

Feel lucky, punk? The fatal attraction of firearms

by Julian Sereno

Firearms, beloved by their enthusiasts and despised by their detractors, have been part of America since the arrival of the European settlers. While gun culture goes back that far, it has never flourished as it does in this day and age, nor has it ever been so crazy and rife with paradox.

This flourishing has come about through the lobbying efforts of the National Rifle Association and the receptivity of Republicans, in Congress, state houses and now the White House.

Catastrophes caused by firearms have sporadically led to efforts at regulation: the assassination of President Kennedy led to banning the purchase of firearms by mail order, the assassination of his brother, Bobby, sought to limit the availability of handguns. The attempted assassination of President Reagan led to the Brady Bill, with background checks and a mandatory five day wait after purchase. A ban on assault rifles passed in 1994 by a Democrat-controlled Congress was allowed to expire in 2004 by a Republican-controlled Congress.

None of these things have put a dent in either the proliferation of firearms or gun violence. Mass shootings have spiked, as have casualties, because of the increasing lethality of contemporary weapons easily available to the public, including 9 mm pistols with extended magazines and assault rifles.

The most common scenario following such mass murders is a cry from survivors and the aggrieved to enact laws to keep lethal weapons away from socio- and psychopaths accompanied

by booming sales at gun stores for the very weapons in question.

According to both the NRA and President Trump, the answer to mass shootings is for more people to carry firearms with them at all times and wherever they may go. As far as school (K-12) shootings are concerned, they encourage teachers to arm themselves and practice at firing ranges. For shootings in theaters (Aurora, Colorado), night clubs (Orlando, Florida) and offices (San Bernardino, California) and universities (Virginia Tech) they propose that those with concealed-carry gun permits be able to keep their sidearms with them at all those places, everywhere, in fact, except where Republican politicians gather, such as last summer's Republican National Convention. They also want it to be easier for gun owners to get concealed-carry permits.

So far, this strategy has failed. The NRA's vision of good guy law-abiding gun owners killing bad guys before they go on murderous rampages has not happened no matter how convenient it is to own and carry firearms. The occasional convenience store robber has been thwarted by the armed citizenry, but not any mass murders.

In fact, the only murderous rampage that was stopped before it started happened on a train from Brussels to Paris in late August 2015. That's when two off-duty American servicemen, a companion and an elderly British man subdued and held for arrest an ISIS-inspired terrorist with an assault rifle. The heroes were unarmed.

Guns have serious drawbacks as a means of self defense. While firearms are extremely well designed to kill human beings, they

frequently end up killing those they were acquired to protect. That is the case for the vast majority of the more than 30,000 people in this country who lose their lives every year on account of firearms. The Centers for Disease Control reports that in 2013, there were 33,636 gun deaths in US, 63 percent of which were suicides. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, living in a home where guns are kept increased an individual's risk of death by homicide by between 40 and 170%. Accounts of children fatally shooting one another are depressingly frequent; in a recent incident, a mom was fatally shot in the back by her toddler who found a loose firearm in the back seat of the car.

There are certainly other ways for self protection. My father's best friend (may they both rest in peace) used to keep a World War II-vintage bayonet hidden at his bedside. It is unlikely someone would accidentally stab someone to death with a bayonet; likewise with all knives and swords, as well as cudgels such as golf clubs, baseball bats, and crowbars.

Firearm aficionados will argue, no doubt, that a person armed with a knife or a club would be at a disadvantage when confronted by someone armed with a gun. This is certainly so, but even someone armed with a gun would be at a disadvantage if a person also armed with a gun is already pointing it. This particular fact is the ultimate reason it is unlikely an armed good guy will stop a mass shooting—they happen fast and the bad guy has already drawn his weapon.

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Democrats 2017

by Don Lein

In 2017 with the advent of Donald Trump's election, Democrat frustration is boiling over and they are showing their true colors. In 2009 were there any Republican protesters carrying signs saying "F— Obama"? Did anyone ever talk about blowing up the White House? To be sure there were some snide remarks about what Obama would sound like without his teleprompter. We did find out and understood why he needed a teleprompter — in order to sound coherent, but I digress... Republicans/Conservatives have traditionally held themselves to higher standards of behavior than their Democrat counterparts. Let's take a look at recent history.

The Occupy Movement was an excellent example of leftist protest. Of course, it was accompanied by rapes, assaults, robberies, etc. The protestors urinated/defecated on police cars and left the places they stayed a clean as a pigsty. Did President Obama, with or without his teleprompter, or any other adult Democrat, advise them that this was uncivilized behavior? The Tea Partiers who protested engaged in none of this type of behavior and left areas where they protested, clean. Fast forward to rioting, turning over police cars, setting fires chanting "What do we want?? Dead cops!!" I assure you these

were not Tea Party protesters and the leading Democrats did not condemn this illegal behavior.

A couple of weeks ago, this uncivilized behavior was visited upon us again at all places, UC Berkeley. A gay conservative spokesperson named Milo Yiannopoulos was due to speak. Instead, hundreds of liberals/progressives/democrats burned stores, threw Molotov cocktails and clashed with police in an effort to prevent Yiannopoulos from speaking. Not only did this bastion of American higher education wish to curtail free speech, the rioters attacked a young Trump supporter while she was being interviewed and threw other supporters to the ground and set their Trump hats on fire. The university blames it on outside agitators, but refuses to uphold its lofty ideals with concrete actions, like allowing campus and other police to do their jobs. Liberals silencing a gay immigrant — what will they do for an encore?

What have the liberal/progressives/Democrats wrought? A fair analysis of the Obama years would say that he downsized the Democratic party into a minority party by taking it hard left. The huge turnout of the African American vote seems unique to Obama and does not apply to other Democrats, the Democrats have embraced the race/gender/class agenda of the coasts, but which is rejected by working class middle Americans, the

environmental movement has become a boutique issue for the ultra-rich, such as Al Gore, and not for blue collar building trades and union workers. What Trump is doing is seen by the majority as a step toward a normalcy they were comfortable in. So what are the Democrat/progressive/liberals doing in the face of these — they are doubling down on the strategy that caused this disaster for them in the first place. A song lyric emerges from the sixties — "when will they ever learn?"

The architects of the Democratic platform are their own worst enemies. They should recognize that while they, in fact, are smarter than the average voter, there are fewer of these "leaders" from academia and the arts, the media, Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and other democratic strongholds, than there are voters from flyover America. Therefore, the voters from flyover America get to pick the leaders they want. If it were simply a Trump phenomenon, the left's approach to attack him might work. Instead, the huge majorities of state legislatures and governors have swung to the Republican side, favoring issues most liberals find offensive. The U.S. voters have made their feelings known — is anyone at DNC listening?

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Fake news has been a long term issue

by Jeff Davidson

The current squabble between the Trump Administration and the corporate media over misrepresentation, mis-information, and fake news is nary drop in the bucket of what has been brewing for decades. Most adults today would probably acknowledge that merely because we see a feature on the news, and especially on the web, that doesn't mean we ought to believe it. The corporate media, like the Trump Administration and certainly the Obama Administration before it, can be culpable of misrepresentations. Still, it is vital to be able to distinguish real information from a barrage of misinformation.

A case in point: Contrary to popular belief, traditional patterns of family life in the U.S. remain surprisingly intact. The U.S. Bureau of the Census figures indicated that most children in America under 18 live with both parents. In his book, *Hollywood Versus America*, Michael Medved observed many years back that the Hollywood perspective on the American family reflected novelty-seeking, eccentricity, and non-conformity. The corporate press is all too eager to follow Hollywood's narrative rather than undertake the task of illuminating the available data on the issue.

OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE

"While out of wedlock child rearing is given inordinate attention on TV, and in the press, evidence is overwhelming that such arrangements are disastrous for the children involved," Medved noted. Stanford University's Center for the Study of Youth Development showed that compared to their peers who live with both parents, and independent of income, race, or ethnicity, children in single parent families have: higher arrest rates; more disciplinary problems in school; a greater tendency to smoke; a greater tendency to run away from home

Children raised by never-married mothers are nearly three times more likely to spend more than 10 years on welfare than children raised by divorced single mothers. The corporate media seemingly don't care about these numbers and don't read books that contain them — unless, of course, they have to testify before Congress.

A generation ago, 25 leading academics and media researchers gathered for a conference on "The Impact of the Media on Children and the Family." One of the organizers commented, "Given the diversity of participants, the conference reached a surprising consensus that values in much of the mass media, especially in violent and sexually explicit materials, are on a collision course with traditional family values and the protection of children."

Following the conference, the coordinators took a systematic review of all the available literature on the impact of the brutal and graphic elements in the media. "This review found harmful effects in 86 percent of the studies and ends the debate about whether or not there is harm."

"The problem isn't just the presence of all the anti-social signals," says say professor and author James Twitchell, "it is also the absence of opposing messages that might promote goodness, unselfishness, deferred gratification, and — dare I say it — respect for authority."

SO, YOU KNOW BETTER?

Among adults, who allegedly can discern fact from fiction, polls show that otherwise seemingly rational people, in notable percentages, believe one or more of the following: alien visitors walk among us; aliens helped build the pyramids; homo sapiens and dinosaurs appeared on earth at the same time; Elvis Presley might still be alive (he'd now be 82); six million Jews didn't perish in Nazi concentration camps during World War II; wolves attack people in droves; porpoises have carried on complete conversations with human beings; the Loch Ness Monster exists; the Bermuda Triangle swallows up ships and planes at a disproportional rate; John F. Kennedy's assassination was a conspiracy

In his 1993 book, *Case Closed*, Gerald Posner walks the reader through every conceivable detail of the case and shows conclusively why it was definitely Lee Harvey Oswald who fired the gun, and how the "magic bullets" did take the angles that they were supposed to. Noted historian William Manchester, after reading Posner's book, said that he couldn't imagine anyone having any further doubt about the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald, on his own, shot and killed John Fitzgerald Kennedy. I read *Case Closed* cover to cover and concur.

Yet, new mythology and conspiracy theories about who killed John F. Kennedy will be concocted and add to the glut of information you can't use, information which serves no one. The "Who Shot JFK?" industry still earns in excess of \$200 million a year, with the potential to go higher, constantly fed by more TV news magazine "investigations," authors, books, and tours all propagated by a corporate media that does not refute obviously bogus claims and does not make any effort to properly inform the public.

I do not regard the misinformation surrounding JFK's death lightly. The nature of society changed as nearly an entire generation suspected that a conspiracy, perhaps a government-led

conspiracy, may have brought down the leader of the free world in broad daylight. Who knows what cynicism about government, the press, or truth itself ensued?

Finally, 30 years later after the event, when Posner assembled the irrefutable evidence about the only assassin it could have been, hardly anyone knows, or even cares. Yet, I contend that the nature of your life changed as a result of the misinformation and unreality that has glutted society's information channels. I submit to you that a sizable chunk of the base of what it means to live in a democracy and to be a citizen has eroded since 1963, for you and everyone you know, whether they were alive at the time or not.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Whether it is corporate media outlets spewing agenda-driven propaganda, a governmental entity seeking to make itself look good, or book authors cashing in on controversy, we need to take pause. In today's world where instant news and communication is transferred between people, integrity in news coverage and information dissemination is vital. Currently, we must look past the false fronts devised to obscure what is actually occurring.

For decades the corporate, mainstream media has loomed over U.S. political discourse regardless of who is in office. The corporate media both guide and shape public opinion, 24/7. In recent years, the mainstream media have thoroughly abandoned any pretense of serving as "unbiased" or "objective" information sources. These all-powerful, monolithic media groups tirelessly push an agenda upon us.

As more citizens become aware, the corporate media monopoly is now being broken. More alert news consumers and the emergence of other forms of media all but assure that the 'news' monopoly will further dissipate. While most news consumers still rely on a handful of all-powerful media organizations, a greater percentage of news consumers are becoming more discerning in what they believe to be true.

Finding the truth is vital and often amazing. As with much of what you do in life, become inquisitive. Conduct your own research and routinely cross-reference what you uncover. Be candid when you're wrong just as you do when you're right. Each of us needs to stay on guard; truth demands it.

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