empathy.” (Will be distributed in class).