

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

CURRICULUM - GUNS IN US TODAY



GOAL & OBJECTIVES:

To understand the evolving relationship of the American public to guns today.

By the end of the session, participants will have:

- explored the historical and contemporary interpretations of the Second Amendment.
- considered implications of gun policy on our community.
- thought about how the role of guns has changed in our society.

Setting	Adult Christian Education Forum, small group or committee meeting
Materials	__ Candle __ Match __ Obituaries __ copies of “Battleground America” summary* __ Paper __ Pen/Pencil <i>*If possible, ask the participants to read the article before you meet.</i> http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/04/23/120423fa_fact_lepore?currentPage=all

opening

- **Read the obituaries** for three different, recent gun violence victims—try to stay as close to the local community as possible. After each is read, **light a candle in memorial of the incident.**

- **Lead the group in this or your own prayer:**

Holy God, we come together today to learn more about our world and your presence in it. We ask that you be with the families and friends of ___ (naming people about whom we have just read) ___. We pray also for the perpetrators, broken people, just like ourselves. Please give us ears to hear and eyes to see your light in the midst of this pain and darkness. Amen.

- **Read** Isaiah 58:1-12

presenting & exploring

- **Introduce** the article “Battleground America,” asking who had a chance to read it, stating its author and where it was printed (Jill Lepore, printed in The New Yorker on April 23rd, 2012), and explaining that the following points for discussion are taken directly from it. (All points are direct or paraphrased quotes.)
- **Pass out** the summary of the article so each participant has a copy. Going around the room, ask for volunteers to read each point.
- **Discuss The New Yorker article**, “Battleground America” by answering the following



questions as a group (a summary of the article is included should someone have forgotten to read it):

—Note: allow a moment of silence after each question is asked so that introverts may have the opportunity to consider their answers. It is okay for the discussion to veer from these specific questions as the Spirit leads.—

- o Did anything in this article surprise you?
- o How aware have you been of society's shift in attitude regarding gun control?
- o Do you think anything was unfairly represented?
- o Does the article change your understanding of the issue? Why/why not?
- o Why do you think this topic is difficult to discuss with friends, family, and in church?

closing

- **Reread** Isaiah 58:1-12

- **Invite the participants to reflect** on what they've learned and how they feel called to move forward in the coming week.

- **Name** a time to come back together for further discussion.

- **End the group in this or your own prayer:**

God, may your life-giving Spirit move through us and inspire us. It is hard to hear about the suffering of our world. We know that you promise a better life, a better way of being together. Help us to find hope in the midst of such sadness and hear your call to action. Amen.

BATTLEGROUND AMERICA

One nation, under the gun.

by Jill Lepore

Printed in *The New Yorker*

April 23, 2012; p. 38-47

Demographics

There are nearly 300 million privately owned firearms in the United States: 106 million handguns, 105 million rifles, and 83 millions shotguns. That works out to about one gun for every American."

- T.J. Lane, the teenager who killed his classmates at Chardon High, found the gun he used in his grandfather's barn. It belonged to his uncle.
- The United States is the country with the highest rate of civilian gun ownership in the world. "The second highest is Yemen, where the rate is nevertheless only half that of the U.S."
- Men are far more likely to own guns than women are, but the rate of gun ownership among men has fallen since 1980 while it has remained the same for women in the same stretch of time. Gun ownership is higher among whites than blacks, higher in the country than in the city, and higher among older people than younger people.
- In many states, to purchase a gun from a licensed dealer you need a permit, which requires you to complete firearms-safety training. People who buy guns from private sellers at gun shows or through other private exchanges aren't required to take a firearms-safety class. These exchanges fall under what is called the "gun-show loophole."
- 40% of the guns bought in the United States are bought from private sellers.
- Arms are military weapons. A firearm is a cannon that you can carry as opposed to artillery so big and heavy that you need wheels to move it, or people to help you...the firearms used by a well-regulated militia (at the time the Second Amendment was written)... could be discharged only once before they had to be reloaded.
- The Second Amendment was drafted by James Madison in order to assure the Anti-Federalists that the people would have the right to form a militia. The original version read: "The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; a well armed and well regulated militia being the best security of a free country: but no person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms shall be compelled to render military service in person."
- None of this (the debate over the Second Amendment) had to do with hunting. People who owned and used long arms to hunt continued to own and use them...As Garry Wills once wrote, "One does not bear arms against a rabbit."

The Second Amendment

The Second Amendment: "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."

America's Evolving Relationship to Guns

- Firearms have been regulated in the United States from the start. In the seventeenth century, multiple states (Kentucky, Louisiana, Indiana, Tennessee, Virginia, Alabama, Ohio, Texas, and Oklahoma) passed laws that banned the carrying of concealed weapons.
- Although the laws were occasionally challenged, they were rarely struck down in state courts.
- The National Rifle Association was founded in 1871. For most of its history, the NRA was chiefly a sporting and hunting association.



- The first major federal gun-control legislation pieces were the 1934 National Firearms Act and the 1938 Federal Firearms Act. Taken together, they created a licensing system for dealers and prohibitively taxed the private ownership of automatic weapons. The NRA supported both.
- In 1939, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the 1934 act, unanimously agreeing with solicitor general Robert H. Jackson that the Second Amendment is “restricted to the keeping and bearing of arms by the people collectively for their common defense and security.”

The Modern Gun Debate

- Gun-rights arguments have their origins not in eighteenth-century Anti-Federalism but in twentieth-century liberalism. They are the product of what the Harvard law professor Mark Tushnet has called the “rights revolution,” the pursuit of rights, especially civil rights, through the courts.
- In the 1970’s, the NRA began advancing the argument that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual’s right to carry a gun, rather than the people’s right to form armed militias to provide for the common defense.
- Fights over rights are effective at getting out the vote. Describing gun-safety legislation as an attack on a constitutional right gave the gun lobby a power at the polls that, at the time, the movement lacked.
- Ronald Reagan was the first Presidential candidate whom the NRA had endorsed. His election

made it possible for gun rights advocates to begin turning a new interpretation of the Second Amendment into law.

- Orrin Hatch became the chair of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, and commissioned a history of the Second Amendment, which resulted in a 1982 report, “The Right to Keep and Bear Arms.” The authors of the report claimed to have discovered “clear—and long-lost—proof that the Second Amendment was intended as an individual right of the American citizen to keep and carry arms in a peaceful manner, for protection of himself, his family, and his freedoms.”
- In 1986, the Firearms Owners Protection Act was passed, repealing parts of the 1968 Gun Control Act (passed largely in response to the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.) and giving new legal authority to the NRA’s interpretation of the Second Amendment, and a growing body of scholarship funded by the NRA.
- Chief Justice Warren Burger said that the new interpretation of the Second Amendment was “one of the greatest pieces of fraud, I repeat the word ‘fraud,’ on the American public by special-interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime.”
- Between 1968 and 2012, the idea that owning and carrying a gun is both a fundamental American freedom and an act of citizenship gained wide acceptance and, along with it, the principle that this right is absolute and cannot be compromised; gun-control legislation was diluted, defeated, overturned, or allowed to expire; the right to carry a concealed handgun became nearly ubiquitous.

NOTES

NOTES



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<http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/two/giving>
and designate the funds to our work with Gun Violence Prevention.

If you would like to get more involved with PPF's work with Gun Violence Prevention, please contact us at gvp@presbypeacefellowship.org.

This curriculum was written and edited by Rev. Margaret Leonard and Sara Dorrien.
Cover photo by Katie Rains.