

SYLLABUS

PUBLIC WEBINAR

Ten Essential Observations on Guns in America

(a.k.a., The Sociology of Guns)

Instructor: David Yamane, Professor of Sociology, Wake Forest University

Time: Mondays, 6:00 pm-7:00 pm Eastern Time (recordings to be made available to registrants)

Dates: 7 weekly meetings from March 25 to May 6, 2024

Platform: Zoom Webinar. Registration is required: https://wakeforest-university.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ZlTmDJkwQt2XDsdqpJYUOQ

OVERVIEW

Guns and their use often have a spectacular presence in American society, not to mention its imagination. Familiar examples abound, from Pennsylvania Rifles to the AR-15, the Colt Single Action Army to the Glock 17, Wild Bill Hickock to Kyle Rittenhouse, and Concord, Massachusetts to Uvalde, Texas. Guns are also a part of everyday life in communities across the country. They are used as tools of self-defense and criminal violence, and are one of the most commonly owned pieces of sporting equipment in the United States.

Clearly, guns are an important part of American society and culture. With over 400,000,000 guns held by at least 80 million private citizens and a Constitutional amendment associated with gun ownership, the possession, regulation, meaning, and use of firearms reaches into important realms of American culture and society.

This webinar explores some of the many roles guns play in the U.S. from a sociological perspective, including the prevalence and distribution of guns, lawful possession and use of firearms, and gun crime and injuries.

Our approach will be organized according to James Wright's 1995 essay, "**Ten Essential Observations on Guns in America.**" We will engage with and attempt to update this classic essay, which is now nearly thirty years old.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

[1] PRIMARY: You will better understand guns' multifaceted role in the U.S., including the history, legalities, and everyday uses and abuses. Relatedly, you will be able to approach the issue of guns in society in a more objective and nuanced manner.

[2] SECONDARY: You will better understand your personal beliefs about guns, including scrutinizing your relationship to guns to make informed choices about your participation with and the place of guns in the communities in which you live.

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT CLASS

[1] This course is offered as a public service. There is no tuition but attendees must register for the webinar.

[2] This course is offered on the Zoom Webinar not Zoom Meeting platform. Only Professor Yamane and any special guests will have speaking privileges. Webinar attendees have access to Q&A and chat functionality only.

[3] Each synchronous (live) session will be recorded for later (asynchronous) viewing by webinar registrants.

[4] Course materials will be provided via a public website: <https://davidyamane.com/public-webinar-syllabus>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

NOTE: Webinar attendees are not expected to have read the material for each module, some of which are quite complex. They are the basis for Professor Yamane's presentations. All course materials are subject to change.

Module 1 (March 25): Guns Are Normal, Normal People Use Guns

Observation 1: Half the households in the country own at least one gun.

Observation 2: There are 200 million guns already in circulation in the United States, give or take a few tens of millions.

Core Resources

- James D. Wright, "Ten Essential Observations on Guns in America," *Society* (March/April 1995)

- David Yamane, [“Guns Are Normal, Normal People Use Guns.”](#) *Gun Culture 2.0 Blog* (26 July 2021)
- John Berrigan, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller, “The Number and Type of Private Firearms in the United States,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2022).
- William English, “2021 National Firearms Survey: Updated Analysis Including Types of Firearms Owned,” SSRN/Georgetown McDonough School of Business Research Paper No. 4109494 (28 September 2022).

Supplemental Resources

On the anthropological normality of projectile weaponry among human beings:

- Randy Miyan, “The Liberal Gun Owners Lens, Pillar 1: Anthropology, Evolution, and Human Innateness” (this page explains the Liberal Gun Owners Lens overall and has a link at the bottom to access a PDF of the LGO Anthropology Lens) (2 December 2021).

The following two videos are spoken explanations of the perspective found in the LGO Lens document linked above:

- Randy Miyan, “The 2022 Sociology of Guns Lecture: The Human-Weapon Relationship (Part 2),” Liberal Gun Owners YouTube channel (48 minutes) (28 September 2022).
- Randy Miyan, “The 2022 Sociology of Guns Lecture: The Human-Weapon Relationship (Part 3),” Liberal Gun Owners YouTube channel (40 minutes) (28 September 2022).

Module 2 (April 1): Gun Culture 2.0

Observation 3: Most of those 200 million guns are owned for socially innocuous sport and recreational purposes.

Observation 4: *Many guns are also owned for self-defense against crime*, and some are indeed used for that purpose; whether they are actually safer or not, many people certainly seem to feel safer when they have a gun.

Core Resources

- David Yamane, [“The Sociology of US Gun Culture.”](#) *Sociology Compass* 11:7 (July 2017).
- David Yamane, [“Gun Culture 2.0: Evolution and Contours of Defensive Gun Ownership in America.”](#) *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* Volume 704, Issue 1 (November 2022).
- David Yamane, [“Gun Culture 2.0 and the Great Gun-Buying Spree of 2020.”](#) *Discourse* (2 February 2021).

Supplemental Resources

- Matthew Miller, Wilson Zhang, and Deborah Azrael, “Firearm Purchasing During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Results From the 2021 National Firearms Survey.” *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2022).
- Claire Boine, Michael Siegel, Craig Ross, Eric W. Fleegler, and Ted Alcorn. “What Is Gun Culture? Cultural Variations and Trends across the United States.” *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (2020).
- Joseph Wertz, Deborah Azrael, David Hemenway, Susan Sorenson, and Matthew Miller, “Differences Between New and Long-Standing US Gun Owners: Results From a National Survey.” *American Journal of Public Health* (2018).
- Clayton E. Cramer, “Guns and Sport in the Early Republic,” in *Armed America* (2006). Part of the response to disgraced historian Michael Bellesiles’s claim that guns were not commonly owned in early America, Cramer entertainingly draws on memoirs and travel accounts to paint a picture of the various uses to which common people put guns in the Early Republic.
- Abigail A. Kohn, *Shooters: Myths and Realities of America’s Gun Cultures* (2004). I have assigned sections of this in the past as she is one of the few social scientists who have tried to understand gun owners on their own terms. In the best of all possible worlds (i.e., with more time), I would require this.

Module 3 (April 8): The Concealed Carry Revolution

Observation 4 (continued): *Many guns are also owned for self-defense against crime.*

Core Resources

- Syllabi for DC v. Heller (2008), McDonald v. Chicago (2010), and NYSRPA v. Bruen (2022). These give a brief overview of the Supreme Court’s current position on the Second Amendment.
- David Yamane, *Concealed Carry Revolution: Liberalizing the Right to Bear Arms in America, Updated Edition* (Shades Creek Press, 2021). **A link to download the ePub book will be sent to course registrants.**

Supplemental Resources

- David Yamane, [“The First Rule of Gunfighting is Have a Gun: Technologies of Concealed Carry in Gun Culture 2.0.”](#) in *The Lives of Guns* (2019). Study of the material culture of defensive gun ownership based on my field research.

- Lawrence Northwood, et al., “Law-abiding One-Man Armies,” *Society* (1978). As far as I can tell, this is the first ever study of concealed carry permit applicants/holders, using data from Seattle in 1972. Read my thoughts on the study [here](#).
- Malone, Chad A., and Trent Steidley. “Determinants of Variation in State Concealed Carry Laws, 1970–2016.” *Sociological Forum* (2019). Although my mini-book looks at the rise of shall issue (and now permitless) concealed carry regimes, it does not systematically explain them. This article begins to do so. Also, Steidley’s solo-authored “Sharing the Monopoly on Violence? Shall-Issue Concealed Handgun License Laws and Responsibilization.” *Sociological Perspectives* (2019).
- Harel Shapira and Samantha Simon, “Learning to Need a Gun,” *Qualitative Sociology* (2018). Still one of the only studies of gun owners that focus on social practices and embodied experiences. Don’t agree entirely with their analysis and conclusions, but it is a unique study worthy of consideration.
- Barnhart, Michelle, Aimee Dinnin Huff, Brandon McAlexander, and James H. McAlexander. “Preparing for the Attack: Mitigating Risk through Routines in Armed Self-Defense.” *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* (2018).

Module 4 (April 15): Defensive Gun Use and The Standard Model of Explaining the Irrationality of Defensive Gun Ownership

Observation 4: Many guns are also owned for self-defense against crime, and *some are indeed used for that purpose; whether they are actually safer or not, many people certainly seem to feel safer when they have a gun.*

Core Resources

- David Yamane, ["Articulating The Standard Model of Explaining the Irrationality of Defensive Gun Ownership."](#) unpublished paper presented at a workshop on “The Ethics, Law, and Social Science of Self-Defense and Firearms” convened by the Center for Ethics in Society at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire (November 2022).
- RAND Corporation, “The Challenges of Defining and Measuring Defensive Gun Use” (2 March 2018).
- David Hemenway and Sara J. Solnick, “The Epidemiology of Self-Defense Gun Use: Evidence from the National Crime Victimization Surveys 2007–2011,” *Preventive Medicine* (October 2015).
- David Studdert, et al. “Handgun Ownership and Suicide in California.” *New England Journal of Medicine* (2020).

Supplemental Resources

- Nicholas Buttrick, “Protective Gun Ownership as a Coping Mechanism,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (2020).
- Wolfgang Stroebe, N. Pontus Leander, and Arie W. Kruglanski, “Is It a Dangerous World Out There? The Motivational Bases of American Gun Ownership,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2017).
- Tara D. Warner et al., “To Provide or Protect? Masculinity, Economic Precarity, and Protective Gun Ownership in the United States,” *Sociological Perspectives* (2022).
- Brandon Hunter-Pazzara, “The Possessive Investment in Guns: Towards a Material, Social, and Racial Analysis of Guns,” *Palgrave Communications* (2020).

Module 5 (April 22): Criminal Defensive Gun Ownership and Illegal Gun Markets

Observation 5: The bad guys do not get their guns through customary retail channels.

Observation 6: The bad guys inhabit a violent world; a gun often makes a life-or-death difference to them.

Core Resources

- Elise White et al., “‘Two Battlefields’: Opps, Cops, and NYC Youth Gun Culture” (New York: Center for Justice Innovation, July 17, 2023).
- Melissa Barragan, “Policing and Punishing Illegal Gun Behavior: An Examination of Jail Detainee Experiences with Gun Law Enforcement in Los Angeles,” *Social Problems* (November 2022).
- Philip J. Cook, Susan T. Parker, and Harold A. Pollack, “Sources of Guns to Dangerous People: What We Learn by Asking Them,” *Preventive Medicine* (October 2015).
- Crifasi, Cassandra K., Shani A. L. Buggs, Marisa D. Booty, Daniel W. Webster, and Susan G. Sherman, “Baltimore’s Underground Gun Market: Availability of and Access to Guns.” *Violence and Gender* (2020).
- Anthony A. Braga et al., “Privately Manufactured Firearms, Newly Purchased Firearms, and the Rise of Urban Gun Violence,” *Preventive Medicine* (December 2022).

Supplemental Resources

- Andrew Papachristos, Anthony A. Braga, and David M. Hureau, “Social Networks and the Risk of Gunshot Injury.” *Journal of Urban Health* (June 2012).
- Lin Liu et al., “Violent Victimization During Reentry: Prevalence, Triggers, and Impact on Mental Health,” *Justice Quarterly* (June 2023).

- Michael Sierra-Arévalo, “Legal Cynicism and Protective Gun Ownership among Active Offenders in Chicago,” *Cogent Social Sciences* (December 2016).
- Rod K. Brunson, Brian A. Wade, and Brooklynn K. Hitchens, “Examining Risky Firearm Behaviors among High-Risk Gun Carriers in New York City,” *Preventive Medicine*, (December 2022).
- Philip J. Cook, “Gun Markets,” *Annual Review of Criminology* (2018).
- David M. Hureau and Anthony A. Braga, “The Trade in Tools: The Market for Illicit Guns in High-Risk Networks,” *Criminology* (2018).
- David Hemenway, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller, “Whose Guns Are Stolen? The Epidemiology of Gun Theft Victims,” *Injury Epidemiology* (April 2017).

Module 6 (April 29): Gun Violence and Prevention Strategies

Observation 7: Everything the bad guys do with their guns is already against the law.

Observation 8: Demand creates its own supply.

Core Resources

- Kerri M. Raissian, Jennifer Necci dineen, and Cassandra Crifasi, “Gun Violence and Gun Policy in the United States: Understanding American Exceptionalism,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2022).
- April M. Zeoli, Alexander D. Mccourt, and Jennifer K. Paruk, “Effectiveness of Firearm Restriction, Background Checks, and Licensing Laws in Reducing Gun Violence,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2022).

Supplemental Resources

- Daniel W. Webster et al., “Research on the Effects of Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs: Observations and Recommendations,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2022).
- Anthony A. Braga, Philip J. Cook, and Stephen Douglas, “Prevention Strategies for Policing Gun Violence,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2022).
- Jaclyn Schildkraut and Lisa B. Geller, “Mass Shootings in the United States: Prevalence, Policy, and a Way Forward,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2022).
- John J. Donohue, “The Effect of Permissive Gun Laws on Crime,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2022).

Module 7 (May 6): Conclusions Regarding Guns and Gun Culture

Observation 9: Guns are neither inherently good nor inherently evil; guns, that is, do not possess teleology.

Observation 10: Guns are important elements in our history and culture.

Core Resources

- Evan Selinger, “The Philosophy of the Technology of the Gun,” *The Atlantic* (July 23, 2012).
- Timothy W. Luke, “Counting Up AR-15s: The Subject of Assault Rifles and the Assault Rifle as Subject,” in *The Lives of Guns*, ed. Jonathan Obert, Andrew Poe, and Austin Sarat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 70–92.
- Anthony A. Braga et al., “Firearm Instrumentality: Do Guns Make Violent Situations More Lethal?,” *Annual Review of Criminology* (2021).

Supplemental Resources

- Yamane, David. [“Understanding and Misunderstanding American Gun Culture and Violence.”](#) *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 23, no. 2 (May 2023).
- Adam Winkler, *Gunfight: The Battle Over the Right to Bear Arms in America* (2011). This is the [best single-volume treatment of the history of guns in America](#).
- Lee Kennett and James LaVerne Anderson, *The Gun in America: The Origins of a National Dilemma* (1975). Reading this book, I came across [passage after passage](#) in which I was reminded that much of what we see in contemporary gun culture and debates over the place of guns in society is not novel.
- B. Bruce-Briggs, “The Great American Gun War,” *The Public Interest* (1976). Published around the same time as Kennett and Anderson, I sometimes assign this essay to highlight again how the gun wars being fought today have been going on for some time. There’s nothing new under the sun.
- Richard Hofstadter, “American as a Gun Culture,” *American Heritage Magazine* (1970). A classic lament of American gun culture. Students get a summary of his argument via my work so I don’t require it.