

# **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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Pronouns: She/Her/Hers

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## **Course Description**

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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.

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## **Schedule of Topics**

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**September 10 (Week 1):**

**What is the Second Amendment? And Why Does It Matter So Much?**

*Recommended Further Reading:*

*District of Columbia v. Heller*, 128 S. Ct. 2783, 554 U.S. 570, 171 L. Ed. 2d 637 (2008).  
<https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/07pdf/07-290.pdf>

Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2018). *Loaded: A disarming history of the Second Amendment*. City Lights Books.

Winkler, A. (2011). *Gunfight: The battle over the right to bear arms in America*. WW Norton & Company.

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**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.)

Kotlowitz, A. (2019). *An American Summer: Love and Death in Chicago*. Doubleday.

Lee, J. (2012). Wounded: life after the shooting. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 642(1), 244-257.

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/23218475?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23218475?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

Nickeas, P. (2019). 'Staggering' Number of Children Exposed to Violence in Chicago. *Chicago Tribune*. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-chicago-children-violence-homicide-trauma-20190715-4fp2kqtaprgjvht6cl6ihsply4-story.html>

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

*Recommended Further Reading:*

Carlson, J. (2018). *Citizen-Protectors*. Oxford University Press.

Harcourt, B. E. (2010). *Language of the gun: Youth, crime, and public policy*. University of Chicago Press.

Messner, M. A. (2009). *King of the wild suburb: A memoir of fathers, sons and guns*. Plain View Press.

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

*Recommended Further Reading:*

Carlson, J. (2014). "Racism Retriggered." *The Society Pages*. <https://thesocietypages.org/specials/racism-retriggered/>

Hemenway, D. (2010). *Private guns, public health*. University of Michigan Press.

Kennedy, D. M. (2011). *Don't shoot: One man, a street fellowship, and the end of violence in inner-city America*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Kleck, G. (2017). *Point blank: Guns and violence in America*. Routledge.

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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*

Cullen, D. (2019). *Columbine*. Hachette UK.

Knox, J. (2019). NRA's Dirty Laundry Exposed as Pro-Gun Group Cleans House. *Ammoland*. <https://www.ammoland.com/2019/04/nras-dirty-laundry-exposed-as-pro-gun-group-cleans-house/#axzz5tln6KASB>

Richardson, J., J. Lee & D. Patton. (2019). Three Gun Violence Scholars on What is Missing from America's Gun Control Debate. *Vice*. [https://www.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/7xmxky/three-gun-violence-scholars-on-what-is-missing-from-americas-gun-control-debate](https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/7xmxky/three-gun-violence-scholars-on-what-is-missing-from-americas-gun-control-debate)

Yamane, D. (2017). What's Next? Understanding and Misunderstanding America's Gun Culture. *Understanding America's Gun Culture*. <https://gunculture2point0.wordpress.com/2018/07/31/whats-next-understanding-and-misunderstanding-americas-gun-culture-book-chapter-final/>

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**October 15 (Week 6):  
From Gun Apathy to Gun Empathy: Outlining the Future of the Gun Debate**

*Recommended Further Reading:*

Brown, B. (2015). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. Penguin.

\*\*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).