Edited by
Benita Heiskanen, Albion M. Butters,
and Pekka M. Kolehmainen

Up in Arms: Gun Imaginaries in Texas

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Figures

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CHAPTER 1

Loaded with the Past, Coloring the Present: The Power of Gun Imaginaries

Benita Heiskanen, Albion M. Butters, and Pekka M. Kolehmainen

Up in Arms: Gun Imaginaries in Texas explores the imaginaries and stories that guns tell about U.S. history, society, and culture, with a specific focus on Texas. Since the Second Amendment to the Constitution grants citizens the right to keep and bear firearms, in the United States guns have a significance unlike anywhere else in the world. The vast number of guns inevitably impacts the everyday maneuvering of people in various ways, but imaginaries constructed about them also have significant performative power and ramifications for individuals, communities, and the nation. Conceived here as gateways between the real world and ideological abstractions, imaginaries serve various important functions, driving legislative efforts, political agendas, community building, and social divisions. As readily seen in gun debates historically and today, gun imaginaries create and reflect divergent social realities, power relations, and lived experiences. On the one hand, contemporary gun imaginaries are loaded with the past through nostalgia, cultural artifacts, and a continuity of identities; on the other, they color a temporal horizon of expectations. This volume thus uses both historical and contemporary imaginaries as a lens through which to explore and better understand a range of cultural aspects intertwined with gun debates in the United States, and in Texas in particular.

Up in Arms offers an illustrative and timely example of the manners in which gun policy, legislation, and culture have become part of an ongoing contestation between state and federal levels. As the right to keep and bear arms has been fundamentally tied to the understanding of individual and collective rights to defend oneself and one's property and family, the act of being armed is laden with spatial and place-based meanings in different contexts and locations. The Lone Star State—which is clearly a part of the U.S. but in many ways has sought to differentiate itself from the rest of the Union—has built its history, identity, and cultural mythology on stories based on various aspects of gun culture. Imaginaries provide a particularly useful operational tool to delineate the ways in which Texans have negotiated local versus national identities and historical legacies in contemporary debates, and for the chapters in this volume to dissect a range of issues, touching upon, among other things,

individual versus collective security, de jure versus de facto policies, and political versus social hierarchies.

This book contributes to a recent body of scholarship that uses imaginaries as ways to conceive the workings of cultural signification and the formation of communities.[1] First and foremost, imaginaries provide a range of dis/connecting nodes through which cultural, social, and political phenomena come together or collide. Imaginaries are a means by which groups of people forge connections, interact, and shape shared narratives and belief systems; they are also explicit sites of conflict when the projected imaginaries differ from one another. Sharing or communicating imaginaries with others are a powerful way to assign meaning to individuals, groups, communities, and the nation.[2] The gun debates examined in this volume are filled with imaginaries that people share with like-minded peers, though they may appear entirely unintelligible to those on the opposing side. In this way, gun imaginaries reflect convergences as well as divergences in cultural, social, and political processes that are negotiated within different temporal and spatial spheres.

Each contributor has been given the freedom to delineate their own theoretical and methodological approaches to the concept of the imaginary, but some shared principles guide the overarching framework. The volume's discussion approaches gun imaginaries as a three-tiered process, focusing first on the ways in which people imagine firearms as constituting their identities, social relations, and physical surroundings. Secondly, it sheds light on how such imaginings about weapons are channeled into stories, images, beliefs, and myths. And, thirdly, it reflects upon how gun imaginaries affect sensory perception, spatial maneuvering, and embodied reactions. The range of topics, temporalities, and approaches discussed allow the chapters to focus on gun imaginaries, images, and/or imagi(ni)ng from distinct viewpoints. By not defining *the imaginary* in any narrow sense for the entire volume, our aim is to demonstrate the range of its manifestations, readings, and interpretations, some of which are frequently—and deliberately—in conflict or contestation with one another. Given the volatile sentiments surrounding U.S. gun culture, the volume seeks to demonstrate the ways in which imaginaries serve as tools to explicate such discordant social realities.

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1 For an overview, see Claudia Strauss, "The Imaginary," *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 3 (2006): 322–44; Hans Alma and Guido Vanheeswijck, "Introduction to Social Imaginaries in a Globalizing World," in *Social Imaginaries in a Globalizing World*, eds. Hans Alma and Guido Vanheeswijck (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

2 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23–30.

Opening with a historical discussion of guns as part and parcel of Texan history and identity, the book turns to other watershed moments in which gun debates assumed special relevance in Texas and had an impact on broader gun debates in the United States. Forever imprinted into the national consciousness was the mass shooting at The University of Texas at Austin on August 1, 1966, the first of its kind on a U.S. college campus. Due to its highly mediatized nature, the "Tower shooting" has been repeatedly referenced as the progenitor of the contemporary phenomenon of public mass shootings, even if other instances of mass gun violence had previously occurred.[3] Despite being a tremendous source of trauma for Austinites, the flagship university's failure to find ways to deal with the shooting in a satisfactory manner left an open wound for generations to come. With a lack of any collective discussion or space for the local community to mourn, the emergence of cultural imaginaries finally provided tools for locals to begin to come to terms with the tragedy and try to comprehend the incomprehensible. Drawing on cultural and media texts, as well as firsthand accounts, *Up in Arms* brings up the multiple ways in which vestiges of the shooting that took place half a century earlier linger on and on, resurfacing and assuming new significance in policy debates, specific cultural contexts, and media texts.

Fifty years to the day after the Tower shooting, Texas yet again became the epicenter of U.S. gun debates with the implementation of the Campus Carry (SB 11) legislation in 2016, allowing licensed gun carriers to bring firearms into public university buildings, including classrooms. Once more, as if history were repeating itself, outside of legislation and policymaking, administrators found it hard to address the potential impact of guns penetrating educational establishments. And again, against the backdrop of the iconic Tower from which the sniper had fired his deadly rounds, a whole host of individuals and groups took it upon themselves to confront and contest the administration's viewpoint by resorting to imaginaries that the official eye was unwilling to see. In addition to the Campus Carry legislation, the contributors to this volume address a range of other relevant efforts—such as the passing of SB 60 in 1995, which allowed licensed Texans to carry concealed handguns in most public areas across the state—elucidating the construction of gun imaginaries amidst important legal milestones.

Introducing original research data comprising fieldwork, interviews, and visual materials as well as cutting-edge cultural and media analysis, the volume poses three main research questions: (1) How are guns used to explain

3 See Jaclyn Schildkraut and H. Jaymi Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016), 29–53.

history, identity, culture, and social relations? (2) How do different generations of Texans depict and negotiate the ramifications of gun legislation in their quotidian contexts? (3) What do the imaginaries and narratives surrounding gun culture reveal about issues that ostensibly have no bearing on firearms? The volume's ten chapters probe these questions by focusing on temporal, spatial, social, political, narrative, and visual imaginaries that display and contest the meanings of guns during watershed moments that bring the gun question to the forefront of societal debates. Building a bridge between theoretical and everyday viewpoints, the volume contextualizes the multiple sets of imaginaries associated with gun culture in Texas and the United States. The connection between the theory and praxis behind gun imaginaries demonstrates the various ramifications, scales, and significance that firearms—and debates about guns—have beyond their actual, technical function.

1 Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production Processes

The history of scholarship on guns in the U.S. has been caught up in an ideological battle between forces behind the gun debate. For decades, for example, the National Rifle Association (NRA) sought—and successfully managed—to prevent government-sponsored research on gun violence. The Dickey Amendment, passed in 1996 as a rider for funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, effectively prevented the CDC from studying connections between gun ownership and public health. Moreover, according to investigative journalism, the CDC even worked internally to quash research, restricting language on guns and gun policy and also flagging research on guns for the NRA.[4] Though gun studies as a field did continue to exist in academic institutions and other organizations throughout this period, the tide has only recently begun to turn. A limited repeal of the Dickey Amendment was passed in 2019, and government-funded scholarship on guns is now resuming. At the same time, there has been increased support by universities and the academic press to promote gun research, such as "MUSE in Focus: Addressing Gun Violence," through which open access has been granted to select books on the subject.[5] Supported by the Academy of Finland, the current volume similarly

4 Michael Luo, "N.R.A. Stymies Firearms Research, Scientists Say," *New York Times*, January 25, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/26/us/26guns.html, accessed April 16, 2021.

5 "MUSE in Focus: Addressing Gun Violence," Project MUSE, https://about.muse.jhu.edu/muse/gun-violence/, accessed April 16, 2021.

offers open access in order to promote easy accessibility of research on guns to scholars across disciplinary boundaries. Also, by expanding the research beyond scholarly sources, this project not only exposes the ways in which different modes of communication are tied to questions of grassroots activism and collective agency, but also opens the discussion to a wider audience.

Because gun debates in the United States intertwine a range of historical and legal aspects with social, cultural, and political ramifications, gun discussions are highly fraught (and often volatile), being contingent on the particular viewpoints from which the subject is approached. Given their complexity, research on guns springs from multiple scholarly frameworks, often emphasizing monodisciplinary approaches that employ singular methodologies, from nationwide surveys to local ethnographies. Some of the most prominent lenses through which guns have been researched fall under the domains of sociology, criminology, and public health, whose quantitative methods afford strong statistical data on gun ownership and the opinions and experiences of those who own guns and those who are affected by them.[6] Primarily due to two factors, the rise in school shootings in the U.S. and the passing of so-called Campus Carry laws in multiple states, which allow licensed carriers to bring handguns on university grounds and even into the classroom, education has also become an important aspect of gun studies.[7]

While these approaches provide a helpful background for this volume's discussion, the purpose of this book is to explicitly move beyond any monodisciplinary or quantitative frameworks toward transdisciplinary knowledge production processes. The shift from quantitative evidence as the primary site of inquiry presents an opening for scholars from other fields—from anthropology to philosophy and American Studies—to further problematize the

6 Amongst others, see Gary Kleck, *Targeting Guns: Firearms and their Control* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997); Kristin Goss, *Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); Angela Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Robert Spitzer, *The Politics of Gun Control*, 8th ed. (New York: Routledge, [1995] 2021); Mark R. Joslyn, *The Gun Gap: The Influence of Gun Ownership on Political Behavior and Attitudes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

7 On Campus Carry, see, in particular, the various works published by the research team at the University of Turku, funded by the Academy of Finland, which provide an overview of the different types of existing literature on the subject, while respectively approaching it from such diverse angles as American Studies, Gender Studies, Urban Studies, Religious Studies, and Security Studies (https://sites.utu.fi/jmc/campus-carry/publications/).

complex reality of guns and bring fresh theoretical approaches to the subject.[8] By going beyond disciplinary viewpoints, we offer a discussion that takes into consideration quotidian experiences, grassroots activism, policymaking, and cultural discourses that reveal the tensions inherent in debates about guns in the United States, as manifested through the case studies in Texas.

Indeed, the burgeoning literature addressing the significance of guns in society has led to self-reflective examination of the scholarship itself beyond polemics of "gun control" and "gun rights." Jennifer Carlson, for example, has underlined the need for researchers to understand the impact of their work on gun policy. Thus, drawing a parallel to David Yamane's Gun Culture 1.0 and Gun Culture 2.0, she differentiates between Gun Studies 1.0 and Gun Studies 2.0.[9] As discussed by Butters in this volume, Gun Culture 1.0 refers to gun ownership for hunting and sports and Gun Culture 2.0 involves self-protection. If Gun Studies 1.0 has emphasized "seeing scientific evidence as a foundation for generating consensus for the betterment of society with regard to guns," including generating consensus about public policy, Gun Studies 2.0 "addresses the question of guns in society by focusing on the conditions that shape the form that the gun debate takes, as well as the meanings that are attached to guns as objects of danger, on the one hand, and safety, on the other."[10] In making this distinction, Carlson seeks to encourage researchers to transform the larger debate by looking not only at *what* things matter, but *why* they matter.[11]

This volume uses the concept of imaginaries to answer Carlson's challenge. A foundational text for this approach is Charles Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries*, published in 2004. For Taylor, imaginaries have to do with the way that people conceive their social existence, how they connect themselves to their peers, and how they form expectations and normative notions of what is commonplace in their society.[12] Understood in this way, imaginaries are

8 As the briefest of examples, see Charles F. Springwood, "Gun Concealment, Display, and Magical Habits of the Body," *Critique of Anthropology* 34, no. 4 (2014): 450–71; Firmin DeBrabander, *Do Guns Make Us Free? Democracy and the Armed Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); Mike Bourne, "Guns Don't Kill People, Cyborgs Do: A Latourian Provocation for Transformatory Arms Control and Disarmament," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 24, no. 1 (2012): 141–63.

9 David Yamane, "The Sociology of U.S. Gun Culture," *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 7 (2017): 1–10.

10 Jennifer Carlson, "Gun Studies and the Politics of Evidence," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 16 (2020): 185, 190.

11 Moving beyond the limitations of monodisciplinary approaches, albeit still with a focus on policy, see also Jennifer Carlson, Kristin Goss, and Harel Shapira, eds., *Gun Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Politics, Policy, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

12 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

the conditions which allow social practices to take place, and they can only be gleaned by observing these practices.[13] Imaginaries are instilled in and mediated by symbols, stories, and representations that members of a social group share with one another.[14] Thus, the concept is related to the well-known formulation by Benedict Anderson of nations as "imagined communities," where people frame themselves as a singular community by means of an act of imagination.[15] Similarly, describing the "imaginary institution of society," Cornelius Castoriadis notes, "The social world is, in every instance, constituted and articulated as a function of such system of significations, and these significations exist, once they have been constituted, in the mode of what we called the *actual imaginary*."[16] In this account, imaginaries are the basis for the constitution of a social existence. Castoriadis's imaginaries encompass both internalized understandings of societal norms and imaginative and creative projections of what society might entail, that is, the actualized understanding of the realities of the status quo and the projected utopias and dystopias that can be envisioned.[17]

As a theoretical lens, imaginaries also allow consideration of the various agencies involved in the debates we examine. Through their connection to imagination, imaginaries are fundamentally *creative* processes and are constantly shaped by the people who use them. They are the constructed platforms upon which political and social actions take place.[18] For example, Molly Andrews has emphasized how aspects of imagination are ubiquitous in people's everyday existence, not just on a level of abstraction but in the ways people maneuver through their daily lives.[19] Meanwhile, in the tradition founded in the thinking of Jacques Lacan, the imaginary has been conceived of as a fantasy that has the power to obscure reality.[20] The concept of the imaginary thus

13 Alma and Vanheeswijck, "Introduction," 3.

14 Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "Towards New Imaginaries: An Introduction," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 5. See also Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 167–73.

15 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

16 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975), 93.

17 Strauss, "The Imaginary," 324.

18 Emiliano Treré, *Hybrid Media Activism: Ecologies, Imaginaries, Algorithms* (London: Routledge, 2019), 107.

19 Molly Andrews, *Narrative Imagination and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

20 Strauss, "The Imaginary," 326–29; Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2005), 17–32.

allows the chapters in this volume to move between creative visions and everyday assumptions as well as shared conceptions and conflicting testimonials.

Given that guns invite such fierce polemic and debate, it is not uncommon for authors working on the topic to take positions on either side. In some cases, this can take the form of activism, such as the case of faculty feeling threatened by Campus Carry and the perceived encroachment of guns—actual or imagined—onto their territory.[21] A recent volume edited by Patricia Somers and Matt Valentine, for instance, is advertised as follows: "While making the case that campus carry legislation is harmful, the book gathers some of the very best thinking around enacting such policies and offers valuable recommendations for mitigating its effects and preserving university values."[22] In other cases, the motives for writing from a specific point of view are less clear, but the scholarship has been called into question. Prominent examples include the controversy ensuing from pro-gun advocate Clayton Cramer's critique of Michael A. Bellesiles's history of guns or the furor surrounding the work of gun apologist John Lott, who finally left academia altogether to form the Crime Prevention Research Center.[23]

The purpose of the current volume is not to take a stand on activist debates ranging around specific legislations; rather, its point is to explicate the multiple viewpoints through which the gun issue is comprehended and rationalized. In other words, we do not take any moral stand on the issue but seek to help readers understand why the groups promoting and opposing guns think the way they do. On an individual level, for both the advocates and opponents of various gun legislation, guns are often understood as a safety issue, entailing various conflicting perceptions of security and insecurity. In addition to addressing grassroots activism, the discussion also delves into rhetorical tropes and online videos produced during the contestation of the Campus Carry law. Finally, an examination of both official and activist images reveals a dynamic visual landscape, offering new insights into reactions to armed

21 See, e.g., Firman DeBrabander, "How Guns Could Censor College Classrooms," *Atlantic*, March 4, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/the-steep-cost-of-allowing-guns-in-the-college-classroom/472296/, accessed April 16, 2021; Christopher M. Wolcott, "The Chilling Effect of Campus Carry: How the Kansas Campus Carry Statute Impermissibly Infringes Upon the Academic Freedom of Individual Professors and Faculty Members," *University of Kansas Law Review* 65 (2017): 875–911.

22 Patricia Somers and Matt Valentine, eds., *Campus Carry: Confronting a Loaded Issue in Higher Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2020), https://www.hepg.org/hep-home/books/campus-carry, accessed April 16, 2021.

23 Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes, "The Bogus Claims of the NRA's Favorite Social Scientist, Debunked," *Vox*, August 30, 2016, https://www.vox.com/2016/8/30/12700222/nra-social-scientist-claims-debunked, accessed April 16, 2021.

academic space and also contributing new overtures to transdisciplinary and multimethodological approaches to studying the ramifications of guns in people's lives. Such types of investigation, we argue, particularly advance knowledge production processes within the field of American Studies.

While recent scholarship demonstrates that there is a growing demand to understand the presence of guns in U.S. history, society, and culture, American Studies discussions on the topic are few and far between. Thus, *Up in Arms* contributes to the literature by providing a timely and transdisciplinary treatment of guns as a complex nexus that includes ideological assumptions, policy-making, everyday experiences, cultural expressions, and individual senses of security and insecurity. By offering a snapshot of Texas gun culture—a goldmine for imaginaries—it also contributes to broader debates about the visceral ramifications of the U.S. Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms. In relation to the existing body of literature related to guns in the United States, this book's decidedly transdisciplinary lens and strong component of media, cultural, and visual analysis open up a pathway for a phenomenon-based discussion that demonstrates the significance of gun culture beyond disciplinary boundaries.

The volume's multimethod approach is based on team fieldwork, personal interviews, visual materials, media and social media sources, and a representative survey of UT Austin's undergraduate student body. The viewpoints presented in *Up in Arms*, including those of both pro-gun and anti-gun groups but also covering social media discourses, help to illuminate the gun issue for a wide readership rather than merely participating in nation-based debates alone. By teasing out and identifying various strands—locating the relationships between race, class, and gender in activism against Campus Carry, for example, or revealing how the history of Texas bears on the way in which guns are formative for contemporary Texan identities today—the volume directly engages the competing ideologies of the pro-gun and anti-gun movements. On the other hand, the authors' shared theoretical use of imaginaries provides a coherent point of focus and reveals similarities between the various forces. By the same token, explicitly concentrating on Texas as the epicenter of gun debates frames a discrete context for the study and supports concrete analysis of specific aspects of gun culture, enabling a review of their interrelated historical, social, and cultural significance.

2 Chapters in this Volume

Alongside historical materials and sources, the original research of this volume is based on fieldwork and interviews conducted by the Academy of

Finland-funded Campus Carry research team in Austin in the spring semesters of 2018 and 2019.[24] Considering a range of temporal contexts within which gun debates have assumed particular relevance, the chapters highlight the ways in which campus communities have experienced, negotiated, and challenged the legislation on multiple fronts. Alongside the lived experiences, the volume underscores visual cultural ramifications of the legislation by examining the official and unofficial images related to the legislation. The multiple imaginaries employed by members of the community to delineate and critique legislative efforts exemplify the dynamic relationship between the various power players involved, ranging from state legislators, university administrators, stakeholders, and members of the university community, each with their own ideological and political leanings.

Laura Hernández-Ehrisman opens the volume with an examination of the history of Texas and Texan identity in relation to gun culture, focusing in particular on such foundational symbols as the Alamo and the Texas Rangers. As a powerful imaginary, the Alamo sets the stage for the Texas Republic and a shared collective identity of fierce independence. The Rangers, the original "good guys with guns," embody frontier masculinity but also represent the first Western vigilantes to be endowed with legal authority. Drawing on the scholarship of historical memory and power, the chapter examines how these stories have been remembered and are retold by gun enthusiasts today—despite their checkered reality. Even as Texas mythologies are utilized in the construction of a "usable past" of heroic white masculinity, they ignore the trauma of manifest destiny and negate the history of enslavement and the violent removal of indigenous and Mexican settlers. Through this diachronic overview, Hernández-Ehrisman reveals how these symbols continue to shape contemporary imaginings, state policy, and the popular and consumer culture of Texas.

Pekka M. Kolehmainen continues the historical angle of the volume by exploring the act of political imagining around guns, centering specifically on the temporal imaginaries constructed about the Founding Fathers in gun debates in Texas. The chapter questions how the groups on both sides invoke the Founding Fathers as both objects and subjects of political imaginations. On the one hand, political activists have created imaginary historical versions of the Founding Fathers to place in relation to their own political imaginations in the modern day, using them to describe their stance as a continuum of a wider

24 The research was conducted by the John Morton Center for North American Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. In the United States, the project was hosted by the Department of American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin. The team also collaborated with St. Edward's University and Austin Community College.

arc of history. On the other hand, the debates have touched on the potential limits of the imaginations of the Founding Fathers themselves, sparking discussions and disagreements on what those historical figures could have imagined in their own times. Using a body of materials drawn from media, activists, and fieldwork interviews to explore these two points and to elucidate through them the larger dynamics of political conflict in the contemporary United States, Kolehmainen asks how the temporal imaginaries of the Founding Fathers constructed around guns are drawn into larger ideological tensions that govern modern politics.

Lotta Kähkönen shifts the frame to the infamous Tower shooting at UT Austin on August 1, 1966, with a focus on public memory. Despite being one of the first and most memorable mass shootings by a single individual in U.S. history, in large part because of the wide media coverage it received, memorialization and discussion of the event was also suppressed by the institution. This chapter explores the mediation and narrativization of the Tower shooting as a kind of cultural trauma, a product of history and politics which was subject to reinterpretation. To this end, it examines a KTBC special news report, aired immediately after the shooting, and two narratives, Elizabeth Crook's novel *Monday, Monday* (2014) and Keith Maitland's animated documentary film *Tower* (2016), created in response to a collective need for commemoration several decades later. Serving as an imaginary of community experiences and providing a means for mourning, these narratives are shown to reify a particular type of imagery with the power to shape the collective trauma and its affective resonance. The chapter specifically focuses on the gendered figures of heroes, victims, and survivors in constituting the collective trauma that emerges as a result of a cultural crisis. Analyzing how these figures are highlighted in the narratives, and what cultural values and concerns the gendered imagery reveals in relation to mass shootings as traumatizing experiences, Kähkönen opens perspectives on how the collective trauma of mass shooting is processed.

Fast-forwarding fifty years, Benita Heiskanen keeps the focus on UT Austin by examining the imaginaries surrounding the SB 11 legislation on Campus Carry. Despite previous failed efforts to make it legal for holders of concealed carry licenses to bring their guns onto public university premises, including classrooms, the Texas legislature garnered enough votes to finally pass the law in 2015. The campus community, local newspapers, and activist groups tried to make sense of the hypothetical realities of an armed campus. The following year, on the very anniversary of the Tower shooting, the new law was implemented. Drawing on two town hall-style public debates organized on campus and internet responses related to them, newspaper reporting from the *Austin*

American-Statesman, and firsthand experiences from students, faculty, and administrators, this chapter probes the discussions surrounding the Campus Carry legislation before and after its implementation. It thereby reveals that debates about firearms frequently have little—if anything—to do with guns. And therein lies their power. For example, what may ostensibly appear as a narrative of self-protection upon closer look exposes implicit assumptions about race, gender, and class relations. Disentangling the multiple layers triggered by the gun debates, Heiskanen reveals a heterogeneous community not only grappling with firearms but multiple social conflicts amplified within the armed campus space.

Mila Seppälä engages with radical political imagination in youth-led gun control advocacy groups in Texas by investigating the types of actions, activist subjectivities, and utopian visions for the future that it has produced. Continuing the discussion of Campus Carry, this chapter traces how the "absurdist direct action campaign" staged by a group of young women at the flagship campus in the fall of 2016 radically reimagined political action in the sphere of gun violence prevention. In the absence of political opportunities, the so-called "Cocks not Glocks" protest against Campus Carry saw students brandishing dildos in order to draw attention to what they felt was the ridiculousness of U.S. gun laws. Seppälä argues that the event used humor as a way to mitigate the precarious experiences and feelings of helplessness that firearms on campus produced among certain segments of the university community. Pivoting to an examination of how radical imagination has also been evoked in Texas during demonstrations of the national gun control movement March For Our Lives, the chapter exposes how a protest built around an imagined generational community led to a confluence of different issue-based groups, facilitating collective processes of imagining larger—even utopian—political projects that are uniquely "American" in nature. As Seppälä reveals, these examples of everyday resistance and broader collective action in Texas represent an important moment in the re-emergence of political hope among the Left in the United States, which has been missing since "the Long Sixties."

Juha A. Vuori approaches imaginaries as a social phenomenon manifested in vernacular practices of representation. Affecting what we are able to comprehend, through what Jacques Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible," our sense of reality, or a "common sense," imaginaries construct different realities; they affect what can be seen, heard, and felt in and through their popular representations. This chapter focuses on visual performances and videos promoting Campus Carry that were produced during the contestation of the SB 11 legislation at UT Austin in 2016. To examine those supporting gun rights, it analyzes a video of a performance of a "mock shooting" on the streets of Austin,

close to campus premises, made to reveal the vulnerability caused by gun-free zones, and a professionally produced short that caricatures a prominent student activist from the "Cocks Not Glocks" group against Campus Carry. In this way, Vuori argues that imaginaries shape how public morality and a sense of virtue relate to such contentious issues, mediating socially constructed meanings and understandings of both security and insecurity, and thereby allow exploration of visions of the political that are contained in them.

Albion M. Butters locates the religious aspect of firearms in terms of fetishism, which has become increasingly manifested through a shift in gun culture over the last fifty years. While the analysis follows the traditional definition of the fetish as a power object that offers affordances to the religious individual, alternative definitions of fetish are applicable as well, that is, understanding the gun as a sexual symbol or commodity. Over the decades, as the reason to own a gun has increasingly become a matter of self-defense and security rather than sporting or hunting, it has opened a space for new imaginaries of modern-day masculine heroes with religious undertones. In Texas, this is exemplified by the passing of laws to allow concealed or open carry of guns in churches, and local parishes sanctioning licensed gun owners to protect the faithful. After establishing the predominance of Christianity in Texas and the proclivity among white evangelicals to favor guns, the chapter traces the nature of faith as intertwined with both politics and ideology. Butters concludes that firearms fetishism and gun imaginaries inform identity, particularly in the construction of a new moral order.

The penultimate chapter of the volume by Albion M. Butters, Benita Heiskanen, and Lotta Kähkönen is a photo essay that uses materials collected during fieldwork in Texas to illustrate the visual arc of the research project on Campus Carry. Comprising 17 full-color images with captions, the photo essay displays both formal and informal imaginaries dealing with the "before and after" of the implementation of the SB 11 legislation. The purpose of the photo essay is to provide an alternative interpretative lens to the conceptualization and experiencing of firearms in the campus space. Through the visual materials, we get a broader and more complex understanding of the ways in which people take a stand on policymaking. Moreover, the visual imagery provides a useful tool to penetrate official discourses that might not be revealed otherwise. This chapter calls attention to imaging as an alternative modus of knowledge production, one which not only carries powerful meanings but also shapes the delineation of the campus landscape. The visual treatment in this volume provides an important linkage between theoretical discussion and the experiential component, which focuses on both the research subjects' and scholars' spatial maneuvering within and outside of academia.

The concluding chapter by Benita Heiskanen and Pekka M. Kolehmainen wraps up the volume by pointing to the explanatory, social, and performative aspects of gun imaginaries, as understood through the various historical contexts and interpretive lenses that the contributors engage. The transdisciplinary American Studies explications of gun debates demonstrate the great significance invested in weapons culture in the United States, be it on societal, cultural, or academic levels. *Guns as imaginaries* galvanize individuals who are *up in arms*, while their actions and reactions reverberate into further imaginaries; thus, individuals and communities simultaneously shape and are shaped by the broader power relations that they are necessarily a part of. Ultimately, the exploration of *Texas as a gun imaginary* and *guns as a Texan imagery* provides a toolbox and a roadmap for future discussions of the significance of firearms in other geographic contexts beyond the United States.

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CHAPTER 2

We are Texas Because of Guns: Firearms in Texan and "American" Imaginaries

Laura Hernández-Ehrisman

1 Introduction

On August 3, 2019, a 21-year-old Anglo man named Patrick Crusius drove for ten hours from Allen, a suburb of Dallas, to a Walmart in El Paso, Texas.[1] He posted a four-page manifesto on 8chan, an imageboard website favored by the alt-right, claiming "This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas," and then proceeded to open fire with his AK-47 rifle. He killed 23 people, making it one of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history. A Texan interviewed in *The Guardian* a week later, Dan Golvach, reflected on the event, "It's just a moral disaster, it's heartbreaking." However, he did not wish to tighten the state's firearms laws, noting, "We are Texas because of guns."[2] This chapter is an exploration of the significance of this statement, which provides context for understanding both the El Paso tragedy and Texas's gun culture. Texas is a state that often evokes images of the Wild West, a place where everyone carries a gun strapped on their hip. More than any other state in the United States, Texas is represented in popular culture as a place filled with guns.

For this chapter, I am drawing on Benedict Anderson's familiar notion of "imagined communities," his particular attention to narratives of national origins, and the ways that these stories create a framework for understanding contemporary collective identity.[3] Even today, many Texans understand themselves as a distinct community within the United States. They draw this imagined community from the popular narratives of the battles to make Texas its own nation. This collective memory, the Texas imaginary, has continued to form a foundation of their sense of identity long after the state was

1 In this article I use the term "Anglo" to refer to White, Non-Hispanic Texans.

2 Tom Dart, "'We are Texas because of Guns': El Paso Carnage Unlikely to Dent State's Gun Culture," *Guardian*, August 9, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/09/el-paso-shooting-texas-guns, accessed May 4, 2021.

3 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004514676_003

incorporated into the United States. Drawing on Charles Taylor's concept of social imaginaries, this chapter is an exploration of how many Texans link their regional identity to the legends and popular mythologies of Texas history. Golvach's statement "We are Texas because of guns" also illustrates how deeply gun culture is intertwined within the Texas imaginary.

Following insights by Jonathan Metzl, this chapter addresses the symbolic nature of guns and recognizes "ways that firearms emerge as powerful symbols shaped by history, politics, geography, economy, media, and culture, as well as by actors such as gun manufacturers or lobbying groups."[4] Gun culture is not merely about gun ownership, but what guns mean to the people who own them, and to those who do not. Guns have become deeply engrained in many Texans' sense of themselves *as Texans*. After all, the mass shooting that happened in Dayton, Ohio just hours after the El Paso massacre did not bring about a similar reflection on Ohioan state identity. Texas's gun culture has been integral to the Texas imaginary, for those both within and outside of the state. And this gun culture has also been inextricably tied to a frontier mythology that legitimized white supremacy—guns as a defense against a perceived "invasion." The dominant narratives of Texas have been drawn as tales of heroic white masculinity which justified the violent removal of Indigenous peoples and ethnic Mexicans, the "settling" of the frontier, and the racial terror at the heart of manifest destiny.[5]

The myth of the frontier, as Richard Slotkin writes, is "arguably the longest-lived of American myths"; it is a persistent imaginary, reemerging in the metaphors we use to describe current wars and political speeches.[6] Pierre Atlas describes the links between frontier mythology and U.S. gun culture. As he notes, "a central message of America's frontier mythology is the justification of violence and gunplay where, significantly, lawbreakers are often lionized."[7]

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4 Jonathan Metzl, "What Guns Mean: The Symbolic Lives of Firearms," *Palgrave Communications* 5, no. 35 (2019): 2.

5 Manifest destiny is a nineteenth-century doctrine describing the idea that Anglo-American westward expansion across the continent was inevitable and justified. The doctrine was used to legitimize the United States' acquisition of western territories, and to justify the war with Mexico in 1846–1848 and the removal of Indigenous nations. Generally tied to the idea that Anglo-American culture is superior to others, the term was first coined by John O'Sullivan in 1845. D. S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, "Manifest Destiny," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 2, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/event/Manifest-Destiny, accessed May 4, 2021.

6 Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800–1890* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 15.

7 Pierre M. Atlas, "Of Peaceable Kingdoms and Lawless Frontiers: Exploring the Relationship between History, Mythology and Gun Culture in the North American West," *American Review of Canadian Studies*, March 2019: 25–49.

Scott Melzer connects this to contemporary culture, using the concept of "frontier masculinity" to explain how these mythologized narratives of the frontier appeal to contemporary working- and middle-class White men.[8] Frontier masculinity, as he defines it, focuses on the values of self-reliance, self-defense, and self-determination.[9] Guns are the foundation of independence, of freedom. The most concise description of how White male gun enthusiasts commonly perceive their role is the phrase "good guys with guns." Explaining how hegemonic masculinity and white supremacy shape these men's worldview, Angela Stroud writes: "Men see their gun carrying as central to what it means to be a good husband and father who is able to protect his wife and children from danger; they see their own gun carrying as noble and just, and they attribute violence and aggression to others, particularly Black and Latino men."[10] Thus, White men imagine themselves as defenders of the frontier homestead, arming themselves against the perceived threat of non-White men.

This imaginary takes a distinct form in the collective historical memory of Texas, particularly in the stories of the defenders of the Alamo and the Texas Rangers. These were the first White Texan "good guys with guns." In this chapter, I trace key moments when the Alamo and the Texas Rangers emerge as symbols of Texas's gun culture, how these symbols evolve over time, and how they are tied to the state's firearms policies. Drawing on the scholarship of historical memory and power, I address how these mythologies are utilized in the construction of a "usable past" for Texan gun enthusiasts, in order to examine ways that many Texans would make sense of guns, and how Texas's gun culture would figure in the national imagination.[11]

As W. Fitzhugh Brundage writes, historical memory involves "the active labor of selecting, structuring, and imposing meaning on the past rather than

8 Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

9 Melzer, 29.

10 Angela Stroud, "Good Guys With Guns," *Gender and Society* 26, no. 2 (2012): 216.

11 The phrase "usable past" is a phrase coined by Van Wyck Brooks in 1918 to describe a reconstruction of the past that would be useful for contemporary concerns. Brooks was referring to literary history, but other intellectuals in the early twentieth century soon adapted the term for a pragmatic approach to history, where American memory could be mobilized as a resource for Progressive-era reform. Scholars in later years would continue to use the term to refer to the ways that the past can be invented and reconstructed to serve the needs of the present. For a more complete discussion of this, see Casey Nelson Blake, "The Usable Past, the Comfortable Past and the Civic Past, Memory in Contemporary America," *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (1999): 423–35.

the mere reproduction of inherent historical truths."[12] Historical memory is also essential for making sense of our own individual and collective identities.[13] The stories we tell ourselves about the past help us connect our individual lives to larger group narratives, as members of families, communities, regions, and nations.[14] These stories impact how we act in the present. Slotkin notes that these stories become prescriptive metaphors that provide a roadmap for how we engage with the world.[15] These are the stories that Texans tell themselves. These are the stories that people outside of the state tell about Texas, where they project both their celebration of gun rights and their fears of gun violence. In sum, Texas's gun culture revolves around how Texans imagine guns and how the nation imagines Texas.

2 The Alamo and the Creation Myth of Texas

Understanding Texas's gun culture begins at the central site of the state's collective memory, the Alamo. Holly Benchley Brear has described the story of the Alamo battle as Texas's creation myth.[16] The story centers on a small rebel army made up of Anglo "Texians" and Tejano settlers who were fighting for Texas's independence from Mexico.[17] They had taken control of San Antonio de Béxar, the capital of the Mexican province, but Santa Anna's troops were marching to reclaim the territory. The rebels, led by Lt. Colonel William Barret Travis and Jim Bowie, fortified the Mission San Antonio de Valero—the Alamo—against attack. When the Mexican army arrived, they hoisted a red flag atop San Fernando Cathedral, indicating that this would be siege warfare where no quarter would be given and no prisoners taken. Santa Anna did offer the rebel forces

12 W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 5.

13 Tiya Miles, *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 13.

14 Miles, 13. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

15 Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 19.

16 Holly Beachley Brear, *Inherit the Alamo: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

17 Anglo-Americans who had resided in the Mexican provinces of Coahuila and Texas often referred to themselves as "Texians." During the Texas Revolution, this term also came to refer to Anglo-Americans who fought for its independence.

a chance to surrender, but Travis responded with a cannon shot.[18] With no reinforcements from other Texian forces, the Alamo defenders were vastly outnumbered by a far larger Mexican army, and yet they chose to stay and fight. Walling themselves in the crumbling Spanish mission, they managed to hold off Santa Anna's forces for 13 days, but ultimately were defeated. Nearly 200 Texians died in the battle. Santa Anna lost almost 600 soldiers, though. His weakened army would be defeated at the battle of San Jacinto a little over a month later, ending the war and ensuring Texan independence. Because of these historic events, the story of the battle of the Alamo has been mythologized as a heroic sacrifice that birthed the Texas Republic in 1836, and even today the Alamo site is often described by many Texans as sacred ground.

The story of the Alamo has also been closely tied to manifest destiny and to Slotkin's concept of regeneration through violence. Slotkin describes what he calls an "American mythogenesis," where explorers, hunters, traders, and other frontiersmen were the true founding fathers. In order to be regenerated, the nation needed to be violently reborn from nature, and frontiersmen were the ones willing to sacrifice themselves for this cause.[19] Beachley Brear articulates this connection when she writes that "the Alamo also serves mythologically as a second birthplace for the American, who undergoes a regeneration in the sacrificial death inside the Alamo image. … Here the death of heroes, coupled with the near-miracle victory of Sam Houston's small army at San Jacinto, 'proved,' in the eyes of many Americans, that theirs was a destiny ordained by God."[20] Beachley Brear also notes that this creation mythology was designed almost exclusively for Anglos, symbolically separating the territory from its ties to Mexico.[21] Raúl Ramos further elaborates this idea, noting that the Alamo as Texas's creation myth functions as a tool to reinforce white supremacy: "with the birth of the Texas Revolution, Anglos cast previous and existing peoples as part of an indeterminate past, rendering all Mexican-origin people, then and into the future, as foreign, and effectively erasing and marginalizing Mexican and Indigenous people from the past and in the present."[22] The Alamo symbolized the birth of a new imagined community specifically for Anglo Texans.

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18 Richard Flores, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity and the Master Symbol* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 29.

19 Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

20 Beachley Brear, *Inherit the Alamo*, 2.

21 Beachley Brear, 2.

22 Raúl Ramos, "The Alamo is a Rupture," *Guernica*, February 19, 2019, https://www.guernicamag.com/the-alamo-is-a-rupture-texas-mexico-imperialism-history/, accessed May 4, 2021.

3 The Texas Rangers and the Citizen-Soldier

The Texans who fought for independence relied upon "irregulars, citizen-soldiers and volunteers" because they could not fund a professional army.[23] Sam Houston did lead a regular force that was largely based on the organization of the United States Army, but the group who fought at the Alamo were one of several volunteer militias. Calling themselves "the Army of the People," they supplied their own weapons and equipment. These militias already had a history that could be traced to the early years of Anglo settlement in the Spanish territory of Tejas. In 1820, the Spanish government passed a measure to open Texas to foreign settlers. Mexico continued these policies with the empresario system, awarding contracts to land agents who would recruit new immigrants. Anglos came in large numbers, fleeing debt and being drawn by inexpensive land. As they arrived they came into conflict with Indigenous peoples, especially as they settled in territory controlled by the Karankawa tribe. Anglo settlers were dissatisfied with the limited success of the Mexican army to protect them from these Indigenous groups, which continued to control much of the territory. In 1823, Texas's first empresario Stephen F. Austin organized a small group of ten "Rangers" to supplement the Mexican government's patrols and subdue the Karankawa, which he believed could never peacefully coexist with Anglos.[24]

In creating the Rangers, Austin was drawing on a familiar concept. Jimmy L. Bryan writes that the idea of the "ranger," in the U.S. context, dates back to at least the mid-seventeenth century, when the General Assembly of Maryland authorized small, mounted groups of "raingers, or scouts" to suppress Indigenous nations.[25] The use of such rangers increased during the French and Indian War, and from that point on the history of rangers and the mythology of the frontiersman would remain closely intertwined. The same year that Austin organized his Texas Rangers, popular novelist James Fenimore Cooper's book *The Pioneers* was published, the first of five novels to feature the character of Nathaniel "Natty" Bumppo as a frontier warrior with exceptional skill, moral

23 Jimmy L. Bryan, Jr., "Agents of Destiny: The Texas Rangers and the Dilemma of the Conquest Narrative," in *The Martial Imagination: Cultural Aspects of American Warfare*, ed. Jimmy L. Bryan, Jr. (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2013), 54.

24 This insight comes from Doug J. Swanson, as explained in John Philip Santos, "The Secret History of the Texas Rangers: 'Cult of Glory' Upends Decades of Mythmaking," *Texas Monthly*, June 2020, https://www.texasmonthly.com/arts-entertainment/secret-history-texas-rangers/, accessed May 4, 2021; Doug J. Swanson, *Cult of Glory: The Bold and Brutal History of the Texas Rangers* (New York: Viking, 2020).

25 Bryan, "Agents of Destiny," 53–54.

certitude, and a willingness to engage in violent conquest when necessary. A distinctly Anglo creation, the Rangers would continue to advocate for Anglo settlers' interests as they came to Texas in larger numbers. By 1830, the Anglo population outnumbered Tejanos by two to one.

Many Anglo and Tejano settlers grew increasingly dissatisfied with the governance of the Mexican Republic, especially after Santa Anna formed a new centralist government that eroded the regional autonomy of the provinces. The initial disputes that led to the Texas Revolution were efforts to restore the federalist system of the Mexican Republic. However, as Anglos increasingly controlled the territory, they also controlled the rebellion. Soon the conflict became a war of Texan independence, with many Anglos anticipating annexation to the United States. During the Revolution, the Texas Rangers became an officially authorized force. They were paid wages and food and supplies, though they had to provide their own horses, tack, weapons, and ammunition.[26] After the Revolution, they continued to function as groups of volunteers organized on an as-needed basis by the provisional government. Because they were authorized by the state but lacked the protocols of a regular army or police force, the Texas Rangers are viewed by historians as the first prominent Western vigilantes to be endowed with legal authority.[27]

This emerging nation of Texas would be a republic devoted to white supremacy. After the war, many families of Mexican descent were driven from their homes by Anglo mobs who distrusted them, regardless of which side they had fought on. Citizenship laws in the new republic also excluded the descendants of Africans and Indigenous peoples. The Texas Constitution affirmed the practice of slaveholding, returning to that status all Black residents who had been enslaved before coming to the state; furthermore, it was ensured that the Republic's Congress would not have the power to emancipate the enslaved. Gun laws in the new republic also affirmed white supremacy. The United States Second Amendment was recognized in the Texas Constitution, guaranteeing the right of every citizen to bear arms "in defense of himself and the state," but since citizenship was limited to White men, this excluded many residents.[28] Lawmakers in the Republic of Texas were particularly concerned about trying to keep weapons out of the hands of the Comanche, and they prohibited the trading of

26 Bullock Texas State History Museum, https://www.thestoryoftexas.com/discover/campfire-stories/texas-ranger, accessed May 4, 2021.

27 Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti–Mexican Violence in Texas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 11.

28 Brennan Gardner Rivas, "An Unequal Right to Bear Arms: State Weapons Laws and White Supremacy in Texas, 1836–1900," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 121, no. 3 (2018): 286.

guns and other weapons to all Indigenous peoples. They also tried to keep guns out of the hands of enslaved Black Texans. The Texas Slave Code, created in 1840, included a provision forbidding an enslaved person from carrying weapons without the "written consent of his master, mistress or overseer."[29] Thus, the few gun control laws that did exist were only designed to disarm non-White Texans.

The Texas Rangers would become one of the greatest agents of enforcing white supremacy in the new republic. They initiated a decades-long campaign of ethnic cleansing against Indigenous peoples, including a massacre of 35 Comanche diplomats, women, and children during peace negotiations in 1840. The Texas Rangers also upheld slavery by hunting down enslaved people trying to cross the Rio Grande into Mexico. In 1838, cornering an armed group of Black men who had escaped, a band of Rangers captured one of the fugitives and slashed him several times with a Bowie knife before selling him back into slavery.[30]

4 Statehood: Young Texas in Repose

As Texas moved from a republic to a U.S. state, the Rangers would continue battling the enemies of white supremacy. Shortly after Texas's annexation in 1845, a lithograph called "Young Texas in Repose" was published as an abolitionist critique of Texas, featuring a Texas Ranger sitting on the back of an enslaved captive.[31] The figure representing the Texas Ranger is depicted as not fully human, in bare feet and with a scarred, wolf-like face. Wearing a wide-brimmed hat over long hair, ragged pants, and an earring, he holds a Kentucky long rifle. Along his arm are inscribed words depicting the most brutal crimes against humanity—slavery, rape, incest, and murder. Several knives are found on the Ranger's belt and shoulder, and he has ankle cuffs, suggesting that he had broken out of bondage himself. Meanwhile, the abused and lacerated victim is rendered less visible. The illustration shows the cruel marks of a whip on a wide back, and cuffed wrists, but not the person's face. The focus here is the monster that Young Texas had become (see Figure 2.1).

29 Gardner Rivas, 287.

30 Jonathan S. Jones, "Though Often Mythologized, the Texas Rangers Have an Ugly History of Brutality," *Washington Post*, September 21, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/09/21/though-often-mythologized-texas-rangers-have-an-ugly-history-brutality/, accessed May 4, 2021.

31 Mavis Parrott Kelsey and Robin Brandt Hutchison, *Engraved Prints of Texas 1554–1900* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M Press, 2005).

FIGURE 2.1 "Young Texas in Repose"[32]

This illustration also represents the ambivalent ways in which people would understand Texas in the decades that followed statehood. As Slotkin notes, when Texas was annexed, the "interrupted course of American expansion was dramatically resumed."[33] Texas annexation triggered the Mexican-American War, which would also bring California and the Southwest into the Union. The imaginary of the frontier would be revived in historical romances,

32 "Young Texas in Repose," ca. 1845, lithograph, published by E. Jones (New York), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT, https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2016123, accessed May 4, 2021.

33 Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment*, 161.

"true captivity" narratives, and the subgenre of "Texican dime novels."[34] The leaders of the Texan independence movement—Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, and William B. Travis—would become American celebrities. Yet, while the frontiersman was often a cultural hero, he was also feared and mistrusted. As J. A. Lemay notes, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, frontiersmen were largely regarded as lawless villains and social outcasts.[35] Even Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, a Frenchman whose writings helped create and celebrate the legends of frontiersmen, described them as "no better than carnivorous animals"; these men, he noted, "are often in a perfect state of war; that of man against man, sometimes decided by blows, sometimes by means of the law."[36] Northeastern Americans would impose these prejudices upon Southerners as well, who were often called *buckskins*. In 1744, Dr. Alexander Hamilton of Massachusetts wrote that "'the most dangerous' wild beasts in the woods were the *buckskins,* a combination 'betwict a man and a beast.'"[37]

No figure represents this ambivalence during the Mexican-American War better than the Texas Ranger, who was becoming better known to the broader public. In his insightful study of the Rangers, Bryan traces the ways that the organization became part of the "American" imaginary. In 1846, when President James K. Polk sent Gen. Zachary Taylor to the Rio Grande to pressure Mexico in order to acquire California, correspondents from New Orleans newspapers chronicled the journeys of "the valiant and undaunted Walker, of the Texas Rangers."[38] Others were inspired to volunteer to join the Rangers, and their narratives created the early legends of the group.[39] Bryan notes that "by casting the Rangers as backwoods patriots, observers affixed Texas to the American mission."[40] These news reports reinforced Texas's integration into the national imaginary.

The Texas Rangers would also make a distinct contribution to the U.S. gun industry, initiating the production of the "six shooter." In 1847, Captain Samuel Walker of the Texas Rangers placed an order for 1,000 revolvers from gun manufacturer Samuel Colt. Though patented in 1836 as being able to fire multiple

34 Slotkin, 162.

35 J. A. Leo Lemay, "The Frontiersman from Lout to Hero: Notes on the Significance of the Comparative Method and the Stage Theory in Early American Literature and Culture," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 88 (1979): 187.

36 Lemay, 187.

37 Lemay, 187.

38 Bryan, "Agents of Destiny," 55.

39 Bryan, 56.

40 Bryan, 61.

times without reloading, sales had been slow before Walker, who wanted an improved version that could hold six bullets, was simple to reload, and would "be powerful enough to kill a man with a single shot."[41] In the 1840s, firearms were widely owned in the United States but marketed as mere tools, being relatively ordinary and unremarkable. The idea of a gun that could fire multiple times was seen as unnecessary for the everyday person. However, the Rangers' celebrated use of the six shooter would popularize this weapon, and Colt's adaptation of new manufacturing techniques, including molds and interchangeable parts, would allow for more efficient, and more affordable, production. The editor of the *Commercial Advertiser* expressed how this new weapon differed from previous Ranger weapons: these were "fatal 'revolvers,' invented by Colt, for the purpose of killing men."[42] By 1856, the company could produce 150 guns per day, and by the start of the U.S. Civil War (1861–1865), the Colt revolver became perhaps the world's best-known firearm.[43]

Yet, newspaper editorials also hinted at how some Americans were troubled by the Rangers' aggression: they "balked at the reports of their cruelty and hatred."[44] As the Rangers exemplified the violence of U.S. expansionism, national correspondents would detail their atrocities. Bryan writes, "as the accounts circulated throughout the nation, the reputation of the Texas Rangers as 'the most bloodthirsty set of cutthroats that ever disgraced humanity' grew."[45] People who opposed the Mexican-American War ended up using the Texas Ranger as "an emblem of the degenerative influences of war and conquests."[46] Overall, Bryan argues that the Texas Rangers became an imaginary through which Americans could resolve their mixed feelings about U.S. expansion. They could incorporate the Rangers into the broader frontier mythology but also set them apart through what Bryan calls "Texan exoticism," which "preserved the distance between them and the ugly reality of unjust conquest, ethnic violence, and capacity for atrocity."[47] Meanwhile, the phrase "Remember the Alamo" would connect the anti-Mexican sentiment of some Texan revolutionaries to the broader context of the U.S. war with Mexico. The weapons

41 Kat Eschner, "On This Day in 1847, a Texas Ranger Walked into Samuel Colt's Shop and Said, Make Me a Six-Shooter," *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 4, 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/day-1847-texas-ranger-walked-samuel-colts-shop-and-said-make-me-six-shooter-18096162l/, accessed May 4, 2021.

42 Bryan, "Agents of Destiny," 62.

43 Eschner, "On this day."

44 Bryan, "Agents of Destiny," 53.

45 Bryan, 58.

46 Bryan, 58.

47 Bryan, 58.

of the Rangers and the Alamo defenders—the long gun and the Bowie knife—came to embody a racist desire for revenge. In his "Song of the Texas Ranger," poet John H. Hewitt of Baltimore employs unapologetic imagery:

> ...Let the knife do its duty, it has slept long enough;
> Its point will get blunt and its steely cheeks rough;
> It thirsts for the blood of the Mexican herd—
> The 'Alamo!' the 'Alamo!'—remember the word.
>
> ...
>
> The ball's in the tube, the hammer's drawn back,
> And death screams an echo to the true rifle's crack;
> Let them howl in despair, the treacherous herd!
> The 'Alamo' the 'Alamo!'—remember the word.[48]

In the decades that followed, the Texas Rangers would become well known as a brutal agency dedicated to the "fight in the ongoing war for racial supremacy," as Monica Muñoz Martinez writes, "blurring the lines between enforcing state laws, practicing vigilantism, and inciting racial terror."[49] Hewitt's poem serves as a disturbing reminder of the harm the Texas Rangers would continue to inflict on communities of color; their weapons are personified as agents of white supremacy.

5 Reconstruction and Gun Control

After the Civil War, the Alamo and the Texas Rangers would become even more enshrined in frontier mythology, but the state's gun laws would change profoundly during Reconstruction.[50] Before the war, the only state restriction

48 John H. Hewitt, "Song of the Texas Ranger," *American Flag* (Matamoros, Mexico), December 19, 1846. https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth479200/m1/1/, accessed May 4, 2021.

49 Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 210.

50 Eric Foner writes that "Reconstruction is the historical period immediately following the U.S. Civil War (1865–1877). During this time, the federal government grappled with how to reintegrate the states of the former Confederacy, to address the inequities of slavery, and to make sure that the Southern states ratified new Constitutional amendments that secured Black civil rights and voting rights. In the South, Black community leaders joined White allies to bring the Republican Party to power, while Southern Democrats struggled to regain

on firearms was a prohibition on dueling.[51] In the aftermath of the war, however, the Texas legislature would begin to enact broad gun control initiatives, which were more restrictive than many other states in both the North and the South. Texas's gun control laws may seem surprising, coming at a time when private gun ownership was becoming more popular in the United States, particularly in the West, where major U.S. gun manufacturers had created a civilian gun market following diminished demand from the military after the war.[52] But this was a particularly violent time in Texas. As Confederate soldiers fled Union occupation, they raided government storehouses, armories, and munitions factories. Economic uncertainty and animosity of Whites toward newly emancipated Black Texans led to a rise in crime and vigilantism.[53] The Texas legislature enacted new gun control laws in 1866, when former Confederates briefly held power. This legislation, which "prohibited the carrying of firearms upon the premises of any citizen without consent," was meant to control Black Texans, because most of them did not own their own land, and it was passed along with other Black Code laws in the state.[54] However, gun regulations during Congressional Reconstruction and military occupation had the opposite purpose: protecting Black Texans from White supremacists. A biracial coalition of Texas Republicans pushed for gun control laws in order to control pro-Confederate vigilante groups like the Ku Klux Klan.[55] Republicans were trying to reduce a staggering level of violence. As Mark Anthony Frassetto writes, "While violence in every Confederate state far exceeded violence in the North, Texas's levels of violence stood out even among the Confederate states."[56] He cites a report commissioned by the 1868–1869 Constitutional Convention (the "Convention Report"), which found that state homicide rates

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control and to reinstate white supremacy." Eric Foner, "Reconstruction," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 10, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/event/Reconstruction-United-States-history, accessed May 4, 2021.

51 Lauren McGaughy, "Texas' Long History with Weapons Includes a Handgun Ban," *San Antonio Express News*, December 23, 2014, https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Texas-long-history-with-weapons-includes-a-5976341.php, accessed May 4, 2021.

52 Pamela Haag, *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

53 Gardner Rivas, "An Unequal Right," 289.

54 Gardner Rivas, 295.

55 Brennan Gardner Rivas, "When Texas was the National Leader in Gun Control," *Washington Post*, September 12, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/09/12/when-texas-was-national-leader-gun-control/, accessed May 4, 2021.

56 Mark Anthony Frassetto, "The Law and Politics of Firearms Regulation in Reconstruction Texas," *Texas A&M Law Review* 95 (2016): 97.

increased from a reported total of 98 in 1865 to 347 in 1867.[57] In response to the ensuing violence, Republican Governor Edmund J. Davis proposed new measures to restore order, which included a law in 1870 that limited the carrying of weapons outside the home—banning them from polling places, churches, and other social gatherings.

Legislation passed the following year was even more significant. Other than residents of "frontier counties," who could carry arms at all times, people were prohibited from carrying weapons in public except when traveling. Brennan Gardner Rivas notes that this law "dramatically and tremendously altered Texans' relationships to their weapons. They could no longer carry or conceal 'any pistol, dirk, dagger, slung-shot [sic], sword-cane, spear, brass knuckles, bowie knife or any other kind of knife' beyond the confines of their property."[58] It is also important to note that another set of Reconstruction-era laws dissolved the Texas Rangers, reorganized the state militia, and created a new state police force. Marking the extent to which the Rangers had acted as agents to uphold slavery in the state, these new laws were effective in reducing violence.[59] As Frassetto explains, "Between 1870 and 1872 the state police had made more than 6,000 arrests, effectively suppressed the Ku Klux Klan, and provided freedmen real protection against racial violence."[60]

6 Symbolic Disarmament and the Myth of the Lost Cause

This temporary challenge to white supremacy was brief. The Democratic party was quickly regaining its power.[61] In 1873, Democrats won the gubernatorial election by a two-to-one margin, and local special elections overwhelmingly favored the party because armed, White paramilitary groups took over polling places to intimidate Black Republican voters.[62] When Democrat "Redemptionists" took back the state legislature in 1873–1874, they disbanded the state police, recommissioned the Texas Rangers, and rolled back many

57 Frassetto, 98.

58 Gardner Rivas, "An Unequal Right," 295.

59 Gardner Rivas, "When Texas Was…"

60 Frassetto, "The Law and Politics," 108.

61 During this time, the Democratic party in the Southern states defended slavery and white supremacy. When they gradually regained power from Republicans during and after Reconstruction, they often defined themselves as "redeemers." Matthew Hild, "Redemption," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, July 20, 2020.

62 Gardner Rivas, "An Unequal Right," 299.

other of the Republicans' efforts.[63] Rather than repeal the deadly weapons laws, though, they instead increased the fine, and made it an imprisonable offense in 1889.[64] This demonstrated that they were not necessarily opposed to gun regulation, just regulation initiated by the so-called "Black Republican party." Several challenges to the law did come before the Texas Supreme Court, but each time it was upheld as constitutional. In fact, Texas's gun control laws would remain on the books for much of the twentieth century, as Progressive Era Democrats banned automatic weapons and levied a tax on all pistol sales, and then made it a felony to unlawfully carry arms in Texas. In sum, Texas defied the trends of its neighbors, with most Southern states only prohibiting concealed weapons and the Western states allowing the carrying of guns outside settled areas.

Still, the perception of Texas as a gun-toting state persisted, and some Texas writers have suggested that Democratic leaders enforced gun control legislation in order to attract more new residents from other states.[65] In fact, fears about Texas and gun violence may have reinforced gun control legislation. In 1879, after a railroad detective named Jim Currie was acquitted after he shot two famous New York actors at a railway station in Marshall, Texas, the *New Orleans Times* reported: "The ruffian Currie's pistol did more than kill one man and wound another; did more than repel immigration from Texas; it wounded the good fame of the south."[66] A *Dallas Herald* editorial that same year went further, calling for "a law directing the prosecution of every man carrying a pistol as guilty of intent to commit murder."[67]

In 1887, city leaders like Alderman E. G. Daggett of Fort Worth noted that people in other states were reluctant to migrate and buy land in Texas because of the state's gun-friendly image. Daggett proposed that police even forego wearing sidearms during daylight hours, in order to reassure newcomers. A *Fort Worth Gazette* editorial noted: "The war is over, and Fort Worth is not a

63 For a thorough account of both the history and mythology of the Texas Rangers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, along with an excellent comparison of the Canadian Mounties, see Andrew R. Graybill's *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875–1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

64 McGaughy, "Texas' Long History."

65 R.G. Ratcliffe and Paul Burka, "Did Texas' Forefathers Know More about Handguns than Today's Politicians?" *Texas Monthly*, March 16, 2015, https://www.texasmonthly.com/burka-blog/did-texas-forefathers-know-more-about-handguns-than-todays-politicians/, accessed May 4, 2021.

66 Ratcliffe and Burka.

67 Ratcliffe and Burka.

'frontier' town. There is too much official six-shooters all over Texas – it looks bad and conveys a false impression of our people and condition."[68]

The other speculation about Texas's gun control legislation is that the laws were kept so that they could selectively enforce them in order to arrest Black Texans.[69] In 1874, the Democratic legislature authorized the state adjutant general to collect firearms from those without the proper authority to have them, and this was used to disarm Black Texans and then arm White Democratic militia companies. As Gardner Rivas writes, "Rearming white Democrats and reinvesting them with state authority signified their recovery of political power from blacks and Republicans, and their 'redemption' of the state in the name of white supremacy."[70] Gardner Rivas argues that Texas Democrats kept the weapons ban because it was an effective method of maintaining white supremacy through selective enforcement.[71] As Black Texans were physically disarmed, White Democrats "gloried in the symbolic significance of this disarmament."[72] This symbolism was played out into the beginning of the twentieth century throughout the South in Lost Cause literature like Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s *The Clansman*, which depicted the Ku Klux Klan protecting White women by disarming a Black militia company loyal to the Republican government.[73]

During this same era, the Alamo was revived as a symbol of white supremacy in both the state and national culture, as it became intertwined with the ideology of the Lost Cause.[74] Up until this period, the Alamo battle ruins had largely been ignored by state officials. But in 1883 the state of Texas officially purchased the Alamo mission church, and then the rest of the grounds were given to the Daughters of the Republic of Texas in 1905. The process of making the Alamo into a national shrine had officially begun. The Alamo would also

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68 Ratcliffe and Burka.

69 Lauren McGaughy, "First to Ban Open Carry, Texas Could be One of Last to OK it," *Houston Chronicle*, December 22, 2014, https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/texas/article/First-to-ban-open-carry-Texas-could-be-one-of-5974401.php, accessed May 4, 2021.

70 Gardner Rivas, "An Unequal Right," 300.

71 Gardner Rivas, 302. For more information about the history of U.S. firearms laws and how the Second Amendment was designed to enable white supremacy, see Carol Anderson's *The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021).

72 Gardner Rivas, 300.

73 Gardner Rivas, 300.

74 The ideology of the Lost Cause was a belief, common among White southerners, that the Confederacy fought for a just cause. Lost Cause advocates also tended to deny the importance of slavery as a motive for secession, claiming that the Southern states seceded in order to protect states' rights. "The Lost Cause: Definition and Origins," American Battlefield Trust, October 30, 2020, https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/lost-cause-definition-and-origins, accessed May 4, 2021.

become the subject of several early films just a few years later. The most well-known Alamo film was called the *Martyrs of the Alamo, or the Birth of Texas* (1915). *Martyrs* was directed by William Christy Cabanne, assistant to D.W. Griffith, one of the most widely acclaimed directors of the time, especially for his film *The Birth of a Nation*, which was based on Dixon's *Clansman* novel. Cabanne's film *Martyrs*, which appeared only seven months after Griffith's, is clearly inspired by it. *Martyrs* depicted ethnic Mexicans as aggressive, savage, drunken, and ill-mannered. As Richard Flores writes: "Like the depiction of arrogant Reconstruction-era blacks in *Birth of a Nation*, ethnic Mexicans, both citizens and soldiers, are represented as morally reprehensible."[75] The film also rewrote the Alamo narrative so that General Santa Anna was already in San Antonio, and he triggered the battle with his decision to confiscate all weapons from the Anglo Texian population. His decision inspired Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett to gather their hidden cache of weapons, storm the streets, and take the Mexican army by surprise. When the Texians took charge of the city, the ethnic Mexicans in the crowd began acting "civilized," doffing their hats in deference to White women. Thus, in the film, as in Texas's Democratic politics, arming White men was seen as a symbol of restoring social order.

It is not a coincidence that the Texas Rangers would also escalate their violence against ethnic Mexicans during this same period. Monica Muñoz Martinez describes the decade between 1910 and 1920 as a "period of terror" for the ethnic Mexican residents of the Texas border region. Under the guise of maintaining order during the Mexican Revolution, the Rangers doubled in size to suppress cross-border raiders, and they indiscriminately attacked ethnic Mexicans throughout the region. Muñoz Martinez writes: "During these years of vitriol and aggression, law enforcement officers, soldiers, and vigilantes claimed the lives of hundreds more ethnic Mexicans, citizens of the United States and Mexico alike. Estimates of the number of dead range from as few as 300 to as many as several thousand."[76] This increase in violence was also tied to increased Anglo migration as land developers and commercial farmers arrived at the Texas-Mexico border during an agricultural revolution in the South Texas valley, stripping ethnic Mexicans of much of their land and their political power.[77] One of the most egregious examples of this violence happened in 1918, when a company of Rangers executed 15 ethnic Mexicans in the West Texas town of Porvenir. After the incident, J.T. Canales, the one Mexican American serving in the Texas legislature, bravely launched a thorough

75 Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 105.

76 Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 7.

77 Muñoz Martinez, 15.

investigation of Ranger abuses. Canales was personally threatened, but the hearings produced over a thousand pages of testimony and publicly exposed the violence of the Ranger force.[78]

During the hearings, the Rangers drew on their legendary status to defend themselves. Supporters said they were a "living monument" that Texans must band together to defend. Yet, supporting testimonies also demonstrated their racism. Texas congressman and rancher Claude B. Hudspeth testified: "You have got to kill those Mexicans when you find them, or they will kill you."[79] Canales's credibility was challenged because he was Mexican "by blood," and ultimately his bill was scuttled. While the Ranger force was eventually reduced by a more modest reform bill, the transcripts of the hearings were buried in the state archives and the Rangers began a new propaganda campaign, which journalist Doug Swanson calls "the fable factory." They wrote books, funded museums and monuments, and worked with Hollywood producers "to promote a heroic Ranger image—all part of a deliberate attempt at mythmaking that shielded Rangers from scrutiny while writing their victims out of official history."[80]

While nineteenth-century accounts demonstrated U.S. ambivalence about the force, the violent history of the Rangers was thoroughly sanitized during the twentieth century. Walter Prescott Webb, a prolific historian of Texas and the American West, wrote an account of the heroism of the Texas Rangers in 1935 that would form the basis for later representations in popular culture.[81] Webb's account was also tied to the Texas 1936 Centennial celebrations. To mark the centennial, more than three million dollars of state funds were dedicated to creating new markers, memorials, and buildings. These new monuments helped reinforce the state's collective memory, and the Texas Centennial Control Commission actively worked to maintain the status of its heroes.[82] The Texas Ranger figure would be popularized in fiction, television, and film, most prominently in *The Lone Ranger*, which began as a radio show in the 1930s and reappeared as a popular television show in the 1950s. According to Gary Hoppenstand, the Lone Ranger became one of the most iconic

78 Sonia Hernandez, "The Lynching of Hispanic Victims on the Texas Border," http://lynchingintexas.org, accessed May 4, 2021.

79 Tim Murphy, "A Century Ago, One Lawmaker Went After the Most Powerful Cops in Texas. Then They Went After Him," *Mother Jones*, July 22, 2020, https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2020/07/a-century-ago-one-lawmaker-went-after-the-most-powerful-cops-in-texas-then-they-went-after-him/, accessed May 4, 2021.

80 Murphy.

81 Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 23.

82 Muñoz Martinez, 244.

figures in American popular culture. As a masked vigilante who operated outside the boundaries of law enforcement, he pursued justice with his Colt .45.[83] He never used his gun when unnecessary, and he shot to disarm rather than to kill. In the television series, the Lone Ranger always used silver bullets to remind himself how heavy a price was involved in using a gun.

The Texas Centennial also helped reorient the story of the Alamo battle around frontier mythology rather than the Lost Cause. As Greg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner argue, the battle of the Alamo provided a more "useful past, one that brought bravado and glory to the field of memories. Hence 'Remember the Alamo' replaced the [Confederate] rebel yell, at least superficially."[84] In the two decades after World War II, several new Alamo films were released. In 1955, the Walt Disney film series *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier* became immensely popular and "inspired a generation of coonskin hat wearers with heroic images of martyrdom."[85] In 1960, *The Alamo*, starring John Wayne, would also inform future understandings of Texas history. Davy Crockett, in particular, would represent the frontiersman as full of optimism, "a much-needed symbol of hope and morale" during the Cold War.[86] During this era, depictions of the Alamo battle lost their overtly racist tone. In particular, John Wayne's film presented much more positive depictions of ethnic Mexicans. Yet the popularity of these films continued to be part of an effort to divert attention from issues of inequality and racial injustice, and these films still represent heroic Texans as White.[87] These depictions also came at a time of increasing connections between the United States military and a large arms industry, which Dwight Eisenhower famously called the "military industrial complex." This further solidified the idea that national security was tied to increased weaponry. Millions of World War II servicemen, now familiar with firearms, returned home and bought firearms for recreational purposes.[88] Richard Hofstadter notes that the close of World War II left a huge surplus of

83 Robert Siegel, "The Lone Ranger: Justice from Outside the Law," NPR, January 14, 2008, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18073741&t=1618837329259, accessed May 4, 2021.

84 As quoted in Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 243.

85 Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 112.

86 Frank Thompson, *Alamo Movies* (Plano: Republic of Texas Press, 1991), 55–56, as quoted in Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 113.

87 Flores, 151.

88 Angela Frye Keaton, "Unholstered and Unquestioned: The Rise of Post-World War II American Gun Cultures," PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2006.

guns, and the United States became the biggest market for them, due to its size and wealth.[89]

While Americans were watching Davy Crockett and the Lone Ranger on television, the real Texas Rangers continued to enforce white supremacy through violence. In 1956, when the NAACP and Black residents of North Texas tried to integrate Mansfield High School, the Rangers helped Governor Allan Shivers defy federal desegregation laws by forcibly preventing Black students from enrolling. In 1963, after voters in Crystal City elected Mexican American Juan Cornejo as mayor, a Texas Ranger captain smashed Cornejo's head into a wall as retaliation for his remarks protesting police violence.[90] Four years later, when Mexican American farmworkers walked off their jobs to protest low wages and terrible working conditions, ranchers called the Texas Rangers to break the strikes by assaulting and arresting the protestors.[91] In 1968, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held hearings in San Antonio, directly addressing discrimination against Mexican Americans for the first time in the nation's history. After its investigation, the Texas Advisory Committee called for the Texas Rangers to be abolished due to their long history of racist practices.[92]

Mexican American scholars would also challenge the heroic narrative of the Texas Rangers. In 1958, Folklorist Américo Paredes's groundbreaking study of the *corrido* tradition, *With His Pistol in his Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*, spoke against the violence of the Texas Rangers. Based on a true set of events, Gregorio Cortez became a folk hero among Mexican Americans in South Texas for killing an Anglo official in self-defense and (temporarily) escaping the Texas Rangers. These *corridos* would celebrate a Tejano narrative of armed citizenship—defending themselves from the lawless violence of the *rinches*. As José Limón explains, "It is this image of the fearless man defending his right with his pistol in hand that defines the male heroic world of the corrido."[93] According to Muñoz Martinez, both the romanticized narrative of

89 Richard Hofstadter, "America as a Gun Culture," *American Heritage* 21, no. 6 (October 1970), https://www.americanheritage.com/america-gun-culture, accessed May 4, 2021.

90 Jones, "Though Often Mythologized." See also George N. Green, "Mansfield School Desegregation Incident," Handbook of Texas Online, https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/mansfield-school-desegregation-incident, accessed April 9, 2021.

91 Gus Bova, "Hundreds Gather to Remember the 1966 Texas Farmworkers' March," *Texas Observer*, September 12, 2016, https://www.texasobserver.org/la-marcha-remembered-austin/, accessed May 4, 2021.

92 Murphy, "A Century Ago."

93 José Limón, *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems: History and Influence in Mexican-American Social Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 17.

the Texas Rangers and the counternarrative of Tejano resistance celebrated armed masculinity.[94]

The response of the state of Texas to these critiques was, once again, to reinforce the heroic narrative of the Rangers. In 1971, the Washington Senators baseball team relocated to the Lone Star State and were named the Texas Rangers, ignoring protests by the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and other civil rights advocates.[95] In 1968, during the same year of the civil rights hearings that would call for the disbandment of the Rangers, the state opened the Texas Rangers Hall of Fame and Museum in Waco. To this day, it remains a site where the Rangers are venerated. The stated mission of the museum is "to disseminate knowledge and inspire appreciation of the Texas Rangers, a legendary symbol of Texas and the American West."[96] Featuring portraits of many prominent Rangers through the force's history, there is no mention of their legacy of racial violence. The second-most prominent set of artifacts in the museum comprises firearms. The first room of the museum is dedicated to the history of firearms: the Colt Walker and the Colt Paterson repeating pistols, including the story of the development of the Colt .44. In interactive displays, visitors can practice assembling and reloading a Colt Paterson, and even compare the weapons in front of them to those in the photographs of Rangers posing with their firearms. As Muñoz Martinez notes, "Guns used by famous Texas Rangers act as surrogates for the men themselves. The prominent place of the history of these weapons in the museum, and the way it frames the history of violence as a heroic progression of guns, makes this a destination for gun enthusiasts and fans of Texas history alike."[97] As museum visitors engage with the museum exhibits, they are invited to identify with the Rangers, to imagine themselves as fellow (predominantly White) defenders of Texas.

7 The Modern Massacre

During the period when the Rangers were arresting and physically assaulting striking Texas farmworkers, another Texas incident would draw national

94 Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 24.

95 Murphy, "A Century Ago." LULAC, originally formed in 1929, is the largest and oldest organization to advocate for economic development, educational attainment and civil rights for Latina/os in the United States.

96 Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 247.

97 Muñoz Martinez, 249.

attention.[98] When ex-Marine sharpshooter Charles Whitman climbed to the top of the Tower of the University of Texas with three rifles, two pistols, and a sawed-off shotgun, Austin became the site of one of the first modern mass shootings on a college campus in the United States. In her account of the shootings, Pamela Colloff wrote that Whitman "introduced the nation to the idea of mass murder in a public space."[99] By the time he was gunned down by an Austin police officer early that afternoon, he had shot 43 people and was ultimately responsible for 14 deaths.[100] Texans—and Americans—would take away different lessons from this tragedy. For gun control advocates, the Tower shooting would become a haunting precedent for the many mass shootings that would follow. For gun rights advocates, it would provide a justification for widening access to firearms, and further the concept of the citizen soldier as protector of the community. As Christopher Hooks reported on the Tower shooting: "The police, short of arms themselves, couldn't figure out what to do about Whitman. So civilians grabbed their guns and started taking potshots at the tower."[101] Here we find the familiar echo of "good guy with a gun" rhetoric. Gun enthusiasts would amplify the story of the citizen militia that helped take Whitman down, minimizing what could have been an even greater tragedy.

In spite of this, Texas gun regulations did not significantly change in the immediate aftermath of the shooting. This would not happen until about thirty years later, after 35-year-old George Hennard drove his Ford Ranger pickup through the plate-glass window of Luby's Cafeteria in Killeen, Texas in 1991. Holding two powerful 9mm semi-automatic pistols, he began shooting customers, killing 23 people and wounding 27 more.[102] The tragedy mobilized gun rights advocates, including Suzanne Gratia Hupp, who survived the Luby's massacre after witnessing the death of her parents. Going into the café, Gratia Hupp had left her handgun in her car—and she later believed she could have stopped the shooter if she had had her handgun in her bag. This experience

98 An account of the Rangers is found in Bova, "Hundreds Gather."

99 Pamela Colloff, "96 Minutes," *Texas Monthly*, August 2006, https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/96-minutes/, accessed May 4, 2021. It should be noted, however, that there is not a consistent definition of the term "mass shooting." The Tower incident is often called a mass shooting because it involved the deaths of more than four people at one or more locations close to each other.

100 Some sources list the number of deaths as 17, when including Whitman's parents and an unborn baby.

101 Christopher Hooks, "Texas' Gun Culture and Politics Made Dallas Shooting Inevitable," *Rolling Stone*, July 11, 2016, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/texas-gun-culture-and-politics-made-dallas-shooting-inevitable-222627/, accessed May 4, 2021.

102 Paula Chin, "A Texas Massacre," *People Magazine*, November 4, 1991.

motivated her to run for the Texas House of Representatives, where she pushed for concealed handgun laws. At the time of the shooting, it was still illegal for private citizens to "conceal carry" firearms. Her efforts resulted in the 1995 law that allows Texans to carry concealed weapons, if they have a license.

In 1993, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) attempted to raid a secluded compound where members of the Branch Davidian religious group lived near Waco. They suspected that the group had a cache of illegal arms. In the shootout that followed, five ATF agents and five Branch Davidians were killed, and sixteen other ATF agents were wounded.[103] This began a 51-day standoff between the FBI and the Branch Davidians, led by David Koresh. The FBI assembled one of the largest military forces ever gathered against a civilian subject: twelve tanks, four combat-engineering vehicles, and a total of eight hundred and ninety-nine agents, including U.S. Customs officers, U.S. Army personnel, members of the Texas National Guard, Texas Rangers, officers from the Texas Department of Public Safety, and Waco police.[104] Then, on April 19, the FBI raided the compound with armored tanks and tear gas. A fire broke out that killed seventy-six Branch Davidians. Public reactions to the events again contrasted sharply. For some, the Waco tragedy reinforced Texas's gun violent image, and the Branch Davidians were portrayed as religious fanatics who brought about their own deaths.[105] For some gun rights advocates, though, the Waco tragedy became a story of unlawful government overreach. As Tara Burton observes, "Waco became something of a rallying cry for those who saw the federal government as a threat."[106] Many of these critics saw parallels between Waco and the Alamo. They would note parallels between Koresh, who gave his followers an opportunity to leave the compound before the raid, and William Travis's mythical line in the sand before the Alamo siege. Daniel Peña remarks on how the narrative of the Alamo is "undeniably echoed" in the rhetoric of white supremacists and terrorists that surrounded the Waco siege.[107] It was the Waco siege that also motivated white supremacist Timothy McVeigh to bomb the Oklahoma federal building two years later.

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103 Tara Isabella Burton, "The Waco Tragedy, Explained," *Vox*, April 19, 2018, https://www.vox.com/2018/4/19/17246732/waco-tragedy-explained-david-koresh-mount-carmel-branch-davidian-cult-25-year-anniversary, accessed May 4, 2021.

104 Burton.

105 Peter Cooney, "Waco Cult Disaster Reinforces Texas's Gun Violence Image," Reuters. April 21, 1993.

106 Burton, "The Waco Tragedy."

107 Daniel Peña, "Remember the Alamo (Differently)," *Texas Observer*, August 22, 2017, https://www.texasobserver.org/remember-alamo-differently/, accessed May 4, 2021.

8 Come and Take It: Contemporary Texas Gun Culture

Googling "Texan gun culture" today, one finds headlines such as "Are Texans Gun Crazy?"[108] Gun culture still dominates the way that Texas is perceived by those outside the state, and it also continues to be closely connected to Texas politics and culture. And, of course, many Texans still own guns. In November 2017, the *Dallas Morning News* noted that according to the ATF, Texans had the largest number of licenses to sell firearms of any state. In addition, "based on data from the ATF, Texas led the nation in April in the number of weapons registered under the National Firearms Act."[109] The consumer culture of guns extends beyond gun ownership as well. Gun enthusiast Chris Bird has created an entire publishing company, Privateer Publications, based in San Antonio, which is oriented around selling narratives about the importance of guns for self-defense. The press releases for his books are filled with endorsements from prominent Texan Republicans, including former Governor Rick Perry, former Congressman Ron Paul, and Jerry Patterson, former Texas Land Commissioner and a former state senator who sponsored the Texas Concealed Handgun Law. In 2010, Governor Perry boasted about killing a coyote with a single shot (the coyote was threatening his daughter's Labrador puppy). Perry was jogging at the time, but he was still carrying a .380 Ruger. The gun's manufacturer quickly took advantage of the widely reported incident, and issued a Coyote Special Edition of the gun, in a box labeled "for sale to Texans only."[110] In 2015, Texas lawmakers passed an open carry law, giving handgun owners the option to show their holstered firearms in many public places. They also voted to lift the ban on concealed weapons on college campuses; this new law was implemented on the fiftieth anniversary of the Tower shooting.[111]

One can also see casual displays that celebrate guns throughout the state. Monica Muñoz Martinez talks about rusted iron signs, featuring a revolver with the words "We Don't Dial 911" (recent versions also display an AR-15 with the same phrase), which are ubiquitous in gift shops in small Texas towns.[112] The

108 Gary Cartwright, "Fear and Loading" as part of the series "Are Texans Gun Crazy: A Special Report," *Texas Monthly*, May 1995.

109 Michael Hogue and Karen Robinson-Jacobs, "Texas' Gun Culture in Four Charts," *Dallas Morning News,* November 6, 2017, https://www.dallasnews.com/business/2017/11/06/texas-gun-culture-in-four-charts/, accessed May 4, 2021.

110 Lawrence Wright, "America's Future is Texas," *New Yorker*, July 3, 2017, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/07/10/americas-future-is-texas, accessed May 4, 2021.

111 Ryan Poppe, "Changes in Texas Gun Culture," *Texas Standard*, 2016, https://towerhistory.org/changes-texas-gun-culture-since-ut-tower-shooting/, accessed May 4, 2021.

112 Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 262.

state's military bases comprise the other space where prominent celebrations of gun culture are seen. While access to actual firearms is tightly controlled at these sites, in the T-shirt stands in the commissary one finds many designs sold by a popular company called Grunt Style. Headquartered in downtown San Antonio, the company sells T-shirts and other merchandise with messages that, as the website notes, combine a love of beer, bacon, and guns. A T-shirt reads "These are a few of my favorite things" with several semi-automatic weapons in the background. Another features the "Rifle Flag" (a U.S. flag composed of various kinds of rifles).[113] One of the most interesting examples of Texas politicians combining this love of bacon and guns is Senator Ted Cruz's campaign video "Making Machine-Gun Bacon." He says, "In Texas, we cook bacon a little differently than most folks," and then proceeds to wrap raw slices of bacon around the barrel of an AR-15. He covers the bacon in foil, shoots the gun, and then proudly eats the cooked bacon.[114]

The symbols of the Texas Revolution also continue to influence national gun culture. The popular phrase "Come and Take It" originally refers to the Battle of Gonzales in October 1835, when Texian settlers refused to give back a cannon to Mexican soldiers. Instead, the colonists raised a flag with the challenge, along with a lone star and image of the cannon. This was the first flag used in the Texas Revolution.[115] Today, "come and take it" has been widely used among contemporary gun rights advocates, appealing to this popular representation of Texan identity and fusing it with a collective defiance against gun control laws. The phrase has been used on pro-gun T-shirts and other merchandise as well. Gun rights advocates have even created their own version of the flag. Instead of the cannon, an image of an AR-15 is displayed.[116]

For many Anglo Texans, the Texas Rangers also retain their heroic mythology. In 1987, the Texas legislature voted that the Texas Rangers could never be abolished.[117] Culture-makers in the U.S. produced more renditions of the

113 Grunt Style, https://www.gruntstyle.com, accessed May 4, 2021.

114 The campaign ad is discussed in Amita Kelly's "Ted Cruz Makes 'Mmm ... Machine-Gun Bacon,'" NPR, August 3, 2015, https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2015/08/03/429014888/ted-cruz-makes-mmm-machine-gun-bacon, accessed May 4, 2021.

115 Many thanks to one of the manuscript's anonymous reviewers, who noted that the phrase "come and take it" is an English translation of the ancient Greek phrase *molon labe*, which King Leonidas used when the Persians called for the Spartans to lay down their weapons and surrender at the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE. Thus, the Texians at Gonzales were referencing an earlier historical moment of collective resistance.

116 John Burnett, "For Sale: A Texan Symbol of Defiance," NPR, October 2, 2016, https://www.npr.org/2016/10/02/495976187/for-sale-a-texan-symbol-of-defiance, accessed May 4, 2021.

117 "The Division Relating to the Texas Rangers May not be Abolished." Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 147, Sec. 1, September 1, 1987.

heroic Ranger in another television show: *Walker, Texas Ranger*, which ran for eight seasons on CBS, from 1993–2001. A reboot of the series premiered on the CW network in January 2021. Interestingly, this series is simply called *Walker*, dropping the reference to the Texas Rangers in the title.[118] The titular character also has a Tejana partner, and the show seems to focus on Walker's struggles with the trauma of losing his wife and restoring his relationship with his kids. These changes may suggest that the show's creative team is putting some distance between this series and the more violent original. There are some signs of new challenges to the heroic mythology of the real Texas Rangers as well. In June 2020, the city of Dallas removed a statue of Texas Ranger Jay Banks from its airport after noting that a forthcoming book would highlight his role in preventing Black student enrollment at Mansfield high school. Also released then was a photo of Banks that showed him casually leaning against a tree—in front of a gathering of White students at the school—where a Black person was hanged in effigy.[119]

The mythology of the Alamo has been more difficult to challenge. For many Texans, the story of the Alamo still represents a heroic last stand of freedom fighters defending themselves against a larger, oppressive force, and guns are central to the narrative. One of the most enduring legends of the Alamo battle is the story of Davy Crockett standing on the walls of the Alamo, swinging his favorite rifle Old Betsy after running out of bullets.[120] The story is inaccurate, however. Crockett left his beloved rifle with his son before he departed for Texas. Nevertheless, when the Alamo became a museum, the rifle would form part of the display as a symbolic stand-in for Crockett himself. Inside the chapel walls of the museum are display boxes featuring other weapons from the historic battle, including a sword belonging to Santa Anna, along with cannons and other weapons of the period. Guides help visitors identify the marks of historic bullet holes on the outside of the building. Visitors are invited to take a specialized tour of the museum, called "The Weapons of the Alamo," to learn how to load a flintlock firearm, as well as the importance of muskets, cannons, and rifles. The public plaza outside of the museum has often been the site of gun rights rallies, including one in 2013 called "Come and Take It San Antonio," where hundreds of rifle- and shotgun-toting gun enthusiasts

118 Lauren Kranc, "The Cast of the CW's Walker Reboot Diversifies The Original Series," *Esquire*, February 4, 2021.

119 Chacour Koop, "Statue of Texas Ranger Removed from Dallas Airport after Book Depicts Racist History," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, June 4, 2020, https://johnbwellsnews.com/statue-of-texas-ranger-removed-from-dallas-airport-after-book-depicts-racist-history/, accessed May 4, 2021.

120 Ramos, "The Alamo is a Rupture."

gathered to protest what they considered to be the city police department's "disregard for Texas law and the Constitution."[121] They were advocating for the open carry of handguns. Prominent conservative politicians also continue to use the Alamo as a stage for pro-gun legislation. Most recently, Texas Governor Greg Abbott decided to sign a new gun bill into law, called Constitutional Carry, at the Alamo. The law now allows Texans 21 years and older to carry pistols without a license.[122]

Outside of these public events, though, much of Alamo Plaza is fenced off, as the Texas General Land Office and the City of San Antonio discuss plans to redevelop the museum grounds. One of the goals of the redevelopment project is to provide a more inclusive and historically accurate depiction of the Alamo site, one that includes the site's early history as a Spanish mission. But the project has been stalled by several controversies. The biggest one was the plan to relocate the Alamo Cenotaph, a monument that was designed for the Texas Centennial and completed in 1940. Designed by Pompeo Coppini and titled "The Spirit of Sacrifice," the Cenotaph monument stands 58 feet tall and dominates the plaza (see Figure 2.2).

The monument features the figures of four of the best-known defenders: Bowie, Crockett, Travis, and James Bonham. The names of all the Alamo defenders are carved along the bottom of the monument, but there are 47 historical inaccuracies in the list. The project designers wanted to correct these inaccuracies and repair cracks and damage that has accumulated over the years. Some critics also argued that the monument was more prominent than the mission church or long barracks (the actual historical buildings of the Alamo battle), and so project designers decided to relocate it in order to make the area more consistent with how things appeared in 1836. They planned to move the Cenotaph about 500 feet, still close to the site but outside of the mission's historic footprint. As Welcome Wilson, Jr, chairman of the Alamo Trust told reporters, the Alamo itself—not the Cenotaph—serves as the key memorial to the battle. "The Cenotaph was not there in 1836," he noted.[123]

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121 Simon Moya-Smith, "Texas Gun Owners Stage Rally at the Alamo," NBC News, October 19, 2013, "Texas Gun Owners Stage Rally at the Alamo," *NBC News*, October 19, 2013.

122 Emily Martin, "Texas Gov. Abbott Signs 7 Gun Bills into Law, including 'Constitutional Carry,' at Alamo," KSAT News, June 17, 2021.

123 Matt Hickman, "$450 Million Overhaul of Alamo Plaza in Jeopardy after Historical Commission Moves to Block Monument Relocation," *Architect's Newspaper*, October 7, 2020, https://www.archpaper.com/2020/10/450-million-overhaul-of-alamo-plaza-in-jeopardy-after-historical-commission-moves-to-block-monument-relocation/, accessed May 4, 2021.

FIGURE 2.2 The Cenotaph "The Spirit of Sacrifice," by Pompeo Coppini

But as always with the Alamo, myth is more important than history, and the Cenotaph relocation plan faced increasing resistance. On December 27, 2019, about 50 people gathered at the site. Led by Baptist minister Brandon Burkhart, carrying Texas flags and posters that read "Don't move the Cenotaph," they called themselves the "This is Texas Freedom Force." The protesters said that they were standing up for the rights of those who died at the Alamo. Their rallying cry "Not one inch" was a symbolic replaying of the Alamo defenders' refusal to leave the doomed fort. One protestor said: "That's not just some big

marble slab standing up there. It reminds all of us that these men died to hold what was ours. And to make sure it stayed ours."[124] Several members arrived at these Cenotaph rallies armed with rifles and other guns. Burkhart defined the protest as "a gathering of Texans, or an occupation."[125] Ray Howard of Ingram, wearing camouflage and carrying an AR-15, added that he was exercising his constitutional right to bear arms, "just like those gentlemen who died in the Alamo."[126]

To understand the Cenotaph defenders' "last stand," one needs to understand the significance of the monument. Of all the sites on the Alamo grounds, the Cenotaph comes closest to representing the story of the Alamo battle as an act of heroic martyrdom. For the Cenotaph protestors, it represents a symbolic tomb which deserves to be maintained in its central place on the Alamo grounds. The Cenotaph protests were apparently effective, for in what some have interpreted as an instance of bowing to political pressure, in September 2020 the Texas Historical Commission voted not to relocate the Cenotaph after all, and the city eventually adopted a new plan that will leave the monument where it is.

9 Conclusion

While Cenotaph defenders won their battle to preserve the monument at its current site, and celebrations of guns continue to dominate the Alamo exhibits, challenges to the traditional Alamo mythology are becoming more widely known as well. A new book called *Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth*, published in 2021, has become a *New York Times* bestseller.[127] The writers synthesize decades of historical scholarship critiquing the heroic myths of the Alamo, focusing particularly on the fact that many Texas revolutionaries fought to preserve slavery. The book became so controversial that the Bob Bullock Texas History Museum pulled out of hosting an interview with the authors, after pressure from its board of directors, which includes Governor Greg Abbott, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, and Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan.[128]

124 Scott Huddleston, "Demonstrators Warn They Will Use Force to Stop Alamo Cenotaph Move," *San Antonio Express-News*, December 27, 2019, https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Demonstrators-warn-they-will-use-force-to-14935296.php, accessed May 4, 2021.

125 Huddleston.

126 Huddleston.

127 Bryan Burrough, Chris Tomlinson, and Jason Stanford, *Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth* (New York: Penguin Press, 2021).

128 Russell Falcon, "Bob Bullock Texas History Museum Pulls out of 'Forget the Alamo' Book Event after Conservative Pressure," KXAN News, July 2, 2021.

There are physical signs of decay as well. The marble block of the Cenotaph is literally crumbling within.[129] Tiya Miles has written about the ways that the past haunts the present, as "we are also a country founded on the practices of Indigenous erasure, illegal land seizure, and racial slavery. … We are plagued by the memory of those wronged on this land."[130] The Alamo site is haunted by its past. Last year someone spray-painted "white supremacy" on the Cenotaph during the middle of the night. They also wrote "All white bodies are weapons, until they are shields" on a wall a block away.[131] If the Cenotaph is a symbolic tomb, then there are ghosts that linger around its base, troubling the present.

In his analysis of power and historic memory, W. Fitzhugh Brundage writes: "Groups routinely sort the past in a particular way to legitimize their current power or aspirations. … Struggles between groups to define some social memories as authoritative and others as trivial fictions are also contests over who exercises the power to make historical narratives possible and to silence others."[132] For many Texans, the battle of the Alamo continues to represent "a people fighting against tyranny and arbitrary rule and for personal liberty and the rule of law."[133] To this day, the Alamo is the most visited landmark in the state. This is still a shrine for many Texans, who cling to the Alamo as much as they cling to their guns. Visitors to the museum are told to remove their hats, and by the front door there is a sign that reminds them:

> BE SILENT, FRIEND
> HERE HEROES DIED
> TO BLAZE A TRAIL
> FOR OTHER MEN

Yet not all Texans revere the Alamo, and not all remain silent. Many Texas historians, writers, and activists are calling for the new Alamo museum to dismantle the racist mythology built around it. Some, like Daniel Peña, directly

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129 One of the planned renovations to the Alamo site is to repair internal damage to the Cenotaph's marble walls. David Gauthier, PE, Senior Project Manager, and Jaster Quintanilla San Antonio, LLP, "Cenotaph to the Heroes of the Alamo Structural Assessment and Stone Conservation Report for the City of San Antonio Transportation and Capital Improvements Department," December 2, 2014.

130 Miles, *Tales from the Haunted South*, 16.

131 Scott Huddleston, "San Antonio's Alamo Cenotaph Marked with Graffiti Overnight," *San Antonio Express-News*, May 29, 2020, https://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/San-Antonio-s-Alamo-Cenotaph-marked-with-15303077.php, accessed May 4, 2021.

132 Fitzhugh Brundage, *Where These Memories Grow,* 11.

133 Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, *A Line in the Sand: The Alamo in Blood and Memory* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 142, 181–82.

link the Alamo imaginary to the El Paso Walmart shooting, noting that the narrative "is designed to celebrate and revere some of the darkest ideologies that have shaped our national fabric: anti-federalism as linked to white terrorism, white supremacy, and the destruction of brown bodies at all costs."[134] Peña's critique echoes the challenges to the Texas Ranger mythology, and to the larger critiques of Texas's gun culture. One could consider this a plea to write a new creation story at the site of the Alamo, one that reckons with its troubled past in order to make this place a more inclusive shrine of Texas liberty.

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134 Peña, "Remember the Alamo."

Burrough, Bryan, Chris Tomlinson, and Jason Stanford. *Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth*. New York: Penguin Press, 2021.

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CHAPTER 3

The Founding Fathers in the Temporal Imaginaries of Texas Gun Politics

Pekka M. Kolehmainen

When Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina was asked in 2010 why suspects on the FBI's terrorist watch list could be prevented from boarding a plane but not purchasing an AK-47, he answered with an allusion to the political imaginations of the Founding Fathers: "When the founders sat down and wrote the Constitution, they didn't consider flying."[1] Graham sidestepped the authority of the Founding Fathers by invoking the limits of their imagination. Regarding issues such as wide-scale human flight—which he implied the Founders could not have imagined—Congress need not be constrained by their thought. On the issue of guns, however, the Founding Fathers' ideas remained authoritative. The difference between an AK-47 and a musket hardly mattered to Graham—what was relevant was that both were guns, and thus something that the Founding Fathers could have conceived as part of their vision for the rights of U.S. citizens. The significance of Senator Graham's response—albeit a mere quip—is that it resonates with the larger political discussions around guns in the United States. People involved in the debates have repeatedly invoked the political imaginations of the Founding Fathers to argue positions on either side of the issue, thus politicizing the very act of imagining.[2]

This chapter explores the meta process of imagining the Founding Fathers and their political imaginations in order to support political positions on guns in the present. This tactic is founded on imaginaries, as the Founding Fathers referenced are often not historical reconstructions of lived individuals, but rather imagined entities created for political purposes. The chapter examines how the Founding Fathers have been used in Texas gun debates over the

1 Gail Collins, "Limiting Access to Weapons Gets Congress Up in Arms," *Austin American-Statesman*, May 8, 2010, A13.

2 Jan E. Dizard, Robert Merrill Muth, and Stephen P. Andrews, Jr., eds., *Guns in America: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 1–13; Robert Spitzer, *Guns Across America: Reconciling Gun Rules and Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29–101; Adam Winkler, *Gunfight: The Battle Over the Right to Bear Arms in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

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last few decades and explicates how they have been conceived as both subjects and objects of political imaginaries. Through this approach, it addresses the larger phenomenon of temporal gun politics, where history becomes a tool for creating larger worldviews and lineages that are used to justify political positions in the present. It examines how history is used as a repertoire for the construction of temporal imaginaries that attempt to normalize certain positions on guns.

I operate via a framework which uses federal-level discussions about guns by legal scholars, judges, and activists to contextualize and analyze two state-level policy shifts around guns in Texas. The first of these is the passage of Concealed Carry legislation in the state of Texas in 1995, which allowed individuals with permits to carry concealed firearms in public areas, with a few notable exceptions.[3] Prior to this, carrying handguns had been historically more strongly legislated in Texas compared to long guns such as hunting rifles and shotguns, which had enjoyed laxer restrictions. Individuals had been allowed to possess handguns, but they could carry them on their person only on their own premises or those under their control (i.e., their home or inside their personal vehicle) or working in a profession such as law enforcement.[4] The second shift was the expansion of this right twenty years later in 2015, when two laws were passed: one to allow concealed weapons into university buildings (Campus Carry) and another to allow open carry of handguns in public areas previously covered by the concealed carry legislation. I connect the Texas discussions around guns at the state level to wider intellectual and ideological trajectories taking place across the nation, especially as they are formulated around one milestone moment in particular: the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2008 that established the current interpretation of the Second Amendment. According to Robert Spitzer, this was one of Supreme Court's "most history-driven (as opposed to law-driven) decisions

3 These include businesses with permits to sell alcohol; places for sporting or interscholastic activities; correctional facilities; hospitals and nursing homes; amusement parks; places of religious worship; and locations where governmental meetings are taking place. Robert A. McCulloch and Sandra G. Wilkinson, "Concealed Weapon Laws: Their Potential Impact on the Workplace," *The Compleat Lawyer* 13, no. 4 (1996): LN4.

4 Robert G. Newman, "A Farewell to Arms?—An Analysis of Texas Handgun Control Law," *St. Mary's Law Journal* 13, no. 3 (1982): 606; Nate G. Hummel, "Where Do I Put My Gun?: Understanding the Texas Concealed Handgun Law and the Licensed Owner's Right-to-Carry," *Texas Tech Journal of Administrative Law* 6 (2005): 139–63. R. Alan Thompson, "Perceived Effects of Concealed Handgun Ownership by Private Citizens Among Law Enforcement Officers in Texas," *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* 12, no. 1 (1997): 61–69; Angela Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 4–21.

in modern times."[5] Through these events, I trace the formation of a set of temporal imaginaries around Texas gun politics, informing understandings at the federal level and then being affected by them in turn.

My approach exemplifies media as the sphere where state- and federal-level imaginaries around guns collide and coexist. If, as Charles Taylor suggests, imaginaries are a form of established collections of notions and symbols that have a communicative purpose for organizing meaning around certain phenomena and tying people together, then media is the site in and through which these connections are formulated, shared, and contested across different groups.[6] There, larger social imaginaries become expressed, refined, and further communicated.[7] It is also a site where different imaginaries are framed in a conflicting relationship as part of a larger ideological struggle unfolding in the United States. From the 1980s to the present, gun debates began to manifest tendencies of the so-called culture wars, a series of cultural conflicts revolving around basic rights and questions of identity coming out of the 1960s.[8] The culture wars channeled anxieties about shifting social hierarchies and changing societal norms into a sense of existential conflict about the meaning of the nation.[9] Guns—deeply woven into the cultural tapestry of both the United States and Texas, to the point where one can hardly imagine either without firearms—were turned into such a front.[10]

This chapter regards guns and the claims made about the Founding Fathers when debating them as terrain in a broader ideological conflict unfolding over the time frame under investigation, from the 1990s to the 2010s. In this conflict, competing ideologies sought to seize the imaginaries surrounding the subject to establish their own ways of understanding the world as the dominant

5 Spitzer, *Guns Across America*, 2.

6 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23–30, 83–99.

7 Samuel Mateus, "A Communicational Matrix to the Imaginary: Looking into the Media Imaginary," *Empedocles: European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication* 8, no. 1 (2017): 69–70, 72–73.

8 See Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

9 James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

10 See Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Abigail A. Kohn, *Shooters: Myths and Realities of America's Gun Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

structures under which the topic was being conceived.[11] This occurs partially in and through media, which is a site where symbolic power is organized by its users.[12] The created imaginaries exaggerated tendencies of cultural conflict, embodied particularly in the rise of the legal philosophy of originalism, which argued that, "the Constitution should be interpreted in accordance with its original meaning—that is, the meaning it had at the time of its enactment."[13] In the decades leading up to the *DC v. Heller* decision, originalism had been embraced by the conservative movement, and heralded especially by Justice Antonin Scalia, who wrote the majority opinion for the case.[14]

This chapter uses both state- and federal-level media materials, the most important source being the *Austin American-Statesman*. It also draws on fieldwork and interviews to further contextualize the dissemination of mediated imaginaries into everyday political thinking around the topic of guns.[15] In its analysis of the ideological trajectories traced in the media materials, the chapter uses key texts produced by legal scholars, political activists, and historians over the studied timeframe. The temporal imaginaries examined concern the ways in which different groups have conceived of themselves as historical subjects participating in historical processes. The questions posed are, in what ways have different actors in political debates conceived of their present as a specific era and how have they related it to the wider trajectories of history that they imagine. By leveraging a shared perception of time, individuals have been able to politically situate themselves in relation to a discrete community with collective power. Similarly, imposing a certain temporal imaginary onto a group of people and conceiving of them as subjects within that temporal frame can be an exercise of political power and subjugation.[16] Thus, temporal imaginaries are sites of tension and political conflict, where different groups vie to establish their own views of the present and its relationship to both an imagined past and future as dominant imaginaries of historical time.

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11 Michael Freeden, *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: The Anatomy of a Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 22.

12 John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1995), 3.

13 Center for the Study of Constitutional Originality, School of Law, University of San Diego, http://www.sandiego.edu/law/centers/csco/, accessed December 14, 2020.

14 Spitzer, *Guns Across America*, 68–69; Marcia Coyle, *The Roberts Court: The Struggle for the Constitution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 163.

15 The fieldwork and interviews were conducted by the Academy of Finland-funded Campus Carry research team from the University of Turku.

16 See, for example, Adib and Paul Emiljanowicz, "Colonial Time in Tension: Decolonizing Temporal Imaginaries," *Time & Society* 28, no. 3 (2019): 1225.

My structure is thematic, although it follows a chronological flow. I trace patterns that resonate, replicate, or are differentiated across the timeframe under study, on both state and federal levels. I begin with the dynamic that I teased in my opening—the idea of the weapon itself as a temporal imaginary that has been constructed in the gun debates. Both the handgun and the assault weapon/rifle[17] have been symbols connected to the political imaginations of the Founding Fathers. In different ways, both were seen as problematic from the point of view of gun rights at various points in time, and thus considered distinct from long guns. From this, I move on to the larger dynamic of forging connections, delineating how and why the actors involved in contemporary gun debates in Texas have sought to trace their temporal lineage to the times and thinking of the Founding Fathers. Finally, I examine how the struggles over meaning have solidified and established themselves in the modern day.

1 "Fixing to be Armed": The Political Imaginaries of Weaponry

The media environment surrounding the passage of the Texas concealed carry legislation in 1995 was rife with temporal imaginaries, with many centering on the particular imagery invoked by the idea of the handgun. The *Austin American-Statesman* marked the passage of the law with a curt note: "Pistol-packin' Texans won't be just a cliché any longer."[18] One "humor column" mocked the idea of a future open carry proposal with an exaggerated description: "This is Texas, for gosh sakes, where men are men, and some of the truck stop waitresses are closing in on it. Let's get Western. Let's get macho. If the public is fixing to be armed, let's strap those guns on in plain sight and show them off as part of our Western attire."[19] Anxieties about firearms mixed with the

17 The distinction between an "assault weapon" and an "assault rifle" is often blurred in popular gun debates, with the two used interchangeably. Generally speaking, the weapons available for purchase by the civilian population in the U.S. are modified to be semi-automatic-only, which excludes them from the definition of "assault rifle." "Assault weapon" has become the political terminology to include such weapons. While these terms have a technical basis, it is also within the scope of this chapter to consider the imaginary aspects attached to these terms and how they are given meaning in the media sphere. See Timothy W. Luke, "Counting Up AR-15s: The Subject of Assault Rifles and the Assault Rifle as Subject," in *The Lives of Guns*, eds. Jonathan Obert, Andrew Poe, and Austin Sarat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 92.

18 Michael Holmes, "What Lawmakers Did—And What They Didn't," *Austin American-Statesman*, May 30, 1995, B3.

19 John Kelso, "Let's Wear Guns with Pride Deep in the Heart of Texas," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 28, 1995, B8.

wider cultural imagery of Texas as a state. The author implied that there was something potentially absurd about Texans walking around with handguns. For those who opposed the law, these depictions sought to differentiate between the lived reality of Texas and the larger cultural imaginaries surrounding it.

Carol R. Lockett, the vice-chairperson of Peaceable Texans for Firearms Rights, wrote to the *Austin American-Statesman* with the express purpose of arguing against these historical imaginaries. She stated that the concealed carry law would not turn Texas into a "Dodge City," the location of archetypal Wild West gun fights. In making the argument, she invoked the Founding Fathers: "But the NRA is not a disembodied evil forcing its will on the helpless. The NRA is us 3.5 million Americans who believe in our right to 'keep and bear arms.' We care about this right and are willing to dedicate time and money to preserve it."[20] Lockett framed the legislation in terms that resonated with many present gun debates. Thus, instead of moving the nation toward barbarism, the legislation was seen as a move toward the original founding ideals of the nation. It was about rights of the people and the promise of the Constitution, and particularly its Second Amendment, which states: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

According to Waldman, for nearly two hundred years, the Second Amendment received fairly little attention; its meaning, while ambiguous, was considered largely settled, until in the latter half of the twentieth century it began to emerge as one of the defining political points of contention in the country.[21] Writing about the sentiments that underlay the original Second Amendment, Saul Cornell has argued that instead of either of the modern understandings of the legislation that characterized the debate about its meaning—strands which he calls individualist and collectivist understandings of the right to keep and bear arms—the eighteenth-century conception of the law was based around civic duty. In this view, the right to bear arms came coupled with a sense of obligation; it was the duty of the citizen to enlist in a militia to defend their community and to purchase and maintain a functioning firearm for this purpose.[22] Thus, the conception of firearms as a means of protection was not individualistic or intended for personal self-defense. In a potential scenario of threats against one's person, the individual was supposed to flee

20 Carol R. Lockett, "Weapons Bill Opponents Relying on False Notions," *Austin American-Statesman*, April 10, 1995, A7.

21 Waldman, *Second Amendment*, xi–xiii.

22 Saul Cornell, *A Well-Regulated Militia: The Founding Fathers and the Origins of Gun Control in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2–8.

the situation and guns were only to be used as the last result.[23] Meanwhile, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz has highlighted the darker motives behind the Second Amendment, suggesting that it was rooted in the settlers' need to control the black population in the U.S. and to wage war against the indigenous groups on the continent.[24] Negotiating these different interpretations of the Second Amendment and its historical contexts became a means by which political debates around guns were fought. Accordingly, they became materials for the different historical imaginaries that various actors sought to build.

In the 1990s, handguns became an important symbol for the early debates on the communal and the individualistic interpretations of the Second Amendment. A pistol was seen as a personal weapon, not meant for militia use. To carry one was to be prepared for self-defense. Some of the early works of conservative scholarship on the Second Amendment, which would set the tone for gun arguments in the coming decades, were based on this dilemma of the handgun. One such book was Stephen P. Halbrook's *That Every Man Be Armed*, first published in 1986. Its original preface specifically framed it as an objection to recent firearms legislation against handguns. The book placed this in the context of the individual's right to bear arms, summarizing the anti-gun position as: "Even if individuals hold this right, some kinds of arms (such as handguns) are supposedly not really 'arms' at all, and can be banned without infringing on anyone's rights."[25] Halbrook believed that targeted animosity existed toward handguns in contemporary gun debates.

For the pro-gun side of the issue, the basic logic of the argument around handguns can be found in Halbrook's 1986 article, which conducted a "linguistic analysis of the right to 'bear arms'" in order to uncover the intents of the Founders regarding guns. An early example of legal originalism, the article delved into what the Founders might have intended with the expression "bear," suggesting that it specifically meant they had favored the right of citizens to *carry* arms on their person, as opposed to merely having the right to possess them in their own homes. Halbrook argued further that this word meant that the Founding Fathers had favored guns as means of individual and personal

23 Cornell, *A Well-Regulated Militia*. See also Patrick J. Charles, *Armed in America: A History of Gun Rights from Colonial Militias to Concealed Carry* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2018).

24 Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2018), 16–23. See also Carol Anderson, *The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021).

25 Stephen P. Halbrook, *That Every Man Be Armed: The Evolution of a Constitutional Right* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), xvi.

self-defense, rather than a civic or collective right.[26] This definition would become inherently meaningful when debating matters such as the concealed and open carry of firearms. In Halbrook's definition, allowing people to own guns was not enough to satisfy the intent of the Founders. People had to be allowed to carry them on their person.

Another word that Halbrook focused on was "arms." He argued that this was a term intended by the Founders to cover "those weapons used by settlers for both personal and military defense."[27] This included rifles and shotguns (as descendants of muskets and blunderbusses, respectively), pistols (as the best and most affordable tool for personal self-defense), and bladed and blunt instruments. What Halbrook felt to be outside the domains of the word were weapons an individual was incapable of "bearing," such as tanks, nuclear devices, or other heavy ordinance, as well as "other dangerous and unusual weapons, such as grenades, bombs, bazookas, and other devices which, while capable of being carried by hand, have never been commonly possessed for self-defense."[28] This early article by Halbrook is a prime example of how the limits and scopes of the imaginations of the Founders were politically crafted in argumentation. The aim was to demonstrate that when the Founding Fathers envisioned the Second Amendment and imagined the nation it would govern, their conceptualization would have covered the idea of the handgun being carried on one's person in public areas. In this way, the handgun had a symbolic quality in the 1990s when its relationship to the Second Amendment was being debated and contested in the media and by political actors in their works.

This sentiment can be found in both of the two Texas cases examined here. In 1995, guns in general were recognized as having a symbolic value in Texas politics. This was noted, for instance, in the *Austin American-Statesman*'s observation that both Governor George W. Bush (who signed the concealed carry law in 1995) and his predecessor Ann Richards (who had vetoed a similar bill in 1993) nonetheless had to pose for photographs with rifles and exclaim their love of hunting when on the campaign trail. "If you can't shoot a shotgun, you can't run for public office in Texas," the newspaper quoted Mark McKinnon, a Democratic political consultant who had worked on Richards's

26 Stephen P. Halbrook, "What the Framers Intended: A Linguistic Analysis of the Right to 'Bear Arms,'" *Law and Contemporary Problems* 49, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 152–57.

27 Halbrook, "What the Framers Intended," 156–57.

28 Halbrook, "What the Framers Intended," 157–60.

1990 campaign.[29] Guns—and particularly rifles used for hunting—were considered part of being a Texan, but handguns, especially concealed ones, were regarded with greater suspicion. They were not part of Texas reality, at least not according to the arguments proposed in the media by those opposed to the legislation.

Later in 2015 also, one writer framed her objections to the passage of open carry and Campus Carry legislations as "Texas lawmakers [grappling] with the presence of guns on society consistently and thoughtfully since Reconstruction."[30] She recalled the words of Governor Pat Neff, who in 1921 vetoed a bill that would have lifted restrictions on the sale of handguns in Texas: "Man is the masterpiece of the world. He lives a life sublime and dies a death immortal. No legislation should be had that will encourage or make easy the taking of human life."[31] While tapping into deeper questions about the value of life and freedom in modern times, writing in a wistful tone, the writer objected to what she felt was a common characterization that Texas's Open Carry prohibition was a "quaint" relic of history that belonged in the past. Instead, she framed the modern law as a new step in an ongoing historical struggle between pro-gun and anti-gun sentiments about the place of handguns in Texas public spaces.[32]

Discussions about handguns and the Second Amendment have actively envisioned the Founding Fathers as having political imaginations of their own. The question behind the argument is whether the Founding Fathers themselves envisioned their words to include handguns. The composition of this kind of historical imaginary is particularly well exemplified over the course of my timeframe in a parallel debate about whether the Founding Fathers could have conceived weapons with the firing capacity of an assault weapon and whether their political opinions could therefore be considered to have weight when legislating such firearms. This issue loomed large over the two cases I have examined here. The Texas bill for concealed carry was implemented against the backdrop of the Federal Assault Weapons Ban put in place by President Bill Clinton in 1994.[33] Meanwhile, the Campus Carry and open carry laws of 2015 were likewise advanced during national gun debates overshadowed by events such as the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012, which

29 Stuart Eskenazi, "It's a Texas Ritual: Candidates Tote Guns, Hunt Votes," *Austin American-Statesman*, September 1, 1994, A1.

30 Bee Moorhead, "Open-carry Law Latest Shot in Long-Running State Fight," *Austin American-Statesman*, September 4, 2016.

31 Moorhead.

32 Moorhead.

33 Melzer, *Gun Crusaders*, 236–37; Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns*, 7–8.

inspired calls to reinstate the Federal Assault Weapons Ban that had expired in 2004.[34]

There is a considerable malleability in the notion of "assault weapon," which has made it a fruitful ground for the construction of historical imaginaries.[35] For this purpose, highlighting the difference between (often illegal) fully military grade weapons and their legal variants, the *Austin American-Statesman* ran an infographic on the question "What makes an assault weapon?"[36] On the webpage of the NRA, the organization notes: "AR-15s and other semi-automatic rifles are not the fully-automatic, military-grade firearms they are often claimed to be by gun control supporters and the media."[37] At a march in 1994 protesting the Assault Weapons Ban, the main organizer of the event, Ron Long of the Committee of 1776 (a pro-gun organization whose name itself was a startling direct reference to the Founding Fathers) referenced this debate when he said: "Right now, I'd like to introduce the greatest assault weapon in this country: Bill Clinton's pen, signing away our rights. Time, after time, after time. That is an assault weapon that we cannot let go on."[38] The speaker turned the term "assault weapon" on its head, moving it from the domain of firearms to the realm of politics.

Robert Spitzer has written about this political dynamic around the term "assault weapon." He notes that since the 1990s it became commonplace to frame the term as a political term introduced and used by gun control activists.[39] Following this trend, a Texas-based layer Carl Haggard exclaimed at the 1994 protest: "Challenge the nice people from the press when they call your weapons 'assault weapons.' Inform them that your guns are very sensitive and don't like to be called names. Mine has a hair trigger, don't call it a name."[40] He proceeded to frame "assault weapon" as a hate-word and a tool of propaganda used by gun control activists.[41] However, Spitzer has demonstrated that the term "assault weapon" was actively used by gun manufacturers in their

34 See, for example, Ralph K. M. Haurwitz, "On Eve of Sandy Hook, Rally Calls for Gun Limits," *Austin American-Statesman*, December 14, 2015, B1.

35 On this, see Timothy W. Luke, "Counting Up AR-15s: The Subject of Assault Rifles and the Assault Rifle as Subject," in *The Lives of Guns*, eds. Jonathan Obert, Andrew Poe, and Austin Sarat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 92.

36 "What Makes an Assault Weapon?" *Austin American-Statesman*, December 23, 2012, A7.

37 "'Assault Weapons' | 'Large' Magazines," NRA-ILA, September 2019, https://www.nraila.org/get-the-facts/assault-weapons-large-magazines/, accessed February 14, 2021.

38 "Second Amendment Rally Part 1," C-SPAN, 15:11–15:26, August 14, 1994, https://www.c-span.org/video/?59536-1/amendment-rally-part-1%2015, accessed March 12, 2021.

39 Spitzer, *Guns Across America*, 79–85.

40 "Second Amendment Rally," 39:00–39:30.

41 "Second Amendment Rally," 39:00–39:30.

advertising campaigns already during the 1980s, before they started moving away from the terminology in the 1990s.[42]

Aside from the issue of terminology, there was also a question of firepower and whether the Founders could have conceived of portable weapons capable of wreaking the type of havoc caused by an assault weapon. This point was explicitly made, for instance, by Austin-based attorney Claude Ducloix for the *Austin American-Statesman* in a piece titled: "Hamilton, Madison Never Imagined Assault Weapons." He argued:

> As we grapple for lawful ways to restrict access to these devastating weapons of death, we are all beholden to the theories, myths and mysteries of what our framers intended as they crafted the Second Amendment. Curiously, Justice Antonin Scalia argued and championed "originalism"—the idea that we must put ourselves in the framer's minds as we modernize their intent.[43]

Ducloix continued by describing his visit to an antique store that displayed muskets from the Revolutionary War. Here it truly struck him that the originalist approach must use that kind of weaponry as the basis for its understanding of the clause, rather than modern guns: "These are *assault* weapons, for trained soldiers to use to offensively *assault* the enemy, not defend himself from a burglar."[44] Indeed, his emphasis called attention to the word "assault" and how, in his mind, a weapon created for that purpose would not fit the intent of the Founders.

On the other end of the debate, pro-gun activists have also sought to answer the question. For instance, the right-wing website *Daily Caller* has compiled a list of repeating weapons to show how the Founding Fathers would been have open to the idea of significant advancements in weapons technology. The article cites William Atwater of the United States Army Ordnance Museum as saying: "[The Founders] lived during the Age of Reason. They celebrated the achievements of the human mind. They had witnessed huge advances in firearms technology."[45] One of the cases listed was that of Joseph Belton, who

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42 Spitzer, *Guns Across America*, 79–82.

43 Claude Ducloix, "Hamilton, Madison Never Imagined Assault Weapons," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 26, 2018, A11.

44 Ducloix, A11. Emphasis in original.

45 Craig Boudreau, "These Guns Dispel the Notion the Founding Fathers Could Never Have Imagined Modern Assault Rifles," *Daily Caller*, June 29, 2016, https://dailycaller.com/2016/06/29/these-guns-dispel-the-notion-the-founding-fathers-could-never-have-imagined-modern-assault-rifles/, accessed January 26, 2021.

was also referenced by the YouTube channel High Caliber History in their take on the subject. This was an inventor who contacted the Continental Congress in 1777 with a proposal to add a modification to flintlock muskets that would allow them to fire several rounds without the need to reload. His correspondence was used to demonstrate that the imaginations of the Founding Fathers and their contemporaries could have grasped the idea of repeating weaponry.[46]

The debate around assault weapons and the Founding Fathers represents one of the most explicit manifestations of the focus of this chapter. The potential reaches and limits of the imaginations of the Founding Fathers are laid out by the different parties, and the results are used to make arguments about the state of contemporary society. The same dynamic applies to the discussions around the carry of handguns, concealed or otherwise. Political relevance is constructed around the proposition of whether the Founding Fathers envisioned a country where people can walk around armed or not, and whether this vision covered various types of armaments, ranging from handguns to assault weapons. This vision of the Founders' imaginations is used in crafting a historical imaginary of the nation that connects the present day to the imagined past. The question then becomes whether the present day is conceived—whether due to laxity or severity of gun laws, depending on one's political leanings—as a direct continuation of the historical trajectories set forth by the Founding Fathers or an aberration of their vision.

2 The Armed Scions of the Founding Fathers

As a constant across the period under study, those pushing for pro-gun legislation often sought to present themselves as inheritors of the legacy of the Founding Fathers. This was the argument of Carol Lockett quoted above, that the NRA was merely representing people seeking to retain the rights granted to them by the Second Amendment.[47] And the organization itself has repeatedly drawn parallels between its activities and the Founding Fathers. For instance, in a fundraising letter sent to its members in 2001, Wayne LaPierre—the CEO and the Executive Vice-President of the organization since 1991—suggested that the financial commitment of the NRA's supporters was comparable to

46 High Caliber History, "The Founding Fathers & Repeating Rifles," YouTube video, 7:51, August 20, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHQF3g07TxI, accessed January 26, 2021.

47 Lockett, "Weapons Bill Opponents," A7.

the sacrifices made by the Founding Fathers in the name of freedom.[48] The 1990s were a time of internal struggle for the organization, as its more extreme elements were looking to push it further toward the right and to frame its objectives in more intense tones. By the second half of the decade, the NRA was leaning heavily toward culture wars logic, depicting the struggle over the Second Amendment as an existential conflict concerning the very soul of the nation, with freedom being at stake.[49] Simultaneously, the "gun gap" traced by Mark R. Joslyn began to form during this time, with gun ownership becoming ever stronger indicator of one's larger political beliefs.[50]

These fractures were present in the gun debates surrounding the concealed carry legislation in 1995. For instance, one reader writing to the *Austin American-Statesman* disagreed with the proposed law, not because they were anti-gun but because they saw it as a dangerous piece of legislation aimed toward eventual gun control. They felt that the NRA had been fooled by gun control advocates into supporting the legislation:

> Those who wish to disarm the American citizen are well known for creating a problem and then offering a solution. In this case the problem is the increase in crime. The "solution" to the problem in Texas is to pass a new law (the concealed carry law) which will register gun owners under the pretense of granting them a permit to exercise a right they already have. Over and over again, registration of guns or gun owners has been followed by confiscation of guns. If the American citizens were to lose their First Amendment rights, those rights could be regained by using Second Amendment rights. If the American citizens were to lose their Second Amendment rights, not only would those rights not be regained, but the other rights in the Bill of Rights would be lost in short order.[51]

The writer clothed their argument in the civic language of citizenship. In their view, the concealed carry legislation was seen as the first step toward gun confiscation. The promises of personal protection granted by the law were seen as a ruse to strip a basic right that in turn guaranteed the existence of other rights. The writer argued that the one thing maintaining basic liberties such

48 Melzer, *Gun Crusaders*, 106.

49 Melzer, 73–74.

50 Mark R. Joslyn, *The Gun Gap: The Influence of Gun Ownership on Political Behavior and Attitudes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–6.

51 "Ulterior Motives Warning: A Concealed Carry Law is Not What We Need," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 1, 1995, A8.

as the freedom of speech was the presence of an armed citizenry. This has also been a consistent theme in the larger frame of gun debates, where firearms are depicted as a liberative tool that can thwart tyranny.

This line of thought, which connected guns to defending the nation against threats, was clearly manifest in the 1990s. For example, anger with the NRA for its perceived propensity to compromise with gun control groups was expressed by the Committee of 1776. The "Second Amendment Rally" held in 1994 in Washington, DC began with a declaration: "One statement for the media: If you misquote us, we will sue you. … And this is our position: No more compromise! This is not about gun control, this is about the Constitution. We will not compromise on the Constitution."[52] The first speaker, Larry Pratt of the Gun Owners of America, opened with a prayer session that addressed the gathering as patriots: "Since we're going to spend our day being politically incorrect, so I've been asked to begin with a religious note."[53] Already within the first few minutes of the rally, the group had depicted themselves as the scions of the Founding Fathers (through their name), as protectors of the Constitution rather than political activists (through the statement on their position), and as mavericks and rebels who dared to go against both the media establishment, who would misquote them, and current popular sentiment, which was critical of their sensibilities. Public prayer was portrayed as a transgressive act against "political correctness," here invoking a term which had found great currency in U.S. cultural conflicts, particularly among conservatives, since the early 1990s.[54]

The speaker continued to forge a linkage to the Founding Fathers by quoting a biblical passage that he noted was incredibly important to them: "When Isaiah told the people of God that the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king, it is he who will save us."[55] Pratt argued that the country's greatness was based around its godliness—its submission to the supreme will of God—and that the Founding Fathers had understood this. He called this the "spirit that settled America and made America great."[56] Thus, he concluded, understanding the Constitution meant accepting the significance religion had in the imaginations of the Founding Fathers. Ultimately, this meant distrusting governmental bodies, which—the implication went—would try to usurp the role of God as the supreme lawmaker.

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52 "Second Amendment Rally," 1:50–2:10.

53 "Second Amendment Rally," 2:25–2:35.

54 See, for example, John Lea, *Political Correctness and Higher Education: British and American Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

55 "Second Amendment," 6:50–7:10.

56 "Second Amendment," 6:50–7:10.

The entire framing of the event in 1994, from the God-centric morality to the group's self-framing as would-be mavericks speaking against the institutional power structure, conformed to the larger themes and topics of the intensifying culture wars across the nation.[57] It also symbolized a larger shift simultaneously taking place in gun politics—shortly after this event, for example, the NRA stepped up its rhetoric by framing gun debates in terms of the culture wars, in order to incite greater furor in its supporters.[58] Religious worldview, history, and guns were fused in a sacred genealogy. Carl Haggard—a Texan lawyer from the Committee for the Bill of Rights—outlined this in his speech at the rally:

> History is a river that flows from God. There are the strains and the tributaries of events that God wills or permits to happen. There is the main body of the river of life flowing into the endless sea of time. … Our Bill of Rights, our head waters of our freedom. From it springs forth the fountain of our liberty. But the Bill of Rights was originally suppressed by the one world order Federalists who controlled that constitutional convention. They were out to create a strong centralized, government, at the expense of the free and independent state and of individual liberty.[59]

Regarding history in terms of a divine origin, Haggard argued that there was a fundamental tension that extended from the founding of the nation to the present day, one between "one world order Federalists" and "freedom-loving Americans." Later on in his speech, he elaborated:

> We can observe, however, from history the sad truth that we do not win every battle against evil just because right is on our side. … Because you see there was always in history existing sinister forces of evil attempting to enslave our forefathers—and now us again—by taking away our God-given right to keep and bear arms and thereby our ability—and this is the bottom line—our ability to oppose, by force if necessary, those same sinister forces of evil. But what is the evil of which I speak against which we must be prepared to defend? After all, the modern-day federalists over there tell us that they're grabbing our guns to protect us from criminals who might misuse them. We know the fallacy of that argument throughout history. You must learn history! Evil forces have always

57 Hartman, *War for the Soul*.
58 Melzer, *Gun Crusaders*, 73–74.
59 "Second Amendment Rally," 19:50–20:45.

> attempted to disarm law-abiding citizens in the name of crime control and security.[60]

In the historical imaginary constructed by Carl Haggard, the people gathered at the rally were the descendants of the forefathers who had written the Bill of Rights, and they were opposed by modern-day federalists. This included Bill Clinton and other figures they considered to be in favor of gun control, who were linked to the historical faction. Federalists both modern and old were understood here as manifestations of a deeper plot—the totalitarian "one world order," depicted as "sinister forces of evil" that remained constant over the centuries.

The rally organized by the Committee of 1776 is useful for demonstrating the early ideological maneuvers that would bear fruit for gun rights activism in the coming decades. It was an event suffused with a shared sense of grievance and persecution. The mentions of Bill Clinton and Congress were met by repeated yells of "Treason!" from the audience. The organizer agreed: "That's how I feel. … There are two-hundred-six … traitors in Congress right now." By implication, to legislate against guns was a treasonable offense—but also a direct threat to the people. The Washington, DC march was mirrored by local rallies organized across the country, including in Austin, and the cultural imagery of Texas was present in the proceedings when Haggard ended his speech with a call to "remember the Alamo."[61]

Behind the language used at the event and surrounding the 1995 Texas legislation was a proclamation that would be repeated across the timeframe of this study surrounding gun laws: namely, that the Holocaust and the subjugation of the Jewish people in Nazi Germany had been preceded by the confiscation of weapons. This allowed parallels to be forged between the gun control activists of the modern era and the authoritarian forces of the past. A version of this can be found in right-wing commentator Glenn Beck's book, *Control: Exposing the Truth About Guns* (2013), which was framed as a series of rebuttals to common arguments made by gun control activists. Addressing the question of Nazis and gun control, Beck argued that while it could not be proven that the Holocaust would not have taken place had German Jews been armed, it was the fact that weapons had to be registered that made the Nazis' operation

60 "Second Amendment Rally," 27:45–29:08.

61 Suzanne Gamboa, "Angry at NRA, Gun Advocates Plan to Rally Today at Capitol," *Austin American-Statesman*, July 2, 1994, B3; "Second Amendment Rally," 41:13–41:15. For an in-depth exploration of the connections between the myth of the Alamo and Texas gun politics, see Laura Hernández-Ehrisman in this volume.

of subjugation and extermination easier. Thus, the act of creating a registry of guns represented a potential first step toward disarmament and oppression.[62] Beck's source for these historical arguments was Stephen Halbrook, for alongside his work on the Founding Fathers' intentions regarding guns, in which they were aligned with the views of conservative politics in the modern era, Halbrook had also extensively argued the connection between gun control and the perpetration of the Nazi atrocities.[63] Already in 1986, he stated that any demand to register guns would count as an "infringement" and that, "throughout history, firearms registration classically has been required as a prelude to confiscation." That the Nazis used gun registration as a tool "to find and execute gun owners" was "well known."[64]

For figures like Stephen Halbrook, the Second Amendment was closely tied to a sense of U.S. exceptionalism, and Nazi Germany was invoked as an alternative historical trajectory that the country could fall toward if it strayed from its core principles. In his 2013 book specifically on gun control in Nazi Germany, Halbrook would define the right to bear arms as something that "reflects a universal and historical power of the people in a republic to resist tyranny."[65] Through the Founding Fathers, gun laws were thus emblematic of the ideals of the U.S. national community. Guns were the thing that separated the United States from authoritarian nations.

In the timeline under study, the next historical question to acquire deep ideological resonance was the extent to which guns were actually part of the lived reality of the Founding Fathers and their contemporaries. This issue became a fervent point of debate in the late 1990s and early 2000s, leading up to the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision in 2008, a threshold moment in terms of the historical and modern understandings of the Second Amendment. It established that the right to bear arms set in place by the amendment was not linked to the need for a "well-regulated militia"; thus, states could not infringe upon an individual's right to own a gun for purposes of self-defense.[66] In Texas already in 1999, *United States of America v. Emerson* had established the Second Amendment as an individual right, not a collective one. The ruling was on part based on "a long tradition of widespread lawful gun ownership

62 Glenn Beck, *Control: Exposing the Truth About Guns* (New York: Mercury Radio Arts, 2013), 108–15.

63 Beck, 109.

64 Halbrook, "What the Framers Intended," 161.

65 Stephen P. Halbrook, *Gun Control in the Third Reich: Disarming the Jews and "Enemies of the State"* (Oakland, CA: Independent Institute, 2013), xvii.

66 Waldman, *Second Amendment*, xiii–xiv.

by private individuals in this country."[67] In the context of the originalist reading of the Constitution to determine the meaning of the Second Amendment, the presence of guns in the daily lives of the Founding Fathers and their contemporaries was not merely a historical question but one that determined the larger place of guns in U.S. culture.[68]

An important conservative articulation regarding the issue came from historian Clayton E. Cramer, who had been cited—among others—in the 1999 Texas case and would again appear in the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision. In between, he was involved with one of the most notable controversies around guns in U.S. history, one which would establish his prominence as a rightwing gun scholar and cement the tenets of pro-gun arguments regarding firearms and the history of the nation for decades to come. Cramer's *Armed America: The Remarkable Story of How and Why Guns Became as American as Apple Pie* (2006), written specifically to argue the idea that guns were an inalienable part of U.S. history and national identity, was framed around a culture war-centered conflict of historical interpretation.[69]

The conflict in question was based on a specific argument made by historian Michael A. Bellesiles, first in a 1996 article for the *Journal of American History* and later in his *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (2000). Bellesiles contended that U.S. gun culture was not a natural occurrence but instead had been manufactured by the gun industry in the nineteenth century, meaning that guns had not had a notable presence in the everyday culture of the Founding Fathers.[70] This argument had special significance as the originalist interpretation of the Constitution was undergoing a transition at the turn of the 2000s: as the critics of the originalists increasingly underlined that

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67 *United States v. Emerson*, 46 F. Supp. 2d 598 (N.D. Tex. 1999), https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp2/46/598/2488037/, accessed March 2, 2021. While the ruling was successfully appealed, the appeal decision specifically maintains the interpretation that the Second Amendment protects the individual's right to keep and bear arms. *United States of America, Plaintiff-appellant, v. Timothy Joe Emerson, Defendant-appellee*, 270 F.3d 203 (5th Cir. 2001), https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F3/270/203/545404/#fn12, accessed March 2, 2021.

68 It bears mentioning that Adam Winkler has highlighted the possible dissonance between legal interpretations of the Second Amendment and historical, lived reality of U.S. gun culture. He argues that while legal scholars until the 1960s appeared to have little interest in the legal meaning of the Second Amendment, the interpretation of gun ownership as a personal right existed on a quotidian level. See Winkler, *Gunfight*, Chapter 4.

69 Clayton E. Cramer, *Armed America: The Remarkable Story of How and Why Guns Became as American as Apple Pie* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Current, 2006).

70 Jon Wiener, *Historians in Trouble: Plagiarism, Fraud, and Politics in the Ivory Tower* (New York: New Press, 2005), 73–93.

the Founding Fathers were a conflicted group of people who held no uniform views, this second wave shifted the focus away from the thoughts of the Founding Fathers themselves to instead conceive how average contemporaries of the Founding Fathers would have understood them.[71] The proximity and the general relationship that they had with guns therefore held importance.

A roaring controversy erupted around Bellesiles's book when Cramer uncovered inconsistencies and flagrant errors in the way that it had handled its source materials. Emory University—where Bellesiles was tenured—launched an investigation and found him guilty of "falsification." The prestigious Bancroft Prize awarded to his book was rescinded. Hounded by the media, Bellesiles became a *persona non grata* in the academic world for over a decade.[72] For Cramer and his ideological allies in the pro-gun movement, Bellesiles's disgrace was a resounding victory, demonstrating what they thought to be undeniably true: that their ideological adversaries in politics, media, and the academia were so keen to embrace any historical depiction that suited their general worldviews that they were willing to bypass standard academic rigor. Bellesiles was portrayed as someone willing to fraudulently twist history to suit their own agenda, and it was only through the indefatigable efforts of those like Cramer that sufficient proof was produced that action had to be taken.[73] As a further consequence, the historical questions raised by Bellesiles's book came to be seen as settled: when Pamela Haag released *The Gunning of America: Business and the Making of American Gun Culture* (2016), which focused on a similar historical argument as that made by Bellesiles, Cramer dubbed it "Bellesiles' Arming America Redux," dismissing its content as a mere rehashing of the earlier disproven interpretation.[74]

In Jon Wiener's history of the politics of academic fraud, he questions whether Bellesiles's errors truly amounted to purposeful fraud, and he suggests that the level of controversy and consequences that Bellesiles faced were

71 Andrew M. Schocket, *Fighting Over the Founders: How We Remember the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 171.

72 Tom Bartlett, "Michael Bellesiles Takes Another Shot," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 3, 2010, https://www.chronicle.com/article/michael-bellesiles-takes-another-shot/, accessed March 16, 2021; "The Bancroft and Bellesiles," *History News Network*, http://hnn.us/articles/1157.html, accessed February 10, 2021.

73 See, for example, Roger D. McGrath, "The American Gun Culture," *New American*, June 4, 2018, 17–21.

74 Clayton E. Cramer, "Bellesiles' Arming America Redux: Does the Gunning of America Rewrite American History to Suit Modern Sensibilities?" *Southern Illinois University Law Journal* 41, no. 3 (2016): 403–38, https://law.siu.edu/academics/law-journal/issues/spring-2017.html, accessed March 16, 2021.

amplified by the ferocity of the contemporary debates into which his book was injected.[75] Rather than representing a case of poor scholarship, Bellesiles was demonized by his critics as a symbol of disgrace for the entire strand of academic literature that questioned the integral nature of guns to the U.S. national experience.

The case of Bellesiles is especially worth noting when considering the temporal imaginaries constructed around the Founding Fathers in contemporary gun debates. The pro-gun argument worked by envisioning its present-day advocates as the spiritual and political heirs of the Founding Fathers. The past and the present had to be in harmony—at least to the extent of the political propositions being advanced, if not the lived contemporary reality. It was therefore of utmost relevance that the Founding Fathers lived with guns, knew guns, and would appreciate guns that would be openly displayed or discreetly carried today. The function of the rightwing temporal imaginaries around guns was to establish this exact point.

3 The Solidification of Temporal Gun Imaginaries

So far, this chapter has traced the trajectory of the struggle over the Founders as empty symbols injected with meaning by different parties seeking to instill their own interpretation as the dominant one. In national gun debates, the Founding Fathers were consistently referenced, in particular to bolster conservative, pro-gun positions. Not only were they recreated as historical entities, but they were then overlaid with imaginaries of their own, thereby delineating the boundaries of what they could and would have conceived. By 2015 and the passage of the Campus Carry and open carry legislations, these imaginaries about the Founding Fathers had largely been established and disseminated. For example, when asked how they would describe the Second Amendment to a foreigner, one of the experts interviewed at UT Austin by the Campus Carry research team gave their view of the historical trajectory that had led to the passage of the SB 11 legislation:

> The Second Amendment was written when we did not have a standing army in this country. … The militias, which is in the first clause to that amendment, were to be funded by the state but raised by the citizens—basically a citizen militia. They had the right to have guns to protect

75 Wiener, *Historians in Trouble*, 73–93.

> themselves from foreign enemies and so forth. … It's never been interpreted this way before, but since 2008 the Heller decision in the Supreme Court separated that clause and said you have the right to have a gun to protect yourself in your home, regardless of whether it is associated with raising a militia. So, it changed the politics. … [P]eople interpreted that as "go ahead and do stupid stuff with guns," if I can say it that way.[76]

In this way, the current situation is understood as the result of *District of Columbia v. Heller*. Specifically, the way that decision has been widely interpreted is seen as having changed politics and made guns a more regular part of everyday experience. Likewise, the historical significance of firearms, including the Second Amendment and the Founding Fathers, has solidified. Another member of the campus community interviewed by the research team recalled the town hall meetings leading up to the implementation of the law:

> There were some real interesting teachable moments. Students who mean well, I presume, but would say real broad political statements like "the Founding Fathers would want us to have the Second Amendment everywhere." Just like that. And then we have [a UT staff member] who goes up and says, "Well, actually, Thomas Jefferson, who founded the University of Virginia, who is one of the sort of foundiest of the Founding Fathers, he banned guns in his own school. So actually we have really concrete evidence that this is not the case."[77]

This quote reveals the conflicting perceptions of history—namely, the historical context presented by the UT staff member and the assumptions that the students had absorbed and held as commonsensical—but, more importantly in the case of the latter, that the temporal imaginary at the root of the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision seems to have taken hold.

The quote also demonstrates an inherent problem in originalist thinking: the Founding Fathers were not a singular entity with monolithic views regarding everything. Their political goals were frequently in conflict, and the early republic was continually teetering between the ideal of consensus politics on one side and, on the other, growing ideological fractures between varying factions among the founders. One such factor concerned fundamental questions

76 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin faculty, April 10, 2018, notes in possession of author.

77 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin faculty, April 25, 2018, notes in possession of author.

about the nature of government, such as whether it should have an active role in public life or whether this would be a threat to individual freedom.[78] Some of these early disagreements were so fierce that they inspired Stephen Prothero to argue that the "culture wars" as a model of cultural conflict was not only applicable to tensions arising since the 1960s—as has commonly been argued—but rather that U.S. history comprises a cycle of heated culture wars about the very meaning of the nation, starting from its founding.[79]

In the 2000s, both ends of the political spectrum repeatedly referenced the Founding Fathers in their speeches: the conservative side to reveal a set of timeless principles that could resonate in the present with the annals of history, the liberal progressives to highlight the fundamental promise at the core of the nation still needing to be realized.[80] Throughout the twentieth century, political figures as dissimilar as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and President Ronald Reagan had realized that the Founding Fathers were largely an empty symbol in people's minds and could therefore be invoked to support vastly different ideologies.[81]

For conservative gun rights proponents, the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision was regarded as a victory on this front. It was the culmination of extensive scholarly work by pro-gun activists, who had attempted to separate the two parts of the Second Amendment: namely, that the Founding Fathers had envisioned guns as a form of individual self-protection, not as a tool of communal defense in the form of a militia. Indeed, Halbrook described these efforts as an uphill battle against the prevailing orthodoxy:

> Such scholarship was unfashionable at the time [in the 1980s], to say the least. Hatred of gun rights was pervasive in legal academia. Even more significantly, these lawyers were hopelessly out of date in a world dominated by an academic consensus that treated the original meaning of the Constitution as a quaint irrelevancy. What counted was not the Constitution itself but what judges had said in their opinions and what professors at prestigious law schools were urging judges to say in future cases. All of the early scholarship on the Second Amendment was written by practicing lawyers who took seriously the ideal of law as a learned profession.

78 David Sehat, *The Jefferson Rule: How the Founding Fathers Became Infallible and Our Politics Inflexible* (Riverside, NJ: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 3–37.

79 Stephen Prothero, *Why Liberals Win the Culture Wars (Even When They Lose Elections): The Battles that Define America from Jefferson's Heresies to Gay Marriage* (New York: HarperOne, 2016).

80 Schocket, *Fighting Over the Founders*, 18.

81 Sehat, *The Jefferson Rule*, 123–78.

> The self-satisfied *faux* sophisticates in the legal professoriate only started to awake from their dogmatic slumber after Antonin Scalia joined the Supreme Court and began to make originalism respectable once again.[82]

This quote exemplifies a familiar dynamic to those privy to the inner workings of conservative ideology in the United States. Through its history, figures within the conservative ideological movement have sought to portray themselves as outcasts, rebels, and mavericks going against established truths, shattering all expectations in their way.[83] Academia has received special scorn in this narrative, being often seen as the hotbed of radical leftist professors who hold conservative ideas and ideals in disdain.[84] In depicting the rise of pro-gun scholarship on the Second Amendment as a battle of brave individuals daring to go against the established norms, jolting the dormant powers-that-be from their slumber in the process, Halbrook's account is celebratory; in his view, the insurgency succeeded and the pro-gun conservatives were able to shift the legislative paradigms around the Second Amendment coming into 2008.

The triumph of conservative gun activism which led to the Heller decision and paved the way for the legislation discussed in this volume was linked to the rise of the legal philosophy of originalism in the 2000s, starting as far back as the 1980s. Prior to that, it had been a term of disparagement for a "misconceived quest for the original understanding."[85] But adopted by Reagan's Attorney General Edwin Meese III, among others, and framed in a more positive sense, originalism had an appeal in the conservative political sphere. In practice, it promised the legal philosophy necessary to overturn Supreme Court decisions of past years that were despised by conservatives, such as the *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion rights in 1973.[86] In this case, the argument was that *Roe v. Wade* was based on a woman's "right to privacy," conceived of as a subset of personal liberty and therefore predicated on the spirit rather than the exact words of the Constitution. The originalist view purported by Justice Scalia and

82 Stephen P. Halbrook, *The Founders' Second Amendment: Origins of the Right to Bear Arms* (Oakland, CA: Independent Institute, 2019), viii.

83 See Kevin Mattson, *Rebels All! A Short History of the Conservative Mind in Postwar America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Nicole Hemmer, *The Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2016); Robin, *Reactionary Mind*, 55–57.

84 Hartman, *War for the Soul*, 222–52.

85 Paul Brest, "The Misconceived Quest for the Original Understanding," *Boston University Law Review* 204 (1980): 204–38.

86 Cass R. Sunstein, "Originalism," *Notre Dame Law Review* 93, no. 4 (2018): 1673–74.

others stressed that this was a subjective interpretation, and that the Constitution contained no explicit mention of a right to abortion.[87]

According to Andrew Schocket, the conservative approach of originalism "contains all the elements of essentialism: the notion of history as a knowable, fixed truth; the founders as the ultimate authorities on civic affairs; and for many, though not all of its practitioners, a focus on individual liberty and what they call 'traditional values.'"[88] In this way, it represents a legal interpretation deeply invested in crafting historical imaginaries, needing to conceive the Founders as subjects across history and as thinking in a uniform and unified manner applicable and apparent to the modern mind. Thus, history was regarded as a reservoir of established wisdom that did not require interpretative action to access.

By 2015, the tone of these debates had become established parts of political language. The level of heated rhetoric around the debates was noted with disdain, for instance, by Ken Herman of the *Austin American-Statesman*, who believed that the passion some of the pro-gun activists felt for the Open Carry and Campus Carry bills were turning civics into an "extreme sport."[89] Although personally in favor of pro-gun legislation, Herman felt uneasy with the level of rancor in firearms debates.[90] This emerged, for example, around another bill introduced in the Texas State Senate in 2015 concerning "constitutional carry," loosely defined as "not needing any form of permission, from any government, to exercise your natural born right to defend yourself."[91] The rationale here is that carrying firearms is a right that the state has no provision to permit, regulate, or deny.[92]

The proposed legislation was followed by extremely stark language, such as the suggestion by Kory Watkins of Open Carry Tarrant County that opposition to constitutional carry was a form of treason that could be punishable by death.[93] Again, the will of the Founders was seen as enshrined in the Constitution and going against it was treasonous activity. This statement also revealed

87 Robert Cassidy, "Scalia on Abortion: Originalism… But, Why?" *Touro Law Review* 32, no. 4 (2016): 741–46.

88 Schocket, *Fighting over the Founders*, 168.

89 Ken Herman, "Civics as an Extreme Sport," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 13, 2015, A1.

90 Herman, A1.

91 USCCA, "What Constitutional Carry Means," YouTube video, 3:55, February 6, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCWONNa_9hU, accessed March 12, 2021.

92 On the view that bearing arms is a God-given right, see Albion M. Butters in this volume.

93 Chuck Lindell, "Hearing Set on Gun Rights," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 10, 2015, A7.

that for some, the Open Carry legislation was only a first step in the greater path toward Constitutional Carry. For instance, the website of the advocacy group Open Carry Texas reported: "As of January 1, 2016, Texas moved an inch closer to the constitutional principles both the state and nation were founded upon. While we were successful in getting licensed open carry passed, our ultimate goal will always be constitutional carry."[94] Thus, both Open Carry and Campus Carry were recognized as stepping stones toward realizing the country's core constitutional principles.

Calling originalism a form of legal fundamentalism, David Sehat has argued that its difference from other legal philosophies is not a question of interpretation but rather a fundamental break in the conceptualization of time. Accordingly, he outlines the disagreement between historians and originalists—the former being most prominently represented by Saul Cornell, the latter by Lawrence B. Solum—to argue that the divide lies in a basic understanding of the relationship between meaning and historical context. Defending the originalists, Solum finds that the meaning of historical legal texts can be arrived at without considering the historical factors that surround it. This method denies time, suggesting that there is no temporal barrier separating the modern reader from the meaning of past texts.[95] This relationship to history is similar to what Jill Lepore has discussed in terms of the Tea Party movement, which arose around the same time as the *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision: namely, that it was not a retelling but a reenactment of history, such that the movement was driven by "historical fundamentalism" in which the past was immutable and ageless and thus readily accessible in the present.[96]

For this reason, I have framed my discussion primarily around temporal imaginaries rather than historical ones. If historical imaginaries consist of creating constellations of meaning around symbols and events in, across, and through history, then temporal imaginaries use these constellations to imagine one's relationship to time more generally. Temporal politics around guns created an immediate temporal bridge between the distant past and the present, directly transplanting the dynamics and issues of a bygone era into the modern day. Furthermore, the distinction between the past and the present was essentially eroded. Following François Hartog, who has argued that a key

94 "The Law," Open Carry Texas, http://www.opencarrytexas.org/the-law.html, accessed January 15, 2021.

95 David Sehat, "On Legal Fundamentalism," in *American Labyrinth: Intellectual History for Complicated Times*, eds. Raymond Haberski, Jr. and Andrew Hartman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 31–33.

96 Jill Lepore, *Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle over American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 7, 16.

feature in an individual's self-conception as a historical being is the existence of estrangement—or "a distance between self and self," history manifests in the recognition of distance between oneself and another historical period.[97] In the temporal imaginaries forged around guns, this distance often vanished: the struggles of the Founding Fathers against tyranny were the same struggles faced by modern gun rights activists. Simultaneously, the present was turned into a constant, unending crisis, where each moment is an existential threat and one needs to be prepared to fight tyranny at a moment's notice.

4 Conclusion

Thinking about the Founding Fathers in the context of contemporary U.S. gun debates is rarely about history. True, they are historical figures, but the ways they have been used are more about the present and the future than the past. In the examples cited in my discussion, history has a utilitarian function, serving to either reinforce or question modern tendencies by pointing toward ruptures or continuations in the passage of time. Ultimately, the question repeatedly presented in these debates concerns a singular principle: if one were to extrapolate a nation's future based on the political ideals of the Founding Fathers, would the end result be similar to the modern-day United States or not? The imaginaries constructed on the basis of the present, loaded with certain ideological principles which determined how different issues received their contemporary meaning, are thus contrasted against the imaginaries superimposed on the minds of the Founding Fathers.

Often, those on both sides of the gun debate felt that these imaginaries differed, if for opposite reasons. For the anti-gun factions, those on the pro-gun side had hijacked the Second Amendment, instilling it with an individualist meaning it was never meant to have and using it to justify the legality of weaponry that the Founding Fathers could not have conceived. For the pro-gun side, it was the anti-gun groups that had seized the discourse in the past, and modern gun laws were only now inching toward the original vision of the Founding Fathers. According to a more extreme interpretation, contemporary battles about guns signified deep struggles similar to what had been experienced by the Founding Fathers themselves. In this type of historical reenactment, the

97 François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), xvi; Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 93–104.

pro-gun forces saw themselves as direct heirs of the Founders, fighting for the ideals of their ancestors against oppressive forces symbolized by their political adversaries.

The ideological chasms revealed were wide, and they corresponded to conflicting worldviews about the very nature of modern society. The Founding Fathers were used to create and mobilize distinct temporal imaginaries—instilled with a sense of what the nation was *about*—for the debates surrounding guns. Recognizing the incongruences of these different imaginaries is essential to understanding the discord that dominates the U.S. political landscape today. Trends in the federal debates were replicated and amplified at the state level in Texas, but in some cases what happened in Texas informed and anticipated the national conversation. Observations specifically of Texas media in the 1990s reveal the active process by which firearms legislation was connected to the ideological imaginaries of the culture wars, which served as preambles to conflicts that would erupt at the federal level in the coming years. The temporal imaginaries of Texas gun politics thus used the Founding Fathers to naturalize certain conceptions of U.S. nationhood and elevate Texas as the place where the basic promise of the nation could and would be fulfilled.

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CHAPTER 4

"I Forgive Him, Yes": Gendered Trauma Narratives of the Texas Tower Shooting

Lotta Kähkönen

> She heard shouting, sirens in the distance, and continual gunfire, and thought she still heard the song playing—*Every other day, every other day / Every other day of the week is fine, yeah*—but then realized this was only in her mind.
>
> ELIZABETH CROOK, *Monday, Monday*[1]

1 Introduction

Elizabeth Crook's novel *Monday, Monday* (2014) opens with a massacre on the first Monday of August in 1966, with a gunman shooting pedestrians from the observation deck of the Main Building Tower at The University of Texas at Austin. The recounted shooting is based on one of the first and most notorious mass shootings by a single individual in U.S. history because of its wide media coverage.[2] The perpetrator Charles Whitman, a former Marine and a student at UT, killed 14 people and wounded 32 others in a 96-minute shooting spree.[3] The character in the epigraph is the novel's protagonist, Shelly Maddox, who has been hit by a bullet. She has been lying on the concrete in a puddle of her own blood, terrified by the prospect that the sniper might be looking at her through his scope. Just as she stops hoping for rescue, two young men heroically come to her aid. The song playing in her head is "Monday, Monday" by

1 Elizabeth Crook, *Monday, Monday* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 15.

2 Philip Jankowski, "Unimaginable in '66, Attacks Have Become Routine in U.S.," *Austin-American Statesman*, July 31, 2016, D3.

3 In addition to the public massacre, Whitman committed familicide. Earlier that day, he had killed his mother and wife in their homes.

The Mamas & the Papas, which hit the top of the charts in 1966.[4] The reference to this particular song is connected to an actual memory by a witness who recalls the song playing on the radio at the time Whitman began shooting from the Tower, and gives an example of how the novel is shaped in relation to memories and imagery of the mass shooting.[5]

I learned about the novel's role as an ameliorative narrative for the community in coming to terms with this cultural trauma during my visits to Austin in 2018 and 2019.[6] I was struck by the abiding aftershocks of the Tower shooting in the everyday lives of Austinites. I met various people who told stories about how the shooting affected the community—people who had friends or neighbors living in town when the shooting happened, or who knew people whose relatives had witnessed the actual massacre. Whenever something happens that reminds of the event, stories about the past resurface. For some, just seeing the visible landmark, the 307-foot UT Tower, may trigger memories, not to mention hearing the news that Campus Carry law would come into effect on the very day of the 50th year anniversary of the shooting. The chronic recollections and stories display a return of traumatic knowledge, which Marianne Hirsch characterizes as postmemory.[7] The notion of postmemory refers to constituted memories by those who did not experience the actual traumatic event. Thus, postmemory expands beyond descendants or family members, involving affiliated contemporaries and generations who recall the past trauma by means of stories, images, and observations. The connection to the past is mediated by "imaginative investment, projection, and creation."[8] The need for memories of the Tower shooting qualifies it as a cultural trauma, as it involves a contested process relating to its interpretation as an outcome of a particular kind of gun culture and, ultimately, of U.S. society.[9] The mass shooting

4 See Music ID, http://impact.musicid.academicrightspress.com/music/pyf6zu.htm, accessed May 30, 2021.

5 The memory story is included in Pamela Colloff's article, for which she tracked down three dozen survivors and witnesses and recorded their stories. Pamela Colloff, "96 Minutes," *Texas Monthly*, August 2, 2006. https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/96-minutes/, accessed June 3, 2020.

6 I was on a fieldwork trip with my colleagues to collect data for a research project studying the implications of the Texas-state "Campus Carry" gun legislation (SB 11) that came into effect on August 1, 2016.

7 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

8 Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.

9 For discussion on how to qualify historical events as cultural trauma, see Neil J. Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 31–59.

was quickly entangled with debates and imaginaries of guns in U.S. society. A day after Whitman's killing spree, President Lyndon B. Johnson stated that one reason for the tragic incident was easy access to firearms, and he used the shooting as a rationale to push for gun control legislation.[10] Fifty years later, the Tower shooting was used in arguments both for and against SB 11, the Texas Campus Carry law.[11]

Drawing from theorization of cultural trauma and trauma cultures after World War II, I will explore the mediatization and narrativization of the Texas Tower shooting as a cultural trauma.[12] In this framing, trauma is seen as a product of history and politics, and subject to reinterpretation. I will take a closer look at the KTBC special news report aired immediately after the shooting, Crook's novel *Monday, Monday*, and Keith Maitland's documentary film *Tower* (2016) by focusing on the persistent narrative of heroes, victims, and survivors in constituting the collective trauma that emerges as a result of a cultural crisis.[13] I am especially interested in what the imagery reveals regarding cultural values and concerns relating to mass shootings as traumatizing experiences. My analysis pays attention to heroes, victims, and survivors as gendered, bringing perspectives to the pervasive cultural mode in which the collective trauma of a mass shooting is processed within U.S. gun culture.[14]

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10 Glenn Utter, ed., *The Gun Debate: An Encyclopedia of Gun Rights and Gun Control in the United States* (Amenia, NY: Grey House, 2016), 308–309; Peter Stearns, "Texas and Virginia: A Bloodied Window into Changes in American Public Life," *Journal of Social History* 42, no. 2 (2008): 308.

11 The Tower shooting was mentioned in viewpoints in public forum meetings organized by The University of Texas at Austin prior to the implementation of the law on September 30, 2015 and October 5, 2015. The events were taped and transcribed. Transcriptions in possession of author. See also Laura Hernández-Ehrisman (in this volume), who brings out how the Tower shooting provided a justification for widening access to firearms.

12 Ann E. Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Anne Rothe, *Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in the Mass Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011); Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*.

13 Keith Maitland, dir., *Tower* (Kino Lorber, 2016).

14 For discussions on how in particular narratives of victims and heroes become a pervasive cultural mode that has cultural and social resonance, see Scott Loren and Jörg Metelman, "Introduction," in *Melodrama After the Tears: New Perspectives on the Politics of Victimhood*, eds. Scott Loren and Jörg Metelman (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016); Elizabeth Anker, "Villains, Victims and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and September 11," *Journal of Communication* 55, no. 1 (2005): 22–37. While these researchers draw on melodrama studies, my approach utilizes theorization of cultural trauma in considering how sense-making of a culturally specific trauma of mass shooting depends on narratives of heroes, victims, and survivors.

The earliest creative works, such as a poem by John Berryman and a ballad by Kinky Friedman, recalled the Texas sniper Charles Whitman.[15] More comprehensive narratives about the amplifying effects of the tragic event began emerging only after several decades as a response to a collective need to understand the long-term effects of the Tower shooting on the community. The need for collective commemoration arose in Texas in the 1990s as individual memories by witnesses were articulated in public and reached a peak when Pamela Colloff's magazine article "96 minutes" in *Texas Monthly* was published in August 2006.[16] This article comprises stories by people who "got shot, fired back, lost loved ones, saved lives by risking their own, and otherwise witnessed" the shooting.[17] The vivid memory stories worked as an impetus for both Crook's novel and Maitland's documentary film, which combines animated scenes recounting moment-by-moment events of the shooting, archival footage, and interviews conducted with survivors. Both narratives include depictions of individual experiences of the shooting.

Maitland, a graduate of UT Austin, elaborates on an interview that there was a "complete vacuum" about the shooting on UT campus, which "did not make sense."[18] He first learned about the Tower shooting in his seventh-grade history class from a teacher who had witnessed it.[19] In the documentary film, Maitland's aim was to focus on "the victims, witnesses, heroes, and survivors' stories to connect with audiences and to offer healing and catharsis."[20] The comment points out the desire to create an ameliorative narrative for the community as well as to maintain the representations in collective awareness, both characteristic needs for the processing of collective trauma.[21] Crook, who specializes in

15 Berryman's poem "I heard said 'Cats that walk by their wild lone'" is included in his Pulitzer Prize-winning collection *77 Dream Songs* (1965) and Friedman's "The Charles Whitman Ballad" on his first album *Sold American* (1973).

16 One of the first occasions of expressing individual recollections is when a local radio talk show encouraged listeners to call and tell their memories of that day. For more on this, see Rosa A. Eberly, "'Everywhere You Go, It's There': Forgetting and Remembering the University of Texas Tower Shooting," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 65–88.

17 Colloff, "96 Minutes."

18 Craig Phillips, "Keith Maitland Goes Back to 1966 to Tell Story of Victims and Heroes of Texas Shootings," *Independent Lens*, February 13, 2017, https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/keith-maitland-tells-story-of-victims-heroes-of-texas-shooting/, accessed October 27, 2019.

19 Phillips.

20 Phillips.

21 JoAnn Ponder, "From the Tower Shootings in 1966 to Campus Carry in 2016: Collective Trauma at the University of Texas at Austin," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytical Studies* 15, no. 4 (2018): 239–52.

historical fiction situated in Texas, was interested in depicting how the Tower shooting "affected the people in the story in the course of their lives, how it will have an effect on them on several decades; how memories will play over time."[22]

2 Campus as an "Open Battlefield": Constituting Imagery of Mass Shooting

The Texas Tower shooting was traumatic not only for the hundreds of people who witnessed the actual event and local community, but the entire society. Whitman obviously aimed to kill as many people in the campus environs as possible, which resulted in a high death toll. It seems that nothing quite like this had happened before. There was no frame of reference for the collective shock prompted by what was depicted as one of the worst mass shootings in the history of the United States. The news headlines and television reports failed to recall previous mass shootings, which created a perception that the Tower shooting was the first in the country.[23] Ranked as the second most important story of 1966 after the war in Vietnam, the shooting has left a profound legacy for the national audience.[24] For example, it was covered in *LIFE* magazine the following week with an abundance of on-scene color photographs.[25] The media had an essential role in fueling the cultural memory and collective trauma, which continue to disrupt a sense of security and involve an ongoing negotiation of collective self.[26]

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22 Elizabeth Crook, "The Harry Middleton Lectureship Presents Elizabeth Crook," YouTube, September 10, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_l7-Y4dUx1s, accessed September 15, 2018.

23 See Maria Ester Hammack, "A Brief History of Mass Shootings," http://behindthetower.org/a-brief-history-of-mass-shootings, accessed October 27, 2019. On the history of public mass shootings in the U.S., see Jaclyn Schildkraut and H. Jaymi Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities* (Crime, Media, and Popular Culture), chapter 3 (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016); Grant Duwe, *Mass Murder in the United States: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007).

24 See Colloff, "96 minutes."

25 "The Texas Sniper," *LIFE*, August 12, 1966. On the coverage by local newspapers, see Alejandra Garza, "'The Eyes of the World Are upon You Texas': How the Austin Newspapers Covered the UT Tower Shooting," *Behind the Tower: New Histories of the UT Tower Shooting 2016,* http://behindthetower.org/how-austin-newspapers-covered-the-shooting, accessed December 28, 2020.

26 For discussion on how collective trauma becomes an epicenter of group identity, see Gilad Hirschberger, "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning," *Frontiers of Psychology* 9, no. 1441 (August 2018), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6095989/, accessed November 30, 2020.

The powerful way in which the Tower shooting was imprinted in cultural memory was driven by news reports by local radio and the TV station KTCB. News director Neale Spelce was on the scene during the Tower shooting, broadcasting live on the radio what was happening. He was accompanied by KTCB reporters Phil Miller and Charles Ward, photographer Joe Lee, and cameraman Gary Pickle, who filmed the events and interviews done on location. Television newscasts and a special report on the Tower shooting included excerpts of devastating film footage displaying, for example, victims lying on the ground, people carrying corpses, and the dead body of the perpetrator, who had been taken down by two Austin policemen, Ramiro Martinez and Houston McCoy. The KTCB television special program broadcast later on that day is among the most influential media texts to embody the cultural memory of the shooting, and it has had a central role in constituting imagery relating to the event.[27]

The KTCB news report on the mass murder opens with Neal Spelce's short account of the shooting and the number of victims. Spelce is followed by Charles Ward, who witnessed the shooting on site. His report has an engaging effect with edited onsite film footage, which shows people hiding behind cars, trees, and stone walls, men running with rifles in their hands, victims lying on sidewalks, and individuals running toward the victims and trying to save them. Ward's voice-over description lists "victims" and "actors," highlighting dramatic opposition between passive and active groups of people: those who tried to find safety and those who acted by responding to "the battle."[28] The narrative repeats phrasings such as "men risked their lives to try to save others," and includes an interview with "one such man," Brehan Ellison, a Vietnam Veteran.[29] In the footage, Ellison is carrying a body away from the campus mall area, and in the interview, he gives short replies to the reporter's questions, stating the facts instead of explaining things. The edited film footage, accompanied by Ward's narration highlighting heroic action, sets the tone for the rest of the program.

Spelce next portrays the perpetrator, whose motives remain hidden, and then moves on to the story of the men "who ended the 90 minutes of terror."[30] These are two policemen and an Austin local, Allen Crum, an assistant manager of the University Co-Op bookstore, who was deputized and followed the police

27 The program later became part of a collective digital archive via YouTube. In my analysis, I have used the KTCB special news program available in the Texas Archive of the Moving Image. Texas Archive of the Moving Image video, 25:34. https://texasarchive.org/2009_01055, accessed September 12, 2019.

28 *Spelce Collection*, "No. 1 – UT Tower Shooting."

29 *Spelce Collection*.

30 *Spelce Collection*.

officers all the way up to the observation deck, where the sniper was carrying out his massacre. Later interviewed in the news studio, Crum offers a detailed account of how he ended up in the Tower building and worked his way up to the top floor with Officer Ramiro Martinez, where they entered the observation deck covering each other, "using our old infantry-style tactics."[31]

There is also a report on the press conference hosted by UT officials. The reporter conveys how Chancellor Harry Ransom read a prepared statement and then gave his personal view "on the heroism shown by the students."[32] In a film excerpt, Ransom is reading the official statement, in which he expresses his sympathy to those families and relatives of the injured and deceased, and extols the heroism of the students, police officers, and staff who tried to rescue those who were in peril. After his statement, Ransom, who himself witnessed the shooting from the main building, adds a personal note, declaring "I have never seen, nor have I ever imagined, anything like it," referring to how young students hurried to rescue and take care of the people who were hurt.[33] The heroic students are not gendered, and Ransom's comments about heroism offer an uplifting perspective in the aftermath of the mass shooting.

Metonyms and references to war and military-style action appear throughout the program. Ward's narration over the film footage describes the campus area as an "open battlefield," associating it with a war zone.[34] With the rising number of deaths in Vietnam and a significant change in news coverage, this was the most relevant point of reference.[35] Accordingly, the images and narration follow the trend set by TV programs on the Vietnam War, which utilized onsite reports and horrifying film footage from the battlefield, including close-ups of dead bodies.[36]

Compared to war correspondence, reporting about the Tower shooting presented unique challenges. The situation differed from that of war, because drawing clear boundaries—such as between those who belonged to the community and others, victims and perpetrators, good and evil—was difficult. The perpetrator was a student and member of the UT community. Moreover, he was an ex-Marine who had served his country. Similar to a crisis caused by a war, there was a strong need to reinforce a sense of particular collective identity. This was done through the figure of the hero, as it offered a way for

31 *Spelce Collection*.
32 *Spelce Collection*.
33 *Spelce Collection*.
34 *Spelce Collection*.
35 The number of U.S. deaths in the Vietnam War tripled in 1966.
36 For a discussion on war reporting on TV, see Tony Maniaty, "From Vietnam to Iraq: Negative Trends in Television War Reporting," *Pacific Journalism Review* 14, no. 2 (2008): 81–101.

the audience to take a specific position in relation to the shooting. The imagery of heroism not only expressed a cultural foundation of community, but also epitomized a desired collective identity.[37] In the special program, it is the civilian heroes that are highlighted. They were chosen to foster certain values and attitudes with which the audience could identify: a capacity to act (for the community), determination, and selflessness, including risking one's life for others.

Although those who acted to help and rescue others consisted of both men and women, men and masculine bodies are visually highlighted as heroes through interviews and images. Representing male heroism is a common convention reinforced by gendered stereotypes in mainstream films, TV, and print media.[38] The hero story here was closely linked to the U.S. war reporting, with patriotic imagery of men as the protectors of the nation and representations of hypermasculinity. Moreover, the reports that considered the reasons for action in Vietnam used a particular narrative of "protectors," "aggressors," and "victims," and the gendering of national identities, whereby the masculine protector identity defined the actions of the United States.[39] Ramiro Martinez, the police officer who shot Whitman, is not interviewed in the program. His story is conveyed by the reporter, who tells how Ramirez was "at home cooking a steak when he heard reports of the shooting on the radio," hurried to the campus, and then rushed to the Tower deck with others and took Whitman down.[40] The narrative gives the impression of a man who is willing to act even when he is off-duty, and in so doing it emphasizes the idea of *voluntary* heroic action by a member of the community.

The triad of heroes, victims, and the perpetrator portrayed in the KTCB special program reinforces an interpretation that adopts heroic men as protectors of the community in a moment of crisis. References to the war—as well as the emphasis on the heroes, victims, and perpetrator—give a frame related to the need to respond to the crisis. In particular, the hero narrative aims to reassure the audience that everything is under control, conveying a message that although the situation is difficult and incomprehensible, the community

37 Bernhard Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma* (London: Routledge, 2004), 16.

38 It should be noted that women are less visible, both as news subjects and as news producers in general. The underrepresentation of women in the news has been studied since the 1970s.

39 Madeleine Corcoran, "Bodily Visions of the War in Vietnam," in *Mythologizing the Vietnam War: Visual Culture and Mediated Memory*, eds. Jennifer Good, Paul Lowe, Brigitte Lardinois, and Val Williams, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 110–12.

40 *Spelce Collection*, "No. 1 – UT Tower Shooting."

will prevail over it. The ways in which the special program focuses on male heroic figures can be seen as part of a larger discourse that uses this type of narrative trope to reassert national identity.[41] Emphasis on the heroic figures and acts helped the community to deal with the unexpected threat that profoundly shook its sense of security. To use Dominic LaCapra's term, the program constructs a "redemptive narrative" in which good overcomes evil.[42] The mass shooting in Texas was connected to national security the next day, when President Johnson urged Congress to press forward with the gun control legislation that had been under consideration there, in order to prevent "all such tragedies" in the future.[43]

3 Decades-Long Silence before Public Commemoration

The Tower shooting was followed by a long period of institutional suppression and silence.[44] This appears unusual from today's perspective, as memory culture now is significantly different from that of the late 1960s. Also, in the twenty-first century, public expressions and reactions to mass shootings and their victims have intensified. This is due to accumulating experiences of vicarious trauma—encountering trauma through stories and images—of mass shootings with a high number of victims, such as the Luby's Restaurant shooting in Killeen (Texas, 1991), Columbine High School massacre (Colorado, 1999), Virginia Tech shooting (Virginia, 2007), and Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting (Connecticut, 2012).[45]

Although the mid-1960s witnessed an unprecedented flood of violence—crime rates were peaking and the war in Vietnam was ongoing—a mass

41 Roger D. Launius, "American Memory, Culture Wars, and the Challenge of Presenting Science and Technology in a National Museum," *The Public Historian* 29, no. 1 (2007): 13–30.

42 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2001), 67.

43 "Statement by the President on the Need for Firearms Control," August 2, 1966, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 795–96.

44 See Eberly, "Everywhere You Go, It's There"; Ponder, "From the Tower Shootings," 244–45; Benita Heiskanen, "Un/Seeing Campus Carry: Experiencing Gun Culture in Texas," *European Journal of American Studies* 15, no. 2 (2020): 1–23.

45 The notion of vicarious (or secondary) trauma has been developed by trauma therapists, referring to therapists' reactions and distress to their patients' accounts of their traumas. Kaplan expands the concept to analyze viewer responses to visual or narrative mediations of trauma in the era of globalization. See Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 39–41 and chapter 4 ("Vicarious Trauma and 'Empty' Empathy").

shooting was not understood as a type of trauma or having enduring effects on individual or collective levels. As Cathy Caruth argues in her pioneering study of trauma, the unexpectedness and intensity of a traumatic incident prevents the mind from fully cognizing the event; it is not known in the first instance.[46] There was no awareness of how the Tower shooting damaged social life or sense of communality. Jeffrey Alexander points out that an event is only recognized as traumatic if it is believed to have "harmfully affected collective identity."[47] To some extent, the institutional silence tells about the inability to consciously deal with the tragic event after stating the fact that it had happened. The denial set limits on processing the suffering and rebuilding a sense of unity within the community.

Cultural trauma and public memory involve a strong need for social unity and existence. As such, public memory is rooted in the cultural contradictions of local and national cultures as well as vernacular and official interests.[48] After the incident in 1966, the University wanted to get back to normal as quickly as possible, and it avoided any reminders of the Tower shooting. In Texas, the desire to avoid attention on how the shooting affected the community was partially linked to fear of a bad reputation, especially after President Kennedy's assassination in Dallas in 1963.[49] The discussion in Texan print media stressed that this had been a rare and random act that should not be overblown.[50] These comments can be seen as a balancing act in contrast to the media spectacle of the Tower shooting in print media published outside of Texas. They also reveal how discussion about the massacre was deliberately suppressed.

The tendency to circumvent dialogue in Texas affected individual survivors, leaving them alone with their loss and grief. Claire Wilson, who lost her boyfriend and unborn child in the Tower shooting, recalls how the taboo against talking about what had happened was so strong that she started second-guessing what she remembered, and she felt isolated.[51] A trauma survivor may not be able to remember the exact course of events, and even if they do,

46 Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3–12.

47 Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 10.

48 John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in The Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 14.

49 Stearns, "Texas and Virginia," 305.

50 Stearns, 305.

51 Pamela Colloff, "The Reckoning," *Texas Monthly*, March 25, 2016, https://features.texasmonthly.com/editorial/the-reckoning/, accessed June 3, 2020.

they may not want to communicate their thoughts or painful memories. In this case, however, the collective silence offered no space for contemplation of individual views, and it shaped the framework for expressing and understanding what had happened. Furthermore, being extended over a long period, it delayed the collective process of meaning-making and coming to terms with the multiple effects of the shooting. The first time Wilson publicly spoke about the event happened ten years later, when a journalist from the *Austin American- Statesman*, Brenda Bell, who had herself witnessed the Tower shooting from the window of the English building, interviewed survivors for an article.[52]

The struggle for shared remembrance began gradually emerging with individual memory stories of the Tower shooting. The local community had developed vernacular narratives, which nevertheless lacked details of what had actually happened on campus. The personal memory stories fortified the need for public commemoration and efforts to share not only the stories of what had taken place but the multiple facets of suffering that had been experienced. This kind of process essentially contributed to the creation of collective trauma.[53] The constitution of collective trauma and the ways to deal with it develop with shifting memory culture, which stresses the importance of finding ways to dismantle silence and express emotions of fear, sadness, and loss.

Despite the pressure by the victims' families for memorialization, it took 33 years before the Turtle Pond located on the north side of the UT Main Building was dedicated as a memorial site in 1999.[54] A proper memorial was to be unveiled in the same place in 2004, but it was never completed. Finally, on August 1, 2016, on the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre, the memorial—comprising a granite stone with the victim's names, a cypress tree, and a bench—was placed at the head of the lower pond. The memorial's primary purpose is to commemorate the individual victims. Cultural representations, such as Crook's novel and Maitland's documentary film, contribute to the same public discourse. If compared to the memorial, however, they have the capacity to engage the audience more effectively because of their multiple ways of interacting with the imagery of a mass shooting. Moreover, they offer transformative potential, as they are able to reflect the process of generating knowledge of the traumatic event. Both stories combine and connect existing memories and imagery to new material in order to create a collective memory for the sake of the present. Reimaging the past in greater detail by using storytelling helps

52 Brenda Bell wrote about the shooting several times on various decades' anniversaries.

53 Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma."

54 Colloff, "96 Minutes."

to develop a variable understanding of what happened that day, how people reacted to the event, and why coming to terms with the collective trauma has been such a challenging process.

4 Reconstruction of Collective Trauma through Narratives

The *Tower* documentary and *Monday, Monday* novel can be seen as highly mediated narratives. In their manner of remediating and recollecting memories by configuring intermedial relations to the archive of sources, they offer examples of the dynamic process of memory in the digital age.[55] Moreover, they not only recollect memories but actively reshape and produce them, reconstructing collective trauma linked to the broader discourse of mass shooting and gun culture in the United States.[56] This enables a critical engagement or *witnessing position*, as postulated by Ann Kaplan. Drawing on Dori Laub's formulation of the witnessing position, Kaplan develops the notion of describing a level of witnessing in artwork, in particular in documentary films dealing with traumatic experiences.[57] In her view, a witnessing position involves a certain degree of distance and ethical consciousness. This ensues when a film deliberately aims to produce a witnessing position for the spectator, which enables attention to the traumatic situation instead of merely identifying or feeling empathy for the individual victims. This kind of witnessing, Kaplan argues, opens the cultural "text out to larger social and political meanings."[58] Presenting the Tower shooting in stories in a more comprehensive way than ever before not only responds to a need for collective meaning-making, however. Maitland's documentary and Crook's novel instead have to be seen as imaginative narratives that provoke larger public recognition and invite the audience to engage in critical contemplation.

As technologies of cultural memory,[59] *Tower* and *Monday, Monday* display how cultural trauma takes different forms and involves multiple levels.

55 For theorization of the dynamic model of cultural memory, see Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, eds., *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

56 For discussion on how media—and digital media, in particular—mediate memories, see Jose van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

57 Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 123–25. See also Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in Caruth, *Trauma*, 61–75.

58 Kaplan, 125.

59 The term "technologies of memory" refers to objects, images, and representations "through which memories are shared, produced and given meaning." See Marita Sturken,

They share a haunting quality, distinctive of trauma narratives, that enmeshes the silenced traumatic past in the present. Maitland's documentary comprises animated scenes, excerpts from the film footage from 1966, and interviews with survivors. Using rotoscoped animation style—a technique that draws over live-action film footage—the documentary recreates the unfolding of the events on August 1, 1966. The aesthetic effect of the animation has been described as "dreamlike" and "surreal."[60] Yet, this dreamlike appearance is knowingly constructed. Maitland aimed to capture "the fussy visual quality of memory."[61] The overall composition underlines the constructed, dynamic, and contagious nature of memory, merging individual memories and cultural memory. The haunting quality arises from repetitive and affective imagery, music, and sounds from the archives—such as gunshots and fragments of Neil Spelce's radio broadcast and the KTCB special program.

Crook's novel exhibits the return of the trauma through "objects of return," in particular in the form of paintings.[62] The return of paintings sustains a narrative movement that signals the return of trauma and its transmission to the subsequent generations. This kind of *transgenerational haunting* is typical of trauma fiction.[63] The most significant painting is a portrait painted by Wyatt, one of the two men who rescue Shelly from bleeding to death after being shot by Whitman. The painting is a waist-up portrait of naked Shelly, showing the bullet scars across her arm and breast. Later, Wyatt paints over the upper body, covering it with a blue blouse, and sends it to Shelly. The portrait is hidden in a closet for years, but it keeps reappearing in key moments in a decades-long process in which she and her family come to terms with the multiple direct and secondary traumas. When Shelly is about to throw it away, her daughter takes it. Finally, when the secrets of the past start to unravel and the repressed

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Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 9.

60 See Chris O'Falt, "How 'Tower' Demonstrates the Possibilities of Art and Healing in Nonfiction Filmmaking," *IndieWire*, December 16, 2016, https://www.indiewire.com/2016/12/keith-maitland-tower-best-documentary-oscar-nomination-1201759487/; David Edelstein, "Documentary Offers a Wrenching Look at America's First Modern Gun Massacre," NPR, October 14, 2016, https://www.npr.org/2016/10/14/497943220/documentary-offers-a-wrenching-look-at-americas-first-modern-gun-massacre, accessed October 10, 2019.

61 O'Falt, "How 'Tower' Demonstrates the Possibilities of Art."

62 The term "object of return" is borrowed from Marianne Hirsch, who uses it in her analysis of return narratives in the genre of Holocaust narrative. See Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, chapter 8 ("Objects of Return").

63 On transgenerational haunting in fiction, see Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), chapter 1 ("The past as revenant: trauma and haunting in Pat Barker's *Another World*").

emotions relating to a chain of past traumas recur one more time, the painting starts disintegrating: the blue paint cracks, revealing the naked breast. The reappearing painting highlights the persistence of trauma and carries a burden of painful memories that are not only linked to the painful events, but to the accruing of family secrets and repressed emotions resulting from experiences of loss. The returning objects highlight the layered and shifting nature of trauma.

As trauma narratives, the novel and the film produce a diverse array of trauma imagery, suggesting different responses and ways of remembering and dealing with a culturally specific trauma. They strive to capture the many levels of memories and knowledge production, revealing also the partiality and incompleteness of differing views. In addition, they focus on the question of how individuals survive the trauma.

5 Postmemorial Imagery of Heroes, Victims, and Survivors

The cultural imagery of heroes and victims motivates both works but is reflected profoundly, and even dismantled. As narratives produced by the postmemorial generation—those who have learned about the shooting through stories, imagery, and selected silences—they do not simply repeat the imagery but have the capacity to recontextualize it, offering ways of working through the trauma, as Hirsch suggests in her discussion of repetitive use of images relating to inconceivable violence.[64] Postmemorial narrating and the inclusion of familiar imagery work to connect the postmemorial generation to the generation that experienced the shooting. The recontextualization in *Tower* and *Monday, Monday* provides a multifaceted interpretation of heroes and victims.

Maitland's film features both men and women as heroes, and it includes viewpoints of witnesses who were not able to perform heroic actions. For example, the film comprises a story of a young woman, Rita, whose bravery differs from that of the men who rush to the Tower to shoot Whitman or carry victims off the mall. Rita runs from cover to go comfort Claire Wilson, who is wounded and bleeding on the hot, sun-baked concrete. She lies down close to Claire and keeps her talking so that she will not lose consciousness, until two young men, James and "Artly" (John Fox), run to carry her to safety. In contrast, the documentary also presents a woman who, witnessing the shooting from a window and seeing Claire laying on her back on the mall, states that not

64 Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 108.

being able to "help the people who were suffering" was a "defining moment because I realized I was a coward."[65] Crook's novel includes a bystander who has an identical experience. In the novel, however, this character is a man, who is too afraid to risk his life. His story complicates the binary imagery of men as actors and heroes and women as passive victims. Overall, the documentary film and the novel revise the gendered narrative of heroic men in the KTCB news program.

The central focus in both narratives is on the figure of a female survivor—Claire Wilson in *Tower* and Shelly Maddock in *Monday, Monday*—injured by Whitman's bullets and rescued by two young men. The symbolic connotations attached to these women survivors are multilayered, yet still tied to the imagery of (women as) victims within the history of the shooting. They are not represented simply as passive victims saved by heroes, but more as survivors who go through a complex process after their traumatic experience. The prominence of the women in the narratives affirms their symbolic role in the processing of collective trauma. Their symbolic power is intertwined with their role as mothers: Wilson loses her unborn child but later adopts a boy, while Shelly has two daughters, the first of which is given up to adoption. While they represent the vulnerability of the community and society, most of all, however, their stories draw attention to the collective process of coming to terms with and the healing of trauma. In relation to the healing process, the most significant aspect of these gendered figures is their capacity to reckon with their painful memories and past.

The day after the Tower shooting, the first representation of a victim appeared in print news. The front page of the *San Antonio Express* covered the story of the shooting with photos of the Tower, Whitman, and Officer Martinez, but the centerpiece is an image of an anonymous woman crouching behind a flagpole (see Figure 4.1).[66] The woman is frozen in an uneasy position, leaning her head against the massive base. This photo became one the most circulated images of the shooting. According to Gary Lavergne, the woman in the photo became "a symbol of unfolding tragedy" as "pictures and news reel footage of a helpless woman frozen in terror … were immediately beamed around the world."[67] A viewer who does not know the story behind the photo indeed sees a woman "frozen in terror," a passive victim waiting to be rescued. The image

65 Maitland, *Tower*.

66 "Student Slays 15 From Tower Perch." *San Antonio Express*, August 2, 1966.

67 Gary Lavergne, *Sniper in the Tower: The Charles Whitman Murders* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1997), 125.

works as a counterpart to the KTCB special program's male heroes, who protect vulnerable victims of the community.

FIGURE 4.1 Charlotte Darehshori hiding behind flagpole

Lavergne offers more details on the image of the victim by telling the story of how "an attractive young brunette named Charlotte Darehshori" ended up behind the flagpole, where she kept still until the shooting was over.[68] Darehshori was working inside a campus building when she saw three people fall on the pavement through her office windows. She rushed outside and headed to the closest body. She then heard "strange noises," which she soon realized were the sound of gunshots aimed at her.[69] She leaped to the nearest cover, the flagpole. Lavergne juxtaposes Darehshori's symbolic importance to that of the shooter: "While Charles Whitman became a symbol of evil, Charlotte Darehshori epitomized innocence and reassuring heroism in the midst of terror."[70] Lavergne seems to suggest that Darehshori was both a victim and a hero, but emphasizes the gendered features and the role of victim especially when describing the photo image. Darehshori is "a helpless young woman" and, like victims in general, "epitomized innocence."[71] This association explains why the photo assumed such a strong symbolic power. It evokes a discourse of

68 Lavergne, 125.
69 Lavergne, 125.
70 Lavergne, 125.
71 Lavergne, 125.

victimhood that is intertwined with moral questions. The very definition of victim presumes some type of human action that is understood to be wrong.[72] As Bernhard Giesen argues, talking about victims raises questions of accountability and responsibility, and entails a social construction in which victimhood is recognized and attributed by varying institutional arenas.[73] In Texas, the institutional denial that followed the shooting delayed discussion about the victims, and in doing so it also stifled discussions of accountability.

By the 1990s, however, there had already emerged a noteworthy shift from the unambiguous figure of helpless victim to survivor, also discernible in Lavergne's way of discussing Darehshori's story. In the United States, this shift arose in conjunction with the expansion of studies on trauma, which relates to broader cultural development. As Donald Downs argues, as the knowledge on various trauma gained currency, "America began to define itself, at least in part, as a nation of 'survivors.'"[74] Anne Rothe elaborates how the wider cultural climate in the United States changed and adopted a survival trope in the 1960s at the time of the Eichmann trials, which gradually expanded to popular culture so that by the new millennium, representations of survivors would be highly diverse.[75] In the widening "popular trauma culture," a survivor designates "someone who has overcome post-traumatic suffering," replacing traditional notions of heroism.[76]

Claire and Shelly are depicted more as survivors than passive victims, and the narratives focus on *how they survive* after the shooting and find ways to let go of the past. They represent survivors in different ways, but they both clearly respond to the idea of a survivor as someone who is able to overcome suffering. If compared to male survivors in the narratives, these two women are more successful in the process of facing their difficult emotions, understanding the different responses and reactions to the traumatic incident, and exonerating equally all the people involved or affected by the mass shooting of blame. In doing so, in the discourse of mass shootings the narratives seem to suggest the role of the survivor as a gendered figure.

The plot of *Monday, Monday* has several twists that connect the central characters to the events on the UT campus in 1966. The novel includes a variety

72 Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, 46.

73 Giesen, 48.

74 Donald Alexander Downs, *More Than Victims: Battered Women, the Syndrome of Society, and the Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 48.

75 Anne Rothe, *Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others in the Mass Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), chapter 3 ("American Survivors").

76 Rothe, 33.

of intertextual and intermedial relations to vernacular stories and imagery attached to the Tower shooting. At the same time, it challenges the imagery, in particular that of heroes and victims. At the onset, the characters seem to occupy those familiar roles, but as the story evolves, the simplifying cultural imagery is problematized. As already mentioned, Shelly is rescued by two young men, Jack and Wyatt, who are cousins. Jack—a Vietnam veteran, like Brehan Ellison interviewed in the onsite film footage—is hit by a bullet while trying to rescue Shelly, thus embodying both a hero and a suffering victim. The event marks the beginning of an extraordinary relationship between the three, who become friends in the hospital where Shelly and Jack are being treated. She realizes how Wyatt and Jack "were the only people who could ever understand what it was like out on the plaza."[77] Although the main protagonist is able to discuss what had happened and even revisits the place where she was injured with Wyatt, the relationship between the three survivors works only as a first phase in coming to terms with the trauma. Overall, the novel resists the discourse of heroes and victims by focusing on the intricate process of surviving trauma, which affects the central characters' families and relationships. Yet, after the turning point, as the quandaries and guilt caused by layered family secrets are finally disclosed, Shelly is able to face the past with its grievances in a way that suggests a new orientation to the present and future, thus "overcoming the post-traumatic suffering" of the survivor discourse, as defined by Rothe.[78] The moment of disclosure compels the protagonist to realize how the past traumas affect her family network. Moreover, the recuperation from trauma is highlighted as a collective process.

The animated scenes of *Tower* deliberately linger on the stories of heroes and victims, yet offer a polyphony of viewpoints that call attention to the differences of individual experiences. Similar to *Monday, Monday*, heroes suffer from anxiety, fear, and guilt. For example, Artly, the man who saved Claire Wilson, asserts that he had "never been more scared in his life," and describes how he can still feel a "cold spot" in his back where he expected the sniper's bullet.[79] In addition, he discloses how he "feels strange guilt" about how he acted that day.[80] Several witnesses comment on how they have not talked about their memories of witnessing the shooting. According to Maitland, the process of getting to know these people, hearing their stories and connecting them with

77 Crook, *Monday, Monday*, 41.
78 Rothe, 33.
79 Maitland, *Tower*.
80 Maitland, *Tower*.

each other, was "very cathartic."[81] When cousins Lee Zamora and Alec Hernandez, Jr., finally meet each other after almost fifty years, Zamora tells that he has "never talked about this to anyone before."[82] Likewise, Claire Wilson only recently met Artly for the first time. In the scene where they are talking together, Artly ponders how he had hidden the memories inside. The final words on the significance of revisiting memories, part of the healing process that is typical of survivor discourse, are given to Wilson, who states that "what's painful is to just not have any sense of the whole thing and not have other people that knew about it. And they could talk about it what happened that day. That's what was painful."[83] The film underlines the importance of talking about and sharing the memories of the shooting, in order to make sense of what happened in the past for the sake of the present and the future.

6 Women Survivors as Reconciliatory Figures

Tower and *Monday, Monday* are momentous in their gestures toward working through trauma. *Tower* engages the audience in a witnessing position, as theorized by Ann Kaplan, drawing their attention to the traumatic situation that continues in the present by linking it to the school shootings that have come after the Tower shooting, and to larger social and political struggles relating to gun violence in the United States. Claire Wilson works here as the *reconciliatory figure* that guides the audience. In *Monday, Monday*, in turn, the significant moment of reconciliation happens when Shelly returns to the UT campus at the end of the story. Revisiting the scene works as a kind of closure and prompts a process of looking backward, enabling her to free herself from the haunting guilt and shame entangled with the past.

In *Tower*, the performing of the "working through" is highlighted as interviews with real-life survivors appear in the narration. The first half of the film utilizes archival footage and animated scenes with actors accounting the events of the Tower shooting. The storytelling is based on vernacular stories and Maitland's interviews with surviving witnesses, and it builds a visceral effect of witnessing the event, as if being there. But at the point in the film when the shooting is over, the animation is interrupted by footage from actual interviews with survivors in the present, in which they recall the events and their feelings after the

81 Phillips, "Keith Maitland goes back to 1966."
82 Maitland, *Tower*.
83 Maitland, *Tower*.

shooting, and depict their sentiments about it in the present. The movement to the present day is dramatic, a moment of overturning.

Similar to the animated narration in which the storytelling revolves around Claire, the first to fall under Whitman's bullets, the scenes with real-life Claire reminiscing on her life after the shooting are given more emphasis. This is done especially by stressing her role as a mother. She tells, for example, how she felt after losing her baby in the shooting and how she was able to adopt an Ethiopian boy later in life. After this, she elaborates on her feelings about the perpetrator, Charles Whitman, who has stayed "kind of wooden" in her mind through the years.[84] She parallels Whitman to "these precious little children who grow up and do sometimes horrible things," implicitly referring to the school shooters that followed in Whitman's footsteps.[85] She has come to think of Whitman as a "very confused, very damaged young man."[86] Next, we see her browsing an issue of *LIFE* magazine from 1966 featuring the story of "The Texas Sniper." She comments on a photo of Whitman as a toddler, standing on a beach and holding two rifles. It makes Claire think of the shooter as that three-year-old, "who would have been sitting on my lap."[87] She continues: "I love that age. So much promise, so much hope. How can I hate someone like that? I can't hate him in spite of the incredible damage that he's done."[88] The narrative succession, from her telling about her own children (one lost in the shooting and one adopted) to her imagining of Whitman as a child sitting on her lap, highlights Claire as a maternal figure. After the detailed presentation of the massacre on campus through a combination of animated scenes and onsite footage, this scene conveys a sense of comfort. The emphasis on Claire's empathy toward the perpetrator fosters sentiments of reconciliation and collective healing.

After Claire has affirmed that she cannot hate Whitman, the interviewer (Maitland) asks: "Do you forgive him?" She smiles and replies without hesitation: "I forgive him, yes. How can I not forgive? I've been forgiven so much."[89] Claire's manner of speaking and facial expressions signal that she has not only found forgiveness but also been able to overcome negative emotions relating to what happened to her in the past. This act, juxtaposing perpetrator and victim, is a powerful moment that has the potential to resonate with a larger

84 Maitland, *Tower*.
85 Maitland, *Tower*.
86 Maitland, *Tower*.
87 Maitland, *Tower*.
88 Maitland, *Tower*.
89 Maitland, *Tower*.

audience. After Claire's words, there is a jump cut to imagery in the past; we hear the distant sound of gunshots as young, pregnant Claire is lying on the South mall, next to her boyfriend's corpse. She turns her head to look upward at the Tower. We hear a man's voice, obviously a recording from the past in the familiar voice of famed *CBS News* anchorman Walter Cronkite, saying: "The horror of these, the sick among us…"[90] Another jump cut moves to an archival film clip, where Cronkite continues his commentary on "our hyper civilization" and "a disrespect for life fostered by government which, in pursuit of self-defense, teach their youth to kill and to maim."[91] He concludes that "Whitman's crime was society's crime."[92] Toward the end of his remarks, we see film footage of special reports which a U.S. audience will recognize as relating to the shootings at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, and Umpqua Community College. The images thus link the individual trauma of the Tower shooting to a wider collective and national trauma of mass shootings. By presenting the survivors in terms of values of collective identity—in this case especially selflessness, compassion, and empathy—and attributing the responsibility to society, the documentary persuades the larger audience to contemplate collective trauma as causing a crisis, and invites them to participate in change.[93] The film ends with Claire affirming how it has been healing to talk with others, and how "a big thing like this" makes a huge difference, referring to the revisiting of the past and the commemoration made possible by the film project.[94]

Monday, Monday also offers a form of reconciliatory closure with the protagonist when she returns to the campus to visit an exhibition of Wyatt's paintings at the Blanton Museum of Art. The central "returning object," the portrait of the protagonist, no longer haunts the narrative. The exhibition includes a painting of the UT Tower titled "1966," which Shelly has seen in a book before. She is surprised that she "did not feel the same pang of emotions, or recognition, that she had felt when she came across the image years ago."[95] Yet, one painting really confounds her, a large image of a window that reflects tree branches, blue sky, and a man's face in the window: "Looking out. Ghostly features. … A look of horror more vivid than the features themselves, in conspicuous eyes."[96] Shelly recognizes the window as the middle window of the third floor of the English building, overlooking the plaza of the South Mall,

90 Maitland, *Tower*.
91 Maitland, *Tower*.
92 Maitland, *Tower*.
93 See Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Trauma," 13–15.
94 Maitland, *Tower*.
95 Crook, *Monday, Monday*, 326.
96 Crook, 327.

where she was shot. She understands that this was a defining moment for the rest of her life. It makes her think of her adopted child, and all the emotions of regret, atonement, and loss that this scene of terror had generated for her and her family.

Shelly next heads to the Tower, enters the main building, and decides to buy a ticket to go up to the observation deck. The Tower functions in the narrative as a place that helps Shelly organize her memories and related emotions. Similar to Walter Cronkite's commentary and footage of the mass shooting in *Tower*, visiting the actual site of the shooting in *Monday, Monday* situates Shelly's individual's history within the larger cultural context, which shapes the meaning of trauma as culturally specific. On her way up, she cannot help but picture Whitman's journey through the building on the day of the massacre. Shelly follows his steps to the spot where he had settled his scope on her, and goes through the significant life events that followed the shooting. At some point, as she walks around the observation deck, she realizes that "there was nothing up here she needed to see or wanted to find."[97] When she looks down to the place where she had laid suffering, she has another epiphany: "She remembered lying there and playing dead, but couldn't remember the pain—not because she had somehow risen above it by standing up here—but because she wasn't that girl any longer."[98] This marks the moment of letting go of the past, precisely because she is not the same person anymore; she has reformed her identity. The realization is accentuated through a heightened sense of the present, the here and now. Shelly understands that everything she needed to see up in the Tower "just happened to be down there," meaning her life in the present, everything she has become.[99] The novel ends as she turns to look at the huge clock and sees "that the bells were about to ring."[100]

7 Conclusion

Tower and *Monday, Monday* reveal needs and emotions connected to mass shootings as a culturally specific form of imagery and trauma. Moreover, they demonstrate a multilayered aesthetic that emerges from the mediations of postmemory and engages the audience emotionally and ethically. Their ways of connecting to past trauma evoke multiple meanings and functions, such

97 Crook, 335.
98 Crook, 336.
99 Crook, 336.
100 Crook, 336.

as commemoration, making sense of a chaotic event, and giving voice to the vernacular. Both participate in constituting an imaginary of community experiences and provide means for mourning in their manner of deliberating on emotions of fear, guilt, and shame. Discussing and dealing with these complex and persistent emotions works as a kind of release, which opens a path to a new orientation in the present. This opening happens through the central mediating or reconciliatory woman survivor. The new orientation signifies, in particular, the narratives' potential to encourage a process of mourning. Dominick LaCapra has outlined mourning as involving a different inflection of performativity that happens through recognizing the difference between the past and the present. This is a moment when the past is simultaneously remembered and actively forgotten, thereby "allowing for critical judgement and a reinvestment in life."[101]

Perhaps the most significant feature of *Tower* and *Monday, Monday* is their way of mobilizing an ethical consciousness. They do not aim to offer conclusive truth-telling or a cure for a complex issue. Rather, they are to be seen as imaginative and ameliorating narratives that invite the audience to critical contemplation. To use Ann Kaplan's notion, they propose a witnessing position through which the audience can participate in the experience of the Tower shooting and a new sense of community. This kind of ethics of witnessing opens the narratives toward a perspective on the broader phenomenon of gun violence in U.S. gun culture. In this sense, *Tower* and *Monday, Monday* are narratives about the present, whereby imaginaries of culturally specific trauma work as a frame for explaining the present cultural crisis of gun violence.[102]

In his theory of cultural trauma, Jeffrey Alexander conceptualizes trauma as a *process* that involves phases of defining how a traumatic and painful event affects community, recognizing the victims and attributing responsibility. As he argues, trauma is the result of "discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity."[103] By including and recognizing multiple viewpoints and previously unexpressed emotions of the survivors, and contemplating questions of accountability, Crooks's novel and Maitland's documentary film are not just narratives haunted by a return of trauma but reflect on the trauma process itself, thereby offering views on how imaginaries of trauma may participate in reforming collective identity.

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101 Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (1999): 716.

102 For the idea of trauma as a frame for understanding culture and social changes, see Kirby Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

103 Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 10.

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CHAPTER 5

Triggered: The Imaginary Realities of Campus Carry in Texas

Benita Heiskanen

> It isn't about the gun itself, but *who* is the owner/holder of such a weapon!
>
> Student testimonial on Campus Carry[1]

1 Introduction

Imaginaries about gun culture are intrinsically tied to implicit assumptions about social power. On a national scale, debates about gun rights reveal deep-seated assumptions about nationhood, American-ness, and shared identity. On a state level, as in the case of Texas, gun debates assume very specific place-based meanings. Further still, individuals' sense of security and insecurity related to firearms speak to racial/ethnic, gender, and class relations in various spatial settings. In this chapter, I want to call attention to the interrelated ways in which imaginaries about guns reveal assumptions about social power relations and how both serve—and are used in service of—the other. I organize my discussion of the imaginary-social power dynamic related to gun debates around a *who/what/where* triad: Who is and who is not a part of shared local and national imaginaries of gun carriers? What do images and stories about guns tell us about perceptions of security and insecurity? Where do images and stories about gun culture assume meaning and become relevant? I will probe the debates, imaginaries, and tropes surrounding the Senate Bill 11 legislation before its implementation in Texas in August 2016. Drawing on

1 Testimonial #9, February 20, 2019, notes in possession of author. As a part of the research, the author collected 124 testimonials written by undergraduate students at UT Austin, Austin Community College, and St. Edward's University to reflect on student experiences at different types of educational establishments in Austin.

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newspaper reporting from the *Austin American-Statesman*, two town hall-style public debates organized at UT Austin, and internet responses related to them, as well as firsthand experiences from students, faculty, and administrators, my discussion reveals a multiplicity of "imaginary realities" that the parties involved attached to the prospect of Campus Carry implementation.[2]

When Senate Bill 11, authored by State Senator Brian Birdwell (R-Granbury), was filed in the Texas legislature in January 2015, the talk in Austin was that this time around, it had a good shot at passing. Similar attempts had been made by previous legislatures, but they had all fallen short. SB 11, however, was coauthored by 19 of the Senate's 20 Republicans, giving it enough support to force a floor vote and leaving the 11 Democrats with few tools to block it.[3] If successful, the bill—better known as "Campus Carry"—would permit students, faculty, and staff to carry handguns on public university campuses, yet allow private schools to opt out of the law based on private property rights.[4] After the filing of the bill hit the news, the UT community, local newspapers, and activist groups tried to make sense of the prospect and ramifications of allowing firearms inside university buildings. While public discourse in the capital city surrounding the Campus Carry legislation was interpreted through diverse ideological lenses, contemplation of the prospect of an armed campus prompted visceral personal reactions in some individuals. The cognitive, sensory, and bodily responses to the prospect of an armed campus were triggered by perceptions of the impact of guns on personal security or insecurity.

The imaginaries of the hypothetical realities of Campus Carry were loaded: on the one hand, they were catalyzed by a whole host of preconceived notions,

2 At the time of the debates over Campus Carry, Senate Bill 342, authored by State Sen. Don Huffines (R-Dallas), advocated for legalizing "Constitutional Carry" (i.e., Open Carry without any permit or training). See, for example, Chuck Lindell, "Hearing Set on Gun Bills," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 10, 2015, A7. As the discussion of Constitutional Carry falls within the parameters of the discussion by Pekka M. Kolehmainen in this volume, I will not treat it here.

3 In comparison to the three previous legislatures, the Senate Republicans modified the rules to require only 19 votes (as opposed to 21) to bring a measure to a floor vote. See Chuck Lindell, "Early Senate Vote OKs Campus Carry Measure," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 19, 2015, A1 and Jonathan Tilove, "Tea Party Hopes Dashed," *Austin American-Statesman*, May 31, 2015, A1.

4 In 1995, SB 60 allowed Texans to carry firearms contingent upon a safety training course required for a handgun license, but it excluded campus buildings from the law. Up until 2015, Texas law allowed shotguns, rifles, and other long guns to be carried in public, but not handguns. SB 11 sought to allow concealed firearms to be carried on all public college and university campuses. See Nate G. Hummel, "Where Do I Put My Gun? Understanding the Texas Concealed Handgun Law and the Licensed Owner's Right-To-Carry," *Texas Tech Administrative Law Journal* 6 (Spring 2005): 139–63.

but on the other hand they hid key consequences brought by the presence of guns in various spatial contexts. Discussions about firearm legislation rarely seem to deal with the function or consequences of firearms—that their purpose is to shoot and kill—or gun violence in society more broadly. Rather, the gun question is frequently used to negotiate various implicit expectations about imaginaries related to "*who* is the owner/holder of such a weapon," as stated in the epigraph of this chapter. And therein, I would argue, lies its power. In contextualizing the public debates on the Campus Carry legislation, I draw on Charles Taylor's notion of *social imaginary*, defined as that through which "people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."[5] Taylor's approach is particularly relevant for my consideration, as it underscores the ways in which so-called ordinary people imagine their social reality, surroundings, and interactions with others, as well as how such imaginaries are maintained and shared through images and storytelling.[6] On the face of it, the debates surrounding firearms on campuses have to do with the right to keep and bear firearms for self-protection in shared space. However, disentangling the layers beneath the various imaginaries used by the multiple players involved, we not only encounter a discordant campus community arguing about firearms but also the charged social power relations amplified within the armed campus space.[7]

2 "Hot as the Barrel of a 9mm Glock": Between the Good Guy and the Bad Guy

In 2015, Texas was looking to become the eighth state to allow some form of gun legislation on campuses. Colorado—the first state to experiment with Campus Carry—was often used as an example to argue for a smooth transition

5 Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 106.

6 Taylor, 106.

7 For a discussion on the spatial aspect of Campus Carry, see Benita Heiskanen, "Un/Seeing Campus Carry: Experiencing Gun Culture in Texas," *European Journal of American Studies* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2020), https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/15817, accessed December 8, 2020. See also Heiskanen, "Not in My Office: Rights in an Armed Campus Space," *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 2 (2021): 252–61, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-american-studies/article/not-in-my-office-rights-in-an-armed-campus-space/2C2EB91FF3CBF0DB297FAFF4140FA931, accessed May 2, 2021.

to an armed campus.[8] While the legislation process did not raise heated opposition in Colorado, "passions over a new campus carry law" in Texas were "running as hot as the barrel of a 9mm Glock after target practice," as the *Austin American-Statesman* put it.[9] "No one," pleaded Senator Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown), "should be forced to surrender their God-given, constitutional right to self-defense just because they set foot on a college campus."[10] Notwithstanding the support among the Republican majority in the legislature, SB 11 was met with vigorous opposition from law enforcement, university officials, and most of the faculty and students.

The key question posed by the parties involved boiled down to whether guns on campus would reduce or increase safety on campus. Both Austin and UT Austin police chiefs publicly opposed the bill on the grounds that weapons in the "emotionally charged social atmosphere" would increase the potential for violence.[11] Chancellor William McRaven of the University of Texas System was quoted in favor of tightening—rather than loosening—gun laws.[12] The *American-Statesman* also took a particularly strong stance against the legislation: "lawmakers should be looking for ways to prevent threatening situations on college premises, not arming more people."[13] Urging legislators to leave the decision-making about firearms to the discretion of the leaders of educational institutions, the *American-Statesman* forewarned: "The pursuit of an agenda that is 100 percent ideology-based bodes ill for Texas' future. True representation means doing what's in the best interest of the state and listening to the will of all the people."[14] Even so, as reported in an editorial to the paper, "the Texas Capitol saw a steady march of gun rights bills from the Senate to the House catering to small-but-vocal portions of the electorate, with a disregard for the voices of those that these new laws might affect. Measures for both campus

8 There is some disagreement between scholars whether Colorado or Utah was the first state to pass Campus Carry. A campus in Colorado did allow guns based on the state's concealed carry legislation in 2003, but Utah was the first state to have a Supreme Court ruling in 2004 that higher education institutions could not ban firearms. Mississippi, Oregon, and Wisconsin passed similar laws in 2011, Kansas in 2013, and Idaho in 2014.

9 Ralph K. M. Haurwitz, "Colorado University Lives with Gun Law," *Austin American-Statesman*, November 22, 2015, A1.

10 Haurwitz.

11 "Colleges Need Last Say on Campus Carry," *Austin American-Statesman*, January 29, 2015, A10.

12 Tim Eaton, "Straus Takes Positions at Odds with Patrick," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 12, 2015, A8.

13 Eaton.

14 "Listen to all Texans on Gun Rights Bills," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 20, 2015, A14.

carry and open carry were passed out of the Senate over the objections of law enforcement."[15]

Senator Schwertner objected, claiming that the uproar was much ado about nothing. In his words, the bill was "simply about ensuring that licensed, responsible and law-abiding adults have the right to protect themselves on the campuses of public colleges and universities."[16] The pro-gun rationale was that an armed campus would be a safe campus, "allowing otherwise helpless students and teachers to face down threats in the classroom or after class while walking home or to their cars."[17] The presence of concealed handgun license holders, the argument went, would benefit everybody, as gun carriers were in a position to take down a potential shooter; therefore, the passing of Campus Carry would serve as a deterrent against acts of violence. The *American-Statesman*, however, fiercely opposed this viewpoint. Citing the burden the law would impose on UTPD, the campus's main law enforcement arm, the paper argued that "more guns on campuses would make the job of law enforcement officers more difficult. And the threat of having to identify the 'good guy' from the 'bad' sets up the makings of potentially deadly errors."[18] In a similar vein, in a letter to Governor Greg Abbott, Chancellor McRaven of UT Austin made a case against Campus Carry based on the fact that the campus police might have difficulty distinguishing between "the bad actor and persons seeking to defend themselves and others when both have guns drawn."[19] While the opponents of the legislation were making the case that "stopping a bad guy with a gun requires more than a good guy with a gun" and "requires a lot of well-trained good guys coordinating with each other," proponents of the law insisted that that "the answer to the gun control debate is not in disarming legal gun owners."[20]

The dichotomy between the "good guy" and the "bad guy" with a gun is a fascinating social imaginary that is perpetuated in public discourses about gun rights. The widespread appropriation of the term originated in a statement made by Wayne LaPierre, the Executive President of the NRA, in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Connecticut in

15 "It's a Wrap: Editorials for the Week of March 15–21," *Austin American-Statesman*, March 22, 2015, E5.

16 Haurwitz, "Colorado University," A1.

17 Chuck Lindell, "Open Carry, Campus Carry Bills Move ahead in Senate," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 13, 2015, A1.

18 "Colleges Need."

19 Ralph K. M. Haurwitz, "UT Leader Opposes Guns on Campus," *Austin American-Statesman*, January 30, 2015, A14.

20 "It's a Wrap: Editorials for the Week of Oct. 11–17," *Austin American-Statesman*, October 18, 2015, E5.

2012. After the tragedy that killed 26 people, most of them children, LaPierre offered a statement to the press, proclaiming that "the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."[21] In debates surrounding Campus Carry, "the good guy with a gun" was assumed to be a licensed—and therefore law-abiding—person who, by default, would be a capable force against "bad guys" posing a threat to community safety. The anti-gun activist groups at UT Austin vocally challenged the notion of "the good guy with a gun" with a provocative question about such preconceived identities: "Who is the bad guy with a gun?"

Although the right to keep and bear firearms ought to be applicable to every citizen in principle, the debates surrounding Campus Carry demonstrated that the question of *who* carries firearms was at the crux of the issue. The following excerpt by an African American Texan interviewed by the *American-Statesman* exemplifies the charged issue: "I know that I will never carry a firearm any further than a gun range. I also know that I will tell my daughters to never ride in a car with a firearm, whether the owner is licensed or not. Why? Because the 'hero' image in the fight for open carry and gun rights in Texas is a white man in boots, not a black man in a hoodie."[22] A UT professor elaborates on the racial power dynamics further: "We know that black people in this country who have gun rights don't have the same rights as white people. Ask Philando Castile, who very calmly said, 'I have a permit. It is in my glove compartment.' And he was executed in his own car for being a legally permitted gun owner. So, we know there's complexities for black gun owners."[23]

The "good guy with a gun" as a distinctly white imaginary is rooted in history.[24] An interviewee supporting Campus Carry ties views on gun carrying to a racialized issue of social control:

> When I look at the long arc of restrictions on firearms possession, it strikes me that gun control, as it's often called, is really about social con-

21 "NRA: 'Only Thing That Stops A Bad Guy With A Gun Is A Good Guy With A Gun,'" NPR, December 21, 2012, https://www.npr.org/2012/12/21/167824766/nra-only-thing-that-stops-a-bad-guy-with-a-gun-is-a-good-guy-with-a-gun, accessed December 6, 2020.

22 Tara Trower Doolittle, "America Must Emerge from Dallas Police Shooting United," *Austin American*-Statesman, July 9, 2016, A14.

23 Interview #1 with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 17, 2018, notes in possession of author.

24 The 1792 and 1795 Militia Acts enacted by Congress specified that "free able-bodied white male citizens" alone could carry a gun, signifying that gun ownership, alongside other civic freedoms, was a racialized matter. See also Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2018), which links gun ownership to settler colonialism, capitalism, and racial relations.

> trol. And gun control measures… In this country, you go all the way back to colonial times, when they start out restricting access to firearms. You couldn't trade firearms to Native Americans. Indentured servants and slaves weren't supposed to have access to firearms. In the Reconstruction era, again, the Southern states immediately tried to pass laws restricting access to firearms by non-whites.[25]

While imaginaries of a white man, standing four-square on his land with a rifle in his hand, protecting his country and property, became widespread in the national mythos and cultural representations of the United States, this source also makes the case that because of the troubled racial past of the country, guns should be made available to all:

> If you look at the majority of concealed carriers, it's white males, right? Why is that? It's not like African Americans don't have a need to carry concealed or don't have a firearms culture. It costs a lot of money. It's money and time. For the kind of populations that are aggregated lower on the socioeconomic scale, the argument that I would make is, really you are impinging on people's ability to exercise this right to self-defense by making them cough up all this money and go through all this stuff to carry. That works great for some suburban guy who has a stable job and everything. For someone who lives in a rough part of Houston, they may just wind up carrying illegally because they can't afford to go through all that stuff. So again, I think that … it democratizes it. It makes it more available to more people.[26]

The imaginary here is paradoxical, for while it ostensibly calls for "democratizing" social power, embedded in it are a set of stereotypical assumptions. Not only are white people envisioned as being comfortably ensconced in suburbia, enjoying the fruits of a socioeconomic status that allows for gun carrying, but there is an implicit assumption that a black man would by default be stuck in a "rough part of Houston" and, therefore, predisposed to acquiring firearms unlawfully.

When on August 1, 1966, UT Austin became the site of the first mass-scale college shooting, leaving 14 dead and dozens injured, one explanation for the shooter's ability to move ahead with his plan unnoticed was, according

25 Interview #2 with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 17, 2018, notes in possession of author.

26 April 17, 2018, interview #2.

to author Gary Lavergne, that he was a "blond, blue-eyed, all-American boy."[27] Charles Whitman, a 25-year-old student and former Marine, managed to haul a sack full of firearms to the University Tower, from which he fired for 96 minutes down on the main mall of the campus and its environs.[28] A graduate student interviewed for this research explains the intersecting social power dynamic further: "There's such a racial and class issue with gun ownership that if you look like him, then people give you more credit and are more willing to let you be the good guy with the gun than a black person, essentially."[29] In *Good Guys with Guns*, Angela Stroud makes the point that "the image of the ideal gun user that is constructed by the National Rifle Association (NRA) emerges alongside controlling images of black masculinity that frame black males as 'threats to white society.'"[30] Even though the "good guy with a gun" is perpetuated as a white imaginary, according to statistics, 55 percent of school shootings from 1982 to 2020 were carried out by white men. Comparatively, African Americans constituted 18 percent, Latinos 10 percent, Asian Americans 8 percent, and Native Americans 3 percent; 5 percent were listed as "other" and 6 percent as "unknown."[31] Based on this data, associations of whiteness with the "good guy with a gun" imaginary are just that—imagined constructs that, although widespread, have little bearing on reality. Even so, "like all binary constructs," Stroud aptly points out, "those who see themselves as good guys rely on bad guys to make sense of themselves; to that extent good guys need the racialized and classed specter of the bad guys."[32]

In the case of SB 11, then, an ostensible debate about "licensed, responsible and law-abiding adults" carrying guns on campus turned explicitly into a racialized, gendered, and class-based argument. The more heated the discussion became, the more the question of social power was linked to gun carrying. As a UT faculty member interviewed for this research put it:

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27 Michael Barnes, "Sniper Attack Chronicler Finds Story Still 'Resilient,'" *Austin American-Statesman*, July 10, 2016, E1.

28 For a detailed study of the Tower shooting, see Gary Lavergne, *Sniper in the Tower: The Charles Whitman Murders* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1997).

29 Interview with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 25, 2018, notes in possession of author.

30 Angela Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 84.

31 "Mass Shootings in the U.S. by Shooter's Race/Ethnicity as of Feb 2020," Statista Research Department, November 9, 2020, https://www.statista.com/statistics/476456/mass-shootings-in-the-us-by-shooter-s-race/, accessed December 6, 2020.

32 Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns*, 110.

> When we started talking about things like the connection between guns and white supremacy or the increased dangers that many people of sexual and racial minorities felt, that they were multiplied for them, we got a lot of pushback, even from our own people… But my colleagues who are people of color got death threats. So, you know, this is a racial issue.[33]

Responses to the legislation were also split along racial/ethnic lines. According to a poll of Austinites on the gun issue, 79 percent of African American and 66 percent of Latino respondents opposed SB 11, while 49 percent of Anglos were against it.[34] At UT, where the majority of students opposed SB 11, a survey conducted for this study had 88 percent of African American, 77 percent of Latinos, and 66 percent of white students opposing the legislation.[35] At the height of the debates surrounding SB 11 in 2015, 71 graduate students working as teaching assistants signed a petition against the implementation of the bill, arguing that the presence of firearms would hinder classroom discussions on "institutional racism, prejudice and violence toward non-white bodies in recent U.S. and global history."[36] In the appeals of the faculty against SB 11, African and African Diaspora Studies specifically insisted on writing their own petition because "they felt that they had different issues than the white community had at UT."[37]

Groups advocating for and against the legislation resorted to the issue of social power as a key strategy for argumentation. In addition to using race to make a case against the bill, there were African Americans, both men and women, who argued for their unequivocal right to defend themselves against crime, echoing the viewpoint that SB 11 served as an equalizer for people of color. In a public debate, a UT faculty member opposing the legislation took issue with such a position, invoking her own Jewish background:

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33 Interview with author, University of Texas at Austin, March 27, 2018, notes in possession of author.

34 Marlon Sorto, "Campus Carry Opposition Varies by Race, Ethnicity," *Austin American-Statesman*, August 7, 2016, B2. For the entire report, see Richa Gupta, "Fall 2016 & Spring 2017 IUPRA Poll Criminal Justice Report," Institute for Urban Policy Research & Analysis, The University of Texas at Austin, https://utexas.app.box.com/v/cj-iupra-poll-16-17, accessed December 12, 2020.

35 John Morton Center for North American Studies, "UT Austin Student Survey on the Campus Carry Law," 2019.

36 Ralph K. M. Haurwitz, "UT Grad Students Petition for Ban on Classroom Guns," *Austin American-Statesman*, December 3, 2015, B3.

37 March 27, 2018 interview.

> He basically kept using his own position as an African American male to say "I as a potentially targeted minority should be able to own a gun to defend myself." … So what I did, which I had absolutely not planned to do and had not done publicly anywhere else, I was like, "Look, if we are going to do that, I come from a family of Holocaust survivors. My mother thinks it is absolutely mortifying that I teach at a university where guns can be carried and that her grandson is at a university where guns can be carried."[38]

Weighing in on the pros and cons of the Campus Carry legislation brought up broader questions about social organization in U.S. society and the differentiation of members of the campus community in particular. The interviewees cited here respond to stories that they are accustomed to hearing about guns and gun carrying. The powerful reactions are prompted precisely by the question of *who* is assumed to carry guns and the perceptions attached to the ramifications of gun carrying.

While the rhetoric of the pro-gun groups depicts individual gun carrying as leveling the playing field for minorities and people of color, the debates over SB 11 reveal the intrinsically hierarchical understanding of social order on campus. Here I return to Charles Taylor's notion of people "imagining" their social existence together in light of the notions and images underlying people's expectations:

> Our social imaginary at any given time is complex. It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations that we have of one another, the kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice.[39]

Even if guns are offered as a solution for the imbalance in existing social hierarchies, the examples cited in this discussion suggest that they deepen the divides between individuals and members of the community. Moreover, the visceral reactions resulting from the prospect of an armed campus point to the cognitive, sensory, and bodily aspects that interviewees view as part of their perceptions of personal security or insecurity. Ultimately, the penetration of guns into the educational context reveals an intrinsic conflict in the ways

38 Interview with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 24, 2020, notes in possession of author.

39 Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," 106.

in which individuals understand their expectations, ideals, and roles in the shared space of a publicly funded university and their maneuvering within it. Whereas the dichotomy between the "good guy" and the "bad guy" with a gun played out as a debate primarily about imaginaries of racialized men, women were also central to the argumentation and rhetoric of both groups promoting and opposing SB 11.

3 "Hook 'Em, Don't Shoot 'Em!": The Right to Bear and/or Bare Arms

One of the principal arguments made by the groups advocating for SB 11 was that, in addition to minorities, guns would keep women safe. An interviewee at UT who was involved in the debates on campus explains the gendered rationale of the groups advocating for SB 11:

> Suppose you've got some young woman. I don't know why they [pro-gun advocates] picked a nursing student. She has a class at night, so she's leaving class at 8:30 at night. Parking on campus is terrible, so she has to walk blocks and blocks and blocks just to get to her car. Why shouldn't she be allowed to carry a concealed handgun? That's what makes her feel safer. Why shouldn't she be able to do that while she's off-campus? If she can't have the concealed handgun on campus, then she can't have it off-campus.[40]

As per the pro-gun viewpoint, women with a concealed carry license would not need to depend on the protection of a good guy with a gun, since they could take charge of their own security. Such thinking was not specific to the Campus Carry legislation. As an interviewee for this research explains, there is a distinct history of women and guns in Texas, evidenced by the following anecdote: "My wife, who is a fifth-generation Texan—when she came to UT in the 1980s, her friends from Midland High School in West Texas were given purse-sized guns by their grandmothers. You know, 'You are going to the big city now. You've got to protect yourself.'"[41] The point here is that the physical presence of guns on campuses per se is not a novel issue; rather, the novel aspect of the debate is over whether "they belong here or not from the point of

40 Interview with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 20, 2018, notes in possession of author.

41 Interview with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 27, 2018, notes in possession of author.

view of the institution itself… That, I think, is a huge cultural change, because the University has been and needs to be a place that's different from other places in Texas."[42] As in the previous section, where gun discourses were conflated with racial/ethnic identity formation, this gender discussion brings to light negotiations of notions of manhood and womanhood.

Yet, even as the presented available choices were "that you can only be safe with a gun or you need to be protected by a good guy with a gun," various groups of activist women on and off campus pushed beyond the good guy-bad guy dichotomy.[43] While contextualizing their opposition against guns as a feminist issue, faculty activists particularly linked debates on SB 11 to broader issues about violence in society:

> I think as feminists we have a context for understanding the social and political dimension of violence and its systematic nature, that this kind of slots into. We do see gun violence as part of a bigger picture of oppression and denial of rights that's backed by violence that we call patriarchy. And I think many, many women have been victims of violence, and so we understand that this is not something that will never happen. This is something that has already happened and something that we already have a vocabulary for contesting and a personal stake in, trying to minimize or push back against it.[44]

Indeed, the most vocal opposition to SB 11 came from various activist groups of women, both on and off campus. The activist groups resorted to a range of verbal and visual statements that called into question the arguments for allowing guns on campus. Whereas the pro-gun point was that guns have been allowed on campus grounds—but not inside buildings—since 1995, and that people would soon get used to guns in the classroom, the women specifically fought against the "normalization of loaded lethal weapons in the classroom."[45]

Gun-Free UT, the largest antigun activist group on campus, launched a grassroots visual campaign centered around bright orange-colored "GUN-FREE UT" signs and "ARMED WITH REASON" graphics on campus. The choice of color is significant, as UT's official color is burnt orange, only a shade different from the bright orange shirts worn by the activists. A founding member of the group explains the rationale as follows:

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42 April 27, 2018 interview.

43 Interview with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 17, 2018, notes in possession of author.

44 April 27, 2018 interview.

45 April 17, 2018 interview.

> You know, our Gun-Free UT T-shirts, they say "Armed with Reason" on the back. That's because we actually do research and know the data, and we know that if there's a gun in a situation, the chances that a woman will be harmed or injured are much greater than if there is not a gun in the situation. There are many, much more effective ways of protecting yourself from gun violence than arming yourself. When there are more guns, there are more gun injuries and more gun deaths.[46]

Gun-Free UT began as an ad hoc organization that was meant to serve as a platform for faculty dissent: "'What if we just have a very simple rally, like on the first day of class? Just so that we have said, 'No, we don't agree to this. We don't consent to this. This is happening against our objections.' So, I really had in mind just one event."[47] Later on, the group formally organized as an online and grassroots movement to "educate the community about the realities of gun violence and gun safety in the hopes of overturning SB 11 and all other laws that permit weapons on campus."[48] Comprising UT faculty, staff, students, alumni, and family, the group modified the UT sports team mascot, the Texas Longhorn Bevo's playful slogan—"Hook 'em Horns" or just "Hook 'em"—into "Hook 'em, don't shoot 'em!"[49]

Another example of wordplay by the anti-gun activists involved moving the letters in the expression "right to *bear* arms" of the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to turn it into "the right to *bare* arms." The slogan was often accompanied by images resembling a modern-day Rosie the Riveter with bulging arm muscles, evoking women's physical prowess (see Figure 5.1 below).[50] The juxtaposing of "bear" and "bare" exemplified the way in which guns, as the editors of *The Lives of Guns* point out, "connect the private sphere of the

46 April 27, 2018 interview.

47 April 27, 2018 interview.

48 See Gun Free UT, "Who We Are: Gun Free UT – Pushing Back against Campus Carry," https://gunfreeut.org/who-we-are/, accessed December 12, 2020. The activism of Gun-Free UT was inspired by a national organization, The Campaign to Keep Guns off Campus, http://keepgunsoffcampus.org/.

49 Bevo's home turf, the Texas Memorial Stadium with a seating capacity of over 100,000, brings together Longhorn fans from different walks of life and ends of the political spectrum for a common cause for the duration of a sporting event. In public debates about SB 11, most parties agreed that guns do not belong at sporting events and should not be brought to the premises of the stadium while games are in progress.

50 Rosie the Riveter is a media and cultural icon associated with women workers during World War II. Represented in a popular poster with her arm raised in strength, she stands for women's independence.

individual's body to the political sphere of collective friends and enemies."[51] Even as the broad discussion of Campus Carry revolved around the pairing of the "good guy" and the "bad guy" with a gun, underscoring firearms as an embodiment of masculinity,[52] in these images women's muscular strength has liberating potential rarely seen outside of sporting contexts. Indeed, Angela Stroud discusses the ways in which women are habitually socialized into seeing themselves as victims.[53] To this mentality a faculty activist responds: "Whether or not you've personally been victimized, walking around as a woman in this culture you are constantly on your guard. I think that's what we say no to. We don't want more of that. We want less of that."[54] Thus, contestations surrounding the SB 11 legislation were tightly connected to questions of women's agency in broader societal affairs.

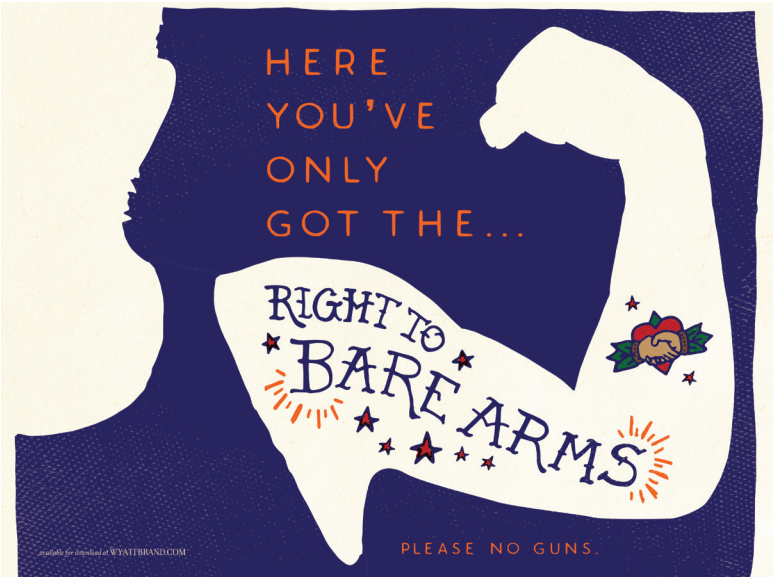

FIGURE 5.1 "The Right to Bare Arms"

The "right to bare arms" trope effectively enabled the activist women to reclaim the discursive space surrounding the Campus Carry bill: in such

51 Jonathan Obert, Andrew Poe, and Austin Sarat, eds., *The Lives of Guns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5.

52 For a discussion of gun owners' corporeal relationships with their weapons, see Charles Fruehling Springwood, "Gun Concealment, Display, and Other Magical Habits of the Body," *Critique of Anthropology* 34, no. 4 (2014): 450–71.

53 Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns*, especially Chapter 3.

54 April 27, 2018 interview.

anti-gun visual statements, the women also displayed an alternative imaginary of womanhood.[55] By highlighting women's physical strength, the images promoted women's agency in taking a stand on the Campus Carry bill.

Alongside striking imagery, the Gun-Free UT activists advanced their agenda by organizing a series of workshops dealing with de facto safety issues on campus. In what they referred to as a "Peace Zone," the group organized voluntary self-defense and de-escalation training for personal safety. "We have never had any training from the University for dealing with these issues in the classroom, except for how to comply with the law," a faculty member recalls, "So, Gun-Free UT really stepped into that chasm, where the University was hoping it would all go away."[56] The attitude among the UT leadership, as experienced by the woman faculty member, was "You'll calm down, don't worry. You're a little hysterical right now, but you'll be okay."[57] Individual experiences depended on where one worked, though, as revealed by the following staff member's account: "Our dean was very conciliatory. I wrote him an email and said, 'Here's what we need to do. I want a walk-through. I want UTPD to come do a walk-through of our offices to tell us what could be done to improve safety.' I wanted trauma first-aid kits for all the offices … and we got our first-aid supplies."[58] The pro-gun advocates responded to the growing demands and concerns raised by the women with a retort that "The Bill of Rights is a bill of *rights*; not a bill of needs,"[59] implicitly questioning the legitimacy of the claims.

The anti-gun women activists on campus stepped up their argument further by calling attention to the intersection of gun violence and domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape. This linkage came to be heavily criticized by the pro-Campus Carry contingency:

> I just think that's remarkable, given this is a university where you have social scientists and people who are interested in working out problems from a basis of factual information and sound reasoning, that it would be met with such an emotional response is the way that I saw it… Some of this stuff got really far-fetched. They were trying to link concealed carry

55 A similar argument can be made about the student group "Cocks Not Glocks," discussed by Mila Seppälä in this volume.

56 April 27, 2018 interview.

57 April 27, 2018 interview.

58 Interview with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 9, 2018, notes in possession of author.

59 See, for example, Open Carry Texas, "Moms Demand Someone Tell Them What To Think," YouTube video, 10:42, May 11, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLGKzCFBonU, accessed December 14, 2020.

> to violence against women—which is interesting, considering that a lot of women rely upon concealed carry for self-defense.[60]

There was also much stronger backlash, in which invocations of physical and sexual violence were used, both online and at activist events, to argue for the necessity of guns. Individual activists became targets of harassment, too:

> I had to change the locks on my door twice. I currently have a restraining order. I still have one guy on Instagram who has created an account just to follow me, and he writes, "This Jewess needs to go to hell." Like half of them are about me being a woman and half are [about me] being a Jew.[61]

A member of the teaching staff describes being a target of violent innuendo that was too subtle to prompt action by law enforcement, yet forceful enough to have insidious psychological consequences: "There are some people who, I think, could fairly be called extremists in their perspective on gun rights, who have expressed hostility toward me. [Law enforcement deem it] not actionable. They don't say, 'I am going to kill you.' They say things like, 'Someone should kill you.'"[62] As discussed by Juha A. Vuori in this volume, one gun rights group went so far as to stage a mock mass shooting, using the UT Austin campus as a backdrop, in an effort to convey the following message: "We want criminals to fear the public being armed. An armed society is a polite society."[63] Although the demonstrators claimed to use cardboard guns and fake blood for their demonstration, some eyewitnesses were convinced that real guns were also present.

Meanwhile off campus, the anti-gun groups found a steadfast ally in local and national advocates, such as Everytown for Gun Safety and Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. A member of the Texas chapter of Moms Demand Action described the attempts to restrict gun legislation as "an alarming show of politicking that caters to a gun lobby agenda rather than listening to the majority of Texans."[64] The off-campus groups bankrolled a series

60 April 17, 2018 interview.

61 Interview with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 4, 2018, notes in possession of author.

62 Interview with author, University of Texas at Austin, April 23, 2018, notes in possession of author.

63 Asher Price, "Mock Mass Shooting Planned," *Austin American-Statesman*, December 10, 2015, A1.

64 Chuck Lindell, "Open Carry Gun Bill Sent to a Welcoming Abbott," *Austin American-Statesman*, May 30, 2015, A10.

of ads that aired in Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, as well as on Facebook and Twitter. The 30-second ads were meant to appeal to people's commonsense: "It doesn't take a genius to know that guns don't belong in college classrooms, dorm rooms, football stadiums or frat parties."[65] Akin to the anti-gun activists at UT, Moms Demand Action argued that guns add an element of danger to an already stressful college life. Appealing to local sensibilities toward the Lone Star State, one ad pleaded: "72% of Texans agree. But Texas politicians would force colleges to allow guns in those places. Don't mess with common sense. Tell your legislators. Texas is better than this."[66] Despite all this, however, the women activists were facing a formidable, well-funded, and relentless opposition, with the symbolic arsenal of the entire U.S. gun lobby directed against them.

One of the wins of the Gun-Free UT movement, ultimately, was to connect the debates beyond the spatial context of the campus space to broader questions of violence in society. Beyond the *who* question that the discussion largely revolved around, the groups opposing guns were able to underscore also *what* guns are actually meant to do. As a faculty activist puts it:

> I think that probably the main success is in the long term of showing to the city and the state and the country that we are not this mute, compliant group of people who are willing to just sort of take this lying down. Even though we weren't able to overturn it or even put into place an opt-out provision to let UT opt out of the law, like the private schools are [doing], I think that probably the biggest success is a signal.[67]

By holding vigils at the Martin Luther King, Jr. statue on campus to commemorate victims of gun violence throughout the United States, the activist groups made the gun rights restriction issue relevant on a national scale beyond UT:

> What I think has happened with guns is, gun advocates and gun marketers have colonized more and more and more of the space in civil society to the point where now I have a gun pressed up against my face in my class. So, we just have to reclaim that space for common sense, for peace,

65 Chuck Lindell, "Groups to Use TV, Internet Ads to Fight Campus Carry," *Austin American-Statesman*, April 9, 2015, A9.

66 Everytown for Gun Safety, "Guns on Texas Campuses," YouTube video, 0:30, May 19, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0uDUp0TzOM, accessed December 13, 2020.

67 April 25, 2018 interview.

> for safety, and for mutual respectful engagement that's not backed by violence.[68]

Yet, the fundamental clash between the groups supporting and opposing the legislation was a philosophical one: while the pro-gun groups viewed violence as acts performed by an identifiable agent, the anti-gun groups emphasized what Slavoj Žižek describes as "systemic violence," subtle forms of coercion that sustain "relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence."[69] As an irreconcilable difference in delineating subjective and systemic violence, the groups promoting and opposing Campus Carry were not in a position to even begin to see eye-to-eye.

4 "A Gun Would Not Be the Most Reckless Decision I Could Make": Beyond Black and White Imaginaries

My focus on the debates surrounding the Campus Carry legislation before its implementation has underscored the ways in which the local communities on and off campus imagined an armed campus before it became a reality, simultaneously revealing implicit assumptions about social power in Texas. I will conclude by reflecting on the *who/what/where* triad and the key questions posed at the outset of my discussion. My conclusions suggest that the imaginaries of who is and who is not a part of shared local and national imaginaries of gun carriers are, albeit deep-seated, never clear-cut but strongly dependent on the specific contexts of the debates. The imaginaries of Campus Carry before the law actually went into effect reveal the conspicuous ways in which the racialized, gendered, and class-based individuals were connected with threats or vulnerability by groups taking a stance on the legislation. Notwithstanding this surface-level dichotomy, activists also resorted to seemingly paradoxical statements—ostensibly to benefit groups considered to be in vulnerable positions—for strategic purposes. Consequently, even though the division between the pro- and anti-gun sides may have initially seemed to involve unambiguous either/or issues, a closer examination reveals grey areas. Specifically taking into account existing social power relations in light of the troubled history of the nation within particular spatial contexts, I will close this chapter by turning to the ways in which some of those complexities emerged in conversations with the sources.

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68 April 27, 2018 interview.

69 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), 8.

Even though many of the interviewees for this research were of the opinion before the law's implementation that Campus Carry would present a particularly strong threat to minority groups on campus, discussions of the broader debate of whether the law should be repealed bring up multiple nuances embedded in the *who/what/where* triad. Consider, for example, the following viewpoints, which call attention to the complexity of the gun question beyond an either/or delineation. Complicating the left-right ideological division of the pro- and anti-gun groups, a graduate student and vocal opponent of Campus Carry takes her in-group to task: "A lot of people to the left, especially at that point [when the debates were strong], they don't have much of an argument [other] than 'Guns are bad. Let's ban all guns. I saw some legitimacy in having rifles for hunting. Like, is it legit to use a legitimate thing?'"[70] Similarly, a member of the teaching staff opposing Campus Carry sheds light on his experience with guns beyond the university:

> I'm not uncomfortable with guns in some circumstances. I own some firearms. I come from a family that has owned firearms for generations, but I've never had the desire to bring a gun to campus. And I have some discomfort with the notion that there are people in the campus community that might be carrying firearms.[71]

Moreover, several interviewees who positioned themselves as being against Campus Carry reveal that they were either former or current members of the NRA. In the words of a student activist:

> It's because I do believe shooting guns is fun, and I understand the mindset behind it. Especially because I'm somebody that does like to look at both sides. I think if you stay in one side, then your argument isn't as strong and, two, you don't really know what you are arguing. So, I became a member because I constantly criticize the NRA and I constantly criticize the pro-gun movement.[72]

Analogously, in discussing the social power aspect of the *who* question beyond the spatial context of the campus, one begins to see nuances beyond the black-white dichotomy, as in the following reflection by an African American faculty member at UT Austin who was in opposition to the Campus Carry legislation:

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70 April 25, 2018 interview.

71 April 23, 2018 interview.

72 April 17, 2018 interview #2.

> As a black person in this country, might there be periods during which I would want to have a gun? … I would never want one in my household, but I wouldn't want to rule [it] out… I think I've seen enough of dystopia in America in the twenty-first century that, I don't know, there might be a point in time where having a gun would not be the most reckless decision I could make.[73]

Complicating the *who* question beyond the educational context of the university and in light of twenty-first century gun imaginaries as dystopic, the interviewee here underscores the grey areas that come up in the pros and cons of the gun debates, which are contingent upon the specific historical contexts within which they are discussed. In turn, an undergraduate student opposing Campus Carry brought up the manner in which *class* could be used to make an argument to support gun carrying: "I consider myself to be fairly progressive and farther to the left than most people I know. But even I acknowledge cases to be made for civilians to own and operate guns. How else can the working class compete in the revolution?"[74] During the fieldwork conducted for this research, other students made similar arguments, going as far back as the Revolutionary War to justify carrying as the ultimate means for individuals to protect themselves against a tyrannical government.

An underlying ideological question that surfaced in discussions with the research participants—be they pro- or anti-gun—concerns *what* they consider as being central to imaginaries of security and insecurity regarding Campus Carry. Across the spectrum, the question boils down to individual versus collective rights, at both the level of the state and the federal government. Irrespective of whether guns are viewed as a threat or means of protection—and whatever cognitive, sensory, and bodily responses they may trigger—the issue at stake is whether the individual is to be in charge of their self-protection. In addition, there are multiple intersectional questions that complicate individual responses to questions of in/security. One aspect frequently brought up by students, adjunct faculty, and staff is the question of *rank*. The possibility to take issue with university policy is contingent upon one's position within the overarching social hierarchy, as evidenced in the following viewpoint:

> The faculty argument has been about being able to have free and open discussion in the classroom without the threat of deadly violence. For staff, it's a slightly different issue. It's about safety in our workplace. It's very often now about dealing with students who are upset and having

73 April 17, 2018 interview #1.

74 Testimonial #3, February 14, 2019, notes in possession of author.

> trouble controlling their emotions, having access to deadly weapons in our workspaces, having co-workers who may not have good anger management, who have access to deadly weapons. So, those are different issues. I mean, faculty face those to some extent but they are primarily concerned with the pedagogical impact of Campus Carry.[75]

A senior faculty member underscores generational experiences and shared sociohistorical events as related to collective issues of in/security:

> The generation before me was duck and cover in the atomic bomb scare and then the generation after me has been in school shooting drills and I feel like my generation has a responsibility to fight for a gun-free education and the kind of educational comfort and safety that I experienced as a student of public schools in this country… I think it's obscene that children are being encouraged to buy Kevlar sleeping mats and backpacks with Kevlar in them. It's just horrifying to me that they're taught how to respond to an active shooter.[76]

Finally, the *where* aspect of my examination of the social imaginary-social power dynamic related to gun debates is centered on the multiple spatial aspects of the armed campus. Although imaginaries of guns are pervasive in Texas history, culture, and mythology, as pointed out in the chapter by Laura Hernández-Ehrisman in this volume, it is largely because of the educational context that the gun question galvanized various groups of people to take a vocal stand on the imaginary ramifications of Campus Carry in unprecedented ways. Although mass shootings in different types of educational establishments in the United States are not uncommon occurrences, on an everyday level they are classified as out of the ordinary, rather than likely. As a UT faculty member put it, "high-risk, low-probability events, who thinks about them, right? Until there's an earthquake or, you know, an airplane crash or whatever. People don't think about it, and they are right."[77] Even though UT Austin became infamous for the Tower shooting and the campus has sporadically had other deadly incidents, the fact that mass shootings do not take place daily turns them into "low-probability" occurrences.

Even as mass shootings *as* imaginaries get downplayed in the *where* of the campus context, the interviewees for this research recall minor incidents of violence that had a chilling effect on the campus community, even without

75 April 9, 2018 interview.
76 April 17, 2018 interview #1.
77 April 4, 2018 interview.

mass casualties. Such an event, for example, occurred on September 28, 2010, when a 19-year-old sophomore brought an AK-47 rifle to the Perry-Castañeda Library and killed himself.[78] The incident, even if not deadly to others, was an eerie reminder of the UT Tower shooting almost a half a century earlier. Another event that shook the community was the murder of an 18-year-old freshman woman, whose body was found in a creek on campus on April 5, 2016.[79] Again, while not a mass casualty incident, it served as a reminder of the implicit reality of violence, which both groups—advocating or opposing gun carrying—appropriated for the purposes of their own argumentation. Furthermore, incidents of gun violence at other educational establishments in the United States while the debates were going on prompted reflections on the issue of the growing number of school shootings in the twenty-first century. In the words of the *American-Statesman*, "that kind of killing and the communal grief that follows has become an awful routine. Seven of the 10 deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history have occurred in the past 10 years, as the number of mass shootings as defined by the FBI has also risen sharply."[80]

The imaginaries of gun violence discussed in this chapter reveal the ways in which firearms are frequently conflated with issues of social power relations. The hypothetical realities of SB 11 triggered a range of *who/what/where* imaginaries, exposing dreams, fears, and hopes that point to various unresolved issues and hierarchies that the community continues to grapple with. The cognitive, sensory, and bodily responses to the prospect of an armed campus in Texas were triggered more often by *who* the perceived carrier of a gun might be, resulting in a range of racialized, gendered, and class-based argumentation. Yet the reality of gun violence in U.S. society suggests that both the groups advocating and opposing Campus Carry are ultimately in the same boat in many ways, sharing the predicament of having to deal with the issue of firearms in shared public and private space. Moreover, both groups are largely bound to broader state and federal legislation and policymaking, even if not sharing mutual interpretation of them. Consequently, while imaginaries have distinct performative power as a gateway between the real world and abstractions, in the Texas case, they also sidestep the fundamental issue at stake. For, ultimately, the main point is *not* about who carries the gun; the actual trigger

78 "UT Austin Shooting Rampage Ends Tragically in the Library," *American Libraries*, September 28, 2010, https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2010/09/28/ut-austin-shooting-rampage-ends-tragically-in-the-library/, accessed February 16, 2021.

79 Chuck Lindell, "Slaying Proves Point, UT Gun Group Argues," *Austin American-Statesman*, April 12, 2016, A1.

80 Philip Jankowski, "Sniper Attack Helped Define 'Mass Shooting,'" *Austin American-Statesman*, July 3, 2016, A1.

point is the gun itself. When all is said and done, the reality of power relations is not merely determined by racial/ethnic, gender, or class hierarchies, but who packs the most firepower. That fact is what all parties involved would do well to stop and think about.

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CHAPTER 6

Radical Political Imagination and Generational Utopias: Gun Control as a Site of Youth Activism

Mila Seppälä

> For those who still think that utopia is about the impossible, what really is impossible is to carry on as we are…[1]
>
> RUTH LEVITAS, *Utopia as a Method*

1 Introduction

"We're your friendly local revolutionaries," declared Mariann Vizard, the Southern Regional traveler for Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), in a speech held in January 1968 at a rally at The University of Texas at Austin in support of resisting the draft.[2] At the time, criticism against the war in Vietnam had spread across campuses in every corner of the country. Vizard was giving a speech on the importance of not only talking about a revolution but living the revolution every day, a revolution that does not begin by taking to the streets with guns but by living freely, "no matter what that means."[3] Fast-forward to March 2018, when Cameron Kasky, a survivor of the Parkland, Florida high school shooting and an organizer of the March For Our Lives (MFOL) protests, greeted hundreds of thousands of students in Washington, DC: "Welcome to the revolution."[4] Students marched in Austin then, too, declaring that "enough is enough" and demanding stricter gun control measures from their

1 Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), xii.

2 Mariann Vizard, "Movement Defense," *The Rag* 2, no. 11 (January 15, 1968): 3.

3 Vizard, "Movement Defense," 3.

4 Cameron Kasky, "Cameron Kasky Speaks at March For Our Lives - We Are the Change," filmed March 24, 2018 at March For Our Lives event in Washington, DC, video, 0:19, https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=rgc2il-20g8&t=1s&ab_channel=MarchForOurLives, accessed May 3, 2021.

leaders in order to "end gun violence." Fifty years stand between Kasky and Vizard, and not much has changed in the protesters' underlying message. As E. J. Montini from the *Arizona Republic* writes: "At its core, the nationwide March for Our Lives campaign is an anti-war movement. It's trying to put an end to a war we've been waging – and continue to wage – against ourselves."[5]

In this chapter, I explore how radical political imagination has evolved and affected political action in leftist, youth-led gun control movements located in urban Texas.[6] I consider radical political imagination to be both action-oriented toward fundamental, systemic change and about the smaller, everyday "alternative visions of being, doing, and belonging" constructed in social interactions.[7] In other words, I analyze radical political imagination as a movement philosophy and as a way of thinking that guides personal activist behavior. In addition, I employ the concept of utopia to describe how the possibilities of radical political imagination are broadened, for example, due to external political opportunities created by mass mobilization. Here, as suggested by Ruth Levitas, I consider utopia as a tool to study radical political imagination rather than as an effort to engage in defining desirable end-goals for societies to strive toward.[8]

I examine radical political imagination as the act of imagining a fundamentally different society than the status quo and utopias as the representations of the broadening of what can be imagined. Both radical political imagination and utopia are culturally embedded notions that reveal just as much about the realities of today as they do about the possibilities of tomorrow. Thus, by probing the understandings the activists have about their own political and cultural context, I examine the type of political action these understandings produce in the present. I particularly focus on radical political imagination that evolves within communities that seem hostile to such efforts but nonetheless are provoked into being through the allowances in other external structures. The political opportunities for leftist youth activists in Texas were and are extremely

5 E. J. Montini, "Montini: March for Our Lives Movement isn't Anti-gun. It's Anti-war," *Arizona Republic*, March 24, 2018, https://eu.azcentral.com/story/opinion/op-ed/ej-montini/2018/03/24/march-our-lives-movement-isnt-anti-gun-its-anti-war/454636002/, accessed May 3, 2021.

6 Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish use the term radical imagination in *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity* (London: Zed Books, 2015). In order to limit the concept to imagination that deals explicitly with the political, I use the term *radical political imagination*.

7 Alex Khasnabish, "Ecologies of the Radical Imagination," *Information, Communication & Society* 23, no. 12 (2020): 1722.

8 Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method*.

narrow, whether it is in the context of the Southern Democrats of the 1960s or the modern Republican Party as the party holding power at the state level. Yet, the anti-war movement in the 1960s as well as the movement against gun violence and mass shootings in places of education both mobilized an unprecedented amount of young people in the United States speaking to the widescale popularity of the issues that translated to local action as well even in the midst of unfavorable political realities.[9]

In this chapter, I argue that the youth-led gun control movements of the twenty-first century are reclaiming the ability to imagine open, even utopian, futures that have been missing from the political Left in the United States. Thus, I begin by considering the time when there was a real belief in social transformation—a revolution—in the U.S. political Left. I define the key concepts of this chapter, radical political imagination, and utopia within the context of "the Long Sixties" and what "radical" meant to the activists themselves.[10] During "the Long Sixties," the Vietnam War galvanized youth in the United States in a way that facilitated radical political imagination, opening up possibilities to imagine a fundamentally different society. Grounding the conversation in the context of Texas and the New Left, I examine *The Rag*, an underground campus paper published in Austin in 1966–1977, and the types of direct action, activist subjectivities, and articulations of utopian visions for the future that can be produced in an atmosphere characterized by mass radicalization.

In order to demonstrate the significance of broad possibilities for imagination and open futures, it is also important to consider the consequences of limited political imagination and a fixed sense of the future. The politics of gun control throughout the late twentieth century offer a compelling example of how a lack of radical activism and narrowing down of possibilities have stymied the political imagination of the Left in the United States. Focusing on the legislative battles around Concealed Carry and Campus Carry in Texas, I demonstrate how the gun control movement has continuously surrendered ground in the face of relentless efforts by the political Right to pursue their

9 "The Latest: 'March for Our Lives' Rallies Draw Huge Crowds," Associated Press, March 25, 2018, https://apnews.com/article/3ff58ce25dd94736aa0d6c2c4f398eec, accessed May 3, 2021.

10 "The Long Sixties" is used to describe how the spirit of activism characteristic of the 1960s began already in the 1950s with the emergence of the civil rights movement and ended in the disintegration of the New Left in the 1970s. See Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps, *Radicals in America: The U.S. Left Since the Second World War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Romand Coles, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman, *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Political Theory* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

own utopian project. This ceding has led some scholars to question whether a gun control movement as such has even existed until very recently.[11]

I argue that the limited political imagination and the appearance of closed opportunities have begun to shift as youth-led gun control movements have emerged as a new iteration of leftist politics. I center on two movements in Texas to demonstrate how the revival of radical political imagination and utopian visions of the future can affect the strategies and goals activists decide to adopt. I begin by examining the campus movement "Cocks Not Glocks" (CNG), which formed at UT Austin after the passage of SB 11 allowing Campus Carry. Drawing on interviews conducted with activists, media appearances by the organizers, and the *Come & Take It* documentary (2018) about the protest, I examine how the CNG protest radically reimagined what political action in gun violence prevention can be by contesting the current state of affairs through humor while also displaying how radicalness can be something embodied.[12] Despite having no real possibilities to affect legislation, the CNG protest was integral to the effort to gain attention to the gun laws in Texas and as such, sparked hope in the campus community with long-lasting effects.

I continue to examine how this hope was again animated by the MFOL marches that cascaded to Austin too. The mass mobilization of young people and students managed to revive political hope in a manner that brought to mind the spirit of the 1960s to the older activists that had lived through the mobilization against the Vietnam War. By considering a variety of data, ranging from policy letters drafted by MFOL and MFOL Texas, campaign ads and a series of speeches and photographs taken at an MFOL protest march in Austin, Texas in 2018, I show how radical political imagination propelled by mass mobilization can exponentially broaden the futures that movements can perceive. I consider how a collective identity framed around an imagined generation has led to the confluence of different issue-based movements that has facilitated processes of imagining larger, utopian, projects. These projects are constructed in interactions within and across organizations, in coalitions centered on empowering minority voices. I conclude the chapter by exploring the future of youth activism and gun control movements.

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11 Kristin Goss, *Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

12 The interviews with the activists were conducted as a part of the Academy of Finland-funded Campus Carry research project at the University of Turku.

2 The Revolution is Inevitable: Radical Political Imagination and Utopias during "the Long Sixties"

When students marched in the spring of 2018 for gun control, many were reminded of the Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam to Washington, DC in 1969. The sheer amount of young people that had gathered for the MFOL marches were enough for the newspapers to draw comparisons to the Vietnam War era. Much of the reporting took its cues from the Associated Press, which documented the marches throughout the day and compared the numbers between the two events: "A series of protests held across the United States Saturday in support of gun control is shaping up to be one of the biggest youth protests since the era of the Vietnam War."[13] The *Washington Post* wrote that the "The memory of the Moratorium — its breadth and its limits — strikingly echoes the strident efforts of high school protesters today."[14] Some protestors present at the MFOL marches were themselves veterans of the 1960s anti-war movement and saw the mass shootings of today as the modern war: "In Vietnam, we shot at someone else; now we are shooting each other."[15]

To understand what made "the Long Sixties" in particular important in the history of radical political imagination in the U.S. Left, and what exactly the youth of today are drawing from its spirit, it is necessary to first understand what makes political imagination radical in the first place. There are many ways to define radicalness, but at its root it is about comprehending problems in society as connected to a larger system.[16] Therefore, in order for societies to be made better, a transformative change to the status quo is required—whatever "the system" and the "status quo" might mean to different actors. Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps suggest that to be radical is to not accept the status quo and act in ways beyond what is considered "normal" in a society.[17] Furthermore, Romand Coles, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman posit that

13 "The Latest."

14 Zachary Jonathan Jacobson, "The March for Our Lives Will Last a Few Hours. Its Impact Will Last a Generation," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/03/23/the-march-for-our-lives-will-last-a-few-hours-its-impact-will-last-a-generation/, accessed May 3, 2021.

15 "'March for Our Lives': Rallies around the World Call for Stricter US Gun Control," *Deutsche Welle*, March 24, 2018, https://www.dw.com/en/march-for-our-lives-rallies-around-the-world-call-for-stricter-us-gun-control/a-43118270, accessed May 3, 2021.

16 The word "radical" itself originates from the Latin word that denotes "root." Merriam-Webster Dictionary. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/radical, accessed April 8, 2021.

17 Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 6.

radical is "fundamental and transformative."[18] Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish define radical as the "understanding that social, political, economic and cultural problems are outcomes of deeply rooted tensions, contradictions, power imbalances, and forms of oppression and exploitation," and nothing short of transforming the whole system can change these dynamics.[19] However, while the root of radicalness is understood as the desire for fundamental societal change, Khasnabish also argues that radical imagination itself is collective work in the mundane.[20] Thus, it is not only found in large-scale action by social movements but in the quotidian, in being and living differently—or, as Mariann Vizard encouraged people in the anti-war rally in Austin in 1968, in living the revolution: "[T]he revolution itself is a very personal, very individual kind of thing. It's happening to people every day. It happens whenever a person or group of people decide that from now on they are going to consider themselves to be free."[21]

Indeed, for the New Left youth running *The Rag*, what it meant to be radical stemmed from the very personal realization that they considered themselves to be different from the rest of the society. Seeing themselves as opposite of what was normal and acceptable helped them to recognize how other societal issues were also consequences of that same discordance with the status quo. For example, Scott Pittman reflected on how growing up with the expectations of his conservative family changed the way he saw his own reality:

> My humanity is so restricted that any meaningful experience threatens my existence within the system – what if I am unable to relate the color black with inferior? Or if $20,000 per year plus is not the epitome of my expectations in life? Or if I can't justify killing by uttering the incantation "commie", "beatnik", or "Jew"? These things do not fit into my concepts of reality, and this forces me to live my own reality within an unreal situation. Once I have lost faith in the conditioning of this society I am able to see an incredible range of alternatives for living and experiencing my environment.[22]

Thus, it was from this sense of difference that the coalitions of the New Left were formed. Loosely affiliated organizations and individual activists fighting

18 Coles, Reinhardt, and Shulman, *Radical Future Pasts*, 4.
19 Haiven and Khasnabish, *The Radical Imagination*, 5.
20 Khasnabish, "Ecologies of the Radical Imagination," 1720.
21 Vizard, "Movement Defense," 3.
22 Scott Pittman, "dRAG-net!" *The Rag* 2, no. 10 (January 8, 1968): 12.

for racial equality, women's rights, gay liberation, and an end to the war in Vietnam saw their fight as against the government of the United States, which was perceived as imperialistic and repressive in its pursuit of a conformist, capitalist society. What was new about the New Left was that instead of traditional unions and emphasis on class consciousness, the movement was driven by a belief that a unique coalition of students and racial minorities could bring about radical change.[23] It included organizations such as the black-led Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the white-led Students for Democratic Society (SDS), who were engaging in the communal work of radical political imagination, acting in solidarity and cooperating in educating the public through leafletting, protest marches, picket lines, and other acts of civil disobedience. The most important goal was to raise public awareness, in the belief that if people saw the discordance with the world for what it was and how it should or could be, change would happen. As Vizard underlined for her readers, power was not in physical power but in numbers:

> Try to involve people on as many levels as possible in action form rallies on the university campuses to a vigil at the LBJ ranch to sit-ins at that draft board to a march to the State Capitol to possible civil disobedience or at least a good picket line. … That, I think, is what "resistance" is all about --- not necessarily involving the militant street tactics of Oakland and Whitehall --- we know we're not ready for that… but simply that we don't ask the system anymore. That we understand that it is rotten clear through and that our job is to show that to as many people as possible so that we can clear it away.[24]

The role that militant, violent action could or should play in radical activism was continuously contested within the movement by the end of the decade.[25] In particular, acceptance of violence deepened tensions between the local organizers in the North and South. During SDS's national convention in December 1967, emphasis was placed on the importance of "new militancy," which the representatives from the Southern states could not embrace.[26] In response, the Austin delegates, together with other representatives from Southern states,

23 Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 96.

24 Mariann Vizard, "It's Time to Organize," *The Rag* 2, no. 12 (January 29, 1968): 13.

25 See, e.g., Holly Scott, *Younger Than That Now: The Politics of Age in the 1960s* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 111; Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 157.

26 Dick Reavis, "SDS National Council Says - The South Will Rise," *The Rag* 2, no 12 (January 29, 1968): 3.

released a resolution that spoke of the resentment Southern organizers felt in what they saw as belittling behavior by the Northern organizers and what it meant to organize in that context:

> And we realize that we are the southern organizers, that we have to develop our own strategy and tactics and knowledge of our concrete geo-political situation, to talk to our own people [sic], and that that is how'we [sic] can best strengthen the national organization and the national strategy and analysis.[27]

Consequently, although tactics did play a key part in the formation of specific movements like the Black Panthers, who in turn were fundamental in provoking in the entire New Left imaginations of radically different kinds of realities, "the Long Sixties" were unique in the history of leftist radicalism due to the possibilities that mass mobilization seemed to offer in terms of imagining a better, even utopian, society.[28] Coles, Reinhardt, and Shulman describe the radicals of the 1960s as being "animated by the 'utopian' sense that it was possible to reconstitute or refound regime by remaking its central institutions."[29] The time was characterized by epic theories and utopias as something not only worth imagining but possible to achieve.[30] As described by one activist in *The Rag*, who was also worried about the state of the movement and the future it promised, the revolution itself was almost a foregone conclusion: "I guess I'll go on supporting the revolution (since it's inevitable and I couldn't possible support the status quo)."[31]

What makes the concept of utopia a relevant analytical tool in explaining the uniqueness of "the Long Sixties" in the history of radical activism of the U.S. Left—and, as I will argue later, in considering the youth movements of today—is its capacity to elucidate the opening of imagined possibilities. In this sense, utopia is not an "end in itself" or a value judgement made on the particular utopian character of a vision for the future but a perspective to help examine phenomena.[32] As Levitas posits, employing utopia as an analytical tool is to study the "expression of longing and fulfilment" embedded and

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27 Vizard, "It's Time," 17.

28 Brick and Phelps, *Radicals in America*, 150.

29 Coles, Reinhardt, and Shulman, *Radical Future Pasts*, 7.

30 Coles, Reinhardt, and Shulman, 4.

31 Larry Freudiger, "California Dreamer: Revolution Revisited," *The Rag*, 1, no. 28 (August, 1967): 10.

32 Vogt, *Between Utopia and Disillusionment: A Narrative of the Political Transformation in Eastern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 5.

repressed in societies rather than understanding utopia as the goal societies could or should strive for.[33] Or, as Charles Taylor explained, no matter how far off utopias might seem, they still deal with what is imagined to be possible "in the bend of human nature."[34] Furthermore, utopias are not wholly diametric to practical thinking either, as "what is pragmatically possible" is defined by the vision we consider to be utopian.[35] What is important, then, is to evaluate how open the possibilities for the future are in the first place, rather than how realistic the utopian visions themselves are. Consequently, what made the radicalism of the 1960s unique was the belief in the actual possibility of alternative futures radically different from the present—that "revolution appeared to hover immanently in the atmosphere"—and how that belief animated political action.[36]

3 "Somewhere in the Middle": Gun Control and the Lack of Radical Political Imagination

In order to understand how youth-led gun control movements are reclaiming the radical political imagination of the 1960s, it is important to understand the type of activism or issue-advocacy born in environments where a lack of different imaginable futures hinders the success of the movement. I argue that this has been the case with gun control in particular. The time after "the Long Sixties" was characterized by a shift in public consciousness that can be described as counterrevolutionary; with governments responding to the imagined wishes of the "silent majority," emphasis was placed on identities that morphed into the culture wars still being played out today, resulting in "a staggering closing down of the sense of possibility."[37] Globally, too, the concept of utopia undeniably lost its value.[38] As utopias were condemned as exercises in futility in the best case and as dangerous and totalitarian impulses in the worst, the emphasis on realism persisted.[39] Fredric Jameson describes how the loss of utopian thought is firmly tied to the fabric of today's postmodern cities, which are in a permanent crisis mode; thus, if any future is imagined at all, it

33 Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, 5.
34 Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 110.
35 Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010), 6.
36 Gary Thiher, "Youth Class!" *The Rag*, 2, no. 27 (June 6, 1968): 4.
37 Coles, Reinhardt, and Shulman, *Radical Future Pasts*, 8.
38 Vogt, *Between Utopia and Disillusionment*, 6.
39 See, for example, Karl Popper, Alan Ryan, and E. H. Gombrich, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

takes the form of a dystopia.[40] Cynical reasoning has led the way to "a weakening of historicity or of the sense of the future; a conviction that fundamental change is no longer possible."[41] It is not only hard to imagine that change is possible but also to imagine what that change could even be. As Roberto Unger declares, "As we have lost confidence in large projects, whether theory or of politics, we have been taught how to live without them rather than how to recover and remake them in other, more promising forms."[42]

This lack of radical political imagination and an ability to imagine alternatives was evident in U.S. leftist politics at the start of the twenty-first century, and in particular it was the underlying condition characterizing the politics of gun control. At first glance, radical political imagination and utopia in the context of gun politics may not seem an obvious pair, especially if utopia is considered to be something unreachable in human societies. However, if we consider radical political imagination to be about understanding issues as systematic and utopia as the opening of possibilities to imagine things that previously were inconceivable, then the concepts are useful in gun politics, too. Furthermore, in many ways the successes of the Right regarding the right to carry guns has enabled the imagining of a type of utopia where every citizen is free to carry guns wherever they wish without any oversight from the government. For example, if the trajectory since post-Civil War Texas had been toward restricting gun carrying rather than making it more accessible, the Concealed Carry bill (SB 60 in 1995), the Campus Carry bill (SB 11 in 2015), the Open Carry bill (HB 195 in 2015), and a law allowing guns in churches (SB 535 in 2019) proved to be watershed moments that would have a profound impact on expanding which and where citizens were allowed to carry.[43]

On the other side, the politics of gun control have been characterized by the continuous cession of ground and moving of the goal posts of what is considered "normal" in society. In 1968, Sue Jankovsky wrote in *The Rag* about how Senate Bill 162, which among other things armed campus police and led to the threatened safety of the writers of *The Rag* and others identifying with the New Left: "The cops have guns; we're not living in a safe, academic community, but in a city."[44] In 2016, not only was the presence of armed campus security

40 Fredric Jameson, "Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future," in *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, eds. Michael Gordin, Gyan Prakash, and Helen Tilley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 22.

41 Fredric Jameson, "Utopia as Method," 24.

42 Roberto Unger, *The Self Awakened: Pragmatism Unbound* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

43 On post-Civil War gun legislation in Texas, see Hernández-Ehrisman in this volume.

44 Sue Jankovsky, "Campus Cops: Licensed to Quell," *The Rag* 2, no. 13 (February 5, 1968): 3.

an uncontested fact, but students and faculty were allowed to carry firearms on the premises of public universities in Texas as well. If in 1995 public buildings could still get away with banning guns on their premises, regardless of the new legislation, no such affordances were given to public universities in 2015, despite their protests.[45] Likewise, if the discussion after the UT Tower shooting in 1966 revolved around whether handguns should be banned or not, in the twenty-first century handguns have become a normalized, uncontested part of life while so-called assault weapons have become the subject of intense debate.[46] And if in 1995 constitutional carry or permitless carry was seen as a fringe idea supported only by the most fervent gun rights advocates, it did become reality in Texas in 2021.[47]

Undoubtedly, this development can be attributed to the relentless efforts and extraordinary scale of organizations such as the National Rifle Association. Yet, in part, it is also due to the inability of gun control advocates to animate wide-scale grassroots action that could be called a social movement.[48] For most of the twentieth century, gun control activism, both nationally and locally, was led by lawmakers and groups of policy experts for whom moderation was the key.[49] In 1995, the challengers to the Concealed Carry bill consisted of the national gun control organization Handgun Control Inc. (HCI), later known as the Brady Campaign, and a coalition of local leaders, such as law enforcement officials, teachers, mothers, religious leaders, and some business owners.[50] In 2015, when the Texas legislature passed SB 11, opposition to the bill looked very much like it had twenty years before, with campus personnel, law enforcement, and organizations such as Moms Demand Action speaking out against it.[51] The end results of both of these legislative fights were the same—the bills were passed with very few concessions. In 1994, the *Austin American-Statesman*

45 Stuart Eskenazi, "DPS Restricts Handguns on its Property," *Austin American-Statesman*, November 30, 1995, B5; Asher Price, "UT Campus Carry Panel: No Gun-Free Classrooms," *Austin American-Statesman*, December 11, 2015, A1.

46 See Kolehmainen in this volume.

47 Sami Sparber, "Texans Can Carry Handguns without a License or Training Starting Sept. 1, after Gov. Greg Abbott Signs Permitless Carry Bill into Law," *The Texas Tribune*, June 21, 2021, https://www.texastribune.org/2021/06/16/texas-constitutional-carry-greg-abbott/, accessed May 29, 2022.

48 Goss, *Disarmed.*

49 Goss, 9.

50 Eunice Moscoso, "Activists, Victims Work behind the Scenes for Gun Control," *Austin American-Statesman*, October 22, 1995, B7.

51 Ralph K.M. Haurwitz, "On Eve of Sandy Hook, Rally Calls for Gun Limits Citing Sandy Hook, Rally at Capitol Says Curb Guns, Marchers Call for Gun Limits," *Austin American-Statesman*, December 14, 2015, B1.

reported a speech given by Sarah Brady at UT Austin that summarized the position of all major gun control advocates of the country: "We are not for disarming people," Brady told the audience, "When you have an epidemic it's a public health issue, a safety issue. … Somewhere in the middle are most of us."[52] Yet, while gun rights advocates had been very vocal about the need to protect their constitutional rights, there were no legitimate "extremist" groups demanding disarmament on the opposing side. The National Coalition to Ban Handguns (NCBH), from which HCI had separated at its formation, had held tougher positions on gun control, including banning handguns.[53] But once it became clear how unpopular this really was, the NCBH changed its position and name to the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, an organization that still exists today.[54]

Nor did gun control arouse any significant grassroots activism in those considered part of the "extremist" groups on the Left during "the Long Sixties." On the contrary, when militancy grew among certain sections of the New Left during the latter part of that decade, the Gun Control Act of 1968 was passed in part to keep firearms from being available to groups like the Black Panthers.[55] While not all members of the movement were convinced that the revolution required taking up arms—most organizers in the South believed that violence was "impossible and inadvisable" as an organizational tactic in their community—limiting gun carrying by private citizens was certainly not on the agenda of the New Left, which saw the U.S. government as enemy number one.[56] Yet, even though the gun debate during the 1960s was not the partisan issue that it is today, Scott Melzer argues that the formation of the gun rights movement and transformation of the National Rifle Association into the ardent defender of the Second Amendment and the "cultural warrior of the Right" happened in part as a direct response to the threat the movements of "the Long Sixties" posed for traditional "American" values and frontier masculinity.[57] Furthermore, Robert Spitzer notes that gun control as a social

52 Mike Burgess, "Sarah Brady Takes Gun-Control Opponents in Stride," *Austin American-Statesman*, October 14, 1994, B7.

53 Robert Spitzer, *The Politics of Gun Control, 2nd ed.* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1995), 89.

54 Walter Carrol, "Organizations Advocating Gun Control," in *Guns and Contemporary Society: The Past, Present, and Future of Firearms and Firearm Policy*, ed. Glenn Utter (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016), 177.

55 For the arguments used by advocates of the bill, see, e.g., William Vizzard, *Shots in the Dark: the Policy, Politics, and Symbolism of Gun Control* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 3.

56 Students for a Democratic Society, National Convention, "The Resolution," *The Rag* 2, no. 12 (January 29, 1968): 13.

57 Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 9, 47.

regulatory policy is bound to incite a high amount of controversy, comparable to issues like civil rights or abortion rights, as it is not only a question of regulating individual behavior but trying to affect community values.[58]

Consequently, throughout the century, as the influence of the NRA grew while at the same time the very public assassinations of political leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy sparked the first stirrings of gun control advocacy, gun rights became the issue of the Right and gun control the issue of the Left.[59] Arguably due to the strength of the gun rights movement, gun politics have been mostly debated on the terms of the Right. On the other hand, the gun control movement has largely been on the defensive, focusing on moderate legislation on the local level with largely symbolic consequences.[60] This has strangled radical political imagination in the gun control movement and narrowed the opportunities to imagine not only a different type of future, but actions and goals worth pursuing. However, I argue that this has begun to shift, as the youth of today are reclaiming the spirit of political hope that characterized the mobilization of "the Long Sixties."

4 "We Don't Want To Live With It": Humor and Generational Utopias as Expressions of Radical Political Imagination

As I contend that the youth-led gun control movements of the twenty-first century are fundamentally altering the dynamics of gun politics, I focus on two ways radical political imagination has manifested in recent gun control movements in Austin formed in relation to two very different political realities: the "Cocks Not Clocks" (CNG) protest showed how, even with limited options, radical political imagination could be expressed through humor, while the March For Our Lives (MFOL) movement, buoyed by the power of mass mobilization, exploded the opportunities for imagining different type of futures. Using humor as an expression of radical political imagination, CNG was able to reimagine action in gun control activism; alternatively, the generational utopias imagined by MFOL redefined the goals of gun control activism. Thus, both CNG and MFOL were key moments in the generational shift in gun control activism.

Humor became the core of the CNG protest when Jessica Jin, a UT Austin alumna, found the idea of accepting gun violence as a de facto part of

58 Spitzer, *The Politics*, 5.
59 Melzer, *Gun Crusaders*, 65.
60 Vizzard, *Shots in the Dark*, 155.

"American" culture not only inherently wrong but completely absurd.[61] Enraged over analysis that pundits on a Texas radio station offered on the permanent and inevitable nature of gun violence after the Umpqua Community College shooting in October 1, 2015, Jin encouraged her peers to start bringing dildos to the university. This was an explicit effort to protest the new Campus Carry legislation, which allowed the carrying of firearms on public universities, and to make visible the absurdities of gun culture, as public displays of sex toys were considered a misdemeanor under Texas state law. The "absurdist direct action organization" would eventually grow into a series of protests involving thousands of participants and sex toys, gaining the attention of local, national, and international media, and eventually even leading to an invitation to the White House for the group's leaders.[62]

Together with a group of young women at UT Austin, Jin organized a protest to fight "absurdity with absurdity."[63] Employing sex toys as a visual representation of this, the CNG protest approached the Campus Carry legislation from a cultural perspective. What the Campus Carry law represented to the CNG protestors was an unacceptable status quo. Jin explained this in the documentary *Come & Take It*: "So they say as long as you have a gun you can live with it. Well, we don't want to live with it, we think that's a horrible solution."[64] Though the CNG protesters did not necessarily contest the constitutional right of citizens to carry firearms, they did contest the normalization of gun culture itself. That is, while they did not question the legality of the bill, they did make efforts to denormalize the concept of private gun ownership for the purpose of self-defense. It is this questioning of the root of the issue, rather than only the specific policy, that made CNG an exercise in constructing collective radical political imagination, while humor became the means to which express it.

According to incongruity theory, "humor is based on the perception or recognition of incongruity" or, as Jarno Hietalahti posits, in the "paradoxes that need to be solved."[65] Connecting this idea to the concept of utopia, as utopias

61 Jessica Jin, "Episode 39 – Jessica Jin (CNG)," interview by Ari Andersen, *Millenials Don't Suck*, January 30, 2018, audio, 7:33.

62 Jin, "Episode 39," 6:35.

63 Mark Wilson, "Sex Toys Used to Protest Gun Law," *Austin American Statesman*, August 25, 2016, B1.

64 Jin, *Come & Take It*, dir. Ellen Spiro and P. J. Raval (March 2018), video, 13:13.

65 Giselinde Kuipers, "The Sociology of Humor," in *The Primer of Humor Research, Vol. 8*, ed. Victor Raskin, (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 363; Jarno Hietalahti, "The Significance of Humor and Laughter for Utopian Thought," in *The Revival of Political Imagination: Utopias as Methodology*, ed. Teppo Eskelinen (London: Zed Books, 2020), 117.

are also contradictions of the present, Hietalahti shows how humor and laughter can become instrumental in enhancing the possibilities for change presented in utopian constructions.[66] The CNG protest did not articulate any utopian visions for the future; indeed, future visions were not instrumental to the protest. However, if humor and laughter have the power to make visible the absurdity of the present, of the status quo, the more then "there is room and possibilities for utopia."[67] Thus, while not presenting alternatives, by laughing at the normalized status of gun culture the CNG protest opened up possibilities for imagining alternatives. As John Holloway describes the modern state of the world, it is as if societies are trapped in a room with no doors and no windows while the walls are caving in—most people are debating how to arrange the furniture in the room but some are, through radical political imagination, creating cracks in those walls.[68]

Absurdity as the expression of radical political imagination can prove to be a particularly powerful tool for activists working to create opportunities in an environment where none seem to exist. For the CNG protestors, whose options for otherwise affecting policy were nonexistent, humor and dildos as a sign of resistance emerged as a way to politicize daily life. The Campus Carry law had already been passed when the CNG protest was organized, and with a Republican majority in the Texas legislature, the chances of successfully lobbying to reverse the policy were not even entertained by the activists. Instead, as described by one of the organizers of the protest, they focused on spreading information and influencing the opinions of their peers:

> Our intention was never to change legislation. It was mostly just to get a reaction out of students, because students were not involved in the decision-making process. Students were not invited to be a part of the task force. They were not invited to testify for the working group. We just wanted to get students involved. This Campus Carry bill is now a reality.[69]

Furthermore, the protest used humor to contest notions of sexuality and gender, not only in the context of gun culture but vis-à-vis the broader culture the protestors occupied: "The dildos proved a point—one to make a joke of masculinity and gun culture, but also to highlight the fact that Texas obscenity

66 Hietalahti, "The Significance," 122.

67 Hietalahti, 123.

68 John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto, 2010), 8.

69 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin, March 27, 2018, notes in possession of author.

laws take precedence over gun control."[70] Beyond gun culture itself—which was not part of the upbringing of the activists—was the fact that gun culture as a representation of "toxic" masculinity appeared to be more acceptable than sexuality.

Using humor to disrupt the normalized imaginations of what gun culture can appear to be, the CNG protest radically reimagined what advocating for gun control looks like. As noted by Jin, most of the gun violence prevention activists were gun violence survivors themselves, working from a place of trauma:

> [U]sually gun violence prevention is really reactionary right? There's a shooting and everyone's like here's what we can change and this is all really sad and terrible and it gets people down after a while, like it's very exhausting to be a gun violence prevention activist because you're dealing with heartbreaking tragedy everyday.[71]

The CNG protest was also rooted in a strong sense of insecurity and the precarious life of the participants, particularly due to women who had been or were afraid of becoming victims of sexual assault, a prevailing concern in campus communities. This sense of insecurity was compounded by the fact that the young women organizers became targets of vicious online hate immediately after the protest.[72] Yet, the ability to have fun within a context that is often characterized by seriousness, tragedy, and an overwhelming sense of fear was in itself radically different from the way gun control activism has traditionally been organized. There is empowerment in finding the fun in survival.[73] The jovial nature of the protests even opened up a physical sense of possibilities intrinsically tied to campus space:

> It was the first day of class when I did that, and so their first experience at UT was me screaming with a dildo. It apparently shaped a bunch, like, "For me, it's my day at UT, my first day in college, and this girl is holding

70 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin, March 27, 2018, notes in possession of author.

71 Jin, "Episode 39," 27:40.

72 Hannah Smothers, "How a Group of College Girls in Texas Became a National Harassment Target For Guns-Rights Activists," *Cosmopolitan*, September 23, 2016, https://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/a3273931/cocks-not-glocks-protest-texas-harassment/, accessed May 3, 2021.

73 Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), 70.

> up a dildo for a gun violence protest." The idea that people will say you can do anything in college and you can really, like… That was a physical feeling for that.[74]

On the other hand, humor can also be mistaken for frivolousness. The organizers of the protest grappled with maintaining the seriousness of the message while understanding that their cohort was persuaded by activism that was fun: "There was an issue with that, just kind of cognitive dissonance, because policy is the most important, but in order to get the attention of college students you have to be more… You have to be a little bit wackier."[75]

The humor and absurdity of the protest caused a multiplicity of complex emotions in the participants and the audience, from an enormous sense of possibility to unbridled hate. Yet, existing in a reality that feels absurd is also deeply *uncomfortable*. The main purpose of the protest was to embody what it felt like, particularly as a woman, to coexist in the same space as firearms. In the performance of the uncomfortable, no borders between the protestors and audiences were demarcated—discomfort was embodied by the ones holding the dildo and induced in the audiences witnessing that act. This approach was made explicit to participants, as demonstrated by the speech Jin gave when handing out the dildos to protesters: "Strap it on, deal with the discomfort, deal with the weird looks because that's the way people should be treating gun culture in America."[76] The uncomfortableness represented the same misfit aspect the radicals of "the Long Sixties" felt upon realizing they did not belong within the status quo.

There was also a clear incongruity between what kind of activists the CNG organizers imagined themselves to be and what the norms and expectations were in the gun violence prevention community, which led to disillusionment that stymied the growth of the movement. Furthermore, this disillusionment was very clearly tied to their identities as young women, many of color, as if their very existence in that space was too radical. Jin described this revelation after being invited to Washington, DC to a gun control policy meeting after the success of the CNG protest to share her perspective with other members of prominent gun violence prevention organizations across the country:

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74 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin, April 4, 2018, notes in possession of author.

75 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin, March 27, 2018, notes in possession of author.

76 Jin, *Come & Take It*, 12:05.

> I don't need to tie what I'm working on culturally into this very dry policy space. My work is probably more cultural and it's more about changing perspectives than changing laws. … My mistake was thinking that I needed the folks in DC to take me seriously. … They put me in a panel in that event called "what's new in gun violence prevention." … [W]hat was new in gun violence prevention was the young person, the black girl and the gays. … That shouldn't be a new thing.[77]

Jin's experience shows how coalitions of students, people of color, and LGTBQ+ people, formed already in "the Long Sixties," sometimes are a product of being grouped together as the same *other* by those in the majority.

Despite the disillusionment, however, the protest managed to create a sense of hope and excitement, both in the organizers themselves and within the community. The official Facebook channel of CNG is an example of the long-lasting resonance of the movement. The page has remained active throughout the years, supporting "get out the vote" efforts and offering political commentary on various issues, often by posting memes with dildos Photoshopped into the hands of Donald and Ivanka Trump, members of the neo-fascist Proud Boys group, and armed men protesting COVID-19 restrictions.[78] Replacing guns with dildos in these memes worked to produce the same effect as the protest itself, using humor to contest the normalization of images of firearms and making visible the absurdity of some of the debates dominating the political conversations of the day. Studies have shown the prevalence of young people engaging with and producing political memes to build community, to cope in the world, and to persuade and influence their peers.[79] The dildos used by CNG proved to be a simple and effective (viral) way to engage with politics online.

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77 Jin, "Episode 39," 50:05.

78 Cocks Not Glocks, "Trump promotes 'GIANT, BEAUTIFUL, MASSIVE' dildo," Facebook, September 30, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/cocksnotglocks/photos/a.1700740450203280/1978033829140606/; Cocks Not Glocks, "#Goyaway, Goya," Facebook, July 16, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/cocksnotglocks/photos/a.1779365942340730/2757464954530819/; Cocks Not Glocks, "Boys will be boys, but they still play with toys," Facebook, August 15, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/cocksnotglocks/photos/a.1700740450203280/1957489484528374/; Cocks Not Glocks, "Michigan protestors valiantly fighting for our right to go back to work to sacrifice our lungs to the holy shrine of capitalism. God bless America!" Facebook, May 2, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/cocksnotglocks/photos/a.1700740450203280/2691633614447287/, all accessed May 3, 2021.

79 On political memes and their usage and purpose, see, e.g., Benita Heiskanen, "Meme-ing Electoral Participation," *European Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 2 (2017); Joel Penney, "'It's So Hard Not to Be Funny in This Situation': Memes and Humor in U.S. Youth Online Political Expression," *Television & New Media* 21, no. 8 (2020): 791–806; Ryan Milner,

The myriad of different opportunities that the organizers of CNG themselves created in the political structure by reproducing alternative ways of doing things made such collective actions vital. The provocative way in which the protest approached gun control activism managed to catch the attention of the media in a way that at that point far surpassed any other effort to contest gun laws in Texas. This also created a sense of hope in the UT Austin faculty. A UT graduate student described how the protest created a sense of solidarity in the community:

> I think it obviously served to highlight the absurdity of the law and also to create a space where the UT community feels united on this issue, as opposed to the legislature. So, I think that creating that space was very successful in letting students know that they are not alone in the opposition of this law. I think that probably the main success is in the long term of showing to the city and the state and the country that we are not this mute, compliant group of people who are willing to just sort of take this lying down.[80]

In the campus community of Austin, the CNG protest, together with the faculty-led Gun-Free UT movement, constructed new networks for gun violence prevention ready to be mobilized, networks that were considered vital when the MFOL protest swept across the country two years later.[81] As a UT Austin professor explained:

> People like to say that nothing happened after Sandy Hook, and if nothing would happen after, you know, twenty six-year-olds are shot, nothing is ever going to happen. But it was never true that nothing happened. … I think what we saw in Parkland this year is a result of that slow, somewhat underground, somewhat understated but long-term continuation of a protest movement.[82]

Radical political imagination and lived forms of utopia are about opening the possibilities for a different future by working "against the present in the present itself."[83] By employing the disruptive power humor can have, CNG created

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"Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 2357–90.

80 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin, April 25, 2018, notes in possession of author.

81 For a discussion about Gun-Free UT, see Heiskanen in this volume.

82 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin, March 28, 2018, notes in possession of author.

83 Keijo Lakkala, "Disruptive Utopianism: Opening the Present," in *The Revival of Political Imagination: Utopias as Methodology*, ed. Teppo Eskelinen (London: Zed Books, 2020), 31.

new ways to advocate for and think about gun control. Through CNG, already the emphasis was placed on the potential of young people to reimagine gun control.

This generational shift, however, would only truly become a driving force in the MFOL protests, where radical political imagination became the vehicle through which to reimagine the goals of gun control and even utopian futures. The first of these protests was organized by students on March 24, 2018, after the Valentine's Day shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The event echoed the size and spirit of the 1960s anti-war protests. As the Parkland youth called on their peers to come together to ensure no more would fall victim to a mass shooting, hundreds of thousands of students responded in solidarity across the globe, in cities and in small towns, from Washington, DC to Hong Kong.[84]

This massive set of gatherings on the streets around the world created, for a moment, the sense that anything could be achieved. To those fighting for gun control, the crack in the wall of the status quo had never before appeared so large. Thus, if the students involved in CNG, limited by how closed the opportunities for change appeared to be, had focused on making visible what was wrong in the present, the MFOL youth were much more future-oriented. The idea that even one more shooting would be too much was popularized in the Parkland youth's first viral tweet #NeverAgain, which galvanized a generation of young people to take ownership of their potential power to change their own realities. For the tens of thousands that walked in Austin, Texas on March 24, 2018, the drawing of borders between now and the past was just as clear. The present had become unacceptable, an unlivable dystopia and existential threat that could no longer be ignored. This would be the point of no return. The newly drawn border was verbalized in signs carrying the popular rallying call of the march, that even one more school shooting would be too much.

The focus in the MFOL marches was not on what was possible but what was impossible to live with. When around 40,000 people die by gun violence per year and political pundits lament this as an inevitable and entrenched part of "American" culture, the goal of "not one more" is utopian even in a very traditional understanding of the word, pregnant with negative and naïve connotations.[85] However, the power in such statements does not reside in the fixedness of the goal or how realizable they appear to be, but in the opening of possibilities created by the imagination that such a goal is actually possible—namely, the idea that the current state of affairs is *not* inevitable.

84 "The Latest."

85 Gun Violence Archive, accessed January 24, 2021, https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/past-tolls, accessed May 3, 2021.

FIGURE 6.1 March For Our Lives. Austin, TX

There is no doubt that such phrases are taken as serious promises by the youth, declaring that they are going to force the change they wish to see in the world. The feeling of empowerment is clear in signs such as "We are the SPARK that will light the FIRE that will BURN the NRA down." One of the organizers of CNG gave an impassioned speech at the Austin march, imploring her generation to come forward and stop "playing nice with the right," as "change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time, we are the ones that we've been waiting for; we are the change that we see."[86] If two years prior things had seemed hopeless for the students fighting the arrival of firearms in classrooms, here the tide of change, like in the 1960s, felt unstoppable.

The power of mass mobilization can be particularly potent when it evokes a sense of unified community among activists, such as the imagined generational cohort referred to by those in the marches. Nor is it only that those identifying with the cohort may believe in its power; for instance, adults who participated felt the same hope. State Senator Kirk Watson (D-District 14), also a former mayor of Austin, affirmed this in his speech at the march: "I believe we are seeing a true turning point. I think we are seeing a moment where the past of history shifts. We're seeing how a new generation speaks openly and enthusiastically and with a unified voice that it not only seeks change in order to secure its future, it demands it."[87] Two years later, the

86 CNG organizer, "March For Our Lives – speech," March 24, 2018, video, 13:40. Videos of the MFOL march on March 24, 2018 at Austin, TX were recorded by the Campus Carry research team.

87 Kirk Watson, "March For Our Lives – speech," March 24, 2018, video, 2:28.

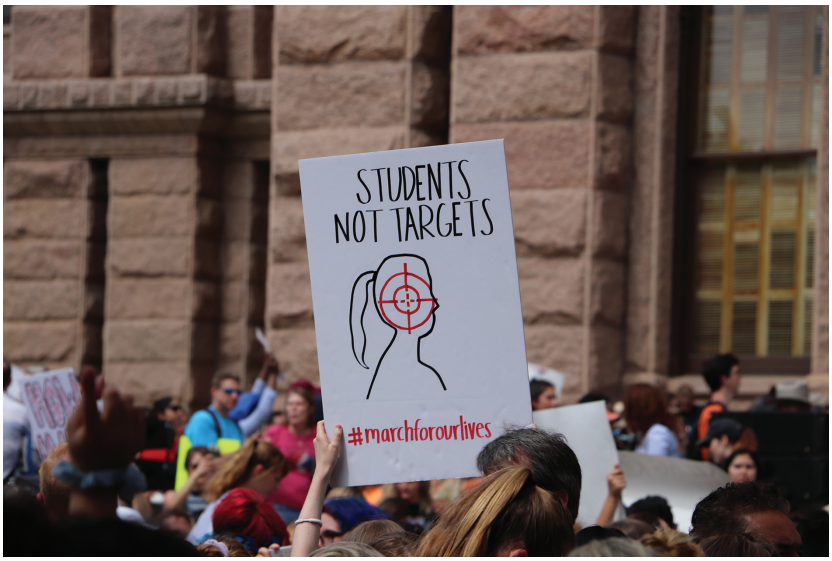

FIGURE 6.2 March For Our Lives. Austin, TX

organizers of MFOL still had that hope in their own power, as evidenced by a TV ad campaign they launched in the fall of 2020, ahead of the presidential elections:

> Our power means we demand all gun sales will be licensed. Our power means we demand weapons of war will be banned for good. Our power means lawmakers must listen. Our power means we refuse black people to be murdered on the streets. We refuse to fear for our lives. We refuse to live without justice. It's our power and we will use it.[88]

Consequently, in many ways the power of a particular generation was drawn from its imaginary of being a cohesive unit. However, it is noteworthy to consider that a sense of belonging to a generation is always relative. Karl Mannheim thus defines generation as a locality that only offers a possibility "which may materialize"; to become a member of a generation in actuality requires participation in a common destiny.[89] Moreover, a desire to participate in

88 March For Our Lives, "Our Power: Next Time," YouTube video, 1:43, August 6, 2020, 1:11, www.youtube.com/watch?v=eH6F_w6tWs4&t, accessed May 3, 2021.

89 Karl Mannheim, "Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Pál Kecskemeti (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 303.

that common destiny, such as taking part in political processes through such actions as voting or being part of a social movement, often requires a shift from negative self-identification with the generation to a positive one.[90] For example, while a recognition of being part of the mass shooting generation does not necessarily translate into a desire to take part in collective action to try and change that sense of reality, a belief that a generation has the power to change things just might. At the same time, members who identify themselves as part of a generation may respond to issues in completely contradictory ways, forming generational units *within* a generation.[91] Indeed, a significant segment of the youngest generation believes that carrying guns is the best way to guarantee their safety.[92]

What made generational community important here is that by adopting such a frame, the organizers of the MFOL movement were able to create an imaginary of a collective that is large enough to support radical political imagination, not only in identifying current problems but establishing an orientation toward the future that can be seen as utopian in nature. Building on creative means of seeking gun control and efforts to contest the normalization of gun culture, such as those constructed by groups such as CNG, MFOL began to see an open future beyond the impenetrable wall of gun legislation that, at least to their generation, had previously appeared closed and fixed. In this way, goals came to be considered not in terms of what is feasible but what is desirable. Moving from individual experiences of insecurity to collectively constructed generational utopian visions for the future, the MFOL youth went from imagining something that feels possible in the present to striving toward something larger and a different way of thinking about public safety altogether.

The youth activists in the MFOL movement did not stretch the limits of their imagination in a vacuum. Importantly, constructing goals that can be considered as generational utopias happened through processes of collective radical political imagination, not only within the movement but especially in interactions with activists working on other issues. For the youth movements of today, radical political imagination is intersectional. The youth organizers of MFOL, the climate justice movement under Sunrise, the immigrant rights

90 Donatella Della Porta, "Deconstructing Generations: Concluding Remarks," *American Behavioral Scientist* 63, no. 11 (October 2019): 1591.

91 Mannheim, "Problem of Generations," 304.

92 For example, 24% of the 1,204 undergraduates surveyed at UT Austin as part of the Campus Carry research project were in favor of the Campus Carry legislation. See results in Sampo Ruoppila and Albion M. Butters, "Not a 'Nonissue': Perceptions and Realities of Campus Carry at The University of Texas at Austin," *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 2 (2021): 299–311.

movement in United We Dream, and Black Lives Matter seeking racial justice are quite explicitly working toward the same goal of transforming institutions in society into something that represents a fundamentally different vision of the United States. A UT Austin professor shared what made them hopeful about the MFOL marches: "[T]hey get intersectionality. It's not just a word as it kind of still is around campus, it's like this cool theory but here's these kids living it and practicing it."[93] While reviving the coalitions of "the Long Sixties," it is not only the recognition of a shared otherness that is driving students, those of color, and LGTBQ+ people together this time, but a fundamental understanding that there is no longer any one issue to advocate for—since all the issues are at their core the same.

The focus of MFOL shifted away from reconciliatory policy propositions. The staples of what can be considered as "commonsense gun laws"—such as a ban on assault weapons, implementing universal background checks, and defining more rigorous standards on who gets to carry—were seen as perhaps beneficial but alone wholly insufficient. Rather, to answer the public health crisis of gun violence, the need for systemic change on all levels of society was seen as imperative. In a policy outline called the Peace Plan for a Safer America, MFOL recognized that gun violence is also about police violence, the rights of immigrants, the rights of LGBTQ+ people, and economic and environmental justice.[94] These issues were all tied together, as evidenced by a letter that MFOL wrote with seven other youth organizations to then-Presidential candidate Joe Biden:

> [W]e grew up with endless war, skyrocketing inequality, crushing student loan debt, mass deportations, police murders of black Americans and mass incarceration, schools which have become killing fields, and knowing that the political leaders of today are choking the planet we will live on long after they are gone. … Why would we want a return to normalcy? We need a vision for the future, not a return to the past.[95]

The key to the alternative vision for the future promoted by MFOL is comprised of community-based programs that tackle the root causes of crime and prioritize restorative justice over criminalization and punitive justice. It is the idea

93 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin, April 17, 2018, notes in possession of author.

94 March For Our Lives, "Peace Plan for Safer America," August 2019, https://marchforourlives.com/peace-plan/, accessed May 3, 2021.

95 March For Our Lives, "Our Letter to Vice President Joe Biden," May 2020, https://marchforourlives.com/earn-our-vote/, accessed May 3, 2021.

behind such radical political imaginations as defunding the police, decarceration, and eliminating force in policing that became central to the goals of particular different MFOL Texas chapters after the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020.[96] Behind the campaign of MFOL Texas "Invest in Communities, Divest from Police" are calls for the reallocation of funding from law enforcement to community programs that focus, for example, on mental health, education, housing, and healthcare.[97] Such calls for abolishing racist institutions and dedicating funding to communities of color have been around as long as there have been black organizers in the U.S. working toward racial equity, but what is unique in the current wave of protest led by youth activists, which MFOL is an integral part of, is how these ideas have propagated across movements and become characteristic of a generational vision for a better future.

5 Conclusion

On October 1, 2020, Jin hosted a panel on activism ahead of the 2020 Presidential Election.[98] The panelists included activists from 18 Million Rising, a national organization creating a leftist Asian American community online, and MOVE Texas, which focuses on youth outreach in Texas. The panel offered a multifaceted crosscut of how radical political imagination and a common project are being constructed in intergroup activist spaces. Jin spoke about the lessons she had learned about organizing for gun control:

> I found the most authentic way to organize for gun control at least is to talk to most impacted communities. … when we pass a bunch of laws to make stuff illegal like who does that impact? Like who gets locked up, whose families get impacted, who's actually getting shot the most all the time and like who are the people in the policy leading rooms and why don't they look like the people most impacted. … I am actually talking

96 March For Our Lives Texas, "A Statement Including a List of Demands from March For Our Lives Texas for City Councils of Austin, El Paso, San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas in Solidarity with Demands of the Black Lives Matter Movement," June 10, 2020, https://www.mfoltexas.org/ordinance.html, accessed May 3, 2021.

97 March For Our Lives Texas, "Texas Banner Drop," August 4, 2020, https://www.mfoltexas.org/past-events.html, accessed May 3, 2021.

98 Come & Take It, "Days of Action Part I - Making the "Hard Ask": How to Turn Out the Vote," Facebook, October 1, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/ComeandTakeItDoc/videos/370520037480882/, accessed May 3, 2021.

> to impacted people or I'm just kind of running along with a bit of more neoliberal, well-funded, messaging that wins but throws a lot of people under the bus.[99]

The evolution Jin experienced in terms of organizing for gun control demonstrates how radical political imagination is being cultivated in activist spaces and how it produces fundamentally different kinds of action. It also substantiates Khasnabish's claim that it is important for researchers to not only consider the "successful" and "grand" movements that animate mass mobilization and policy change but examine how radical political imagination can and is produced in the quotidian activism of community organizers.[100] As the radicals of the 1960s encouraged their peers to both take part in collective action and live the revolution every day, so do the current movements produce alternative ways of being for the individual and for the collective.

The politics of gun control in the United States have for the most part appeared to be closed and with limited options for the future. Within this reality, CNG contested their present by making visible the absurdities they perceived in what had become normal. Through radical political imagination, CNG was also able to reimagine the ways of thinking about and engaging in gun control advocacy. Mass mobilization can also provide increased opportunities to imagine what was previously unimaginable. MFOL was able to harness that power and thereby construct utopias for an imagined generational community. Yet, movements on the ground before mass mobilization are what support the relationships and networks to be tapped into, like awakening a slumbering giant, until an opening in the political structure appears. As movements and organizations such as Cocks Not Glocks and March For Our Lives are banging on the impenetrable wall of the status quo, the future thus appeared, even if only for a moment, to be open instead of closed.

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99 Jin, "Days of Action Part I", 29:49.

100 Khasnabish, "Ecologies," 1723.

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CHAPTER 7

Pro-Campus Carry Video Imaginaries at The University of Texas at Austin

Juha A. Vuori

This chapter examines the two YouTube videos that have elicited the strongest reactions within the Facebook community of the student-led "Cocks Not Glocks" gun control movement against Campus Carry. Made from the perspective of gun rights, these videos advocated for the Campus Carry law (SB 11) at The University of Texas in 2016. One presents a publicly staged mock shooting on the streets of Austin, close to campus premises, while the other is a short film that caricatures a prominent student activist from the "Cocks Not Glocks" group.[1] By analyzing such popularly created visual artifacts, the chapter contributes to the study of "vernacular security,"[2] and posits the notion of visual vernacular imaginaries as a conceptual tool for analyzing issues of security and insecurity.[3] The gun imaginary I explore here supports Campus Carry and presents guns in a favorable light. It is operated through audiovisual narratives that were performed in a street protest or made specifically for circulation through YouTube. The imaginary aims toward constitutional carry where guns represent a constitutional right and freedom, and provide for protection in a world where anywhere is potentially dangerous. From this viewpoint, university campuses and buildings are the same as any other space, and therefore concealed carry should be allowed in them, too.

While my focus is on the online visual vernacular of localized security imaginaries involved in Campus Carry at UT Austin, this chapter also benefits from

1 DontComply.com, "Mock Mass Shooting on UT Campus," YouTube video, 5:09, December 13, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhdxF8YHTh8&feature=youtu.be, accessed October 21, 2019; Brett Sanders, "Never Met Her," YouTube video, 4:02, August 31, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ar1a878M98w, accessed October 12, 2019 (the video has been made private).

2 Nils Bubandt, "Vernacular Security: The Politics of Feeling Safe in Global, National and Local Worlds," *Security Dialogue* 36, no. 3 (2005): 275–96.

3 Juha A. Vuori and Rune S. Andersen, eds., *Visual Security Studies: Sights and Spectacles of Insecurity and War* (London: Routledge, 2018).

fieldwork conducted in 2018 and 2019.[4] These materials provide context for my investigation of how security is articulated through visual means by particular individuals and groups on the Campus Carry issue. Because security vernaculars have mainly been studied ethnographically[5] or with focus group interviews,[6] the exploration of "visual vernaculars" that include non-institutional or popular videos and visual performances is a new opening for this approach. Indeed, the greatest focus of even critically engaged security studies has been on "high politics"[7] or the societal fields of "security experts."[8] The security constructions of "diverse publics,"[9] including those who are not "experts" or in official political positions, are also vital for gaining understanding of the politics of security in societies. Indeed, visualities are a vital part of today's online vernaculars. Online environments are among the crucial sites and arenas where issues of everyday security are contested and negotiated by individuals and communities. As we will see below, this has also been the case for the pro-gun position in the debate about UT Campus Carry.

The contestation of Campus Carry is embedded in a larger societal shift in U.S. gun culture. David Yamane has noted both attitudinal and regulatory transformations in the "culture of armed citizenship" in the United States.[10] Indeed, self-defense replaced hunting as the primary reason for gun ownership in the 2010s. This coincided with the liberalization of both carrying firearms—either openly or in concealment—and legally using lethal force.[11] Campus Carry joins and reinforces this general trajectory in the United States. In relation to this, Harel Shapira and Samantha Simon[12] argue that gun carrying is not only about

4 The fieldwork materials, collected by the Academy of Finland-funded Campus Carry research project at the University of Turku's John Morton Center (JMC), include interviews with UT Austin students, faculty, and staff, and a representative survey of undergraduates (N=1,204).

5 Nils Bubandt, "Vernacular Security."

6 Lee Jarvis and Michael Lister, "Vernacular Securities and Their Study: A Qualitative Analysis and Research Agenda," *International Relations* 27, no. 2 (2012): 158–79; Nick Vaughan-Williams and Daniel Stevens, "Vernacular Theories of Everyday (In)security: The Disruptive Potential of Non-Elite Knowledge," *Security Dialogue* 47, no. 1 (2016): 40–58.

7 Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for* Analysis (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

8 Didier Bigo, "Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease," *Alternatives* 27, no. 1 (2002): 63–92.

9 Vaughan-Williams and Stevens, "Vernacular Theories," 43.

10 David Yamane, "The Sociology of U.S. Gun Culture," *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 7 (2017): 1–10.

11 Harel Shapira and Samantha J. Simon, "Learning to Need a Gun," *Qualitative Sociology* 41, no. 5 (2018): 3.

12 Shapira and Simon, "Learning to Need a Gun," 18.

a set of attitudes,[13] meanings,[14] or ideology toward guns, but that the identities formed in it are produced through an embodied practice.[15] Imaginaries play an important role here, too, as they are among the things that provide people with motivations, rationales, and legitimization for carrying a gun. Indeed, what both security and insecurity mean and how they are understood derive from socially constructed and culturally mediated worldviews.[16] In this way, the chapter argues that imaginaries shape how public morality and a sense of virtue relate to such contentious issues. They mediate socially constructed meanings and understandings of both security and insecurity, and thereby allow exploration of visions of the political that are contained in them.[17]

1 YouTube, Social Imaginaries, and U.S. Gun Culture

Social imaginaries are about how "ordinary people" imagine their social surroundings that are "carried in images, stories, and legends," as they are "shared by large groups of people."[18] Accordingly, a "Campus Carry" imaginary is constituted by a number of genres of storytelling, which can include scholarship, journalism, history, art, popular culture, and online videos. The focus in this chapter is on the two YouTube videos that have the most views, comments, and reactions in the Facebook community of the "Cocks Not Glocks" student movement. Indeed, social media and video services like YouTube have become crucial mediums and means for circulating visual contents that range from entertainment to news and political viewpoints.

The first video is of a protest performance[19] organized by "Murdoch Pizgatti" (a.k.a. Zach Horton).[20] The video depicts a "mock shooting" that was filmed

13 Jeremy Carter and Michael Binder, "Firearm Violence and Effects on Concealed Gun Carrying: Large Debate and Small Effects," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 33, no. 19 (2018): 3025–52.

14 Angela Stroud, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Concealed Handguns," *Gender and Society* 26, no. 2 (2012): 224.

15 Shapira, Harel, and Samantha J. Simon. "Learning to Need a Gun." *Qualitative Sociology* 41, no. 5 (2018): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-018-9374-2.

16 Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, eds., *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (London: UCL Press, 1997).

17 Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006).

18 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

19 DontComply.com, "Mock Mass Shooting."

20 Mac McCann, "Let's Go Gun Crazy. UT's Campus Carry Debate Explodes," *Austin Chronicle*, December 18, 2015, https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2015-12-18/lets-go-gun-crazy/, accessed October 12, 2019.

during the "Life and Liberty Walk to End Gun Free Zones" held near the UT Austin campus on December 12, 2015. Six individuals here become the victims of a staged mass shooting and robbery committed by "bad guys," who targeted that spot because it was a gun-free zone.[21] The second video is a short film, "Never Met Her," written and directed by Brett Sanders.[22] It depicts the murder of an anti-gun activist who uses a dildo rather than a knife to defend herself against an armed intruder. Both videos became very controversial and were covered in national newspapers.

Social imaginaries affect what people are able to comprehend through the "distribution of the sensible" and a shared sense of reality, a "common sense."[23] Such "common senses" construct different realities, including issues that relate to gun culture, such as License to Carry (LTC) permits and Campus Carry. How issues are imagined affect what people can see, hear, and feel about them. Popular representations are crucial in the formation of common senses of how, where, and why issues are implemented, who implements them in relation to whom, and how public morality and a sense of virtue relate to them. This also applies to security imaginaries.[24]

In the case of the contestation around Campus Carry specifically, there are competing imaginaries on the opposing sides of the issue. The main groups against guns on campus are the faculty-based organization "Gun-Free UT" and the "Cocks Not Glocks" student movement, which has a much more visible online presence and is more "media-savvy," in the words of faculty at UT Austin.[25] The main gun advocate groups include "Come and Take It in Texas"[26] and "Texas Students for Concealed Carry on Campus,"[27] which was part of the national "Students for Concealed Carry" organization.[28] These pro-gun groups have not always seen eye to eye on how to conduct their campaigning.[29]

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21 DontComply.com, "Mock Mass Shooting."

22 Sanders, "Never Met Her."

23 Jacques Rancière. *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. G. Elliott (London: Verso, [2008] 2011), 99, 102.

24 Christina Rowley and Jutta Weldes, "The Evolution of International Security Studies and the Everyday: Suggestions from the Buffyverse," *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 6 (2012): 513–30.

25 See Seppälä, this volume.

26 Dave Montgomery, "Groups Converge for Mock Shooting Near University of Texas," *New York Times*, December 12, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/13/us/gun-advocates-demonstrate-outside-university-of-texas-campus.html, accessed October 12, 2019; see also Don't Comply, http://dontcomply.com, accessed October 12, 2019.

27 Texas Students for Concealed Carry on Campus, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/texasscc (activity in the Facebook group ended in 2017), accessed October 12, 2019.

28 Students for Concealed Carry, https://concealedcampus.org/, accessed October 12, 2019.

29 McCann, "Let's Go Gun Crazy."

Yet, these imaginaries connect to more general institutional and private imaginaries of gun-related violence that are produced and maintained, for example, by gun training and active shooter instructional videos.[30] Here, institutional imaginaries promote the need to be vigilant, prepared, and responsible for one's own security, since bad things can happen anywhere and at any time.[31] Individuals are told to "run, hide, fight" with improvised weapons until they are sure the assailant of a mass shooting has been neutralized, either by them or by the authorities.[32] In the individual pro-concealed carry imaginary, though, the fighting does not happen with fire extinguishers or water bottles, but with firearms.[33] It is the responsibility of armed individuals to stop armed "madmen" from turning their rampage into a "bloodbath."[34]

For Jutta Weldes, social imaginaries concern the cultural raw materials of which representations are constructed.[35] In more general terms, for Charles Taylor, social imaginaries enable the practices of society through sense-making.[36] Imaginaries are about how contemporaries imagine societies to be: the imaginary of a society "is the creation of each historical period, its singular manner of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence"; it is "the basis for articulating what does matter and what does not."[37] There appears to have been a change in U.S. gun culture and, accordingly, in gun imaginaries during the past decade, where self-defense has overtaken previous imaginary bases for gun ownership.[38]

While visualization can be effective in putting viewpoints forward, an imaginary is not necessarily visual; various assemblages of popular representation practices configure these kinds of imaginaries as constitutive dimensions of public morality. Indeed, for Taylor, at issue are the ways in which people "imagine" social existence, how individuals fit together with others, and what normal

30 Juha A. Vuori "Campus Carry and Active Shooter Event Emotion Management," *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 2 (2021): 286–98.

31 "Options for Consideration Active Shooter Preparedness Video," dir. Connor Patrick Griffin (2015; Department of Homeland Security, 2017), video, https://www.dhs.gov/cisa/options-consideration-active-shooter-preparedness-video, accessed October 10, 2019.

32 "RUN. HIDE. FIGHT. ®Surviving an Active Shooter Event" (City of Houston, 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0, accessed October 11, 2019.

33 Vuori, "Campus Carry."

34 FAQ, Students for Campus Carry, https://concealedcampus.org/faq/, accessed April 15, 2021.

35 Jutta Weldes, "Going Cultural: Star Trek, State Action, and Popular Culture," *Millennium* 28, no. 1 (1999): 117–34.

36 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2.

37 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975), 92.

38 Yamane, "Sociology of U.S. Gun Culture."

expectations and their underlying normative notions are, such as the ability to identify a "foul."[39] Imaginaries are about the "repertory of collective actions" at our disposal.[40] One aspect here is "internal honor," which curbs inappropriate behavior through internal sanctions;[41] another is public morality and the self-description of communities of virtue, which practices of representation produce and maintain. Visual registers can be one way to gain access to such spheres and the expectations within them (for example, in how concealed carry is represented visually in terms of where and how it takes place). The aesthetics of such representations cultivate dispositions toward public morality, who we should be, and how we should act.[42] They work toward producing a unified moral imagination as a common sense.[43]

A "general deterioration of morality" and a concomitant increase in violent crime is a shared concern among many who carry concealed firearms.[44] In actuality, though, crime has not become more violent in the 2000s. Rather, its coverage in the news has become more graphic.[45] This underlines how social imaginaries have a greater impact on attitudes toward—and rationales for—carrying guns than direct personal experience. The imaginary aspect of using risks and costs as the rationale for carrying a gun for self-protection is quite striking when, for example, only two out of 46 respondents in a sociological study of those who had obtained an LTC permit did so as a result being a victim of crime, but all of them carried guns for self-defense. In the survey conducted for the Campus Carry research project, of the 10 percent of respondents who owned firearms, about half noted self-defense (54%) or the defense of family (54%) as their reason for owning a gun. At the same time, 24 percent reported having been a victim of a violent crime off-campus.[46]

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39 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23–24.

40 Taylor, 25.

41 Brent Steele, "'Ideals that Were Really Never in Our Possession': Torture, Honor and US Identity," *International Relations* 22, no. 2 (2008): 245.

42 Lilie Chouliaraki, "The Humanity of War: Iconic Photojournalism of the Battlefield, 1914–2012," *Visual Communication* 12, no. 3 (2013): 315–40.

43 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, [2004] 2006).

44 Shapira and Simon, "Learning to Need a Gun," 8.

45 Jaclyn Schildkraut, "Crime News in Newspapers," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice: Oxford Encyclopedia of Crime, Media, and Popular Culture*, ed. M. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

46 In a series of questions asking if UT Austin undergraduates had previously been a victim of violent crime off-campus, 24.1% (290/1204) answered yes to at least one—and sometimes more than one—of the following: mass shooting (.3%), domestic violence (4.7%), sexual assault (11.9%), mugging (1.8%), assault (4.3%), robbery (7.6%), or other (4.7%).

The Students for Campus Carry organization also bases its origins in the need for armed self-defense on campus.[47] According to the FAQ on their website, the initial spark for the organization came as a response to the Virginia Tech mass shooting in 2007. In their view, campus police are not dispatched quickly enough to protect students from "deranged" gunmen: "Only the people at the scene when the shooting starts—the potential victims—have the possibility to stop such a shooting rampage before it turns into a bloodbath."[48] Thus, carrying a firearm is a way to prevent bad things from happening, anywhere and at any time, irrespective of how frequent actual instances of violence are in specific spaces and places.[49] This pro-Campus Carry discourse securitizes[50] the campus as a place where violent things can happen to everyone, at any time. According to this line of thought, individuals need to have the possibility to defend themselves with guns, because the authorities are not there to immediately protect them.[51]

To identify threats to the existence of something of value points to vulnerability, which may in turn produce a sense of insecurity. Identifying a four-minute gap in the response time from authorities to a mass shooting may result in an individual feeling that they need a gun for self-defense. While school shootings have become an expected part of school life in the U.S., they are infrequent. Still, Campus Carry encourages continuous weapon-carrying for protection, always and everywhere.

Paradoxically, even though security promises confidence and protection, it may also bring about fear and unease in situations where threats may not have been given much consideration before. This tendency has been identified in discussions regarding active shooter drills at schools,[52] and it was also noted

47 FAQ, Students for Campus Carry.

48 FAQ, Students for Campus Carry.

49 See, e.g., "Active Shooter Incidents in the United States in 2018," Federal Bureau of Investigation (2019), https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=823952, accessed May 10, 2021; J. Pete Blair and Katherine Schweit, "A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013," U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation (2013), https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=757920, accessed May 10, 2021.

50 Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*.

51 Vuori, "Campus Carry."

52 Erika Christakis, "Active-Shooter Drills Are Tragically Misguided," *Atlantic*, March 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/03/active-shooter-drills-erika-christakis/580426/, accessed October 11, 2019; Cheryl Lero Jonson, Melissa M. Moon, and Joseph A. Hendry, "One Size Does Not Fit All: Traditional Lockdown Versus Multioption Responses to School Shootings," *Journal of School Violence* 17, (2018): 1–13.

by a pro-gun instructor at UT Austin, who carried himself but did not want students to feel like they were under siege.[53] Furthermore, not taking the security measures identified in security speech can produce a sense of vulnerability. The same seems to apply to some of those who carry guns at all times; for them, not carrying a gun elicits a keen sense of insecurity. While one of the students at UT Austin who aimed to carry all the time stated that they did not feel insecure without their firearm, they also said they felt "naked" without it, and likened not having their gun to forgetting to wear a watch or leaving their wallet behind.[54]

The implementation of security politics may produce what has been called a "security trap,"[55] or a "boomerang effect,"[56] which effectively points to the folk tale of the Golem.[57] Such notions refer to the negative effects of actually employing "security measures" to deal with an issue of concern. Indeed, security language may unleash unpredicted consequences if left unchecked, like the Golem that is created for protection but turns out to be uncontrollable and disastrous for its creator. As such, the Second Amendment can be viewed as a form of securitization to guarantee the liberty of citizens against a potentially oppressive leader or tyrant, yet the prevalence of firearms in the U.S., joined with its form of gun culture, annually produced nearly 40,000 small arms casualties in the form of gun-related suicides, murders, and mass shootings in the 2000s.[58]

Guns can be owned and maintained for a number of reasons and rationales, including hunting. In the gun discussion at hand, though, concealed carry implies a vigilant individual who is always attuned to and prepared for threatening situations while being willing and able to defend themselves. Vigilance is not reserved for LTC holders, however. One of the responses to the 9/11 terror attacks, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, was to put emphasis on

53 Interview with research team, University of Texas at Austin, April 17, 2018, notes in possession of author.

54 Pro-Campus Carry focus group, University of Texas at Austin, April 19, 2018, notes in possession of author.

55 C.A.S.E. Collective, "Critical Approaches to Security in Europe: A Networked Manifesto," *Security Dialogue* 37, no. 4 (2006): 443–87.

56 Kyle Grayson, "Securitization and the Boomerang Debate: A Rejoiner to Liotta and Smith-Windsor," *Security Dialogue* 34, no. 3 (2003): 337–43.

57 Juha A. Vuori, *How to Do Security with Words – A Grammar of Securitisation in the People's Republic of China*, Annales Universitatis Turkuensis B 336 (Turku: University of Turku, 2011).

58 John Gramlich, "What Data Says About Gun Deaths in the U.S.," Pew Research Center, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/16/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/, accessed February 15, 2020.

a vigilant citizenry.[59] This formed a shared basis for institutional imaginaries. The era of the war on terror coincided with the increased prevalence of school shootings at universities. Together, these have resulted in the enhancement of surveillance, communications, and infrastructural technologies, and the securitization of campus policing.[60] This has meant that campuses have been effectively militarized. Such militarization of campuses has been based on four security discourses: "(1) borders of legitimacy, (2) counter-terrorism strategies, (3) active-shooter response, and (4) crowd control."[61] This trend is also quite evident in the active shooter instructional videos produced by a number of universities.[62]

According to Ben Brucato and Luis A. Fernandez, the first militarized campus discourse is not about "crime" as such but produces a divide between criminals and law-abiding citizens, which legitimizes state authorities' intervention. At the same time, it also reproduces racial and class hierarchies. This happens by turning matters of jurisdiction into symbolic geographical and socio-hierarchical boundaries where the campus serves as a container with a legitimate inside and a class- and race-coded, potentially criminalized outside.[63] Secondly, the anti-terror discourse is embedded in the overall militarization of U.S. police, which includes the use of surplus military vehicles and battle gear.[64] The active shooter response has resulted in drills and alert systems being put into place at a number of universities. These can be viewed as a form of emotion management akin to the civil defense drills during the Cold War; thus, mundane drills are used to turn uncontrollable terror into a manageable fear.[65] This is also one of the explicit purposes of the active shooter instructional videos produced by authorities like the Department of Homeland Security and various universities.[66]

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59 Joshua Reeves, "If You See Something, Say Something: Lateral Surveillance and the Uses of Responsibility," *Surveillance & Society* 10, no. ¾ (2012), 235–48.

60 Ben Brucato and Luis A. Fernandez, "Socio-Technical Developments in Campus Securitization: Building and Resisting the Policing Apparatus," *Counterpoints* 410 (2013): 79–104.

61 Brucato and Fernandez, 85.

62 Vuori, "Campus Carry."

63 Brucato and Fernandez, "Socio-Technical Developments."

64 Xavier Guillaume, Juha A. Vuori, and Rune S. Andersen, "Making Norms Visible: Police Uniforms and the Social Meaning of Policing," in *Visual Security Studies: Sights and Spectacles of Insecurity and War*, eds. Juha A. Vuori and Rune S. Andersen (London: Routledge, 2018), 150–70.

65 Brucato and Fernandez, "Socio-Technical Developments," 88; Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 46–47.

66 "Options for Consideration."

Like institutional and individual gun imaginaries, security and its politics operate on multiple levels, from the highest echelons of government to everyday reality. The multitudes of security concepts, practices, and policies are brought about by political speech, techniques, and technologies.[67] Visual discourse is also relevant here, and arguably more so as the prevalence of audiovisual media has increased with new communication technologies.[68] Everyday discussions and grassroots viewpoints have gained new opportunities for circulation, which also makes visual vernaculars a relevant object of analysis when examining imaginaries.

2 Visual Vernacular Security Imaginaries

The notion of vernacular security was coined by Nils Bubandt in his study of localized security in Indonesia. In that study, he showed how local understandings of security may prevail over official national or even global policies and ways of approaching an issue. When states are able to graft their policies onto traditional concerns of being "secure," their policies may be quite successful, but when this is not the case, local anxieties may win out.[69] Indeed, understandings of vernacular security vary at the local, national, and global levels. While such multiple understandings of security may intersect, they are not always compatible. The meaning of security is contested academically,[70] and within high politics and public discourse alike.[71] With Campus Carry, too, there are multiple levels of political discourses at play. The debates at UT Austin, for example, are connected to the NRA's national lobbying efforts, and "Students for Campus Carry" operates on a national level.

Here, the national gun discourse of the NRA draws from what Scott Melzer calls "frontier masculinity."[72] According to this line of thought, guns are positively associated with masculine features like self-reliance, rugged individualism, and a strong work ethic. A settler or frontier mentality is viewed as moral and honorable, and seen as producing strength, force of will, and

67 Jef Huysmans, *Security Unbound. Enacting Democratic Limits* (London: Routledge, 2014).

68 Rune S. Andersen, Juha A. Vuori, and Can Mutlu, "Visuality," in *Critical Security Methods: New Frameworks for Analysis*, ed. Claudia Aradau, Jef Huysmans, Andrew Neal, and Nadine Voelkner (London: Routledge, 2015), 85–117.

69 Bubandt, "Vernacular Security."

70 Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*.

71 Jarvis and Lister, "Vernacular Securities," 168.

72 Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

masculinity.[73] In this way, carrying guns means to act in a strong, willful, and manly manner. This in turn allows good people to avoid danger and chaos.[74] Accordingly, NRA publications report incidents where armed citizens have defended themselves against criminals; this produces an imaginary of a vigilant citizenry that is particularly masculine in its character.[75]

Overall though, security means different things to different societies at different times, since the core fears of societies or social groups are unique and relate to vulnerabilities and historical experiences.[76] This means that articulations of security that are both socially specific and historically situated draw from both lived experiences and social imaginaries. Indeed, for the large majority of U.S. citizens, their concerns with violent crime relate to imagined scenarios. Accordingly, imaginaries and the vernacularization of Campus Carry are operative in the creation of a politics of fear, the reproduction of gendering and racialization practices, and the enactment of identities.[77] Even the Students for Campus Carry website points to racialized imaginaries in the gun discourse. According to them, though, Campus Carry is not intended to arm "dangerous bigots," but to allow for self-defense for minority groups and women against such protagonists.[78]

The meaning of security is contested, and there are multiplicities of and within security even in vernacular usage. Nevertheless, security still offers a powerful sign or concept "for articulating support or opposition for political projects."[79] This means that security has an "inherently political character"[80] irrespective of the level on which it is explored. This observation, based on focus group interviews in the United Kingdom, seems to hold for the case at hand as well. Indeed, interviews with faculty at UT Austin by the Campus Carry research group and the controversy around SB 11 show how security was imposed on

73 Steele, "'Ideals that were really never in our possession,'" 248.

74 Steele, 251.

75 Kevin Lewis O'Neill, "Armed Citizens and the Stories They Tell: The National Rifle Association's Achievement of Terror and Masculinity," *Men and Masculinities* 9, no. 4 (2007): 459.

76 Ole Wæver, "Conflicts of Vision: Visions of Conflict," in *European Polyphony: Perspectives beyond East-West Confrontation*, eds. Ole Wæver, Pierre Lemaitre, and Elzbieta Tromer (London: MacMillan, 1989): 301.

77 Georg Löfflmann and Nick Vaughan-Williams, "Vernacular Imaginaries of European Border Security Among Citizens: From Walls to Information Management," *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 3 (2018): 387.

78 David Burnett, "Why Race Matters—and Doesn't—for Campus Carry," Students for Concealed Carry, June 6, 2020, https://concealedcampus.org/2020/06/why-race-matters-and-doesnt-in-the-campus-carry-debate/, accessed April 4, 2021.

79 Jarvis and Lister, "Vernacular Securities," 170.

80 Jarvis and Lister, 173.

campus through state legislation. What the pro-gun groups and individuals saw as an increase of security was experienced by others as an increase of unease, insecurity, and outright fear. Indeed, according to the research group's survey, 14 percent of undergraduates felt that Campus Carry increased their feeling of safety on campus, while for 53 percent it decreased their feeling of safety.

The politics of security at a lower level may not necessarily disrupt those at a higher level or be more progressive: security may have repressive qualities and reproduce institutional discourses even in everyday vernaculars.[81] The everyday remains ambiguous in this regard,[82] and it should not be romanticized as a site of pure resistance or authenticity.[83] Indeed, the pluralities of power and resistances must be kept in mind; civil society is often understood as being a more authentic site of social organization, and also as being an opposing force to the state (i.e., an authentic site of resistance). But civil society can also be a site of conservatism, and civil society can be co-opted by the state.[84] As William A. Callahan notes, "The relation between power and resistance is not clean or pure, but sticky."[85]

Much of the critically engaged research on security has studied "high politics"[86] or the societal fields of "security experts."[87] This, however, leaves open a gap for studying the security constructions of "diverse publics,"[88] including those who are not "experts" or in official political positions. There is a need to explore what popular articulations of threat and (in)security by non-elites or non-experts do as well. Indeed, security imaginaries at play in less privileged sites may also do harm.[89] Accordingly, the focus of the chapter now shifts to how security can be articulated by particular individuals and groups through visual means in the context of the Campus Carry issue. While most studies of security vernaculars have been conducted either ethnographically[90] or with focus group interviews,[91] visualities can be included within non-elite

81 Vaughan-Williams and Stevens, "Vernacular Theories," 42, 45.
82 Vaughan-Williams and Stevens, 48.
83 Lee Jarvis, "Toward a Vernacular Security Studies: Origins, Interlocutors, Contributions, and Challenges," *International Studies Review* 21 (2019): 118.
84 William A. Callahan, *Cultural Governance and Resistance in Pacific Asia* (London: Routledge, 2006), 99, 109.
85 Callahan, 108.
86 Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework*.
87 Bigo, "Security and Immigration."
88 Vaughan-Williams and Stevens, "Vernacular Theories," 43.
89 Jarvis, "Toward a Vernacular Security Studies," 12.
90 Bubandt, "Vernacular Security."
91 Jarvis and Lister, "Vernacular Securities"; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens, "Vernacular Theories."

vernaculars due to the visual nature of today's quotidian online ways of living: online visualities need to be counted among the "spaces, rhythms, objects, and practices"[92] that surround us in the everyday. For example, while visual memes that circulate on the internet can be construed as trivial and mundane, they reflect deep social and cultural structures.[93] Accordingly, online environments are among the sites and arenas where issues of everyday security are contested and negotiated by individuals and communities. This is also the case for Campus Carry.

Therefore, I coin here the notion of a "visual vernacular" that includes non-elite or popular videos, images, and visual performances. Memes in the form of stock character macros, reaction Photoshops, or rage comics are, for instance, among today's quintessential visual vernaculars.[94] Yet, the contestation of Campus Carry has also included videos and performances. A prominent example here involved the use of a sex toy, which became a central meme for both sides of the Campus Carry contestation: the "Cocks Not Glocks" movement that opposed the SB 11 law imaginatively employed dildos as a visual form of protest,[95] and this was in turn antagonistically lampooned by gun rights supporters in a controversial fashion in one of the YouTube videos examined here.[96] The dildo also appears in a more conciliatory pro-gun campaign logo, "coexist," where the letter X is formed by crossing silhouettes of a gun and a dildo.[97]

Memes, non-commercial YouTube videos, and protest performances are among what is called popular culture in its academic sense. The unraveling of an elitist view of culture has made the visualities of the everyday relevant objects of study.[98] Similarly, the media landscape has been dramatically transformed with the spread of social media and the tectonic shifts in news organizations. For example, the production and circulation of even professional-quality videos have become achievable with relatively minor investments in

92 Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

93 Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 15.

94 Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*, 99–118.

95 The dildo features prominently in two documentary films about the movement: *Come and Take It* (2018), co-directed by P. J. Raval and Ellen Spiro, and *Cocks Not Glocks* (in production) by Audra Webbe.

96 Sanders, "Never Met Her."

97 Kelsey Bradshaw, "Dildos descend on UT Austin in 'Cocks Not Glocks' protest of guns on campus," *mySanAntonio*, August 24, 2016, https://s.hdnux.com/photos/51/22/13/10822389/3/ratio3x2_2300.jpg, accessed May 10, 2021.

98 Tony Bennett, "The Politics of the 'Popular' and Popular Culture," in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, eds. Tony Bennett, C. Mercer, and J. Woollacott (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), 6–21.

technology, and even a smart phone can suffice. As such, the cost of producing and distributing media content has become much cheaper. At the same time, traditional media has been concentrated within a few media conglomerates.[99]

This change has been termed "convergence culture" by Henry Jenkins.[100] The convergence of old and new media is also enforced by a participatory media culture, and what Jenkins calls a collective intelligence. YouTube is a prime example of this, as it has content that has been produced for old media as well as content specifically made for online consumption, allowing for viewer participation with likes, dislikes, comments, shares, and reaction videos. YouTube's suggestion algorithms and share function enforce the combination of dispersed content into a shared collective intelligence or imaginary of experience, which has also raised concerns about "filter bubbles."[101] This final feature is also enhanced with the possibility to subscribe to a YouTube channel, or to support content producers financially through YouTube or, for example, services like Patreon. Convergence culture has impacted the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural products and affected the formation of political imaginaries. Indeed, YouTube has become a politicized arena in contemporary U.S. "culture wars."[102]

3 Visual Pro-Campus Carry Vernaculars

Both the national-level institutional and private gun-imaginaries can be used as a baseline when reading the two specific videos examined here. This allows us to see whether the vernacular forms of Campus Carry align or diverge from elements in the national imaginaries. This can be achieved by noting what the referent objects of security (e.g., individuals or families) are, or what Campus Carry is used to secure.[103] Such connections can also become apparent

99 Henry Jenkins. *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 17–18.

100 Jenkins.

101 Camille Roth, Antoine Mazières, and Telmo Menezes, "Tubes and Bubbles Topological Confinement of YouTube Recommendations," *PLoS ONE* 15, no. 4 (2020): e0231703; Lauri Paltemaa, Juha A. Vuori, Mikael Mattlin, and Jouko Katajisto, "Meta-Information Censorship and the Creation of the Chinanet Bubble," *Information, Communication and Society* 23, no. 14 (2020): 2064–80.

102 Jean Burgess and Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández, "Mapping Sociocultural Controversies Across Digital Media Platforms: One Week of #Gamergate on Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr," *Communication Research and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2016): 79–96.

103 Vaughan-Williams and Stevens, "Vernacular Theories," 47.

through the use of vernacular categories and concepts in the description of Campus Carry and the gun-free zones that oppose it.[104] How people are presented in racial terms and how this intersects with other continuums of worthiness are also important here. For example, the legitimization of campus police has worked toward producing a sense of a poorer, racialized outside that needs to be protected from.[105] The use of shorthand for institutionalized securitization or threats may also show connections to larger discussions, such as counter-terrorism[106] or active shooter events.[107] Finally, the vernacular can be analyzed in regard to national elements of the NRA's gun discourse:[108] for example, gun users defend the defenseless,[109] "American" virtues, individual freedom,[110] family values, or notions like "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."[111]

The "mock shooting" performance organized by "Murdoch Pizgatti" (a.k.a. Zach Horton)[112] and filmed on December 12, 2015 during the "Life and Liberty Walk to End Gun Free Zones" near the UT Austin campus[113] pertains to many of the above analytical elements. In the video, six actors wearing Gun-Free UT T-shirts and one wearing a shirt that reads "proud member of the terrorist watch list" are huddled around a person in a dark suit holding a "gun-free zone" sign. These individuals then become the victims of a staged mass shooting and robbery committed by "bad guys" who targeted that spot because it was a gun-free zone.[114] The criminals wear baggy clothes and hide their faces with bandanas and sunglasses; they have Sharpied "thug" tattoos, and one of them is sporting a cornrow hairstyle, reminding of how television shows imagery of gangs and people of color. While most mass shootings are committed by white males,[115] the organizer of the protest defends this in an interview, saying

104 Löfflmann and Vaughan-Williams, "Vernacular Imaginaries," 392.
105 Brucato and Fernandez, "Socio-Technical Developments," 86.
106 Brucato and Fernandez, 87.
107 Vuori, "Campus Carry."
108 Melzer, *Gun Crusaders*.
109 O'Neill, "Armed Citizens."
110 Melzer, *Gun Crusaders*.
111 NRA, "NRA Stand and Fight: America Speaks For Itself," YouTube video, 4:30, January 16, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-phl2d_n60, accessed October 10, 2019.
112 McCann, "Let's Go Gun Crazy."
113 DontComply.com, "Mock Mass Shooting"
114 DontComply.com, "Mock Mass Shooting."
115 "Active Shooter Incidents"; Blair and Schweit, "A Study of Active Shooter Incidents"; Joel A. Capellan, "Lone Wolf Terrorist or Deranged Shooter? A Study of Ideological Active Shooter Events in the United States, 1970–2014," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 6 (2015), 395–413.

that it "had nothing to do with race, at all. … Obviously, we're not trying to stereotype."[116] That the actors were free to choose their own attire displays the racialized imaginary they were aiming to evoke and abide by.

The performance in the video follows the script of "securitization"[117] on the level of the individual and family being the referent objects of security: gun-free zones need to be removed before it is too late and "your children or loved ones" are killed in a mass shooting and robbery, because when unarmed you cannot "protect yourself with your natural right to bear arms"; "gun-free zones are dangerous to those who obey laws"; and "a rule, a law, a sign does not protect you" in a "government-sanctioned victim shooting gallery."[118] Indeed, according to Horton, the slow response time of the police and the media during real-life mass shootings is the rationale to ban gun-free zones.[119] This is also a point made by the megaphoned narration of the performance: the good guys with guns are at least ten to twelve minutes away, which allows the criminals and killers "to do as they wish," since the average mass shooting lasts only four minutes.

As noted above, one person in the performance is wearing a T-shirt that reads "proud member of the terrorist watch list." This is sold on the Don't Comply website. The T-shirt evokes the terrorist imaginary, but one of domestic (white supremacist) terrorism rather than the foreign one produced by authorities post-9/11. Furthermore, the position presented is one of resistance or opposition to the national imaginary. The "Don't Comply" radio show hosted by Horton is aired on TalkNetwork.com, which also features a variety of conspiracy theory-type content. As the text on the T-shirt suggests, Horton is concerned "with how the government takes the crisis [i.e., mass shootings] and turns it into a reason to take away liberties of the people."[120] At the same time, the securitization of the issue is presented as stemming from the mass-shooting phenomenon: "We're sick of watching people die in these mass-murder situations."[121] In effect, he counters a security argument of disarming citizens to prevent mass shootings with a security argument of arming citizens to stop mass shooters.

In addition to the long time it supposedly takes for authorities to respond to a crime scene (an officer at UT Austin quoted the response time as 3–4

116 McCann, "Let's Go Gun Crazy."
117 Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework.*
118 DontComply.com, "Mock Mass Shooting."
119 McCann, "Let's Go Gun Crazy."
120 McCann, "Let's Go Gun Crazy."
121 Montgomery, "Groups Converge for Mock Shooting"; see also http://dontcomply.com.

minutes, while the performance cites the national average as 10–12 minutes), the narration connects to the NRA's discourse by repeating the slogan "the only thing that can stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."[122] It also refers to how advocates of gun-free zones purportedly stifle their own constitutional rights. The props in the performance (e.g., cardboard guns, ketchup on shooting victims), coupled with a Saturday morning cartoon style of movement, snickering, and lamenting (as well as perhaps unintentional flashing of butt cracks), work toward making the threatening visual of targeting specific political opponents in a shooting less serious.

Yet, despite such downplaying of its seriousness, the performance can still be read as an indirect threat speech act.[123] It was also received as such by some in the Gun-Free UT group, who were angered and felt "threatened by people who target us in this way."[124] The inappropriateness of the performance was also noted on the pro-Campus Carry side; for example, a former director of public relations for Students for Concealed Carry concluded that "these so-called gun rights groups seem to be little more than anarchists cloaking their antics in the legitimacy of the Second Amendment."[125] While the tone of the "Mock Mass Shooting" performance was not serious, the use of carnival and comedy[126] was much stronger in a "mass farting" counterdemonstration made by Campus Carry opponents at the same time, which affected the filming. As one of the protesters noted, the anti-gun protesters used humor to counter fear by speaking the language of assholes in the form of fart guns.[127]

Sarcasm is also the prevalent mode of the second video "Never Met Her," written and directed by Brett Sanders.[128] This tone is immediately made apparent with a notice in the beginning of the film that is fashioned to resemble the rating label of the Motion Picture Association, which describes the content as follows: "This film contains triggers: not suitable for degenerate animals"; "Restricted: violence, language, reality"; and "Intended to offend weak minded individuals." The websites www.brettsanders.me and www.dontcomply.com

122 DontComply.com, "Mock Mass Shooting"; NRA, "NRA Stand and Fight."

123 Clara Eroukhmanoff, "It's not a Muslim ban!' Indirect Speech Acts and the Securitisation of Islam in the United States Post-9/11," *Global Discourse* 8, no. 1 (2018): 5–25.

124 McCann, "Let's Go Gun Crazy."

125 McCann; see also the Students for Campus Carry Facebook statement on the performance: https://www.facebook.com/ConcealedCampus/posts/10154445019417622, accessed May 5, 2021.

126 Louise Amoore and Alexandra Hall, "The Clown at the Gates of the Camp: Sovereignty, Resistance and the Figure of the Fool," *Security Dialogue* 44, no. 2 (2013): 93–110.

127 McCann, "Let's Go Gun Crazy."

128 Sanders, "Never Met Her."

are also referenced in the opening. Beyond the website promotion, the two videos are connected through Murdoch Pizgatti, credited as the choreographer of the film. Brett Sanders's website contains a few other films he has made, as well as "liberty news," "activism," and stories related to "open carry." Sanders describes himself as a "freedom fighter."[129]

The film begins with a pan shot of a kitchen counter with a framed quote "Moms demand actions for gun sense in America," two books (*The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and *Hippie* by Barry Miles), and a set of kitchen knives. A young woman, credited as "dildo girl"[130] (Staci Wilson), places a large black sex toy on the counter. She then sits on her couch to watch (Fox affiliate) news coverage of a Gun-Free UT rally, and talks to "Rosie Zander" on the phone about it (the phone shows a cropped image of a blond-haired young woman holding a large black dildo). The conversation also brings up Shannon Watts, who founded the Moms Demand Action group. "Dildo girl" and Rosie agree to meet up the next day in their "safe space." The news story emphasizes the use of sex toys at the rally that opposed Campus Carry. Leading "Cocks Not Glocks" activists are also interviewed in the news, and explain their viewpoint: "we are just fighting absurdity with absurdity and we are just trying to point out how crazy it is"; "we will continue to fight gun extremism because that's really what Campus Carry is, it and open carry and permitless carry are all examples of this gun extremism." For example, Jessica Jin is interviewed on the news and tells how she has been harassed and threatened for her activism around the issue.

The upbeat music at the beginning takes on a more sinister tone when a dark-skinned person of color credited as "communist" (Eric July) is shown sneaking up to "dildo girl's" house, past a Gun-Free UT sign (in the larger discursive context, the sign can be read as a reason for choosing this target). "Dildo girl" appears worried as she hears someone rattling the lock of the door. When the "communist" assailant smashes through, accompanied by more energetic music, she grabs the dildo instead of a kitchen knife, points it like a gun at the intruder, and yells: "Stop! Stop, or I swear I'll blow my load all over your face! Cocks Not Glocks!" The intruder tilts his head disapprovingly and shoots her "gangsta-style" with the gun pointed sideways, splattering blood over a framed

129 Amy B. Wang, "Texas Gun-rights Activist Slammed for Graphic Film Portraying Shooting of a Student Protester," *Washington Post*, September 13, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/09/13/texas-gun-activist-under-fire-for-graphic-video-portraying-the-death-of-a-student-protester/, accessed May 4, 2021.

130 See Ana Lopez, "What Would You Do If You Saw This Terrifying Video Of 'You'?" Refinery 29, September 1, 2016, https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2016/09/123294/cocks-not-glocks-gun-activist-violent-youtube-video, accessed May 4, 2021.

"Gun Sense in America" sign on the wall. The "communist" then retorts "What, bitch!", adding with amusement, "fucking liberal." He proceeds to grab the flat-screen television and dismissively states "Cocks Not Glocks" as he walks past a "no guns allowed" notice on the front door. The music returns to the upbeat track while the camera stays on "dildo girl," lying in a pool of blood on the floor with her blue eyes looking at the viewer and the black dildo pointing at her face.

As the short story does not have a narrator, it does not present a direct frame or anchor for its security argument. It does, however, provide multiple intertextual references that form a set of positions for the characters and what they represent. "Dildo girl" is wearing a T-shirt with the star of Texas, a drawn caricature of a penis, and the text "Come and Take It." Used by the "Cocks Not Glocks" protesters, this shirt plays on Texan symbols such as the Alamo.[131] Together with the large black dildo, the phone conversation, and the news coverage, "dildo girl" is presented as a representative of the "Cocks Not Glocks" group. Indeed, she also uses the name in her warning to the assailant, who is not impressed by it and even repeats it when leaving the scene. Ana Lopez, a Latinx activist in the group, felt that the "dildo girl" was a caricature of her, and that the film worked to "target" her for online harassment.[132] Sanders, however, denies that it depicts Lopez: "It was not set up or meant to be any particular person … It was just meant to be a girl that was part of their protest."[133] The security narrative of the short film can be viewed as a warning: not having a gun puts you in deadly jeopardy, even if you are a *Communist Manifesto*-reading liberal. This was also pointed to as the core message of the film by Sanders in an interview for the *Washington Post*: "The whole point of the video is to basically eviscerate gun-free zones and the dangers of gun-free zones."[134] In an interview with the *Texas Standard*, he adds that "I thought it was a very dangerous idea to do that – to announce to the world that you are unarmed, and you are going to be an easy target and an easy victim to some of the crazy criminals out there."[135] The specific referent object of security in the film is an individual (a Latinx woman played by an Anglo). The tone of the film can also ostensibly be presented as doing the same as the "Cocks Not Glocks" movement, directly

131 See Laura Hernández-Ehrisman, this volume.

132 Lopez, "What Would You Do…?"

133 Wang, "Texas Gun-rights Activist"; Rhonda Fanning, "'It Was Terrifying': Campus Carry Protester Feels Targeted By Gory YouTube Video," *Texas Standard*, September 6, 2016, https://www.texasstandard.org/stories/it-was-terrifying-campus-carry-protester-feels-targeted-by-gory-youtube-video/, accessed May 4, 2021.

134 Wang, "Texas Gun-rights Activist."

135 Fanning, "'It Was Terrifying.'"

citing their statements and tactics: the film is fighting their absurdity with its own absurdity. In addition to the satirical tone set by the rating label, "dildo girl" grabs a dildo rather than a knife to defend herself. The appropriation of the anti-gun movement's register has also been emphasized by Sanders: "We basically played out their idea. Their idea is to disarm everybody, arm everybody with a sex toy and hope for the best."[136]

In the Campus Carry contestation, absurdity and carnival have been deployed by both sides. The "Cocks Not Clocks" movement explicitly used the ridiculousness of banning sex toys to point to the ridiculousness of carrying guns. Similarly, the counter-demonstration against the pro-gun performance used dildos and fart guns. In turn, the mock shooting deployed elements of comedy to soften its depiction of violence and "Never Met Her" employs satire to legitimize its graphic use of gore and depicting someone being shot in the head. Yet, even a speech act with the tone of sarcasm that is intended to be a warning can easily be taken as a threat.[137] As already noted, this was also what actually happened, as the "Cocks Not Glocks" activists viewed the video as a threat to them. It also appears that the controversy around the video was sufficient for it to be made private on YouTube, unlike the other videos on Brett Sanders's website.

The imaginary of the "Never Met Her" film abides by the racialized securitization discourse of the national securitization of campuses. The assailant is a person of color who is coming from off-campus, and who is poor enough to murder just to steal a flat-screen television. This threat of a black man cannot be countered because of "gun sense," "safe spaces," "no guns permitted" signs, the "Cocks Not Glocks" movement, or "fucking liberals," which represent negative things and targets of ridicule in the semiotic field of the film. The racial aspect shows the effect of imaginaries that go against the facts. In an interview with the *Texas Standard*, Sanders comments on his casting choice, "statistically, African Americans are more prone to create violent crimes. It does play into the stereotype, whether we like it or not."[138] As with mass shootings, FBI statistics show that people categorized as "white" commit more violent crime than those categorized as "black."[139] The film also draws from older Cold War-era threat registers, as the attacker is both credited as a "communist"

136 Wang, "Texas Gun-rights Activist."

137 Juha A. Vuori, "Deterring Things with Words: Deterrence as a Speech Act," *New Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics and International Relations* 24, no. 2 (2016): 32–50.

138 Rhonda Fanning, "'It Was Terrifying.'"

139 "Arrests," Crime in the United States, 2014, https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/tables/table-43, accessed May 4, 2021.

and wears a red T-shirt with symbols of the Soviet Union on it, while the victim is connected to Communism through *The Communist Manifesto* on the kitchen counter. Together, the imaginary intersects ideological, racial, class, and criminal threats and is embedded in the larger context of the culture war.

4 Conclusions

The vernaculars of the two specific videos examined in the chapter both abide by and diverge from the national institutional and individual imaginaries. Both present the referent of security on an individual level as either "family and loved ones" or victims of a robbery homicide. Gun-free zones are referred to with signs in both videos, and the one with narration categorizes these as "targets of opportunity," "government-sanctioned shooting galleries," or being simply ineffective against criminals. The director of "Never Met Her" also refers to them as "'killing zones' – where unarmed law-abiding citizens advertise their vulnerability to criminals."[140] In both videos, gun-free zone signs also attract violent criminals to commit their crimes. Furthermore, such spaces are presented as going against the "natural right to bear arms," and those foolish enough to not be armed are portrayed as jeopardizing their own lives and rights.

The security imaginaries in the videos have a number of intersecting elements. In the mock shooting, the shooters were older than students and not necessarily academic (one of the actors was an alumni, though); in this way, they represented threats beyond campus. In racialized terms, the mock shooters were Anglos, yet they evoked people of color with their clothing and hairstyles. In "Never Met Her," the attacker intersected with leftist ideology, being from off-campus, poor, and black. A number of types of shorthand and intertextual symbols were also used in the videos: killers, criminals, and bad guys in one and communists, liberals, and hippies in the other. Such intersections form a discursive constellation that posits positive elements with the self and negative elements with the threatening other.

The national pro-Campus Carry discourse explicitly disavows "bigots" and "anarchists," but the vernacular imaginary examined here produces racialized threat images. Indeed, both examples present in their visuals a racialized gaze that places people on a continuum of worthiness; in both cases, the shooters were racialized or people of color whereas the victims were Anglos. At the same time, the attackers were of a lower class than students and depicted as coming

140 Rhonda Fanning, "'It Was Terrifying.'"

from outside campus, as in the securitization discourses that have been used to legitimize the militarization of campus police. In the mock shooting, the victims were both women and men, and the attack was a mass shooting. In the robbery homicide scenario, the victim was female, as were the activists who oppose Campus Carry and promote "gun sense." The position in the videos is in line with the pro-gun position overall in the national imaginary, namely, being a masculine one.

Active shooter events and terrorism are a major concern in both federal and university imaginaries. The mock shooting evokes the mass-shooting phenomenon and the securitization of terrorism, but also frames itself in resistance to both. In the case of the former, while the imaginary of institutions is to resort to improvised weapons as a last resort after running and hiding, the performance promotes the use of firearms as the immediate resolution of the issue. Regarding the latter, the performers present themselves as the target of securitization of domestic terrorism. Both videos also contain elements of the NRA's national gun discourse: gun users defend themselves and their loved ones, gun carrying is a U.S. virtue and part of individual freedom, and good guys can stop bad guys with guns. The pro-gun position is also presented as masculine, whereas opposition to Campus Carry, for example, is feminine, represented by female activists and "moms."

The vision of the political that the imaginaries examined here produce is a masculine and individualist position, where the legitimate use of force is not limited to the state and where the individual is responsible for the security of themselves and their loved ones. Indeed, the state's capacities are presented as limited in guaranteeing the security of the individual against threats posed by deadly forms of crime like mass shootings or robbery homicide. Carrying guns is a right of individuals to protect themselves from such threats that are represented as racialized and stemming from poorer classes. At the same time, leftist and feminine political positions are presented as threatening vis-à-vis such rights, as they aim to limit individual rights and effectively emasculate the individual in a world fraught with danger.

The pro-Campus Carry vernacular discussed here securitizes the campus as a place where violent things can happen to anyone, at any time; because the authorities are not there to immediately protect them, individuals need to have the opportunity to protect themselves with guns. The intersections of the threat imaginaries in the videos also showcase how the gun issue is deeply embedded in the larger "culture wars" in the contemporary U.S. and how the "gun" operates as a commodity for both sides of this contestation. Such imaginaries are part of the discourse that brought about the Campus Carry legislation that imposed "security" in this manner, even in university buildings. At the

same time, such vernacular security imaginaries show that they are not always necessarily progressive or disruptive of institutional views, but can do unprogressive things, too; as the interviews and survey show, vernacular security for some means vernacular insecurity for others.

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CHAPTER 8

Firearms Fetishism in Texas: Entanglements of Gun Imaginaries and Belief

Albion M. Butters

> Her family is incredibly conservative, to the point of … guns are like God.[1]
>
> UT Austin undergraduate

FIGURE 8.1 "God, Guns & Sons," Madisonville, TX

1 Interview with the author, University of Texas at Austin undergraduate (Texas native), April 4, 2018, notes in possession of author. This study draws on interviews with native Texans (students, faculty, and staff at St. Edward's University and The University of Texas at Austin) conducted in 2018 and 2019 by the Academy of Finland-funded Campus Carry research project at the University of Turku.

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"GUN SHOP" read the sign, printed in big stenciled letters designed to catch the attention of passing cars on a rural Texas highway. The name of the business appeared beneath, a bit smaller: "God, Guns & Sons." Right there, on the vinyl banner of a roadside unregistered dealer captured in a colleague's snapshot, was a perfect juxtaposition of religion and firearms and masculinity, the very elements we had been discussing during a fieldwork trip to the Lone Star State to engage in research on guns.[2] The more I considered it, the more the sign appeared to epitomize a particularly Texan phenomenon, namely, fetishism of firearms. This chapter seeks to unpack the nature and the significance of that relationship, going beyond the most common perception of fetish as sexually related.[3]

In fact, fetish has a multiplicity of definitions. It can represent a religious power object, a type of relationship with material commodities, and/or an object of sexual fantasy. More specifically, fetishism is alternately theorized as: 1) a formative aspect of religion in proto-anthropology, 2) an aspect of commodification in Marxist philosophy, and/or 3) the outcome of an unresolved castration anxiety in childhood, according to Freudian psychoanalysis. Because there is significant crossover between these different definitions (as evident in the gun dealer's sign even), the fetish can be summarized as a complex locus of power, an assemblage that gains special value through the displacement of desire or meaning and thus becomes a source of reverence, fascination, or even worship.[4]

The transdisciplinary angle of fetishism allows this chapter to investigate the various connections that exist between religion and pro-gun attitudes in Texas. This is done, for example, by examining the recent passing of Senate Bill 535 in 2019, which allows open and concealed carry in places of worship. Support for this bill can partially be explained by mass shootings at churches in Texas, a predominantly Christian state, but also because religiosity itself is an

2 According to the Firearms Owners' Protection Act, a federal statute that regulates the sale of guns, those who only occasionally engage in trade or seek to add to or sell from their personal collection are not required to have a license. Since they are not required to conduct background checks on potential buyers or even document their sales, unregistered dealers operate in a grey area of the law. This may explain the temporary nature of the sign in the photo.

3 While fetishism of guns has yet to be studied in depth, for a discussion of representations in pop culture, see Roderick McGillis, *He Was Some Kind of a Man: Masculinities in the B Western* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009); see also William Settles, "Guns and ED: How American Men Are Proving That Freud Was Right," *The Restless Mind*, March 1, 2013, https://wsettles.wordpress.com/2013/03/01/guns-and-ed-how-american-men-are-proving-that-freud-was-right/, accessed May 1, 2021.

4 Tim Dant, "Fetishism and the Social Value of Objects," *The Sociological Review* 44, no. 3 (1996): 498.

important predictor of support for guns. Along with religion, guns are closely tied to cultural and ideological imaginaries related to frontier masculinity and individualism, and the development of fetishism may also be traced to a shift from rural gun culture to patterns of owning a firearm for self-defense. As the chapter will show, the social practices and ideologies of gun carriers combine with religious faith and praxis, leading to the gun simultaneously inhabiting multiple meanings that are integrally intertwined with identity and belief, and thereby serving as a mode of moral identity construction.

For their owners, guns not only have power as deadly objects and significance as imaginaries; power and significance are also found where these intersect in firearms fetishism. This study thus resists a purely ontological framing. Investigating fetishism does not ignore the real power of the object—the gun's ability to take life foregrounds that—but instead it finds a shift in firearms' perceived significance. This can happen either socially, as "a displacement of meaning through synecdoche,"[5] or conceptually, by means of personal imaginaries. This is to say, firearms fetishism can play at the level of society (i.e., it may support collective recognition of the individual as a religious protector/masculine hero ideal) or on the level of the individual, informing their own moral self-understanding.

1 The Fetish and the Firearm

The long genealogy of the concept of fetishism finds its origin in the early theorization of the primary stage in the formation of religious belief, preceding monotheism. Writing *Du culte des dieux fétiches* in 1760 about Portuguese healers, Charles de Brosses argued that certain items have religious significance and are worshipped because of the powers they possess, being both supernatural and real objects that bridge the gap of the sacred and the profane.[6] Although this interpretation already fell into disrepute in the Victorian era, vestiges remain in the study of religion and anthropology, applied to social theory as the magic that modernity could not destroy.[7]

5 Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen, *Female Fetishism: A New Look* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994), 45, cited in Dant, "Fetishism and the Social Value of Objects," 498.

6 Stephen Böhm and Aanka Batta, "Just Doing It: Enjoying Commodity Fetishism with Lacan," *Organization* 17, no. 3 (2010): 348.

7 Charles F. Springwood, "Gun Concealment, Display, and Magical Habits of the Body," *Critique of Anthropology* 34, no. 4 (2014): 468; see also David Graeber, "Fetishism as Social Creativity: or, Fetishes Are Gods in the Process of Construction," *Anthropological Theory* 5, no. 4 (2005): 407–38.

Fetishism found its next definition in the theory of Karl Marx, who compared man's relationship with commodities to the way in which in the "mist-enveloped regions of the religious world … productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life."[8] When Marx famously stated that a table was not just a table, he meant that it assumes a fetishized value beyond its status as a mere material object; in other words, to replace use value with exchange value is "to invest it with powers it does not have in itself."[9] For Marx, exposing this relationship was key to his argument that the true significance lay in the human labor that created the object, rather than in the object itself. A hundred years later, Jean Baudrillard would advance this interpretation by using semiotics to define the commodity fetish, emphasizing its social value through an exchange of signs and meaning.[10]

The third definition of fetish emerged in the psychoanalysis practiced by Sigmund Freud. Here the fetish represents a penis substitute, created when a boy discovers that his mother's genitals lack what he himself has. Serving as "a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it,"[11] the fetish is understood to exert power in two ways: through substitution it forms an object of desire, which may be worshipped, or in the case of someone who has lost touch with reality, it leads to an unhealthy relationship and abuse.[12] Jacques Lacan and Wladimir Granoff advanced Freud's theory, making their own semiotic turn in 1956 (in a way that would influence Baudrillard) by moving beyond sexual substitution to a displacement of signs. In this interpretation, the fetish is not about the penis per se but a *symbolic* marker (i.e., phallus), an Other that cannot be attained because it is not *real*.[13] As an *imaginary*, however, the fetish can fill this lack; through its symbolic power created and expressed through social relations, it transforms the anxiety that people experience into something they can believe in.[14] After such displacement, a

8 Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. I*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress, [1867] 1954), 78.

9 Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 28.

10 Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, MO: Telos, [1972] 1981), 75. See also Dant, "Fetishism and the Social Value of Objects," 504.

11 Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927–1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works* (London: Hogarth, 1961), 154.

12 Böhm and Batta, "Just Doing It," 350.

13 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (London: Tavistock, 1977).

14 Jacques Lacan and Wladimir Granoff, "Fetishism: The Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real," in *Perversions: Psychodynamics and Therapy*, eds. Sándor Lorand and Michael Balint (New York: Random House, 1956), 265–76; Böhm and Batta, "Just Doing It," 352–56.

magical quality is added to an object, making it even more appealing to one's unconscious desire to become an ideal person, complete and self-actualized.

As a signifier, the gun operates on different levels, standing for something more than the literal object itself, informing ideologies and identity, a cultural representation of "American-ness" transmitted across generations. The gun is attributed power beyond its purely physical function, and by being treated as special it impacts the lives of those who treat it in that way. This fits the simplest definition of a fetish as an object with social value.[15] It is not sufficient to remain with the simplest definition, however. Because the concept of fetishism is multivalent, the various interpretations—religion, commodity, and sexuality—need to be discussed sequentially but also as they intertwine.[16]

First, guns have a long history of being fetishized as a power object in association with religious traditions. Traditionally, for example, religion and hunting have been intertwined in the coming of age of boys in the U.S., also reflecting the relationship between gun culture and masculinity.[17] This was reflected in an interview with a faculty member of St. Edward's University, who remembered his own rite of passage:

> In fact, for my confirmation, what did my dad do? For my confirmation, I was in fifth or sixth grade, [and it was] the first time he let me go hunting by myself with a twenty-gauge shotgun. That was his reward for me being confirmed as a Catholic: "Now you can go hunting with your gun."[18]

Public policy writer Barry Bruce-Briggs found the same among Protestants, describing the ritual importance of receiving one's first gun at puberty, calling it "the *bar mitzvah* of the rural WASP."[19] During this critical moment of identity formation, coming of age, and committing oneself to a spiritual community, masculinity and frontier tradition and religion intersect, comprising a complex of "becoming" that can be difficult to separate when examining the shift in gun culture.

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15 See Dant, "Fetishism and the Social Value of Objects."

16 For an indispensable overview of fetish theory, see William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 9 (Spring 1985): 5–17.

17 Gary Kleck, *Targeting Guns: Firearms and Their Control* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997).

18 Interview with the author, St. Edward's faculty (Texas resident since 1998), April 23, 2018, notes in possession of author.

19 Barry Bruce-Briggs, *The Great American Gun War: Notes from Four Decades in the Trenches* ([n.p.]: National Rifle Association, 1976), 41.

However, the so-called "Revolt in Cincinnati" in 1977 does represent a key watershed moment. Effectively a coup of the leadership of the National Rifle Association (NRA), this was the point at which the organization's focus radically shifted from hunting and marksmanship to Second Amendment rights. Since then, the long tradition of recreational use of guns in the U.S., including sporting and hunting, has experienced significant decline; from 1977 to 2018, the percentage of households with adult hunters has fallen nearly by half.[20] Although not as dramatic in Texas, the share of hunters is trending down there as well, partly because of the drop-off in the number of children being raised in that culture.[21]

While it would be a category mistake to strictly separate "recreational gun culture" (e.g., sporting, hunting, collecting) found in rural communities from "defensive gun culture," especially given that the individualistic frontier mentality includes elements of both, the overall decline in hunting and the rise in such gun behavior as concealed carry not only signal a change in reasons for firearms ownership but also a shift in the values associated with it.[22] Tracking advertisements over more than six decades in *Guns* magazine, Yamane et al. have been able to demonstrate two distinct phases; following journalist Michael Bane, they call these Gun Culture 1.0 and Gun Culture 2.0. This shift pertains to firearms fetishism in different ways: an obvious manifestation is the overt commodification of guns in ads (see below), but there is a faith-related aspect as well. For this reason, Yamane et al. specifically point to the need for future research on the sacralization of the Second Amendment and guns, suggesting that Gun Culture 2.0 actually has fundamentally religious dimensions.[23] One way to trace this is through the changing rhetoric of the NRA.

Jessica Dawson has convincingly shown through textual analysis of *American Rifleman* (1975–2018) that the gun rights organization has a history of employing religious language to transform perceptions of the meaning of the

20 Violence Policy Center, "The Long-Term Decline of Gun Ownership in America: 1973 to 2018," VPC, June 2020, www.vpc.org/studies/ownership.pdf2020, accessed May 1, 2021, 3.

21 Mike Leggett and Charley Locke, "Has Hunting Become a Rich Man's Game?" *Texas Monthly*, October 2018, https://www.texasmonthly.com/travel/hunting-become-rich-mans-game/, accessed May 1, 2021.

22 On the frontier mentality, see Katarzyna Celinska, "Individualism and Collectivism in America: The Case of Gun Ownership and Attitudes toward Gun Control," *Sociological Perspectives* 50, no. 2 (2007): 233.

23 David Yamane, Paul Yamane, and Sebastian L. Ivory, "Targeted Advertising: Documenting the Emergence of Gun Culture 2.0 in Guns magazine, 1955–2019," *Palgrave Communications* 6, no. 61 (2020): 1–9. See also David Yamane, "The Sociology of U.S. Gun Culture," *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 7 (2017): 1–10.

Second Amendment.[24] Examples of terms that gained increased importance include "God-given" (to refer to gun rights) and "evil" (as a force needing to be resisted through self-defense); furthermore, the battle for gun control has even been called a "holy war." This was declared most impressively by the actor Charlton Heston, who was head of the NRA from 1998 to 2003 but also had religio-cultural cachet due to handing down God's law as Moses in the film *The Twelve Commandments* (1956).[25] That the NRA saw itself as similarly disseminating dogma can be found in the words of the former CEO Warren Cassidy: "you would get a far better understanding if you approached us as if you were approaching one of the great religions of the world."[26] In this regard, the role of the NRA accords with a perceived fusion of the secular and religious spheres, a binary imaginary of "America" comprised of dual creeds that intertwine in the special status provided by the First and Second Amendments.

For the faithful, such as members of the National Rifle Association's Madison Brigade, belief in the freedom to keep and bear arms is concomitant with belief in the Constitution as divinely inspired and Second Amendment rights as "granted by God"; according to Scott Melzer, this view is aligned with the objectives of the Christian Right, whose battle against secular humanism is informed by "dominion theology" and the idea that the United States should be ruled by the faithful until Christ returns.[27] With guns being situated squarely in the holy nexus of religious nationalism, they comprise both the justification, the sanctioned means, and the fetish power object to defend the will of God.[28]

In the NRA's historically situated rhetoric, firearms assumed a new meaning as "totems mystically linking owners to their ancestors, and, even more important, to our collective American forefathers."[29] In Gun Culture 2.0, the firearm

24 Jessica Dawson, "Shall Not Be Infringed: How the NRA Used Religious Language to Transform the Meaning of the Second Amendment," *Palgrave Communications* 5, no. 58 (2019): 1–13.

25 Osha Gray Davidson, *Under Fire: The NRA and the Battle for Gun Control* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1998), 44; David Morgan, "Heston Urges Gun Owners to Vote for Bush," CNN, October 18, 2000, https://edition.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/10/18/heston.campaign.reuters/index.html, accessed May 1, 2021. On the religious rhetoric used by Charlton Heston in support of the NRA, see Dawson, "Shall Not Be Infringed," 7–8.

26 Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 15.

27 Melzer, *Gun Crusaders*, 121.

28 On Christian nationalism, see Andrew L. Whitehead, Landon Schnabel, and Samuel L. Perry, "Gun Control in the Crosshairs: Christian Nationalism and Opposition to Stricter Gun Laws," *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 4 (2018): 1–13.

29 Davidson, *Under Fire*, 44.

"brims with symbolic power far beyond its physical utility."[30] This aspect is succinctly expressed, for example, in an ingenious and religiously charged marketing slogan from the nineteenth century: "God created men. Colonel Colt made them equal."[31] But there are various other ways in which firearms can act as symbolic objects in a "gun cult" context.

According to Randall Collins, it is possible to differentiate three different spheres of activity in a person's relationship with their firearm: individual (involving private behavior), communal (guns being the center of shared attention), and imagined (what one might do with the gun).[32] As an example of the former, one can cite personal rituals involving the gun that extend beyond the merely functional.[33] An example given by Collins lends itself perfectly to the current discussion of fetishism: "the long hours that gun cultists spend on reloading ammunition suggests that this is a ritualistic affirmation of their membership, something like a member of a religious cult engaging in private prayer, in actual physical contact with the sacred objects, like fingering the beads of a rosary."[34] In terms of the communal level, the association of guns with the First Amendment (as seen in the legal battle over carrying in churches) highlights their undeniable religious significance. Finally, regarding the imagined level, one can point to NRA fear messaging and gun culture eschatology. From the fictional trope of a "zombie apocalypse" to the much more proximal belief that the culture war in the U.S. will escalate into real war, gun ownership gains a "what if" mentality. With the transition of hunting and sporting culture (gun as tool) to constructed (in)security vis-à-vis a created Other (gun as fetish), the object is accorded a magical and literally apotropaic quality.

Second, the commodity fetishism of firearms also has a long genealogy in the United States. Since the nineteenth century at least, guns have provided an imaginary into which the common man can enter—they are a key part of the story sold to the people, where armed heroes defend their community and the nation. Writing on the historical significance of the gun fetish moving beyond merely material needs, Joan Burbick explains:

> As such, it was more than anything else a springboard to a set of identities, a web of dreams, a way of knowing the self, emptied of everything

30 F. Carson Mencken and Paul Froese, "Gun Culture in Action," *Social Problems* 66, no. 1 (2019): 3.

31 Larry Koller, *The Fireside Book of Guns* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959), 136.

32 Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 99.

33 See Abigail Kohn, *Shooters: Myths and Realities of America's Gun Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54.

34 Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 101.

> that got in the way of the urge to buy, and filled with the moral pap of nation building. By the end of the nineteenth century, the gun as a commodity was saturated in meaning.[35]

As seen here, a network of discursive practices based on marketing existed well before the constructed imaginaries of Gun Culture 2.0. While advertising patterns in *Guns* magazine, for example, may have changed in the last fifty years, the values that people place in guns have been influenced through the management of images, symbols, and emotions for far longer. In this regard, the creation of the commodity fetish may follow a more cultural model than a materialist (Marxist) one.[36] Or it can be regarded as involving both through a two-part process:

> The fetishism of commodities consists in the first place of emptying them of meaning, of hiding the real social relations objectified in them through human labour, to make it possible for the imaginary/symbolic relations to be injected into the construction of meaning at a secondary level. Production empties. Advertising fills. The real is hidden by the imaginary.[37]

On this point, there is a big difference between a gun and the table discussed by Marx: imaginary meaning can be attached to the gun much more easily, being "a social object that incorporates subject positions, ideas as well as material form," per Baudrillard's understanding of fetish as the site where the subject and object may merge or be confused.[38] In practice, this allows marketing of gun imaginaries to extend beyond purely profit-driven agendas to political and social ones with a potentially dramatic impact on personal and shared belief, including religious worldview.

Third, coming at last to the sexual interpretation of firearms fetishism—dating back to Freud's famous statement that "all weapons and tools are used as symbols for the male organ: e.g. ploughs, hammers, rifles, revolvers, daggers, sabres, etc."—the phallic significance of guns cannot be ignored.[39] Indeed,

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35 Joan Burbick, "Cultural Anatomy of a Gun Show," *Stanford Law & Policy Review* 17, no. 3 (2006): 662.

36 Yamane et al., "Targeted Advertising," 3.

37 Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising*, 51. Original italics removed.

38 Dant, "Fetishism and the Social Value of Objects," 504.

39 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume V (1900–1901): The Interpretation of Dreams (II) and On Dreams* (London: Hogarth, 2001), 357.

this connection has explicitly been made in recent gun debates.[40] In Texas, for example, student activists in the Cocks Not Glocks group at UT Austin made international headlines in 2016 with protests against Campus Carry that juxtaposed sex and violence, using dildos (outlawed in public) to make a statement on the normativity of (legally) carrying firearms. The group's graphic Twitter logo (Figure 8.2) illustrates the semiotic power of the gun as penis.

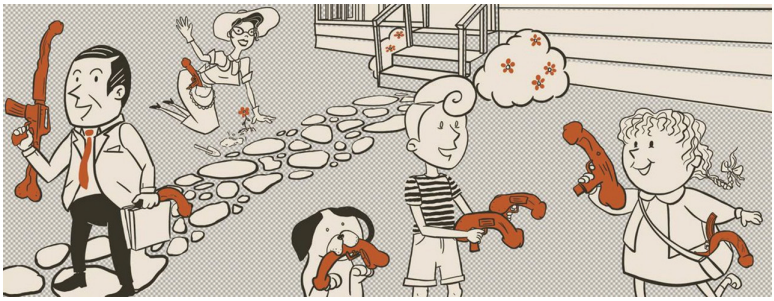

FIGURE 8.2 "A well armed populace is the best defense against fear" (2016)

Rhetorically as well, the students conflated the two. Most famous perhaps was their inversion of the historic challenge from the "Come and Take It" of the Battle of Gonzales in 1835 to "Take It and Come," here referring not to the famous cannon but the free sex toys they were handing out.[41] Other slogans employed similar sexually charged double-entendres: "You are packing heat, we are packing meat,"[42] "Time to be hard-on gun culture,"[43] and "The larger the Glocks, the smaller the cocks."[44] The last of these barbs is particularly poignant, highlighting a common perception that guns act for men as compensation for a lack of virility or strength. Not only does this directly remind of Freud's fetish, but it also targets the idealized ability of a man to stand on his own. For example,

40 This rich subject has also been dealt with elsewhere. On the priapic theory of guns, see, for example, Don B. Kates, "Gun Control: A Realistic Assessment," Pacific Research Foundation, April 15, 1990, https://ssrn.com/abstract=2953370, accessed May 1, 2021; Susie McKellar, "Guns: The 'Last Frontier on the Road to Equality'?," in *The Gendered Object*, ed. Pat Kirkham (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 71–79.

41 For more on the Gonzales cannon, see Laura Hernández-Ehrisman in this volume.

42 Interview with the author, University of Texas at Austin undergraduate (Texas native), April 4, 2018, notes in possession of author.

43 @CocksNotGlocks. Twitter, November 12, 2016, https://twitter.com/CocksNotGlocks/status/797218783597248512, accessed May 1, 2021.

44 @sfclem, Twitter, August 24, 2016, https://twitter.com/sfclem/status/768525086282383362, accessed May 1, 2021.

when William Settles writes that "the gun cult is rooted in fantasy … unique to the American experience,"[45] he specifically connects the gun fetish to a decline in male virility and the false promise of success through individualism. Fieldwork among gun owners shows that this is not far off the mark, for they admit that loss of the firearm symbolizes a loss of one's power as a male, and such feelings may be even more pronounced in cultural contexts where the rugged masculinity and heroism so endemic to the frontier imaginary of the Southwest are prevalent.[46] For example, referring to a mother not allowing her son to use guns, the author of *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* (2001), a popular book in conservative Protestant circles, baldly exclaims: "That is emasculation."[47]

In multiple ways, therefore, firearms fetishism today can be seen as supporting the realization of an imaginary that had not necessarily been possible before, at least in Lacan's interpretation of it as a lack, symbolic of fused phallic and consumerist desire:[48]

> As an object, the gun exists as something we imagine will satisfy us; its existence is more imaginary than real. … As children, we were our cowboy heroes, just as we could never be those heroes. The gun was both object and subject in that it represented something separate, desirable, and in a real way unattainable, while at the same time it was an extension of ourselves.[49]

Today, the gun/hero imaginary—the gun and the hero being fused through desire—is no longer unattainable in the United States. Through the fetish, the desire to become a hero can be fulfilled; the gun is a hero-maker, not just *in potentia* but in actual practice. This can be seen in the cases described below.

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45 Settles, "Guns and ED."

46 For a discussion of guns and hegemonic masculinity, see Angela Stroud, "Good Guys with Guns: Hegemonic Masculinity and Concealed Handguns," *Gender and Society* 26, no. 2 (2012): 227–30.

47 John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 65, cited in Samuel Stroope and Joshua C. Tom, "In-Home Firearm Access among US Adolescents and the Role of Religious Subculture: Results from a Nationally Representative Study," *Social Science Research* 67 (September 2017): 140.

48 With its discussion of signification, Lacan's psychoanalytic theory extends Freud's differentiation of the penis and the "phallic," as one can be possessed and the other cannot; see Lacan, *Écrits*.

49 McGillis, *He Was Some Kind of a Man*, 73–74.

2 Guns in the Church

On November 5, 2017, gunfire sounded from the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. Stephen Willeford, a local neighbor, ran from his house to investigate—barefoot but armed with a trusted AR-15. He yelled as loud as he could, drawing out the lone shooter who had already killed 26 people and injured 20, and then wounding him. When the man sped off, escaping the scene, Willeford flagged down a passing truck and gave chase until the gunman drove off the road and shot himself.[50]

Stephen Willeford has been called a "good guy with a gun."[51] Having put his own life on the line to save others, he exemplifies the famous statement made by NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre after the Newtown, Connecticut school shooting in 2012: "The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun."[52] Willeford became an instant hero in the local community but also for gun rights advocates nationwide—he met President Trump and was featured in a NRA commercial. There are also religious dimensions to this story. For some, Willeford's actions on that fateful day transcend a merely worldly context. A gun manufacturer from San Antonio, for instance, gave him a special new AR-15 to replace the one not returned by the police.[53]

On one side of the assault weapon is the flag of Texas, on the other a passage from the New Testament: "For he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."[54] The symbolism here is multivalent. On one hand, it exemplifies a tradition of adorning firearms with biblical quotes as a fetishistic attempt to make the weapon holy;

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50 Michael J. Mooney, "The Hero of the Sutherland Springs Shooting Is Still Reckoning With What Happened That Day," *Texas Monthly*, November 2018, https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/stephen-willeford-sutherland-springs-mass-murder/, accessed May 1, 2021.

51 Joe Holley. *Sutherland Springs: God, Guns, and Hope in a Texas Town* (New York: Hachette Books, 2020). For a discussion of the cultural concept of a "good guy with a gun," see Stroud, "Good Guys with Guns," 216–38.

52 Peter Overby, "NRA: 'Only Thing That Stops A Bad Guy With A Gun Is A Good Guy With A Gun,'" NPR, December 21, 2012, https://www.npr.org/2019/11/25/782705313/guns-america-the-good-guy-with-a-gun, accessed May 1, 2021.

53 In the end, the police did return Willeford's assault rifle in a ceremony at the First Baptist Church, where he now attends services.

54 Romans 13:4. While this passage stands out from the New Testament's non-violent message and portrayal of Jesus Christ as the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), the Old Testament contains numerous instances in which exceptions to the Sixth Commandment are made for the faithful; see Jacques van Ruiten and Koert van Bekkum, eds., *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

see, for example, the controversial engraving of verse numbers (cf. John 8:12, 2 Cor. 4:6) on the gun sights of rifles used by the U.S. military.[55] On the other, these words construct its wielder as both a Texan and a divine agent, a dual identity which resonates with Willeford himself. Indeed, in an interview a year later, he framed the shootout as a battle between good and evil, in which he was protected by God against the bullets directed his way, while the Holy Spirit helped him to remain calm. Reflecting back on growing up with guns and shooting since he was only five years old, Willeford felt that the Lord had been shaping him his whole life for that day.[56]

Along with the imaginary of the "good guy with a gun" becoming actualized, the tragedy of Sutherland Springs importantly provided Texas legislators with the political capital they needed to pass Senate Bill 535, which in 2019 removed "a church, synagogue, or other established place of religious worship" from the list of excluded places where a licensed person might carry a firearm, open or concealed.[57] This came as glad tidings for those congregations who wanted citizen protectors in their pews, and it also represented a victory for those who argued that the Second Amendment—namely, that the right of the people to bear arms shall not be infringed—extends to sacred space. Again, the debate was framed in terms of a battle between good and bad. As Texas State Senator Donna Campbell (R), co-sponsor of SB 535, explained: "We have learned many times over that there is no such thing as a gun-free zone. Those with evil intentions will violate the law and carry out their heinous acts no matter what."[58] This statement reveals a twofold ordering on the part of the gun owner: on one hand, the borders between types of space are erased; on the other, different types of people are delineated.

SB 535 signaled the independent streak of the Lone Star State as willing to break with a longstanding tradition of churches being off limits to weapons. This has been the case with the Catholic Church, for example, which for centuries has offered sanctuary to those fleeing violence, reflecting a collective agreement in society that hallowed ground is off-limits to acts of aggression.[59]

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55 Erik Eckholm, "Firm to Remove Bible References From Gun Sights," *New York Times*, January 21, 2010, https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/22/us/22guns.html, accessed May 1, 2021.

56 Mooney, "The Hero of the Sutherland Springs Shooting."

57 Texas, Senate Bill 535, 2019, https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/86R/billtext/html/SB00535F.htm, accessed May 1, 2021.

58 Donna Campbell, "Texas Legislature Passes SB 535 to Secure Texans' Right to Carry in Church," Donna Campbell M.D., May 21, 2019, https://www.donnacampbell.com/texas-legislature-passes-sb-535-to-secure-texans-right-to-carry-in-church/, accessed May 1, 2021.

59 Lauri Scherer, ed., *Gun Violence* (Farmington Mills, MI: Greenhaven, 2013), 92.

In Texas, however, while the law does allow a church to forbid firearms if it gives "effective notice," Catholic dioceses other than El Paso and Dallas chose to let their individual parishes decide how to proceed, reflecting the ideological differences between conservative and liberal congregations. While Protestant denominations also differ on this issue, for some evangelical strands, guns even comprise an integral part of their faith.

In recent years, gun rights proponents have argued that the First Amendment's protection of the free exercise of religion should allow them to carry in church. Waging battles in court to this end, they have not only cited a "sustained and sincere tradition" of carrying but also that "the right (if not the duty) of self-defense is well established in Christian theology."[60] Highlighting the difficulties in separating religious identity from cultural heritage, William B. Bankston et al. note in their study on guns, "Especially in a traditionally southern population, religion, as also ethnic identity or geographic location, is likely a surrogate measure of cultural heritage."[61] This complex relationship has put the judicial branch in the difficult position of needing to determine the practical implications of belief vis-à-vis gun imaginaries. For example, when several people along with a guns rights organization and Baptist church in Georgia brought a case to the Eleventh Circuit to overthrow a state law prohibiting firearms in places of worship, the court upheld the ban, ruling that "there is no First Amendment protection for personal preferences."[62] In its view, the plaintiffs failed to sufficiently demonstrate the theological basis for their claim (e.g., having a religious duty to carry, like a Sikh with a *kirpan* knife) or that their worship was hindered by not having a gun.[63] In the history of the United States regarding what deserves legal protection, there is a large divide between religious belief and religious behavior, with the latter being much more subject to regulation.[64] I would argue, however, that gun imaginaries represent a point of intersection between belief and behavior, and SB 535 in Texas was accordingly able to challenge such strict divisions.

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60 John M.A. DiPippa, "God and Guns: The Free Exercise of Religion Problems of Regulating Guns in Churches and Other Houses of Worship," *Marquette Law Review* 98, no. 3 (2015): 1123.

61 William B. Bankston et al., "The Influence of Fear of Crime, Gender, and Southern Culture on Carrying Firearms for Protection," *The Sociological Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (1990): 302n1.

62 GeorgiaCarry.org, Inc. v. Georgia, 687 F.3d 1244, 1255 (11th Cir. 2012), cert. denied, 133 S. Ct. 856 (2013).

63 For the argumentation around the parallel of Sikh boys being allowed to carry knives to school for religious reasons, see Brian Leiter, *Why Tolerate Religion?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

64 On this point, see Catherine Cookson, *Regulating Religion: The Courts and the Free Exercise Clause* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The new gun law was put to the test two years after the tragedy of Sutherland Springs, when a drifter entered the West Freeway Church of Christ in the suburbs of Fort Worth and opened fire with a shotgun. In this instance, people were ready. At least seven parishioners drew on him and less than six seconds later, he lay dead on the floor, having been taken down by Jack Wilson, a firearms instructor and "security volunteer."[65] The passing of SB 535 had led to a very different outcome than in Sutherland Springs, and the validation of the law further cemented the powerful gun imaginary of the "good guy with a gun." This narrative was picked up by gun rights proponents, as well as by politicians nationwide. Notably, President Trump tweeted, "Lives were saved by these heroes, and Texas laws allowing them to carry arms!"[66] Pronounced agency of the hero—inevitably male—thus came to accompany the shift in gun culture, from gun as tool to gun as fetish. The power of the gun gained additional significance through its immediate proximity (being legally available where it had not been before), yet it also benefited from the fetishistic affordances given to it—as an item with religious status, as the epitome of consumer culture, and as a reinforcement of masculinity.

The hero-making role of the gun is clearly seen in the stories of Stephen Willeford and Jack Wilson, whose heroic defense against church shooters won them national recognition and praise. Even outside of a church context, such a selfless act of protecting their community would have likely still led to their being considered a "good guy with a gun." In Texas, however, the Christian frame made their moral status and heroic identity even more unequivocal.

3 Texas as a Nexus of Guns, Religion, and Moral Identity

To better understand firearms fetishism in Texas in particular, it is necessary to analyze more closely the relationship of guns and religion there, not as a universal but specifically in terms of different faiths. Texas is a very religious state with a Christian majority. According to a 2015 Pew survey, more than half of Texans identify as either Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, or Historically Black Protestant, while nearly another quarter are Catholic. Although

65 Montgomery et al., "Inside a Texas Church, Guns, Bibles and a Spirited Firearms Debate," *New York Times*, December 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/30/us/texas-church-shooting-fort-worth-white-settlement.html, accessed May 1, 2021.

66 @realDonaldTrump, Twitter. December 31, 2019, https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1211813523581546496 (account since suspended), currently available at https://www.thetrumparchive.com, accessed May 1, 2021.

there are Texans who belong to other spiritual traditions, they are in the minority, and only 18% said they had no religious affiliation—half the number of "Nones" found in Vermont, for example.[67] This religious landscape provides critical context for the cases discussed above, and it points to the broad level of support for SB 535. The church shootings happened in a place that was familiar to most Texans.

Notwithstanding the manifold expressions of personal belief within any given faith, the connection between gun ownership and Protestantism—especially in the South and Southwest—has been proven by scholars.[68] Already in 1989, Robert Young revealed that religion has an explanatory force when it comes to support for guns, along with such cultural factors as a heritage of frontier mentality and childhood socialization with firearms, especially common among Protestants; in addition, he cited the popularity of hunting among adherents of that religious faith.[69] Based on data from the 1984–1998 waves of the General Social Survey (GSS) on guns, Katarzyna Celinska was further able to show that Protestant affiliation independently predicts gun ownership.[70] And more than a decade later, analyzing a subsequent set of GSS results (2006–2014), David Yamane confirmed that religious fundamentalism is a significant factor, with evangelical Protestants being the most likely segment to own guns.[71]

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67 "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2015/05/RLS-08-26-full-report.pdf, accessed May 1, 2021.

68 While attention is paid here and in the following discussion to differentiate between the South and the Southwest, with Texas being considered part of the latter, it is important to note that this identity is also a creation and rebranding effort by the state. See Light Townsend Cummins, "History, Memory, and Rebranding Texas as Western for the 1936 Centennial," in *This Corner of Canaan: Essays on Texas in Honor of Randolph B. Campbell*, eds. Richard B. McCaslin, Donald E. Chipman, and Andrew J. Torget (Dento: University of North Texas Press, 2013), 41.

69 Robert Young, "The Protestant Heritage and the Spirit of Gun Ownership," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28, no. 3 (1989): 300–9; Celinska, "Individualism and Collectivism in America," 229–47.

70 Celinska, 232.

71 David Yamane, "Awash in a Sea of Faith and Firearms: Rediscovering the Connection Between Religion and Gun Ownership in America," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 55, no. 3 (2016): 622–36; see also Stephen M. Merino, "God and Guns: Examining Religious Influences on Gun Control Attitudes in the United States," *Religions* 9, no. 189 (2018): 1–13. However, generalizations about evangelicals supporting gun ownership also need to be problematized; for debates within the faith, particularly between generations, see Eliza Griswold, "God, Guns, and Country: The Evangelical Fight Over Firearms," *New Yorker*, April 19, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/god-guns-and-country-the-evangelical-fight-over-firearms, accessed May 1, 2021.

After Campus Carry law (SB 11) was passed in Texas in 2015, surveys have also revealed a correlation between religiosity and opinions on gun ownership around that specific issue. In polls conducted among Austin residents by the Texas Politics Project and the *Texas Tribune*, those who attended religious services more often were more likely to support guns on campus.[72] The same was found among undergraduates at UT Austin, the vast majority of whom were Texas natives: those who supported Campus Carry attended religious services more often and were also more likely to consider themselves religious. In addition, one in ten went so far as to assert that this position was informed by their religious beliefs.[73] Given the broad range of quantitative research, it is thus safe to conclude that religiosity is integrally connected to patterns of gun ownership.

Yet, regarding the relationship of guns and religion, with both offering empowerment and protection, one might ask if they are mutually exclusive. For example, if a person's faith is strong, how necessary is it for them to own a gun? Focusing precisely on the emotional and moral force gained from firearms, F. Carson Mencken and Paul Froese answer that sociological processes, including economic distress, are actually more significant than religion in shaping attitudes toward guns.[74] In other words, guns can give meaning and a feeling of empowerment for certain individuals in an acute situation—particularly white men in financial precarity—as they struggle with "a lack of connection to other sources of existential meaning."[75] According to their data, "high levels of religiosity decrease gun empowerment among gun owners suggesting that religious commitment offsets the need for meaning and identity through gun ownership."[76] A lack of granularity in the Baylor Religion Surveys (2013) that Mencken and Froese studied prevents such a conclusion, however. For

72 "The University of Texas / Texas Tribune Poll Cross Tabulations," The Texas Politics Project at The University of Texas at Austin in Conjunction with the Texas Tribune, June 26, 2015, https://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/sites/texaspolitics.utexas.edu/files/201506_poll_crosstabs.pdf, accessed May 1, 2021.

73 The survey of UT Austin undergraduates (N=1,204), conducted by the Campus Carry research team in spring 2019, was representative of that population in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, and fields of study. For more results, see Sampo Ruoppila and Albion M. Butters, "Not a 'Nonissue': Perceptions and Realities of Campus Carry at The University of Texas at Austin," *Journal of American Studies* 55, no. 2 (2021): 299–311.

74 Mencken and Froese, "Gun Culture in Action."

75 Mencken and Froese, 23. On the rhetoric of guns to defend frontier masculinity, linked with the breadwinner mentality, see Melzer, 25–43. On challenging economic circumstances affecting gun attitudes among men, see Jennifer Carlson, "Mourning Mayberry: Guns, Masculinity, and Socioeconomic Decline," *Gender and Society* 29, no. 3: 386–409.

76 Mencken and Froese, 18.

although they probed overall religiosity (i.e., how often one attends worship, how religious one considers oneself), they did not consider the specific religious faiths of the respondents, and Christian denominations can differ widely in their attitudes around guns. For instance, when Catholic Bishop Kevin Farrell (Diocese of Dallas) excoriated the "cowboy mentality" supporting the legislation to allow open and concealed carry of guns in churches, there was considerable backlash from evangelical Protestants.[77] Another relevant difference between Protestantism and Catholicism is that the former tends toward individualism and the latter is more institutionally coercive. Considering that the religious freedom set forth in the First Amendment has a strongly Protestant bent, it would not be surprising if the ideology surrounding gun ownership shared a similar character.[78] Accordingly, the rugged individualism of the so-called "cowboy mentality" of Texas can be seen as running deeper than a frontier imaginary alone, also reflecting intersections between one's religious and moral worldview and the perceived right to keep and bear arms.

As demonstrated in the legal discussion above on the theological basis for allowing firearms in church, there are challenges in separating religion from cultural heritage.[79] It is important to remember not to view religious as private and secular as public. To separate the two, to engage in the boundary-making exercise of the modern that creates artificial bifurcations and "has served as a mystifying ruse masking the undifferentiated cultural realities always in play," is to miss both their complex intertwining and the fact that they are constantly in motion.[80] Just as cultural forces may be present in the habitus of the gun itself—that is, the shared social norms and dispositions surrounding the object—religious aspects can be found as well. These are not necessarily solely based on religion per se, but a complex nexus of meanings (e.g., the hero ideal, moral status as a protector). The fact that religion is increasingly recognized as a diffuse category does not mean that things do not play a religious function, especially in modern social imaginaries.

Beyond the clear delineations of faith outlined above, particularly concerning the connection between evangelical Protestantism and attitudes toward guns, another helpful lens for the discussion can be gained by employing a

77 Peter Feuerherd, "Dallas Bishop Condemns Texas' Gun Carry Law, Prohibits Guns in Worship Spaces," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 14, 2016, https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/dallas-bishop-condemns-texas-gun-carry-law-prohibits-guns-worship-spaces2016, accessed May 1, 2021; see also Michael W. Austin, *God and Guns in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2020).

78 Randall Styers, "Religion and Cultural Theory," *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no. 1 (2013): 74.

79 Bankston et al., "The Influence of Fear," 287–305.

80 Styers, "Religion and Cultural Theory," 72–79.

more discursive study of religion. Aimed at exploring the construction of meanings, this approach reads texts, theory, rhetoric, and fieldwork data in a way that challenges existing definitions of religion as a pre-established category. In this case, therefore, "'religion' is understood as an empty signifier in the sense that it is historically, socially and culturally constructed and negotiated in various situations."[81] Thus, while the religious landscape of Texas always needs to be kept in the background, it is critical to also leave open the possibility of emergent forms, especially given the dynamic nature of gun culture. An example of this may be found in the moral significance of firearm fetishism, which finds support within the Christian worldview but is not limited to it. While seen in the cases above on gun-wielding protectors of churches, for example, the construction of a moral identity around guns is not limited to sacred space. Instead, it is dependent on a broader range of underlying forces and beliefs, which in turn are linked to gun imaginaries.

The first and simplest of these is the concept of the "good guy with a gun," the hero ideal discussed above, which has been promulgated by the NRA and through pop culture. Second is the sense of "moral right" afforded by the Second Amendment to own a gun, tied to the Christian worldview of those who wrote the U.S. Bill of Rights and the militia of the American Revolution being exemplarily upstanding.[82] Third, the hero imaginary of the frontier could be mentioned. With Gun Culture 2.0, all these forms combine, such that specific social groups have appeared to find in guns a new source of "moral purpose."[83] In times of potential lack or loss, white males in particular may rely on an emotional and moral connection with the gun as symbolic power, with the semiotic force of the cultural symbol helping to define and support one's identity. As Mencken and Froese explain, "It is these social contexts that trigger a need for moral meaning and an attraction to frontier gun mythology; they also ultimately determine an American's perception of guns and their importance to self and society."[84] Thus, the moral aspect of gun imaginaries needs to be understood in multiple ways, in terms of both historical and cultural contexts,

81 Teemu Taira, "Making Space for Discursive Study in Religious Studies," *Helsinki Study of Religions: A Reader* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2016), 74. On the term "empty signifier," used in semiotics to refer to a word or concept that has floating meaning and may be appropriated in various ways, including in the service of religion or its theorization, see Michael Bergunder, "What is Religion? The Unexplained Subject Matter of Religious Studies," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26 (2014): 264–66.

82 Stroud, "Good Guys with Guns," 218.

83 Mencken and Froese, "Gun Culture in Action," 24.

84 Mencken and Froese, 3.

nationally but also in relation to Texas in particular, with continuing negotiations around gun culture.

Gun ownership implies—and, legally speaking, demands—a social contract. In addition, it is attended by moral expectations, often set by religion. Since perceptions of firearms by Christians in Texas have been shown to be favorable overall, there tends to be communal support for a person to have one, especially when they are socially embedded among others who are doing the same. As Collins notes about ritual, "The individual feels moral when he or she is acting with the energy derived from the heightened experience of the group."[85] Phenomenologically speaking, it is worth highlighting that the gun owner *feels* moral when carrying—and for many, this would not happen if their religious worldview did not support it.

Yet, the instrumentality of the gun can play a role in this feeling as well. For example, gun carriers told Jennifer Carlson in the field that "they believed they had become *better people* because of their choice to carry guns."[86] On one hand, this belief may be predicated on individuals being able to protect their loved ones and society at large; the literal power of the fetish item gives moral empowerment. On the other, the fact that the fetish has actual power reinforces its credibility as a talisman, which needs to be kept close, if not on one's body. But is it accurate to consider the gun a religious object?

Other than some rare examples in which ministry and worship do revolve around firearms (e.g., Pastor Hyung Jin Moon's "Rod of Iron" church), there is insufficient evidence to support such a claim.[87] Moreover, while more widely one hears of gun cults, this term refers only to the social practices involving firearms; guns themselves do not promise any divine reward. Indeed, it is the immanent quality of the fetish, relevant in daily life rather than some undetermined soteriological future, which benefits the person holding it.[88] Furthermore, the gun resists interpretation as a religious object per se, unlike the Muslim's *hijab* veil or the Sikh's *kirpan* knife, which are clearly linked to demonstrations of faith.[89] For this reason, it is perhaps more accurate to locate firearms fetishism in relation to gun imaginaries, not the gun itself, operating

85 Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 39.

86 Carlson, "Mourning Mayberry," 402. Italics in the original.

87 Tess Owen, "We Spent a Wild Weekend with the Gun-Worshipping Moonie Church That's Trying to Go MAGA," *Vice News*, October 31, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en/article/xwep53/we-spent-a-wild-weekend-with-the-gun-worshipping-moonie-church-thats-trying-to-go-maga, accessed May 1, 2021.

88 Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising*, 56.

89 Cf. Qur'ān 24:31; Guru Gobind Singh's command to the Sikh community in 1699 regarding "the five Ks."

in a mutually sustaining framework of belief. Such a relationship is not without precedent throughout history. For example, if one considers the sword of the medieval knight made holy for the Crusades or the samurai's *katana* blessed by Shinto priests, they were special precisely because of their relation to religious mores—namely, chivalry or the Bushidō code of honor.[90] The weapon is what helped the warrior be what he needed to be in order to fulfill his moral duty and hero imaginary. This same type of entwinement is arguably taking place today in Texas with gun imaginaries, with guns gaining religious significance in the process.

David Graeber understood the fetish as midway between magic and religion. Following Émile Durkheim's view that the former is concerned with the aims of the individual and the latter with society, the power object appropriated for oneself entails powers also being imposed in relation to the social bond.[91] Simply put, along with the gun comes moral responsibility. By sanctioning the gun, which will always remain a threat due to the liminal nature of its potential use in either sacred or profane ways (e.g., righteous defense versus murder), society subverts its power from the personal and harnesses it for the collective. The same process can be said to take place when firearms are allowed in church. The gun is conceptually transformed from an object that takes life to one that saves lives. In this manner it becomes sacrosanct, per Durkheim's sociology of religion, which defines as one of the functions of ritual the honoring of an object that has social value, in order to make it sacred or to ensure that such a status is maintained. If for Durkheim the principle of the sacred is a transfiguration of society and its blessings are the morals that society affords, the sacred quality of the gun for its owner—its fetish value—is realized in the moral character its imaginary inculcates.[92]

This can be explained in a way that better clarifies the relationship between morals and religion per se. In his discussion of modern social imaginaries, Charles Taylor makes the pragmatist argument that they have been possible through a process of secularization and disenchantment, a shift from the normative discourse of a religious worldview. Due to what Taylor calls the "great disembedding," religion has been forced to operate and assume new forms in a profane world, taking a "different place."[93] As a consequence, "the ways

90 Derek A. Rivard, *Blessing the World: Ritual and Lay Piety in Medieval Religion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 160–63.

91 Graeber, "Fetishism as Social Creativity," 427.

92 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, [1915] 1995), 358.

93 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 49–68, 194.

people imagine their social existence" are simply moral, based on a collective agreement of how to behave.[94] Gun imaginaries—as a modern social imaginary—can thus be seen in alignment with the neo-Durkheimian "modern moral order"[95] as much as any purely religious one. For many Texans, however, the distancing from religion is a problem. In a debate with Beto O'Rourke, for example, Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) blamed the increasing trend in school shootings on "removing God from the public square."[96]

Indeed, differentiating between moral systems exposes a tension in belief systems, with guns situated at the core. According to Max Weber's theory of disenchantment of the world, modern scientific inquiry and technology are privileged over faith and religion.[97] While personal claims to religiosity can certainly be maintained, in their retreat one finds a shift of prioritization of religious agency from the transcendental to the immanent, the domain in which firearms are operative. As a hinge between competing imaginaries, the gun simultaneously disenchants and enchants. It is made of cold steel, and yet it stirs strong emotions. Writing on the magical quality of guns "as an enchanted assemblage of performance, control, omnipotence, pleasure, and fear,"[98] Springwood resists a purely Weberian interpretation, noting that "despite advancements in science and technology, practices in contemporary society remain wholly enchanted by imagined force(s)."[99] This brings us full circle back to fetishism, whose complex theoretical frame is able to encompass these apparent contradictions:

> Here magic is modern, having never faded in the shadow of modernity, always saturating the technologies of science and of the state, not to mention capitalist fetishism. Perhaps magic is what links desire to fetish, both of the Lacanian and the Marxist sort.[100]

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94 Taylor, 23.

95 Taylor, 3–22.

96 R. G. Ratcliffe, "Cruz and O'Rourke Confident in First Debate, But Was There a Clear Winner?" *Texas Monthly*, September 22, 2018, https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/ted-cruz-beto-orourke-first-debate-contentious/, accessed May 1, 2021. On guns as a response to the moral decay of the Christian nation, see Whitehead et al., "Gun Control in the Crosshairs," 2.

97 Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 155; see also Terry Maley, "Max Weber and the Iron Cage of Technology," *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 24, no. 1 (2004): 69–86.

98 Springwood, "Gun Concealment," 452.

99 Springwood, 455.

100 Springwood, 448.

In the end, the formation of moral identity through firearms may be sociocultural, religious, or based on a new modern moral order. At the risk of teleology, however, the point here is not the exact nature of the cause but the way in which in it is expressed. Fusing power and signification in a moral context, the idealized hero is the manifestation of firearms fetishism, embodying the relationship between gun imaginaries and the gun itself.

4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the ways in which gun imaginaries have taken form through various types of firearms fetishism in Texas. Outlining the state's religious landscape with a historical view toward shifting gun cultures, it has shown a range of gun-related expressions of Christianity and their significance in the formation of moral identity. In relation to alternative theoretizations of fetishism, guns have also been examined in terms of commodification and masculinity.

The religious and ideological landscape of the United States—and Texas in particular—is changing. Attrition in church membership, especially among the younger demographic, calls into question the transmission of the core values of Christianity—or at least it signals an increasing gap in worldviews. At the same time, even as ongoing urbanization and the decline in hunting suggest a continued generational turn to Gun Culture 2.0 of owning a firearms for the protection of oneself and others, legislation has passed to allow constitutional carry in Texas; this means that gun owners will not need a permit to holster firearms in public, either concealed or openly. How will these changes affect the moral component of gun ownership? Will young new heroes fill the shoes of Stephen Willeford and Jack Wilson?

This difficult question can perhaps be addressed through a final consideration of the three interpretations of firearms fetishism comprising the focus of this study. Because at the level of religious or magical power the fetish item is fundamentally intertwined with moral significance, it is hard to imagine a complete rupture of certain gun imaginaries (like the "good guy with a gun") from societal mores. As long as vestiges of the hero ideal remain, even in the face of individualist tendencies the fetish will generally be directed to the benefit of the collective. The danger of a rupture lies in the overextension and shifting of the gun imaginaries themselves (e.g., beyond the gun having value as a tool or even a cultural symbol). This can be described in terms of Baudrillard's "loss of the real,"[101] whereby, at a certain point, there is a risk that what the

101 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: SAGE, 1976).

gun used to represent will be replaced by a simulacrum of its own existence. Here, fear of the government coming to take one's guns, such as fomented by ideologues like Alex Jones broadcasting out of Austin, can also signify a fear of gun imaginaries being censored by "woke" culture. One could therefore ask if threatening a gun owner's identity entails a risk of also threatening the moral order built upon it.

In terms of consumerist firearms fetishism, gun sales in Texas are up, and there is every reason to believe that the trend will continue in its current dramatic fashion. In practice, this means a larger gap between the "haves" and the "have nots." Because attitudes on gun ownership tend to be predicated on strong ideological divides, which are often expressed through othering rhetoric, this does not bode well. When buying a gun is linked to being a "good American,"[102] it sets up a morally difficult situation regarding those who do not own a gun, who are not "good." Following this particular gun imaginary to its natural conclusion along ideological lines, one ends up with two Americas. This differs significantly from fifty years ago, of course. When asked about divides around gun ownership in Texas in the past, a professor at St. Edward's University in Austin confessed, "I don't remember it in my childhood being as much of a concern either way."[103] This is not the case today.

Loss of the real can also be seen in the shifting gun imaginary of the frontiersman, whose relationship with his firearm was inextricably linked to ideals of self-sufficiency, masculinity, independence from the state, and rule over nature.[104] With nature having ever-decreasing relevance, the other aspects have gained more importance. In gun control debates that center around conflicting visions of "American-ness," tending either more egalitarian or more individualistic,[105] values of individualism are an ever clearer predictor for gun ownership and attitudes.[106] In practice, the protection of the gun owner may be limited to their defined community, whatever that means in the face of increased tribalism. Drawing on a heritage of defiance in the face of potential loss, the gun imaginary of the Alamo may be rhetorically conjoined with threats of martial retaliation: the individualist strain of "don't mess with Texas" still stands as a warning to not mess with Texans' guns. Potential loss is also at the core of the sexual interpretation of the gun fetish. In the context of "us

102 Mencken and Froese, "Gun Culture in Action," 7.

103 Interview with the author, St. Edward's faculty (Texas native), April 26, 2018, notes in possession of author.

104 James D. Wright, "Ten Essential Observations on Guns in America," *Society* 32, no. 3 (1995): 69.

105 Dan M. Kahan, "The Gun Control Debate: A Culture-Theory Manifesto," *Washington & Lee Law Review* 60, no. 1 (2003): 6.

106 Celinksa, "Individualism and Collectivism in America," 229–30.

versus them" polarization, this aspect has special relevance for the male gun owner. Defending one's guns is a way to maintain hegemonic masculinity in a time of gender precarity.[107] Similarly, when the nature of the idealized (gendered) hero is called into question, increased semiotic importance may be attached to gun imaginaries.

Entangled with ideology and identities, the ontological gerrymandering between modern social imaginaries and a loss of the real opens the door for multiple possible futures—both negative and positive—from increasing insulation and individualism to insurrection under the guise of patriotism to a reconciliation of differing worldviews. In the worst-case scenario, fear of the government coming to take one's guns can lead to a self-fulfilling apocalyptic prophecy, as seen in the siege of Waco, Texas in 1993. At the other extreme, with gun imaginaries informing and being informed by moral behavior, it is possible to hope for a more integrated outcome, where civil debate between different communities may account for shared concerns for security, and the increasing trend toward individual self-protection does not eclipse the ethos where the interests and safety of the collective are of greatest import. Given the future unknowns around the moral component and signification of gun ownership, fetishism offers an important theoretical lens to illuminate the complex dynamics of power and belief surrounding firearms going forward as well.

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107 Carlson, "Mourning Mayberry," 405.

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CHAPTER 9

Imaging Texas Gun Culture: A Photo Essay

Albion M. Butters, Benita Heiskanen, and Lotta Kähkönen

The following presentation of 17 full-color photographs (courtesy of the John Morton Center for North American Studies) displays both formal and informal imaginaries of Texas gun culture, providing a visual context for the various subject matters discussed in the chapters of the current volume. This set of images was collected during fieldwork in Texas in 2018–2019 during the research project on Campus Carry conducted by the John Morton Center for North American Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. As such, it encompasses the "before and after" of the implementation of the SB 11 legislation, providing an alternative interpretative lens onto the conceptualization and experiencing of firearms in the campus space, as well as related aspects of gun culture in the Lone Star State. Through the visual materials, we get a broader and more complex understanding of the ways in which people take a stand on policymaking. Moreover, the visual imagery gives a useful tool to penetrate official discourses and historical imaginaries that might not be revealed otherwise.

This chapter provides an important linkage between theoretical discussion and an experiential component, which focuses on both the research subjects' and scholars' spatial maneuvering within and outside of academia and other areas of Texas. By presenting the photographs without any interpretation, aside from very brief captions, we seek to give readers the opportunity to encounter the images as we did, not imposing closure and letting them speak for themselves.

FIGURE 9.1 George Washington Statue and the UT Tower

FIGURE 9.2 View of the Main Mall from the UT Tower

FIGURE 9.3 Bullet Holes atop the Tower

FIGURE 9.4 Tower Bullet Hole Ornamentation

FIGURE 9.5 Turtle Pond Memorial

FIGURE 9.6 Turtle Pond Granite Memorial

FIGURE 9.7 "Gun-Free UT" Signage, Garrison Hall and West Mall Office Building, UT Austin

FIGURE 9.8 "Gun-Free UT" Vigil at MLK, Jr. Statue, UT Austin

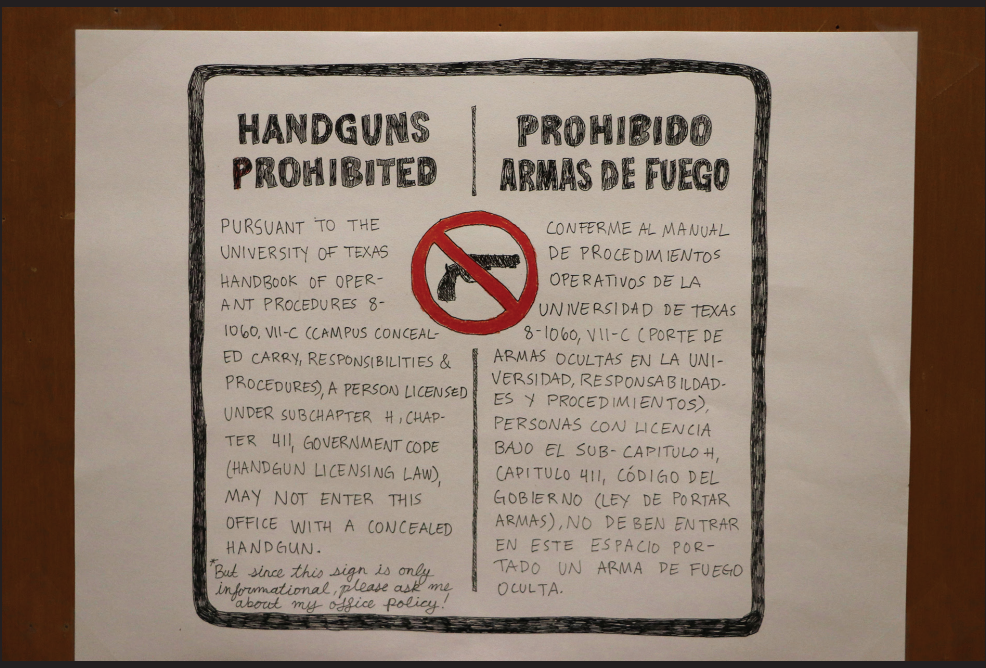

FIGURE 9.9 Non-official Sign, Faculty Office, UT Austin

FIGURE 9.10 Non-official Signs, Faculty Offices, UT Austin

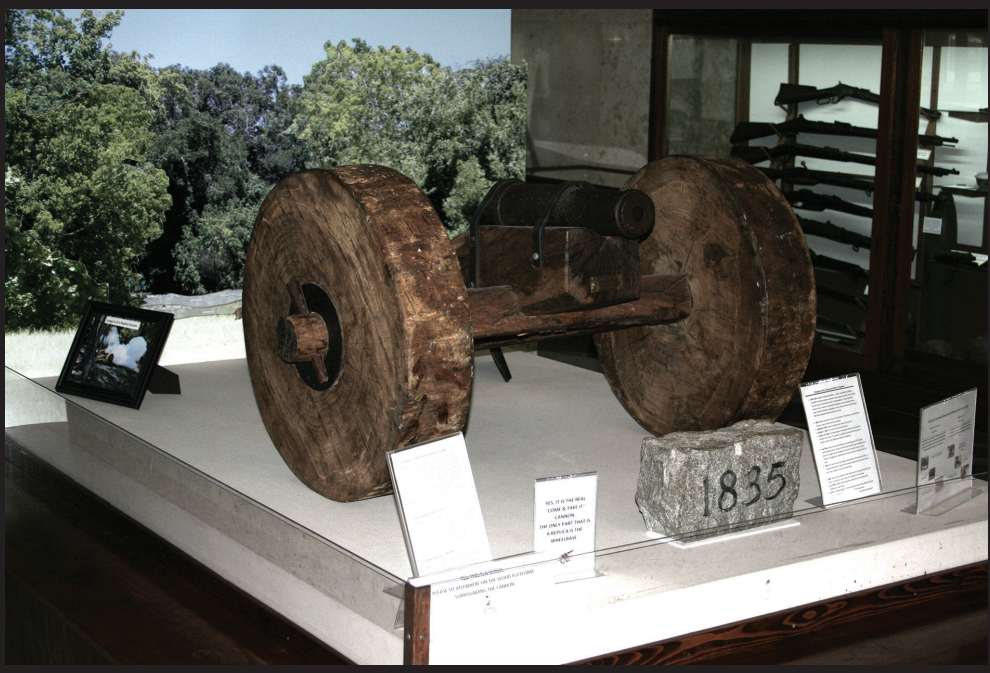

FIGURE 9.11 The Historical "Come and Take It" Cannon, Gonzales Memorial Museum, Gonzales, TX

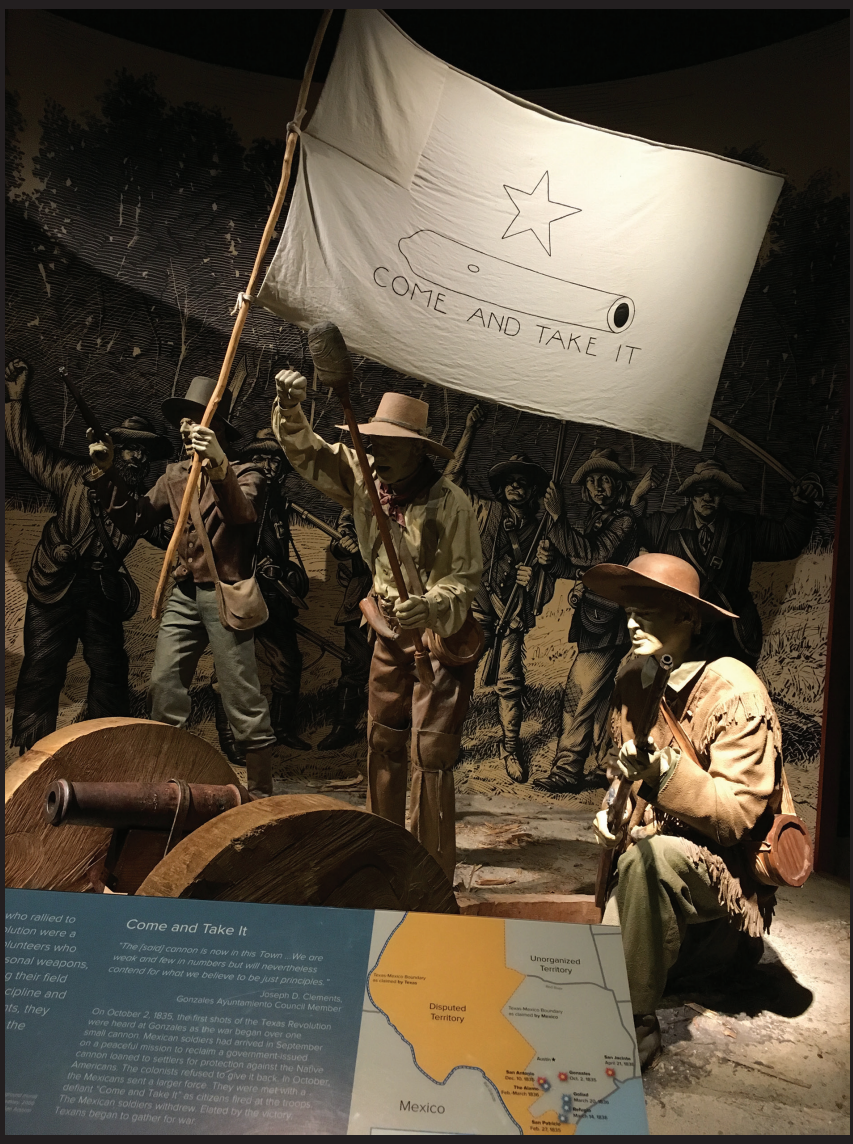

FIGURE 9.12 "Come and Take It" Exhibit, Bullock Texas State History Museum, Austin, TX

FIGURE 9.13 "Texas Ranger," Texas Capitol

FIGURE 9.14 "I Shall Never Surrender or Retreat," Alamo Statue, Texas Capitol

FIGURE 9.15 "March For Our Lives" Protest Sign, Texas Capitol

FIGURE 9.16 "March For Our Lives" Protest Signs, Texas Capitol

FIGURE 9.17 Gun Shirts, Austin, TX

CHAPTER 10

The Explanatory, Social, and Performative Power of Gun Imaginaries

Benita Heiskanen and Pekka M. Kolehmainen

In this closing chapter, we return to the ways in which imaginaries related to firearms—complete with their explications, actions, and reactions—serve as lenses to understanding Texas history, society, and culture, as well as its greater relationship with U.S. gun culture. As a title and a metaphor, *Up in Arms* speaks to the range of clashes brought about by the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment right to keep and bear firearms, the sundry groups and individuals involved in said clashes, and their ramifications on quotidian, politico-ideological, and scholarly levels. By focusing on various approaches to imaginaries, images, and/or imagi(ni)ng of guns in Texas and the United States, the contributors to this volume have built a bridge between theoretical and everyday viewpoints, which reveal firearms' deep-seated connections to identity formation, everyday behavior, and belief systems that shape fundamental questions and attitudes about individual and collective being in the world. In so doing, the chapters particularly elucidate the explanatory, social, and performative power embedded in discourses and practices taking a stand on gun rights and/or restrictions.

Because neither gun culture nor gun imaginaries are the property of any one discipline alone, this book's discussion has made a case for a transdisciplinary American Studies approach based on a phenomenon-based starting point, one which underscores various interpretive lenses through an examination of imaginaries, images, and/or imagi(ni)ng, and their historical, cultural, and societal manifestations. While scholarship on guns often has a monodisciplinary focus, this work has sought to offer an interpretive framework that steers beyond disciplinary boundaries, providing a toolbox and a roadmap for discussing both historical and contemporary imaginaries. Moreover, given the symbiotic nature between the federal- and state-level dynamics of gun debates, the volume has approached the gun question as a dialogue between the national explications and place-based realities of groups of people in favor of or opposing gun rights. Because of its special status in national imaginaries and lore related to firearms, the Lone Star State serves as an apt arena to explore the projected imaginaries surrounding the rationales of gun-carrying, and also

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highlights the interrelationships between local-national liaisons embedded in discussions of gun culture.

1 The Explanatory Power of Guns

The contributors of *Up in Arms* have demonstrated the multiple levels through which imaginaries facilitate the explanatory power of guns. Through imaginaries, guns become connected to larger deliberations about U.S. nationhood and culture. In so doing, imaginaries allow the creation of connections which invest guns with explanatory power in relation to larger socio-historical, political, and cultural dynamics. As various social groups turn guns into objects of imagination and imagi(ni)ng, *guns as imaginaries* can be amplified and utilized in various types of formal and informal messaging, including both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The chapters in this volume have traced such processes and messaging from a range of temporal, social, and cultural vantage points.

Through a historical journey across landmark events and characters, Laura Hernández-Ehrisman's discussion is a case in point in demonstrating the explanatory firepower of guns in Texas history, mythology, and tradition. Depicting the ways in which gun culture was imagined into the very core of collective identity, built environment, and popular culture, her chapter illustrates the ways in which Texas mythologized itself as an imaginary of the Wild West, one that has perpetuated the image of the state as being unique from the rest of the nation. In particular through popular culture representations, Texas has, throughout its existence, been depicted as standing for and epitomizing the essence of a community imagined through guns. Such conceptualizations are reflected in present-day statements of ebullience, including the slogan "We Don't Dial 911," which are spread through paraphernalia, commercials, and political campaigns. In such portrayals, the fiercely independent character of "Texan-ness" has rested firmly on the capacity to draw one's own gun—eye-to-eye and toe-to-toe—in the face of imaginary adversaries. As Hernández-Ehrisman demonstrates, Texas has thus been principally imagined as a community through guns, with its history explained by gun battles and its identity reinforced by gun-carrying.

Yet, as Pekka M. Kolehmainen's chapter makes evident, Texas's gun culture also stands for and exemplifies the national imagery of gun carrying in many ways, echoing various imaginaries and stories that guns tell about U.S. history, society, and culture. For example, the rhetoric surrounding the Founding Fathers serves as a gateway to negotiations about Texas's relationship between

national culture, and the multiple and fraught intricacies embedded therein, which speak to fundamental beliefs about nationhood, inclusion, and exclusion. Through the Founding Fathers' envisioning of the right to keep and bear arms, Kolehmainen forges a connection between gun imaginaries and political imaginaries tied to partisan ideological viewpoints, while also driving legislative efforts and policy agendas. Furthermore, with examples from local and national political campaigning, Kolehmainen's chapter probes the subtle ways in which state-level politics not only has to do with guns, but particular types of guns as sources of identity formation. Such signification is used for tactical purposes in politico-electoral agendas and the like, in particular signposting state-level identity and the collective identification of Texan-ness. Moreover, guns play a key role in shared narratives, cultural artifacts, and nostalgia for a long-gone past that may have precious little to do with de facto circumstances of the present.

Beyond the federal- and state-level discussions, the volume reveals the explanatory power of gun-carrying in various spatio-temporal settings. The various site-specific contexts, ranging from educational forums and places of worship to media and popular cultural representations, illustrate what guns mean for people's senses of security and insecurity on a quotidian basis. Focusing on events on The University of Texas at Austin flagship campus, Lotta Kähkönen, Benita Heiskanen, Mila Seppälä, and Juha A. Vuori depict the ways in which individuals and groups conceptualize, represent, and commemorate guns as imaginaries in various contexts of the armed campus. Through a discussion of the memories constituted around the trauma of the Tower shooting at UT Austin in 1966, Kähkönen presents a temporal linkage of trauma experiences on campus between different generations of Texans, and the ensuing imaginaries of both those who did and did not experience the actual event.

Heiskanen illustrates the visceral imaginary reactions toward Campus Carry prompted by the news of the imminent implementation of the legislation in 2015. The responses which were triggered by perceptions of the impact of guns on personal security or insecurity particularly highlight the explanatory power of guns before and after the armed campus became a reality. Seppälä, in turn, discusses youth activism against gun culture as radical political imagination after the Tower shooting and with the implementation of Campus Carry, calling attention to the generational experiences of the activists taking issue with the status quo in various contexts of higher learning. Vuori's case study on videos targeting student activists highlights how popular culture is intrinsically linked with conceptualizing vernacular security culture: that is, senses of security and insecurity beyond official, top-down viewpoints of security conceptualizations. Albion M. Butters's treatment of the multiple interpretations

of guns as fetishism illustrates the various explanatory processes and meta-discourses attached to guns in such contexts as places of worship, which may ostensibly have little to do with firearms but are nevertheless central to identity formation and the belief systems of practitioners of religion.

2 The Social Power of Guns

One of the main insights of the original research conducted for this book is that imaginaries and narratives surrounding gun culture reveal much about the social power of guns, underscoring a whole host of issues that have no bearing on the function of firearms per se but, rather, the discordant social realities of the people debating them. The volume's discussion—which takes into consideration quotidian experiences, grassroots activism, policymaking, and cultural discourses—highlights the vast range of ramifications of the presence of guns for social relations. Indeed, the power of an individual to carry a loaded, lethal weapon necessarily affects the sensory perception, spatial maneuvering, and embodied reactions of not only the carrier but those adjacent to the weapon. As evidenced by the research for this volume, not knowing which members of a social group are carrying firearms has consequences for individual, intra-, and intergroup relations. The understanding of the social aspects attributed to the everyday functioning of guns and gun-carrying thus plays a critical role in delineations of identity, community building, and social divisions, both contemporaneously and historically.

Whether civilians as gun carriers—either as "good" or "bad" "guys with guns"—are imagined as threats or saviors fundamentally has to do with perceptions of which people in society are imagined as heroes and which are perceived as victims. Historically, white men in the United States have been regarded as defenders of the frontier homestead against the perceived threat of non-white men. Indeed, it is against the understanding of this historical background that the myth-making and cultural representations around *Texas as a gun imaginary* and *guns as a Texan imagery* also assume meaning. Even though Texas imaginaries and narratives about gun culture—complete with the historical mythos about frontier masculinity, the Alamo, and the Texas Rangers—suggest a link between guns and whiteness, Hernández-Ehrisman complicates the notion of Texas gun culture *as* whiteness. By revisiting the events leading up to the annexation of Texas into the United States, her discussion exposes the ways in which Texas history was always intrinsically about the interactions and power-brokering between Anglos, Mexicans, Indigenous tribes, and the enslaved. Butters reveals the ways in which guns provided an imaginary for men to see themselves in unison, belonging to a national story

in which they—as armed heroes—defended their country and community. In the twenty-first-century context, Heiskanen points out how the debates surrounding Campus Carry were centrally about the assumed racial, class, and gender imaginaries associated with gun carriers and how the contestation of social hierarchies on campus reflected social organization in U.S. society. In Vuori's treatment of videos, gun imaginaries also serve as models for imagined futures in potential active shooter scenarios, for example, corresponding to individual beliefs about the capacity of one's behavior in a crisis situation.

Throughout this volume, the contributors exhibit the multiple ways in which guns have come to serve the purposes of media, cultural, activist, and moral imaginaries that eventually assumed a life of their own, irrespective of what state legislators or university administrators wanted to envision. Deliberately pushing beyond policymaking, the volume highlights the ways in which communities themselves experienced, negotiated, and challenged gun rights and restriction—and their ramifications—on multiple fronts. Vuori's discussion, for instance, depicts how leftist and feminist posturing were presented in YouTube videos as threatening vis-à-vis gun rights activists in their effort to limit individual rights and, in so doing, emasculating individual gun carriers. Butters's discussion of firearms fetishism points to the ways in which gun-carrying supports a notion of a religious protector/masculine hero ideal, informing individuals' understanding of their own morality, religiosity, and masculine prowess. Drawing on first-hand interviews, media texts, and cultural representations, the contributors showcase the actual practices and representations through which individuals imagine their social existence together. Therefore, it is in the social power produced around guns that historical cultural, and political phenomena come together or collide, serving as gateways between real life and imaginary scenarios. When all is said and done, the lived experiences that the discussion draws from demonstrate best the ways in which guns serve as a locus to forge connections, drive interactions, and shape social relations and individual and collective identities.

3 The Performative Power of Guns

A main premise for this volume's discussion at the outset was that gun imaginaries have significant performative power and that they serve important functions in history, society, and culture. Throughout the volume, therefore, the chapters discuss this performative aspect, either implicitly or explicitly. Kähkönen's discussion of the capacity of narratives to serve an ameliorative function for a collective need to understand the long-term effects of the Tower shooting of 1966 on the community is one such example. The Tower shooting

itself has been used as a tool for arguments by activists for and against firearms legislation. Moreover, the performative power of guns is particularly evident in the chapters by Seppälä, Heiskanen, and Vuori, who consider the grassroots measures with which various communities advocated for their agendas, either for or against the Campus Carry legislation on and off campus, as well as in online contexts. Seppälä shows how "March for Our Lives" activists and the organizers of "Cocks Not Glocks" galvanized a future-oriented agenda through the envisioning of a radical political imagination and mass mobilization. The "Cocks Not Glocks" movement's performative dimensions were specifically evidenced in its ability to reimagine gun control activism through humor, while "March for Our Lives'" generational utopias redefined the goals of gun control activism across the United States.

The flip side of the performative power of gun rights activism is displayed in Vuori's discussion of videos that advocated for the Campus Carry legislation in Texas. The publicly staged mock shooting in Austin, as well as the video depicting the murder of a "Cocks Not Glocks" activist holding a dildo for protection in lieu of a gun, display the performative power of guns as violent spectacles. In the context of YouTube or the streets of Austin, these examples show the ways in which gun debates penetrate shared public space into areas beyond campus. Their distinct performative goal was to advocate for even looser gun regulation in the form of so-called "permitless" or "Constitutional Carry."

The temporal scope of the volume traces the ramifications and possibilities that the performative power of guns enabled at different historical moments. Kolehmainen's chapter highlights the ways in which guns have been used to perform historical imaginaries, connecting the struggles of contemporary political activists with their imagined historical forbearers, thus also linking guns to historical narrativizations of imagined pasts. Seppälä illustrates how the possibilities of political imagination have been expanded and constrained by the performative power of guns at different times, from the radical imagination of the 1960s to the scope of present-day gun activism. Kähkönen explores the dynamics of trauma and silence as factors constraining cultural expressions in the aftermath of the Tower Shooting. These elucidations underline the ways in which the performative power of guns is always conducted in dialogue with broader historical, political, and cultural sentiments.

4 Entangled Gun Imaginaries

The explanatory, social, and performative power of guns respectively become entangled in such ways that guns are understood vis-à-vis their broader societal contexts and everyday surroundings. The Campus Carry legislation in Texas

was a threshold moment in which such entangled imaginaries of guns became apparent, reflecting both past gun legislation and future scenarios. While in 2016 the notion of Constitutional Carry legislation seemed but a far-fetched fantasy of the most avid pro-gun advocates, during the finalization of this volume in 2021 it became a reality. Governor Greg Abbott signed HB 1927 into law on June 17, 2021, and it came into effect on September 1. For individuals meeting a specific set of legal criteria, the bill removed the existing requirement for a permit to carry a holstered handgun. During the signing ceremony, the Governor described the bill as a document that "instilled freedom in the Lone Star state."[1] Just as the Campus Carry bill had come into effect on the 50th anniversary of the Tower Shooting, the Constitutional Carry bill was passed in the first legislative session after the fatal mass shootings in El Paso and Midland-Odessa.

The passage of Constitutional Carry—the "Holy Grail of gun laws," as it is known by some gun rights advocates—serves as an apt ending to the examination of gun imaginaries discussed in this volume. At their core, imaginaries serve as tools for people to mentally process the presence of guns in U.S. society, politics, and culture. Through contesting and competing imaginaries, activists on both sides of the issue have created divergent social realities which connect guns to deeper fractures between their worldviews. The gun question has thus become tangled up with other issues, fueling fissures and antagonisms that emerge elsewhere in the political landscape. By studying the issue of guns from a transdisciplinary point of view, the volume has demonstrated the interconnectedness of guns with a range of relevant historical, political, and cultural phenomena.

Although Texas is repeatedly imagined through its association with guns, *Up in Arms* has demonstrated the extent to which this association has been culturally constructed, politically manufactured, and historically contingent. To call attention to such contingencies, the volume has located various avenues of influence that have fostered the mythical connection between Texas and guns. At the same time, the chapters in the volume have elucidated the connections that guns have forged between local Texan identity and formations of national identity. Through their varied discussions of gun imaginaries, the contributors have revealed the many ways in which Texas is indeed special—and, then again, how it is not—for such matters ultimately remain in the (bulls)eye of the beholder.

1 Heidi Pérez-Moreno, "New Texas Law Allowing People to Carry Handguns Without Permits Stirs Mix of Fear, Concern Among Law Enforcement," *Texas Tribune*, August 16, 2021, https://www.texastribune.org/2021/08/16/texas-permitless-carry-gun-law/, accessed April 28, 2022.

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