

Text 10. Why America lets the killing continue

Facts and figures

Gun violence is a shocking feature of American life, as shown by different mass shootings, especially in Columbine High School, Colorado (1999) and quite recently in a cinema in Colorado and in school, in Newtown, Connecticut.

- ◆ Despite the *Gun Control Acts* passed in 1968 and 1994, all kinds of firearms can easily be purchased and owned.
- ◆ The *Second Amendment* to the American Constitution (1791) gives the American citizens who wish to keep a firearm a constitutional ground. It says, with an odd punctuation: “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.” Does it mean that all individuals have the absolute right to own guns or only those who serve in a militia?
- ◆ These two different interpretations make firearm enthusiast see an attack on gun ownership as an attack on freedom, whereas gun control advocates read the *Second Amendment* the other way round and would like strict limitations to be implemented.
- ◆ In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled with a narrow majority that the *Second Amendment* guaranteed individuals a right to possess firearms for personal protection, without any connection to service in a militia.
- ◆ *The National Rifle Association* (NRA), a powerful lobby which influences millions of voters and a lot of members of Congress, opposes any restriction on the sales and circulation of guns.
- ◆ Forty-seven percent of American adults currently report that they have a gun in their home or elsewhere on their property.
- ◆ After the Connecticut shooting, a member of the House of Representatives issued the following statement: “These shootings are becoming too common; it’s too easy for dangerous people to get the weapons that help them perform mass executions”.
- ◆ In his documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (1999), Michael Moore reckoned that the previous year, the number of people killed by bullets in Western countries had been the following:

Australie: 65	Great Britain; 68	
Canada: 165	France: 255	the United States: 11,127.
- ◆ After the latest mass shooting, Yoko Ono, John Lennon’s widow pointed out that since the assassination of her husband on December 8th, 1980, more than 1 057 000 people had been killed by firearms in the United States.

Words you might need

Gun-control : la réglementation des armes à feu

a bill : un projet de loi
an act : une loi adoptée
to pass an act : voter une loi
an amendment : un amendement
a US Senator : un sénateur
a Representative : un Représentant (= député)
a ban : une interdiction
to ban/to prohibit : interdire
a weapon : une arme
gun control : la réglementation des armes à feu
to check : vérifier
a check : une vérification
a background check : une vérification des antécédents judiciaires
a thorough check : une vérification complète
a gun licence : un permis de port d'armes
the criminal record : le casier judiciaire
a gun show : une foire aux armes à feu
ammunition : des munitions
a firearm/a gun : une arme à feu
a rifle : une carabine
a handgun : une arme de poing
an assault weapon : un fusil d'assaut
a bullet : une balle
the trigger : la gâchette
to press the trigger : presser la gâchette
trigger-happy : à la gâchette facile
a cartridge : une cartouche
a clip : un chargeur
stray bullets : des balles perdues
the murder toll : la liste des victimes
a killing spree : un accès de folie meurtrière
a rampage : un déchainement de violence
ownership : la possession
a murder : un meurtre
a murderer : un assassin

a policy : une politique
a rally : un rassemblement
safety : la sécurité
to assault : attaquer
a bloodshed : un bain de sang
a shooting : une fusillade, un meurtre
a shooting range : un stand de tir
within shooting distance : à portée de tir
a target : une cible
a slaughter : un massacre, un carnage
a mass killing : une tuerie, une hécatombe
gang warfare : la guerre des gangs
to commit suicide/to kill oneself : se suicider
a serial killer : un meurtrier en série
to shoot, shot, shot : tirer
available : disponible
bloody : sanglant
deadly/lethal : mortel
a backlash : un retour de manivelle
to accuse of : accuser de
to charge with/to blame for : accuser de
a licensed dealer : un armurier patenté
a permit : un permis
to object to : refuser
to pin the blame on : imputer la faute à
to restrict access to : limiter l'accès à
to reverse the trend : inverser la tendance
restrictions on : des limitations à
a judge, a justice : un juge
a lawyer, an attorney : un avocat
an advocate of : un partisan de
the law : la loi (en général)
the lawmaker : le législateur
registration : l'enregistrement
a ruling : une décision de justice
the county sheriff : le sheriff du comté
insane : dément
crazy : dingue
law-abiding : respectueux de la loi
ruthless : impitoyable

mandatory : obligatoire
outrageous : scandaleux
stringent : strict
drastic measures : des mesures radicales
unlawful : illegal
a radical : un extrémiste
good : le bien
evil : le mal
foolhardy : téméraire
destructive : destructeur
disquieting : inquiétant
horrific : atroce, abominable
misleading : trompe
urigid : rigide
threatening : menaçant
tragic : dramatique
tough : rude, dur
unreasonable : déraisonnable
wild : sauvage
fair play (adj) : loyal
lenient : bienveillant
respectful : respectueux
sensible : raisonnable
concealed : caché
to refrain from : s'interdire de
to cherish : chérir
to abide by the law : respecter la loi
to administer justice : rendre la justice
to bear/to carry a gun : porter une arme
to crack down on : réprimer
to deter : dissuader
to disclose : révéler
to enforce the law : faire appliquer la loi
to guarantee : garantir
to grant : accorder
to implement : mettre en application
to outlaw : proscrire
to own : posséder
to prevent : empêcher
to push for : préconiser
to resort to : recourir à
to restrict : restreindre
to rule : décider
to shoot : tirer
to strike down a decision : casser une décision

to take steps : prendre des mesures
to trigger : déclencher
to undergo a check : subir une vérification
to uphold : soutenir, confirmer
to claim, to maintain : prétendre, soutenir que
to kill : tuer
to die, died, died : mourir
to be dead : être mort
to pop off (argotique) : clamsner, claquer
to bite the bullet/to kick the bucket : passer l'arme à gauche
to push the daisies : manger les pissenlits par la racine
an undertaker : un entrepreneur de pompes funèbres
a corpse : un cadavre
the coroner : le médecin légiste
a coffin (GB), a casket : un cercueil
a funeral parlor (US) : un salon funéraire
the paramedics : le SAMU
999 : numéro d'urgence de la police
to injure : blesser
the injured : les blessés
injuries : des blessures
the casualties : les victimes
The gun lobby : le lobby des vendeurs d'armes
The National Rifle Association (NRA) : l'Association nationale des détenteurs d'armes à feu
an activists : un militant
to bolster security : renforcer la sécurité
frontier justice : la justice expéditive
to protect oneself : se protéger
to take the law into one's hands : se faire justice soi-même
freedom of speech : la liberté d'expression
freedom of thought : la liberté de pensée
an infringement : une restriction
a crime : un crime
an offense : un délit
a scare story : une histoire pour faire peur
a scapegoat : un bouc émissaire
the villains : les méchants
the good : les bons
an opponent : un opposant

Exercises

1. Find synonyms in the text for

- a. unable to behave normally because of mental illness
- b. a sudden period of violent behaviour which can cause destruction
- c. a violent quarrel or clash
- d. a large public meeting held to support an idea
- e. a problem which does not deserve attention, since it is not a major concern
- f. with a slight degree of difference in feeling or meaning
- g. an expression of great sadness
- h. to be present at an event

2. Exploring the text : Are the following statements right or wrong? Justify your answer

1. The author's son was one of the victims in the Connecticut school shooting.
2. In 1992, a mass shooting occurred in a college and the murderer was one of its students.
3. The author deems gun control is pointless. Whoever wants to kill can do so with a knife.
4. If the right to bear arms is an inalienable part of American freedom, further tragedies are to be expected.

3. General debates

1. Why didn't the Columbine mass shooting change the American minds concerning guns?
2. Can the right of the citizen to protect himself and his family be so "inalienable"?
3. Would a gun control policy infringe a basic freedom?
4. Why can it be dangerous to keep gun at home?
5. Is the ownership of an assault weapon or of a high calibre weapon justified?
6. Why have lawmakers been so reluctant to start a debate and to legislate if gun safety laws could prevent tragedies and save lives?

4. Essays (200 words + or - 10 %)

1. Comment upon the following statement: "The real solution is to place security guards at the school doors... Some members of the Connecticut school staff should have carried pistols".
2. Comment upon the following statement: "Criminals can get guns. So, there's no logical or sensible reason for disarming the people that are good guys!"

5. Translate into French

The third paragraph ("In the wake of Galen's murder...")

Why America lets the killing continue

My wife and I learned about the Connecticut school shootings on our way home from the cemetery, where we had just finished observing the 20th anniversary of our son's murder.

Our son Galen, who was 18, and a teacher were killed on Dec. 14, 1992, by a deranged student who went on a shooting rampage at *Simon's Rock College* in Western Massachusetts. Galen was a gifted kid, and *Simon's Rock* seemed like the perfect place for him. He'd never been happier. The killer had a vastly different reaction to this environment. After run-ins with college officials, he vowed to "bring the college to its knees." He bought a semi-automatic rifle, a military-style assault weapon, at a gun shop down the road, and obtained oversized clips and ammunition through the mail.

In the wake of Galen's murder, I wrote a book about the shooting. In it I suggested that we view gun crime as a public health issue, much the same as smoking or pesticides. I spent a number of years attending rallies, signing petitions, writing letters and making speeches, but eventually I gave up. Gun control, such a live issue in the "early" days of school shootings, inexplicably became a third-rail issue for politicians.

I came to realize that, in essence, this is the way we in America want things to be. We want our freedom, and we want our firearms, and if we have to endure the occasional school shooting, so be it. A terrible shame, but hey - didn't some guy in China just do the same thing with a knife?

Still, whatever your position on gun control, it is impossible not to react with horror to news of the shootings in Connecticut. Our horror is nuanced by knowledge of what those families are going through, and what they will have to endure in years to come.

More horrible still - to me at least - is the inevitable lament, "How could we have let this happen?"

It is a horrible question because the answer is so simple. Make it easy for people to get guns and things like this will happen.

Children will continue to pay for a freedom their elders enjoy.

Adapted from Gregory Gibson, *nytimes.com*. 14/12/2012
(G. Gibson is the author of *Gone Boy: A Father's Search for the Truth in His Son's Murder*.)