Clinging to their Guns?
The New Politics of Gun Carry in Everyday Life

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Abstract

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Alongside a series of high-profile massacres over the past decade, Americans continue to turn to guns as the solution to, rather than the cause of, violent crime. Since the 1970s, most US states have significantly loosened restrictions on gun carrying for self-defense, and today, over 8 million Americans hold permits to carry guns concealed. Contrary to popular images of gun culture, this is not a white-only affair: in Michigan, whites and African Americans are licensed to carry guns at roughly the same rate. And while women are licensed at rates far lower than men, their numbers are increasing. This dissertation presents an in-depth analysis of the new politics of concealed carry and asks: Why do Americans not just own guns but also carry them? What role does the NRA play in enabling people to carry guns? And finally, how do different kinds of gun carriers enact the model of citizenship advocated by the NRA?

Through intensive ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with gun carriers and pro-gun advocates in the Metro Detroit area, it shows how suspicion of the state's power to police, combined with the embodied practice of gun carry, sustains a new politics of policing, crime and insecurity. Situating the appeal of guns in contexts of neoliberal decline facing Michigan, this book analyzes how, with the help of required NRA training, gun carry becomes an embodied, everyday practice through which gun carriers embrace a moral duty to protect not only oneself but also others (usually family, but sometimes strangers). I show how this moral duty is enacted differently by different groups of gun carriers: while all of the gun carriers I interviewed turned to guns to supplement what they viewed as inadequate police protection, gun carriers of color also mobilized gun rights as a way to defend against police abuse and assert their political rights, echoing the anti-statist position of groups such as the Black Panthers. Meanwhile, male gun carriers embraced their duty to protect self and others as a way to assert their social relevance as male protectors amid their declining status as breadwinners, while female gun carriers tended to emphasize their individual right to self-defense as an act of empowerment.

Overall, this dissertation argues that for pro-gun Americans, the carrying of guns is a means of practicing good citizenship amid perceptions of social disorder. This understanding of American gun politics helps to clarify both why

Americans so vociferously 'cling to their guns' as practical and symbolical tools of policing, and it also sheds light on the NRA's hidden power as the primary organization that trains and certifies Americans to carry guns.

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Preface

This book is about the complex ways in which guns come to figure as solutions to multiple insecurities (economic, social, physical) by making a statement about the failure of the state's power to police – and how ideals of citizenship are remade in the process. It focuses on gun carriers in Michigan: As the most economically depressed state in the U.S., Michigan is the site of especially exacerbated socio-economic insecurities as compared to the rest of the country. This book aims to raise questions about how, as political objects, guns work to address (real and imagined) social, economic and physical insecurities, and it suggests that what lies at the heart of gun politics is a particular critique of the state's power to police. Sometimes alarmingly exclusionary, sometimes surprisingly inclusive, gun politics stipulate new moral codes for how a person should behave amid a context perceived to be saturated with insecurity and aggravated by the state's perceived failure to adequately police.

To take seriously the politics of guns and embark in the sustained analysis that this book provides is fraught with political peril; with guns one of the most contentious social issues in the United States (the other is abortion), it is difficult to avoid a value judgment on whether guns represent good or evil. For those looking for a condemnatory analysis of the people who choose to carry guns, this dissertation will probably be a disappointment. That is not because this kind of analysis is not possible or even justified: there are already plenty of books already touting the myriad ways in which Americans have been duped by conservative elites. What this dissertation tries to do is something a little different: it tries to unpack the universe in which guns are a sensible, morally upstanding solution to the problem of crime, a universe in which the NRA is not a hardline lobby peddling myths of heroic masculinity but rather a community service organization, a universe in which guns are beneficial not only for white men but also for racial minorities and women.

Make no mistake about it, gun violence is an epidemic in the US: gun deaths are on track to outpace motor vehicle deaths, and in 12 states plus DC, they already do (VPC, 2013a). A recent CDC (Leshner et al., 2013) report on firearms-related violence unpacks the disturbing statistics of the nation's gun problem: in 2010, there were 31,672 gun deaths and 73,505 non-fatal gun injuries. Most gun deaths are suicides, followed by homicides (only 1% of firearms deaths are unintentional or accidental shootings). In 2010, 19,392 people ended their lives with a gun. Of the 12,664 homicides reported to the FBI in 2011, 8,583 were firearms-related, and of these, gun-involved homicides, 72% were carried out with handguns (this represents just less than 50% of total homicides). Of course, these numbers do not include people who are threatened, but not injured or killed, with guns. Importantly, gun casualties are not equally distributed: the CDC reports that economic conditions and geography shape who is affected by guns and how. White, rural, middle-aged men are most likely to commit suicide; youth of color living in conditions of urban poverty are most likely to be the victims of homicide. African American men are most likely to be killed by guns.

These are compelling statistics: no one disagrees about that. The question that the gun debate turns on, is: what should they compel us to think or do?

Gun policy represents one answer. Gun proponents, of course, maintain that people should have the right to defend themselves against gun violence with equal force: that is, with guns. Whether guns are effective tools of self-defense is widely contested (Kellermann's reports suggest guns increase risks of homicide, suicide and armed robbery, while Gary Kleck and his colleagues have shown that people who use guns self-defensively have a greater chance of survival during criminal victimization); perhaps this is because their proficient use depends more on the skills, training and know-how of the user rather than the gun itself. As the CDC report notes, even though gun owners report greater feelings of safety, "additional research is needed to weigh the competing risks and protective benefits that may accompany gun ownership in different communities" (CDC, 2013: 41). But many Americans are not waiting for more research to make up their minds about guns: for millions of Americans, they've already decided that guns are a protective device against crime, a solution to the problem of violence. What this book does is try to unpack how guns come to be viewed as the solution, and what that means for contemporary notions of Americans citizenship.

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I want to acknowledge the many people who supported me in pursuing this controversial topic. I want to especially thank two groups of people: the people in the pro-gun world who opened their arms to me (even as a "Berkeley" sociologist) and the people in the sociology world who stood behind this project and believed in the importance of analyzing pro-gun America from the ground up.

First, I want to thank the gun carriers, instructors, and activists who participated in this study. Whether you shared your time during interviews, your expertise during impromptu firearms training, or your generosity in introducing me to other "gunnies" and inviting me to picnics, potlucks and activist events: this study would not have been possible without you. Each of you deserves recognition in contributing to this study. Thank you.

Next, I want to thank the sociologists who shaped this project. First, the two intellectual powerhouses who supported this project from the beginning: Raka Ray and Ann Swidler.

To Raka: From the beginning, you believed in me more than I could believe in myself. I cannot thank you enough for your kindness in words, generosity in time, and simple willingness to respond quickly and decisively to my ever-anxious emails. Your choice to accept me as your student gave me the self-awareness, intellectual community, and courage of conviction that has made me a better person (and not just a better sociologist). Because of you, I struggle to find the balance between analytical coolness and compassion, friendship and intellectual rigor, between conviction and reflection – that is, I struggle to become more like you. Thank you for being my role model and mentor.

To Ann: Thank you for kindly but consistently challenging me; for giving me the space to develop my own voice while relentlessly drawing that voice back into the realm of sociology, even as I wandered off; for mentoring me as a student and as a teacher; for showing me the rewards of sociological reason over ethical or normative impulse. I have never felt so honored to hear the words: "You have a dissertation!"

Introduction: Clinging to their guns?

On a March afternoon in 2011, Corey, a white man in his late 30s, was working the cash register at his family's corner store in Flint, Michigan. The store, Annie's Market, had stood on the same block on the East Side of Flint for almost 40 years, stubbornly refusing to follow suit with the rest of the once-bustling neighborhood. In my interview with him, Corey described changes in the neighborhood alongside broader economic shifts: "Before, it was all blue collar, shop workers, and a little bit of welfare. Now it's all welfare, and things are different now." As jobs left, houses were abandoned, and then, as Corey explained, "the kids were having fun burning them down…two, three fires a night down there." Popularized in Eminem's *8 Mile*, these burnings have been regular occurrences in Detroit and Flint since at least the 1990s, culminating each year on the night before Halloween in a city-wide night of arson known to locals as "Devils Night." After the city of Flint drastically reduced their fire and police forces in the spring of 2010, several arsonists burned down abandoned houses. Flint has attempted to deal with the ongoing arson by bulldozing houses: "Where our store is, they've torn down like 400 houses," Corey told me. "It's like open football fields."

Despite the exodus first of work opportunities and then of buildings, Annie's Market still enjoys a regular and diverse customer base: younger members of a local gang who call themselves the Cobras, Flint city workers, prostitutes, police officers, the elderly. On that March afternoon, Corey had just checked out a 70-year-old man, a customer who patronized the store regularly. Corey sensed two more customers come in, but he kept his gaze focused on sorting the old man's bills into their place in the cash drawer. Shutting the cash register, Corey raised his eyes to the barrel of a gun. The man – a 19-year-old African American "with a criminal record" (in Corey's words) – demanded money, starring at Corey's right hand. Within a matter of milliseconds, Corey reached for a five-shot revolver with his left hand. He aimed it, squeezed the trigger once and then again, hitting the would-be assailant twice. As the 19-year-old's partner ran out of the store, Corey fired his gun in his direction, missing him. Exiting the store, the fleeing partner ran into the 70-year-old customer who had just left the store; the old man later told Corey that he sensed something amiss about the two men and decided to U-turn his car back to the store, but he was unsuccessful in his attempt to tackle the second man. Corey called 911 while the 19-year-old bled to death.

At first, Corey thought the would-be assailant was only 16: "it just would have been terrible to shoot a kid. But 19 – he's old enough." Knowing that he was an adult and that he had a criminal record as well, Corey told me, "it doesn't bother me." And it did not seem to bother his customers, either: "It's been both black and white [customers] that say 'good job'." Even the police in Flint seemed unshaken by the incident and quickly declared it a justifiable homicide; Corey was never arrested or held in jail. Quite the opposite. A few days after the shooting, one cop visited him at the store: "I had a cop stop in the other day, and he said, 'Are you the guy who shot him? Good job!' And he shook my hand!"

How did Corey come to be standing in Annie's Market, looking over the bloody body of a would-be assailant, with three chambers empty in his five-shot revolver? How did he come to believe that he needed a gun? Even before acquiring his revolver and his permit to carry it, Corey himself said that he had been held up "a dozen" times with various weapons and that he had been successful in "usually put[ting] up a fight if I find the opportunity is there." But recently, Corey had decided that it was "just time" to start carrying a gun: "I just thought it was time, I guess. Crime's bad, cops are low. I think this is what we come to. Cops are low everywhere. They always lay them off first, and it doesn't make no sense why they lay those guys off first." As we talked in his kitchen, his wife laughed from the living room as she interrupted with one-liners about Flint's dismal condition: "Murder City, USA!" But despite Flint's abysmal crime rate, Corey mockingly dismissed the financial barriers to leaving: "Soon as we hit the big game, we're gone! [laughing]". But more tellingly, he acknowledged that the store was his home: "I put my application out there every once in a while. But that's all I know – the store."

As I talked to Corey, I realized that his gun was less a political statement and more of a tool to negotiate the practical realities of Flint – as he said, "crime's bad, cops are low." When I asked him whether he was a member of the National Rifle Association, he told me that "Those guys are nuts. Did you see some of those guys? Did you see Ted Nugent? He's a helluva bull hunter, but man! [laughs] About his gun? He's kind of crazy about his guns!" Having voted for Obama in the 2008 election, Corey is not afraid that his gun rights will be taken away, but he does think it is time that he uses these rights to address a growing sense of social disorder. Indeed, he turned to guns not simply to address social disorder but to do so in a way that maintained a sense of community. For example, explaining why his business hadn't installed bulletproof glass like countless other businesses in Flint and Detroit had, he said "We don't really want to get glass. It's so impersonal. Who wants to talk to somebody behind glass? You can't shake nobody's hand, you can't talk to nobody."

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Jason, an African American man in his late 30s, decided to take a walk around his hometown of Detroit in the Spring of 2011. Recalling the events of that evening during my interview with him, he told me that he had holstered his .45 caliber handgun and openly carried it as a deterrent to crime, as had become his routine over the past few months. (Open carry designates the practice of carrying a holstered handgun in plain view. Most open carriers wear their guns holstered on a belt, much like police officers.) He also strapped on a recording device; he never carried his gun without it. As he neared the Wayne State University campus in Detroit, he was approached by a group of police officers with their hands on their guns. Jason recounted, "You know…me being Black, I have to think, don't make any sudden moves, or you know, I'll be dead… you should have just seen their eyes, they were like – I thought I was Frankenstein or something!"

The police on Jason's audio recording, which he shared with me, acknowledged that Jason's actions were legal if unusual. Jason was not in one of the handful of areas in Michigan where firearms are strictly forbidden, his

handgun was properly registered, and he even had his valid concealed pistol license on him, even though he was openly carrying his gun. Explaining the reason for stopping Jason and seizing his gun, one police officer simply said, "you don't see this everyday, man." After confirming that his handgun was properly registered, the police eventually returned his belongings, including his gun. On his recording of the stop, the police audibly drive off, and then a crowd starts cheering before the audio recording cuts out. Jason explains, "I was deep in Detroit when I got stopped. And people were at a bus stop, and they were looking like, oh my god! Another Black man going to jail for a gun. So when…they see the officers let me out of the car, they handed me back my pistol…People were cheering…they couldn't believe it! I walked over to them, and I explained, look, you know open carry is legal…That's the whole point. They need to see – you can carry." After explaining to bystanders the legalities of open carry, Jason returned home, wrote about his interaction with the police on a popular gun forum, and saved his audio recording, eventually also sharing that online. He explained his decision to carry a gun to me:

> *I'm just a fat guy out there walking, trying to stave off diabetes or whatever. I'm just trying to stay fit…When people think about why Detroit is such a fat city, ain't nobody going outside and exercising if they're going to get shot up or mugged! That's what I'm trying to do: take my city back one day at a time, one step at a time, and show the thugs, look, that's right, I have a gun too. You got yours concealed, I have mine open. Who do you think is gonna get to theirs faster?*

He explained that he started carrying a gun because "the economy was going bad and everything" and "I said, you know, my number's coming up." However, like Corey, his reasons for carrying a gun seemed to exceed personal protection: connecting his decision to carry a gun to the decline of Detroit, he also saw his gun as a way to "take my city back."

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Over 8 million Americans have a license to carry a gun, like Corey and Jason. This dissertation examines the contemporary politics of gun carry by asking, How do gun carriers understand firearms as a means of keeping people safe, rather than making us less safe? In what social contexts does gun carry appear as a solution rather than a problem, to whom, and what is the problem it aims to solve in the minds of those who engage in this practice? In short, why are Americans not just owning guns but also carrying them as part of their everyday lives? Corey's and Jason's stories provide insight into the social significance of guns: the motives behind their actions, and the meanings they attached to their guns, resonated with themes that were repeated again and again in my conversations with gun carriers: concerns about economic decline, social disorder and police inefficacy alongside an embrace of gun carry as a civic duty. Indeed, Corey's and Jason's stories suggest that what is at stake in contemporary gun politics is not simply the affirmation of conservative social values but something much broader: the problem of policing. I argue that gun carry serves as a political response to the perceived (in)efficacy of public law enforcement against the backdrop of social insecurities. This politics is characterized by three dimensions: first, Corey, Jason and other gun carriers in this study turn to guns

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as a way to enact a new kind of citizenship – the citizen-protector – premised on both the *right* to bear arms and the *duty* to protect both self and others; second, they use crime as a touchstone for understanding a myriad of insecurities that threaten their communities; and second, they engage in gun carry as an embodied practice that allowed them to supplement, and sometimes supplant, public law enforcement.

The Paradox of Pro-Gun America

Since the 1960s, public opinion about guns has changed significantly. 1967 was the last year in which more Americans supported a ban on handguns than opposed it. In the latest Gallup poll in late December 2012, 74% of Americans opposed such a ban. Surprisingly, in this regard, women were *more* pro-gun in 2011 than their *male counterparts* in 1991.[1] And while in 1991, a majority of Democrats, Easterners, women, Americans over 50 years of age, and Americans living in households without a gun supported a ban, by 2011 *there was no subgroup of Americans based on gender, age, college education, region, political affiliation or household gun ownership that supported a ban on handguns in the majority.*[2] Whether or not they own a gun, most Americans now believe that the Second Amendment guarantees their right to do so (73%; 91% who own guns; 63% who do not own guns). While Democrats still support a handgun ban at a higher rate than Republicans, Democrats (a decline of 17%), Republicans (a decline of 19%) and Independents (a decline 17%), *all showed a comparable decline in their support for a handgun ban* from 1991 to 2011.

This is particularly paradoxical because of measured declines in both crime and gun ownership rates among Americans:

Crime. Since the 1990s, violent crime has markedly dropped (Zimring, 2012). Yet, Americans today are much more likely to own guns for protection rather than hunting: 48% say they own a gun for protection, as compared to 26% in 1999.[3] While some scholars have argued that perceived risk and victimization do help to explain gun ownership,[4] the dramatic drop in crime alongside increased public support for gun rights remains paradoxical. Indeed, "perceptions of crime, fear of crime, or reports of being victimized by crime in recent years" – as Gallup notes – have an unclear relationship to this shift in opinion. McClain (1983: 320) found that in the case of Detroit, "the fear indicator alone has no impact on gun ownership" and that Detroiters – both Black and white – "appear to be less supportive of gun regulation than previous research has indicated." Meanwhile, Williams and McGrath (1976: 29) note that "knowing

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[1] In 1991, 34% of men and 51% of women supported a ban on handguns; in 2011, these figures dropped to 20% and 31%, respectively. See Gallup (2012) for historical trends in public opinion on guns.

[2] While placing restrictions on the *sale* of firearms enjoyed greater popularity (women, Democrats, Easterners, and Americans living in households without a gun supported these restrictions in the majority in 2011), these numbers still showed a dramatic drop from their 1991 levels.

[3] See the 2013 Pew Research's Center study on why Americans own guns by Michael Dimock, Carroll Doherty and Leah Christian.

[4] Gary Kleck and his colleagues (2011) argue that perceived risk and victimization do help to explain gun ownership among those individuals owning guns for the purposes of protection; Lizotte, Bordua and White (1981: 503) also conclude that fear of crime has a significant impact on protective gun ownership, as this construct is correlated with "trust in the police and the courts, victimization, and perceived crime."

a person's victim status will *not* help predict gun ownership" and surprisingly, people expressing fear were *less likely to own a gun* – suggesting a negative relationship between fear of crime and gun ownership. All of this suggests that the dramatic decline in the crime rate is not – in any direct sense – "driving" American sentiments on guns.

   Gun Ownership. As a second paradox, despite ever-increasing support for gun rights, the number of gun-owning Americans may be declining: while the Gallup poll (Saad, 2011) finds that gun ownership by household has remained consistently high, some surveys suggest otherwise. According to General Social Survey data, while 45% of Americans had a gun in their household in 1993, just 34% reported having a gun in their household in 2012.[5] Twenty-four percent of Americans say they personally own a gun. Of those who own a gun, 61% are white men. Gun owners, moreover, tend to be suburban, Independent but lean Republican. This has led many in gun debates to conclude that gun culture is "dying out" alongside the conservative politics that buttress it. However, even if these statistical changes reflect real changes in ownership rates, it is unclear whether gun culture is "dying" or being reconfigured and polarized – with more passive gun owners selling their firearms (think: they inherited granddaddy's gun but they themselves do not shoot) and more politicized gun owners accruing a larger arsenal of firearms and ammunition. After all, the number of gun purchases has skyrocketed even as ownership has not: every Black Friday, for example, since President Obama has been in office has set a new record for gun purchases.

The Gun Carry Revolution

   One way of unraveling these paradoxes is to examine in more detail what, exactly, Americans are doing with the guns that they do own. Americans, no doubt, own guns for many purposes: for hunting, for the protection of property, for marksmanship. But since the 1970s, Americans have started to do something new with their guns: they *carry* them on their persons.[6] Indeed, while many on the Right condemned then-Presidential Candidate Barack Obama's 2008 gaffe – that Americans "cling" to their guns[7] – as indicative of the would-be president's elitist anti-gun attitudes, his choice of words was prescient. With the proliferation of gun carry since the 1970s, Americans *have* increasingly "clung" to their guns – not metaphorically, but literally.

   Scholars have examined the landscape of contemporary gun politics from a variety of perspectives, from Melzer's (2009) analysis of the National Rifle Association (NRA) to Goss's (2008) examination of the barriers faced by the gun

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[5] See "A Shrinking Minority," a report issued by the Violence Prevention Center (2013).

[6] Of course, it is difficult to say just how often Americans carried guns concealed prior to the passage of these laws. Moreover, there is no doubt that many Americans – particularly Americans who cannot own or carry guns legally because they have felonies on their records – have carried and continue to carry guns without a legal permit to do so. But even so, the number of Americans licensed to carry concealed have been *increasing* since these laws have been passed. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that these laws are facilitating, rather than simply reflecting, the practice of concealed carry. But a newfound right to do something in itself does not explain its popularity, and nor does it explain why the laws were passed in the first place.

[7] During his 2008 election, then-Presidential Candidate Obama infamously described American gun owners to a hall full of San Francisco liberals: frustrated with the economy, "it's not surprising that they [Americans] get bitter, that they cling to their guns."

control movement in the US to a variety of exposés and "insider" accounts of the NRA's inner workings (Anderson, 1996; Brown & Abel, 2003; Feldman, 2008). But scholars have not adequately examined the significant qualitative changes in what Americans are practically doing with the guns at they do own – that is, *carrying* them for personal protection purposes. This study contributes to existing scholarship on the social life of guns by examining and unpacking the politics of gun carry in everyday life.

Gun carry is a new phenomenon. While in 1981, Lizotte, Bordua and White found "only partial evidence of a subculture of protective gun ownership," self-defense gun use (particularly gun carry) has exploded since their analysis, as indicated by transformations in the legal structure and new markets for concealable firearms and defensive accessories. Since the 1970s, increasing numbers of Americans have had the legal right to carry guns on their person as they go about their daily lives. Before the 1960s, most Americans lived in states that licensed Americans to carry concealed guns on a "may issue" basis. This meant that while they could request a license to carry a gun concealed, the licensing authorities could grant or deny the license on an arbitrary basis. In 1976, however, Georgia (with the help of the National Rifle Association) passed the first shall-issue legislation adopted in the post-1960s era. This "shall-issue" legislation completely removed the arbitrary licensing procedures of previous "may issue" systems, and it allowed anyone who fulfilled a list of clearly defined requirements (e.g., age, residency, training, and so forth) to obtain a concealed pistol license. When Georgia passed this law in the mid-1970s, only four other states had similarly lenient systems.

A few additional states quietly passed similar laws, but in 1986, Florida garnered national media attention for its shall-issue legislation, which galvanized over two-dozen more states following suit in the 1990s and 2000s. The variety of states with shall-issue legislation is wide, spanning the Western, Southern, Midwestern, and even Eastern regions of the U.S. Today, this dramatic shift in the laws and practices surrounding firearms means that 40 states allow residents to easily obtain a permit to conceal a gun (or, in some of these states, to do so without a permit at all – a new trend known as "Constitutional carry"). At least 8 million Americans now have licenses to carry guns concealed, more so than at any other time in American history, and residents in states like Florida, Pennsylvania and Michigan are licensed at a rate of about 1 in 20 to 1 in 25.

Importantly, gun carriers do not appear to follow the same demographic patterns as gun owners. While male gun carriers are overrepresented as compared to female gun carriers (men in Michigan are four times more likely to have a concealed carry license than women), in Michigan,[8] *whites and Blacks are equally likely to have a concealed carry license, and both groups are overrepresented among concealed carry holders* (see Appendix A). Michigan residents are licenses at a rate of 1 in 25, but both whites and Blacks are licensed at a rate of 1 in 24 according to 2013 data from the Michigan State Police.[9] Moreover, in Michigan's

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[8] Note that in terms of government data collected as part of concealed licensing, no national-level data exists due to differences in state-level concealed pistol licensing procedures, and I no of no survey that examines the national-level racial and gender make-up of concealed carriers.
[9] This means that low rates of concealed pistol licensing among the small percentage of non-white, non-Black Michigan residents (just over 5% of the population) must pull down the state ratio from 1 in 24 to 1 in 25.

three most populous counties, Blacks are more likely than whites to be licensed to carry: in Wayne County, where Detroit is located, 1 in 21 Blacks have licenses as compared to 1 in 24 whites; in Macomb County, a suburb of Detroit, 1 in 17 Blacks have licenses as compared to 1 in 24 whites; and in Oakland County, also a suburb of Detroit, 1 in 15 Blacks have licenses as compared to 1 in 23 whites. Certainly, these gun carriers – as racially diverse urban and suburban men and (to a lesser extent) women – break from popular stereotypes of gun owners as "toothless, butt-scratching bubbas" (Massey, 2004: 577). How, then, do we make sense of the contemporary gun politics that drives these gun carriers to not just own guns but carry them?

The Citizen-Protector: Individual Rights, Collective Duties
"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."
- *Second Amendment, US Constitution, 1791*

"Every person has a right to keep and bear arms for the defense of himself and the state"
- *Article 1, Section 6, Michigan Constitution, (1963; originally adopted without "keep and" in 1835)*

This dissertation examines how gun politics has dovetailed with neoliberal developments (a push toward privatization, failures of public law enforcement, increased insecurities articulated through crime) to create a version of citizenship oriented around guns as everyday objects of safety and security, of policing and protection. Notions of good citizenship lie at the center of gun politics. As Kristin Goss, author of *Disarmed* (2008), summarizes in an 2013 op-ed,

> *Gun politics is not simply about differences on policy proposals. Gun politics is about what it means to be a good American. It's personal. Even gun owners who don't belong to the NRA believe, as my dad did, that gun ownership is a civic virtue, a hallmark of American self-reliance and duty…For gun owners, ownership is evidence of their civic spirit.*

Varying across historical time and social context, citizenship is defined by both rights and duties. In this dissertation, I unpack the *citizen-protector*, a kind of citizen enacted through the exercise of gun rights for the purpose of both *self-defense* and *defense of others*. This is a particular kind of citizen who is willing to take (criminal) life in order to save (innocent) life, a moral duty that scholars have explored mainly only as it relates to the police role (e.g., Bittner, 1970) rather than a generalized basis of good citizenship. The United States provides fertile soil for this particular version of citizenship to take hold: the gun has historically served as the medium to exercise a right to self-defense and to enact a duty to ensure broader social order, oftentimes in revolt of the state. Two strains of gun-focused citizenship – one centered on an individual right, the other on a collective duty – are historically long-standing features of the so-called "American mind" (Brown, 1991). Not only the Second Amendment but also state constitutions celebrate both: Michigan's constitution of the early 1800s, for example, proclaims the right to "bear arms for the defense of himself [sic] and the state," with the understanding that the armed citizenry *is* the state.

These two strains are rallied in contemporary gun culture: from the 1984 Bernhard Goetz case[10] to the text of Stand Your Ground laws[11] passed in over a dozen and a half states after 2005 to the "insurrectionist ideology" that Horwitz and Anderson (2009) identify in some pro-gun arenas, both of these elements of American citizenship have been reinvigorated in contemporary gun politics. These strains are also evident in the texts that dominate pro-gun politics. Regarding the right to self-defense, the NRA's "The Armed Citizen" is a long-running column (dating back to the early 1900s) that features individualized accounts of self-defense. As O'Neill (2007) analyzes, the column emphasizes the valiant heroism of men, women, elderly and even children who defend themselves against faceless threats. The narrative is privatized (many of the incidents happen within the sanctuary of the home) and individualistic, showing the inefficacy of the state and demonstrating the need of individuals for the means of self-defense. Regarding the collective duty to promote social order, other texts suggest a more *proactive* dimension of pro-gun politics: John Lott's famous *More Guns, Less Crime* (1998) text has been appropriated by gun advocates not simply to suggest the legitimacy of individualistic right to self-defense: Lott's book is used to make the case that guns are not just good for those who carry them but for everyone. In other words, Lott's book suggests that gun ownership and carry is not simply an expression of the right to self-defense but also a collective duty aimed at promoting social order more broadly (the takeaway from the book is that the more people carry guns, the safer society will be for everyone).

Scholars, media pundits and pop sociologists have long emphasized the centrality of American culture as a driving, inertial force in shaping pro-gun sentiment. There are two dominant strains of this argument: one group of scholars argues that guns are taken up by Americans who have an inherent cultural disposition toward independence, self-reliance (Braman & Kahan, 2006; Kahan & Braman, 2003; Down, 2002) and, perhaps, the willingness to solve social problems through violence (Nesbitt & Cohen, 1996). Alongside this scholarship, another group of scholars argues that guns are a reactionary response to the declining status of privileged Americans, specifically white male breadwinners, in the wake of the status gains of women, non-whites and other marginalized groups of people (Connell, 2005; Burbick, 2006; Stroud, 2012; Cox, 2007; O'Neill, 2007; Melzer, 2009). I argue that the citizen-protector provides a different reading of gun culture as compared to the the self-reliant, independent American figured in the studies of Braman, Kahan and Down and the backlash losers in studies like Melzer's and Burbick's. Specifically, the citizen-protector provides a window into the *moral politics* that sustain pro-gun sentiment by showing how the act of killing to protect self and others is framed as morally just and warranted.

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[10] Bernhard Goetz shot 4 African American teenage boys in 1984. He was acquitted of murder but convicted of possession of an illegal weapon. Known as the "Subway Vigilante," Goetz was a symbol of frustration with high crime rates and garnered broad support. According to Brown (1991: 134), "a nationwide poll taken two months after the event showed that 57 percent (including 39 percent of nonwhites approved of Goetz's action and that, true to the spirit of no duty to retreat, 78 percent would, following Goetz's presumed example, use deadly force in self-defense."

[11] Stand Your Ground laws not only allow individuals to defend themselves but also *intervene* in some felonies in order to defend others, as described in further detail in Chapter 3.

The Citizen-Protector: **Historical Roots**

This moral politics connects guns to citizenship in two ways: on the one hand, guns enact an individualistic right to self-defense (as evidenced in the "The Armed Citizen") and on the other hand, they embody a civic duty to promote social order (as evidenced by the pro-gun embrace of Lott's book). In other words, the citizen-protector is not made of whole cloth but crafted out of two uniquely American ideologies: the "no duty to retreat" doctrine and "patriotic insurgency." These two ideologies do not simply shed light on the broad contours of pro-gun sentiment in the US; they also reveal core contradictions within gun politics, which helps explain the divergent appeal of gun carry to different kinds of Americans.

The "No Duty to Retreat" Doctrine. The US inherited the doctrine of "duty to retreat" from England, which stipulates that when faced with an attacker, the victim must attempt to flee the attack before resorting to self-defense. However, in the US in the 1800s, a new doctrine became institutionalized: the "no duty to retreat" doctrine, which states that a victim can immediately resort to self-defense if he or she is in fear of his or her life or grave bodily harm. No demonstration of an attempted retreat is necessary. A series of cases, starting in the late 1800s in state supreme courts and culminating in the 1921 *Brown v. United States* Supreme Court Case, upheld the "no duty" doctrine as moral imperative that rejected the "legalized cowardice" contained within the original English "duty to retreat" doctrine: "Transcending the legal maxim, it was a deeply felt philosophy of behavior with the authority of a moral value…the right to stand one's ground and kill in self-defense was as great a civil liberty as, for example, freedom of speech" (Brown, 1991: 37). Brown (1991) argues that by the 1880s, the "no duty" doctrine had become a national institution, critical to land consolidation and dispute in the West and celebrated in courts in the East as part of the duty to protect oneself and one's property (which, circa 1800s, included women and children).[12] Therefore, contained within the "no duty" doctrine is a tension: the doctrine both maintains an individualistic *right to self-defense* as well as a patriarchal *duty to protect one's household*. Judith Steihm (1982) characterizes this distinction by emphasizing "defenders," who share equally in the work of protection, and "protectors," who position themselves as privileged protectors of others, who are themselves presumed incapable of self-defense. Historically, the "no duty" doctrine has tipped in favor of protectors rather than defenders,

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[12] While there are debates as to the extent to which the mythical gun-slinging westerner existed to the extent that he now populates the American imagination, his importance is undeniably linked to the fact that "so many people at the time, and since, believed that he did. The frontier hero represented an ideal of manliness that left an indelible mark on the law of self-defense, not just in the western states where he supposedly lived, but in the east, where the legends really grew, as well" (Gillespie, 1989: 47). Defense of oneself and one's home was so central to American manhood that soon after the Supreme Court's decision in 1921, the "true man" test was soon applied not only to whites but also Blacks: in 1925, Clarence Darrow argued on behalf of Ossian Sweet, a Black man who decided to use firearms to defend himself and his family in his home when he moved onto an all-white block in Detroit and was attacked by an all-white "home owners association" (Boyle, 2005). Darrow's argument turned on the extension of "no duty" across racial lines, while Judge Murphy reminded the jurors that "under the law, a man's house is his castle. It is his castle whether he is white or black, and no man has the right to assail or invade it" (McRae, 2010). The case was declared a mistrial.

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meaning that property-owning men have benefitted significantly more from the doctrine than other Americans.

The Ideology of Patriotic Insurgency. Running alongside, and intersecting with, this emphasis on a moral duty and legal sanction to "stand one's ground" in face-offs that presumably occur at an individual-level, is an affinity for insurgency and revolt that connected guns not simply with the resolution of private disputes but moreover with the broader pursuit of social order. Historian Robert H. Churchill (2012) calls this "patriotic insurgency" and argues that it betrays a particular kind of libertarian ideology rooted in 18th century American Revolutionary thought. As Churchill (2012: 5) notes,

> *The early American proponents of this theory believed that liberty was best protected by a united community and that an individuals freedom to act on behalf of either the people or the state was subject to the approval of the local community. They believed that the recourse to legitimate violence was neither public, in the sense of requiring state sanction, nor wholly private.*

In the US context, then, arming oneself *against* the state is a way of enacting *American* citizenship. [13] Patriotic insurgency provides a cultural script for inscribing anti-statism into citizenship – a paradoxical alliance that uniquely characterizes the US context and provides fertile grounds for contemporary gun culture. While the Second Amendment laid the groundwork for the persistence of patriotic insurgency throughout American history, at each step, this insurgency has taken on different hues, sometimes radical, sometimes reactionary, but always armed in defense of citizens against the state. On the one hand, the penchant for collective violence provided fertile ideological soil for the rise of white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan first in the Reconstruction South and later in the Civil Rights era, and it also provided justification for white supremacist groups of the 1990s during the broader surge in militia activity (Crothers, 2003).[14] On the other hand, "patriotic insurgency" has also served radical ends as well. Labor organizations, for example, in the late 1800s turned to the Second Amendment and the doctrine of "patriotic insurgency" to arm themselves against state-sponsored defense of capitalists.[15] Likewise, armed Civil Rights and Black Power groups, from the Deacons for Defense (Hill, 2006) to the Black Panthers (Austin, 2006; Bloom & Martin, 2013) embraced gun politics to promote a radically anti-racist form of "patriotic insurgency." Thus, like the "no

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[13] This is precisely what the militia movement of the 1990s embraced: namely, "that popular political violence as a legitimate response to the denial of certain fundamental rights by agents of government; that insurgent violence against the state was a legitimate response to state-sponsored violence against its citizens and that a state monopoly on violence, absent any popular deterrent against its abuse, yielded more violence rather than less" (Churchill, 2012: 5).

[14] Indeed, it is in these developments that we can situate the South's unique contribution to gun control: so-called "may-issue" concealed carry licensing systems that ensured that whites maintained a monopoly on guns carried in public (Diamond & Cottrol, 1991; McDowall & Loftin, 1983; Tahmassebi, 1991). Thus, "patriotic insurgency" has been rallied for reactionary ends, serving to maintain racist regimes through armed extra-state organizations.

[15] Joseph Labadie, a printer, socialist and member of the Detroit Knights of Labor noted that "it is necessary to use dynamite to protect the rights of free meeting, free press and free speech" (Oestreicher, 1981: 200), and in 1885, calls were made to form a "workers' militia" called the Detroit Rifles (Oestreicher, 1981: 134). The *Labor Leaf,* a labor newspaper in Detroit, even compared armed workers to "their forefathers of 1776" (Oestreicher, 1981: 135).

duty" doctrine, there is a tension here: armed and organized revolt against the state may be either reactionary (think: KKK) or radical (think: Black Panthers). These stances imply slightly different relationships between citizen and the state against which he/she revolts: the state may be viewed as well-intentioned but inadequate and therefore in need of civilian "back-up", or Americans may arm themselves in order to supplant the state altogether. As such, guns taken up *in relation* to the state may serve to *supplement* or *supplant* the state.

The Citizen-Protector: **Contemporary Tensions**

Together, these two doctrines present two core tensions: a tension between *self-defense* and *defense of others* and a tension between *supplanting the state* versus *supplementing it*. How do the tensions between *defenders and protectors* (contained within the "no duty" doctrine) and between *supplementing and supplanting* the state (contained within the "patriotic insurgency" ideology) play out in contemporary gun politics? These tensions clarify how gun carriers enact this version of citizenship in divergent ways:
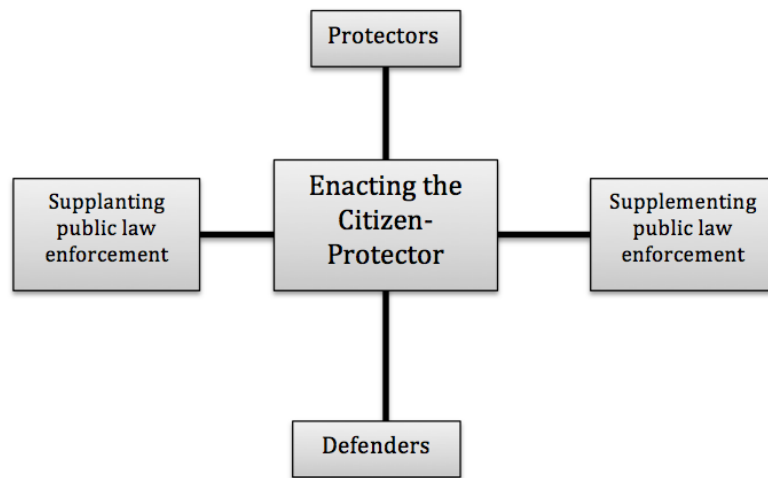
My research in Michigan revealed that male gun carriers in general tended to emphasize their duty to protect alongside the right to self-defense (i.e., the top-half of Figure 1.1), while female gun carriers tended to emphasize the right to self-defense (i.e., the bottom half). In other words, men tended to situate themselves as *protectors*, while women tended to situate themselves as *defenders* (Stiehm, 1982). Meanwhile, I found that relations to the state were racialized. Among the gun carriers I interviewed, the state is imagined consistently, though not exclusively, in terms of public law enforcement. While virtually all gun carriers emphasized the inadequacy of the police (and thus used their guns to *supplement* the police), men of color (and a subset of white men) used their guns to *supplant* the police (i.e., the upper left quadrant), enacting a more radical version of the citizen-protector.

The question, then, is why and how do these different gun carriers enact different versions of the citizen-protector, and in what contexts? And what is the role of the NRA in shaping how gun carry connects to citizenship? This dissertation argues that the NRA promotes gun carry as an innovation that solves neoliberal problems of policing with a particular solution of idealized

citizenship: the citizen-protector, which is in turn enacted by gun carriers in racialized, gendered ways in contexts of neoliberal decline.

The NRA

How does the NRA shape the "citizen-protector" model? Analyses of American gun politics often place the National Rifle Association (NRA) front-and-center in terms of explaining pro-gun America. The rising power of the NRA can be linked to the surge in conservatism in the U.S. since the 1970s,[16] with NRA's lobbying efforts, its ties to conservative politicians, and its ability to rally votes and dollars shaping it into one of Washington's most powerful lobbies. The NRA has used what Scott Melzer (2009) calls "culture war" rhetoric to galvanize conservative Americans, with significant costs to the Democrat party and leftist politics more generally. The argument that gun politics is driven by fear is so widespread that the gun industry has even (ironically?) embraced it, deeming President Barack Obama the "greatest gun salesman in America" for presumably compelling fearful Americans to buy guns and ammunition in record-breaking numbers since his election to the presidency (Owens, 2012). Conservatives and liberals alike have accredited Obama and the threat he presumably poses – as the first African American president, as a socialist gun grabber – with this boom in guns.

While much attention has been focused on the NRA's *national* lobbying efforts, however, scholars have paid relatively less attention to the NRA's *state-level* lobby efforts as well as how the NRA's service-oriented arm complements its more explicitly political arm. A linchpin of the NRA's state-level lobbying efforts has been the passage of shall-issue legislation. The passage of these laws signifies a win for pro-gun Americans wishing to not only own but also carry guns. But these laws are also vehicles for the NRA to link its service initiatives to its political agenda. States that *require* training (79% of shall-issue states do) often provide the NRA with a virtually exclusive mandate to train thousands of Americans who wish to obtain a concealed handgun license – and, in the course of training, promote the NRA. In other words, these laws do not just stipulate a series of criteria necessary to obtain a concealed weapons license. In addition,

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[16] Known as the "New Right," this political shift refers to a highly effective movement of think tanks, politicians, alternative media outlets, churches and grassroots organizations that culminated in Ronald Reagan's presidential election in 1980 and has swayed politics to the right ever since (Hardisty, 2000; Berlet, 2000; Diamond, 1995). While some popular writers have dismissed the New Right as a cacophony of disgruntled, but privileged, Americans and working class simpletons (see Thomas Frank's (2005) *What's the Matter with Kansas?* for an example), many scholars have shown that the New Right's political success has resulted from a sophisticated coordination across multiple strands of American conservatism – religious conservatism, libertarianism, social traditionalism, neo-conservatism, among others (Blee, 2010). While American conservatism was mainly a small, intellectual movement from the 1930s to the 1950s, American conservatism is now a complex, broad-based and powerful political ideology that is characterized by a general suspicion of the American government and strong support for punitive approaches to social problems, among other viewpoints (Himmelstein, 1990; Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2005; Lakoff, 2002). Because of the broad-based appeal of US conservatism, scholars have shifted from analyzing conservative beliefs as irrational paranoia (as per the scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s such as Hofstadter (1964) and Bell (2001)) to unpacking the moral universe and cultural worldviews (Lakoff, 2002) in which conservative politics appears not only rational but also upstanding and virtuous (for a particular excellent example, see Luker (1985)).

they stipulate that Americans wishing to exercise their "right to self defense" go through some form of NRA-certified training or be trained by NRA instructors. For the 30 states that require training in order to obtain a concealed pistol license, training requirements are often stated in such a way as to *de facto* require NRA training, and the NRA is referenced *by name* in many of these laws as the preferred training organization.[17, 18]

Because of these training requirements shall-issue laws provide a critical space for the NRA to shape how Americans enact gun rights: these laws allow Americans to exercise their gun rights by integrating guns into their everyday social lives, and this penetration of guns into everyday life occurs at an *embodied*, *practical* level. Guns are not simply something to think about in the abstract; to the Americans who carry them for self-defense purposes, they are a pertinent part of everyday life, without which they feel vulnerable and even "naked."

In these training courses, guns become a way to practice good citizenship as citizen-protectors: students learn that gun carriers are morally upstanding individuals who are committed to saving innocent lives, even if this means shooting another person. Stipulating the Second Amendment as "America's First Freedom," the NRA course materials and other print materials suggest that Americans are better off relying on their personal guns than the police for protection against crime. Concealed carry laws *allow* gun carriers to reduce their reliance on the police; NRA courses teach them *how* to do so. In that sense, gun carry is not only an expansion of gun rights but also a vehicle of neoliberal governmentality (Dean, 2009): coordinating the everyday practices of Americans, gun carry laws help remake how policing is carried out and by whom through the diffusion of power rather than its centralization (Foucault, 1990; Foucault, 1982; Simon, 2002).

I agree with previous analyses on the NRA in that it plays a critical in organizing and standardizing gun politics at the national level and in pushing through legislation that opens new opportunities for Americans to practice gun politics. However, focusing excessively on the NRA's uncanny success, rather than the context in which the NRA's initiatives could prove successful, risks both misunderstanding the contemporary specificity of gun politics and, for that matter, providing the NRA with perhaps more credit than it deserves in galvanizing American pro-gun sentiment. Indeed, the surge in pro-gun sentiment, as described above, can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, not

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[17] In Michigan, Public Act 372, which outlines the requirements for a concealed pistol license (CPL), states that the training program must be "certified by this state or a national or state firearms training organization." The specific requirements – at least 30 rounds fired, with three hours of range instruction and five hours of classroom instruction – line up well with the NRA's Personal Protection in the Home course, which – ironically – is the course that almost all NRA instructors in Michigan use to certify their students to carry a gun concealed *outside* of the home.

[18] Further, these laws are not only in the interest of the NRA. Shall-issue laws create market demand for firearms and firearm accessories: concealable weapons, defensive ammunition, firearm lasers, holsters, bulletproof vests. The U.S. firearms industry is, after all, big business: it includes about 300 companies that generate about $4 billion in annual revenue according to a 2011 Business Wire report. According to the Violence Policy Center, since 2005, the firearms industry has earmarked between $14.7 million and $38.9 million to the NRA. It is not a jump to say that the NRA and the firearms industry both profit from expanded laws that ensure that guns, firearms accessories and ammunition remain legally available and accessible to the American public (Sugarman, 1992).

Obama's election in 2008. It also predates the NRA's 'heyday' of the 1990s, when the organization reached 4 million members and helped inaugurate Newt Gingrich's Republican Revolution in the US Congress. The "right-wing backlash" narrative, while apparently intuitively plausible to both the Left and the Right, glosses over exactly what is unique about contemporary gun culture and politics: namely, the emphasis on gun carry in order to supplement, and in some cases supplant, public law enforcement. Corey's and Jason's stories both point out how much the "right-wing backlash" narrative misses its mark: as a gun-toting Democrat, Corey does not carry a gun because he is worried about "culture wars" but about policing and crime, and as a gun-toting African American, Jason is more concerned with the practical politics of establishing himself as a law-abiding citizen – to police and criminals alike. These gun carriers are "not so dumb" and "not so passive" (as Gamson's (1992) analysis of political talk reminds us): they are grappling to interpret, manage and address social problems with the cultural and socio-legal tools at their disposal. The NRA is critical in explaining which tools are in the toolkit (Swidler, 1986), but it is Corey and Jason who choose to use them and with what meanings. Both carry guns because they believe the best option at their disposal is to rely on a gun to protect themselves and others. The NRA's ability to shape pro-gun America, therefore, must also be linked to the organization's initiative to promote guns as everyday, practical tools, against the backdrop of increasing public concerns regarding crime and policing. In other words, this dissertation emphasizes two distinct motors behind the contemporary concealed carry movement: the NRA's lobbying and training initiatives at the *state* (rather than federal) level and the transformations in the organization of social insecurity, protection and policing under neoliberalism.

Neo-liberalism, Crime and Policing

How, then, might we further make sense of Corey and Jason and the broader social context in which Corey's (carrying a gun and shooting a 19-year-old in self-defense) and Jason's (openly carrying a gun despite police harassment) actions comprise a legally and morally acceptable response to problems surrounding crime and policing? In what social contexts is the citizen-protector an attractive model of citizenship? Any account of the social significance of crime in contemporary American life is incomplete without reference to a series of social shifts that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s that placed crime at the center of the American imagination. This period gave birth to what scholars have referred to as the "War on Crime," a collection of discourses, techniques, and objectives that have increasingly placed crime control at the center of American life (Simon, 2007).

The notion of fighting a "war" against crime was put forward in a 1968 position piece by then-presidential hopeful Richard Nixon entitled "Toward Freedom From Fear," which was written in response to the urban disturbances – riots, protests and an increase in crime – that marked the 1960s. Legal scholar Jonathan Simon argues that that decade represented the beginning of a "constitutional moment" characterized by "the problem of criminal violence and the widespread and enduring fear among Americans that our systems of public security, primarily our criminal justice system, could not protect them from becoming victims" (Simon, 2004: 339). In other words, the salient failings of the

American state centered on its inability to protect Americans. This shift facilitated a reinterpretation of the Second Amendment[19] according to which (1) victims are defined in a "zero-sum," war-like relation with criminals, with the former enjoying legal, moral and cultural supremacy; (2) lethal action is a legitimate response to these confrontations between victim and criminal, which again are imagined in zero-sum, warlike terms; and (3) individualistic solutions are preferred amid mistrust of government action (Simon, 2004: 356). In short, the unfolding of the War on Crime provided the cultural means with which to recast the Second Amendment as one of the most relevant aspect of the U.S. Constitution, rather than a "dead letter" (Simon, 2004) that refers to an anachronistic institution of early American history (i.e., state militias).

This "constitutional moment" gained traction from the reconstitution of American social life that scholars call neo-liberalism. At its core, neo-liberalism is a set of techniques, justifications and schema that emphasizes the expansion of the capitalist market as an end in itself. This definition has a number of distinct, if contradictory, implications. First, under neo-liberalism, the state is subordinated to the market, both through the *privatization and deregulation* of the state as well as through the increased emphasis on *consumerism* as the primary means to address social problems. While particular state agencies are dismantled and privatized, citizens themselves must "make do" with the only available means at their disposable: consumption. Thus, neoliberal ideology celebrates the market and the consumptive citizens who are privileged to participate in it.

What, then, is to be done with those who fail in this valued social activity (i.e., the duty to buy; see Rose (1999a; 1999b))? This question gets at the punitive side of neo-liberalism and betrays the simplistic definition of neo-liberalism as simply "deregulation" and "defunding": while social welfare is indeed dismantled under neo-liberalism, it is replaced by another rapidly expanding state apparatus – the criminal justice system – that addresses social and economic marginality with the punitive tactics of incarceration, coercive policing and racially biased sentencing (Wacquant, 2009). As Bernard Harcourt (2010: 80) notes, "the logic of neoliberal penality facilities contemporary punishment practices by encouraging the belief that the legitimate space for government intervention is in the penal sphere – there and there alone." Punishing those who cannot participate in the market, this punitive neoliberal state produces the racialized contours of the War on Crime as poverty management. Despite marked drops in crime rates, the War on Crime continues to shape the American social imagination through the criminalization of poor, Black men, a dynamic that both produces the specter of the Black criminal and subjects minorities to a punitive criminal justice system that exercises unequal power over minorities from the bottom (i.e., police) to the top (i.e., the death chambers).[20] This means that poor people of color (especially poor *men* of color) are more likely to have first-hand experiences in which they are harassed, illegally detained or falsely

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[19] Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution declares that 'A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep a bear arms, shall not be infringed."

[20] As Harcourt (2010: 85) goes on, "th[e] vision of an ordered market delimited by the penal sanction dominates the public imagination today. Modern penal practices in the United States are consistent with this. The size and cost of our neoliberal penal sphere in the United States far exceeds those of earlier periods."

arrested by police and other state agents than whites, and they are also more likely to face imprisonment (Brunson, 2007; Carr, Napolitano & Keating, 2007; Dottolo & Stewart, 2008; Hagan & Albonetti, 1982). A wealth of urban ethnographies have probed the urban ecology set into motion by the War on Crime. Poor, minority urban communities are both over-policed (as they are subject to police militarization and disproportionate enforcement of drug and gun laws in part through racial profiling) and under-policed (as police fail to provide basic levels of security to ensure social order).[21] Within this context, Harcourt (2006) shows that young men of color turn to illegal guns for a variety of reasons – self-defense, respect, masculinity. Meanwhile, ethnographers Sudhir Venkatesh (2008), Phillippe Bourgois (2002), and Martin Sanchez-Jankowski (1991) have shown that the sophisticated gang structures emerge in this vacuum of police protection precisely to establish order – rather than further undermine it. This is why some scholars have labeled gangs "primitive states" (Syropoulos, 1995). What, then, does all of this tell us about *legal* guns?

Policing as Civic Duty

The argument forwarded in this dissertation provides a parallel story to the urban ethnographies that have focused on the impact of the War on Crime on urban youth of color: I show that this strategy of acting like a state is not confined to the rogue world of gangs – it is a legal, and increasingly commonplace, practice among millions of Americans. As "crime-fighting tools" donned by private citizens, guns respond to the social preoccupation with *crime and criminals*, an increasing emphasis on privatized, consumptive solutions to collective problems and, therefore, a particular celebration of the self-protecting citizen – the citizen-protector. Linked to particular understandings of good citizenship, guns become imaginable as central, everyday crime-fighting tools amid the contemporary punitive neoliberal order. As Marx and Archer (1979: 38) presciently note just as the NRA began implementing its strategy of pushing for shall-issue legislation in the 1970s, "Americans have responded to recent law enforcement problems through increased fear, estrangement from one's neighbors, avoidance behavior, increased receptivity to law-and-order politics and – as the rising fortunes of the private security industry suggests – increased purchases of protective devices such as better locks, alarms and weapons," a sentiment that dovetails with scholars who stipulate guns as a response to perceptions of increased crime and decreased police efficacy (McDowall & Loftin, 1983; Smith & Uchida, 1988). Not only purchasing but actually performing security, today gun carriers thus take on *private* responsibility for protection through the guns they tote and thus treat policing as a virtuous civic duty.

While "policing" is best understood as a generalized social practice (indeed, throughout much of US history, policing has been handled by private, rather than public, entities), it is often popularly associated with public law enforcement – "the police." Gun carry contests this association by sharing in the work of policing and addressing perceived problems of public law enforcement – namely, police inadequacy and police aggression. Indeed, Michigan's gun laws, like many other states, do not simply expand the right to self-defense. They

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[21] See Rios (2011) for an evocative ethnographic account of this paradox and the ways in which it produces, rather than reflects, the criminalization of poor young men of color in Oakland, CA.

empower Corey and Jason to do something they simply could not have done before: they can perform some of the duties traditionally associated with police and thus can "act" like a police officer. Both can carry guns concealed thanks to Michigan's 2001 shall-issue legislation, which allows residents to obtain a license to carry a gun concealed provided they meet a set of predefined criteria. Meanwhile, Michigan's 2005 justifiable homicide law allows citizens to use a gun to protect not only oneself but also others – family members, friends and even strangers – against the threat of death or grave bodily harm. (For this reason, gun carriers nickname the law the "Good Samaritan Law.")

Does this mean that gun carriers are actually engaged in the everyday work of public law enforcement, rendering the latter more and more irrelevant? No. Gun carriers are not police officers: while some told me stories of performing citizen arrests or intervening in crime (or their willingness to) in ways that moved their understanding of their guns *away* from mere protection tools and *toward* policing tools, they were not involved in police bureaucracy and paperwork, in enforcing laws beyond citizen arrests, in coordinating raids and SWAT operations. So why talk about policing? First, policing is a generalized social practice that is both moral and practical. Policing, in the context of gun carrier, is more about a moral duty to promote social order in response to perceptions of social disorder rather than the concrete practices that characterize public law enforcement. Second, gun carriers take up this moral duty to promote social order *in relation* to public law enforcement:[22] guns are taken up in order to address practical problems of social disorder, amid particular understandings of public law enforcement and in order to protect, and in some cases produce, social order by promoting an alternative model of citizenship premised on the right and duty to protect and police. Echoing public law enforcement, gun carriers emphasize the masculine duty (or prerogative) to protect amid racialized understandings of crime and policing, with guns becoming particularly salient in contexts where the state's power to police is both incomplete and contested. Overall, policing is central to understanding the contemporary politics of gun carry precisely because gun carry is productive of citizenship (that is, the citizen-protector) oriented around *both* the right and the duty to defend self and others (that is, policing). Thus, the <u>overriding claim</u> of this dissertation is that the emergence of contemporary gun carry politics in Michigan is largely driven and shaped by the unfolding of a particular kind of destructive neoliberalism (which has undermined economic security while simultaneously exacerbating *racialized* concerns regarding *both crime and the state's capacities to police*) alongside longstanding gender ideologies *that sanction men with the duty to protect* and *stipulate that both dependency <u>on</u> the state and violation <u>by</u> the state are manifestations of emasculation.* Centered on a particular kind of citizenship promulgated by the NRA (the citizen-protector) but enacted in different ways by different kinds of gun carriers, this politics is not simply an ideological stand: it is a deeply felt,

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[22] While this study focuses on the self-defense politics of guns, this is not to imply that policing and personal protection comprise the only reasons that Americans own guns: American gun owners are also hunters, collectors, target shooters. Moreover, while this study looks at Americans who own guns *legally*, there is a wealth of literature on Americans who own and use illegal guns for personal protection and other reasons; see Harcourt (2006).

everyday politics that allows gun carriers to practically 'act like the state' as they supplement or supplant the state's capacity to police with their guns.

This emphasis on policing as a generalized, civic duty helps to make sense of both Corey and Jason. Stuck in Flint, a city of socio-economic decline, Corey used his gun to engage in a type of protection that he believed the state could not, or would not, provide. From his point of view, Corey's gun – "there's so much crime now, and there's so many less cops" and "[The cops] can't do nothing about it" – was a response to the police's ineffective capacity to combat crime alongside eroding social controls, including the breakdown of Flint's automotive industry; rampant unemployment; notorious spikes in violent crime; the bulldozing of huge swaths of the city; even eroding gang structures. But far from providing an alternative approach to public law enforcement, he seemed to mimic it: had Corey had a badge alongside his gun, his justifiable homicide would have far less noteworthy. Indeed, Corey acted out a familiar story that pitted gun-wielding, oftentimes white men (i.e., police officers) against poor men of color (i.e., repeat offenders "with a record"). It is no coincidence that Corey borrows the logic of the criminal justice system to justify the (un)worthiness of the 19-year-old he shot (rather than a fellow citizen, he is treated an adult offender with a criminal record).

Jason likewise borrows the logic of the criminal justice system, distinguishing himself from "thugs" by publicly and openly displaying his legally carried gun. But as a resident of Detroit, a city blemished with a long history of abusive police practices, Jason articulated police primarily as harassers – not as ineffective protectors. His gun allowed him to practice a kind of citizenship usually off-limits for Black men in America: the presumed thoughts of the onlookers – "Another black man going to jail for a gun" – reflect the reality that guns born on the bodies of young men of color are often the sign of criminals, not law-abiding citizens. And indeed, a disproportionate number of Detroiters are under prison control.[23] In contrast, Jason's lawfully owned gun distinguishes him from criminals (felons cannot own guns in Michigan) as well as stand up to police tactics targeting the city's residents.

Corey and Jason are thus both caught in a racialized dynamic of crime, criminalization and policing that has become particularly aggravated in contexts of neoliberal decline like Flint and Detroit. I argue that the racialized and gendered meanings attached to Corey's and Jason's guns derive *not* from their individual viewpoints or biases but rather from the gendered and racialized nature of the public institution they are struggling to replicate, replace and even repudiate: that is, the police, rather than an attempt to recover American frontier values, racist individualism or patriarchy – as some scholars of gun politics have argued (Connell, 2005; Burbick, 2006; Stroud, 2012; Cox, 2007; O'Neill, 2007; Melzer, 2009). Indeed, in turning to guns, both Corey and Jason enact themselves as citizen-protectors as they use guns to navigate conditions of social insecurity.

Methods

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[23] According to a report by the Urban Institute Justice Policy Center (Solomon, Thomson & Keegan, 2004: vi), "Approximately one-third (34 percent) of prisoners released to parole in 2003 returned to Wayne County" (where Detroit is located).

To understand gun politics as a productive, practical politics of policing, I ask three questions: Why are Americans carrying guns? What role does the NRA play in enabling people to carry guns? And how do gun carriers understand themselves in relation to the state, particularly public law enforcement? Focusing on Michigan, this dissertation answers these questions based on 71 in-depth interviews with gun carriers, five months of participant observation in firearms classes, at shooting ranges and at activist events, five months of online ethnography on gun-rights forums, and archive work, with the permission of the Board of Human Subjects at University of California, Berkeley.

The dissertation's focus on Michigan makes a unique contribution to understanding the broad appeal of guns in the US. The state has broadly expanded gun rights over the past 15 years, but it lacks the 'typical' heritage often used to explain away pro-gun America. It is not in the South, and thus, it lacks a 'culture of honor' often used to make sense of pro-gun America, nor does it have a clear "frontier" culture as is in the Western Mountain region (another argument often used to explain pro-gun politics). Moreover, Michigan is a politically Blue state. By focusing on the case of Michigan, this dissertation unpacks gun politics *not simply* as a case of right-wing mobilization *but also* as a response to concerns about crime and insecurity. This is particularly pertinent insofar as new research suggests that the white working-class Americans believed to comprise an important conservative voting base vary significantly by region, with Southerners most likely to embrace hardline conservative stances regarding abortion, treatment of racial minorities and labor politics (Jones & Cox, 2012).

My focus on Michigan, rather than the 'usual suspects' like Texas or Arizona, allows me to further move away from treating gun culture as an aberrant, and ahistorical, example of American exceptionalism and instead situate it squarely within broader dynamics of punitive social control. Michigan's history of deindustrialization and economic decay, racial segregation, violent crime, and urban rioting illustrates, in exaggerated form, particularly destructive moments of American neo-liberalism that have led to increased punitiveness as well as social insecurity.

Since 2001, Michigan has passed significant rollbacks on gun restrictions related to self-defense. In 2001, Michigan passed "shall-issue" legislation, allowing anyone who completes a one-day training course, has no record of felonies and fulfills a number of other requirements on age, residency status and so forth, to obtain a concealed pistol license. In 2005, Michigan passed expanded "Stand Your Ground" legislation. This law removed the duty to retreat for anyone who believes they are under imminent threat of death or grave bodily harm. It also allows someone to intervene in a felony if someone else is under imminent threat of death or grave bodily harm; for this reason, this law has also been nicknamed the "Good Samaritan" law. There is no provision in Michigan law that allows the defense or protection of property with lethal force. Today, around 400,000 Michiganders have concealed pistol licenses (or around 1 in 25 residents), and Detroit and Flint have justifiable homicide rates hundreds of times the national average. Moreover, the list of pro-gun, non-NRA organizations based in Michigan is lengthy: it includes the Second Amendment March (a national organization that organizes Second Amendment rallies throughout the country), Michigan Open Carry (one of the only non-profits in

the country dedicated to promoting the open carry of firearms), Michigan Coalition for Responsible Gun Owners (which boasts itself as the "largest state-based firearms advocate in America"), and Shooters' Alliance for Firearms Rights (an organization that releases its own evaluation of electoral candidates as a counterpoint to the NRA's political rating system). Within the span of merely 10 years, Michigan had transformed from a state in which "only criminals carry guns" to a place where gun carry is a legal, legitimate and relatively commonplace practice.

Michigan is not unlike the rest of the country; in most states, concealed carry of handguns is tolerated if not encouraged. But because of Michigan's history of deindustrialization and economic decay, racial segregation, violent crime, and rioting that illustrated, in exaggerated form, particularly destructive moments of American neo-liberalism, Michigan is particularly useful for understanding the contemporary social significance of American guns because it suggests how contemporary processes of deindustrialization and neoliberalism provide new basis for pro-gun sentiment. To the extent that these processes become increasingly widespread in the US and globally (as discussed in further details in the Conclusion), the analysis presented here may shed light on why people in such contexts turn to guns. As such, Michigan's predicament captures *one* ecosystem in the complex process of neo-liberalization (Peck & Tickell, 2002): it highlights the destructive features of deregulation, on the one hand, and criminalization, on the other.

To understand gun politics, I use both in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations. The present study is unique[24] in that it includes a range of sites at which gun politics are practiced – the shooting range, firearms training classes, pro-gun picnics, gun shows, and most importantly, everyday life; no study has analyzed the everyday impact of gun carry from an ethnographic perspective. To this end, I participated in Michigan gun politics in various forms during 2009. The first portion of my research involved intensive, multifaceted ethnography. From February to July, I conducted an ethnography of gun politics that allowed me insight into the broad range of activities that constituted gun politics. First, I attended pro-gun rallies, picnics and marches organized by state-level, non-NRA pro-gun organizations. Second, I joined gun carriers at the shooting range, and I also attended NRA training courses required to obtain a concealed pistol license. As part of this portion of my fieldwork, I also became certified as a NRA instructor. Third, I observed Michigan-based gun-rights forums on the Internet. And finally, for five months of my fieldwork, I carried a 9 mm Smith & Wesson M&P handgun on a daily basis.

For the second portion of my research, I conducted in-depth interviews with 71 gun carriers, which lasted between one and five hours. Unlike previous research on gun politics, my interviews reflect the demographics of gun owners as predominantly, but not exclusively, white men, as I include non-whites and women in my sample. I interviewed 71 pro-gun men (N = 60) and women (N =

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[24] There are an abundance of studies that make legal analyses of gun laws and policies; that analyze the relationship between guns and crime rates; that interrogate popular representations of gun owners as heroes or villains. A handful of studies directly engage the social worlds of gun owners and advocates themselves (Melzer [2009] talks to 20 gun users; Kohn [2004] interviews 12; Burbick [2006] attends gun shows).

11) who carried guns on a regular basis; the vast majority of interviewees were white (87 percent), while the rest were Black (N = 7), Hispanic (N = 1), or multiracial (N = 1). Interviewees were primarily employed (or looking for employment) as blue-collar workers in professions like welding or trucking (39 percent), white collar professionals like lawyers, IT specialists and administrative staff (42 percent), and security specialists, such as current or former police officers, self-defense instructors or bouncers (11 percent; in addition, 25 interviewees were certified by the NRA to teach firearms courses and taught on a regular basis, although this was not a primary source of income for all of them). Five were retired or not looking for work. Most were in their 40s, 50s and 60s. Based on their own political identification and the political views expressed during the interviews, 13 percent (N = 9) were left-leaning libertarians or liberals, and the rest were right-leaning libertarians and conservatives (N = 62). The vast majority of interviewees (80%) were from urban and suburban Michigan, including Detroit, Flint and Lansing.

Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation starts by situating Michigan's gun politics in the state's history of deindustrialization and economic decay, racial segregation, violent crime, urban rioting and, more recently, dramatic cuts to social services such as police and firefighters. I treat Michigan as one case of particularly destructive moments of American neo-liberalism that have led to increased punitiveness as well as social insecurity. In "**Chapter 1: Criminal Insecurities**," I situate in-depth interview data within the socio-economic transformation of Michigan since the 1970s, and I show how gun carriers imagine and articulate crime in terms of racialized and classed narratives that resonate with broader insecurities associated with postindustrialization and neoliberalism. I start by examining the historically long-standing use of guns as tools for home protection in the US, particularly in rural settings where gun owners and carriers are rendered vulnerable by their physical isolation. But most of the gun carriers I interviewed did not live in rural areas. Thus, I argue in this chapter that suburban and urban gun carriers use guns *not* to address the physical isolation of rural life but rather the *social vulnerability* of contemporary urban and suburban life.

I next argue that the NRA's promotion of expanded concealed carry laws address on-the-ground insecurities perceived by gun carriers, but in addressing these concerns, the NRA also attaches a particular set of civic rights, duties and responsibilities (that is, a model of citizenship) to the lawful carrying of guns. "**Chapter 2: Producing the Citizen-Protector: NRA Training & the Everyday Politics of Gun Carry**" turns to my ethnographic and interview data to examine how the practice of gun carry shapes gun carriers into a particular kind of citizen, what I call "citizen-protectors". Through an analysis of NRA training required to obtain a concealed pistol license, I show how the political subjectivities of gun carriers are shaped, and I suggest that at the center of contemporary gun politics lies a moral project centered on gun carriers' ethical and physical capacity to use lethal force to protect themselves *and* police their communities. While not all gun carriers enact this capacity (some students in these courses may choose not to carry guns at all), NRA courses are powerful because they present an alternative model for citizenship that centers on the capacity for both the protection of self and others.

This dissertation then considers how this version of citizenship presented in NRA training courses is enacted in everyday life by different kinds of gun carriers. These chapters turn the focus away from the NRA's organizational activities to the social life of the moral politics that the NRA promotes, and as such, these four chapters show how the ideologies promoted by the NRA are embedded, enacted and negotiated in everyday life by gun carriers. In "**Chapter 3: From Protection to Policing: Embracing the Citizen-Protector**," I show how gun carriers embrace this NRA version of good citizenship (the citizen-protector) by embracing guns both as tools for protecting themselves as well as tools used to *protect others:* specifically, gun carriers articulated a willingness to protect their families, friends and even strangers. This suggests that gun carriers are doing more than engaging in self-defense; they are also practicing a particular kind of policing. I argue that this additional layer helps explain the disproportionate representation of men among gun carriers: guns allow gun carriers to align themselves with the masculine-marked duty to protect vulnerable others – particularly women and children.

In "**Chapter 4: The Citizen-Vigilante: Mistakes, Misunderstandings and Misuses of Guns**," I explore the ways in which this idealized version of citizenship – the citizen-protector – opens up the possibility for lethal mistakes and misunderstandings that places gun carriers in legally risky situations as well as puts innocent lives at risk. Theorizing the citizen-vigilante as the "dark side" of the citizen-protector, I focus on the case of one gun carrier who was eventually arrested and charged for assault with a deadly weapon after he misinterpreted a threat. I use the case to explore how the citizen-vigilante emerges as a byproduct of self-defense laws, self-defense training, and self-defense culture, even as gun carriers themselves embrace a model of citizenship that emphasizes the moral duty to protect innocent life with lethal force if necessary.

Because gun carriers embrace a duty typically monopolized by public law enforcement, the citizen-protector necessarily stands in relation to public law enforcement. I use ethnographic and in-depth interview data to examine how gun carriers use their guns to define themselves through and against the police, and I show that gun carriers' critiques of public law enforcement are embedded in the growth of state militancy under the War on Crime and the more recent defunding of public services, both of which are linked to American neoliberalism. In "**Chapter 5: Supplementing the Police: Enacting the Citizen-Protector**," I explore the widespread belief among gun carriers that the police are an ineffective, if perhaps well-intentioned, force. Unpacking the historical relationship between the state's power to police and masculinity, I highlight how gun carriers use guns to address concerns about the state's perceived inability to protect, and as such, guns provide a means of fulfilling their own masculine duty to protect *as well as* reject dependency on the state for protection. Rather than using guns to express a deep-seated philosophical dislike for the police as a political institution, I find that most gun carriers turn to guns as a practical solution to the perceived problem of police inadequacy, which is aggravated in some cases by public law enforcement's own statements about defunding and personnel cuts. In other words, gun carriers mistrust the adequacy of the police in *practice* and thus reject dependency on the state, but they identify with the duties of the police in *principle* and embrace the kinds of social responsibilities that policing entails. This makes sense of the paradox that gun carriers are

demographically most likely to have levels of confidence in the police despite professing profound misgivings about police inefficacy: in fact, their guns are a testament to how seriously they take policing – so seriously, that they want to use guns to act like the police.

In "**Chapter 6: Supplanting the Police: Radicalizing the Citizen-Protector**," I use interview data, alongside observations made during my ethnographic and online work, to show that some gun carriers are concerned not only with the state's inability to protect but also its propensity to violate; all but one non-white and many white interviewees highlighted police abuse and emphasized their guns as a means to protect themselves and their rights, a claim confirmed by my ethnographic data. By calling attention to the racialized relations between gun carriers and public law enforcement as well as the gendered practices that comprise police stops, I argue that for some gun carriers, guns are also a means of protesting excessive and violating police force. This leads some gun carriers – particularly gun carriers of color as well as gun carriers who openly carry their guns – to enact a more radical version of the 'citizen-protector', or what I call the neoradical citizen-protector.

After considering how men use guns to define themselves as citizen-protectors in relation to public law enforcement, I turn to my interview and ethnographic data on female gun carriers as well as my own auto-ethnographic experiences as a gun carrier. In "**Chapter 7: The Softer Face of Gun Carry: Citizen-Protectors or Citizen-Defenders?**," I examine the relationship between women and gun carry. On the one hand, female gun carriers reported various benefits from carrying a firearm, such as feelings of empowerment, greater mobility, or enhanced safety. On the other hand, however, as female gun carriers entered gun politics, they encountered a culture of masculinity perpetuated by other gun carriers and even police officers, who read their decision to carry a gun *not* as empowerment but rather as an expression of their maternal instinct; their sexual desirability; or a laughable attempt to be 'one of the boys' – not unlike the ridicule experienced by female police officers. Even as women carriers experienced guns as empowering, men's disparagement of armed women suggests that the duty to protect and police remains masculine terrain, despite claims by pro-gun men that guns are "the Great Equalizer." Drawing on feminist scholarship, I argue that some women's experience suggest an alternative version of gun-involved citizenship – the citizen-*defender*.

I summarize my findings and their implications for future scholarship in the "**Conclusion: Fear of an Armed Nation**." I consider how the analysis presented here can inform gun politics at the state and national levels. Acknowledging the deep embeddedness of guns in American life as a means of addressing social insecurities amid perceptions of police inefficacy, I end by challenging the terms of the vitriolic "Great Gun Debate" in an attempt to reframe the gun debate as a conversation about protection and policing. Acknowledging the deep embeddedness of guns in American life as a means of addressing social insecurities amid perceptions of police inefficacy, I argue that gun control advocates oftentimes fail to recognize the moral and practical politics embedded in gun culture and how, ironically, gun control measures may incite greater support for guns than reduce it (not unlike Gallaher's (2003) critical analysis of gun politics with respect to the US Patriot movement). Based on the findings of this dissertation, I suggest that policies emphasizing the *supply* rather

than the *demand* for guns are misguided. This shift, I believe, would not only move beyond the "Great Gun Debate" but it would also address the underlying concerns of the millions of Americans who chose to own and carry guns. As such, this dissertation tries to answer the call of British sociologists Hillyard and Burridge (2012) for a "distinctly sociological contribution to the debate" on guns by clarifying how the use of firearms for self-defense comes to be sensible, attractive, enjoyable and perhaps even socially necessary to the more than 8 million Americans licensed to carry.

Chapter 1: Criminal Insecurities

"Our houses are protected by the good Lord and a gun.
And you might meet 'em both if you show up here not welcome, son.
Our necks are burnt, the roads are dirt, and our trucks ain't clean.
The dogs run loose, we smoke, we chew and fry everything."
- Josh Thompson, Country Western singer, "Way Out There"

For much of American history, a gun in the house has been a staple, bread-and-butter item. Historically, guns have provided food (through hunting) as well as protection (from "wildlife," both animal and human, as a couple of gun carriers joked to me) for Americans living in isolated, rural areas. This is reflected in the regional proportion of home gun ownership; according to Gallup, households in the West (43% of households), South (54%) and Midwest (54%) are places where Americans are more likely live in rural farms and have much larger rates of household gun ownership as compared to the East (36% of households).

The use of guns as tools for home defense (and hunting) is widely accepted across the American political spectrum; when U.S. Representative and Democrat Gabrielle Giffords was shot at a meet-and-greet event in Arizona, several Democrats publicly opposed high-capacity handguns that can hold over 30 rounds and be easily concealed, but many professed to have no problem with shotguns in the house for sensible self-protection. And in almost all states, even notoriously "anti-gun" states like California, armed protection of the home is completely legal. Such uses of guns have been legal by common law, if not formal law, for hundreds of years.

The rural gun carriers I interviewed articulated this general embrace of guns as sensible tools of home defense in ways that seemed decontextualized from place and time. For example, Julie is a 42-year-old white woman who carries a gun on a regular basis and owns several home defense guns in addition to her carry pistol. A divorcee, she lives alone in a rural area of Michigan; her farmhouse, complete with chicken coop, is down a long country road. But Julie is not a "typical" farm girl; she is a self-described feminist who lives alone and works in corporate America, but she nevertheless has a rural lifestyle in which home gun ownership seems natural. She explains a moment where she felt her home was insecure:

> *About a month ago, Bessie [her dog] barked, and I got up, and I looked out the window. I could tell there was something going on, and I grabbed my pistol, and I looked out the window, and there were two carloads of people in my driveway at like 2:30 in the morning. One was parked on the road, and one was parked in the drive. I'm like, I'm going to need a rifle! And I really did – I went and got my rifle, because this is not good. And what it was – I think there was a carload of woman and men and they were like leaving the bar – there was like giggling and stuff, and then they finally*

> *took off, but I was like, this pistol isn't going to do it. I don't know why*
> *these people are in my driveway at 2:30, 3:30 in the morning.*

Julie's story emphasizes a decontextualized story of guns as tools of household protection; a woman living alone is threatened by a generic group of "teenagers" – this story, devoid of meaningful race, gender or even class markers, could have just as well have been told in 1950 as in 2010, when I sat down to talk to Julie in her home. Brandon, a white, pro-gun Democrat in his early 60s who has spent his life in a conservative, rural area, also articulated a rather generic narrative about the role of firearms as home protection tools. As he explains,

> *I grew up on a farm, and we always would go hunting– so we always had*
> *weapons around the home, shotguns, rifles. It was something that was an*
> *accepted way with us in Northern Michigan. [...Today,] if you go to break*
> *into my house, this is what you are going to get. The first thing you have*
> *to do is get through the pit bull, and then you have the Chihuahua at the*
> *top of the stairs. Then you are looking at a .44 magnum. And the barrel is*
> *enough! I don't even have to hit you, the concussion will knock you down!*
> *It's a great deterrent! You call 911 where I live, and the person would be*
> *able to put in 36 clips into you before the cops even thought about turning*
> *the corner.*

As with Julie, the gun is part of a broader ecosystem of rural life in Brandon's account. With the police protection promised by 911 elusive due to the vast open space of rural Michigan, Brandon relies on his dogs (a pit bull and Chihuahua) and his .44 magnum handgun. Brandon's account, like Julie's, is mostly characterized by the isolation of urban life that breeds a particular kind of frontier self-reliance that other scholars have connected to gun culture (Burbick, 2006; Melzer, 2009; Cox, 2007; Connell, 2005; Slotkin, 2003). And like Julie's account, Brandon's also seems nostalgically timeless: frozen in time, rural Americans turn to guns as a deeply embedded form of home protection.

Off the Farm

Julie's and Brandon's stories highlight armed but isolated rural American households. Their story sits well with popular images of gun culture as a primarily rural affair. But the majority of the gun carriers I interviewed were not rural; they were suburban or urban. In fact, of the roughly 400,000 concealed pistol license holders in Michigan as of March 2013, over 185,000 reside in the three counties that comprise Detroit and its suburbs (Wayne County, where Detroit is located, has the most license holders at almost 80,000). Unlike Julie and Brandon's accounts, these gun carriers are rendered insecure not simply by physical isolation but also by *social* vulnerability. While *physical* isolation takes a front seat in Julie's and Brandon's accounts, gun carriers who lived in more urban and suburban areas emphasized the *social* vulnerability tethered to changes in the social geographies in which they are situated. And they contextualized their feelings of vulnerability, insecurity and unsafety as a patently *contemporary* phenomenon.

For example, consider how Casper, a white gun instructor in his mid-50s who lives in suburban Detroit, describes today's criminal in contrast to the criminal of the past:

> *In the 60s, [thieves would say] "Give me this!" And they had a knife, and*
> *you gave them your wallet, and they'd go away. Nowadays, they'll have*

your address, your ID, they'll come to you while you are sleeping, their
buddies will come with them, they'll break in the house, murder, rape, rob
and pillage you.

This is quite a different narrative than Julie's and Brandon's; Casper imparts a clear, nefarious motivation to the criminals in his story. They are organized, they are excessively violent, and they are nightmarish. And they are not like they used to be; whereas criminals in the past performed petty crimes that resulted in the small inconvenience of a stolen wallet, today's criminals viciously and rapaciously stalk their victims into their most intimate spaces – the home – to "murder, rape, rob and pillage."

Other gun carriers also indicated that 'something had changed' in their communities: Dave, a 32-year-old white computer programmer who lived in a suburb that directly bordered Detroit, described a downturn in his community. As my fieldnotes describe our conversation:

He went on to tell me about his neighborhood declining. He said that his
next-door neighbor got firebombed….Crime is definitely going up in his
neighborhood, and that that's just the reality of life. People need to be
proactive and directly involved in their own safety.

Likewise, Nancy is a white married woman who lives in a Detroit suburb in Wayne County, the same county as Detroit. When I asked her and her husband about their decision to own and carry guns, she told me, "Things are just getting weird with the economy the way it is, and it's getting closer and closer to our back door. It's getting out of control, and I want to be able to at least have some control. There's more break-ins, there's more abandoned homes." To illustrate, Nancy referenced a neighborhood on the edge of Detroit: Redford. Turning to her husband, she said, "Just look at your sister [in Redford]. There was a break-in like four doors down from her…They beat the hell out of this old lady because they wanted the pop cans out of her backyard and she didn't even have any. Right?" I asked her to explain. She went on, "There were teenagers going around and knocking on doors, getting pop cans. This 82-year-old woman answered the door and said, 'No I don't have any.' They said, 'we'll go around in back and look in the garage.' And she was like, 'No, you're not.' And so they beat her half to death. […] Redford is going downhill quick." Nancy refers to Redford, a historically white suburb, to explain the seemingly inescapable insecurities that now threaten homes around Detroit's suburbs; after all, "it's getting closer and closer to our back door," with economic problems presumably driving Detroit's crime problems out into the suburbs.

Indeed, rather than contained spaces of criminality, Detroit and Flint were imagined by gun carriers as – to quote Sam, a white gun carrier who lived in a more rural suburb of Detroit – a "dead ulcer" that "spreads" into the suburbs. Suburban gun carriers told me that they worried about "roving gangs of criminals" that presumably traveled from Detroit to terrorize surrounding areas and render suburban homes – the very space of middle class security (Simon, 2010) – vulnerable. Ben, a white retired engineer and firearms instructor who lives in suburban Wayne County (the same county as Detroit), provides another image of this shift, explicitly referencing the specter of Detroit, explicitly highlighting the centrality of not only place but also race:

We are still in Wayne County, though we are on the very edge out here –
right on the Washtenaw border. We still have reason to be concerned

about the city of Detroit and its residents. I mean, you heard it – years ago – white flight! Then it became good black flight. And now its just – the bad of the bad are left over and leaving. It had such a – admirable reputation in its day. It's just so sad to see what's become of it.

Though he admits that he lives moderately far from Detroit, Ben says that he still has "reason to be concerned about the city of Detroit." And unlike Brandon and Julie, he explains his concerns in terms of social change, pinning his own insecurities on the "bad of the bad" Black Detroiters who, as he told me earlier in the interview, "are migrating out this way to do their dirty deeds." Other times, this more recent "spread" was explained by gun carriers in terms of the general downturn in the Michigan economy against the backdrop of Detroit. Felix, a white firearms instructor who lives in the deep suburbs of Detroit, told me that one of the reasons he purchased his gun "was for home protection…If you read the [local paper] for the last to years, the home invasions are on the increase. The economy has something to do with it – people are more desperate." Billy, a white man who moved several years ago from a rural area in Montana to just a few miles north of Detroit, also emphasizes a "change" by telling me, "Since I've been living in Michigan, there has been a change. And it's really become more noticeable to me because where I'm from." He went on to explain his reaction to this "change": "when I'm at home, if I walk out into the garage, or I go out there to get the mail, I got the holster on, and the gun's in there."

But this sense of change was not confined to the suburbs; it also permeated the urban centers. Gun carriers in Flint and Detroit also told me that they were turning to guns out of a growing sense of insecurity. For example, Austin, a 36-year-old white machinist and truck driver who lived in Flint for several years, told me that he "tried to live my life [by] stay[ing] out of confrontation." He told me that even with a gun, "After dark in Flint, I would not even go off my property." Nevertheless, he openly carried a handgun on his property: "When I was at home, in the neighborhood I was in, I wanted people to understand that if they were going to try and mess with me, it would not be any fun for them. For the most part, I don't really often carry openly – I never have really, except when I was in Flint, and I made a point to do it when I was in Flint." And recall Jason, the African American Detroiter from the introduction, who told me that "the economy was going bad and everything" and "I said, you know, my number's coming up."

This sense of change suggests that something is different about contemporary gun culture, particularly the portion of gun culture that revolves around self-defense and gun carry and attracts people in urban and suburban areas to take up arms. Like Americans in the mythical Wild West, these gun carriers use guns for enhancing their security and safety, but they live in a very different kind of frontier than the one that figures in the so-called "frontier mythology" usually ascribed to gun proponents (Melzer, 2009): this frontier – marked by 8 Mile, 7 Mile, or any other number of streets that Michiganders use to parse out spaces of varying degrees of safety and insecurity – teeters on the brink of disorder and breakdown, rendered insecure by social vulnerability more so than mere physical isolation. While the social significance of guns as tools of protection has long existed in the American imagination, guns are being deployed in social spaces like Michigan to address contemporary social problems. But what are the social insecurities in which gun carriers are embedded?

Beautiful, Horrible Decline

Michigan, particularly the Metro Detroit area, is haunted by two well-known, and intertwined, American nightmares (Steinmetz, 2009). One is a racialized nightmare, represented by Black urban poverty, racial segregation and White Flight to the suburbs. The other is an economic nightmare made up of closed factories, rampant unemployment and abysmal levels of economic inequality. In Michigan, these two nightmares are weaved together in an urban stretch of I-75 that spans 70 miles from Detroit to Flint.

In the southern end of this corridor lies predominantly African American Detroit; once celebrated as Motor City, the city is a living ruin of the once-vibrant automobile industry. As Farley, Danziger and Holzer (2000: 1, 2) note, "Detroit, the Motor City, was once the symbol of our national industrial prowess, the home of an innovative automobile industry that played a key role in the development of the middle class…[now] Detroit no longer symbolizes industrial might or technological innovation. Rather, the city is frequently seen as leading the nation in unemployment, poverty, abandoned factories, empty office buildings, high crime, and bitter racial strife."

Majestic buildings pockmarked with broken windows and loosely attached plywood line the cityscape of Detroit, eerily evocative of the city's former glory. Its once-monumental, but now abandoned, Central Station has been stripped of its plaster and brass by vandals, and shattered glass and broken tiles now cover the floor as the dramatic arches inside cast shadows across the debris of the vast building. Detroit's "beautiful, horrible decline" (according to a 2009 Time Magazine headline) has given rise to what some locals call "disaster porn." Arguably founding the genre, Yves Marchand and Romain Reffre, two French photographers, descended on the city in 2008 and snapped disturbing images of decayed beauty that conjure up, to use Steinmetz's (2008: 211) phrasing, a "Golden era of Fordist prosperity," feeding the "nostalgic longings" of white suburbanites.

Wander around Detroit, and you'll see the empty houses and lots that exude a zombie-like sense that the city is simultaneously living and dead, vacant but persistent. Schools themselves are closed down and abandoned, and only 62% of Detroit's students graduate high school.[1] Quaint houses are now uninhabited and dilapidated, mocking the middle-class lifestyle promised to new migrants to the city back in the early 1900s. A far cry from the Five Dollar Day advertised by Henry Ford in 1914 to attract new workers to the city, today's Detroit maintains an unemployment rate of around 19% and a poverty rate of 32%.[2] Detroit appears, then, as both warzone and abandoned battlefield; it is a broken promise to the sons and daughters, granddaughters and grandsons of those who came to the city chasing the seemingly unstoppable engine of American industry.

Industrial oasis is now urban wasteland. Life expectancy in Detroit is lower than in any other major American city. According to a report by the Urban Institute Justice Policy Center (Solomon, Thomson & Keegan, 2004: vi), "The

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[1] See "Detroit High School Graduation Rates Rise" from *CBS Detroit* (2011).
[2] See "Michigan Unemployment Rate Drops to 8.8 Percent, Detroit Unemployment Still 19 Percent" in the *Huffington Post* (2012).

majority (80 percent) of prisoners released to parole in Wayne County returned to Detroit, where the unemployment rate in 2000 was more double what it was in the rest of the state, and where over one-fifth of the families live in poverty. Among the prisoners released to parole in Wayne County, 41 percent returned to eight zip codes—all of which are in Detroit. Most of those eight zip codes display high levels of economic and social disadvantage" (Solomon, Thomson & Keegan, 2004: vii). When asked about their top concerns, Detroiters themselves overwhelmingly cite crime and the problems that breed criminal activity: abandoned buildings and vehicles, broken streetlights, bus service, drugs.[3] The Detroit Police Department has recently ended its policy of automatically responding to burglary calls, and citizens have turned to their guns as police presence shrinks from already abysmally low levels. Justifiable homicides have increased 79% in the city of Detroit from 2010 to 2011 to 34, about 2,200% above the national average. Carl Taylor (2012; see also Taylor (1989)), a criminologist and ethnographer of gangs in Detroit, describes this urban context as terrorism: "urban terrorism is what many citizens and communities in Detroit are experiencing. Robberies, home invasions, random shootings and homicides of innocent citizens, including babies, young children and families….I say terrorism because of the many fine citizens trapped in their homes and apartments being held captive…Detroit, with its long traditional of blue collar work ethic, is struggling with the transformation of the postindustrial era."

8 Mile marks the northern boundary of Detroit: cross this boundary, perhaps traveling up the thoroughfares of Woodward Avenue on the West and Gratiot Avenue on the East, and you'll find a cacophony of suburban spaces: Ferndale, Royal Oak, Warren, Roseville, Eastpointe, Southfield, Dearborn Heights, Clawson, Madison Heights. Save for a few exceptions (e.g., Pontiac, derisively referred to by some locals as the "Little Detroit" for its increasing African American population and relatively high crime rates), these are historically white areas, where panicked white homeowners fled as African Americans began populating the city of Detroit in the 1920s, presumably driving down property values. The 1967 Riot – often incorrectly credited with causing Detroit's decline (as argues, the decline of Detroit started long before the Riot) – did not create this northern drift of whites, but it accelerated it dramatically.

Today, these predominantly white suburban areas are hardly immune to the socio-economic decline brought on by the processes of deindustrialization that have gutted Detroit; as Taylor (2012) notes, "this is much more than a Detroit or a race issue when we consider similar problems in the suburbs." There is something ironic here: as Binelli (2012: 9) notes in his journalistic account of the city, "a deep racial animus [has] continued to pit Detroit's suburbs against the city (the most segregated major metropolis area in the country) – this despite the fact that the suburban sprawl largely invented by Detroit automakers had begun evincing a structural failure of its own, with foreclosure rates in once-model suburbs like Warren actually higher than Detroit's."

There are some suburban strongholds – Bloomfield Hills, Grosse Pointe, perhaps Rochester Hills – where white privilege continues to coincide with economic security, but for the most part, the presumed safety of the white suburb has been eroded by economic insecurity. Whereas Michigan added about

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[3] See "Detroiters' No. 1 Concern" from *Detroit Free Press* (2012).

88,000 jobs every year from 1991 to 2000, this trend reversed so that by 2009, Michigan lost 783,000 – or 1 in 5 – jobs according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The miles and miles of mom-and-pop shops that used to thrive off of Michigan industry have closed, one-by-one, leaving suburban Michiganders with fewer and fewer employment options; Ernie's, a famous local deli near Ferndale that still manages to sell its hearty, caloric sandwiches, used to cater to factory workers in the early and mid 1900s. Now, it is more of a kitschy relic.

Historically, suburban life has been – as Simon (2010) shows – a security precaution historically affordable to middle-class, white Americans. Life in the suburbs promised not only home ownership but also refuge from the problems that blight urban centers, including crime. But the increasing insecurity of these areas betrays the increasing insecurity of Michigan's middle class: a recent study from the *Economic Policy Institute* shows that the household income in Michigan has fallen 11.2% from 1979 to 2010. To put this into even more stark perspective, in 1979, Michigan's middle class made 13% more than the US average, but in 2010, this figure was 6% *below* the US average.

Passing through this suburban sprawl during the 90-minute drive up I-75 from Detroit to Flint, you eventually arrive at a dead end – both figuratively and literally, as the interstate had been closed down and turned to dirt during my fieldwork. The birthplace of both General Motors and the United Auto Workers, Flint has lost 20,000 residents since 2000, and despite meager attempts to reindustrialize the city after General Motors closed its last factory in the 1980s, Flint was declared a "financial emergency" in late 2011. Over a third of its population lives below the poverty line.

Racially segregated (Detroit and Flint are predominantly Black, the areas between them predominantly white), economically stratified (Detroit and Flint are centers of impoverishment, even though the entire region is economically strained), deindustrialized, depopulated: Michigan is a broken dream, a place where hard-working, industrial Americans have risked life and limb – while working, while striking – only to end up with one of the worst economies in the US. This reality is not lost on the state's residents: though some optimistically embraced Michigan's work ethic and hoped for the future, they also see the state as a sort of doomsday prophesy for a myriad of insecurities that may soon face the rest of the country.

The specters of both Detroit and to a lesser extent Flint therefore serve as flashpoints for the neoliberal and punitive developments in the US over the past 50 years. In the 1960s and 1970s, spiking violent crime, urban upheaval and political unrest gripped the American imagination. As Comaroff and Comaroff (2004) note on the politics of neoliberal punitiveness, "In these times, criminal violence is taken to be diagnostic of the fragility of civil society." In Michigan, this "diagnostic" criminal violence takes the form of sporadic, seemingly random home invasions, muggings and shootings alongside more collective, deliberate acts of violence, such as the 1967 Riot and the annual Devil's Night (where arsonists burn parts of Detroit the night before Halloween). Indeed, it is through crime that the two American nightmares weaved together in Southeastern Michigan – one that is about racial segregation, inequality and oppression, the other about economic insecurity and decay – are imagined and addressed by gun carriers.

The Racialized Nightmare

"Shoot me, I'm already dead."
– Ballcap Logo in Detroit, Circa 1980s

Though Detroit had a relatively small Black population prior to 1910, because of both Black and white migration from the South, Detroit was the US's fastest-growing metropolitan area in the 1920s (Martin, 1993). While African Americans were lured by promises of higher wages, better housing, and overall less racial animosity than the South could offer at the time, many found that many of the problems that beset them in the South followed them North. The slums created by the influx of new residents due to racist housing practices were seen by white Detroiters as evidence of the degeneracy of the new African American residents (Sugrue, 2005), and as Martin (1993: 47) writes, "whites responded to the influx of 'uncivilized' Blacks with restrictive covenants and segregation...[and] the presence of white migrants from the South intensified racial tension in Detroit." Crime, poverty, moral laxity – all of these issues were attached to Black Southerners, whose customs, lifestyles and mannerisms seemed offensively foreign to Detroiters, particularly to white and Black elites, the latter of whom "generally agreed with white Detroiters 'that the southern Negro is more criminal by nature than his northern brother'" (Katzman, 1973: 162).

The next 30 years of Detroit's history would be marked by abusive police practices, the formation of violent all-white "home owners associations" aimed at keeping Blacks off of all-white blocks, the dwindling of economic opportunities for both African Americans and whites (African Americans, by the way, never did have access to the $5-a-day jobs they were promised), the fleeing of whites from the city, and one interracial riot in 1943, which was the bloodiest riot at the time (Georgakas, Surkin & Marable, 1998). Despite the complex and long-term problems besetting Detroit's African American population since their arrival in mass numbers in the 1920s, the 1967 Riot is popularly understood – in the press, in the popular imagination – as the turning point (Sugrue, 2005; Fine, 2007). As Binelli (2012: 3) describes the popular imagery at that time, "If, once, Detroit had stood for the purest fulfillment of US industry, it now represented America's most epic urban failure, the apotheosis of the new inner-city mayhem sweeping the nation like LSD and unflattering muttonchop sideburns."

The Detroit Riot began on July 23, 1967, early in the morning when police decided to raid a blind pig (an illegal liquor establishment) on Twelfth Street that was serving alcohol after hours. A number of circumstances made the raid noteworthy, though not out of the ordinary: because of joint welcoming and farewell celebrations for Vietnam War soldiers, the blind pig was particularly crowded that night; a split-second decision to arrest everyone in the establishment meant that police required additional reinforcements; safety concerns with the alley behind the establishment led police to parade arrestees on Twelfth Street, thereby bringing the raid out into the public; the slow arrival of reinforcements gave time for a crowd to gather; and finally, the politicized messages screamed by arrested African Americans as they were brought into police vehicles added an immediate element of protest to the raid. Initially, the police seemed to take a rather apathetic attitude toward the gathering crowd. Aiming to contain the riot area around Twelfth Street, they did little to actually stop any looting or vandalism that had already started (Fine, 2007). The

atmosphere initially seemed jubilant. As one rioter noted in the early hours of the morning of the 23rd, in the face of the lack of police presence, "For the first time in our lives we felt free" (Fine, 2007: 161).

The Riot went on and became increasingly violent. This violence was due not only to rioters *but also to* the Detroit police and the National Guard, the latter of whom were called in by Mitt Romney's father George Romney, who was governor of Michigan at the time. Detroit became a literal war zone with 3,000 police, 500 state troopers, 2,000 members of the Michigan National Guard, 5,000 paratroopers from the Eighty-second Airborne. This led Representative John Conyers of Detroit to note that "what really went on was a police riot," with "federal agents...restrain[ing] Detroit police...unbelievable in their determination to visit excessive violence upon the population" (Austin, 2006: 83). In all, the official numbers report that about 7,000 people were arrested, 43 people died, and 1,189 were injured, with the vast majority of fatalities due to police and National guardsmen shootings of Blacks.

In the aftermath, there was a distinct disparity between whites and Blacks regarding perceptions of the Riot, its causes and its characteristics. If 69% of Detroit Blacks in one survey said that the Riot occurred because people were "being treated badly," only 28% of whites agreed. Moreover, 31% of whites said that "criminals" had started the riot; 11% of Blacks thought so. Most problematically, 37% of surveyed Detroit whites said that stronger law enforcement was needed as a preventative measure against future riots; within a few months, this proportion among whites grew to 51% (Fine, 2007: 391). In contrast to the alleged criminality of rioters and the Riot itself, a few months after the Riot, 56% of Blacks preferred "rebellion or revolution" to the term "riot" to describe Detroit's civil unrest (Fine, 2007: 351), suggesting that "pride and a sense of cohesion" (Warren, 1975: 17) among Blacks emerged under a highly politicized form of looting and rioting (Austin, 2006: 171).

The Riot's Social Significance

"The National Guard, they're scared of hunting me."

- Swift, member of Detroit's D12 rap group, "Shit on You" (2000)[4]

The Riot had two long-lasting consequences on the social ecology of Michigan:

First, it solidified popular images of African Americans as criminals and provided evocative imagery to justify various expansions in punitive social control – from the growth in the criminal justice system to aggressive policing practices. Notably, it was the 1967 Detroit Riot that helped to inspire the watershed 1968 Safe Streets Act that inaugurated the War on Crime (Simon, 2007), unleashing a prison industrial complex that has ravaged Black communities. While the incidence of violent crime has dropped markedly since the early 1990s – we have roughly returned to levels of the late 1960s – the institutional and cultural responses to this spike have an indelible mark on American society. Today, there are more Black men in prison now than there

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[4] With the exception of the quote that opened this chapter, all of the references to music lyrics are taken from Michigan-area artists. I include hip hop artists, including Eminem, as a counterpoint to my findings, as their music captures – often in a more digestible form than the scholarly analysis I attempt to offer – the cultural meanings that shape life in Michigan in general and gun carry in particular.

were Black men enslaved in the mid-1850s, and Black men are now more likely to go to jail than to college.

In addition, the Riot (and other examples of Black civil unrest – from the riots in Newark and Watts to the Black Panthers) brought into focus the practices of public law enforcement; for some, the Riot was a protest against long-standing police abuse, but for others, the Riot was the justification for ever-increasing brutality. New police initiatives at both the Federal and state level led to the dismantling of the Black panthers (such as the FBI's COINTELPRO; see Austin 2006) and the continued repression of inner-city Blacks more generally. In Michigan, the Detroit Police Department's repressive Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets (STRESS) program implemented after the Riot led to the murder of a plainclothes Black officer after white officers decided he was suspicious (Georgakas, Surkin & Marable, 1998).

Why is this important for understanding contemporary gun politics? After all, the racialization of crime is not a historically new phenomenon: Stabile (2006) analyzes media coverage of crime in the 19th and 20th centuries to show that racialized fears have often been expressed through anxieties surrounding the threat of Black men as criminals. But the growth of the incarceration apparatus in the US, *alongside the police's aggressive targeting of racial minorities*, has placed racialized understandings of crime at the center of the American imagination (Simon, 2007). It has also provided a general framework for how this problem of crime 'should' be dealt with (that is, punitively). As Parnaby and Leyden (2011: 253) suggest, this aggressive policing transforms how people understand the ecology of crime and its control: "in conjunction with the media's affinity for spectacular crime news…these images of policing [as a "high risk" activity involving "life-and-death stakes"], these images of policing have become part of how North Americans think about crime control and policing." This echoes Rose's (2002) contention that racial profiling has proliferated beyond the bounds of public law enforcement to become a generalized social way of 'seeing' crime as racialized.

Second, the Riot helped create the socio-economic conditions in which the criminalization of racial minorities – particularly Black men – could become a self-fulfilling prophesy. While Detroit's Black population already faced difficult socio-economic conditions, the Riot led to the exodus of white residents and white businesses from the city. Conditions of poverty and social marginalization have historically positioned poor people of color in social situations where legitimate forms of work and mobility are blocked. The Riot only aggravated this, leading young, industrious Detroiters to look for alternative means of navigating social insecurity outside of formal employment. In other words, they turned to crime, pioneering what scholars have called the "postindustrial" gang. As Hagerdorn (1998: 368) explains: "economic restructuring may have altered the characteristics of a growing assortment of new postindustrial gangs. For example, many gangs now operate as well-armed economic units inside a vastly expanded informal economy, replacing economic work for young males with jobs selling drugs." These gangs are not driven by pride, turf or honor. They are smart, profit-oriented organizations comprised of members trying to "figure out how to survive in a postindustrial world" (Hagerdorn, 1998: 393).

Detroit's gangs, such as Young Boys, Inc., were some of the earliest studied 'postindustrial' gangs. Formed in 1977, the Young Boys, Inc. were

noteworthy in their entrepreneurialism: they were the first gang to offer a "Money-Back Guarantee" on their heroin sales, and to attract new customers, they also provided free samples on a weekly basis, known as "The Freak of the Week." In an ethnography of Detroit gangs, Mieczkowski (1986) finds that far from individual "hustlers" who are interested in protecting territory, he identifies a strict work ethic among runners (those who sell heroin and are not allowed to work while high) combined with violent social control (usually exerted by the crew leader – or "the gun"). Shrewdly business-oriented, the crews operate as entrepreneurial organizations operating in a vacuum of social control, "exert[ing] a sort of 'Hobbseian effect' upon social relationships" (Mieczkowski, 1986: 658).

As the 1980s unfolded, such gangs were credited with making Detroit one of the epicenters of the crack epidemic, with public officials in nearby cities in Indiana and Ohio blaming their own crack problems on "crack mobs" and "criminal entrepreneurs" that were "spreading" from Detroit and seeking new markets "in communities of all sizes in Michigan".[5] The specter of inner city violence in Detroit was famously captured in a 1987 headline in the Village Voice: "Kids Killing Kids: New Jack City Eats its Young." Barry Michael Cooper (1987), author of the infamous article, insisted that there was more to Detroit's crime problem than poorly enforced laws: as he rather dramatically notes, "the DNA for this mutant strain of teen blood [referring to the ruthlessness of teen gang members of the 1980s]" was the 1967 Detroit Riot. Cooper (1987: 29) ends his expose with a disturbing image: a teenager dressed in "sweats, trench coat, and Ellesse gym shoes…[and] a black cap with a white stencil that said, *Shoot me, I'm already dead.*"

Notably, from the early 1960s to the early 1970s, the nature of homicides in Detroit changed dramatically: while 40% of homicides were committed with a gun in 1963, by 1973 this figure was 76.2% (Fisher, 1976).[6] According to a Time article in 1984, guns were starting to resemble "household appliances" in Detroit, "with an estimated 1.5 million firearms in a city of only 1.2 million people."[7] By 2012, more than 85% of Detroit homicides were committed with a firearm.[8]

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[5] See, for example, "Detroit's Crack Mob Spreads Out Drug Entrepreneurs, Invades Other Areas" from *The Chicago Tribune* (1988).
[6] This led Fisher (1976: 398 – 399) to conclude that "although not the single causal factor, firearm availability contributes significantly to the magnitude of the homicide rate." Indeed, this period of rampant gun violence led many scholars to examine the relationship between firearms and violent death and crime (Newton & Zimring, 1970), with some scholars developing complex models that take account not only firearms accessibility but also race, gun control and other factors to explain the sudden surge in gun-related violence. For example, in an argument that bears some elective affinity to 'culture of poverty' reasoning, Seitz (1972) suggests that the impact of race is so great that while gun control laws may reduce homicides committed by whites, they would be unlikely to impact homicides committed by non-whites due to a culture of illegal firearms use, which is not contradicted by contemporary accounts of inner city violence (Anderson, 1999). Despite the longevity of this debate – it still persists today – scholars such as Ludwig (2000) maintain that the evidence between gun prevalence and crime remains "ambiguous" and "inconclusive."
[7] See "Crime: Teen Violence in Detroit" in *Time Magazine* (1984).
[8] See "Detroit's Murder Rate Continues to Climb" by Sarah Cwiek in *MichiganRadio.com* (2013).

During much of my fieldwork, I lived at 8-and-a-half-mile, just north of the infamous Detroit border. Despite being a half mile from the border, on New Years Eve, 2010, at midnight, I was privy to an annual celebration by Detroiters: I remember vividly the torrent of gun fire – the large booms of shotguns; rapid fire, sounding like fully automatic machine guns – that I could hear a half-mile away from the border of the city. This was despite – or perhaps because of? – an earnest call that year by the Detroit Police Department to put an "end to the celebratory New Year's Eve gun fire."[9] It is hard to imagine, though, that the gunfire was merely celebratory; the tradition seemed to have more in common with Devil's Night, in which arsonists set the city on fire in an annual pre-Halloween ritual suggestive of the 1967 Detroit Riot, than New Year's Eve firecrackers.

That night, the city sounded like a warzone for at least an hour. Sitting just outside of Detroit's boundaries hearing the extended gun fire, I wondered how it would have been in 1967, when the Riot broke, followed by a media blackout that made rumors the only means of information-sharing. But perhaps this was the wrong question to be asking: my attempt to insert temporal distance between past and present disrupted the disturbing continuity between then and now that Michiganders – gun carriers or not – articulated. It seemed that perhaps the Riot never really ended; it just changed forms, became aggravated, went underground.

Though many cities in the US that experienced rioting in the 1960s have long since forgotten about these moments of urban unrest, many Michiganders – regardless of race – still refer to the 1967 Riot as a turning point (Hartigan, 1999; Kenyon, 2004). Gun carriers mentioned it both implicitly, as Ben (quoted above) did, as well as explicitly, and casual conversations during the ethnographic portion of this study often turned to discussions of the Riot. When I joined one family that I had met through fieldwork for Thanksgiving, the older members of the family discussed their whereabouts in Detroit when the Riot broke out over turkey and stuffing – one was stuck in Canada, the other was away at camp, still another was traversing the city. When I taught at Washtenaw Community College, my students were well-versed on the causes and consequences of the Riot, and many had second-hand stories that they had inherited from their parents who had experienced the Riot first-hand. These observations confirmed Kenyon's (2004) analysis that the Riot served as a watershed moment that demarcated Detroit and, to a lesser extent, Flint, as dangerous areas where the links between Blackness, poverty and criminality were forged.

Michigan's gang-related problems also persist, and today, they are hardly confined to Detroit: gangs have been identified in all 83 counties in the state (a result of the entrepreneurial nature of these organizations (Hagerdorn, 1998)). Now selling not only heroin but also crack-cocaine and amphetamines, gangs both profit from, and help to sustain, the city's drug problem: in Detroit in 2011, an estimated 8.2% of high school seniors have used amphetamines, 1% have used crack, and 7% have used powder cocaine.[10] While Michigan's gang problem

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[9] See "Guns don't kill people, morons do: Detroit Leaders urge an end to celebratory New Year's Even gunfire" by Darrell Dawsey in *MLive.com* (2010).
[10] See "Experts: Cocaine use down but 'other things have taken its place'" from *The Detroit News* (2011).

appears to have eased somewhat since the 1980s and 1990s, gang activity and violent continues to plague the city as a strategy of survival in the context of blocked legitimate employment rather than status or turf battle. Carl Taylor, a criminologist originally from Detroit's West Side, contests police reports that gang activity has ended in the city. He argues that while the Young Boys, Inc. no longer run the city, there are now "far more sophisticated and highly secretive business operations"; in Taylor's words, "what's sweeping this city are what I call CEOs – covert entrepreneurial organizations. They do not wear gold chains or beepers or Fila sweatsuits anymore. They're probably wearing ragged clothes and driving ratty cars. They've seceded from the union" (Gwynne, 2001). Or as Obie Trice, a local rapper, quips in his song, "Detroit City," "Bitch, I'm a Detroit hustler…loud, nasty, foul, never flashy."

Gun Carriers Articulate Crime

Not surprisingly given popular narratives linking Blackness and crime and the persistence of socio-economic insecurities that drive poor, young men into crime, gun carriers articulated crime using racialized tropes – the gangbanger, the drug dealer, the crackhead – all of which are implicitly connected with gang- and drug-related activity. This imagery, of course, defines how Americans in general understand crime (Rose, 2002; Stabile, 2006), and moreover, it is, I would argue, overdetermined by the dynamics laid out that have turned Michigan into a particular kind of postindustrial nightmare.

Gun carriers alluded to "roving bands of criminals" coming from Detroit or Flint, who they described as "thugs," "fellows perhaps of a darker skin with britches down to their knees" and "gangbangers" who wore "hoodies" and "droopy pants." In stipulating Black men as particularly aggressive (for example, Patricia noted that "you see the gangbanger, and it could be a perfectly nice kid, and you are like: potential threat"), some gun carriers imagined poor men of color as dangerous and aggressive, echoing popular caricatures that link hypermasculinity, aggression and Blackness (Tonry, 2011).

Though they may have referenced gangbangers, drug dealers, and crackheads as criminal threats, the gun carriers I interviewed had different social distances from gang violence. Some gun carriers – like Michael, a white gun instructor who grew up in Detroit and now lives in a suburb – told me his story of direct victimization by gangs. When I asked him why he turned to carrying firearms, he told me,

> When I was 18, I was nearly beaten to death by a gang. I sustained really serious injuries. I was able to break the hold that somebody had on me – there was nine of them. When I got away, I called 911. A police car finally rolled up, and I told them I needed to get to that hospital. They weren't all that concerned, but they let me in the car. [Then they left me at] a bus stop, and when the bus came, I staggered on to it and said to the driver, "I have to get to a hospital somehow, I can't see, I don't know where I am." And he took me to another intersection and gave me a transfer so I could take another bus and eventually end up at the hospital. I had a couple of surgeries, a couple months of rehab. About six months later, I was able to return to work, and it cost me thousands of dollars.

Although he was attacked by several men at once, he blamed the police, rather than the gang, for dropping him off in what was, according to him, a

worse area than the place where the police picked him up instead of taking him to a hospital. Others who live in and around Flint and Detroit cited markers of gang-related activity (e.g., drug dealers or thugs). For example, Peter, a white man who lives in Flint, provided this image of criminality:

> *Let me get this straight. Somebody whose lifestyle revolves around selling hard drugs and violent crime and shooting whoevers wear the wrong color hat – [they] are going to worry that you made it illegal for them to have a gun? Who is going to suffer from that the most? The gangbanging thug who lives that lifestyle anyway and has no respect for human life, or you know, my wife, who is no physical match for that thug who has decided that she looks like an easy mark tonight and going to bust in her door?*

This vision of crime both connects crime to gang activity ("selling hard drugs and violent crime and shooting people" and "the wrong color hat"[11]) as well as justify guns (we hear about the "gangbanging thug who lives that lifestyle anyway and has no respect for human life" – are they "going to worry that you made it illegal for them to have a gun?"). As such, Peter provides a moralistic understanding of the racialized gangbanger: he is literally sociopathic in his disregard for human life. Gerald, an African American 36-year-old who lives just outside of Detroit but grew up in Los Angeles and frequently travels through Detroit for work, further explicated this disregard for human life: "the true gangsta – he's just going to shoot you first. People will ask us, 'why do you carry so many?' It's because – that reason. I may be facing down a rifle or a shotgun. [Carrying a gun] wasn't a hard choice for me, it really wasn't. I grew up in LA, around a lot of different people, and seeing the world the way I saw it, I felt – you know, I better protect myself. [What do you mean?] Just violence. Gangs. You know, when I was in California, that was when the Bloods and Crips were doing it in the streets, and I grew up around a lot of that stuff." Jason, the African American gun carrier mentioned in the introduction who openly carries his gun in Detroit, likewise situated his gun as a tool to "show thugs – look, that's right, I have a gun too."

Gun carriers who lived in more suburban or rural areas also referenced tropes of gangbangers, drug dealers, and crackheads. Sometimes, they also had direct contacts with "drug-dealers" and "gangbangers." For example, Barry, a Hispanic gun carrier who lives in Jackson, MI, told me that he obtained a gun because he lived near a drug dealer "across the street from the police station in the ghetto:"

> *It was a self-defense thing for me. […] I…moved to Kalamazoo to go to Western Michigan. Lived across the street from the police station in the ghetto. Apparently, the guy two doors down from me was a drug dealer […] so, living where we did, it wasn't the best neighborhood…you walk around to the corner store, and I mean you didn't want to be without one [a gun] there. It just wasn't the best neighborhood. Never had to use it, never had to pull it out. Never had an issue, and I actually took a class for my CPL when I was 20 and got it right after I turned 21.*

Gun carriers outside of Flint and Detroit, however, tended to cite less direct experience with gang-related activities and, therefore, spoke about related crime

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[11] However, Hagerdorn (1998), Mieczkowski (1986) and other scholars argue that this "turf-oriented" gang culture does *not* characterize Michigan-area gangs.

in relatively vague terms. Billy, the white machinist who lives in Royal Oak, told me that he does not visit certain parts of Detroit because of gang problems: "Cops will not go into Hamtramack [a district in Detroit]. In fact, part of gang initiation is to shoot a cop car. [The cops] will go through there, but they won't get out of their cars. So when I go driving, I don't feel safe anymore." Meanwhile, Elwood, a white lawyer who lives in Lansing, euphemistically told me that:

> *I hate to oversimplify it, but if the crack head who decides he wants to club the little blue-haired lady on the head to take her purse suddenly is confronted with a gun, I don't know. If he realizes he might get shot, that might be a deterrent for him…And frankly you and I both know that it is the good citizen that decides to get a CPL, it's the good citizen who decides to obey the laws – it's the people that I generally represent that don't do that. You know. The thug who shoots somebody over a drug deal – he doesn't have a CPL. He doesn't even own that gun. Legally.*

Some gun carriers questioned this implicit racialization of crime. Patricia, a white administrative assistant in her mid-40s, self-consciously notes that "Your mind makes these little snap judgments. I did that the other day. I saw a kid that looked like a farm boy [and thought:] no threat. How do you know that? Then you see the gangbanger, and it could be a perfectly nice kid, and you are like: potential threat. You have to understand that every young black male is not a threat to you. And you don't want to live in a world where your brain is doing that."

But Patricia was rare in her explicit reflexive problematization of the racialization of criminals as Black. While not all gun carriers talked about crime in terms of race, and some gun carriers explicitly called attention to racist police practices (a topic I consider in detail in Chapter 6), racialized tropes of crime were almost unavoidable in a social ecology that overdetermined criminals as Black. This should not be surprising to scholars who study the racialized politics of crime over the past fifty years: these articulations of crime demonstrate how race and racialized criminality has become an interpretive tool (Hartigan, 1998) for articulating social insecurities brought on by processes of postindustrialization and neoliberalism. These processes have not only made racial minorities vulnerable to poverty and social marginalization, but these processes have also justified the expansion of aggressive policies by public law enforcement that target racial minorities. All of this shapes how threats are evaluated and imagined: as Rose (2002) suggests, we should consider racial profiling not simply as a practice of public law enforcement but a generalized way of "seeing" that is both disseminated and justified by the mass processing of racial minorities within the contemporary American criminal justice system (Simon & Feeley, 1992). Indeed, this is one means by which race becomes a "principle of social vision and division" (Bourdieu, 1989). Thus, crime becomes a means of articulating and imagining a two-pronged racialized nightmare that besets Southeastern Michigan: on the one hand, it is a nightmare in the sense that African Americans in Detroit are subject to austere, if informal, segregation; blocked opportunities for employment let alone upward mobility; and aggressive treatment by the criminal justice system – from police to prisons. On the other hand, it is also a nightmare in which African American men are not only the victims but also the villains: imagined as threatening, desperate drug-addicts and gangbangers, they populate a particular kind of nightmare in the

minds of Americans across racial divides. The two sides of this racialized nightmare did not originate with gun carriers, nor is its articulation confined to them. But this nightmare no doubts play an important role in creating feelings of threat and insecurity for gun carriers – and Michiganders more generally – in this 'urban frontier.'

The Economic Nightmare

> *"My life is full of empty promises and broken dreams*
> *I'm hoping things look up, but there ain't no job openings*
> *I feel discouraged, hungry and malnourished*
> *Living in this house with no furnace, unfurnished.*
> *[…]*
> *That's rock bottom: when this life makes you mad enough to kill.*
> *That's rock bottom: When you want something bad enough to steal*
> *That's rock bottom: When you feel that you've had it up to here*
> *'Cause you mad enough to scream but you're sad enough to tear."*
>
> - Eminem, Detroit rapper, "Rock Bottom" (1999)

This racialized nightmare, however, does not stand alone. It is intertwined – sometimes inextricably – with the overall economic decline of Michigan's industrial economy that has affected the state as a whole, and not just the "dead ulcer" of Detroit (Steinmetz, 2009). This decline is evident by a number of factors. As Danzinger and Farley (2010: 1) write,

> *In 1970, Michigan residents had higher economic status than residents of other states. This advantage eroded between 1970 and 2000 as economic growth was more rapid outside of, than inside, Michigan. The first decade of the 21st century has been especially problematic in Michigan, whose workers and households now have earnings and incomes that are below the national average and a poverty rate that is above the national average.*

According to their report, median household income in Michigan was *lower* in 2008 than it was in 1980. And from 2000 to 2011, when the US lost 1% of its non-farm employment, Michigan lost a full 18.4%. They note that while the 2008 recession hit Michigan hard, none of this story is particularly new: "the erosion of Michigan's economic status relative to that in the rest of the country began more than 30 years ago. The oil price shocks of the 1970s and the severe recession in the early 1980s provided early warning signs that it would be risky for Michigan to continue to place most of its economic bets on the high-paying manufacturing jobs that were its source of prosperity in the quarter century following World War II." (9). As Danziger and Farley (2010: 9) conclude their troublesome report, "We do not know if, in the coming decade, Michigan can reinvent its economy and regain some of its lost prosperity. We do know that unemployment rates and poverty rates will remain high for the foreseeable future."

This economic context weighed heavily on almost every gun carrier I interviewed as they explained his or her decision to carry a gun. An emphasis, therefore, on the racialization of crime obscures how economic restructuring has not only made African Americans more vulnerable but also how it has frayed social fabric across demographic groups in Michigan. Gun carriers – again, like Michiganders more broadly – saw "the economy" as a catch-all explanation for crime.

Sometimes, gun carriers switched between racialized, moralistic explanations of criminality and economic motivations: Felix, a white gun carrier quoted above, begins with an economic motivation to explain crime: "you know the economy has something to do with" an increase in home invasions because "people are getting more desperate." He quickly turns this trope of economic desperation into a moralistic one: it's the addict "desperate to get their habit taken care of" who is "breaking into homes and robbing people on the streets." Gerald, the African American who lives just north of 8 Mile, likewise attributes economic motivations to gang activity, noting:

> *We have 30% unemployment. 75% high school drop-out rate in Detroit. And I think they're down to like a third of the schools: 2/3s of the schools are closed down. So it's sad. You know, [the] National Geographic [channel] was doing a thing about the gangs in Detroit. I thought that was pretty dog-gone bad. People that got all these different skills and education. And we just – fell off like that. But that's a whole 'nother conversation. If people would just educate themselves a little bit more, it wouldn't be so bad. But when people are poor, they can't eat – I don't know. You or I can't say we wouldn't do it! Know what I mean?*

Gerald presents a mixture of empathy and blame: on the one hand, he states that he understands why people join gangs or commit crimes: to eat. He cites a number of statistics that makes it appear as though he is blaming the broader socio-economic system, and after all, "you or I can't say we wouldn't do it!" But at the same time, he also blames Detroiters who turn to crime by doubting their work ethic: "If people would just educate themselves a little bit more, it wouldn't be so bad."

Others emphasized, as a vague but definitive truth, that "the economy" has made people more "desperate." For example, Darius, Elwood and Henry tell me that:

> *The economy's sucked for such a long time that so many people have to survive – and you know, they'll grow a victory garden to try to keep their grocery costs low. They'll commute and carpool and stuff like that to keep their costs low. Because every family it seems is suffering in some way through the economy.* (Elwood, white male)
>
> *We live in an arguably – some people are desperate, and our society has become – I don't know have any facts, but it seems to me that its been pretty violent.* (Darius, white male)
>
> *Some people no matter what happens – they are not going to commit crimes. They're going to work, they'll dig up their yard and plant vegetables. They'll do whatever they can so they don't commit a crime. But then you have other people where as soon as things get hard, they're out there trying to take somebody's property or something.* (Henry, African American male)

Elwood does not explicitly attribute violence to the economy, while Darius directly articulates the economy as somehow (despite not having "any facts") related to increases in violence. Nevertheless, I juxtapose their quotations because they suggest the extent to which the economy is seen as an overarching stressor in people's lives – whether they are law-abiding (i.e., "growing a victory garden to keep their grocery costs low") or criminal (i.e., "it's been pretty violent"), a sentiment that Henry echoes.

What is striking also about these articulations of economic insecurity is the acute sense that Michigan's socio-economic context is a reversal of its former promise. For example, Tom, a white resident of Genesee County just outside of Flint, explained the shift from idyllic American dream to its present day condition:

> *Right after WWII, the economy was going good, cars became cheap, and with the advent of the trailer, people were moving around. It was really kind of an Ozzie and Harriet country, everybody was getting along, and cops were sitting in the doughnut shop because there wasn't anything else to do. Well, it's not that way anymore.*

With industry up and the economy "going good," there was little for cops to do but sit "in the doughnut shop"; Tom laughed ironically as he told me that this was, in fact, the origin of the derisive myth of the "doughnut-eating cop": contrasting the past to the present, he created a nostalgic vision of cops and crime control in which cops simply did not have that much work to do. Today, "it's not that way anymore." Rusty, a former General Motors employee who now moonlights as a DJ, likewise painted a dismal picture, noting that "I think the economy is a runaway you know golf cart down a steep slope. You know? Um, its not even on its wheels." Rusty began carrying a gun because he worried that his work as a DJ might make him vulnerable: he said that he often worked with large amounts of cash and expensive equipment and traveled late at night, and after seeing a special on the local news that limo drivers were being targeted at night, he decided to start carrying.

In addition to alluding to crimes committed for economic gain against the backdrop of a flailing economy, gun carriers also talked about economically motivated crimes that are better captured by the phrase 'going postal'. Popularized because of a series of shootings involving current or former employees of the U.S. Postal Service, the phrase gained popular currency as an expression of workplace rage. One of the incidents that helped popularize the term occurred in the Detroit Suburb of Royal Oak on November 14, 1991, when Thomas McIlvane open fire killed four people and himself after being fired from his job at the Royal Oak Post office. Analyzing incidents of workplace rage, alongside school shootings, Mark Ames (2006: 77) argues that these incidents are best read *not* as the work of sociopaths but rather as "rare examples of domestic rebellion":

> *Under Reagan, corporations transformed from providers of stability for employees and their families to fear-juiced stress engines. Reagan's legacy to America and modern man is not the victory in the Cold War, where he simply got luck; it is instead one of the most shocking wealth transfers in the history of the world, all under the propaganda diversion of "making America competitive" and "unleashing the creative energies of the American worker." New corporate heroes like General Electric's Jack Welch spoke of "unlimited juice" to squeeze from his employees—and wring their rinds he did. While work became increasingly stressful and time consuming with fewer rewards for the majority, capital was sucked from the middle and lower classes of working America and deposited into the off-shore accounts of the very highest layer of the executive and shareholder class.*

Ames goes on to argue that declining workplace conditions have driven some Americans to shooting sprees as an expression of 'rebellion' against the market-driven system that has gutted American manufacturing, antagonized inequality, and left Americans chasing an unachievable dream of prosperity and upward mobility. One might raise the question of whether it is possible to read shootings as 'protest' when the shooters themselves did not attribute this interpretation to their actions. Regardless, however, of whether these are acts of rebellion, they do appear to be expressions of frustration, stress and anger at an unfair economic system. And for gun carriers, the notion that 'the economy' caused immense stress – leading some to become, as Eminem rants, "mad enough to kill" – was treated as a social reality. For example, Marlin, a white gun instructor, described to me a typical crime scenario that involves a guy "who had a bad day at work" to demonstrate the variety of criminal threats gun carriers may face:

> *Say you're walking through whatever mall right now. A guy had a bad day at work, lost his job, grabbed his deer rifle, and he decided to have it at the mall manager and whoever was at the mall. And now you've got 300+ people [at risk].*

Marlin is referencing a narrative of crime that is better captured by the phrase "going postal" than by images of gang members or desperate home invaders. The criminal imagined in this passage is an implicitly white man: he owns a deer rifle (whites are significantly more likely to own guns for sporting or hunting purposes), he lives near a mall (and therefore, is likely to be suburban), and he has (or had) a job. Like the postal worker who infamously murdered five people in a Royal Oak, MI, post office after being fired due to "insubordination," Marlin's imagined criminal is activated by his economic situation – he "lost his job."

These articulations of crime as economically driven (whether because people are 'getting desperate' or 'going postal') suggest that gun carriers understand crime in more nuanced terms than often acknowledged (see Stroud 2012 and Burbick 2006 for two examples of analyses that reduce criminal insecurities to racialized fears). There is little doubt that the broader racialization of crime shaped how many gun carriers imagined and described crime. But gun carriers' discussions of crime *also* serves an expression of economic insecurities, which may appear together with or separate from more racialized articulations of crime.

For scholars of neoliberalism, that crime represents a complex co-articulation of racial and classed insecurities should not be surprising: emphasizing market-based solutions alongside the punitive tactics embedded in the criminal justice system, neoliberalism at once reproduces and reinvents racial subordination (with the prison now replacing social welfare as the 'safety net' available to poor, black men) while aggravating class inequalities through deindustrialization, depressed wages, increased hours, and an erosion in collective rights. These trends, obviously, do not affect all Americans in the same way: poor, young men of color have particularly born the brunt of these transformations as they are corralled into prisons and jails. But while these men suffer disproportionately, in Michigan, the economic effects of neoliberalism have not been contained within any one particular demographic group (besides the extremely small minority of executives in Michigan who have managed to

benefit from these changes). This may explain why gun carry is an appealing strategy across racial groups in Michigan (as will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 – 5; see also the Appendix).[12]

What is to be done?

"'Dead but not dormant', neoliberalism may indeed have entered its zombie phase. The brain has apparently long since ceased functioning, but the limbs are still moving, and many of the defensive reflexes seem to be working too. The living dead of the free-market revolution continue to walk the earth, though with each resurrection their decidedly uncoordinated gait becomes even more erratic."

- Jamie Peck (2010: 109)

Michigan's predicament is not synonymous with neoliberalism; it captures *one* moment in complex processes of neoliberalization. Critical geographers Peck and Tickell (2002) argue that when defined in monolithic or universalistic terms, neoliberalism becomes too broad a construct for understanding the complex reconfiguration of late capitalist societies. Although "neoliberalism does seem to be everywhere" (Peck & Tickell, 2002: 392), they distinguish between destructive and creative moments of neoliberalization and argue for "local neoliberalisms." As a site of *local neoliberalism*, Michigan highlights the destructive features of deregulation, on the one hand, and criminalization, on the other. Unlike more "creative" variants of neoliberalism, Michigan remains in a state of insecurity; alternative regulatory regimes, based nevertheless in the precarious premise of the market, have yet to darn the unraveled social fabric of Michigan life. As one gun carrier and instructor from suburban Detroit told me bluntly, "it's a complete social breakdown." Crime is a means of articulating this social breakdown.

In emphasizing crime as linked to processes of neoliberalism, I am emphasizing the micro-level, everyday interpretations of criminal insecurities rather than broad-based conclusions regarding the relative violence of contemporary societies over vast swaths of historical time. Scholars such as Steven Pinker (2011) – along with a pantheon of historical criminologists – have shown persuasively that we leave in exceptionally peaceful times as a result of a number of processes – the emergence of the Leviathan state, the emergence of a market economy, urbanization, the Rights Revolution, and a fundamental shift in human cognition favoring self-restraint and self-control. Regardless of the relative peacefulness of contemporary Western society as compared to the past, people who are embedded in contexts of decline nevertheless are attentive to more micro-level shifts in criminal insecurities that, moreover, are linked up not

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[12] For example, Paula McClain found in 1983 that the impact of victimization on Detroiters differed by race: "Blacks in high risk areas who have also been victims of street crimes will probably own firearms….[while] whites whose homes have been burglarized will likely own weapons" (McClain, 1983: 318). This leads her to ask, "Is it possible that blacks in high risk neighborhoods view firearms ownership as a defense against street crime, while whites in similar areas view ownership in terms of defending one's household?" (McClain, 1983: 318). Even in low-risk areas, a distinction persists: McClain found that whites tend to own for sport, blacks for protection. Updating this to the present day and taking note that whites are *carrying* guns and not just owning them for sport, this racialized distinction may be changing such that whites are increasingly resembling their black counterparts in Detroit. The 'democratization' of economic insecurity in Southeastern Michigan may be an important reason driving gun carriers of different backgrounds to guns.

simply to crime rates themselves but also to broader insecurities that are differentially experienced across the urban, suburban and rural spaces surrounding Detroit and Flint. Increases in Waterford Township, Troy, West Bloomfield Township, and Novi – all predominantly white, and some quite well-off, suburbs – suggest that crime, like the insecurities driving crime, is no longer contained within the city boundaries of Detroit and Flint. [13] Moreover, preliminary data from 2011 and early 2012 – from Oakland to Detroit – suggests that the 2008 recession is beginning to be felt in surging crime rates.

Scholars of crime control under neoliberalism have revealed that social insecurities are not 'remedied,' 'disciplined' or 'ignored'; they are criminalized. With traditional mechanisms of social controls declining (Simon, 2002) alongside the rise of an increasingly punitive surveillance state (Gilliom, 2006), social insecurities are criminalized in starkly concrete terms, as evident in the discriminate use of incarceration as a form of social control. But the flipside is that as particular kinds of social marginalization become criminal acts in themselves (to be poor and black is, in itself, a crime – see Rios (2011)), racial and classed markers in turn become interpretive tools for *imagining* insecurity *as* crime. Hence, insecurities are not only rendered criminal in contemporary contexts of neoliberal, postindustrial decline: they are also *imagined* as criminal as well (Simon, 2002).

As such, these tropes of criminality do not simply represent crime: they are also articulations of structural failures endemic to neoliberalism. No doubt, race provides a powerful interpretive tool for imagining and legitimizing these failures, blaming "gangbangers" themselves instead of the blocked employment opportunities that drive certain people into gang life as well as the punitive state apparatus that criminalizes them (Rios, 2011; Wacquant, 2009). But race is not the sole means through which insecurities are imagined, not least because neoliberal insecurity is hardly contained among the racially marginalized – especially in a postindustrial context like Michigan where all but a small number of corporate executives have experienced significant declines in income and employment opportunities.

Michigan's "horrible, beautiful decline" begs a solution: Increase police presence? Provide market incentives for companies to relocate to Michigan, such as the passage of right-to-work legislation in 2012? Let Detroit – and Michigan – go bankrupt? Enhance social safety nets? Indeed, social safety nets over this period have declined dramatically: welfare rolls dropped 62% from 1996 to 2001, a development the Heritage Foundation called "exemplary" (Sheffield, 2012), and in 2011, Governor Rick Snyder signed into law a life-time cap on welfare cash receipts, effectively banning 11,000 families, and counting, from welfare altogether.

Notably absent from most gun carriers' accounts of crime and insecurity is a sustained discussion of the erosion of social safety nets, such as welfare or unemployment. State intervention seems futile; after all, where would the money come from?[14] Moreover, because social breakdown is imagined as instigated by

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[13] See "FBI: Violent Crime, Including Murder, Down in Detroit in 2008" by Jonathan Oosting in *MLive.com* (2009).

[14] Of course, scholars of neoliberalism remind us that despite watchwords like 'abandonment' and 'exodus,' which evocatively describe the zeitgheist of contemporary Michigan, none of this

the invisible (and cruel) hand of the market and indicated by an amorphous, epidemic of crime, the problem seems overwhelming and intractable. Many residents have responded to these nightmarish circumstances by leaving the state; Michigan, as noted above, was the only state to lose population from 2000 to 2010. And for those who stay behind, an annually increasing number are carrying guns. This is not the gun culture that happens down on the prairie, in an isolated area of West Texas, Arizona or Montana, with its origins in Western expansion and America's frontier legacy. Nor is it the gun culture that happens in the swamps of Louisiana or Mississippi, with deep roots in an Antebellum South in which men established their honor through dueling violence. This is a gun culture shaped not by the physical isolation of rural America, as illustrated by Julie and Brandon at the beginning of this chapter, but by the social vulnerability of suburban and contemporary America. Thus, this chapter provides confirmatory evidence for Williams and McGrath's (1976: 30) insight that "gun ownership [is] expressive of pressures that involve fundamental questions about the thrust and direction of the social system." But how do guns not only express, but also address, these questions? To answer this question, I now turn to the National Rifle Association's role in shaping gun carry as an everyday practice.

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would be possible without state-led initiatives that have helped to undermine economic vibrancy of the area as well as governed the outer edges of social order through punitive policies of aggressive policing, imprisonment and probationary surveillance. As Harcourt (2010: 87) notes, "in all markets, the State is present."

Chapter 2: Producing the Citizen-Protector: NRA Training and the Everyday Politics of Gun Carry

Many Americans – especially Americans outside of gun culture – associate the National Rifle Association with a no-compromise, hardline gun agenda, captured by figures like Wayne LaPierre, who called federal agents "jack-booted thugs" in 1995, or Charleton Heston, who proclaimed to gun control proponents that "I have only five words for you: From my cold, dead hands!" But the NRA's critical role in shaping gun carry is not fully captured by such oppositional phrases: indeed, in addition to preventing guns from being taken from the "cold, dead hands" of Americans, the NRA is also much concerned with expanding Americans' rights to holster guns on their very alive bodies. In this chapter, I argue that the NRA's promotion of expanded concealed carry laws address on-the-ground insecurities perceived by gun carriers, but in addressing these concerns, the NRA also shapes norms and expectations surrounding citizenship. Most of the concealed carry laws in the US implicitly or explicitly require NRA training courses in order to obtain a license. In addition to educating students about firearms laws and basic firearms safety, these courses present a particular set of civic rights, duties and responsibilities (that is, a model of citizenship) that are attached to the lawful carrying of guns. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the NRA produces – rather than merely galvanizes – gun carriers as good citizens who desire to use guns to protect themselves and others. Despite numerous studies on the NRA (Davidson, 1998; Melzer, 2009; Sugarman, 1992; O'Neill, 2007), this dimension of the NRA's power has been overlooked, and as a result, current understandings of why Americans embrace guns remain incomplete.

I argue that gun carriers are empowered by NRA courses to practice a particular kind of citizenship – what I call the "citizen-protector."[1] These courses teach gun carriers that they are a particular kind of person – a law-abiding person willing to use violence to protect innocent life. In fact, most course time focuses on the moral and legal dimensions of gun carry – not firearms skills. I argue that through the firearms training required to obtain a concealed pistol license, the NRA training encourages gun carriers to: 1) affirm oneself as a citizen-protector and 2) cultivate that self through embodied practices associated with firearms, including regular gun carry. Ironically, these state-mandated courses provide a forum for the NRA to interject itself in the relationship between citizens and the state by promoting itself as the primary organization concerned with the safety of ordinary Americans.

The NRA's Promotion of Gun Carry

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[1] I would like to thank Josh Page for his guidance in formulating this term.

The NRA's complementary positions as the premiere national firearms training organization, the leader of the pro-gun lobby and the political arm of the firearms industry is important in making sense of the broad shift in state-level gun laws since the 1970s. One of the most significant legislative actions undertaken by the NRA in the past 50 years has been the passage of shall-issue laws throughout the U.S. These laws, which are passed at the state level, allow Americans carry guns on their person as part of their everyday lives. In the past, access to concealed carry permits was restricted and issued at the discretion of the licensing boards, but under the passage of 'shall-issue' laws, state licensing bureaus were forbidden from denying Americans a permit on an arbitrary basis. Under shall-issue laws, states required to issue citizens a permit to carry firearms concealed in most public places, provided they have met a number of basic guidelines and criteria based on their residency, criminal record, age, and – most of the time – training requirements[2].

These laws have greatly transformed the significance of guns in everyday life: while only a handful of states in the 1970s had such laws, today Americans have the legal ability to carry guns in 40 states. These laws can be understood as "send[ing] an authoritative signal [i.e., from the state] about the nature of individual and organizational security and how it is most effectively and legitimately secured" (Goold, Loader & Thumala, 2010: 16), and these new regulations may be "even shaping existing markets" (including niche markets for small, concealable guns; firearms accessories such as laser optics; and defensive ammunition) by making guns more accessible as objects of everyday security.

The proliferation of gun carry first as a legislative strategy undertaken by the NRA and then as an everyday practice undertaken by Americans does not only *reflect* the NRA's emergent power as leader of the gun lobby: it also helps to maintain and reproduce the NRA's political power. Much like Armstrong (2002) documents the transformation of LBGT movements from state-oriented politics to identity politics, so too do cultural processes play a key role in transforming self-defense politics. However, in the case of the NRA, this transformation results not so much from the strategic deployment of *identities* (as per Armstrong (2002) and Bernstein (1997)) as from the shaping of everyday *practices* (as per Mahmood (2004)). The NRA shapes the everyday practices of gun carriers through the training courses required by most state-level concealed carry laws. These laws provide the NRA with - to use Goold, Loader and Thumala's (2010: 38) terminology - "ideological and cultural soil in which to grow" by requiring training to obtain a concealed pistol permit. Insofar as states *require* training (79% of shall-issue states do), they usually provide the NRA with a mandate to train thousands of Americans who wish to obtain a concealed handgun license. For the 30 states that require training to obtain a concealed pistol license, training

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[2] Even though the NRA opposes gun control, it has usually supported training requirements. For example, in Iowa, the NRA openly called for a training clause to be included in the state's 2010 shall-issue legislation (Iowa's law explicitly names the NRA), and the organization opposed an alternative, more "pro-gun" law proposed by state legislator Kent Sorensen that would not include training requirements, arguing that that law would not pass. Soon after the law went into effect, the NRA issued a "call to arms" by developing the "Iowa Instructor Initiative," which sought to rapidly increase the number of certified NRA instructors in Iowa who were willing to teach the concealed pistol licensing course (the NRA counted only 145 instructors in Iowa upon passage of the law).

requirements are often stated in such a way as to *explicitly or implicitly* require training by the NRA. This means that shall-issue laws not only allow Americans to carry guns but encourage them to take courses from, and fund, the National Rifle Association.[3]

These shall-issue laws reflect a long-standing focus of the NRA's activities: the NRA has existed primarily as a service organization since its founding in 1871, providing firearms training, overseeing shooting competitions, and facilitating the recreational use of guns (Davidson, 1998). These activities continue to dominate much of the NRA's organizational focus: the NRA is the only firearms organization able to offer a systematic firearms training program that is recognized at the national level, and it trains an average of 750,000 Americans *every year* with the help of around 80,000 NRA-certified instructors. While the NRA transformed from a predominantly service organization to a political lobbying organization with the founding of the National Rifle Association Institute for Legislative Action in 1976, shall-issue laws (and the training that these laws require) represent the nexus of the service and lobby arms of the organization.

NRA Training Requirements in Michigan's Shall-Issue Law

In 2001, Michigan passed "shall-issue" legislation, allowing anyone who completed a one-day training course, had no record of felonies and fulfilled a number of other requirements on age, residency status and so forth, to obtain a concealed pistol license. Michigan's Public Act 372, which outlines the requirements for a concealed pistol license (CPL), states that the training program must be "certified by this state or a national or state firearms training organization." Although there is room – legally speaking – to offer a non-NRA course, I found no concealed pistol license training course in Michigan that did not in some way integrate NRA-sanctioned training elements into their classroom, and for the most part, the NRA course was adopted in whole. This means that each of the 300,000 Michigan residents who have a license to carry a firearm have entered a training space marked by the NRA. Within the span of merely 10 years, Michigan has transformed from a state in which "only criminals carry guns" to a place where gun carry is a legal, legitimate and relatively commonplace practice.

Inside the NRA Classroom

A range of scholarship shows that there are many reasons that gun owners may turn to guns initially,[4] and as I show in Chapter 1, perceptions of social vulnerability play a key role here. But such arguments do not tell us what happens to people after they decide to carry a gun that they own. A look inside the NRA classroom reveals that the gun carrier is not simply a scared American galvanized by the "culture wars", nor is he or she simply responding to concerns about crime. To unpack how one *becomes a* gun carrier, *rather than assume that gun*

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[3] In Michigan, gun carriers typically spend about $100 to $200 on required firearms instruction, $300 to $1000 on a firearm, ammunition and related accessories and $105 to the state to process the concealed pistol license, resulting in an initial investment of about $500 to $1300.

[4] This may include they concerns about disorder (McDowall & Loftin, 1983; Smith & Uchida, 1988), cultural worldviews (Braman & Kahan, 2006; Kahan & Graman, 2003; Nesbitt & Cohen, 1996); or status anxiety (Burbick, 2006; Melzer, 2009; O'Neill, 2007).

carriers are inherently predisposed to gun culture or mainly reacting to outside stimuli such as disorder or their declining status, I argue that NRA training courses are spaces where gun carriers are shaped. NRA training emphasizes the moral politics of gun carry and encourages would-be gun carriers to affirm and cultivate themselves as citizen-protectors. Some gun carriers even experience these training programs as transformative and report feelings of independence, self-reliance, empowerment and self-actualization.

Who is the Citizen-Protector?

NRA training helps shape gun carriers as particular kinds of citizens with particular kinds of capacities. There are many opportunities for gun carriers to become more involved in gun culture beyond the NRA, including non-NRA state-level organizations such as the Michigan Coalition for Responsible Gun Ownership, the Shooters' Alliance for Firearms Rights and Michigan Open Carry; print material like *Concealed Carry Magazine*; and online blogs and forums such as the MIGunOwners.Org and OpenCarry.Org. The NRA training courses, however, represent one of the first stops in becoming a gun carrier. By training Americans in the practices of gun carry, the NRA is able to intervene into everyday life and embed gun carry as an everyday solution to the problems of crime described in Chapter 1. Apolitical rather than polemical, the NRA's training materials and course guides facilitate the personal transformations of people who, to quote the title of one NRA program, "refuse to be a victim".

Citizenship can be understood as a set of rights and duties associated with full participation in the public sphere. Under neoliberalism, citizenship is 'privatized' both in the sense that consumption becomes a civic duty *and* citizens are expected to be self-reliant and self-discipline, taking on social functions formally addressed by the state or other collective entities. How does this apply to issues of crime and insecurity as well as protection and policing? O'Malley (1992) uses the term 'responsibilization' to capture this link between crime and citizenship: social functions are devolved on individuals as personal responsibilities that, in turn, shape the meanings of good citizenship. An increased emphasis on crime as an overarching metaphor for social problems (Simon, 2007) has combined with the individualization of social risk through processes of "responsibilization" to produce crime-preventing subjects, what O'Malley has called "homo prudens." O'Malley (1992) situates homo prudens as a *crime*-preventing "responsibilized" subject: a self-regulating, self-governing subject that emerges through the individualization of responsibility for crime prevention amid state withdrawal from crime control (Garland, 1997).

Gun carry individualizes and 'responsibilizes' crime control and – to the extent that gun carriers see themselves as responsible, law-abiding citizens – situates gun carry as a moral imperative and civic duty. Through the exercise of gun rights, gun carriers are able to position themselves as a particular kind of responsible citizen. And unlike other security commodities, such as gated communities or home alarm systems, gun carry is direct, unmediated, embodied and individualistic; it is directly performed by the same individuals who purchase guns and practice with them, and it requires the cultivation of particular embodied techniques and mental capacities (while one might install a home alarm and forget about it, the same cannot be said about carrying a gun on a regular basis).

NRA courses are a central place where a particular practice of citizenship, centered on the embodied practice of gun carry, is promoted – what I call the 'citizen-protector.' It is in these courses that prospective gun carriers learn not only about gun *rights* but also about moral *duties* to protect oneself and others against the backdrop of state inefficacy. In the context of these courses, gun carry comes to be a desirable practice of self-reliant, responsible citizenship, defined against the backdrop of neoliberal insecurities described in Chapter 1.

In these classes, gun carriers profess their love of life by maintaining they have the ethical and legal capacity to kill for the protection of self and others. I use the term 'citizen-protector' to emphasize how gun carriers see themselves as morally, law-abiding upright protectors, or even 'Guardian angels,' who keep innocent people safe (sometimes themselves, sometimes others) from criminals. A citizen-protector, or what gun carriers might call a "sheepdog", is distinctive in that he or she considers killing, under certain circumstances, as a morally upstanding response to violent threat. To this effect, gun carriers explicitly identified as "sheepdogs" who protect the "sheep" from the "wolves." Philip, a white NRA instructor who lived in a suburb of Detroit, told me that he introduces these categories to his students:

> *We're all either sheep, we are wolves, or we are sheepdogs. And you got to ask yourself – which one of the three are you? Obviously, we're not the wolves. We're not the evil people. The wolves want to attack the sheep, but they don't want no resistance, obviously. So that means we're either the sheep dog or the sheep. And the sheep dog is there to protect the sheep, and that's how I look at it. We're one of the three. Sheep, wolves and sheepdogs.*

Likewise, Jonathan, a white gun carrier from a rural area of Michigan, connected his decision to carry a gun with a willingness to kill in order to save life:

> *I see gun rights as an issue of life…It matters not your political affiliation. This goes with life and keeping life in here. [My brother would say], "I have no interest in killing anyone, however, I have no interest in being killed, either." And that just so succinctly explains it. It just goes with life.*

This link between the willingness to use a firearm in self-defense, on the one hand, and the valuation of one's own life or the life of others, on the other, characterized my interviewees. Gun carriers used this valuation of life to demonstrate their confidence in being able to use a gun should the need arise. When I asked Patricia, a white woman in her 40s who carries regularly, whether she thought she would be able to actually use a gun in self-defense, she told me:

> *Could I shoot somebody? Absolutely. The skills are a way of improving my odds, but I think that you have to have the mindset that you are going to survive, no matter what happens. It's your life.*

As daily carriers, Patricia and Jonathan both highlight a basic premise of gun carry: both profess a fundamental determination to protect innocent lives and assume it is their responsibility to do so. Indeed, gun carriers overall emphasized themselves as responsible, independent sorts who refused to be "sheeple": as Carrie, a female instructor from a suburb of Detroit, explained, "We tend to be an independent breed. People who are interested in and do carry guns tend to be pretty – strong-minded. Very independent. And um, not sheep. Not followers."

In interviews, gun carriers and instructors told me that it was their duty to encourage safe, responsible gun carry. Ben, the white retired engineer who became a firearms instructor during his retirement, explained that his firearms

school is not simply about profit: "I take it further, I take it personal. I don't give a squat about how many people I put out the door. The cha-ching, cha-ching [sound of a cash register]. No, this is all pride with me." Ben's "pride" in the responsible use of guns was echoed by gun carriers as well; Patricia told me that "[as a gun carrier,] I almost feel like I have to be a representative of responsible gun ownership," while Carrie told me, "I'm about – exercise the Second Amendment, but do it responsibly. Make sure you're within the law." Echoing O'Malley's understanding of "responsibilization", these gun carriers implied that responsibly carrying a gun means both knowing how to use a gun within the boundaries of the law and knowing how to use one *safely*, thereby individualizing the problem of crime control as a personal responsibility.

While these gun carriers celebrated one set of civic rights and duties, they also set clear boundaries on appropriate attitudes and actions; as with all forms of citizenship (Agamben, 1998), stepping outside of these boundaries was sanctioned with social exclusion and even death. I found that many times during my interviews and, especially in online gun forums, the sense of civic responsibility celebrated by gun carriers morphed into a "blame the victim" narrative that situated gun carriers as morally superior to unarmed victims who "deserved what they got." At the more innocuous end of this spectrum would be Philip, who tells his students that part of being safe is making sure not to look like a sheep: "we'll teach [our students] that we don't want to be easy prey for somebody. Evil people would want to attack the people who are the weakest…if you look like a sheep, they're going to attack the sheep." Slipped into this discourse is a certain degree of agency achieved through a gun: you can prevent "looking like a sheep" by – as one gun carrier told me – "looking confident," which meant having "situational awareness" and appearing alert and focused. But with agency comes responsibility, such that victims who were unarmed were described by some gun carriers as having made a conscious choice to be defenseless. In this sense, a saying that gun carriers often quoted from Benjamin Franklin – "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety" – took on a sinister tone. Upon hearing about a crime, gun carriers at times would remark that the victim "hopefully will learn now" (that is, to carry a gun).

Becoming a Citizen-Protector: Affirmation

How does NRA training promote this particular kind of citizenship among Michigan gun carriers? As noted above, Michigan, as in most states, gun carriers are required to attend an NRA firearms training class. The course is primarily classroom-based: only a few hours of the course take place on the shooting range – and students shoot less than 100 rounds of ammunition, hardly enough time to develop proficiency in sharp-shooting. During the classroom portion of course, topics include: Legal and Moral Aspects of Violent Confrontation; Threat Assessment Techniques; Fundamentals of Marksmanship; Mental Preparation; and an Overview of the NRA as a political organization dedicated to keeping Americans safe.

A relatively small portion of the 8-hour course focuses on hands-on firearm handling (usually just a couple of hours), perhaps because the primary purpose of these courses is *not* to train sharp-shooters. Rather, the NRA is focused on training the kinds of people capable of responsibly and morally using

firearms. To do so, the NRA focuses *not* on *physical* training but on *moral* training: these courses usually open with a *moral question* that is followed by several other similar questions and statements: "Am I prepared to take the life of another human being to save my own or my family's?"

Some variation of this question is usually posed to students early on during the classroom section of their firearms training, hours before they receive hands-on firearms training. Presented as a question with "no right answers" (as instructors often remind their students), NRA materials suggest that there *is* a right way of going about *approaching* this question: people *should* be concerned about defending themselves against threat, even if they are wary about the means they are willing to use to do so. But it is not enough to care about your safety and carry a gun just because the NRA and NRA instructors have told you that you should: you have to be the rare kind of citizen who is willing to use a gun to protect innocent life. Thus, the question that lies at the center of these courses is *not* whether one should or should not carry a gun but rather whether one *is capable or not* of using a gun.

NRA training materials approach this question explicitly, asking "Are you capable of using deadly force?"[5] Folded into this question is a particular approach to armed self-defense, namely, that students should identify the religious, moral and social limits to their willingness to kill "to save my own life or the life of a member of my family." As an injunction to ethical contemplation, these questions ask students to think concretely about the *type of self* capable of using lethal force. It is a self, as NRA materials note, who is "religiously", "personally", and "morally permitted" to "take a life in self-defense" and who can "tolerate the judgment" of others.

Following the lead of NRA materials, NRA instructors pose these same questions to students in concrete, relatable terms, asking students to not only imagine a "ideal" situation in which self-defense is sanctioned but also ambiguous scenarios. Jimmy, a white firearms instructor in Western Michigan, told me that:

> *Moral and ethics are a huge part of what I teach in my class. We go through the various religions, and I leave it up to the individual. You have to decide yourself what your rules of engagement are. What if it's four guys? What if it's four teenagers? What if it's a six-year-old pointing a gun at you? You need to decide – under what conditions will you use your firearm? I leave it very much up to them.*

Jimmy implicitly assumes a choosing, individualistic subject who must not only make their own decisions but live with the (potentially lethal) consequences of doing so. The line of questions that Jimmy asks in his class create a division between the type of self that *is capable* of shooting in self-defense and the type of self that is *incapable* of shooting. The latter, he suggests, need not pursue their firearms training further. Richard, a white gun carrier who lives in the suburbs of Detroit and runs a firearms instruction business (in addition to a number of other businesses), voices a similar sentiment, delineating those who are capable and incapable of wielding lethal force:

> *A lot of people will take the class, and one of the first things that the NRA*

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[5] Direct quotations from NRA materials are taken from the NRA's *Personal Protection in the Home* (2000) handbook, which was used in most of the classes I attended in Michigan.

tells us [as instructors] is if [a student] can't shoot [a perpetrator], [the student] shouldn't take the class. You have to set your own boundaries. We tell [our students] that if somebody is hurting them or hurting their child or something, and that child is in danger of its life, if you can't shoot [the perpetrator], you shouldn't take the class. We've had ladies who have taken the class say, " I couldn't shoot nobody! I couldn't shoot nobody!" And we'll give them a scenario. Okay, let's say somebody is grabbing your grandchild and trying to put them in the vehicle. What would you do? "I'd hit them with whatever I had!" Now, are you worried about killing that person if you're hitting them with your purse? "No." So, you have to set your boundaries.

Richard's description of the scenarios he uses in his courses is illustrative not only because it echoes Jimmy's previous demarcation between those who can and cannot wield force but also because it suggests *how* one comes to understand whether one is capable of using lethal force. Rather than assuming a *self-evident* ability or desire to use a gun in self-defense, Richard's role as instructor is to *uncover* and *expose* that his students have this sort of mentality – in the right context. Andy, a white instructor, also suggests that pushing students to imagine scenarios under which they would use their gun helps them clarify their personal level of (moral, religious, or social) comfort with the deployment of lethal force:

I think it's important to develop scenarios as to where is the line in the sand drawn when you say this is when it is I must use deadly force. I think that everybody goes through that period of not being sure whether they should use deadly force. Or whether they even could. Because the taking of a life is a horrible, horrible thing. It's not like in the movies where somebody gets hit in the shoulder and then they stop.

Together, Andy, Richard and Jimmy elaborate on the NRA's basic message contained in course materials: that shooting another person in self-defense can be a (morally, religiously, or socially) repugnant experience, that taking a class in armed self-defense does not imply that one is capable of using lethal force, and that, therefore, apprehending the boundaries of one's capacity to use a gun in self-defense requires ethical contemplation – usually in the form of imagined self-defense scenarios. Nevertheless, there is an implicit normative element here: whether one is capable of using lethal force in particular scenarios is closely associated with the extent to which one values one's own life and the lives of others (after all, when faced with an imagined criminal who is endangering their grandchildren, the women that Richard describes quickly exclaim that *"I'd hit them with whatever I had!"*). As the NRA (2000: 26) notes in its training materials, "those who include a firearm in their personal protection plans are affirming the value of their own lives and those of their family members. The ethical person does not ever want to use deadly force, but recognizes that there are times when it may be the only option to protect innocent lives." There is thus a seemingly apolitical assumption tucked neatly into the NRA's training materials: that gun carriers must value (innocent) life to the point that they are willing to kill (presumed) criminals.

My decision to carry a gun, initially, was informed by these moral implications as a way to convey my integrity as a researcher: During the course of this research, I understood quickly that carrying a firearm was a necessary 'rite of passage' that demonstrated that I was committed to understanding gun

culture, rather than studying gun culture simply to demonize it. I also knew that my unwillingness to carry would make me seem a bit too frivolous about my safety: to them, carrying a gun meant that I took my own safety seriously and, therefore, a mark of how reliable and even trustworthy I was to the people I was studying.

But my decision to carry a gun also exposed me to the moral dilemmas, burdens and responsibilities that carrying a gun imply: with a gun, you can defend yourself, but that is a strange mix of blessing and burden. Having undergone firearms training, I knew that I *was capable of using a firearm* if I was faced with, for example, the proverbial "violent rapist." What if I was, in fact, violently attacked at some point during my research, while I was carrying? What kind of person would I be if I *did* use a gun? And what kind of person would I be if I *didn't*? With the heavy weight of the gun on my hip, I could not ignore these questions – even if I could not answer them completely. Because guns are lethal objects that can be used to take away someone else's life, guns also have the power to reveal inconvenient truths about their carriers, the social contexts in which they live, and the moral precepts they follow. This dilemma, moreover, is not unlike the liminal role that police play in maintaining social order according to Egon Bittner (1970): "the role of the police is to address all sorts of human problems when and insofar as their solutions do or may possibly require the use of force at the point of their occurrence."

NRA courses help future gun carriers navigate these ambiguities and inconvenient truths. The NRA, in fact, explicitly reminds its students that they are the good guys, who are defined against the criminal 'predators':

> *If you do defend yourself, it is important in the aftermath to remember:*
> *- You are a good person […]*
> *- You are a moral person*
> *- Your attacker was the one who chose a lifestyle and sequence of events that led to this encounter*
> *- You were morally justified in protecting yourself and your family*
> *- You have quite possibly saved the lives of others by stopping this predator from harming future innocent victims.*

This is a colorblind discourse that frames the question of criminality *as fundamentally about moral turpitude: perceived criminals become disposable because they are morally inferior* to the citizen-protector, who has a moral duty to protect innocent lives. This draws on, and reproduces, narratives surrounding criminals as morally flawed individuals rather than the product of structural forces that marginalize, incarcerate, and disenfranchise predominantly poor men of color (as described in Chapter 1). In doing so, this moral justification moves killing – in some circumstances – from an immoral act to a moral act and spells out who is worthy and unworthy of life.

In addition to being defined *against* the individualized criminal, the citizen-protector is an implicitly gendered brand of citizenship given the emphasis on protecting "yourself and your family." While gun instructors, as I will note in more detail in Chapter 7, often promoted guns to women by emphasizing a maternal duty to protect their children, the emphasis on protecting others seems to align with broader cultural norms that, as will be described in Chapter 3, mark the sanction to protect others as masculine. This is not to say that only men attach moral meanings to their guns, but as I will

discuss in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, how gun carriers enact this brand of citizenship varies by both race and gender. It is worth noting for now, then, that historically, the duty to protect has shaped the kinds of idealized citizenship available to men (e.g., as soldiers), and this historical legacy shapes the present-day meanings of good citizenship in the context of gun carry.

Becoming the Citizen-Protector: Transformation

By encouraging students to see themselves as citizen-protectors, NRA classes sometimes created immediate experiences of "transformation" and "empowerment" for students. Gun instructors often highlighted watching their students "transform" as an especially rewarding aspect of their classes: Frankie, a white gun instructor, told me, "I tell people when they say they are coming to class, I say, you will not be the same person when you leave at the end of the day – and it will be in a good way. You may not even realize it at the time, but you'll be different." Embracing their capacity to protect innocent life through the lawful act of gun carry and self-defense, some concealed carriers also told me they experienced transformation and empowerment during the classes. Laura and Billy, both regular firearms carriers, told me that:

> [Before taking a class,] I wasn't into self-defense. I had that "I don't get into that" [mentality]. I just wanted to learn to shoot. When I came to the classroom, I got hooked. It heightened my awareness about what's going on in ways that I never imagined. Never. I was living in the dark. [Laura]

> Your demeanor changes. You're just all of a sudden become confident, more comfortable. You're not concerned about all of this petty shit that's going around. [Billy]

Laura's words suggest a transformation: once "living in the dark," she now understands how to identify threats ("it heightened my awareness about what's going on") and her willingness to defend herself (despite previously having a "I don't get into that" mentality), while Bill notes that "all of a sudden" he became "confident, more comfortable." Laura feels that she is prepared to defend herself – or at least have a fighting chance, distinguishing herself from her former self that was "living in the dark." Indeed, she carries two Glock pistols on her person at all times. Bill, meanwhile, is not "concerned about all of this petty shit" – as he made clear during the rest of the interview, he is concerned mainly with "staying alive."

But professing or affirming one's status as a citizen-protector is not enough; being a citizen-protector means practicing this kind of citizenship in everyday life, through gun carry. NRA courses teach students an array of gun-related practices to carry into everyday life, and in doing so, NRA classes allow students to transform themselves in tangible, embodied ways by providing them with adaptive capacities needed to survive criminal threat *and* strengthening their attachment to the citizen-protector ideal that they profess to embrace.

NRA course materials advise that regardless of one's moral comfort or perceived willingness to use a firearm in self-defense, the ability to actually do so is a matter not of will but of training:

> The way you train is the way you will react under stress. This is why you practice to get into the habit of dropping empty cartridge cases, letting magazines fall to the ground, and seeking cover when attacked.

"Habit" – whether this means being able to comfortably and quickly reloading ammunition (i.e., "dropping empty cartridge cases, letting magazines fall to the ground") or adaptively developing an exit strategy (i.e., "seeking cover when attacked") – becomes a way of protecting oneself not only from the *external* threat of a criminal attack but also the *internal* threat of one's own potential inability to use force quickly and decisively.

This emphasis on habitualized practice adds – to reference Weber's (2002) thesis on the protestant ethic – a *psychological* sanction to train diligently, methodologically, and habitually: not only is it impossible to know whether one has truly achieved the level of confidence or the type of mindset necessary to survive a gunfight until it actually happens, but even if one *does* achieve this mindset and *is* confident, "there are no guarantees for success," as Kenneth, a white instructor who "grew up fighting" in Detroit, told me. He explained that in his classes, "We're careful to point out to people that there are no guarantees to success. All that we can do is increase our chance at success."

This unknown element distinguishes defensive shooting from hunting or target shooting. All forms of shooting involve a great degree of dexterity, which can lead to "such cardinal sins as moving 'off-peg', loading early or shooting low birds," as Hillyard and Burridge (2012: 402) describe with respect to game hunting in England. However, in both hunting and target shooting, the shooter receives a clear verification of one's technical proficiency – do you hit the game? Is there a hole in the bull's eye? But this verification is lacking for the vast majority of Americans armed for self-defense purpose. Relatively few will ever face an actual criminal encounter so that they can find out whether they have the skills needed to survive, and by then, it will too late to modify one's training regimen. As my fieldnotes summarize one gun instructor's lesson on this topic, "He emphasized that you must create good muscle memory, and that includes muscle memory for safety. He said that you need to develop skills that are automatic – you are going to be wetting your pants, with your heart beating at 220 beats per second. You have to know what you are going to do." But what will you, in fact, do under such conditions? This instructor emphasized that because it is impossible to simulate a real gunfight, it is impossible to know. All of this builds in a great degree of anxious uncertainty into defensive training.

This uncertainty was evidenced not only in my conversations with people like Kenneth but also in my observations at shooting ranges and on online forums; while gun carriers debated the intricacies of worst-case scenarios online and ad infinitum, they also developed, and shared, an array of different kinds of shooting exercises aimed at 'stimulating' a real gun fight: during one NRA training course, each student was paired with a range officer, the latter of whom was supposed to increase the 'anxiety level' of the student. As I tried to rapidly shoot down range at a bull's eye with a .38 revolver I had borrowed from one of the instructors, my range officer yelled at me – "Hurry up! What are you doing? Are you hitting him? What's going on? Come on!" None of it was particularly stressful, but the point was to provide some window into the distraction someone might face in an actual defensive scenario. As another example, I was at an outdoor range, during an informal shooting session, when another shooter decided we should run a few hundred yards away from and then toward the targets to simulate the rush of adrenaline and pumping heart rate that would occur in a real gunfight. My hands shook as I pulled my 9 mm handgun from the

holster after my sprint and aimed toward a large silhouette target; this simulation seemed much more realistic in demonstrating the difficulties of shooting under stress. I hit, but only because the target was so large and I was so close to it (a scenario, I was told, actually reflects the close-combat nature of most self-defense scenarios). Through my interviews and fieldwork at shooting ranges and classes, I found that gun carriers and instructors had countless drills for preparing for a gunfight, but despite the nuances each brought, one consistency stood out: serious gun carriers must regularly practice in ways that simulate – as closely as feasible – the conditions of a real shoot out, with the understanding that such simulations will never be quite like the 'real thing.'

The basic NRA courses recognize and emphasize the importance of training regularly as well given the indeterminate nature of self-defense scenarios. NRA (2000: 139) course materials explicitly note that regardless of one's moral comfort or perceived willingness to use a firearm in self-defense, the ability to actually do so is a matter not only of will but also of training: "you must be prepared – through training, prior visualization and mentally playing out scenarios – to be in control of the situation and act decisively." The NRA (2000: 140) notes that although "there is no way to determine ahead of time how you will react to a particular situation" and despite the "internal resistance" that "many people have…to inflicting deadly force on another person in a face-to-face encounter," these obstacles can be ameliorated "through fear, as well as through conditioning and visualization training."

The NRA also course becomes a place for future gun carriers to learn the types of practices and techniques that they can use to "continue to train, both mentally and physically" (according to NRA materials): visualization, situational awareness techniques, and repetitive exercises aimed at developing "muscle memory." Indeed, the cultivation of these capacities both assumes, and anticipates, that gun carriers will enact act as "citizen-protectors" should they be faced with a violent confrontation.

Visualization is usually introduced during the classroom portion of training. Visualization essentially involves "visualizing" a scenario crime and then imagining, in detail, one's response to it: "visualization should be used to imagine defensive scenarios…[which] gives you a dry run of such situations, and helps reduce the surprise factor should any of these situations actually take place" (NRA, 2000: 27). Firearms instructors and gun carriers alike referred to visualization as a key to their training; Butch, a white gun instructor from Western Michigan, jokingly quipped to me that he visualizes crime scenarios so habitually that "I've already killed about a dozen guys since we've been sitting right here." Preston, another white gun carrier and part-time instructor, says that thinking through possible crime scenarios allows gun carriers to develop a "plan": "I talk to people about how regular training is important and about developing a plan so that the things that you may need to do are comfortable for you to do and easy for you to do. The assailants already have a plan, and you'll already be caught off guard when you are confronted by somebody against whom you may need to use deadly force."

In addition to visualization, students are encouraged to modify their daily, habitual behaviors by practicing "situational awareness." In other words, gun-related habits are not confined to the shooting range but rather must be integrated methodologically into everyday life. Introducing a schema of

"awareness" that ranges from unaware to aware to alert to alarmed, the NRA instructs students to constantly survey their surroundings, remaining cognizant of any potential threats. During my interviews, gun carriers often emphasized alertness and "situational awareness." For example, Richard told me about a time he *almost* drew his firearm; he was exiting an opera house in Detroit, after a tie-and-gown event. His narration of this event was shaped by the ways in which the NRA instructs students to use "situational awareness" in identifying a "potential threat:"

> *I just put my hand on [the gun] so that if anything happened I would be able to draw real quick. The biggest thing is situational awareness. If you walk out into a parking lot, look around you know, see what the threats are.*
>
> *[What tips you off that it is a threat?]*
>
> *Something is just [off] – why are these two guys here? They're not wearing suit and ties? You know, what's the deal on that? This didn't look quite right. And they were following us pretty close. Just – if I didn't have to draw, I didn't have to draw. But I was aware.*

Words like "situational awareness" and "alertness" punctuated my interviews with gun carriers as they described everyday experiences of insecurity. Moreover, the actions of gun carriers seemed to confirm this heightened cognizance. During my interviews, which mostly took place in restaurants and coffee shops, I would often notice my interviewees visually scanning the surrounding area, and when they arrived before me, it was not uncommon that they chose a strategic seat, with their back against a wall to allow view of the surroundings. An elaborate roleplay undertaken in an anticipation of potential criminal threat, such actions structured the everyday habits of the gun carriers I interviewed.

In addition to visualization and situational awareness, the last set of embodied techniques that the NRA promotes, and instructors and gun carriers practice, is the repetitious manipulation of firearms, including drawing, pointing and shooting. The NRA officially tells its students that they should practice their shooting skills at least once a month as "a small price to pay to ensure your firearm is functioning properly and your skills are up to par." The vast majority of firearms instructors and regular gun carriers I interviewed, however, told me that practice should be more regular. Samuel, a firearms instructor, told me that gun carriers should practice every night, at home, drawing their gun and pointing it (unloaded) at an imagined threat. Butch, the white firearms instructor from Western Michigan, advocates the same regimen, while Stan, another gun instructor, told me that he wanted his students to practice enough to "develop muscle memory."

Do gun carriers actually train regularly and repetitiously, as suggested by these instructors? As noted above, the gun carriers I interviewed emphasized their training regimens, but it is reasonable to believe that the degree to which gun carriers practice these techniques is broad and variable. Perhaps, then, the long-term, habituated practice of these techniques is not the *exclusive* purpose of these classes. Instead, these practices create a 'common place' (to use the terminology of Ewick and Silbey (1998) in their discussion of legal consciousness) for the lawful act of carrying a gun: guns belong in everyday life as part of

exercising a moral responsibility. Once guns enter into everyday life as objects to be worn and carried rather than locked up and stored away, guns become normalized as everyday objects rather than taboo objects that should be kept out of sight and out of mind because of their potentially lethal consequences.

The Practical Politics of Gun Carry

Not all Americans own and carry guns, and of those that do, not all are in the NRA. Yet, according to Gallup polls taken after the Newtown, CT, shootings (Newport, 2012a), the NRA enjoys majority approval among Americans in general in addition to the organization's roughly 4 million members. There are many reasons why the NRA is such a well-recognized, favorable, and powerful organization in the US – such as its alignment with both the firearms industry and the politicians in Washington, DC, and state capitols throughout the US. This chapter has unpacked one important mechanism contributing to the NRA's mobilization of pro-gun sentiment among Americans: through firearms training, the NRA interjects itself into the quotidian practices and habits that millions of Americans undertake in order to maintain a sense of safety and order. Concealed carry laws, with the help of NRA training, provide a state-sanctioned mechanism for addressing perceived vacuums of social order by redefining lethal violence as moral and reshaping citizens with new capacities. The NRA does not represent the only organization aimed at promoting gun rights: at both the state and the national level, there are a variety of organizations and venues that bring together gun carriers and gun advocates. Yet the NRA is unique in its capacity to offer nationally recognized programs to train Americans in the practical and moral politics of carrying of firearms.

NRA training is thus critical in understanding how gun rights are enacted in everyday life: far from the halls of US Congress and even state legislatures, gun carriers are not just talking about gun politics. They are enacting them through an array of practices that provide them with the tools – they believe – will keep themselves safer and allow them to be the kind of moral person and good citizen – the citizen-protector – who protects innocent lives safe from criminals. Yet at least eight million Americans have turned to gun carry as a way of addressing what they see as problems of crime and disorder. The carrying of guns is a means of practicing responsible citizenship: distinguishing themselves from criminals, gun carriers – with the help of the NRA – emphasize a valuation of life, and they cultivate the capacity to use lethal force to protect themselves and others from violent criminals. The result is a pro-gun politics that is practiced *not necessarily* in the voting booths and *not exclusively* in the vitriolic discourse often characterizing public debates on guns: this politics is an embodied life-affirming practice that is embedded in everyday life.

As such, gun carry is increasingly becoming a 'taken-for-granted' practice that shapes the lived experience of gun carriers. For gun carriers, the gun and the holster became akin a bodily appendage – such that gun carriers maintained that they felt 'naked' without their guns. This embodied attachment to guns has political implications: it transforms how people think about gun rights as something that people *do* rather than something people simply believe in or abstractly have. Henry, an African American gun carrier and instructor from Detroit, expressed this sentiment when I asked him whether he thought the concealed carry laws would ever be overturned:

*Something drastic [would have to happen] for it to change. It's here to stay.
People like it because they feel safe, and they have a firearm, and it's a
right that they never had before. Now, if you want it, you can go apply for
it.*

Henry's words summarize the significant impact that the NRA's pursuit of
"shall-issue" concealed carry laws has had on gun politics. Indeed, these NRA
courses reshape what Bourdieu (1980 [1990]) calls habitus – or the set of 'taken-
for-granted' bodily capacities and practices patterned by people's positions
within social structure. If Bourdieu's concept of habitus can be described as
"society embodied" (to use Van Wolputte's (2004) turn-of-phrase), then the effect
of these courses – whether intentional or not – is to turn gun carry into habitus
and gun carriers' capacities and practices into "gun culture embodied" (to
paraphrase Van Wolputte).

 As Bourdieu might anticipate, not all Americans are equally ripe for this
kind of embodiment project: it is Americans in particular contexts of social
insecurity and who articulate particular gender ideologies and enjoy particular
kinds of relations to public law enforcement (as will be described in Chapters 3 –
6). And, no doubt, Michigan's lingering blue collar ethos, with its emphasis on
mechanical expertise and dexterity and manual labor, makes gun carry – as a
"hands-on" approach to personal security – a particularly 'sensible' practice to
begin with.[6]

 As such, gun carry can be considered a style of governance that allows for
the "responsibilization" of certain civic capacities and, as such, the achievement
of a particular version of neoliberal citizenship – the citizen-protector. As Simon
(2002: 138) has suggested, guns become vehicles of "governance" that shape
everyday behaviors of self-regulation: "In the broad sense used in the sixteenth
century according to the late historian Michel Foucault, the term government
'designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be
directed'...governance, in this sense, overlaps with the work of the state but is not
coextensive with it...New forms of freedom [such as loosened restrictions on gun
laws] compel the creation of new forms of governance." Thus, NRA courses
provide one place where these processes are coordinated and proliferated: if
governmentality refers to the managed and coordinated "conduct of conducts"
(to reference Foucault's famous turn-of-phrase), gun carry provides a new
instantiation of governmentality that emerges *not* through the state (as per Simon
and Feeley (1992; see also Mitchell (2009)) but rather through NRA training
(which is non-state but state-sanctioned). As described above, gun carry is a style
of social control – in the double sense that (1) gun carriers themselves are socially
controlled through gun carry (i.e., gun carry is a form of gun regulation and
works as a means of "instituting regulated autonomy," to borrow a phrase from
Ryan's (2011: 771) analysis of neoliberal citizenship as a "technology of conduct")
as well as (2) gun carriers are empowered to exert coercive social control over
others. In a sense, gun carry "responsibilizes" into everyday practice what

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[6] This elective affinity between the handling of guns and broader social predispositions of those
who engage in gun-related practices is also described by Hillyard and Burridge (2012: 403) with
respect to hunting: "the meaning and practice of game shooting involves technical competence,
wealth, a predisposition towards the embodied experience of being in the countryside and –
more often than not – the sociability of the shoot lunch."

political theorist Carl Schmitt (2008) has designated as a defining feature of the state: the power to (arbitrarily) decide who lives (and is a friend) and who dies (and is an enemy).[7] Understanding how the NRA promotes a particular kind of citizenship – i.e., the citizen-protector – thus extends the work of criminologists such as Bayley and Shearing (1996) and Zedner (2006), who emphasize that law enforcement agencies do not monopolize policing but instead share it with private individuals, corporations and community groups.

This chapter has uncovered the micro-level mechanisms by which this monopoly is eroded, and it also raises the question of how public law enforcement interface with armed citizens. Emphasizing the inefficacy of police while providing citizens with the capacities to *act like the police*, NRA training may actually be part of a much broader reconfiguration of policing in the US. It is in these courses that gun carriers learn that the NRA is the main organization fighting for the safety of Americans by protecting their Second Amendment rights. Replacing the contract between citizens and the state, the NRA interjects itself as the protector of individual freedom – under the assumption that the state is untrustworthy. In fact, an entire unit in the NRA's personal protection in the home course is dedicated to explaining the NRA's unique role in fighting for Americans' right to self-defense. After all, NRA course materials tell students that its basic goals "are to…promote public safety, law and order, and the national defense…[and to] train citizens and members of law enforcement agencies and the armed forces in the safe handling and efficient use of firearms," among other objectives (NRA, 2000: 217). Many instructors sell students an NRA membership included in the price of the course or at a discounted rate. This, of course, provides the NRA with even more opportunities to situate itself as the primary 'watchdog' looking out for Americans.

This provides a different understanding of the NRA: while the NRA is often understood as a no-compromise right-wing social movement organization, it is also an important criminal justice organization insofar as its training programs shape the everyday politics of crime, policing and social control. How, then, do gun carriers themselves talk about and understand the kinds of moral obligations discussed in these NRA courses?

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[7] This expands Weber's (1978) analysis of the state as defined by its monopoly on legitimate force.

Chapter 3: From Protection to Policing: Embracing the Citizen-Protector

Since the late 1960s, the War on Crime and its aftermath has branded a particular version of crime and insecurity at the center of the American collective consciousness and its collective social apparatuses. On the one hand, crime became represented by the specter of the hyperaggressive man of color in movies, crime reporters, the news, music and beyond. On the other hand, the criminal justice apparatus has expanded to disproportionately punish poor men of color as other forms of social safety – such as welfare – retracted. Together, these dynamics have created a self-fulfilling prophecy that has had profound effects on how Americans think about crime. With these broad cultural currents in mind, gun carriers are probably not particularly distinct in the way that they imagine crime. They probably find crime to be more of a pressing concern than non-gun carriers on average, but the imagery, narratives, and tropes used to make sense of criminal activity are not unique or exclusive to gun carriers.

But even as images of crime and criminality circulate throughout American society, guns – and the messages that the NRA proliferates surrounding guns – appeal as the solution to crime to *particular kinds* of Americans more than others: men are disproportionately more likely to own guns, they are disproportionately more likely to have licenses to carry them, and based on newspaper reports of justifiable homicides, they appear to disproportionately use guns in self-defense. Even if women carriers are increasing in number, men are four times more likely to have a permit to carry a gun in Michigan than women. I have chosen not to qualify this with a racial modifier because it remains unclear whether the legal use of guns for protection is actually all that uneven across different racial groups of men.[1] Whites and Blacks in Michigan are equally likely to hold licenses to carry a gun concealed at a ratio in 1 in 24.[2]

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[1] So how do these numbers square with popular perceptions that connect legal guns with whiteness? Certainly, legal gun use *in general* is not consistent across race. According to the 2010 General Social Survey, 36.50% of whites own guns versus 15.50% of African Americans do, with an average 8.7% ownership across other racial and ethnic groups. Yet breaking this number down for handguns, this difference almost disappears: according to a national survey of private gun ownership released in 1997 (unfortunately, the most recent data available), about 16.5% of whites own handguns, while 13.1% of African Americans do (Cook & Ludwig, 1997). These numbers have probably changed somewhat over the past 15 years, but they do suggest that the racial difference in gun ownership may not hold as strongly with respect to gun ownership for self-defense. This also echoes findings by McClain (1983), who found in the early 1980s that African Americans are more likely to own guns for protection than recreation than whites. Controlling for protection versus recreation appears, therefore, to significantly reduce the racial disparity of gun ownership. What this means is that the self-defense use of guns cannot be reduced to a white-only affair, while the preponderance of men involved in gun carry seems central and undeniable.

[2] And these figures become more compelling when comparing racial disparities (or lack thereof) in concealed licenses in the three most populous counties in Michigan: as noted in the Introduction, Blacks in all three counties are significantly more likely to have a permit to carry a

Why do men – and, apparently, different kinds of men – dominate gun carry? And what are these men doing with the guns they carry? Gun carry serves as a solution to the problem of violent crime; when carried, guns provide a mobile tool of self-protection that can moves with gun carriers as they themselves traverse public space that they understand as potentially risky. Yet the guns donned by gun carriers were not just there for self-protection: as I spent more time with gun carriers, I learned that this was, in fact, only part of the story. Over the course of the next three chapters, I examine male gun carriers to (I focus on female gun carriers in Chapter 7) and how they understand the purpose of the guns that they don: they think about guns as tools used not only *to protect themselves* but also *to protect others* in line with the "citizen-protector" model of citizenship promoted in NRA courses. Gun carriers are concerned about their right to self-defense, but gun carriers, especially male gun carriers are also driven by a *moral* politics centered on the duty to protect others.

Focusing on male gun carriers, this chapter parses out how gun carriers articulated the right to self-defense versus the duty to protect others. Self-defense, no doubt, is a critical aspect of American gun carry, as I show in the first part of this chapter. In the first part of this chapter, I examine how gun carriers talk about self-protection, oftentimes emphasizing that violent crime can happen "anytime, anywhere." Key to this narrative of self-protection is the *right* to self-defense based on embodied vulnerability. However, in addition to their *right* to self-protection, male gun carriers also talk about their *duty* to protect others – particularly their families, vulnerable women and children, and even strangers. Turning to these narratives, I argue that this emphasis on protecting others is gendered, as men have historically been sanctioned with the prerogative to protect. Understanding gun carry as an expression not only of the right to self-protection but also the duty to protect others helps explain, I argue, the overrepresentation of men as gun carriers such that the decision to carry a gun ultimately lines up with an embrace of the moral obligations discussed in NRA courses.

The Practical Right to Self-Defense

Michael was a gun carrier and instructor with whom I often drank coffee, late into the night, at a diner just off of 10 Mile. He always arrived before I did and sat facing the door (a habit I noticed dozens of other gun carriers repeat). He wanted to have a clear view of everyone who might come into the diner, and he never wanted his back turned to a potential assailant. At one of our first meetings, he let me in on the self-defense scenarios that played in his head, telling me that if someone came into the diner pointing a gun, he knew exactly which of his three firearms[3] he was carrying that he'd pull, and in what order, in order to protect himself. Casper, likewise, reviewed almost the exact same scenario as Michael as we sat in a different diner, this one with a small, enclosed glass entrance-way to trap cold air. Imagining an armed assailant appearing in

gun concealed than whites, suggesting that portrayals of gun rights as an all-white affair are deeply inaccurate.

[3] Michael was the only gun carrier I met who regularly carried three firearms. However, it was not unusual for gun carriers to carry two guns: a larger "carry" gun alongside a smaller "back-up" gun.

the vestibule, he told me he'd be sure to first use a bullet to bust through the glass before "stopping the threat" – to use his phrasing.

Both Michael's and Casper's foray into these scenarios of criminal violence suggests the extent to which gun carriers understood urban and suburban space as "under siege": as Detroit-area one gun instructor posted in his blog, "We have let fear transform us into nomads - moving from crime scene to crime scene. Eventually, you are going to have to stop running and start living." Conversation over coffee or a dinner with friends could always be interrupted; your guard had to always be on. In the view of gun carriers, guns were a necessary precaution and practical tool used to protect oneself in contexts of social insecurity.

Gun carriers did not necessarily believe that a criminal was lurking around every corner, waiting to strike. I did not observe that gun carriers were nervous, paranoid or edgy – at least in their physical demeanor. But they certainly believed that crime is random, unpredictable, and senseless and that it could happen anytime, anywhere. Having a gun didn't mean being prepared for the inevitable, but it did mean being prepared for the worst and having the tools to protect oneself if necessary. As such, gun carriers saw themselves as inherently vulnerable to an *ever-present threat* of crime. Take Danny, a white writer and part-time firearms instructor, Veronica, a white secretary and part-time firearms instructor, and Gerald, an African American who lives in Oak Park and runs a foster care facility in Detroit:

> *I disagree with the premise that it's very unlikely that you're going to be attacked on the street. I don't have a statistic to back this up, this is just from the reading I've done. You probably have a 50/50 chance in your lifetime of being criminally victimized. […] I had a student who had been abducted from a supermarket parking lot. She said she was abducted, put in a trunk of a car, taken someplace else, raped, beaten, and left for dead. She survived, and she now carries two guns at all times. A supermarket parking lot! Who would think?* [Danny]

> *This [gun] is for my own safety. I go out for walks all the time, and these guys come out from nowhere, and if they've got guns or not, they're big boys!* [Veronica]

> *People just wig out, just for the fact that that's how they feel that day!* [Gerald]

Danny explicitly acknowledges that although statistics may suggest otherwise, crime is a real, ever-present threat ("I don't have a statistic to back this up"). Even so, he estimates that a person is just as likely to be victimized by crime over the course of his or her lifetime as not, and it could happen in the least expected places ("A supermarket parking lot! Who would think?") Meanwhile, Gerald emphasizes crime as unpredictable, saying that "people just wig out just for the fact that that's how they feel that day." Likewise, Veronica emphasizes that "these guys come out of nowhere," as if the threat of crime literally materializes out of thin air.

Their conviction that crime can happen anytime, anywhere is not based on expert knowledge (i.e., statistics) as much as lay knowledge (Lupton & Tulloch, 1999): Danny purposively reads about self-defense, teaches self-defense courses and knows several crime victims, and Veronica told me that most of her knowledge about crime comes from stories and first-hand accounts from other instructors and her students. Meanwhile, Gerald told me that his knowledge of crime comes from his first-hand experiences of victimization and second-hand experiences he hears about from friends and acquaintances.

Gun carriers, in fact, often shared first-hand and second-hand experiences of victimization, providing specific examples of crimes that rendered them physically insecure. They referenced stories that ranged from violent crime to school bullying: Victor, an African American gun carrier who lives in Detroit, told me that, "I was never pro-gun, I was never anti-gun. It was something that I felt I did not need. That happened all the way until I got robbed at gun-point about five or six years ago. And then I realized, I might need a handgun." Connor, a white shoe salesman, told me that, "like 99% of other people in the world, I thought nothing's gonna happen to me, I'll be okay," until a random kidnapping occurred at a local Subway sandwich shop that he frequented. The "it could happen to me" feeling caused him to obtain a concealed pistol license thereafter. Further aggravating these anxieties about the unpredictable nature of crime, several gun carriers also told me that they felt the media reported only a small percentage of actual crimes. As Billy, a white machinist, told me,

> The crimes that are committed in this area alone [near 10 Mile in Royal Oak], you know, maybe one percent, maybe two percent hit the media. Most major crimes never hit the media. People don't know. A woman who's a real estate agent or a broker came walking out of a bank, she got kidnapped. Two idiots took her, went to two different ATMs – This is in Birmingham [a white, wealthy suburb of Detroit]! This is a wealthy place – and they forced her to draw money from these ATMs, and then they took her out and killed her. This shit goes on all the time. And people – they don't know.

This distrust of mainstream information channels – such as the media – has a long history in Michigan. After the 1967 Detroit Riot, the two largest newspapers in the city instituted a media blackout, meaning that information surrounding the Riot traveled largely through rumor. As Kenyon (2004) argues, this created a narrative crisis in the interpretation of the events of the Riot, a crisis that has had long-lasting effects on how Detroit urbanites and suburbanites evaluate and process knowledge claims by the media as well as word-of-mouth. As Billy's quote suggests, there remains deep distrust in more formal information channels, further exacerbating anxieties surrounding the threat of crime – even in places "like" Birmingham.

That said, though, gun carriers did vacillate to some degree between this "any time, any place" narrative and a more nuanced understanding of the social geographies of crime. Even though Alex, a white electrician, told me that "you don't know when it it's going to happen," he also told me that he did not feel unsafe as I interviewed him in a predominantly white, rather rural area about 50 miles from Detroit (and he also emphasized that he encouraged his friends in Detroit to carry, acknowledging Detroit as a more dangerous place). Sam, a

white gun carrier who lives in a rural suburb of Detroit, told me that he felt relatively safe in the white suburb of Waterford, but "People in Detroit – for the love of god, carry something! Anything! It's the only way that the predators in society are going to learn!" Richard, a white gun carrier, balanced an understanding of crime as random with an understanding that it is also patterned:

> *Can you list for me any of the times that you would not have the capability of stopping a hostile criminal from committing violent acts on you? There isn't any time that we would want to give that up. It's no more likely that somebody will walk in that door and decide to kill everybody in this restaurant than anywhere else. It may be more likely in terms of the environment and demographics: out of work, need money, that kind of thing. But in terms of just general human nature and what makes people do crazy stuff, you can't use your mind to try and figure it. You'll just never be right. I've never seen anybody who was.*

Richard switches between two, disparate understandings of risk: On the one hand, he acknowledged that "it [violent crime] may be more likely in terms of the environment and demographics"; on the other hand, he insisted that "it's no more likely that somebody will walk in that door and decide to kill everybody in this restaurant than anywhere else." Likewise, Austin, the 36-year-old white machinist and truck driver, also emphasized this contradictory understanding of crime within the same breath as he explained his decision to start carrying a gun when he moved to Flint, MI:

> *Most of the places I've lived have been relatively tame. I've come to understand that location doesn't make a huge difference, because it can happen anywhere. But there are lower crime areas, and that's generally where I've lived.*

Richard and Austin seemed to be caught between two logics revolving not only around the risk of crime but also bodily vulnerability, which is both inherent and social: as *mobile* sites of physical vulnerability, bodies are rendered vulnerable both *as an inherent aspect of embodiment* as well as a *socially constituted aspect due to the spaces in which bodies are embedded and through which they move* (Butler, 2006).

As objects to be worn on one's hip rather than tucked away at home, guns provide a means to address these conflicting understandings of insecurity as gun carriers move through their daily lives. On the one hand, gun carriers echoed narratives ever-present risk by describing the regularity with which they carried their guns: "I am sure it is odd for a fellow [to carry] a gun all the time – because I carry a gun whenever I can….I don't want to be in a position where I decide on day, oh I don't really need to carry my gun today and then need to" (Fred, white criminal defense attorney); "you don't know when it its going to happen. If you knew when it was going to happen, you wouldn't take a pistol. You'd take a shotgun or a rifle. [But…] a pistol [is] convenient to have with you" (Sebastian, white electrician); "you know, anytime you're without, you never know when you're going to need [a gun]. So its best practice to have it at all times, that way it's always there. Just like carrying a wallet" (Taylor, white construction contractor). Dave, the 32-year-old white computer programmer, told me that there is no place he doesn't feel 'at risk,' and the only time he does not carry is when he is legally unable to.

On the other hand, though, some gun carriers also acknowledged the perceived spatial organization of crime by modifying where they go. Referencing the specter of Black criminality associated with Detroit described in Chapter 1, gun proponents often said they would never go to Detroit unarmed, and they expressed anxieties even entering the city with guns. One online poster wrote, "I get to sit in my car on residential streets all over the area just to make a living. 8 mile and 75 tomorrow [an area of Detroit with a reputation for high crime and low police presence]. Man, I need some body armor", while another offered "I do not go to D-town [Detroit]. Maybe if I was better trained in the sideways kill shot" ("sideways kill shot" refers to how "gangbangers" stereotypically hold their guns sideways). Many gun-toting men told me that they were more likely to avoid areas they labeled as "dangerous" or "high-crime." In a sense, this is not surprising; when Gallup asked respondents about what they do because of "their concern over crime," a full 48% said that they "avoid going to certain places or neighborhoods you might otherwise want to go to." For the men who I interviewed, their decision to carry guns seemed to compel them to engage in greater practices of avoidance so that carrying a gun actually *limited* their mobility.

Interestingly, while armed men told me that they limited where they would go, women tended to emphasize *increased* mobility. Cheryl, a white real estate agent, described going into Pontiac, an area other gun carriers labeled "Little Detroit" because of its increasing population of African Americans. While in Pontiac, she said she found she was being followed by car to a house she was planning to sell; instead of leaving the area, she decided to maintain awareness but continue as usual: "it's funny. When you got the gun, you aren't scared. I was just a little spooked." Julie, who as noted before lives in a rural area, travels to Detroit occasionally. She also told me that she feels greater mobility with her firearm; "I can walk around after dark. I don't have the same concerns. And the same with driving. I drive wherever I want to. If I'm in the city [of Detroit], I mean, I'm still cautious. I'm still hoping my car doesn't break down here, but if it does, I got a gun. And a phone. It's [the gun] an extra layer of safety." Perhaps in light of women's already limited ability (Wesely & Gaarder, 2004), the gun-carrying women I interviewed tended to express feelings of greater mobility. However, even this expanded mobility was punctuated by a keen understanding of the spatial organization of danger by distinguishing between country, town and city.

Overall, I found that gun carriers – both male and female – understood guns as tools of self-defense in relation to a particular understanding of crime that could happen "any time" and "any where." While this had different gendered implications, the decision to carry a gun on one's person complemented their understanding of crime as random and sporadic. Gun carriers talked at length about their right to self-defense, their feelings of embodied vulnerability, and their decision to "stop running and start living" (as Victor, quoted at the beginning of this section, maintained). Yet some gun carriers emphasized something more: gun carriers, especially male gun carriers, were concerned not only with defending themselves but also protecting their families, friends and even strangers. This expanded duty to protect is reflected *both* in the laws that govern firearms use as well as in the meanings that male gun carriers attached to their guns.

The Moral Duty to Protect

Gun carriers are not only legally empowered to defend themselves: they have also been increasingly empowered to defend and protect others as well. Legal recognition of both the right to self-defense *as well as* the duty to protect others has expanded in recent decades. As concealed carry has propagated throughout the US since the 1970s, Americans have gained the right to protect themselves as they move through public space. While this wave of laws ensured their right to *self-protection*, more recently, the expansion in Stand Your Ground laws – passed in over a dozen-a-half states since the mid-2000s – have not only further protected the right to self-protection but also have extended it to cover the duty to protect others. In Michigan, this law reads that "A person is justified in the use of deadly force and does not have a duty to retreat if he or she reasonably believes that such force is necessary to prevent imminent death or great bodily harm to *himself or herself or another or to prevent the imminent commission of a forcible felony*" [emphasis added]. In other words, Stand Your Ground laws make it legally possible to achieve the kind of good citizenship – the citizen-protector – outlined in the previous chapter.

But this willingness is more than a legal right; it doubles as a moral obligation to self *and* others. And this moral obligation is not gender-neutral: it resonates with duties associated with men and masculinity. Iris Marion Young (2003: 4) summarizes this logic of masculinist protection: "the 'good' man is one who keeps vigilant watch over the safety of his family and readily risks himself in the face of threats from the outside world in order to protect the subordinate members of his household…the gallantly masculine man is loving and self-sacrificing, especially in relation to women. He faces the world's difficulties and dangers in order to shield women from harm….the role of this courageous, responsible, and virtuous man is that of a protector." Guns – specifically guns carried for the purposes of protection – provide a means for men to symbolically achieve and sometimes even practically enact this particular version of masculinity.

That is not to say that gun carriers actively discourage women from carrying guns or that women are socially or physically incapable of carrying: men encourage women to arm themselves, and women *do* carry guns, though not in numbers nearly as large as men. But there is a 'script' available for men to embrace this duty to protect: guns allow male gun carriers to alloy "muscle and compassion", not unlike the compassionate masculinity that Messner (2007) analyzes with respect to Arnold Schwarzennegger's political persona. Messner (2007: 466) characterizes this new masculinity as follows: "toughness, decisiveness and hardness are still central to hegemonic masculinity, but it is now normally linked with situationally appropriate moments of compassion and, sometimes, vulnerability." Indeed, the duty to protect others that gun carriers discuss accomplishes exactly this splicing of tough resoluteness with compassion.

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It was my first trip to Flint; I was supposed to meet a group of open carriers in a diner and then follow them to a friend's house who ran an Internet radio station from his basement. As I drove into the city, I noticed graffiti, trash, abandoned business. The exit was less than a mile from the diner, next to what looked like an abandoned auto parts or tool store. From the outside, I could see

the old-fashioned diner counter with barstools and noticed the group of gun carriers, who had already arrived. As I opened the door, I saw a "Gun Carriers Welcome" sticker, supplied by the gun carriers I was meeting who had befriended the Albanian owner who, incidentally, also agreed that guns were good for his business. As I walked toward the group of men, I passed a cop who seemed uninterested by the open carriers.

We chatted about gun rights, the city of Berkeley, and the economy over biscuits and gravy, and as we finished up the meal, one of them, Adam, a white man in his 50's, told me, "Just so you know…this isn't in all that nice of an area. So don't get scared." As I wondered what "not all that nice of an area" meant by Flint's standards, a city nationally known as a "Murder Capital" (as Corey's wife quipped, as noted in the Introduction), Adam interrupted my thoughts: "but don't worry. We have guns."

After I returned to California and presented my research to other scholars, I was often asked whether I felt unsafe being around people – usually men – who were fully armed with one, two or even three guns. After I obtained my own concealed pistol license, I suppose I could have appropriated Adam's logic: "I'm not worried. I have a gun." But with or without a gun, I never felt unsafe with any of the gun carriers I interviewed. At first, I tried to justify this through a sort of logic of self-preservation on their part: after all, gun carriers should be motivated to present themselves in the best light possible in the presence of an outsider and researcher. But what I sensed early on – and what I later discovered what was really at work – was that gun carriers did not generally see themselves as a solitary "army of one," concerned exclusively with the asocial problem of personal protection. They didn't see their decision to carry a gun as an action that benefited only them; rather, they saw their guns as a way to claim their *right to self-protection* as well as a *duty to protect others*. Not only was Adam not a threat to me; he wanted to let me know that his gun would protect me as well himself. Would or could Adam proficiently use his gun to protect himself and others around him? This was entirely unclear. But what clear enough was that Adam was not going to purposively use his gun against me; this would contradict the moral politics he, and other gun carriers, attach to gun carry.

Indeed, rather than merely a tool of *personal* protection, gun carriers regularly described the decision to carry a gun in *relational* terms. This was evidenced not only in the way gun carriers talked about their guns but also by more subtle cues. For example, at shooting ranges and on discussion boards, gun aficionados often discussed how to deal with a "hostage situation," and one popular target depicts a grimacing white male clutching a scared white female. On the one hand, it is a useful target for practicing firearms safety: can you shoot well enough to avoid hitting your wife, girlfriend, or daughter? On the other hand, the target *extends* what gun carriers should be doing with their guns well beyond self-protection to the realm of *protection of others*. And it also interpellates the shooter in a very particular way. In this depiction of a "damsel in distress", the shooter is not gender-neutral: this target situates the shooter as the protector of women – a duty that has socially fallen on the husband, boyfriend or father. My gender (and race) probably played a key role in the willingness of Adam, and other gun carriers, to take on a protective stance toward me; not only did I not threaten gun carriers with my presence, but my social status allowed them to

enact familiar scripts regarding the role of men in protecting women (a finding I critically examine in Chapter 7).

Families

In line with the logic of masculinist protection outlined by Young (2003), gun-carrying men often emphasized their duty to protect vulnerable others – particularly their loved ones. Andy, a white firearms instructor from rural Western Michigan, told me that "my attitude is that the strong have a responsibility to defend the weak. I do have some skills and abilities that I've developed, and I think it's my responsibility to use them," while Elwood, the white lawyer, bluntly told me that "I carry for my protection and the protection of my loved ones." Indeed, this duty to protect very much resonates with the familial norms traditionally attached to the male head-of-family. Consider, Butch, a white firearms instructor from West Michigan who was active in several Michigan-based gun-rights organizations, and Brad, a white truck driver. When I probed them about their decision to purchase guns, carry them and even become involved in gun politics, they told me:

> *I would rather be home writing a novel rather than doing all this political stuff. I don't even like politics. But up until my kids were born, I didn't get involved in politics. That was kind of the wake up call for me. Once I had a kid, I thought, man, I felt responsible. I have a responsibility now. I have to raise this kid.* (Butch)

> *The child's born. Mortgage, marriage. I have a kid. I'm paying for all this stuff on a truck driver's wage; she's [his wife] a stay at home mom until [his son] was five. So I'm paying for everything. And it wasn't where I expected her to be in the kitchen, you know. We both knew right off the bat that we were equal, but we had different purposes. I was good at making money, and my wife's good at tending to the kid, and I wanted to protect them all, so then a firearm comes along in '99.* (Brad)

For Brad and Butch, their guns allowed them to fulfill a duty or – in Butch's words – a "responsibility" to their families. Not only were they providers; they were also protectors. And it was a gun that provided them with this new capability. Likewise, Dave, the engineer, told me that having a gun made him feel that "when I'm with my family, I could defend them. I'm not a karate expert, so I never had that feeling of safety until I had a firearm" (from fieldnotes). Men's guns seemed to confirm their utility to their families.

This is not an insignificant function of guns amid the socio-economic changes in the US in general and in Michigan in particular. During conversations with male gun carriers, I noticed that several not only talked about protecting women and children, but they also moralized an overall decline in men's willingness to live responsible, respectable lives. Some gun carriers identified a decline in men connected more to their failure to grow up into breadwinners: for example, Austin told me that "They don't grow up as quickly as they used to years ago." Brad elaborated further, telling me how irritated he is when he sees teenagers and young men in their girlfriends' cars: "And she's pumping the gas. She's going into the store to buy him candy or snacks. And she's driving the car.

And he's just sitting there. The least he could do is drive the car." Brad's frustration hit a nerve conveyed in phrases like "The End of Men" (Rosin 2010; see also Jefferson (2002)), which capture women's increased dominance in the workplace and education and the erosion of the male breadwinner model. As Rosin (2010) details, this is merely the outcome of "a profound economic shift that has been going on for at least 30 years."

These dynamics have been particularly aggravated in Michigan. Danziger and Farley (2010: 1) analyze the gendered dynamics of Michigan's economy:

> *Men have higher economic status than women. However, since the early 1970s, and especially during the recent recession, men's employment, earnings and health insurance coverage have fallen relative to those of women. Women are now more likely to graduate from college than men, are less likely to be unemployed than men, and more likely to have health insurance. For example, in 1973, the national unemployment rate for women 20 years and older was 1.6 percentage points higher than that for men (4.9 vs. 3.3 percent); in 2009, it was 2.4 percentage points lower (7.5 vs. 9.6 percent).*

As residents of Michigan, a state known for its vibrant then devastated industrial economy, the gun carriers I interviewed are not unlike the white working-class boys and men analyzed by Fine et al. (1997: 54): as they explain, "In the span of a few decades, foreign investment, corporate flight, downsizing, and automation have suddenly left members of the working class without a steady wage, which compounded with the dissipation of labor unions, has left many white working-class men feeling emasculated and angry….it seems that overnight, the ability to work hard and provide disappeared." However, statements proclaiming the 'end of men' overlook a more complicated picture: in the wake of this economic transition, some men (such as gun carriers) are maintaining their relevance by defining themselves as protectors (see also Gallagher and Smith (1999)) against other men who are presumably turning to crime and violence. Legally carried guns allow men to situate themselves as respectable, responsible and reliable, displacing economic vulnerabilities onto bodily vulnerabilities.

Extending, rather than contradicting, this narrative of men as protectors, male gun carriers often told me stories about how they encouraged women in their lives to carry guns or how they were disappointed that these women chose not to carry. Paul, for example, seems to betray his own anxieties in his statements about his wife facing off against Hulk Hogan; indeed, his wife's gun serves as a way for Paul to fulfill his role as protector *in absentia*. As he went on to say,

> *I would hate to think that right now, while I'm sitting here at work, my wife is absolutely defenseless at home…The only thing that is going to protect my wife and my children from whatever he has in mind is a gun that she keeps next to the bed.*

Likewise, Jonathan, a freight train mechanic from Central Michigan in his early 30s, also relayed to me a lengthy story about an ex-girlfriend who he had reconnected with many years after their relationship had ended; learning that she had been physically assaulted with a razor by a woman with whom her current boyfriend was having an affair, Jonathan took the woman to a shooting

range for an impromptu lesson, filed an emergency concealed pistol license application and helped her find a new place of employment. Because male gun carriers often articulated the guns carried by women as extensions of their duty to protect, they generally did not view armed women as a threat. This contrasts some previous accounts of pro-gun men; Burbick (2006), for example, argues that pro-gun men tend to understand women as anti-gun "gun grabbers."

Because male gun carriers often articulated the guns carried by women as extensions of their duty to protect, they generally did not view armed women as a threat. But not only did men promote guns to women but they also understood armed women as fulfilling a duty of their own: to protect their young. Echoing Sarah Palin's "Mama Grizzly" rhetoric[4], gun carriers often emphasized a "mother's instinct" to explain why women should be armed, as I will describe in more detail in Chapter 7. For example, Butch told me that he tries to spark this instinct within women who come to his class. Explaining one story about a woman who "could not hit the broad side of a barn from the inside," he told me that he simply asked her to imagine that someone had kidnapped her child while she pumped gas at a gas station and that her only hope was her gun. When he asked her what she'd do, she responded – despite being a "Christian woman" – "I'd shoot that son of a bitch!"

Suggesting that "self-defense" is an inadequate label for capturing what gun carriers are doing with their guns, gun carriers I talked to generally articulated their guns as tools to protect *others*. Particularly among male gun carriers, guns were a means of protecting vulnerable others: women and children. With the added twist that men actively *promote* guns to women as a way of fulfilling the patriarchal duty to protect their women and children, pro-gun men articulated a familiar discourse that situated their willingness to protect as part of their duties as fathers. The guns donned by men were imagined as defensive tools used to protect not only themselves but also their wives, girlfriends and children, while the guns donned by women were imagined in more matriarchal terms to protect their children (a narrative that female gun carriers contradict, as I will discuss in Chapter 7).

Male gun carriers focused their efforts to protect others mainly on their family. Most of the time, this willingness to protect others was limited, as gun carriers imagined guns as a tool for protecting insecure families. But many gun carriers also feel sanctioned to intervene in protecting others – even strangers. Indeed, by carrying guns, they believed that they made not only themselves and their families but also their broader communities safer.

Strangers

Alongside this focus on *families*, gun carriers also articulated their decision to carry a gun as benefiting their communities more broadly. As suggested by Adam's implied pledge to protect me, a young white and unarmed female he had just met a few weeks prior, from the perils of Flint, gun carriers often talked

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[4] Throughout her 2008 bid for US Vice President and thereafter, Palin described herself as a 'mama grizzly' to emphasize her maternal toughness: "You don't want to mess with moms who are rising up…if you thought pit bulls were tough, you don't want to mess with mama grizzlies" See "Sarah Palin Calls on 'Mama Grizzlies' to Help Republicans Win Election" in *The Telegraph* (2010).

about their capacity to protect others – particularly women and children – even if they were strangers or acquaintances. While this topic was rarely discussed by female gun carriers, male gun carriers often discussed whether they would, or should, intervene in on-going crimes. For example, consider a scenario that Casper, the white gun instructor in his 50s, shared with me. He relayed the story to me to emphasize the importance of good firearm technique, but his choice of scenario betrays an underlying assumption that guns can, and perhaps should, be used to protect vulnerable strangers:

> *If you are driving by a schoolyard full of kids, and there's a guy standing there with a rifle. If you shoot him, the kids live. Do you have the skills and the ability to draw that handgun out, and put rounds on that person effectively? Can you do that* right this second? *And that's a lot of chaos going on. That's a lot of movement going on. Are you going to stand there from 35 yards out and do it? Can you do it? Or are you going to move to get a better position and advantage?*

By emphasizing children as vulnerable others, Casper's story arguably plays into the gendered narrative described above. Yet it is distinct in that he presumes no relation between the kids and their would-be protector. In fact, the armed citizen seems to have been passing by the schoolyard completely by chance. Casper, moreover, assumes that the only thing standing preventing the armed citizen from taking out the "guy standing there with a rifle" is the former's firearms skills; there is no discussion of calling 911, nor is there any attention paid to the moral prerogative of shooting the "guy standing there with a rifle." Assuming that defending the kids is the right thing to do, the only issue for Casper is whether the armed citizen has the skills to do it.

Other gun carriers emphasized this sense that their guns protect not only themselves and their families but also their communities. Referring to one of his friends who carries and often goes on long walks with his wife, Peter, the gun carrier from Flint, told me that "it makes my wife safer. It makes you safer!" When I asked Travis, a white carrier who lived just outside of Detroit, if he primarily carried for self-defense, he recoiled from the question, telling me it was too complicated to give "one reason":

> *It's a right, it's self-defense, it's a deterrent against crime. It's letting other people know it's legal, it's also letting other people know that there are those who do this in the neighborhood, so you might want to go do this somewhere else. It's all of it.*

This interaction was instructive as I struggled to understand why Travis could not have simply answered "yes:" he *did* carry for self-protection, but just as importantly, he carried for the more general protection of his neighborhood: "it's also letting other people know that there are those who do this [carry a gun] in the neighborhood, so you [criminals] might want to go to this [commit a crime] somewhere else." Likewise, Austin told me that

> *I believe that I have a right to carry. I should I have the right to carry any time, anywhere. That is one of the principles that this country was founded. For the defense of myself, my family, those around me – anybody.*

In a similar vein, explaining his gun carry habits, Billy simply told me that "I'm going to stay safe. Whoever is around me is going to be safe."

For these gun carriers, carrying a gun makes their broader *communities* safer, with the implication being that gun carriers will be willing to intervene as

"Good Samaritans" on behalf of victims, even if they are strangers. Indeed, the "Stand your Ground Law" that sanctions such interventions is sometimes called the "Good Samaritan Law." Many gun carriers saw themselves as responsible citizens willing to protect their communities with lethal force if necessary. This sentiment was most evocatively expressed by Timothy, a white gun carrier from suburban Detroit. Deflecting the stereotype of gun proponents as racist "bubbas," Timothy initially embraces a rather communitarian duty to protect others:

> *You'll have your stereotypical bubba with his two front teeth, that's gonna wanna "shoot any nigga that comes on his property". You've got that just as with any other cross section of society you've got your bad apples. But by and large a responsible firearms owner will stand back to back with another man, woman or child of any race, nation or creed to help them defend their own life.*

Timothy seems to link together gun ownership a duty to stand "back to back" with any "man, woman or child of any race, nation or creed to help them defend their own life." Similarly, Austin also emphasized that people "generally…do the right thing." He told me that he opposes gun restrictions, saying that laws make people lazy: "There are so many laws, that people think that the law is going to protect them. Law doesn't do it!" Nevertheless, he trusts Americans to be armed because "people have a tendency, generally, to do the right thing. Human nature is pretty good, as far as I am concerned."

Two gun carriers told me that they actually *have* intervened in what they described as potential crime scenes; not insignificantly, both involved domestic violence disputes. For example, Tom explained:

> *A boy and girl were screaming and yelling back and forth. I still had my gun and everything on because I had just been home maybe 20 minutes or so. She's screaming all kinds of profanities, and she said, "you slap me again and I'm going to call the cops." This is right in front of my house. So I step out on the porch, and he raises his hand back up to her, and she says, "I dare you to hit me." And I said, "So do I." And I'm standing there, wearing my 1911 [handgun]. And he looks up and says, "who are you?" I say, "I'm the guy who's going to call the cops." I said [to the woman], "do you want help?" She said, "yeah, he won't leave me alone." So, I said, "you can step away from her, she's requested help, by law right now, I have the right to use deadly force to protect her." He just kind of shut up. I said, "would you like the phone to call 911?" She said, "no, just keep him away from me until I can get out of here." I said, okay, if you don't call the police, then you go about your way. And I suggest you go up the hill, you go that way. So she took off running down the road, and he's just standing there, and I said, "hit it. If I see you go that way, I'll call 911 while I'm running after you." So he took off, I went into my house and minded my own business. But I never drew [my gun] on him.*

In this excerpt, Tom is situating himself as a "good protector" against the hypermasculine violence of a domestically abusive (ex?) boyfriend or husband. Distinguishing himself from masculine failure (the abuser), he presents himself as a responsible citizen who literally stands in for the strong arm of the law (a finding I examine in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5).

Not all gun carriers ascribed to this broadened duty to protect others; in fact, most gun carriers emphasized their families, not strangers or their

communities more broadly. But strikingly, even if they did not embrace this broadened duty, they often acknowledged that their decision to carry a gun allowed them to take on this duty if they chose to do so. Even Timothy, who embraced a broad duty to protect others, wrestled with this question:

> Because you can't always help somebody. I mean, as much as I care about human life and well-being, you know, just because I see some woman being raped in the corner of a dark alley, I'm not necessarily going to give my assistance. If I can, and it's safe to do so, yes I will do so. If it's just myself that's maybe going to be at risk, I'll be more prone to do what I can. If he's with me [referring to son], probably not….not saying that I wouldn't or that I wouldn't try to if it was at all possible, but you can't always…and sometimes you can stop something like that by as simple as walking outside, flicking your porch light on, and saying "Get the hell away from here." You don't even need a weapon. Most crooks are such cowards that as soon as you turn the light on, they run like a cockroach.

Ultimately, his duty to duty to protect his son trumped his willingness to intervene, as he says, in "some woman being raped." But the mere fact that he even imagines this dilemma to consider this question – what do I do if I see a woman being raped? – and then centers his answer on whether or not to use his gun demonstrates that guns implicate far more than personal protection or the protection of property.

Timothy seemed somewhat bothered in this excerpt by his inability to intervene responsibly – he clarifies, for example, that he is "not saying that I wouldn't try to if it was at all possible." The most common reasons that gun carriers told me that they would not intervene in an ongoing crime were either that they would jeopardize their own safety or the safety of others, like Timothy, or that they were concerned that they would misinterpret a non-criminal encounter as a criminal one, for example, by misconstruing a risqué sexual tryst as a rape (this example of a "misinterpreted" rape came up over and over in conversations with male gun carriers). But these were more practical concerns than moral ones --- gun carriers did not question the moral rightness of intervening, and they did not doubt that it was their prerogative to do so should they choose.

From Protection to Policing

> We [are] Americans […] Gotta protect ourselves […]
> Livin' up in these streets, through worse and through better health
> Surviving by any means, we are Samaritans
> What do we get us in?
> […]
> Take a look at where you live
> This is America, and we are Americans
> - Eminem, "We as Americans" (2004)

On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman, a Latino man in his late 20s, phoned the Police Department of Sanford, Florida, to report a suspicious stranger in his gated neighborhood. A concealed carrier, Zimmerman volunteered in the neighborhood's community patrol, but he was not officially on patrol that night. Nevertheless, he decided to make the call when he didn't recognize Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American boy who had just

purchased an Arizona Ice Tea and Skittles. Zimmerman was correct in deducing that Martin did not live in the neighborhood; he was visiting his father for just a few days. Police advised Zimmerman to stay back and not follow Martin. However, within a few minutes, the two were in a hand-to-hand scuffle, and by the end of the night, Martin would lie dead with a gunshot wound straight through his chest. There is no video to adjudicate what happened that night; we only have Trayvon Martin's lethally wounded body, the 911 audio of a hair-raising scream that preceded the fatal shot and a video of visibly wounded Zimmerman reenacting the encounter the day after. Originally set free on the basis that he was 'standing his ground' and defending himself against Martin's attack, Zimmerman is now charged with second-degree murder, and his trial is pending as of this writing.

Zimmerman initially justified the shooting with the controversial "Stand Your Ground Law". These laws not only allow Americans to protect themselves: they also allow Americans to protect others and, in that sense, *police*.[5] Zimmerman, of course, claims he shot Martin in *self*-defense, but his original motivation for following Martin was *less* about his personal protection and more about the protection of his community. The case, therefore, raises an important question: are terms like "self-defense" or "self-protection" adequate for understanding what Americans are doing with the guns they carry?

While much of the world watched as Stanford, Florida, officials delayed in taking Zimmerman into custody for the alleged homicide of Trayvon Martin, Michigan gun carriers discussed on message boards whether Zimmerman was justified in the shooting and whether or not it was an example of racial profiling. While they were split in terms of how they lined up in these debates, they did not debate the moral legitimacy of Stand Your Ground laws that allowed them to take the protection of themselves, and others, into their own hands against the assumption that the police would not, or could not be there to save them.

This chapter connects the everyday, social significance of guns to problems of policing: it demonstrates that guns are something that gun carriers, particularly male gun carriers, use to not only protect themselves but also others. Guns are not just objects of individualistic self-defense but in fact connected to a broader *social* duty centered on maintaining social order against a particular understanding of disorder and insecurity. In this chapter, I have suggested that this duty – and the brand of citizenship it represents – appeals particularly to men. Within the neoliberal context of Michigan, where declining incomes dovetail with spiked crime rates and an unraveling social safety net, gun carriers prepare to meet (criminal) force with (law-abiding) force, moving from mere self-protection to policing.

Yet not all gun carriers actually act out the moral citizenship that they profess to embrace: they may misrecognize threats, they may over-react, they may perform poorly under pressure. What happens, then, when gun carriers themselves cross the line between lawful and criminal, between "good guy" and "bad guy," between citizen and vigilante? In the next chapter, I explore how this

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[5] One can't help but wonder whether Zimmerman's actions would have garnered such public attention had he been a police officer. Indeed, Zimmerman's use of force against Martin suggests that the division between policing by public law enforcement versus policing by civilians may be blurring.

moralized version of good citizenship (and the laws, training, and cultural norms that prop it up) sanctions unlawful, over-reactive, and morally questionable actions. How do gun carriers, in other words, find themselves acting *not* as citizen-protectors but as citizen-vigilantes?

Chapter 4: The Citizen-Vigilante: Mistakes, Misunderstandings and Misuses of Guns

"We caution people that when you get the concealed pistol license, you are not automatically deputized to go out and save the world. This is not the issue that we're trying to fight."
- Craig, white gun carrier and instructor

"A CPL is not a 007 License."
- Pro-Gun Adage

Introduction

In the 1970s and 1980s, Charles Bronson starred in a series of *Death Wish* movies featuring Paul Kersey, an architect-turned-vigilante, who engages on a killing spree of would-be criminals in revenge for his wife's (*Death Wish*) and daughter's (*Death Wish II)* murders. The story is popular among gun proponents; it features dramatic shoot-outs in addition to dramatizing the line between good and bad killings, between criminal and vigilante. By *Death Wish III*, the series turns the tables further: Kersey's vigilante crime spree earns the attention of New York Police Department, and he is recruited to help the department fight rampant crime. Kersey's a vigilante, there's no doubt about that: but is he one of the good guys or one of the bad guys? A similar question should be asked about contemporary self-defense culture: gun carriers are morally and legally empowered to kill, but does that make them the good guys or the bad guys? And how does the rampant proliferation of guns as personal protection devices change our tolerance for killing?

Much of the gun debate focuses on the extent of gun violence and the correlation between gun availability and gun violence. Make no mistake about it, gun violence is an epidemic in the US: gun deaths are on track to outpace motor vehicle deaths, and in 12 states plus DC, they already do (VPC, 2013a). A recent CDC (Leshner et al., 2013) report on firearms-related violence unpacks the disturbing statistics of the nation's gun problem: in 2010, there were 31,672 gun deaths and 73,505 non-fatal gun injuries. Most gun deaths are suicides, followed by homicides (only 1% of firearms deaths are unintentional or accidental shootings). In 2010, 19,392 people ended their lives with a gun. Of the 12,664 homicides reported to the FBI in 2011, 8,583 were firearms-related, and of these, gun-involved homicides, 72% were carried out with handguns (this represents just less than 50% of total homicides). Of course, these numbers do not include people who are threatened, but not injured or killed, with guns. Importantly, gun

casualties are not equally distributed: the CDC reports that economic conditions and geography shape who is affected by guns and how. White, rural, middle-aged men are most likely to commit suicide; youth of color living in conditions of urban poverty are most likely to be the victims of homicide. African American men are most likely to be killed by guns.

Scholars have gone to great lengths to demonstrate (conclusively) the sheer magnitude of the gun problem in the US and (inconclusively) the effect of legal guns on gun violence. In light of the gun violence epidemic, there is a wealth of literature examining the causal relationships between guns and crime. Numerous scholars have tried to prove – or disprove – a causal link between guns and crime, with limited success (the controversial "More Guns, Less Crime" thesis (Ayres & Donohue, 2003a, 2003b; Duggan, 2001; Lott, 2010). Meanwhile others have tried to establish a link between firearm possession and victimization: Kellermann's reports suggest guns increase risks of homicide, suicide and armed robbery, while Gary Kleck and his colleagues have shown that people who use guns self-defensively have a greater chance of survival during criminal victimization. While both sides of the gun debate maintain that facts are on their side, the CDC ultimately concluded that given sparse evidence pulling in both directions, more research on the social ramifications of guns.

The debates about gun policy presume that these are the questions that really matter in determining gun policy, namely, whether gun rights lead to more gun crime because guns get into the "wrong hands." Again and again, we hear both sides of the gun debate maintaining that "lawful gun owners should not be punished for the actions of criminals," and that "no one wants to take away anyone's legitimate rights to self-defense." The presumption behind all of these statements, however, is that there is a clear line between the good, honest and morally upstanding gun carrier, who never strays from the law, and the bad, depraved armed criminal, who is intent on wrecking havoc at all costs.

But what about the good guy who makes a mistake? Or the good guy who goes bad? A gun doesn't make mistakes, it's true, and a gun doesn't kill people. People do these things. But a gun is what can transform a mistake into a killing, it brings people closer to breaking the law than they otherwise would be, and it creates a situation in which shooting – accidental or intentional, justified or criminal – is always a possibility. This chapter therefore examines the dark side of the citizen-protector: the citizen-vigilante. While the citizen-protector is cool, calm, collected; morally motivated; and always within the law, the citizen-vigilante is macho, emotional, irrational; egotistically motivated; and sometimes, but certainly not always, within the law. The citizen-vigilante is both the prototype against which gun carriers define themselves, but he is also what they are always at risk of becoming.

I use the citizen-vigilante to designate the blind spots of the citizen-protector model of citizenship. Even though it may seem oxymoronic to juxtapose "citizen" next to "vigilante," I do so to emphasize that vigilante-like actions are a byproduct of the moral politics embedded in gun culture. In other words, people who end up committing vigilante-like actions – taking self-defense too far and too seriously – do not do so out of a criminal proclivity but because they either take the citizen-protector model too seriously or they misapply it real-life self-defense scenario. This means the citizen-vigilante is contested ideological terrain: what counts as inappropriate and excessive to one

carrier may be legitimate and justified to another. Because self-defense law emphasizes *subjective* perceptions of threat, there is a great degree of leeway built into self-defense scenarios from a legal perspective. In addition, while the NRA provides a great deal of training on the moral aspects of gun carry, training programs have surprisingly little to say about the actual dynamics of a self-defense scenario, including how to evaluate whether a threat 'really' justifies legitimate force and how – given the adrenaline rush that comes along with being confronted by a criminal – a gun carrier is supposed to make that split-second decision. This chapter, therefore, aims to navigate this darker side of concealed carry. It is organized around the only concrete example of a gun carrier who ultimately was found guilty of breaking the law due to firearm use. I examine the mechanisms (and mixed messages) that simultaneously *facilitate* and *hinder* such behavior: self-defense law, self-defense training, and gun carriers themselves, and I conclude by emphasizing the importance of training in addressing this tendency within gun culture.

From Citizen-Protector to Citizen-Vigilante

I met Aaron at a Coney Island diner a few weeks after the incident happened. He had already had acquired a lawyer and been charged with brandishing a firearm, and eventually, he was convicted and had his gun rights suspended. While Aaron's is the only story I heard first-hand during my fieldwork, he is one of over 1,000 CPL holders were charged with a crime that year, according to the Michigan State Police. Of these, 124 cases involved brandishing a firearm; Aaron became one of the 35 people in Michigan from July 2009 to June 2010 charged with brandishing and assault with a deadly weapon.

Aaron's incident began when he drove his car, carrying his two children, to a gas station on 9 Mile. He said he "rarely" goes out at night, but for some reason, he had decided he wanted to get a pack of cigarettes. He pulled in behind another car:

> *I pull up to a gas station, and she's at a pump. I pull a good four to five feet away from her, not blocking right in front of her. I didn't come in and cut her off when she's pulling out or something. I get out of the car, and walk up to the door [of the gas station], and I see her coming up to the door. [She's] one of those people you see having a bad day, you know, pissed at something or someone. So I just give her a wide berth, float on by, and uh, as I'm going inside the doorway there, and I'm noticed she's talking to me, you know? She's giving it to me. You know, for a lady who's old enough to be my mother to say the least – and for the situation, she's just belligerent. Cussing, F this, and B-I-Ts, all that! She's saying, "You're going to block me in!"*

At this point in the conversations, Aaron maintains that he is on the right side of common sense: he is cognizant of his surroundings and giving this woman, who he describes as "belligerent" and "having a bad day," a wide berth. Aaron then describes, however, that the woman moves from having a general bad attitude to voicing threats:

So she was driving [a] nice truck, beautiful truck, right? At first I'm just kind of letting her talk, and then she says, well I'll move this MF [motherfucker] myself! I'll tear this – you know, B [bitch] up! You know, all that type of stuff! So I'm like, maybe you don't see it – I don't see how you couldn't see it, but my kids are right there, my children are in the car. "You need to just back the F [fuck] up!"

I asked Aaron for clarification as to whether she actually said those words. He responded, "Oh, yeah! "You need to just back the F [fuck] up!" The way I responded to her was, 'Ma'am, now if you had just simply asked me to move my car.' I am a respectable guy. Here's an elder, clear enough. Like I said, she was probably old enough to be my mom." He would have happily moved the car not only to avoid a fight, he said, but also to be a role model to his kids: "I turned to her, I was like 'Ma'am, if you would have just asked me, I wouldn't have had a problem. Both of my kids are sitting right there, you know, so I'm – I got to be a role model. But she's not pausing to hear what I was saying. So, I turn and walk away." He went back inside, away from his car, in order to buy his cigarettes.

This, however, turns out to be the pivotal moment of the incident. He goes inside the store, and hears someone say "Oh, she's in the truck!" When Aaron turns his head to look at the truck, he finds that it is just inches – not feet – away from the car holding his two kids. He rushes out to the car:

I had it [the gun] in my front right pocket, I had it on my side, finger off the trigger, and I'm in a defensive stance. Even in her statement [to police] she said I was four to five feet, so I didn't run up on [her] window or nothing like that. "Ma'am, you need to stop – you need to back up. I am a CPL holder, and I am armed." Now, this lady, she was mad. She gives me that look like "uh, no you didn't!" You know what I mean? And reaches over and grabs her phone. So when she does that, I don't know what she's coming up with – so I move to my right so I can get a visual with what is coming up. Keep in mind I'm already paying attention. I'm at a gas station, and I'm facing 9 Mile. Okay? So, when she comes around, I notice the phone, I'm standing by the store doorway by now. Put it in my pocket, realize I don't have my phone, starting to get the sweats a little bit, now the adrenaline is kicking in, right? So I had to recollect myself. What am I doing here? Am I here to fight with people? Or am I here to take care of my business and move on? So I'm like, "you go over here, get my cigarettes" [talking to himself]. So when I come back to the store, I'm thinking, okay, this is one of those things that we teach all the time about you know, try to limit your mistakes. So I can't find my phone, so I'm thinking – tell the store clerk to call the police, since I don't have my phone. But as I go up there, I ordered the cigarettes. Why? I don't know. Sometimes in training – we have people go up to the line, and they say you go left, and everybody goes left – five people in front of you go left, and if for whatever reason, you get up there, the adrenaline is flowing, and a lot of stuff is going on, and it's to the right. So why I go left instead of right? Why did I order cigarettes instead of have the clerk call [the police] – I don't know! But I did that.

Even though he said he wanted to be a "role model" for his kids, he soon found himself embarrassed in front of them: after the woman called the police, officers showed up:

> *I got ten cops standing around me – you know what I mean? Everybody who is riding down the street is looking out their windows and stuff. Plus, both of my kids are staring –* staring *– at me. So, I told them [the police officers] what happened… So, he [one of the officers] said, "Sir, could you turn around?" And I'm like, "Am I being arrested?" And he's like, "Yes." I'm like, "What for?" He's like, "We'll tell you after we put the handcuffs on." [laughs]. They handcuffed me, let me know it was for felonious assault and this that and the other. So, now my daughter is screaming, and I'm trying to calm her down, I can't talk to him [the police officer] no more because I'm trying to calm her down.*

During my interview, and in his initial statement to police, he maintained that he *hadn't* pulled out his gun and that he hadn't done anything wrong. In fact, at the time of the interview, which was before any preliminary hearing had been scheduled, Aaron told me he thought he handled the incident well because it did not escalate to violence:

> *How I handled her – I actually was pleased, you know, because like I said, that's what you want in any situation to do. To deter before it becomes violent. Even though she was making that threat, you know, I'm glad that I didn't jump the gun –with adrenaline, all that stuff – I'm glad that I was able to keep some type of composure. As far as training – I am just trying to limit mistakes. It could have gone a lot worse. You know what I mean?*

Aaron did, however, feel that he made a mistake in talking to the police:

> *One funny thing about the situation, and I teach it all the time, and I never really understanding how powerful and overwhelming that urge to talk is. You understand? I'm telling myself the whole time, you don't need to talk, point out evidence. This is a bad situation, but I haven't done anything, and whatever I did, I know its well within my rights, and asked if I would make a statement, so I'm thinking – well, I've always prepared myself for in a shooting [rather than brandishing]…It's a fine line that you have to walk.*

Based on my hour-long conversation with him and his description of the incident, Aaron was no Charles Bronson. He was prepared for trouble, but he certainly was not looking for it. He was not, in the words of Taxi Driver vigilante Travis Bickle, "a man who would not take it anymore. A man who stood up against the scum, the cunts, the dogs, the filth, the shit. Here is a man who stood up." No, Aaron was not trying to take the law into his own hands and 'stand up' to criminals – he was trying to protect his kids and, in the heat of a confusing moment, ended up pulling out his gun against the female driver, as surveillance video would later show. Was his misrepresentation of the situation the result of wishful thinking, purposeful lying, or confusion? This is not clear.

But what is clear is that a number of factors led Aaron to use his gun in a unlawful manner that endangered the "angry" woman who verbally confronted him; embarrassed him in front of his children; and put him in legal jeopardy. First, self-defense laws – particularly Stand Your Ground laws – provided him with a baseline justification for his actions. After all, he said, "I was within my rights." Second, while his training focused on what would happen in a clear-cut attack that involved him needing to *shoot*, his training was less useful for more ambiguous threats. He had to stop and ask himself, "*So I had to recollect myself. What am I doing here? Am I here to fight with people? Or am I here to take care of my business and move on*?" Ultimately, he didn't answer the question, because he avoided it by going inside to purchase a pack of cigarettes. And finally, his protective impulse toward his children – an impulse that is widely embraced by gun carriers as a legitimate reason for carrying a gun in the first place – probably colored the extent to which he viewed the angry woman as a threat. All three of these factors – self-defense law; self-defense training; and self-defense culture – blur the line between the citizen-protector and the citizen-vigilante and ultimately put both the public *and* gun carriers at legal and physical risk.

Self-Defense Law

When is it legal to pull out one's gun in self-defense? When can one shoot? When must one run away? As described in the "Introduction," the US has gradually moved from "duty to retreat" doctrine, which was inherited from the English common law on self-defense, to "no duty to retreat" not only from one's home but also from any place one has a legal right to be. "Duty to retreat" requires that anyone who uses force in self-defense must first show that they had made every "reasonable" attempt to flee the attack, while "no duty to retreat" removes this legal imperative. Where and whether one doctrine, as opposed to the other, applies varies by state. For example, all states had adopted – formally or in practice – the "Castle Doctrine" by the early 1900s, which provides an "exception" to the "duty to retreat" when an attack occurs in one's home. The Castle Doctrine holds that there is no duty to retreat if someone unlawfully enters onto one's property: as Ross (2007: 2) notes, "When a person is in his home, he is not required to retreat further. This is logical because when in the home, a person has already retreated as far as he can from the perils of society. By limiting the exception to the necessity to retreat to the castle, the self-defense doctrine was easy to enforce without difficulty in distinction." Other scholars suggest that pride in ownership and an interest in private property also likely plays a role in sanctioning off the home as an exception to "duty to retreat" (Drake 2007: 584).

Stand Your Ground laws expand the "no duty to retreat" doctrine "beyond the castle and into the streets" (Ross 2007: 2). Under these laws, which are now in force in over two-dozen states, a person has no duty to retreat in any place he or she has a legal right to be. The law "presumes that the lay person is justified in the use of deadly force and prohibit an arrest" (Ross 2007: 2) unless clear evidence exists to attest otherwise. This applies to whether the shooter is the victim of the attack, or whether the shooter is intervening in a felony that places the victim at risk of grave bodily harm or death.

Police departments enforce the presumption of justified self-defense differently: for example, in Florida, where Stand Your Ground laws have been in existence since 2005, police departments vary widely in their protocols on investigating self-defense shootings (Ross 2007: 42). In Corey's case, mentioned in the introduction, police quickly cleared him after he shot someone at the convenience store where he worked, and he was released from the police station that night. He was never handcuffed or arrested. Once a case is closed as a self-defense shooting, the victim can neither bring criminal charges nor can press for civil liability. This means that while gun proponents might say that they would "rather be tried by 12 than carried by 6," Stand Your Ground laws makes this statement "irrelevant." As Weaver (2008: 405) describes with respect to Florida's Stand Your Ground law, "no longer will a person need to worry about being judged by a jury for using deadly force so long as the user of force can prove the requirements in section 776.013(1)(a)-(b)." This is the presumption of reasonableness.

Police and, if the case ever makes it to trial (many self-defense cases do not), judges and juries must evaluate whether a shooting qualifies as self-defense based on whether the shooter's beliefs about the impending threat was *reasonable*: his or her beliefs must be reasonable regarding (1) that there is a threat; that force is necessary; and that lethal force is a proportional response to the threat. Note that while Stand Your Ground laws *expands* the "no duty to retreat" doctrine, all self-defense law is based on the "reasonable person" standard. And this is where legal scholars wedge their critiques: on the one hand, it is almost impossible to adjudicate what constitutes reasonable fear (and the presumption, again, is that people who shoot in self-defense are reasonable), while on the other hand, there is an easy slippage between "reasonable" and "typical" beliefs.

As Lee (1996) writes, this slippage opens up the possibility for self-defense laws to be disproportionately used against racial minorities who are stereotyped as criminal aggressors. As she explains, "the Black-as-criminal stereotype is so deeply entrenched in American culture that false claims of Black criminality are made and, in many cases, readily believed" (Lee 1996: 408). In one experimental study, social psychologist B. Keith Payne (2006) identified what he called "weapons bias": an ambiguous object was more likely to be identified to be a gun when held by a darker-skinned person than a lighter-skinned one. Payne found that this bias was particularly pronounced when participants in the study were asked to make split-second decisions about the object, and he also found that their biases had absolutely nothing to do with their conscious beliefs about race. Whether or not they held racial beliefs was irrelevant to the fact that they were more likely to "see" a gun in the hands of a Black man than a white man. This suggests that racial stereotypes connecting Blackness and criminality are pervasive and subconscious, and they can affect they very people who evaluate self-defense cases (i.e., police, juries or judges), leading them to view fears of Black men as "reasonable."[1]

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[1] Lee emphasizes that this confuses "reasonable" with "typical:" "a "typical" belief is not necessarily a "reasonable" belief. Just because most or many people share the same bias does not mean that the shared bias is a reasonable bias. The average person is not necessarily reasonable. Moreover, we as a society have

Stand Your Ground laws effectively remove the duty to retreat; they mandate that law enforcement they should presume that self-defense shooters are reasonable; and they in turn protect shooters from criminal prosecution and civil liability once a case is declared self-defense. As a result of these three factors, critics have worried that these laws will cultivate a "shoot first" mentality that disproportionately puts racial minorities in danger of being shot and killed through a "reasonable" mistake on the part of a shooter. According to researchers at the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center, whites who kill blacks are already less likely to be found "not guilty" than blacks who kill whites, but Stand Your Ground laws exacerbate this difference even further. To the extent that Stand Your Ground laws empower citizens to "act like police," this means that citizens may be participating in what is a widespread practice among public law enforcement (Harris, 1999; Meehan & Ponder, 2002): racial profiling. This critique of Stand Your Ground laws therefore does not presume that gun carriers are racists, any more than critiques of racial profiling by police require that police hold prejudicial views. Rather, this critique suggests that because we live in a society saturated with images of Black men as criminals, well-intentioned individuals may end up mistakenly assessing a threat and deciding to shoot, knowing that the law is tipped in their favor under the presumption that they are law-abiding, well-intentioned citizens.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

If these laws open up so much possibility for misunderstanding and mistakes, why have them? Proponents of the law "argue that it eliminates the need to make split second decisions in the face of a life and death situation" (Drake 2008: 576). When faced with a genuine self-defense encounter, adrenaline rushes, fine motor skills degenerate, and thought processes become muddled. People should not be victimized twice, proponents of these laws say: not only attacked by a criminal but then labeled a criminal for defending themselves. If someone, for example, someone misinterprets a violent mugging for a homicidal attack and decides to shoot and kill in self-defense, they should not be held responsible for demonstrating that the "true" intentions of the attacker were to kill instead of simply maim. Indeed, the confusion and uncertainty and panic that characterize self-defense encounters are visible in Aaron's own story. Two interactional dynamics seemed particularly at play: what Randall Collins, author of *Violence: A Micro-sociological Theory*, calls "forward panic" and "institutionalized bluster."

Collins's text begins with the presumption that violence is rare and that people are socially predisposed to avoid violence – whether by replacing physical violence of force with symbolic violence of words or by simply refusing

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decided that, even if most people are susceptible to (or guilty of) racial prejudice, such prejudice is improper" (459). As she goes on, "At one time, most Americans believed there was nothing wrong with slavery. The fact that slavery was not only accepted but approved of by most people did not mean that such a belief was reasonable" (495).

<p style="text-align:center">106</p>

to fire (as evidenced by the relatively low rates of firing among soldiers in war). As Collins writes,

> *The folk theory assumes that violence is easy, and that all it takes is a sufficient buildup of steam to blow the top off. We have seen, to the contrary, that violence is socially difficult, and it is much more common to carry out social rituals that pretend to fight but confine it to conventionalized gesturing.* (338)

The "social rituals that pretend to fight" and "conventionalized gesturing" that keeps violence at bay vary across social groups. For example, while middle class conversations may include griping, whining, arguing and even quarreling, the repetitive nature of these conversational styles keeps conflict to a minimum and avoids violence (342 – 344). In contrast, boasting and blustering – more assertive, more overt, and less polite – lie outside of the institutionalized boundaries of "polite middle-class conversational ritual" (345). Collins reads Elijah Anderson's (1999) ethnography of gang life in Philadelphia through the lens of ritualized violence, arguing that the "code of the street" is an example of "institutionalized bluster." Those who adhere to the street code embrace "a distinctive visual appearance through clothing style, grooming, and accessories" (350); use "a style of talk…[that is] generally loud and accompanied by exaggerated gestures" (350); and "present oneself as explicitly willing to use violence" (352). The purpose of the street code is not to engage in violence but to avoid it: it is a "frontstage" presentation of self that, paradoxically "attempt[s] to avoid violence by boasting and bluster [and by] projecting an image of confidence in one's ability to fight well" (351). The goal, therefore, is not to instigate a fight but rather to dominate a would-be aggressor before a fight breaks out. The street code grows in certain social contexts: where police protection is unreliable at best and aggressive at worst and where conditions of poverty place individuals at greater risk of violent confrontation. The street code is therefore not a resource used by hardened criminals but rather a strategy used by regular folks navigating socio-economic conditions not of their choosing.

What happens when the street code leaves the urban street and comes, for example, to the suburbs? Aaron's story suggests one outcome: the misrecognition of the street code. It is unclear what the purpose of the woman's expletives were; perhaps she really was just having a "bad day" or maybe she had grown accustomed – because of the street code – to being more verbally aggressive than the "polite" society north of 8 Mile road. Either way, the story suggests that the misrecognition of "institutionalized bluster" (even if she came close to hitting Aaron's car, ultimately she fell short) is one pathway into violence. This, moreover, provides an interactional reading of how racial profiling shapes self-defense cases: when two, very different sets of cultural norms for suppressing violence come into collision, misinterpretations may result in more, rather than less, violence.

This is not to justify Aaron's actions because he experienced some version of "culture shock" that led him to believe he needed to pull his gun when, in fact, there was not threat. He still could have walked away. He could have gotten in his car and driven off, even after her car came within inches of his. But he didn't. Why not? Forward panic is the second mechanism that runs alongside, but is

independent of racial prejudice, misunderstanding or stereotyping: as Collins (115) writes,

> *Racial prejudice can be the initial factor that builds tension and sets off a forward panic, and thus the perception of an atrocity. But forward panic has its own dynamics and operates independently of racism…racial antagonism is not the only way that the initial tension of confrontation can build up; where it is involved, it often is superimposed on the more general mechanism of tension/fear.*

Forward panic is "a period of prolonged tension/fear" followed by "a frenzied rush of destruction" (88). When viewed in isolation, the eventual violence seems like "overkill" – as in the case of police beatings. Collins argues that this excessive aggression is a product neither of a violent disposition of individuals involved nor a rational calculation of the threat at stake: rather, he emphasizes that it is a product of violent situations characterized by "a buildup of tension, which is released into a frenzied attack when the situation makes it easy to do so" (89). At this point, violence moves from rational choice to an "unstoppable" force: "the various kinds of tension/fear that come out in a rush of violence have often been described as an adrenalin rush" (92) and violence feels "for the time being…unstoppable" (94). At this point, an aggressor may get "tunnel vision" (65), where he or she becomes so focused on the threat he/she not only reacts with excessive force but also focuses on the threat to the erasure of everything else. In some of the gun courses I attended, I observed trainers chastise students to "break out" of tunnel vision by asking them to visually "scan the room" after every shot to check for additional threats and innocent bystanders and to maintain awareness. This exercise was as much about protecting others as about protecting shooters: for example, one gun instructor, for example, emphasized that criminals often use decoys to distract a victim before the "real" attack started.

Some version of forward panic seemed to be at work with Aaron's decision to pull his gun: tension built as the woman first verbally accosted Aaron and then returned to her car and started driving it into Aaron's car. Had she simply rear-ended his car, he might not have responded with his firearm drawn: he would have had to figure out whether she had made a mistake, whether her actions constituted violence. But with the build-up, colored probably by his misrecognition of the street code, he had already decided she was a potential threat, and a "sudden trigger" (113) – in this case, Aaron turning around to see her car within inches of his – leading to overreaction on the part of Aaron.

Unlike self-defense laws, which govern lethal force under the assumption of a "reasonable" threat, self-defense scenarios are exceptional events in which both parties act "unreasonable" to the extent that they are both engaged in – or presumed to be engaged in – lethal violence. The law purports to be a rational system, but the attack that is instigated by the misrecognition of institutionalized bluster and unfolds as a result of forward panic is far from "rational". Whether these laws are misused, then, depends not simply on the letter of the law but also the social world in which this law is enacted. In others, whether well-intentioned individuals who use guns in self-defense are able to ascertain threats "reasonably". Subconscious beliefs about what constitutes a threat, alongside the dynamics of a fight that can exact a centripetal pull on people and compels them to react with violence, can lead gun carriers to take actions that ultimately propel

them to act more like over-reactive citizen-vigilantes who respond with disproportionate and unreasonable force to a threat and less like the calm, cool and collected citizen-protectors that they aspire to be. This means that on their own, well-written laws will never be enough to ensure that gun carriers will not put themselves, and the lives of innocent people, in danger: in addition, gun carriers must themselves be cognizant of the factors that shape the exceptional instances of self-defense scenarios. This puts an onus not just on crafting good laws – but also on ensuring that gun carriers are adequately trained not just to point and shoot but also to understand how to ascertain "reasonable" threats and act in a lawful manner in response to them.

Self-Defense Training

Where do gun carriers learn about the law and its application to real-life self-defense scenarios? As discussed in Chapter 2, the NRA courses that I observed, and the course materials that I analyzed, tended to emphasize the moral dimensions of shooting in self-defense. In addition, there was an auxiliary legal section that is usually taught by either a lawyer or a police officer. These sections go over the basics of self-defense law in Michigan: that you cannot kill someone for stealing property but only because they are threatening death or grave bodily harm; the threat must be imminent and reasonable; and there must be a disparity of force to justify shooting someone. One oft-cited "rule" often taught in this portion of the course is the so-called "21-foot rule": if a threat is within 21 feet (for example, someone is running at you with a knife), then that constitutes an imminent threat. Of course, the 21-foot rule is not law; it is a way to simplify the law's application to self-defense scenarios.

There is no reason to think that Aaron was not well aware of all of these laws and legalities. Even though the state only requires an eight-hour course to obtain a concealed pistol weapon, Aaron did much more: he told me he regularly went shooting, he worked as a range safety officer at a local range, and he had also just received his certification as an NRA instructor. When I interviewed him, he was in the process of slowly building his own firearms academy, a process that was inevitably stalled by the fact that all of his firearms had been confiscated after he was arrested for assault.

But clearly, Aaron's training was not enough to help him avoid the trouble that ensued when he stopped at a gas station for cigarettes. Why did he react to a threat that – ultimately – led him to brandish his firearm and lose his legal ability to carry a gun concealed for several years? Was Aaron engaged in a version of racially profiling (he never identifies the race of the woman, but the vernacular he ascribes to her marks her as Black) – which led him to overreact to the threat, as anticipated by theories? How did the prolonged build-up shape Aaron's response? And what do we make of Aaron's repeated emphasis on his children and his own role as both their protector and their role model?

Perhaps there is an easy answer to all of these questions: quite simply, Aaron misunderstood or disregarded the law. This answer, however, presumes not only that the shifting lines between legal and illegal were relatively clear and straightforward as the event unfolded, but also that Aaron was a rational, calculating actor in the moment at which he grabbed his gun and pulled it out of the holster. Law and society scholars, however, take issue with this presumption:

in their study of social workers, police officers and teachers, Stephen Maynard-Moody and Michael Musheno (2003) find that even state agents – people we would expect would be most adept at applying the letter of the law – must engage in pragmatic improvisation to "fit" the law to everyday life. Self-defense scenarios such as Aaron's further demonstrate the impractical rationality of law: despite a number of rules and laws that govern how to act in self-defense scenarios violent interactions are governed not by law but by social-psychological principles that render law an afterthought in violent confrontations.

So what's missing in this training that might have made Aaron – and perhaps others – approach a perceived threat differently? While there is a great deal of discussion of why one is morally right to shoot someone else in self-defense and the embodied techniques of doing so, there is a relatively sparse discussion on how one actually ascertains that there is a threat, and at what point. Consider, for example, Billy, who told me about his training regime:

> *I don't think I'll ever be prepared to the fullest because in – whatever encounter it happens, its going to be in seconds. And you don't know what's going to happen, so the best thing to do is to be prepared for the worst. The best thing – aside from the rules, point in safe direction, keep your finger off the trigger, blah blah blah. Yeah, getting that gun out of the holster. That's 90% of it. Get that gun out of the holster. So you do it this way, you see people do this – pull it up and out, straight up and out. It's the fastest. You can – if you begin right here. We have 21 foot rule. You know, you cannot shoot somebody within 21 feet. Or outside 21 feet. If they are within 21 feet, then you can. But it only takes an individual to charge 1.5 seconds to go from there to you. 1.5 seconds is the time it takes. Or thereabouts. So that faster you can pull it out – and its all muscle memory. You know?*

Billy maintains that the threat he experiences will be quick, and that decisive action will be necessary. His biggest issue – as he says – is "get[ting] that gun out of the holster." But what's missing in Billy's account is not his ability to shoot but his ability to ascertain whether a threat requires lethal actions. The presumption is that the easy part is ascertaining the threat; the hard part is dealing with it.

Training tends to bolster this presumption rather than question it. Part of this is due to the pace of these courses: in advanced training well beyond what is required for the concealed pistol license, individuals *do* have the opportunity to act out scenarios in which they must quickly decide whether they are legally sanctioned to use their guns in self-defense. But in the courses required to obtain a concealed pistol license, I found that there was not a great deal of emphasis placed on distinguishing the murky regions between "not a threat," "potential threat" and "active threat." Rather, these courses seem to imply that as long as you are alert and cognizant of your surroundings, you will be able to ascertain threats. Instructors may go through an array of self-defense scenarios to talk through whether lethal force is warranted – as noted in Chapter 2.

But often, even these scenarios are excessively abstract, and most problematically, there is rarely a mention of race in these courses. There is certainly no mention of race in NRA materials, only individualistic and color-

blind renderings of "bad criminals" and "good guys." This avoidance of race, of course, is good PR policy: by talking about criminals in abstract terms, the NRA avoids being accused of reproducing stereotypes of Black men as criminals. At the same time, however, the avoidance of talking about race altogether may actually increase the likelihood that individuals make split-second judgments based on subconscious prejudicial beliefs rather than reasonable evaluations of threat. In other words, firearms training courses could be a venue for people to evaluate their own beliefs and think about how they might lead them to over-estimate threats. But this is impossible without talking explicitly about race. Echoing the cultural sensitivity training that some police departments undergo to address issues like racial profiling, these courses *could* serve as a forum to have a frank discussion about how the misrecognition of "institutionalized bluster" – from clothing, to talk, to empty threats of violence – can easily escalate into real violence through forward panic.

But such conversations, as far as I observed, did not happen, likely because of the cultural taboos surrounding race. There as no mention, for example, of the weapons bias (Payne, 2006). As a result, students may well leave the class feeling free to use whatever cues they find "reasonable" to ascertain a threat.

In addition to generally ignoring the issue of race, students get mixed messages about whether they should walk away from threats or be trigger-happy. For example, gun instructor after gun instructor told me that they stress the importance of violence in their classes: according to one gun instructor, "avoid a lethal engagement, and you avoid the emergency room, the morgue, the cemetery. You can call me a name, and you know what? You're right. I'll let you be right." Meanwhile, sayings like "I'd rather be tried by 12 than carried by 6" suggest that an overwillingness to misunderstand something as a threat when it, in fact, is not. There is the presumption that having a gun makes you calmer, less aggressive, and less likely to engage in a fight (something gun carriers, as I have noted in other chapters, often emphasized), yet there is little guidance as to how to recognize the signs of impending confrontation so that one can, indeed, walk away before it is too late. Gun carriers are told, for example, that "a CPL is not a 007 license," as noted in the quote that appeared at the beginning of the chapter. But they are not given adequate training to understand how their moral commitments to protect innocent lives may actual mark them off *not* as good citizen-protectors but as morally ambiguous and even legally criminalized citizen-vigilantes.

Self-defense laws are, at best, a makeshift way of adjudicating situations that – as Collins's analysis shows – can spiral out of control, situations where concepts like "reasonableness" and "proportional force" become effectively (if not legally) irrelevant. Meanwhile, training (at least, required training) generally does not address the social parameters of self-defense scenarios – from the basic social-psychological dimensions of fighting to how racial prejudices and differences may escalate fights. Whereas self-defense laws open up the possibility for gun carriers – now armed like police – to engage in the same racialized policing tactics as public law enforcement (namely, racial profiling), training does little to shape students in terms of how they adjudicate and understand what counts as a threat as opposed to a stereotype. The assumption is that students will just "know." These formal (the law) and semi-formal (legally

required training) mechanisms open up gaps for error, misunderstanding and misuse of firearms. So what about informal mechanisms – the norms that emerge out of prolonged online discussions of self-defense scenarios, the ways in which gun carriers celebrate certain acts while chastising others, and the macho boasting that comes with trips to the range? Does self-defense culture fill in the gaps opened up by inadequate laws and ineffective training, or exacerbate them?

Self-Defense Culture

Gun carriers often embrace the libertarian notion that self-regulation and self-policing best guarantee a safe and harmonious society – as conveyed by the saying that "an armed society is a polite society." But are gun carriers willing to police their fellow gun proponents? How do they deal with incidents that cross the line from citizen-protector to citizen-vigilante? Did gun carriers keep "unworthy" people from carrying guns? Were people ever shut out from gun culture?

During my research, I found a handful of stories of gun carriers actively dissuading people from carrying and chastising people when they acted unlawfully or inappropriately. For example, Kent was a firearms instructor who told me, like virtually every other gun instructor I interviewed, that he rarely fails students in his class. However, Kent quickly qualified this by saying that he "screens" them before he allows them in his courses: as he told me, "I deny them way before that. I don't have my classes like other guys have their classes – I meet with the people, and I talk to them…I'll screen them." I assumed that Kent probably screened them for basic firearms ability, but when I inquired further, I found out I was wrong: "The ones that I have denied have been some screwed up idiots. Meaning, not that they were stupid or they were retarded. But that they were – racist. Those are the only ones that I've had to deny." How did he know they were racist?

> Yeah, they'll say, "I want to be able to kill that N-word if they come on my property." You got the wrong guy, not interested. That's just unacceptable, and there's still a couple of flaming idiots out there… I think we need to shun those people and they need to be kept in their place. But, its an older gentleman that lives by himself – the one that comes to mind – lives by himself out at the end of a country road. You know, he needs protection, and yet, as far as I'm concerned, he doesn't deserve it.

Not only did Kent screen "screwed up" "racist" "idiots" out of his classes, but he also tried to prevent one from getting a CPL altogether when he called the local Sherriff. He said he admitted that his actions were hypocritical:

> That's the problem with any law – at what point do you say you know better than anyone else? And I think that's a problem with most laws. Even that guy. I feel like he still has his rights…So I'm a hypocrite. You know? I still think he has a right to protect himself. I wish there was a mechanism where we could try and straighten him out so he could still enjoy his rights. And not scare the hell out of people where I'd be afraid he'd hurt somebody else that shouldn't be hurt.

Of course, that "mechanism" – "where we could try and straight him out so he could still enjoy his rights and not scare the hell out of people [and possibly] hurt somebody else that shouldn't be hurt" – is precisely what is missing from training program. In its absence, Kent enforces his own screening

process so as to protect the rights of "people who are legitimately needing protection and not just out to hurt somebody."

Perhaps Kent's actions are better described as "selfish" (a word he uses himself) than "anti-racist": he wanted to protect the image and rights of "people who are legitimately needing protection." Indeed, perhaps for reasons of "image-maintenance", other gun carriers engaged in similar activities: one gun carrier told me in an interview that he actively dissuades others from obtaining a CPL if he believes they will be a liability; he even lied to his own mother, telling her she was not legally eligible for a CPL, in order to keep her from attempting to get one. Other gun carriers chastise gun carriers: in one particular example, a gun carrier named Roger was active in one of the gun-rights groups I studied. He had the habit of pulling out his gun – usually to show it off – in public places. As a result, he lost his CPL but could still open carry. Well-known among gun carriers because of his antics, he was described to me in several interviews as "bad for the movement" and a "liability." At one point, gun carriers even dedicated an entire forum thread to encouraging Roger to "get a job" and move off of welfare.

Macho Men

These instances were generally sporadic. I did not witness a generalized culture of self-policing. But I did often hear complaints from gun carriers about *other* gun carriers. One of the most consistent gripes that gun carriers voiced was the general "macho" attitudes of *other* gun carriers. For example, Larry and Kevin, both white gun carriers, both complained about the machismo of gun culture. While Larry noted that he doesn't need a Desert Eagle (an infamously large handgun) because "I'm sorry, but I have a normal-sized penis," Kevin summarized the "machismo" within gun culture by saying, "back to the macho thing: guys have a tendency to know everything. Just ask us! We know everything! We know everything there is about cars! We know everything there is about guns! We know everything! They're all full of shit." Meanwhile, Michael, a seasoned shooting instructor, echoed Kevin, saying,

> *The militaristic approach – I know everything, I am God, I am champion of the world! That's what prevails in the firearms (world), whether you're a trainer, or whether you're not a trainer. This constant competition. Everybody who there's who wants to prove to me with their $5,000 tricked-out Russ Carniac 1911 .45 that they can hit a bullseye at 30 feet. They can relax. Men are – they are a breed. Mommy mommy! Look at me! I'm jumping in the deep end! And it just annoys me. Can't you just relax?*

While Larry, Kevin and Michael betrayed their irritation at the "know-it-all" attitudes of some male gun carriers, others said that this attitude was not only annoying but also dangerous, as "alpha males" will be more likely to start a fight than avoid it: Christian, an African American gun carrier who told me that "*the macho thing is just terrible,"* said that wanting to play the 'hero' often lands men in trouble. Instead of de-escalating situations that could lead to violent confrontations, men will tend to exacerbate them. Likewise, Jeremy, a father, concurred that "playing the hero" is a recipe for (lethal) disaster. He specifically condemns vigilantism:

> *Vigilantism will get you killed. Those who want to run out there and play vigilante, they're going to meet their own demise. Because you can't*

always help somebody. If it's just myself that's maybe going to be at risk, I'll be more prone to do what I can. If he's with me [referring to his son on his lap], probably not.

Reading these complaints of gun carriers against their insistence that avoiding a fight is critical and that walking away matters more than proving one's toughness, I began to wonder how I managed to find all of the non-macho, clear-headed, and morally upstanding gun carriers, despite the preponderance of "macho" men within gun culture. What this suggests, I think, is that a moralized discourse on guns sits alongside a great degree of boasting, and perhaps also blustering, that is institutionalized within gun culture. What, then, to make of this boasting and blustering?

On the one hand, ethnographic research, such as Burbick (2006) tends to take this macho ethos at its face value, and to the extent that I saw gun carriers use their detailed and not-so-detailed knowledge about firearms, their presumed expertise on how to react to a life-threatening attack (virtually never verified in real life), and their target-shooting skills on the range to dominate each other (as well as me, which allowed me to adopt the role of interested but unskilled and unknowledgeable researcher), gun culture encourages men to dominate one another and also shuts out women from participation (see Chapter 7 for more details on this). On the other hand, however, Collins (2009) warns that verbal boasting should not be assumed to be as a invitation to, or endorsement of, actual physical violence: as described above with "street code," verbal jostling may actually *substitute for* and thus *ameliorate* the chances of actual physical violence breaking out. Or, put differently, men's verbal endorsement of violence is, by and large, just that:

> *[Boast and bluster] is the opposite of polite middle-class quarreling; its archetype is masculine, indeed macho, working-class/lower-class youth….it might seem obvious that boasting leads to violence because it is part of the culture of those who habitually fight. But this is ignoring the dirty little secret of violence – the barrier of tension/fear that makes fighting incompetent when it happens, and produces much more gesture than real fight…the culture of machismo, of the tough guys, the action scene, is mainly the activity of staging an impression of violence, rather than the violence itself…the world of boasting and bluster is a repetitive set of situations; much of the time they have their own equilibrium, staying within their own limits, but sometimes they spill over those limits. (Collins, 2009: 338 – 339).*

What this means is that, at least when enacted in the confines of gun culture, among "gunnies," this machismo is generally not an indication of violent tendencies but rather a playful jostle not intended to erupt into actual, physical violence.

So does that mean gun carriers are in the clear? Not quite: as Collins emphasizes, violence results not from violent *people* but from violent-inducing *situations*, although certain beliefs, attitudes and propensities can compel people to more likely react with violence. Time spent with other gun carriers at the range or in heated debates on online pro-gun discussion forums are not

situations likely to "spill out" into intentional violence.[2] The bigger question is how this macho normativity rears its ugly head outside the confines of gun culture, in real-life self-defense scenarios. And this is where a culture of machismo becomes dangerous: Aaron said his actions were motivated by his fears for the safety of his children. So why did he leave the car unattended while he bought cigarettes, only to return with his gun out, aimed at the woman, as she inched toward his car? Likely unable to formulate a "rational" response to the situation given that Aaron was probably experiencing forward panic, he justifies his actions with an emphasis on his masculinity: his identification as a responsible father facilitated his overreaction and probably put his children through more pain – after all, they watched from the car as their father pull out a gun on another woman and was arrested by a cop.

The desire to "play the hero" and to "protect my children" may therefore slip into vigilantism when these desires come into play in a real-life self-defense scenario. Indeed, this machismo is the "dark side" of the moralized, respectable masculinity that gun carriers celebrates. For many, guns are a way of achieving a calm, resolute masculinity and embrace their role as protectors of themselves, their families, protector role, but if this role is taken too seriously or too eagerly embrace, this misplaced machismo can accelerate an encounter in which someone should just "walk away" into a full-on self-defense encounter. It is not possible to tell whether Aaron's emphasis on masculinity in his own account of the story is an accurate portrayal of his thought processes during the incident or a convenient, ex post facto justification of his actions. In Aaron's case, it is a probably combination of both: that the emphasis on guns as a means of achieving masculinity both justifies certain acts of bold self-defense as well as increases the likelihood of those acts occurring in the first place.

Rogue Individuals, or Byproduct of Gun Carry?

Ultimately, then, the question is whether people like Aaron – and there are, admittedly, relatively few of them – are rogue individuals who likely would have committed crimes regardless of the legality of concealed carry, or whether people like Aaron are a necessarily byproduct of concealed carry. Does the celebration of the citizen-protector also encourage the citizen-vigilante?

Had Aaron not been armed, he would have not committed a crime that night: without his gun, he could not have unholstered it and pointed it at a woman that he believed – unreasonably, legally speaking – was threatening his children. Was Aaron a closeted criminal, a ticking time-bomb ready to explode, and that night at the gas station was an inevitable moment in Aaron's metamorphosis? Perhaps. After all, Donald Black (1983) argues that much crime can be understood as a form of self-help: many murders, assaults and aggression that deemed criminal are also ways to mete out justice in extra-legal ways. Perhaps Aaron is just a common criminal, meting out justice in extra-legal ways, and therefore, at once a criminal and a vigilante? This may be the case, but more likely, having the gun is what brought Aaron over the edge: unable to deal with

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[2] Add footnote regarding accidental shootings.

simultaneous legal, physical and moral dimension of gun carry, Aaron acted in a way that he became an aggressor rather than the moral citizen-protector.

This is the first critical element: that gun carry brings people to the edge in terms of the fine line between legal and illegal, between citizen-protector and citizen-vigilante. It empowers them to do things that they couldn't – physically, without a gun – do. The second element is that it creates the presumption that if they are armed, everyone else *could* be, too, and these other people certainly could be capable of violence. While this assumption, as I've argued before, does not mean that gun carriers are necessarily paranoid and looking for threats as they go about their daily lives, it does suggest that gun carriers may well *overestimate* a threat when they find themselves in what they perceive to be a dicey situation. This is the second element of concealed carry that encourages people like Aaron.

And third and finally, once a fight starts, having a gun fundamentally changes the character of that fight. The armed party is armed, which makes them want to reach for their gun rather than fight it out. And they are also aware that the gun could become the object of the fight and turned against them. The gun therefore adds to the tension/conflict that Collins (2009) maintains drive fights. This means that the armed party is probably even more eager to end the fight – and end it decisively – than might otherwise be the case.

At the same time, there are millions of concealed carriers who do not commit firearms-related crimes every year. The handful of rogue cases should not be confused with the many gun carriers who never commit a crime or even come face-to-face with a life-threatening attack, for that matter. For the most part, gun carry *is* hypothetical because the likelihood of using a gun in self-defense – let alone killing another person – is relatively low compared to the number of gun carriers. Yet each of these people, through their decision to carry a gun, exercise their rights, and embrace a moral duty to protect themselves and others, take on the risk of becoming criminals themselves and, in the process, risk reproducing the problematic practices of public law enforcement, such as racial profiling. Again, I use the term citizen-vigilante to suggest that these criminal activities are not the result of criminals purposely manipulating self-defense law (although there is evidence that this has happened) but rather to suggest that these pitfalls are a byproduct of the moral system embraced by gun carriers. Gun carriers who press this moral system too far end up breaking the law and engaging in morally questionable behaviors *not* because they are criminals but because they take the law *too* seriously. The biggest impact of concealed carry, then, is not how concealed carry ends up expands clear-cut criminal uses of guns but rather how it blurs the line between "good" and "bad" guns, between citizen-protector and citizen-vigilante.

Conclusion

A year after Corey shot the African American teen who had held him up at gun point, police decided to reveal a new detail to him: the gun that he used in the robbery was fake. His life was never in danger – at least not from the "pistol" that was pointed at him. In follow-up stories, Corey told reporters he still thought he made the right decision. Was Corey "really" justified in what he did? According to the police's investigation, who knew when they ruled the case a justifiable homicide that they gun was fake, yes. But morally, did Corey act in the

right? Could the incident have ended differently? What if Corey just had given him the money – after all, is a life really worth any amount that could have been in that cash register? Of course, it is easy to scoff back: the robber did not choose to use a fake gun by accident; it was intended to inspire fear and intimidation in Corey. Obviously, the robber had no right to the money Corey held in the register, and in the heat of a robbery, there's no time to confirm whether the gun pointed at your head is real or fake.

Nevertheless, this update to Corey's story suggests the kind of lethal mistakes, confusions, and misunderstandings that can happen in the course of armed self-defense encounters. Of course, the initial mistake was the robber's: he committed the first act of criminal threat and intimidation that cascaded quickly into his own death. No one has argued that the youth was not intending to rob Corey; family members only wish that he wasn't paying with his life for his poor decision. Yet, Corey's story brings out an important question that is glossed over and individualized in NRA materials: how do you know when a threat is real? Gun instructors and NRA materials suggest that ultimately, it is up to you: *you* have to decide when *your* line has been crossed, when *your* safety or the safety of your loved ones has been compromised, and *you* have to live with the consequences of making that decision, which may turn out to be right (as Corey maintains) or wrong.

While gun carriers engage in a number of informal practices – from screening concealed carry students to complaining about one another's machismo – there are no formal mechanisms to address how guns can torpedo gun carriers down the tunnel of forward panic and how stereotypes of criminals can land gun carriers into morally and legally ambiguous territory, not to mention endangering the "innocent life" that gun carriers profess to hold so dear. In the aftermath of the Zimmerman trial, which found that Zimmerman was "not guilty" of either manslaughter or 2nd-degree murder in the killing of Trayvon Martin, many have called for the repeal of Stand Your Ground laws that appear to have facilitated Zimmerman's acquittal (even though his defense did not invoke Stand Your Ground, the early months of the investigation as well as jury instructions were affected by Florida's Stand Your Ground law). The NAACP has introduced "Trayvon's Law," which is a set of bills that includes, among others: repealing Stand Your Ground laws, ending racial profiling among public law enforcement, and disrupting the "School-to-Prison" pipeline that funnels young Americans of color into the prison system. None of these initiatives would have necessarily changed the outcome of Zimmerman's trial. But what they would do is try and change the social ecology in which Zimmerman's actions occurred by dismantling the carceral system that disproportionately bears down on people of color – from arrest to conviction to parole – and therefore challenge the stereotypes that link criminality to Blackness.

One of the easier ways, however, to challenge these stereotypes among Americans, especially armed Americans, may not be to change laws as much modify *existing* laws: in most states, residents must attend some sort of training in order to obtain a concealed pistol license. As I've noted, this training tends to avoid discussions about race and tends to gloss over discussions about how stereotypes and prejudices (not only racial, but all kinds) may lead gun carriers to over-, or under-, estimate an impending threat. There is no frank discussion on the real connections between race and crime as well as the reality of racial

profiling. There is no discussion about how race influences whether or not we may identify an object as a gun – and rush to our own gun. And there is very, very rarely hands-on role-playing that requires students to ascertain threats in real-time, with real people.

There have been several calls to add cultural sensitivity training to police departments to avoid racial profiling. In the departments that have implemented this training, the results have been somewhat encouraging. This same approach can be implemented in concealed carry classroom: it may lead to uncomfortable discussions about race, crime and racial profiling, but this may be the only opportunity for gun carriers to have such a discussion – which might end up saving their lives – both physically and lawfully – as well as the lives of others.

People like Aaron and Corey have the unfortunate experience of actually drawing their guns in a situation in which they feel their lives, or the lives of others, are threatened. For Aaron, this meant he lost his gun rights, while Corey was never arrested and was even congratulated by a local police officer. Though Aaron and Corey fall on two sides of the law, they are both the results of people attempting to exercise their rights while trying to stay within the law. Both of these cases suggest that one of the most important shifts that concealed carry has brought into being is the increased legal vulnerability of Americans by way of their choice to carry a gun and the redefinition of some killing as "justifiable." Indeed, both cases suggest that in addition to the impact that the availability of guns may have on criminal gun use, we must also remain attentive to how gun laws facilitate lawful people to engage in morally ambiguous, and legally ambiguous, behavior.

The male gun carriers I met during my fieldwork generally embraced the moral duties associated with the citizen-protector model described in Chapters 2 and 3. This chapter, however, demonstrates that like all moral systems, this is one is not perfect: it can sanction a dangerous blur between lawful and criminal behavior, leading some gun carriers to look more like citizen-vigilantes than good citizens. This is a familiar dynamic: public law enforcement must also walk this fine line. This link is not surprising: the NRA's brand of citizenship does not just empower gun carriers to embrace their right to self defense; it also empowers gun carriers to use their guns to replicate, and sometimes replace, public law enforcement. I now turn to Chapters 4 and 5 to examine how male gun carriers enact themselves as citizen-protectors by defining themselves through and against public law enforcement.

Chapter 5: Supplementing the Police: Enacting the Citizen-Protector[1]

> *"There's an intruder in my house.*
> *He cut my phone lines, can't dial out.*
> *I scream for police, but I doubt*
> *They're gonna hear me when I shout."*
> - Eminem, "We as Americans" (2004)

No longer the promising city of the early 1900s, Detroit now serves as a popular symbol of crime, poverty and urban decay. Almost daily, the *Detroit Free Press* broadcasts stories of horrific crimes: a beat-up grandma, an unidentified, burnt body inside a torched SUV, gas station car-jackings, and random shootings. Meanwhile, headlines on police defunding echo Corey's contention, described in the introduction, that "crime's up, cops are low": "Police Cuts Raise Fears" (*Muskegon Chronicle*, 2008), "Flint to lose 69 police officers, firefighters face layoff Thursday" (*Flint Journal*, 2010), "Layoffs hit 11 First Responders in Royal Oak" (*Macomb Daily*, 2010), "Russian Roulette, Detroit Style" (on gambling with the city's crime problem by cutting its police force; *MyFox Detroit*, 2011). Tragic, but illustrative, current and former police officers have been the targets of crime: in July 2009, James Barren's house was robbed the last day he served as Detroit's chief of police;[2] in January 2011, a man armed with a shotgun went on a shooting spree in one of Detroit's police stations;[3] in May 2012, Stanley Knox, former police chief of Detroit, was robbed at gunpoint outside of his house;[4] and in November 2012, another man entered a police station in Southfield, a suburb of Detroit, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to shoot an officer through bullet-proof glass.[5]

Making sense of this criminal violence against the backdrop of police defunding, gun carriers themselves cited a smattering of popular mantras and adages that conveyed the clear if clichéd message that police are inadequate and ineffective, even if well-intentioned: "I carry a gun because a cop is too heavy"; "When seconds matter, the police are only minutes away"; "A gun in the hand is worth two cops on the phone"; and, simply, "I don't dial 911." These slogans were not only shared during my interviews with gun carriers: they appear on welcome mats to homes and businesses, on t-shirts and bumper stickers, in the signature tags that gun carriers use for their online forum posts and emails, in National Rifle Association paraphernalia. Many gun carriers spoke highly of the

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[1]Portions of this chapter have been adapted from Carlson (2012).
[2] See "James Barren's home robbed on last day as Detroit chief of police" by Oosting (2009) in *MLive.com*.
[3] See "Graphic Video shows Detroit cop station shooting" by Corey Williams at *Associated Press/NBC News* (2011).
[4] See "Former Detroit Police Chief robbed at gunpoint outside home" in *MLive.com* (2012).
[5] See "Police Station Shooting in Southfield, Michigan Leaves Suspect Dead, Officer Wounded" by David Goodman at *The Huffington Post* (2012).

police and the important social duties that they provide. Indeed, I argue that they take these duties so seriously that they themselves – by carrying a gun – attempt to replicate the police. In this regard, male gun carriers see themselves as *supplementing* the police, often appealing to abstract or anecdotal reasons to explain that law enforcement, while well-intentioned, is ineffective and inadequate for ensuring the individual safety of Americans.

What do these suspicions regarding public law enforcement tell us about gun politics? In this chapter, I argue that at the heart of gun politics lies not only the problem of crime but also policing: policing is both the problem (as per inadequate public law enforcement) and the solution (as per gun carry). The sentiments voiced by gun carriers suggest that public law enforcement *matters* when it comes to gun politics: the defunding of public law enforcement agencies (and the police's response to this defunding) is a problem that gun carry solves by "responsibilizing"[6] policing onto individual citizens. As such, the armed citizen-protector implicitly contests the adequacy (and, perhaps ultimately, the relevance) of the state – at least the state's capacity to police. As Bayley (1976) and McNab (2009) note, the handgun is one of the dominant symbols of American public law enforcement, alongside the badge. Both symbolically and practically, the widespread legalization of gun carry shrinks the gap between the (armed) citizen and the police officer.

In this chapter, I extend my analysis from Chapter 3 on the relationship between guns, masculinity, and the police by examining how male gun carriers enact a particular version of the 'citizen-protector' in relation to the police.[7] I start by analyzing gun carriers' narratives about police inadequacy as well as the ways in which police themselves aggravate suspicions of police ineffectiveness. I show that gun carriers' critique of the police as inadequate (if well-intentioned) dovetails with the shrinking of police in contexts of neoliberal decline and that there is a material basis to the concerns they voice about police inadequacy in Michigan. I then turn to a curious paradox: white, conservative men tend to exhibit high levels of confidence in the police. What makes gun carriers – themselves predominantly white, conservative men – different? I use gendered theories on the state's police power to resolve this paradox by arguing that guns allow men to situate themselves as citizen-protectors not only by *reclaiming* the duty to protect (as suggested in Chapter 3) but also by *rejecting* dependency on the police, both of which help to recuperate their status as responsible *men*. In doing so, male gun carriers achieve a double reclamation of good masculinity: they both reclaim the duty to protect as their own *and* reject an effeminizing dependency on the (ineffective) state. Thus, when carried to supplement perceived inadequate police, guns may serve to reclaim masculinity through *both* the embrace of the historically masculine duty to protect others *as well as* the rejection of dependency on the police.

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[6] See Chapter 2 for an extended discussion of responsibilization.

[7] I do not focus on race in this chapter for two reasons. First, this narrative surrounding police inadequacy was voiced consistently and vociferously by male gun carriers across the board (female gun carriers, in contrast, seemed less concerned with the problem of policing, as described in Chapter 7). Second, gun carriers of color (along with a significant minority of white gun carriers) offered a second narrative alongside this one – that the police are not only inadequate protectors but also aggressive violators, and an analysis of this narrative requires a chapter of its own.

Articulating Police Inadequacy

Gun carriers referred to police inadequacy as a basic premise of their decision to carry a gun. While they discussed various kinds of crime – ranging from gangbangers to domestic abusers (as described in Chapters 1 & 3), their discussions of crime assumed a state that they viewed as unable to protect them. Their appeals to police inefficacy emphasized an agreed-upon reality that gun carriers shared: despite their best intentions, police are incapable of intervening in, let alone preventing, all violent crime.

Gun carriers often noted that realizing that police are only there to "clean up the body," to quote one gun carrier, was a key step in their decision to purchase and carry a gun. Brad, the white truck driver, was also a former police officer in the army. He explained his choice to purchase firearms by noting, "[I] realized that the government was not going to be able to protect me. Cops weren't [going to be there]. Having been a cop, [I know that] you can't be everywhere." Other gun carriers recounted watching the police pass them by as they tried to call 911. For example, explaining to me why he doesn't trust the police to watch over his safety, Cole, a white retiree who lives in Wyandotte, recounted a situation in which he waited for police to arrive with a gun pointed to his head: "I think it took like five to ten minutes for those cops to show up. That was something that I didn't like. I've been a victim of crime, and I'm getting tired of it. I don't want to be a victim anymore." Echoing this sentiment, Billy, the white machinist, told me, "Cops don't show up until after the fact. They're not going to show up when guns are blazing and people are dying." When I asked Henry, an African American gun carrier, what he thought about the police, he echoed this sentiment: "I think they'll be there late. Definitely. Their job is not to help you."

Gun carriers tended to see people's willingness to rely on the police as naïve if not ignorant. For example, Greg is a retired autoworker who lived in Waterford. He told me that relying on the police was foolhardy: "You know, if you were going to call an ambulance, a policeman or Jimmy John's [a sandwich delivery chain] – who would be the first one there? That's a little far-fetched, but if you are counting on a police officer to show up and stop [a crime], it's not going to happen." Likewise, Fred, a white gun carrier and instructor, emphasized the sheer naiveté of placing trust in the police's ability to "save you": "If you believe the police are going to come save you, you probably believe in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny." Dismissing faith in the police as dangerously childish, he told me that about 10 to 20% of his students are victims of crime, while the rest "know what happens when you call 911."

While most gun carriers relied on slogans and anecdotes to explain their apprehension regarding police inefficacy, other gun carriers made more legalistic arguments regarding police protection. Specifically, these gun carriers elaborated on police inadequacy by emphasizing the lack of legal requirements on police to protect individuals as opposed to 'public order'. Jesse, a white gun carrier, recounted learning about the "Myth of Police Protection" as he decided to both own and then carry guns for self-protection. Reflecting on his years as an Emergency Medical Technician in Detroit, he told me:

> *I've treated thousands of people who were victim of violent crimes in*
> *Detroit for 15 years everyday. EMT. So, all day long, gun-shot, stab, gun-*

shot, stab, beating, beating, gun-shot, stab, beating, robbery, shot, robbery, shot – you know. I got the idea that the media put about one incident a day on TV, and I saw dozen in one shift….[This violent crime] is hidden from the public because the powers that be don't really want civilians to be aware of the crime – if you knew everything that happened in Royal Oak [MI] in 24 hours, you would probably stay home or move somewhere else. Because you have, in the back of your mind, the illusion of police protection. As a matter of fact, in the book "Call 911 and Die", the anecdotal note underneath it shows a woman on the phone with her kid and a guy with a big knife, it's a good book, and it says: "The Myth of Police Protection in America." There isn't any police protection in America.

Tom, the white gun carrier who lived just outside of Flint, echoed this sentiment, telling me, "they're [public law enforcement] not bound by any law or the Constitution to protect you." And finally, Peter, the white gun carrier from Flint, MI, referenced the 2005 Supreme Court case Gonzales v. Castle Rock and the 1975 Warren v. District of Columbia, both of which establish that police have no constitutional duty to protect individuals – only social order more broadly.

Gun carriers, as described in the previous chapter, understood themselves as always already at risk of victimization, but what pushes them to carry a gun is the realization that the police will not be available to protect them should they actually become victims of crime. Sometimes, this realization was couched in rather abstract legal language or trite mantras and slogans; other times, gun carriers spoke rather explicitly about the drastic cuts to public safety that had occurred within the recent past. These narratives revealed a basic, and universal premise, among gun carriers: that police may be well-intentioned, but they ultimately are inadequate, and therefore, gun carriers must take responsibility for the duties that mark police work.

Neoliberalism & the Police

These narratives, however, are not articulated in a vacuum; they are embedded in a broader restructuring of public services under neoliberalism. In other words, there is a structural grounding to the concerns that gun carriers voice about inadequacy, even as the NRA exacerbates such concerns. Indeed, this double grounding of police suspicion – that is, in *both* structural forces *and* NRA propaganda – is crucial to understanding the resiliency of pro-gun sentiment for the gun carriers I interviewed.

Even though American neoliberalism has generally been associated first with an *expansion* in the punitive capacities of the state (Wacquant, 2009), the US has witnessed a *contraction* in the state's capacities to police and punish since 2008.[8] Police departments across the US expanded steadily from 1992 to 2008, resulting in an overall 25% increase in sworn police officers (COPS, 2011; Reaves, 2012). However, the US Department of Justice estimates that 10,000 to 15,000

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[8] However, it is worth emphasizing that by and large, the reductions in social welfare state functions remain significantly larger as compared to the penal functions of the state. In other words, the penal state remains resilient relative to the welfare state even as both undergo contraction; see Wacquant (2012). From example, while 10,000 to 15,000 police officers lost their job since 2008 (see below), over 300,000 teachers have been laid off according to a report entitled "Teacher Jobs at Risk" (Executive Office of the President, 2011).

officers have been laid off due to budget cuts in the aftermath of the 2008 recession. According to a report issued by the US Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), "police agencies are some of the hardest hit by the current economic climate," and according to a survey of police chiefs taken in 2011, "94 percent of respondents agreed that they were seeing 'a new reality in American policing developing'" due to significant reductions in the budgets and personnel since 2008 (COPS, 2011: 3). These decreases in public services have occurred earlier in Michigan as compared to the rest of the country. In Michigan, police forces reached an all-time high in 2001 at 28,596; in 2011, the number of officers had depleted to just 23,744 (see Graph 4.1).[9]

Graph 4.1. Number of Police Officers in Michigan, 1995 - 2011 (Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports)
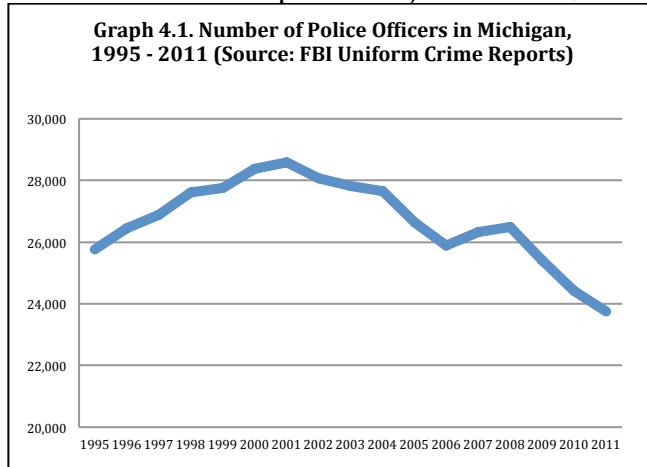
Some gun carriers were attentive to the dramatic cuts to public services that have exacerbated Michigan since the early 2000s. Fred, a firearms instructor, provided a stark now-and-then contrast to the well-funded police of the past and the defunded and overworked police of today; according to my field notes,

> *He told me that when he was growing up, you had two police in a car. Then you just have one. Now police officers are peace officers who must take on multiple duties. For example, there was a big fire down his street, and his wife was shocked to see the police officers changing into fire fighter uniforms, because they now also do fire. He said that he lives in a middle class suburb – much like Troy. He said that this is not just happening in Detroit. He said that people are starting to feel less safe, and they are coming to class, too.*

Tom, the white gun carrier living in a rural area outside of Flint, told me that

> *The ultimate bottom line of it…always falls back to the dollar. Especially in Michigan. Michigan is bankrupt. And the police can't be everywhere. I don't recall the exact numbers, but in Michigan, for the number of on-duty law enforcement per capita, I believe you have one in a 2,600 chance of being the one who receives help if you need it. Sorry, I don't like them odds. You know, the amount of law enforcement just isn't there. [and some crimes are] automatically a two-car call. Now you have four officers tied up, and what happens to the person that's in the violent situation and needs the officer there? You got four of them tied up over there.*

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[9] Relatedly, Michigan was one of only 11 states to have experienced continual annual decreases in correctional expenditures since 1999. See Reaves (2012).

In addition to emphasizing police inadequacy due to defunding, a handful of gun carriers also made reference to problems related to the state's correctional facilities. While at the national level, public expenditures on corrections have increased steadily from 1992 to 2009, Michigan was one of only 11 states to have experienced continual annual decreases in correctional expenditures since 1999.[10] The "emptying" of prisons was interpreted by the handful of gun carriers who mentioned it as an additional means by which the state is shirking its responsibilities to ensure public order and exacerbating social insecurity. As Victor, an African American gun carrier and instructor from Detroit, ranted in an online forum,

> *Let me see if I understand this: The government empties the prisons and fails to monitor ex-offenders which in many cases go on to commit more violent crimes AND then our government blames the community for a lack of morals, a no-snitch culture, implements deep cuts to public safety, and then offers to "buyback" guns from law-abiding citizens. Pay no attention to the men behind the curtain. Buy a handgun, get a carry permit, and protect yourself.*

During my fieldwork, I found that these anxieties surrounding police inefficacy were oftentimes galvanized, rather than ameliorated, by police agencies themselves (and this is despite the fact that national organizations representing public law enforcement, such as the National Sheriffs Association, generally support gun control measures). For example, in July 2010, the Bay City Police Department's union erected billboards calling attention to the city's decision to cut funding for police but replay the roof of the City Hall: one provocatively reads, "City Hall's Roof Will Not Stop You From Getting: Beaten, Shot, Stabbed, Robbed. 5 Laid Off Bay City Cops Could Have!" (see Figure 1).[11] Meanwhile, in summer of 2012, the Detroit Police Department distributed flyers to baseball game attendees (see Figure 2) in Detroit's Comerica Park that read "Detroit: Enter at Your Own Risk." The flyer reminded readers that "Detroit is America's most violent city"; that "Detroit's homicide rate is highest in the country"; but "Detroit's Police Department is grossly understaffed." The flyer compares police work in Detroit to being a fan at a baseball stadium, sarcastically quipping that the former would be "more than exciting and beyond exhaustion."[12] Neither of these public proclamations specifically encouraged Michiganders to carry guns, and in fact, the Detroit Police Department regularly holds gun buy-back programs to remove guns from the city's streets. Yet these fear-mongering tactics play into the fears and anxieties that gun carriers have surrounding police efficacy by posing a problem with no easy broad-based solution. In contrast, carrying a gun appears as an immediate, individual-level fix.

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[10] There is a small decrease from 2009 to 2010, suggesting that the era of mass incarceration in America may be coming to a close; see Brown (2012) for a sustained analysis of the relationship between the 2008 recession and reduced reliance on incarceration.

[11] See "Billboard Protest of Police Layoffs in Michigan Fuels Public Safety Debate" by Stephen Carl at *Fox News* (2010).

[12] See "Enter At Your Own Risk: Police Union Says 'War-Like' Detroit is Unsafe for Visitors" from *CBS Detroit* (2012).

POSSIBLE
The Result Of Bay City Commissioners
Laying Off Five Police Officers

City Hall's Roof will not stop you from getting:
Beaten
Shot
Stabbed
Robbed
5 Laid Off Bay City Cops Could Have!

Paid for by the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 103

Attention: 🛑

ENTER DETROIT AT YOUR OWN RISK

Unlike Cabrera, Detroit's triple crown is one of infamy. It is a crown of thorns consider:

- Detroit is America's most violent city;
- Detroit's homicide rate is the highest in the country;
- Detroit's Police Department is grossly understaffed;

Consider Some of Detroit Police Officers' Working Conditions

- Only department in the country with police officers working 12 hour shifts without appropriate staffing. FANS GET TIRED DURING A BASEBALL GAME EVEN IF IT'S EXCITING. IMAGINE WORKING 12 HOUR SHIFTS AS A DETROIT POLICE OFFICER – IT WOULD BE MORE THAN EXCITING AND BEYOND EXHAUSTION;
- Detroit Police Officers are the lowest paid of any big city police department as well as making substantially less than suburban departments;
- Detroit Police Officers have made MAJOR LEAGUE concessions in pension, wages, and other benefits that have saved the city millions of dollars;
- The state treasurer has threatened Detroit Police Officers with another 10% wage cut for going to court to protect their rights.

Detroit Police Officers are doing all they can to protect everyone despite the city's less than BUSH LEAGUE treatment that they are on the receiving end of.

NO POLICE NO PEACE

Meanwhile, other police agencies did not just exacerbate concerns about police inefficacy: they specifically promoted guns as the solution to this problem. Several gun carriers from Flint reported that they were specifically encouraged by police to carry guns to address the low police presence. While most stories that gun carriers told me about direct encounters with the police involved officers who were either neutral or aggressive toward gun carriers (see Chapter 6), a handful of gun carriers told me stories of Flint police officers who had advised residents to carry *and use* guns. One gun carrier told me that after his friend called in to report a drive-by shooting, the police officer on the other line reportedly told him to "arm himself" in case of retaliation. Another gun carrier, Austin, the white gun carrier and truck driver, told me that he called the police to report a home invasion that had occurred while he was gone. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the officer arrived at the scene and repeatedly told the gun carrier that he legally could shoot a home intruder on sight: "the cop showed up and just sort of glanced around, and he was very adamant in telling me, to kill when they are in your house. And I said, I'm pretty well versed in that, but he mentioned that *several* times." And Corey, who was described in the Introduction, was congratulated by a Flint police officer after he had committed justifiable homicide.

Gun carriers' suspicions surrounding the police, therefore, can be situated in a broad restructuring of public services under neoliberalism, particularly "late" neoliberalism (unfolding in Michigan starting in the early 2000s and in the rest of the US starting with the 2008 recession). As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, American neoliberalism has given rise to a massive growth in the punitive capacities of the state under the assumption that violent crime threatens the very foundation of social order. Political discourse is increasingly framed in terms of victims and victim rights, leading lawmakers to "systematically favor vengeance and ritualized rage over crime prevention and fear reduction" (Simon, 2007: 106), while police are celebrated in "mostly heroic terms" as they risk their lives on behalf of potential or actual victims (Simon, 2007: 96). The punitive logic of neoliberalism, however, may paradoxically undermine confidence in the state's capacity to keep Americans safe from crime (Garland, 2002) if the threat of crime outpaces the state's (perceived) capacity to punitively manage crime. The funding and staff cuts to police enter into this dynamic by further exacerbating concerns about the state's capacity to manage crime. In an effort to enhance confidence in the police and address budget cuts, some police departments have turned to community policing models that integrate community members. Indeed, if some police agencies have dealt with the recession cutbacks by "shifting some of the duties typically reserved for sworn staff to civilian employees as a means of cost savings" (known as "civilianization") as well as the increased use of volunteers (COPS, 2011), gun carry expands this process and, in doing so, weakens the monopoly of public law enforcement on policing work by supplementing the police. This turns policing, as Eric Klinenberg (2001: 80) maintains in his analysis of community policing appropriately titled "Bowling Alone, Policing Together," "into a mode of social integration." As he explains, this

> …marks a disturbing trend toward a society where distrust, suspicion and fear are organizing principles of politics and culture. If effective as a form of organizational reform for police departments and as a means for combating local crime problems, as a program for civic renewal collective policing represents democracy in its most desperate and depraved form. Americans may be bowling together, but they are policing together with unparalleled enthusiasm.

Gun carry might be therefore conceptualized as a particularly austere enactment of community policing (appropriate to Michigan's particularly austere version of neoliberalism) that allows Americans to be not only the eyes and ears of the police but also the strong arm of the law. Unlike most community policing programs, which are initiated and overseen by the police themselves, gun carry is community policing without the police. So while Klinenberg (2001) suggests that community policing elevates distrust as an organizing principle of society, gun carry takes that principle and turns it into a pointed critique of the state's capacity to police and protect.

The distrust voiced by gun carriers, as Klinenberg (2001) suggests, is embedded in a broader culture of cynicism surrounding the police. Among the American public at large, confidence in the police has been on the wane. In a 1999 Gallup poll, 70% of Americans said that they had a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in police. By 2005, according to Gallup (Jones, 2005), this figure dropped to 53%. In 1999, whites were most likely to express confidence in the

police (73%), but African Americans still expressed confidence in the majority (54%). By 2005, these numbers had dropped dramatically for both whites (57%; a decline of 16%) and African Americans (32%; a decline of 22%). And these numbers are low: globally, Americans tend to have lower confidence in the police. For example, Jang, Joo and Zhao (2010) found that confidence in the police is inversely correlated with the homicide rate, which sets the US apart from the other Western industrialized nations.[13]

Although confidence in the police appears to be decreasing and police defunding appears to be on the rise, gun carriers still generally come from demographic groups most likely to exhibit relatively high levels of confidence in the police – that is, white conservative men. According to a 1999 Gallup poll, 94% of whites polled did not believe their race or ethnicity played a role in being stopped by the police, while 42% of African Americans polled said that it did. Disproportionate distrust of the police has been widely documented among people of color in comparison to whites. Moreover, as predominantly white, conservative men, gun carriers appear to differ from other conservatives. Both within and beyond the US, confidence in the police is significantly correlated with political conservatism (Stack, 1998). According to the 2005 Gallup poll on confidence in the police, conservatives are also much more likely than liberals to be confident of the police (58% versus 40%), and conservatives are also much more likely than liberals to own guns. However, gun owners are about as confident in the police as respondents on the whole – about 52% versus 53%. This suggests that conservative gun owners differ, to some degree, from their non-gun owning conservative counterparts in having less confidence in the police to control crime.[14] How, then, do we make sense of these critiques of the police as inadequate?

Gendering the Citizen-Protector

The answer is that these articulations regarding the police are embedded in gender ideologies regarding police power and state dependency. In Chapter 3, I argued that gun carriers embrace a masculine-marked duty to protect others. Indeed, gun carriers are distinct from other Americans in that they respond to concerns about police by "responsibilizing" (O'Malley, 1992; O'Malley, 2000) policing, enacting the "citizen-protector" model described in Chapter 2. But in doing so, they are not simply *embracing* the duty to police and protect others: they are also simultaneously *rejecting* the police's monopoly on policing and, as such, their dependency on the police. There is a double reclamation of masculine independence and self-sufficiency in gun carriers' critique of the police as inadequate: on the one hand, they are embracing the duty to protect, which has historically fallen on men, as their own rather than the state's, while on the other hand, they are rejecting dependency on the state.

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[13] The historical fragmentation of the police in the US means that American policing forces are neither centralized nor consolidated, as in Western Europe, leading to a degree of standardization that is lacking in the US. There are thus significant inequalities in policing in the US: police presence; police response times; and arrest rates vary dramatically across the US. In addition to higher violent crime rates, these factors may explain why the US stands out with respect to confidence in the police.

[14] This difference may also be attributed the fact that not all gun owners are conservative.

This double reclamation is evidenced by the ways in which gun carriers often tied together *self*-defense with the duty to protect others, particularly their wives and their children (discussed in Chapter 3). Although they reject *their own* dependency on the police, their attitudes toward protecting others suggests that gun carriers (especially men) mimic the police on a smaller scale, "serving and protecting" their families as good fathers. It is in this sense that gun carriers reclaim the duty to protect from the state; not only do they demand access to the means of violence (guns) but they do so on behalf of themselves *and* their families. This makes sense of Gau's (2008) contradictory finding that gun proponents both mistrust the police *yet* identify with the police: gun carriers mistrust the adequacy of the police in *practice* but they identify with the duties of the police – especially at the level of the household – in *principle*.

As such, gun carriers achieve a particular brand of American individualism, one centered on *repudiating dependency* on the state and *assuming personal responsibility*. In short, I found that enacting the responsibilized 'citizen-protector' (described in Chapter 2) involved rejecting dependency on the police. Connor, a white shoe salesman, directly connected personal responsibility to rejection of dependency on the police: "We have to protect ourselves. It's up to us to take that personal responsibility. So much of what our society has done in the past 50 years [is] shirking responsibility in everything to law enforcement. Do you really you think that in the moment you need a police officer they're going to be within a stone's throw from you? That's just crazy. I don't understand the mentality of the people who think the police is going to save them in that situation." Billy, the 57-year-old machinist who emphasized the police's inability to crime, told me that pro-gun politics are about "Taking care of yourself. Taking responsibility." Meanwhile, Matthew explained his choice to carry a gun by saying, "I have to be able to take care of myself, and that's what makes me free and independent." For these men, to arm oneself is to "take responsibility" rather than "shirk responsibility" and depend on the police for (inadequate) protection.

About a third of the gun carriers I interviewed told me that they did not grow up with guns. For many of these newcomers, their embrace of guns dovetailed with an embrace of self-reliance and responsibility despite the naiveté of their parents. For example, Cole, who told me his long wait on a 911 call was a critical aspect of his decision to carry a gun, told me that "I was the one who brought the shotgun in the house!" Elwood told me his parents never own guns because they lived in a middle-class bubble, but his exposure to the "real world" led him to question whether dependency on the police is a smart choice. Finally, Doug told me that as a child, he watched his parents "scam the welfare system" and later turned to conservatism – and embraced gun rights – to assert his dignity as a responsible, self-reliant American capable of protecting himself and others.

Guns allow them to acknowledge social concerns about the ever-present risk of criminality and the inadequacy of police protection, on the one hand, and the longstanding cultural demands that charge them – as men – with the responsibility to protect themselves and their families, on the other. Feminist theories of state power help make sense of how state dependency informs the gendered relationship between public law enforcement and gun carry: feminist scholars have argued that dependency on the state for protection (either through

public law enforcement, through the military or even through welfare (see Fraser and Gordon (1994)) creates a problematic dynamic in which the state recreates patriarchal relations by placing itself as the head of the patriarchal household (now the nation-state) and positioning subjects of the state as the dependent women and children of the patriarchal household (Young, 2003). The gendered origins of the state's power to police further clarify the link between gun carriers' rejection of public law enforcement and masculinity. The notion of "police power" comes from a doctrine of state power originating in England that originates in the consolidation of patriarchal power (Dubber, 2005). Just as the home is protected as a "haven in a heartless world" through the doctrine of "no duty to retreat,"[15] so to must the police, paradoxically, use force in order to ensure otherwise peaceful social order. While Blackstone's famous treatise on English common law stipulated that a "man's home" is "his castle," Dubber (2005: 3) explains the modern state as "the institutional manifestation of a household," which rendered men (and women and children) subjects of the King in exchange for the King's protection. Constitutive of the modern state, this prerogative power to both protect subjects *and* violate them resonated with the power that hitherto had been wielded by men at the household level. The police role therefore aligns with one particular conceptualization of masculinity among the many definitions that gender scholars have offered: the collection of social norms that have historically relegated to male heads-of-households the duty to protect and the sanction to violate those within their respective domestic domains. Indeed, the police power of the state emerged from a patriarchal arrangement in which men wielded prerogative power to protect (and therefore violate) over their households (Brown, 1995; Dubber, 2005; Hartmann, 1979). As Charles Tilly (1985) notes, one of the basic functions of the state has been to serve as a "protection racket."

The demand to depend on the state for protection conflicts with more generalized masculine norms that require men to be self-reliant, independent, and able to protect themselves and their families. This contradiction between the prerogative power of *the state* and the norms placed on *men* to serve as protectors means that under American neoliberalism, men who strongly identify with these norms and feel that the state cannot protect them from crime are likely to view dependency on the state as emasculating rather than empowering. Thus, the guns that men bear for self-protection are a means for them to become practically efficacious, self-reliant, and responsible despite the state's perceived inability to protect them.

As such, the bearing of guns for self-defense can be understood within a gendered disjuncture in which the state's flaunted power to protect under American neoliberalism conflicts with broader cultural demands on men to be self-reliant, inviolable, and independent, which in turn are exacerbated by widely publicized cuts to public safety. Guns emerge as a way to reclaim self-reliance, independence and responsibility against a state that cannot, or will not,

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[15] As described in the Introduction, the "no duty to retreat" doctrine holds that the target of a violent attack does not have a duty to demonstrate that he or she has retreated from the threat before using lethal force to defend him or herself from death or grave bodily harm. The duty sanctions not only self-defense but also defense of household members – i.e., women and children.

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guarantee order to society in general and safety to individuals in particular. Gun carry is therefore in line with *both* neoliberal ideology, which emphasizes individualistic, market-based solutions to collective social problems, *as well as* long-standing links between masculinity and the duty to protect. Taking their cues from "tough on crime" politicians and the media, Americans (particularly middle-class suburban whites) have become the consumers of private security – gated communities, crime-resistant SUVs, and private surveillance systems – often due to imagined fears of Black criminality (Simon, 2007: 201). Guns emerge as symbols of manly self-reliance, responsibility and independence (Melzer, 2009; Burbick, 2006) not because of any inherent meaning attached to firearms but rather in relation to perceptions of inadequate police protection and their gendered ramifications. In emphasizing their gendered responsibility to protect themselves and others, gun carriers tend to gloss over state accountability, viewing the state from as an unreliable and ineffective force. In line with the neoliberal emphasis on privatization and responsibilization, public law enforcement appears then as an *inadequate protector*, particularly amid cut-backs to public services.

The Police's Helpers?

In rejecting dependency on the police, gun carriers, however, were not necessarily antagonistic toward the police. Many gun carriers generally saw themselves as helping the police with a job that police are no longer, and perhaps never were, capable of doing themselves. As such, they saw themselves as the police's helpers - seeing themselves as law-abiding people whom police should embrace rather than eschew.[16] Fred, a white gun carrier, told me that police officers should be more "at ease" knowing that lawful Americans have obtained gun permits:

> *If I was a state cop, and I pulled someone over, and I walked up to the door [of a car] with my hand on my gun scared shitless and the driver hands me his CPL and said "I am also armed, here's my CPL," I would be completely at ease. It's the guy who stole the gun who is going to pull it out and shoot you… It's frustrating because people believe there is so much danger in it, but these are the most law-abiding people that we have! I give my CPL to officers if I get pulled over, even if the gun is not with me.*

Meanwhile, Craig, a white gun carrier, explained his exasperation at police officers who oppose concealed carry laws; after all, CPL holders are "the good guys":

> *You would think in most cases [officers would support civilians carrying guns], and some of them are willing to believe that, and some of them aren't. There's always the chief of police organization – this national organization of chiefs of police that don't like concealed carry laws, and it's really silly because like you said when you look at empirical data – the people who are doing it [obtaining a concealed pistol license] are actually the good guys.*

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[16] In fact, these seemingly contradictory sentiments fit well with US conservative ideology: an emphasis on libertarian, anti-statist ideology alongside an embrace of law-and-order politics characterizes one of the paradoxes of the American New Right.

Occasionally, gun carriers cited abstract examples of how their guns would allow them to serve as "back-up" for the police should a violent encounter escalate. Several gun carriers talked concretely about helping the police in less-than-lethal encounters: for example, one told me that he was asked to do "look out" duties for a cop while a car blocked a local road. But during my fieldwork I never heard of a specific incident in which gun carriers provided "back-up" for the police in terms of firepower. Nevertheless, these sentiments suggest that by and large, gun carriers reject police *dependency* more so than the police *per se* (although, as I argue in Chapter 6, some gun carriers forge a more radical view of the police). While they identify with the police and even maintain that their choice to carry a gun actually makes the work of public law enforcement *easier*, they also believe that depending on the police will make them more, rather than less, vulnerable.

Deracializing the Citizen-Protector

This emphasis on manly self-reliance and responsibility also helps to enact the "citizen-protector" as a color-blind, if gendered, model of citizenship. A few gun carriers explicitly referenced one local figure who particularly fulfilled these virtues: an African American doctor named Ossian Sweet. In fact, when I began interviewing gun proponents, I was taken aback by a number of suburban and rural white men who embraced the story of Ossian Sweet, a Black doctor who committed the cardinal sin of moving into an all-white block in Detroit in the 1920s (Boyle, 2005; Widick, 1972; Vine, 2005). For example, Craig, white gun carrier in his 60s, Gavin, a 29-year-old white gun carrier, and Edward, a white electrician in his 60s, all emphasized the Sweet case as evidence of the "racist gun roots of gun control":

> *In 1927, there was a [Black] doctor – a fellow named Ossian Sweet. Ossian Sweet moved into a white neighborhood, and Sweet got visited regularly by the KKK... He ended up in with a fight in the driveway, and members of his family defended themselves. There were police officers present, and he ended up going to jail. Because he was the Black guy, obviously that would make him the wrong person…This didn't make the KKK and Black Knight group very happy, so off to Lansing [the state capitol] they went, and they said, "Look, we want people who are going to buy a handgun to have to come in – because we want to see the color of their face." That way, there's always the potential to make it tougher for the Black folks to get their guns.* [Craig]
> *Somebody has had to have told you about the racist roots of gun control in Michigan.* [Gavin]
> *Are you getting into the Ku Klux Klan part of it? The Doctor downtown who defended himself? [Gun control in Michigan] was a racial issue – the politics behind it that started the whole mess!* [Edward]

According to Kevin Boyle's (2005) history of the case, Sweet stockpiled firearms before moving into his new home, remembering the lynchings that he witnessed as a child. The guns proved useful once white mobs started forming in front of his house. After a few shots were fired from inside, the Sweet family was arrested and, though charges were eventually dismissed, the case is believed – by both gun carriers and sociologists alike (McDowall & Loftin, 1983) – to have led to Michigan's introduction of gun registration.

The Sweet case may seem an unlikely story for pro-gun men to tell, some of whom openly discussed their fears of Black criminals. Perhaps under pressure to appear tolerant, these men used the Sweet trial to demonstrate their aversion to racism. Indeed, pro-gun organizations such as the NRA, Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Rights, and Gun Owners of America often connect control to racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. Such appropriation of a civil rights story to promote gun politics, therefore, is not uncommon among gun proponents; indeed, the NRA calls itself America's oldest civil rights organization.

To reduce the embrace of Ossian Sweet to political expediency, however, obscures the kind of idealized American that he represents to the gun carriers who mentioned him: he proved that good men, regardless of skin color, had the right and duty to protect themselves and their family. The gun carriers who described the Sweet case could identify with him (regardless of race) because they could easily imagine taking his same actions: in the face of threat, Sweet armed himself rather than give up his freedom to own property where he wanted. When trouble started, he did not count on the police to stop the mob, much less defend him and his family; indeed, Sweet announced at his trial that he would "have to die a man or live a coward." Assuming responsibility not only for himself but also his family, Sweet exemplified a good father who not only worked his way out of humble beginnings but also armed himself on behalf of his family in defense of his "castle." As such, the Ossian Sweet case sits well with today's law-abiding, gun-toting Americans: they see crime as an ever-present threat, much like they imagine the white mobs of Sweet's era (though today the criminal is usually imagined as Black, not white), and they view guns as a means of "being a man" in the face of police inadequacy. And, Sweet did what few gun carriers will ever do: he actually *used* lethal force in order to protect his family. He was a citizen-protector.

Solving the Problem of Police Inefficacy

"What people all over the country fear today is being abandoned by their government. If a tornado hits, if a hurricane hits, if a riot occurs, they're going to be out there alone. And the only way they're going to protect themselves in the cold and the dark, when they're vulnerable, is with a firearm."

"Gun owners are not buying firearms because they anticipate a confrontation with the government. Rather, we anticipate confrontations where the government isn't there—or simply doesn't show up in time."

- Statements from Wayne LaPierre, Executive Vice President of the NRA, in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Shootings

In the aftermath of the Newton, CT, shootings, Wayne LaPierre appeared at congressional hearings on gun control, wrote op-eds and appeared on the news outlets in early 2013. While he emphasized Americans' right to armed self-defense, he presented a slightly reworked narrative that centered *not* on Americans' fears of "jack-booted thugs" but rather on their fears of government abandonment. No doubt, LaPierre's corrective shift in rhetoric can be read as an attempt to enact "damage control" in the wake of some gun advocates' very public calls to arms – from Alex Jones, who told Piers Morgan that "1776 will commence again!" if Americans' Second Amendment rights were infringed to

James Yaeger, CEO of Tactical Response, who said he would "start killing people" if an Assault Weapons Ban were passed. Rhetorically expedient as the NRA's statements were, LaPierre's words simultaneously echo and reinforce gun carriers' sentiments that relying on government is foolish: in a disaster – whether a tornado, hurricane, or riot – the only reliable mechanism of protection is a personal firearm. There are many ways in which the American state is popularly imagined as 'vulnerable' from the outside (think: the US-Mexican border, 9/11) and the inside (think: domestic terrorism, violent crime). Americans have rallied in a variety of ways to address feelings of vulnerability and insecurity that are often embedded in conservative, anti-statist ideologies sense that emphasize state failure. The decision of gun carriers, therefore, to don guns in response to perceived state ineffectiveness shares an elective affinity with the unarmed community groups that operate as the 'eyes and ears of the police' (Carr, 2005), the Minutemen militias that reclaim the American nation as impenetrable and secure as they performatively patrol the US/Mexico border (Oliviero, 2011), and the survivalists and insurrectionists who prepare for doomsday scenarios by stockpiling firearms and food (Mitchell, 2004).

In the context of police defunding, gun carry is one way to address concerns regarding state inefficacy or – in the words of Wayne LaPierre – "government abandonment." And by carrying a gun, gun carriers both embrace a duty to protect self and others as well as reject dependency on the state for protection. Through their rejection of state dependency, gun carriers enact themselves as citizen-protectors who are responsible, independent and self-reliant. This, I have argued, marks the citizen-protector as a particular kind of gendered citizen insofar as protectionist masculinity – as an idealized version of masculinity – defines men as independent, self-possessed protectors (Young, 2003).

But if the citizen-protector is a masculine-market citizen, how is he racially marked? Despite gun carriers' embrace of Ossian Sweet, this emphasis on the police as *simply inadequate or ineffective (rather than also violators of rights)* is a racially privileged perspective of the police. As Simon (2007) notes, the neoliberal War on Crime has shaped how white Americans understand, embrace and sometimes critique state-led punitive measures as well as how they participate in social control; taking their cues from the state and the media, whites (particularly middle-class suburban whites) are also the consumers of private security – gated communities, crime-resistant SUVs, private surveillance systems and guns – often due to imagined fears of Black criminality (Simon, 2007: 201). In terms of the state's police power, this means that perhaps because they have less familiarity with the state's capacity to violate, white Americans are more likely to emphasize the state's (in)ability to protect them.[17]

This chapter, and the chapter that precedes it, argues that guns are carried both for the purposes of protection and policing against the backdrop of a state

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[17] As described in further detail in the following chapter, poor non-whites (especially poor, non-white men) are more likely to have first-hand experiences in which they are harassed, illegally detained or falsely arrested by police and other state agents than whites, and they are also more likely to face imprisonment. Thus, the understanding of the state as a collective entity that *harasses and violates* Americans is liable to be more widespread among people of color than whites (Hagan & Albonetti, 1982; Dottolo & Stewart, 2008; Carr, Napolitano & Keating, 2007; Brunson, 2007).

perceived as ineffective. This account, however, is only complete insofar as it emphasizes the meanings that the white men I interviewed tended to attach to their guns – that is, the "stereotypical" gun proponents. Specifically, this account ignores the people of color and women who also carry firearms. How, then, do they enact, negotiate and even subvert the version of citizenship – the citizen-protector – endorsed by the NRA? I take up this question in Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 6, I show that men of color (as well as a minority of white men) embraced gun carry as part of a broader politics that centered on an understanding of police as *aggressors* (as well as inadequate and ineffective). I argue that these gun carriers understand their guns not only as *supplementing* but also *supplanting* the police, and as such, they *radicalize* the citizen-protector model of citizenship. Meanwhile, in Chapter 7, I show that armed women tend to emphasize the right to self-defense *over* the duty to protect others, situating themselves as *citizen-defenders* rather than *citizen-protectors*.

Chapter 6: Supplanting the Police: Radicalizing the Citizen-Protector[1]

"Malice Green was beaten to death with a flashlight and hit 26 times in the head after he was already legally dead. The cops said that they thought he had something in his hand, and he wouldn't open it. So the two big cops beat him to death. What really makes me ill is that Malice Green was, I don't know, 5'7'', 140 pounds. Of course, that doesn't occur in Bloomfield Hills [a white, wealthy suburb of Detroit]."
- Michael, white firearms carrier and instructor, Royal Oak, MI

Malice Green may appear to be an unusual person for a gun carrier to talk about. A poor black man who was beaten to death in 1992 in Detroit after a routine traffic stop for allegedly having crack cocaine in his hand, Green seems more like the criminal against whom gun carriers arm themselves rather than someone with whom they would sympathize. Yet some gun carriers referenced police abuse of Malice Green as well as Rodney King, Oscar Grant and their own first-hand stories of police harassment. These gun carriers understood the police as inadequate protectors, but there was something more biting to their critique: they also saw the police as a force against which they needed protection.

Gun carriers, in general, saw themselves as more vulnerable to the police as a result of their decision to carry a gun: Michigan law states that concealed pistol license holders must disclose that they have a CPL if they are stopped by the police for a traffic violation – whether or not they are carrying a gun. For most gun carriers, this vulnerability was a nuisance but ultimately a small price to pay for the ability to legally carry a gun: besides telling me that they consciously tried to make more an effort to obey traffic laws, limit their drinking, and avoid confrontations that might lead to police interactions, most gun carriers experienced this additional vulnerability to the police as a theoretical problem – not something that affected them in any substantive way.

But for some gun carriers – all but one of the men of color I interviewed as well as a significant minority of white men – police violation was not simply an abstract problem. All of these gun carriers experienced first-hand police violation: for some, this was related to their decision to carry a firearm openly, much like a police officer. Despite its legality, open carry often led to police interactions and – sometimes – detention or arrest. For these gun carriers, guns are not just about *supplementing* the police: guns were also deployed as a protest *against* the police's proclivity to violate rights and perhaps might be better viewed as *supplanting* the police.

At times echoing the armed politics of the Black Panthers, gun carriers who arm themselves in light of police harassment can be situated within a broader growth of aggressive policing that has been politically facilitated through "tough on crime" policies under the so-called War on Crime. From

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[1] Portions of this chapter have been adapted from Carlson (2012).

Detroit's infamously lethal STRESS (Stop Robberies and Enjoy Safe Streets) program of the 1970s to present-day police practices of aggressive broken windows policing and stop & frisk policies, an aggressive policing apparatus has been rallied in the US to counter the racialized threat of crime under neoliberalism. These policies have had many consequences: the incarceration of people who have committed no crime; the normalization of everyday abuses that poor minority men face from police; and deep distrust of public law enforcement across broad sectors of Americans. This chapter argues that one more consequence should be added to this list: the co-articulation of gun politics with police mistrust and legal cynicism. While all but one of the minority men I interviewed articulated such a politics, so did a minority of white gun carriers. Far from indicating the irrelevance of racialized policing practices, this radicalization of white gun carriers suggests that the practices of public law enforcement have outgrown their original uses and that, in some cases, they might be wielded against racially privileged Americans who, in turn, might develop a more radical politics of race in America.

These more radical critiques of public law enforcement call for a rethinking of the gendered politics of gun carry described in Chapter 5: in addition to an embrace of the duty to protect and a rejection of state dependency, some gun carriers also use guns to 'stand up' to police violation. This resistance to violation is more antagonistic to police than merely rejecting *dependency* on the state, and as a result, the version of the 'citizen-protector' enacted by gun carriers implies not just *supplementing* but also *supplanting* the police. In other words, these gun carriers use guns as both practical *and* symbolic objects to contest the police as negligent in protecting Americans and aggressive in violating their rights.

This chapter proceeds as follows. I start by showing that all gun carriers experience increased vulnerability vis-à-vis the police through the legal structure of concealed carry laws in Michigan. Most gun carriers – through a combination of their racial privilege and their willingness to recognize the authority of police – never experience extreme forms of police violation. I then turn to those gun carriers who do experience police violation either due to their lack of racial privilege or their decision to open carry. For men of color, police violation via gun rights sits within a broader understanding of racist police practices in the US. For white men who embrace this stance, police violation seems to be the 'gateway' that exposes them to a more radical politics of race – at least insofar as it relates to aggressive policing.

I end the chapter by returning to the gendered politics of gun carry explored in Chapter 3, and I argue that minority gun carriers as well as open carriers enact a more radical version of the "citizen-protector" model of citizenship as they use guns to demand recognition of their full rights as Americans. In particular, these gun carriers (like all of the gun carriers I interviewed) emphasized individual and private solutions amid perceptions of state failure that are in line with a neoliberal emphasis on private consumption, but in addition, they also articulate a radical stance by critiquing the state as a coercive, violent institution. As a result, I suggest that these gun carriers enact a modified version of the "citizen-protector" model – the *neoradical* citizen-protector – that encompasses the NRA-approved model of citizenship while also moving beyond it. I conclude by noting that although debates about gun laws

often assume a racially privileged gun owner and carrier – the white Americans who often figure as the face of pro-gun politics – it is minority men who are not only most subject to gun violence but also most harassed when they attempt to legally own, carry and even use guns for self-defense.

Articulating Vulnerability to the Police

Carrying a gun entails increased exposure to the possibility of breaking the law: as one gun carrier told me as he pointed to my hip, where my firearm was presumably concealed, "You are never so close to becoming a criminal as you are now." What he meant was that with just a single misstep – a careless decision to go into a pistol-free zone with my gun, a misinterpretation of a situation that might lead me to brandish my firearm without legitimate cause (i.e., without reasonable fear of death or grave bodily harm), a failure to disclose to a police officer that I had a concealed firearm during a minor traffic stop – any of these could lead me into a quagmire of legal (and, therefore, financial) problems. While gun carriers varied in how closely they walked the 'fine line' of the law, they almost unanimously articulated a heightened awareness of their interactions with the police as part of carrying a gun. For many gun carriers, to carry a gun is to experience the authority of the police for the first time – even if that authority remains generally an abstraction.

According to Michigan law, a gun carrier must "immediately" disclose that he/she has a permit to carry a gun concealed when stopped by a police officer, regardless of whether the reason for the stop is firearms-related. The failure to disclose immediately – even waiting a few minutes while the officer explains the reason for the stop – may result in a fine of up to $500 or a six-month CPL suspension the first time and a fine of up to $1,000 and revocation of the CPL for the second offense. As Matt, a white machinist explains,

> *In Michigan, when you get the CPL, it's attached to your driving record. So if you get pulled over, they already know before they walk up to your car - they already know before they walk up to your car that you have a CPL. But the law requires that I have to disclose first things out of my mouth, I have to tell them – that I have a CPL.*

Though gun carriers were generally able to acknowledge the purpose behind the disclosure requirement as enhancing officer safety (although some saw it as purely symbolic, given that police could run their name or license plate number through Michigan's LIEN system and ascertain their CPL status without disclosure), this legal requirement meant that interactions with police officers – generally stressful encounters in and of themselves – were heightened by the very fact that they possessed a CPL and that, therefore, they might be treated differently by police. For example, one white gun carrier told me that carrying a gun means "you give up some rights." As my fieldnotes describe my conversation with him,

> *For example, if you are driving, the police can see your license and see right away that you have a CCW and you are conceal and carrying. He said that you have to tell them that, anyway. He got out his driver's license to show me that on the back, it has a big yellow sticker that very clearly says that he could be carrying a gun. He said that a police officer – once they see that – can automatically ask you to take a breathalizer. So this means, according to him, you are already giving up rights.*

Gun carriers seemed to assume that because of their guns, routine police stops could escalate – for example, a stop for speeding might escalate into a search-and-seizure of a car once police officers found out that they were carrying. To ward off this possibility, gun carriers routinely told me that they modified their everyday habits to minimize police interaction. For example, Max, a man in his 70s, told me he no longer speeds:

> *You know what? My wife pushes the envelope [with time]. At one point we were going to a function, and telling me I had to be there in two hours before we have to be there. Because she would leave things until the last minute and then – the gals – take longer to get ready. And then I'd have to break the speed limit. She knows now that I won't go over the speed limit. I won't do that. Even if we are a little bit late going to church. I won't push it, because I know I don't want to be stopped – number one. I don't want to be stopped when I'm carrying. And I explained to her why. You have to tell them when you give them your license you have to tell them that you – I have a CPL, and yes I am or am not armed.*

If traffic stops represent the more routine, if incidental, ways in which police become a conscious factor in gun carry, self-defense shootings are the rarified, yet ultimate situation for which gun carriers prepare themselves. And dealing with the police in the aftermath of these situations, as gun carriers learn in firearms courses, is critical. In addition to disclosure requirements during more routine police stops, gun carriers are also taught during firearms classes to fully exercise their Fifth Amendment rights to remain silent should they actually use their guns in self-defense. Gun carriers told me that they worried that they would be "victimized twice" – first by the initial assailant and then by law enforcement and the court system. According to Henry, an African American gun carrier,

> *If you are involved in something – I wouldn't want to say anything, get your lawyer there. Because anything you say can be used against you in a court of law --- they [police] are not there to help you. Nothing you say is going to help you, so you need to be quiet and tell your lawyer and do things to help yourself. If you give them fuel for the fire that's what they're going to use….You don't want what you're saying misinterpreted. And you might even say the wrong thing!*

Police officers are therefore construed as a potential threat: they are the state agents that are empowered with fining them for gun violations, suspending their CPLs, confiscating their guns and even rescinding their gun rights altogether. One gun-carrying lawyer who takes on gun cases as part of his general practice even told me that he makes it a point to use the verb "steal" whenever he brings clients to court for illegal police confiscation of firearms: as he paraphrased his argument in court,

> *'If I did that, your honor, they would be within their rights to call the police and to come to take me to jail and you would be sending me to prison for a while. Just because they have a gun.' Anyway, that's one of my issues, one of my pet peeves. A big, big part of that pet peeve is the distinction between the authority that law enforcement has and [civilians].*

Gun carriers are well aware that police have the power to take away their gun rights, and in my interviews, on online gun forums, and in firearms classes, gun carriers and firearms instructors shared real-life stories and imagined scenarios

to show the police doing just that. At the same time, however, this sense of police violation seemed more of an abstract possibility rather than a concrete reality for most (white) gun carriers – as would be expected based on scholarship on race and policing (Morrison, 2007). My own – rather limited – experiences confirm this. When I was pulled over in a speed trap near the Detroit International Airport, I waited for the police officer to approach and nervously gripped the steering wheel as I prepared to immediately disclose that I was a CPL holder – even if it meant interrupting the police officer and even though I was not carrying a gun at the time. The police officer seemed to barely acknowledge my CPL status. While I cannot extrapolate my own experiences to others (and, as I argue below, my gender probably made me particularly unthreatening to the police), I rarely heard of police harassment of white concealed carriers. Non-white gun carriers, and gun carriers who chose to carry openly, however, saw a very different side of public law enforcement.

Racializing Police Harassment

"Where I'm from, we don't bite our tongues.
Are you sure you want niggas 21 to carry guns?"[2]
- Swift, member of Detroit's D12 rap group, "Ain't Nuttin but Music"

In the United States, the police are a bifurcated force: on the one hand, police officers may appear as benevolent but ineffective protectors, while on the other hand, they may interface with citizens as aggressive violators. Scholars such as Wacquant (2001; 2009), Hallsworth and Lea (2011), Davis (2003) and Tonry (1995; 2011) have emphasised the *violent*, *coercive* foundation of the neoliberal state along racialized lines. Crime-fighting techniques of questionable constitutionality, such as no-knock raids, excessive use of force, and racial profiling, have been institutionalized under the "tough-on-crime" banner, with large, urban police departments taking "an aggressive turn" as they increasingly resemble U.S. military units rather than domestic police forces (Kraska & Kappeler, 1997: 1). These militaristic tactics tend to target poorer communities of color like Detroit and are justified by an "out-of-control drug and crack problem" (Kraska, 1996: 9). The harassment of gun-toting men of color – even where gun carry is legal – can be situated within these punitive developments and their effects on police cynicism among racial minorities in the US. For the gun carriers of color I interviewed, vulnerability to the police is more than a theoretical problem: it is a heightened everyday risk associated with the decision to engage in an otherwise legal activity. That this risk is born by men of color who chose to exercise a right is tied to the racialized policing practices that are captured with the phrases "driving while Black" and "walking while Black" (Rose, 2002). One poster in an online Michigan gun forum summarized the difficulties of being a "BMWG" (common slang for "Black Man with a Gun" on gun forums) by talking about "DWB" (driving while black):

> I don't know if some of you realize what DWB is like. And I don't mean black like Obama, I mean black...with slightly baggy clothes, tinted windows, rims, hoodies, and rap music. What upsets us is that we can get

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[2] This rap lyric refers to shall-issue legislation. According to Michigan law, residents must be 21 years old to obtain a Concealed Pistol License, but they cannot be denied a license on the basis of race.

a ticket for playing "loud" music on Woodward [referencing the white suburbs of Royal Oak, Ferndale, Berkely and Bloomfield Hills] at 5pm, but a Harley Motorcycle can ride through my residential neighborhood after 8 and roam freely while setting off every car alarm it rides by. I have personally been stopped and searched by cops at Hart Plaza because my cell phone case "looked" like a gun holster. My whole car was searched because they couldn't figure out what the two switches under my radio were for....as if I had some hidden Batman compartment concealing all of my weed.

The minority gun carriers I interviewed agreed that police are ineffective and inadequate – as discussed in Chapter 5. But they also brought an additional critique to bear, citing the police as abusive, violent and even actively threatening. For example, consider George, an African American from Detroit who told me that many of his friends began carrying in the mid-70s due to concerns about police abuse:

In our neighborhood, we had an all-white motorcycle gang that was literally getting away with sexual assaults. They were going to the bus stop on the main thoroughfare, almost like patrols. This was getting really rampant, and there was only one black cop, all the rest of them were white. Me being involved with different black coalitions, we were like the prey for the police. They wanted to kill us. We never walked out alone. Couldn't afford to. A lot of my friends got beat down when caught by themselves. We were scared of assassination.

George implicitly references Detroit's own innovation in the War on Crime; in the aftermath of the 1967 Riot and amid concerns about skyrocketing violent crime rates, the Detroit Police started the Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets (STRESS) program, the aggressive policing program described in Chapter 1. The ramifications of these policing practices continue today: even though he was not alive during the Riot and its aftermath, Chase, a 25-year-old African American gun carrier and firearms instructor, voiced similar experiences as George, saying that "in Detroit, you can just be talking outside, and the police'll come up on you with their pistols drawn and say "Guns or Drugs? Let me see your IDs!" They'll put you up against the wall and pat you down. I think me being young, people figure, "oh, he have a [an illegal] gun." I guess they think I'm irresponsible or something." Chase's experiences make reference to the 'other side' of the War on Drugs: not only drug laws but also firearms laws are used to criminalize young men of color – a practice popularly known as "stop and frisk" in which police shake down "suspicious-looking" men for illegal drugs or weapons.

The existence of legally armed African American men disrupts these policing practices. With legal gun carry, the premise of "stop and frisk" is undermined: the guns that police find on the bodies of Black men cannot be assumed to be illegal. Yet, some gun carriers reported that police did not approach them with the assumption that they were law-abiding citizens exercising their lawful right to bear arms. During my interview with Gerald, an African American gun carrier, he spontaneously ran through a laundry list of his encounters with Detroit police officers, with incidences ranging from invasive questioning to illegal searches. As he summarized,

Police officers are just angry for whatever reason. I had this one officer who felt the need to question me as far as my reasons for wanting to

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[legally] carry [a gun]. I didn't see why I needed to discuss that. I'm trying to be respectful, but why I'm carrying shouldn't be any of your concern. I've heard plenty of times that there is a young black male stopped, and the police say, "there's a problem in the area, and we just pulled you over, and we're just going through your trunk." I had officer ask me where the drugs were. "We got your guns, where the drugs at?" And then they claimed that "you fit that description." They play those games, they play those games.

Gerald reflects sentiments widespread in minority communities that "those games" that police play are disproportionately targeted at poor, young men of color who "fit that description" of criminals (Webb & Marshall, 1995; Weisburd, 2000; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Brunson, 2007; Gau & Brunson, 2010).[3]

But gun carriers of color were not alone in voicing this particular critique of police: while all but one gun carrier of color I interviewed espoused this more radical critique of the police, a significant number of white gun carriers also shared a critical understanding of police as aggressors, almost all of whom had direct contact with police that they characterized as negative (this is inline with Webb and Marshall's (1995) and Gau and Brunson's (2010) findings that other factors, such as class, may also be important in structuring who has negative police encounters and, therefore, negative attitudes toward the police). Echoing Gerald, they emphasized the "anger" with which police approached civilians. Michael, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, is a white man who grew up in Detroit and now lives just a few miles north in Royal Oak. He told me that police "don't approach people in a way that's respectful anymore. It's accusatory, it's inflammatory, it's violating your rights 90% of the time. You know, police are civilians, too. They're not at war with anybody. [laughs] Other than civilians." This notion that police are "at war" with civilians is not typically embraced by white men, but Michael's experiences growing up in Detroit in the 1970s provided him with atypical insight. Tom, a retired postal worker from a rural area just outside of Flint, also referenced police attitudes to explain why he minimizes contact with law enforcement, again referencing negative first-hand experiences with police: "You need someone to enforce the laws [but] I've had bumps with many law enforcement, that's why I have such a negative attitude. Part of their attitude you could equate the same to a college professor. You know, "shut up! I know more than you do! You're depending on me to defend you. I know how to do it, stay out of my job.""

Most of the white gun-carrying men who took this view of the police had experienced negative police contact because of their decision to openly carry firearms; while legal and even common in some rural areas of Michigan, openly carrying a gun often leads to police interactions. These stops often transformed these men's views of the police, leading them to view police violators of rights. When Nathan, a 29-year-old firearms instructor, learned that police could illegally threaten to arrest him, he felt that his rights had been violated:

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[3] A recent analysis of hip-hop lyrics also shows that while rappers are often characterized promote criminality and aggression against police, lyrics about police are more likely to express sentiments that police unfairly and harshly target racial minorities. See Steinmetz and Henderson (2012).

I got stopped [by the police], and the city's attorney came back and said that the police didn't break any law. Cops can threaten to make an illegal arrest. But until they actually go through with it and lie on a police report, there's no crime. So the attorney is saying the cop can illegally threaten to arrest you if you don't leave a public place. To me, it's a Fourth Amendment issue. You're searching and seizing. You're forcing me to leave. To me, that is no different than saying, "You're in our custody."

For Michael, Tom, Nathan and other white gun carriers, police are not simply a slothful but otherwise benign force; rather, police are manipulative (i.e., "cops can threaten to make an illegal arrest") and "inflammatory" (i.e., "shut up! I know more than you do!"). Compared to white gun carriers who simply emphasized the threat of crime amid police *absence* rather than the threat of police *presence*, these white gun carriers were much more troubled by race-based biases in policing and more reflexive regarding their own prejudicial attitudes. These attitudes regarding race and racism seem to stem from the attitudes that radicals hold toward the police: attitudes critical of the police were a means of developing a more systematic critique of state power, which led them to more critical views regarding race *with respect* to the state more characteristic of the Black Panthers (Austin, 2006) than the NRA. Barry, a Hispanic gun carrier who had been harassed several times by police for open carrying, directly compared the police's harassment of gun carriers to racial profiling: "They're [the police] taught…if someone has a gun, [then they are a threat]…I understand what they've seen, but at the same time, that's like saying every Arab I run into is a terrorist. You can't have that mentality, as natural as it is." A handful of white gun carriers who I met through the course of my research told me that the increased harassment of minority gun carriers like Barry (his story was widely shared on online gun forums) had alerted them to the double bind of being a legally armed person of color.

This awareness, in turn, led some white gun carriers to critique the police not only for harassing gun carriers but also for harassing people of color through practices like stop and frisk. Linking generalized racism and police abuse, Michael told me that "A person who's on crack and does petty street crime robberies to get 20 dollars a day doesn't have an attorney. Even if they did, no one would care. Because they don't profile for somebody whose life is worth anything. The negative experiences with police, the Rodney Kings, the Malice Greenes – police get away with those because nobody cares." During my conversation with Carter and Jaden, a white gun carrier and an African American gun carrier, respectively, who together ran a security business in Flint, they took turns telling me stories of police inefficacy in the city: police arriving late to a crime scene, arriving without back-up or not arriving at all. Carter ended with a story, though, that was similar to the stories that other gun carriers told me about Flint officers encouraging gun carriers to use guns (described in Chapter 5), with one caveat: the police officer was advising him to do something that appeared to be illegal. Carter was in an aisle of a convenience store when he saw a young African American "tucking" an AK-style rifle; the only reason Carter noticed the rifle was because the youth was reaching up to an item on a top shelf. A police officer arrived a few minutes after the youth had left the store, and the carrier reported the incident. The police officer, to the dismay of Carter, told him he could have shot the boy. He ended the story with exasperation, "You

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cannot just shoot someone for that! He was just a kid, and he wasn't doing anything."

By critiquing the police's ability to violate in addition to their inability to protect, these gun carriers situate not only common criminals but also the police as threats. Because they tend to emphasize the threat of *police*, they echoed feelings widespread among African Americans that the police are more harmful than helpful, particularly when it comes to violating rights (Hagan & Albonetti, 1982; Dottolo & Stewart, 2008; Carr, Napolitano & Keating, 2007; Brunson, 2007). For these gun carriers, the version of citizenship they enacted was not based simply on protecting others and rejecting *dependency* on the police: as neoradical citizen-protectors who embraced the individualistic right to bear arms, they rejected their own dependence on the police *as well as* eschewed the notion that police are necessarily well-intentioned, helpful servants of the people.

Yet, even as they echoed these feelings, these white gun carriers nevertheless seemed to approach police differently than the Black men I interviewed. Returning to my conversation with Nathan, for example, he told me that he wanted to get arrested for his gun rights because he was willing to be the "test case" that ultimately leads to police reform. Consider, in contrast, Henry, an African American gun carrier, who appreciated people like Nathan who "have enough verve" but preferred himself to "fly under the radar":

> *I like the fact that some people have enough nerve and willing to put their freedom [on the line] to a certain degree or even their physical well-being at risk in order to push this law that's on the books, and help everyone to be able to carry without getting harassed by the police. I like those people, but I'm not one of the ones who would want to be out there and push this. It would go bad for me, probably. I couldn't stand a lot of the pushing around: the police approaching me, and I know he's in violation of my rights and he wants to push me around and handcuff me and slam me on the ground – I don't know how I'd react to stuff like that. It might go sideways on me, and I might end up getting shot up. So, I keep my gun covered. I try to obey the law. I try not to bring any unnecessary stress to myself. I try to fly under the radar where I'm not bringing too much undue attention to myself.*

During my interview, Henry did not report having had any negative interactions with the police, and yet as he described an imagined police encounter, he emphasized how quickly the encounter could turn *lethal* rather than merely *illegal*. He wasn't thinking about arrest or about his various rights being violated, as Nathan was: he was thinking about "getting shot up." Even though all of the gun carriers who embraced this more radical vision of the police emphasized that police not only harass but also use illegitimate force, white gun carriers seemed to view themselves as more *politically* vulnerable to police, whereas minority gun carriers were more likely to emphasize their *physical and political vulnerability*.[4] There was thus a certain degree of entitlement that many white gun

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[4] There are, however, at least two cases of police abuse against white open carriers – one that involves officers physically beating an open carrier, the other that involves an open carrier being pushed the ground while the officers had their guns drawn. These incidents suggest that white open carriers *are* physically at risk when exercising lawful gun-related activity, but that said, my conversations with these gun carriers tended to focus on the abrogation of rights, rather than physical harm, as the main danger involved in negative police encounters.

carriers brought to their police interactions: that as law-abiding Americans under the full protection of the law, police should, and ultimately must, uphold the law when dealing with them. When the police failed to do so, these white gun carriers reacted with surprised outrage and indignation. Meanwhile, minority gun carriers reacted to police harassment with equal outrage and indignation, but they seemed to lack the surprise that many white gun carriers had. In other words, for white gun carriers, police harassment shatters an entitlement to be treated well by the law, whereas for minority gun carriers, it confirms an expectation of mistreatment. This suggests that *not only* the acknowledgement of one's rights by public officials *but also* one's expectation of having one's rights acknowledged is racialized. In a free society of equals, every citizen should both be *and* feel 'entitled' to the same rights. Yet these feelings of entitlement comprise an important difference that distinguishes white gun carriers who critique the police from gun carriers of color.

Rethinking Masculinity

> *"Sorry, Officer, I don't care how pissed it gets you,*
> *But I don't go nowhere without my pistol, pistol."*
> - Eminem, "Pistol, Pistol" (2001)

About half-way through my fieldwork, an open carrier I had met through fieldwork was ticketed and fined for openly carrying a firearm in a place where (according to the police officer) he was not legally entitled to carry. After reviewing the law, he realized that there was no legal basis for the ticket. He called up a few of his friends, and soon a group of open carriers decided to descend on the police station, located in a white suburb that bordered Detroit, openly carrying guns in order to demand that the ticket be dismissed. There were about 8 men, all of whom were white, and they ranged in age from their early 20s to their mid-50s. Some were fathers; one was a military veteran. An unarmed white woman in her early 20s volunteered to video tape the incident, while the male gun carriers wore audio recorders. I was invited to the event and – if I wanted to – open carry into the police station (a action which is legal in Michigan). Curious about how police would react to an open-carrying woman after hearing stories about police interactions exclusively from male open carriers, I decided to join them.

We walked into the police station as a group on a Sunday morning, and the gun carrier who had been originally ticketed approached the front desk to demand that his ticket be dismissed. The police officer behind the counter stood up immediately, telling us to leave; we were told that none of us were entitled to be there, besides the original gun carrier. One of gun carriers responded to the officer that this was public property, while another gun carrier pulled out his cell phone to dial a lawyer. About a half-dozen officers appeared from a basement staircase, and we were told to raise our hands: each of our guns would be examined to see if it were legally registered to our name. There was nothing else the police could legally do. The gun carriers protested, but all of them obeyed. As the police disarmed the gun carriers, they traded insults: "Oh, you think you're a big man now?" one cop quipped to an open carrier. When they got to me and my gun, they were silent.

The serial numbers on the guns were slowly run. The guns were handed back, one by one, and the police officers asked each gun carrier if he could reload

outside as a courtesy. The gun carriers agreed. The original ticketee's name was called, his gun returned, and he was told that his ticket would be dismissed. The officer explained, "I'm not sure why they gave this to you." Finally, just my gun was left, and it turned out – to my disbelief – that my gun was turning up unregistered. I was shocked and upset, and feared the headlines: "Berkeley PhD student arrested for illegal possession of firearm." But there would be no headlines; I quickly produced my registration card (which I always carried, even though I was not bound to do so by law). When the police officer saw the slip and returned my gun to me, he thanked me for having the piece of paper, but said it didn't really matter – he trusted me and would have let me have my gun back anyway.

Had I not been a white female – had I been Gerald or Henry, for example – I'm not sure that the police officer would have been so generous with overlooking what would have been a felony had I actually been carrying an unregistered gun. And at the end of the incident, after the ticket was dismissed, the guns were returned, and the open carriers were armed and eating at a Coney Island hot-dog diner literally a stone's from the police department, I wondered what, exactly, was the point of everything that had transpired; it was sheer performance on both sides, or as one of the open-carriers jokingly quipped afterward, "a big dick-swinging contest."

By highlighting this incident, my goal is not to imply that this very deliberate act of police confrontation is similar to the uninvited instances of police harassment that people of color face. This incident – and the decision by open carriers to openly carry – almost certainly appears to the bulk of Americans, including most gun-carrying Americans, as an over-reaction by the open carriers to a minor instance of misunderstanding on the part of the police. Indeed, in my conservations with and observations of gun carriers, I found that many viewed open carriers and their actions as offensive, arrogant, pushy, and even dangerous. While most gun carriers I talked to thought that open carry should be legal, several qualified their support by saying, "But just because something is legal doesn't mean you should do it."[5]

I highlight this incident, then, because it reveals something about how police interactions unfold when guns are involved: masculinity seems to be inextricably linked with *how* these confrontations with the police unfold and what is at stake in them. This dynamic is not surprising given that, as described in Chapter 5, police power itself is historically rooted in patriarchal relations. These gun carriers were not just using their guns to affirm a duty to protect and rejecting dependency on the police: they were also *resisting* gendered tactics of the police. As Cooper (2009) argues, police stops are a means for officers to situate themselves as "the man," placing the detainee in a subordinate, emasculated position vis-à-vis the officer. Police stops, seizures and searches are geared at symbolically or physically dominating civilians in ways that ritualistically re-enforce "the masculine esteem" of officers (Herbert, 2001;

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[5] Open carrying does *not* constitute a "mainstream" component of American gun politics by any stretch of the imagination; for the NRA, for example, has refused to support open carry legislation, probably because of the revenues associated with concealed carry licensing (through state-mandated training requirements) but also because of the negative associations of open carriers as police-baiters.

Cooper, 2009). If "possession of a revolver is an essential part of being an American policemen…even more than the badge, it sets an officer apart from ordinary citizens" (Bayley, 1976: 165), then carrying a gun legally, then, may become a means for men to symbolically contest the authority of state officials, particularly the police, and resist emasculation vis-à-vis the state's power to violate. This means that at stake in this resistance is not only rights but also masculinity: with the police functioning as a social institution that both enforces the law *and* promotes masculine values (Herbert, 2001), police stops allow officers to both criminalize civilians and achieve an authoritative brand of masculinity (Cooper, 2009), often with racial overtones (Dottolo & Stewart, 2008).

Radicalizing the Citizen-Protector

For gun carriers enacting what I call the *neoradical* citizen-protector, guns become a symbolic means of resisting this emasculation and maintaining their status as men: by carrying guns lawfully and becoming knowledgeable about their rights, they symbolically resist police harassment. Indeed, in addition to taking *manly responsibility* by eschewing dependency on the state (as per Chapter 5), these gun carriers also engage in *manly resistance* against the police. Lawfully carrying a firearm becomes – to quote one gun carrier – a way to say "to the world, I'm my own man…I'm willing to stand up and speak truth to authority, the very authority that we have empowered."

Oftentimes, "speaking truth" simply meant that gun carriers who experienced negative police encounters shared their stories and even recordings of the incidents online in Internet gun forums, as I observed during my months of online fieldwork. By sharing these stories, they encouraged one another to become educated not only on the intricacies of the law but also on talking points with police. Some instructors even decided to add a component on police harassment to their firearms classes: for example, Chase, the 25-year-old African American resident of Detroit, explained why he incorporates a section on police harassment in his class: "A lot of people don't know their rights in Detroit, and I figure that's how they [the police] get away with it. I was actually thinking about somehow getting the message out about what they do [by starting a blog as part of his firearms school]. I'm going to try get more younger people involved, and I want to let people know their rights."

Open carriers also told me that their decision to open carry was, in itself, an attempt to educate the public more broadly and even "desensitize" the public about gun rights by "bringing them out of the closet." But they were not simply alerting the public and the police to the existence of guns in public space. They were also modeling a particular kind of citizenship in which the public no longer relies on, or needs, the police. Instead of entrusting public law enforcement with policing, these gun carriers seemed to prefer a community-based policing system in which people watch out for one another as part of their collective responsibility to one another. Individualistic, unorganized, but legal, this means that these more radical gun carriers enact a slightly different kind of "citizen-protector" that the version espoused by either the NRA or most gun carriers.

I have called this the neoradical citizen-protector to call attention to how these gun carriers not only wish to supplement but also perhaps supplant public law enforcement. As Michael told me, "Law enforcement says, 'Call 911. You know, you're not a police officer!' The reality is, you *are* and you *can be* if you want to be – strictly legally speaking." While this could be read as simply a

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rejection of police dependency, when juxtaposed with Michael's statements about Rodney King and Malice Greene, there appears to be something more at work: Michael is suggesting an alternative organization of social order maintenance in which everyday citizens act like the police *not* because the police just won't be there but because the police is a corrupt force. Is Michael promoting a version of vigilantism? Perhaps. But he is also responding to first-hand experiences of police neglect and abuse: as noted in a previous chapter, Michael's turn toward guns started when he was attacked by a gang of men in Detroit. After the attack, he was able to flag down a police car, which he said only dropped him off in a worse area instead of taking him to the hospital. (Dropping civilians off in unknown or unsafe areas appears to be a common tactic of public law enforcement in large urban areas; it was also mentioned by the African American men in Brunson's (2007) study on experiences of police harassment in St. Louis.) Despite the severity of his injuries, which he said took months of surgery to fix, he used the incident to illustrate his misgivings about the police, rather than criminals. His gun allows him to not simply reject dependency on the police but also model what good policing looks like – that is, guns born on the hips of good-willed citizen, not monopolized in the hands of ill-intentioned cops. Michael told me gun carriers should study the law so that if they ever interact with a police officer, they can "outlaw" the cop. His double entendre, I think, is intentional: he means both that the gun carrier should *more* knowledgeable about the law than the police officer *and* that the gun carrier should expose the illegitimate or unlawful use of police power by public law enforcement.

Jason, the African American described in the Introduction, also discussed his decision to open carry in didactic terms. By openly carrying a gun, his goal was to model a kind of citizenship that is off-limits for men of color – what Jason euphemistically described as "something you can [only] do north of 8 Mile," the border between Detroit and its whiter suburbs. Jason explained to me, for example, why he views himself as a model for the community:

> When they learn I'm not a cop, they just become so animated because they see its real. It's not just something I heard about that open carry is something you can do north of 8 mile….There's a black man here in my presence, open-carrying, and he's confident. He's not a thug, there's no police, he's walking out of a door, and he's not trying to cover it. So when they see that, they're like, I want to do that too.

Jason's "confident" law-abiding behavior allows him to navigate a double-bind that men of color may face: either become 'thugs' or join the police and, therefore, a structure of institutional racism embedded in law enforcement practices. By embracing the practice of gun carry, Jason is *resisting* the "neoliberal paternalism" (Soss, Fording & Schram: 2011) that has placed black men in a catch-22 as either criminals or co-conspirators (that is, to become cops in the push to diversify the face of public law enforcement without the concomitant transformation of racialized policing practices (Gardner, 2012)).[6] A Black man with a gun who is neither criminal nor cop is a shocking disruption of this binary. And unlike Michael and other white gun carriers, who may appear vigilante-like

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[6] This does not contradict the fact that gun carry is simultaneously saturated with neoliberal ethos of self-reliance and independence (as described in Chapter 3); this is precisely why I use the word "neoradical" to describe Jason's actions.

in their indictment of the police, Jason's disruption is both more and less than sheer vigilantism; rather, the display of an openly carried gun by a Black man is an audacious proclamation of lawfulness that Jason embraces as a way of bringing up his community. Referencing the legal restriction that forbids felons from owning or carrying firearms, he tells me, "I wanted to walk over to them and be like 'You want to do this? Stay out of trouble. Keep a clean record, and you can do the same thing I'm doing.'" By openly carrying a gun, Jason modeled a different kind of masculine citizenship available to those who "keep a clean record." Rather than emphasizing criminal behavior or hypermasculinity (Rios, 2011), this different kind of resistant masculinity is tied to law-abidance and the civic duty to protect oneself and others.

Everyday Tyrannies

Perhaps Michael, Jason, and the other gun carriers who use their firearms to contest the police, should be best read in terms of the stereotypes that circulate about gun carriers and proponents as driven by paranoia about growing police power and government tyranny: their words echo sentiments voiced by people like Alex Jones, who recently declared on CNN's Piers Morgan show that "1776 will commence again!" if the US government attempts to ban guns because the Second Amendment, after all, is about government tyranny. This reading notwithstanding, for the gun carriers I talked to, their experiences of "tyranny" in the form of their local police departments were not abstract or theoretical: they might be the target of police harassment because of the color of their skin, or they might have invited additional police scrutiny due to their decision to openly carry a gun, but either way, their interactions with the police have them first-hand explosure to the notion that police *can be* aggressors. And indeed, "tough on crime" politics *have* given the state a mandate to not only *protect* law-abiding civilians but also *violate* potential criminals. That open carry allows gun carriers to contest police violation, I think, is a key reason why the most active African American gun proponents in Detroit that I met promoted concealed carry *as well as* open carry.

My analysis is not meant to justify, promote or endorse this understanding of public law enforcement as much to show that this kind of social protest – reminiscent of armed Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s (Austin, 2006; Williams, 1998; Hill, 2006) – is still contained in the act of carrying a gun for some gun carriers. Supplanting the police rather than identifying with them, these gun carriers use gun to engage in a particular, masculine-marked practice: by carrying guns, they protect themselves from both physical harm *and* political harm. And while they focus on Second Amendment rights, they often touched on other rights as well, emphasizing the importance of empowering ordinary people through rights: Kevin, a multiracial truck driver, told me that "We're supposed to be standing up for our rights. This isn't even just Second Amendment rights we're talking about. We're talking Fourth Amendment. Fourteenth Amendment." Enacting themselves as neoradical citizen-protectors, these gun carriers take on a version of citizenship reminiscent of the Black Panthers (Austin, 2006) insofar as they emphasize "speaking truth to authority" as a means of simultaneously safeguarding their rights, protecting their communities and being their "own man" against the backdrop of a violating state.

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Who Can Seek Police Permission?

The worst thing about guns: as bad as Sandy Hook was, the worst thing is that we are encouraging, as a nation, black-on-black genocide in our inner cities, and no one apparently cares about it.

- Buzz Bissinger, on the Piers Morgan Show

Young, poor men of color are not frequently included in debates about gun rights or gun control. And yet, these are the Americans who are most likely to be affected by such legislation. On the one hand, this is because young men of color are most likely to be affected by gun violence: gun homicide is the *leading cause of death among Black teens*, and gun injuries to Black teens outnumber those suffered by white teens by a ratio of 10.[7] According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, this racial disparity is also visible with justifiable homicides: from 1976 to 2005, 43% of victims of justifiable homicides by civilians were African American, and most were in their 20s and 30s (this general pattern holds for justifiable homicides by police as well). In urban cities, guns add to a toxic mix of poverty, blocked upward mobility, and incarceration. One analysis of Chicago showed that people living close to homicides that took place over the last 12 years were more likely to Black, earn an average of $38,318 (as compared to $61,175 not near homicides), and are twice as likely to have not finished high school. The hope that gun control advocates hold out is that by restricting guns further and enforcing the laws already on the books, this level of gun violence will decrease. Indeed, this is precisely the argument that Frank Zimring (2011) makes in his groundbreaking book on New York City's crime decline: an aggressive program of gun control and gun buybacks did, in fact, help to lower the crime rate.

But the flipside of this is that those same aggressive gun control policies helped, in part, to unleash a problematic dynamic that also originates in New York: the controversial "Stop & Frisk" program that encourages police officers to stop "suspicious-looking" individuals in order to find illegal drugs or guns (this program is not unlike aggressive policing tactics that have been in place, if informally, in Detroit for decades). According to the New York Civil Liberties Union,

> An analysis by the NYCLU revealed that innocent New Yorkers have been subjected to police stops and street interrogations more than 4 million times since 2002, and that black and Latino communities continue to be the overwhelming target of these tactics. Nearly nine out of 10 stopped-and-frisked New Yorkers have been completely innocent, according to the NYPD's own reports.[8]

These practices are dependent, of course, on the assumption that carried guns must be illegal; New York City has some of the strictest gun control laws in the country. But the people who are most likely to be harassed in an effort to 'enforce'

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[7] See the report "Protect Children, Not Guns" from the Children's Defense Fund (2012). http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/protect-children-not-guns-2012.pdf

[8] See "Stop-and-Frisk Practices" from the American Civil Liberties Union of New York State (2013).

gun control – those who look 'suspicious' – are poor men of color, not the white conservative men who constitute the public face of pro-gun America.

The NRA-ILA's website reads that "For 130 years the National Rifle Association of America has stood in opposition to all who step-by-step would reduce the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms to a privilege granted by those who govern. NRA continues to fight against those who would dictate that American citizens should seek police permission to exercise their constitutional rights." For most gun carriers in Michigan, "seeking police permission" means exactly that: an increased vulnerability to police because of disclosure requirements. Despite this increased vulnerability to police, their right to carry a firearm is usually acknowledged by public law enforcement, especially if they are carrying concealed, are attentive to their other law-abiding behaviors (such as speeding), and don't look "suspicious." For the relatively small portion of gun carriers who step outside the boundaries of recognizably "lawful" gun carry (whether because they choose to carry openly or because they 'look' like potential criminals), "seeking police permission" is not an abstract problem that only minimally affects whether and how one carries a gun. Instead, police harassment is an everyday possibility that affects people who are nevertheless engaged in lawful activities. Again, my goal is not to condone such activities (even as they are legal) as much as show how they are productive of particular kinds of political subjectivities.

This chapter and the preceding chapter together examine how gun-carrying men enact different versions of what I call the "citizen-protector" model of citizenship: they are means of managing race, masculinity, and – as political tools used to "talk back" to the state – good citizenship. Whether gun-carrying men imagine the state as absent and ineffective or intrusive and violating, they virtually all view guns as a means of *both* addressing the practical problem of policing *and* asserting themselves as good, lawful citizens who protect not only themselves but also their families and communities amid a breakdown in social order. Indeed, despite their differences, the message of the NRA – regarding the "fight against those who would dictate that American citizens should seek police permission to exercise their constitutional rights" – resonates with all of them, even if its meaning is nuanced by each gun carriers' individual experiences of policing, crime and social status. These chapters have unpacked the ways in which masculinity, race and gun carry are intertwined into a complex politics of policing that is embedded in a particular context of neoliberal decline. But this leaves a critical question unanswered: What about armed women?

Chapter 7: The Softer Face of Gun Carry: Citizen-Protectors or Citizen-Defenders?

"God created man and woman, but Samuel Colt [a gun manufacturer] made them equal."
- Gun Adage

Are women better off with or without guns? Both sides of the gun debate offer clear-cut answers to these questions: to gun control advocates, guns mainly harm women, while to gun rights advocates, they can only help them. While women have an emerged as an attractive ally for both sides of the gun debate, however, I argue that such a question is rigged by the binary thinking that underlies it: it forces women to weigh in on a debate in which neither side fully captures why they may, or may not, be drawn to guns for the purposes of protection. This chapter focuses on how guns are embraced, negotiated and adapted by women who choose to carry them. I show that despite efforts of gun proponents to promote women's involvement in gun culture and politics, female gun carriers occupy an ideologically contradictory position within gun politics. On the one hand, female gun carriers reported various benefits from carrying a firearm, such as feelings of empowerment, greater mobility, and enhanced safety. Guns, they told me, not only allowed them independence from police (as male gun carriers emphasized) but also independence from men, and often, their turn to guns coincided with increased independence in other realms of their lives – such as employment or a divorce. On the other hand, however, as female gun carriers entered gun politics, they encountered a culture of masculinity – perpetuated by other gun carriers and even police officers – that read their decision to carry a gun *not* as empowerment but rather as an expression of their maternal instinct; their sexual desirability; or a laughable attempt to be 'one of the boys' – not unlike the ridicule experienced by female police officers. Even when pro-gun men supported armed women, this support often reinforced gender binaries: for example, male gun carriers frequently promoted guns by appealing to women's *duty to protect others* as a 'natural' expression of women's maternal instincts. Even as women carriers experienced guns as empowering, men's narratives of armed women suggests that the duty to protect and police remains masculine terrain, despite claims that guns are "the Great Equalizer." I conclude that the armed women I interviewed sometimes enact an alternative to the citizen-protector model of citizenship: drawing on Judith Stiehm's (1982) distinction between protectors (who monopolize the means of self-defense to protect the 'weak' – women and children) and defenders (who share equally in the task of defense and protection), I suggest that some female gun carriers forge a model of citizenship better characterized as the 'citizen-defender.'

Courting Women into Gun Culture

"Women bring something to the Second Amendment movement that men can't. They bring that softer side. It's easy to call me this mean, gun-toting redneck, I carry because I

want to kill people. Because women have that softer side to them, that softer nature. You can't insult women without having it come back on you."

- Butch, white gun carrier and instructor

Despite its sometimes sensationalized treatment in the media, women's involvement in gun culture is not new. As Laura Browder (2006), author of *Her Best Shot*, notes, women have long been involved as hunters, trapshooters, cowgirls, wives, mothers and even scantily clad models. After all, it was over 100 years ago, in the late 1800s, when Annie Oakley, her shotgun in tow, became the indelible image of the American cowgirl. There have been noteworthy shifts in the past several decades since Oakley charmed America by "convincing thousands of people that women could perform and compete [in the rodeo] without losing their domestic virtues" (Riley, 1995: 47). Like men, women are now more pro-gun than ever before: more women opposed a ban on handguns in 2011 than *their male counterparts in 1991*. And some surveys have suggested that women have become more involved in gun culture as well: one hotly contested 2011 Gallup poll found that 23% of female respondents owned their own gun, but 2010 General Social Survey data suggests this number is closer to 9%. It is possible that with around 43% of women reporting that they live in household with guns according to the same 2011 Gallup poll (Saad, 2011), perhaps these inexplicably inflated numbers simply reflect women's feelings of ownership over and entitlement to the guns that men own in their homes. In addition, women are carrying guns concealed in record numbers, representing 1 in 6 of Michigan concealed carry license holders.

These gun-toting women have not gone unnoticed by companies that manufacture bra holsters, concealed carry purse rigs, and small, concealable and cute guns like Ruger's pink and impractically tiny .380 LCP (Smith & Smith, 1995). Meanwhile, shooting ranges like the Firing Line in Westland, MI, have tried to attract women by hosting Ladies Nights, which often include heavy discounts on gun rentals and free or discounted gun tutorials in a women-only environment. And while gun instructors themselves are disproportionately male, many have taken to offering women-only classes, and some instructors even specialize in this niche market, such as Mary and Allen Polkowski's Ultimate Protection Academy in suburban Detroit. Anecdotally, the gun instructors I interviewed often remarked that they had witnessed an uptick in female students recently: as Butch, a white gun carrier and instructor told me, "in my CCW classes ten years ago, 10% of my classes were women. Now, between 25 and 30% are women. So it's definitely growing. Women are getting more involved."

The NRA courts women by arguing that more guns are in women's best interest: this has the dual effect not only of attracting women into shooting[1] but also situating the NRA as concerned about women's safety (Blair & Hyatt, 1995). As Butch describes in the quotation that opens this section, women are believed to represent the new "softer" face of gun politics. In one FAQ sheet that the NRA published on concealed carry laws, the organization contended that "Women are most likely to be attacked by men, who, by and large, have the advantage of size and strength. Having a firearm shifts the advantage in the woman's favor." Indeed, leading up to the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in the

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[1] But note that many of the women seeing NRA materials are likely already predisposed to become involved with firearms; see Blair and Hyatt (1995).

early 1990s, which the NRA opposed because of the restrictions it placed on the gun rights of people accused of domestic violence, the NRA ran ads encouraging women "to choose to refuse to be a victim" by arming themselves with guns.[2] In 1999, the Merrill D. & Lillian Z. Martin Endowment was established to promote the NRA's "Women on Target" shooting courses. Thus, over the past few decades, the NRA has made significant attempts to reach out to women by developing women's programs that teach women a range of firearms skills, starting with the basics of choosing a firearm, learning about different kinds of ammunition, and firearms safety as well as introduce women to target shooting, hunting, and self-defense.

"The Bang! The Power!"

What attracts women to guns? The women I interviewed extolled the virtues of arming oneself, echoing Kathy Johnson and Paxton Quigley, nationally recognized firearms instructors that market to women: according to Quigley's website (www.paxtonquigley.com), guns are a way to "abandon age-old bonds of male dependence, and break free from the powerlessness, fear and depression that has plagued our gender for so long." The female gun carriers I interviewed voiced similar sentiments. Consider the story of Carrie, a white administrative assistant and gun instructor in her 60s. While she did not grow up with guns, she told me that she had come to view them as a symbol of "strength." Carrie told me she became interested in firearms after her father had been abducted in Detroit when she was a child:

> He was approached in broad daylight in a small open-air parking lot next to the building where he worked, and these guys decided he had money, and they held a gun to his head and shoved him into his own car and drove him around in his own car. He wound up in the trunk of his own car for several hours. At one point was beat up and tied up, and it was pretty traumatic for him. The car came to a halt somewhere, and he kept banging his head on the trunk lid to try and attract attention, and finally, an older fellow wandered by. They talked through the lid, and the older guy went off to find somebody else, and finally, he found somebody who came and let him out. It turned out he was parked out on Cass Corridor in Detroit, one of the worst areas of Detroit at the time. This was back in 1974.

Her story of crime alludes to a particular moment in Detroit's tumultuous history: the abduction, after all, occurred only seven years after the Detroit Riot ripped through the city.

The experience stayed with her, and as a young adult, she decided to learn more about firearms: "I approached a couple of gun shops in the area about training and basically got laughed right off the phone," implying that she was not taken seriously by the men she encountered in gun culture. Determined to learn about guns, she taught herself how to shoot: "I got myself educated and that was when I realized that there was a huge inequity in how things were handled." She was referring to inequities in access to firearms: while she was "laughed right off the phone" for wanting to learn how to handle firearms, she learned that women who needed guns for personal protection were being denied

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[2] See "NRA Campaign Under Attack; The Small-Arms Industry Comes On to Women" by Melinda Henneberger at *The New York Times* (1993).

permits under Michigan's previous "may issue" system of licensing: "Particularly for women who were in situations where they felt threatened by a former boyfriend, husband, any kind of stalking situation, being denied the ability to defend themselves absolutely unacceptable."

Carrie soon became a firearms instructor in part because she wanted to help other women value their own lives and safety – even if this meant not being "nice". As she recalls one course:

> *I was doing a class in Barion Springs for women, and I said, "I gotta make this point because it keeps coming up." I said "Ladies, you've got to understand when it comes to a choice between being nice and being safe, safe always wins." When we got to a break, a lady came up, and she said, "thank you for saying that, because I was always so afraid to say anything, then I wouldn't be a nice girl." And that right there pointed it out to me that for a lot of women, there's that inability to cross the line of being nice to being assertive about your own safety. So many of the women who came wanted to learn [about firearms], but they still needed some help getting across that barrier.*

Carrie's experiences echo what scholars who have studied self-defense have uncovered. Self-defense classes become a place where a particular kind of "physical feminism" is realized: McCaughey (1997) argues, for example, that within self-defense classes (including but not exclusively those involving handguns), women "unlearn" the "prescribed femininity" that teaches them that they will always be physically inferior to inherently stronger, more aggressor rapists and assaulters. In the classes she studied, she found that women learn to become "scrappy" and "opportunistic" "victorious fighters," while men are recast as "beatable, or at least vulnerable, posers of strength and brutality" (McCaughey, 1997: 63; 66). Likewise, Hollander (2004: 228) surveyed women who participated in self-defense courses and found that they experienced an embodied transformation: "Self-defense classes disrupt conventional understandings of gendered bodies because they demonstrate to women that they can use their bodies effectively, and they also suggest that men's bodies are not invulnerable." The women in her study viewed their bodies as a source of empowerment rather than oppression; they felt more comfortable being assertive with not only strangers but also friends, acquaintances and intimates; and they questioned men's taken-for-granted physical domination. Starting from the premise "women have the ability to protect themselves, rather than relying on others for protection," self-defense courses "are life transforming because they address three issues that touch every aspect of women's lives: the fear of sexual assault, the self, and gender" (Hollander, 2004: 225).

For some of the women, this transformation was ignited by a close-up experience with crime, such as Carrie's father's abduction. Likewise, Annie, an administrative assistant in her late 40s, told me that guns were a way to "take the power back" and to "never be defenseless again" after an abusive childhood.[3] When I sat down to interview her, she asked me bluntly, "Do you want me to start at the beginning?" Not realizing where her experiences with guns would take the interview, I said yes. She told me that she remembered nights when she'd hear the shotgun racking after a phone call early in the morning, and she

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[3] Material from Annie's interview is based on fieldnotes.

even recalled one night that she saw her mom on the bed, strangled by the barrel of a rifle her dad was holding over her mother's neck. She recalled nights where they had to sneak out of windows and walk through the snow, led by her mom to safety, when her dad presumably got into trouble.

Annie was kicked out of her home when she was 17, and forbid firearms and alcohol in her house completely. But then she became interested in fighting – particularly martial arts. She told me that she wanted to learn to be a fighter, and that this desire soon led her to firearms. As my fieldnotes from the interview note:

> She said that she never, ever wanted to be defenseless again - and that you can't be afraid of firearms, you have to learn to respect them. She said she has never had to pull a firearm on anyone ever: it's in human nature not to want to hurt other people, but some people don't have that prohibition and don't care about hurting others. She reiterated that she is against violence, but she will defend herself, especially after her childhood.

While some women narrated their turn to guns through experiences with crime and violence, others came to guns out of a general curiosity or desire to learn about something that had been reserved for men. For example, Laura, a white 51-year-old secretary, emphasized the "bang! The power! [Feeling] powerful!" when explaining how she felt when she first shot a firearm. Laura presented her first encounter with guns in explicitly gendered terms:

> I went up north to visit some friends. And you know how the story goes: the girls are talking about sewing, and the guys are talking about hunting. So I overheard one of the guys saying he wanted to go shooting. Nobody had any interest. So I said, I will! This was my first experience [shooting], and I [realized] I had an inner interest [in guns] that I didn't even know about!

Meanwhile, Veronica, a white corporate manager, also turned to guns as part of an overall transformation in how she looked at the world and her (gendered) place within it: as she noted, "I really think women are socialized to believe that your life is valuable only in terms of other people's lives – like – 'since I became a Mother, I'm much more…' You know what? Your life, without children, is worth much more than that person who is trying to hurt you." Veronica told me that her turn toward guns and her involvement in Second Amendment politics was a result of an overall transformation in her life, which included divorcing her husband: "my thinking was evolving about a lot of things. I grew up in an area and a time where I worked, I went to school, raised kids that kind of thing. It's just funny how your perceptions change. My mother-in-law was like – little stay at home mother, submissive. I was pretty conservative as far as most things."

Veronica says her "evolution" started when she became frustrated with gun control advocates – particularly women: "they were saying – we speak for women. It didn't make any sense to me." Her husband, whom she later divorced, owned several pistols in their rural home, and she recalled herself thinking, "I'm not like a gun person, but I'm looking at all of these [guns]: there are guns everywhere, and they are not causing any crime." As she became interested in Second Amendment politics and gun rights, her husband was not initially supportive: "he did finally buy me a gun, but it was like the worst gun ever. It was like this little $99 .22 pistol. It was such a piece of crap, and he completely mocked me for wanting to shoot." Once she divorced her husband, her sense of

self-reliance only grew; as she told me, "The whole me changed when I got divorced – I take care of myself 100%. I don't depend on anybody, and I don't want to depend on anybody, and when I have to, it bothers me."

Finally, some female gun carriers came to guns because they were encouraged by their husbands to arm themselves. Both Cheryl and Tiffany obtained concealed carry licenses for these reasons. Cheryl obtained a concealed pistol license when her husband decided to obtain one for himself, while Tiffany obtained a concealed carry license holder after she met her future husband, who had long supported gun rights. He introduced her to guns as tools of safety rather than terror: a pro-gun Democrat, Tiffany had initially opposed gun rights after she was held up at gun point by an ex-boyfriend, but she now believed that guns – when properly handled – can and do make people safer.

Coming to guns for a variety of reasons – from criminal encounters to curiosity to encouragement from their husbands – the female gun carriers I interviewed connected feelings of independence and self-reliance with their guns, and they also discussed how regular carry makes them feel less afraid. Cheryl, a white schoolteacher and real estate agent, told me that her gun allowed her more mobility. Explaining dangers associated with her real estate work, she told me about one house that she quickly left after realizing that people may have been squatting in it: "It's funny. When you got the gun, you aren't scared. If I had the gun then, I probably would have been braver." Likewise, Nancy, a women in her 40s, implied that guns make gender differences irrelevant:

You know, a grandma can pull the trigger. It has nothing to do with [the gender of] who's carrying it. He's [pointing to her husband] no more dangerous than I am. We can both pull the trigger. It's just that simple.

Echoing scholars who have interrogated the empowering effects of self-defense for women (Hollander, 2002; 2004; Searles & Berger, 1987; McCaughey, 1997; 1998) and the gendered "nature" of public space with respect to fear of violence (Wesely & Gaarder, 2004), female gun carriers talked about firearms – and their potential to enhance safety as they moved through space – in generally positive terms.

Along these lines, some female gun carriers even viewed their guns as a way to deal with the 'occupational hazards' of jobs that required them to move around in public space. In one concealed carry class for women that I observed, the instructor asked why each woman wanted to obtain a license. Several of the women replied concerns about their safety while working jobs that required them to travel, such as real estate agents. In this regard, women's increased participation in the workforce (as discussed in Chapter 3) to seemed to 'fit' with the ethos of self-reliance connected to guns in both a practical and political register: guns not only symbolized "strength" and "power" (as per Carrie and Laura) but they also practically facilitated women's physical mobility through sites – as described in Chapter 1 – perceived as vulnerable and insecure. This means that this so-called "End of Men" shift in gendered employment patterns (described in Chapter 3) splinters the gendered experiences of men and women as they turn to guns. As I argued in Chapter 3, men use guns to *distinguish* themselves from failed men who are stigmatized by excess dependency on or violence toward women and redefine their roles as *protectors rather than providers*. While women use guns *also* in relation to men in that guns allow them to reject dependency, their deployment of guns is not about maintaining their utility to

others (as it is with men emphasizing their protective duties vis-à-vis women) but is rather about achieving independence *from* others.

(Mis)recognition from Men

Did I experience the empowerment that guns were supposed to impart to women? My 9 mm Smith & Wesson M&P allowed me to participate in a masculine space (gun culture) as well as move through space – presumably – with the kind of confidence and entitlement usually attached to a male body; both of these aspects of gun carry allowed me access to new sorts of cultural capital and embodied capital – experiences that were novel and exciting. I also did feel safer moving through my fieldwork; I always conducted interviews at a place of the interviewee's choosing (a local restaurant, coffee shop or their house). This meant that I often traveled through unfamiliar areas to arrive at an unknown location. As a solitary woman moving alone through these spaces (who, moreover, drove a 'chick car' with a California license plate), I felt that having a firearm probably allowed me to exude a level of confidence I would not otherwise have (as other gun carriers have noted about themselves). Yet, as I described my experiences in Chapter 2, guns also bring along with them significant responsibilities, burdens and inconvenient truths surrounding the power to kill, even if 'morally justifiable.' I personally experienced guns neither as evil objects nor as the tools of liberation: precisely because guns allow their carriers to walk a very fine line between law-abiding and criminal, moral and sinful, good and evil, I felt that guns could not be reduced to empowerment, even if many of the feelings I experienced while using them were 'empowering'.

This ambiguity was particularly poignant in the context of a number of unsolicited interactions I had while carrying a firearm openly – which I occasionally did as part of my research. I often went to one coffee shop that was frequented by a number of other gun carriers that I met through my research, who also occasionally open carried. During these days, I was often approached by male strangers (never female strangers): one white, thirty-something man approached me with his business card (he was a photographer) to tell me he was "pro-gun" and think its "hot" when women carry; a white man in his 70s who could barely walk with a cane managed to make it over to my table to tell me how he was happy to see that "women are finally doing this"; two white men in their 40s who waited behind me in line snickered, "Do you know how to actually use that?" and "Does your boyfriend know you do this?"; one African American man walked past me and jokingly said, with his hands up and laughing, "I didn't do it!"; a table of white men in suits asked me why I felt the "need" to carry, and when I explained I was doing research and from Berkeley, one replied "Well, that explains everything, then" (apparently they did not get the notice that Berkeley is a hotbed of gun control, not gun rights, despite its association with militant 1960s politics). I even had a police officer from a unit well known to harass open carriers whistle at me as I walked by.

There are plenty of people who believe that carrying a gun is excessive and/or ridiculous – particularly if it is openly carried. And I often heard of gun carriers finding themselves in conversations – sometimes heated – with strangers, especially if the gun carrier decided to openly carry. But I never heard of stories – except from other women – about strangers approaching them to tell them that their guns were hot, funny, and/or ridiculous. While my interactions with

strangers are not representative of the broader public, they do suggest that there is something about an armed woman that cannot be taken all that seriously because her gun is really just a symbol of 'hotness' or perhaps something she does because of her 'boyfriend', husband or other male figure. And even then, when she does try to use guns, she is often ridiculed: there are several 'viral' videos on the Internet that ridicule women's lack of proficiency with guns,[4] and male gun carriers told me about a common prank in which men (never themselves!) "teach" their wives or girlfriends to shoot by giving them an excessively large handgun (e.g., a 480 Roland) to watch it fly out of their hands. (And this might explain why, when I proficiently shot a 480 Roland, its owner was somewhat shocked that "a woman" could "handle" that large of a firearm.)

Women gun carriers face a whole legion of barriers to carrying guns as compared to their male counterparts because women's guns are belittled by at least some men – both within gun politics and outside of it. What this means is that the NRA statement on "police permission" – quoted before in Chapter 6 to demonstrate the centrality of police in understanding men's pro-gun, police-suspicious sentiments – provides a necessarily incomplete reading on the barriers to women wishing to exercise "the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms":

> *For 130 years the National Rifle Association of America has stood in opposition to all who step-by-step would reduce the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms to a privilege granted by those who govern. NRA continues to fight against those who would dictate that American citizens should seek police permission to exercise their constitutional rights.*

Extending this logic, if armed men must seek the police's permission, then armed women not only must seek the police's permission but also the permission, and recognition, from other men. They therefore must undergo a double-justification of their *legal* right to carry a gun as well as their *social* right to do so on *their* terms (and not the terms of men). Just as female offenders violate both *the legal system* and the *gender system* (Carlen, 2010), armed women often find themselves in the position of having to ask permission not only of *the law* (through the concealed pistol license application, which men and women alike must seek) but also of *men.*

This double justification, I would argue, was the reason why female gun carriers referred to situations in which their guns put them in *social* confrontations with men. For example, Virginia was a white retired politician who lived alone in a rural area outside of Lansing. Decades earlier, she was one of the few Michiganders who was able to obtain a concealed pistol license under the pre-2001 concealed carry laws, which required her to justify why she should have the privilege of carrying a gun concealed. While she obtained the license from the state, she apparently did *not* receive permission from men at large to carry her firearm: she told me that she was accused of sleeping with the Sherriff as well as angered men who themselves were unable to obtain a license: "this

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[4] This echoes Hopfl's (2003) insight that the demonstration of bodily mastery and, in her analysis, the metaphorical phallus is key to excluding women from masculine spaces such as the military; in a double sense, women are excluded from "becoming a (virile) member" – to quote the title of the her study.

[guy] was from Kalamazoo. He had heard that I was carrying, and he was saying 'How can a woman do this? You know, you're just a woman! You're just a young girl, how can you have a gun?'...They would look at me and think – she couldn't be carrying. That was when I was about 30 pounds lighter." While Virginia successfully gained *legal* permission to carry a gun, she failed to gain the social permission of (certain) men.

Likewise, Carrie, who traveled to hunting lodges to promote the passage of the passage of Michigan's shall-issue legislation in 2001, found herself confronted with men who presumed a male monopoly on firearms. As she recounts one memorable incident:

I was one of the few women that had ever crossed that doorway [into the hunting club]. It was a men-only club, and I didn't know it until I was there the night I was supposed to speak. And I'm used to 90% men. So, one of the guys came over to me and said – I'm so sorry, Pat, we didn't realize but with your name, we didn't know if you were a man or a woman, but we assumed you were a man. I said, "What do you want to do?" He said, "We're not going to ask you to leave."… I have been very welcome at every club – and for the most part, I was welcome at that one. There were a few die-hards that just – mm, didn't like this. One of the guys that was with me wanted us to leave and make a big scene, and I said, "No. Then we're just dropping to that level. Not gonna do it."

Mustering up her wit to appeal to an all-male crowd, she decided she would try to use this as an opportunity to open "people's minds – even a little crack." As she went on,

I thought about it, and when they introduced me, I got up, I'm looking across this sea of faces, and I said, "You know what guys? Any time I get to stand up in front of 300 guys and you all to listen to me – that is a good day!" The place erupted, they were laughing, and it went from there. I got their attention. And you know, we were able to have a dialogue. They were asking questions, I was running up and down off the stage – it was a great night. It could have been horrible. But it went well, and I think there were a lot of guys there that were primed to hear the message. And the few that were sitting there with their arms crossed, some of them kind of loosened up over the course of the evening. I did have to educate hunters when we were talking about CPL. The attitude for a lot of the hunters – men – was, "I don't need a pistol, I don't want a permit, I don't see any reason for anybody to have a permit, I'm happy with what I got - I've got my rifle, my shotgun, whatever." I stood in front of 300 men at a gun club and said, "Okay, you're entitled to your opinion. But what about your wife? Your daughter? Your aunt? Your mother? Your grandmother? Your neighbor who doesn't have a husband or boyfriend? When you are not around to defend the homestead, what about them? Don't they deserve the right to take care of themselves and to do it with good training and, you know, the right attitude? And I had men come up to me – one guy had tears in his eyes, he was half drunk, but tears in his eyes! He said, "I never thought about it that way, and you changed my mind."

Carrie used men's logic against them – "when you are not around to defend the homestead, what about them?" – in order to break down a group of men dead-set (as she described it) on the tried-and-true link between men and guns.

Perhaps representing a shift in gun culture, this line of reasoning – that men should encourage women to carry guns as an extension of their (men's) duty to protect to vulnerable others – was widespread among the male gun carriers I met.

Men's Promotion of Guns to Women: The Duty to Protect Others

Some accounts of gun owners and carriers suggest that pro-gun men view women as "gun grabbers" who take away their gun rights (Burbick, 2006). However, as I noted in Chapter 3, the gun-carrying men I interviewed generally articulated a different relationship between women and guns: they liked the idea of armed women. I experienced this encouragement first-hand: Before I had obtained a concealed pistol license, I was actively encouraged to obtain one by many of the gun carriers I met, suggesting that they took to heart the adage that the gun is the "Great Equalizer." For example, Felix, a white retired man, and Gary, a white lawyer in his early 30s, both ended our interview by encouraging me to be armed; as my fieldnotes show:

On the way out [Felix] gave me a short little pontification about driving alone - that as a woman, he wouldn't want to drive alone and unarmed at night on the highway, as it was just too dangerous. Armed, it seemed, would be okay, but not unarmed. [fieldnotes with Felix]

At some point, I realized that the interview had already gone on for almost three hours, and I had a 90-minute drive back to Detroit. I told him I needed to start driving on the highway, and he replied back, 'Not to be chauvinistic, but I wouldn't drive by myself if I was a woman on the highway and unarmed.' [fieldnotes with Gary]

To these men, guns allowed women to be alone by affording them extra safety: Gary admitted that it might sound "chauvinistic" to tell me that I should carry a gun, and in his version of "chauvinism," the gun and the man appear interchangeable.

Intertwined with, and alongside, these more "chauvinist" co-optations of gender-inclusivity were a handful of statements that emphasized a more egalitarian approach to protection (Stiehm, 1982). Casey, a 29-year-old white gun carrier, told me that he has taught each of his ex-girlfriends how to shoot a gun and encouraged them to carry as well; during our interview, he referenced Angelina Jolie's character in *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* to describe his ideal mate: "A girl who not only do I love and I want to be with, but she's got my back, too!" Opening the possibility that he might need a woman, and her gun, to defend him against threat, Casey explicitly breaks from the masculinist formulation that men have an exclusive privilege to protect. Meanwhile, Dylan, a white technician from suburban Detroit, weaves together these two formulations – a more masculinist version that centers on the absent masculine protector and the more egalitarian version that emphasizes women's equal participation in the protection of self and others: "The divorce rate is at 50%, and with the single family being so prevalent, I think a woman has to take on her own protection as a responsibility. And I'll tell you what – *the guy is not infallible!* Why not have two people that can protect themselves rather than one?"

Casey and Dylan's sentiments were rare, however: the more prevalent theme across my conversations with male gun carriers was that women's guns served to supplement, rather than supplant, men's duty to protect (McCaughey, 1997). For example, after emphasizing that women should be armed, one white

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father and husband told me that he encourages his wife to carry in his presence: "if we were together, I would definitely make sure she had it". His reasoning behind this encouragement revealed that her gun hardly acted as a means of gender equality: "you have it with you, and then I can use it, you know." Likewise, one African American gun carrier told me that he thought it was "cute" that women carried, but that should "something go down," he assumes that he'll "take control."

Men also assumed that women lacked interest in guns; several male gun carriers bemoaned that their wives are just "not terribly interested" in firearms, according to one white gun carrier. In effort to get women interested (as well as perhaps further extend men's own duty to protect not only women but also children), many men told me that they tried to convince women of the utility of guns by emphasizing women's duty to protect *others*. Indeed, if an acknowledgement of women's ability to *protect men* was fairly rare, male gun carriers frequently emphasized women's duty to *protect their children.* Echoing Sarah Palin's "Mama Grizzly" rhetoric[5], gun carriers often emphasized a "mother's instinct" to explain why women should be armed.

For example, as noted in a previous chapter, Butch told me that he tries to spark this "maternal instinct" within women who come to his class. Explaining one story about a woman who "could not hit the broad side of a barn from the inside," he told me that he simply asked her to imagine that someone had kidnapped her child while she pumped gas at a gas station and that her only hope was her gun. When he asked her what she'd do, she responded – despite being a "Christian woman" – "I'd shoot that son of a bitch!" From the perspective of this gun instructor, maternal ideologies are a critical tool in awakening women's 'natural' instinct to protect. Or recall Richard, from Chapter 3, who described how he demonstrates to women that they are capable of shooting in self-defense:

> *We'll give them a scenario. Okay, let's say somebody is grabbing your grandchild and trying to put them in the vehicle. What would you do? "I'd hit them with whatever I had!" Now, are you worried about killing that person if you're hitting them with your purse? "No." So, you have to set your boundaries.*

Uncovering and exposing that his students possess the mentality to kill another human being in the right context, Richard uses a gendered narrative to show women in his class that they do have the capacity to shoot under certain circumstances. Likewise, Bruce, a gun instructor, purposely finds out about whether the women in his class have children in order to "use [this] against them." He notes that once he taps into this maternal instinct within women, they turn out to be better learners than the men in his classes. As he explains:

> *I see a lot of women every year in class. I am seeing more and more of them…They take instruction better [than men]. The women seem to respond better [than men to training]. The one thing that we usually use*

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[5] Throughout her 2008 bid for US Vice President and thereafter, Palin described herself as a 'mama grizzly' to emphasize her maternal toughness: "You don't want to mess with moms who are rising up…if you thought pit bulls were tough, you don't want to mess with mama grizzlies." See "Sarah Palin calls on 'mama grizzlies' to help Republicans win election" in *The Telegraph* (2010).

against them: we'll talk to them before hand, we'll get more background [so] we'll get into their heads a little bit. [And then we'll] say, you have this gun in your head. It's 3 o'clock in the morning. They've kicked your front door in. They're going to probably tie you down, rape you, and probably rape your six-year-old daughter that you just told me about. And God only knows what else they're going to do to you and your family. Unless you stop this situation now, immediately. Because you probably don't want to have your children see you killed and brutalized in front of them.

This emphasis on women's capacity to protect their children raises a question: are men actually promoting guns to women for women's *self* protection, or for the protection of *their* (read: men's) children? While male gun carriers emphasized women's capacity to protect *children* as a way to tap into women's capacity to shoot, the promotion of guns to women often seemed to buttress men's ability to act as protectors of their households. Consider my interview with Timothy, a white gun carrier in his early 30s. When I asked him whether his wife carried a gun with her, he told me:

My wife was robbed at gunpoint, but my wife still doesn't carry. She's not to that point where she's willing to do whatever is necessary to make sure she goes home [alive]…I hope that day will come, especially when she's out and about with my son. That really bothers. You know, the fact that they're out there with no level of protection. So that kind of bothers me, but she's not ready for it. So I can't expect her to – but I hope.

Timothy's answer suggests the ambiguity with which male gun carriers promote guns to women. On the one hand, he wants his wife to carry not only because he wants her to be protected but also because he wants his son to be protected as well. His wife's unwillingness to carry, therefore, jeopardizes the safety of *his* son and, by proxy, undermines Timothy's own duty to protect his family. But on the other hand, Timothy is respectful of his wife's unwillingness "to do whatever is necessary to make sure she goes home [alive]." What matters, then, to Timothy is not so much whether his wife is protected (she, after all, is given a pass to choose to go unarmed) but rather whether his son is protected.

Women's Embrace of Guns: The Right to Self-Defense

Ironically, *men* emphasized *women's* duty to protect others much more so than the women gun carriers themselves: most of the women I interviewed did not embrace the narrative that women should primarily carry to protect their children. In fact, most of them either did not have children or had adult children, making the issue of children utterly irrelevant to their everyday decision to carry guns. And not surprisingly, this narrative was outright criticized by some of the women I interviewed. Veronica directly questioned this narrative regarding armed women and the extent to which women themselves believe it:

I really think women are socialized to believe that your life is valuable only in terms of other people's lives – like – "since I became a mother, I'm much more [interested in protection]" You know what? Your life, without children, is worth much more than that person who is trying to hurt you. And that's really good that you want to defend your children, but your life – not just your kids – is worth it. I think a lot of women think, "I could

kill somebody that was trying to hurt my kids, but if they were trying to hurt me, I don't know if I could do it." Bull!

This puts a gendered twist on the 'citizen-protector' model described in previous chapters. As I have argued, gun politics, and the anti-statist politics that go along with gun politics, provide a venue for men to situate themselves as responsible men – what I call citizen-protectors – amid socio-economic shifts that have undermined the traditional bases of masculine hegemony (breadwinning). As described in Chapter 3, male gun carriers are using guns to situate themselves as responsible, socially useful citizen protectors in part by defining themselves against failed men: either men who are dependent on women or men who are excessively violent toward women. But while this version of good citizenship *empowers* men by providing them with a basis for power and privilege (they are, after all, demonstrating their social utility to others by embracing the willingness to protect others by carrying a gun), this is *not* the case for women. When applied to women, this citizen-protector, centered as it is on a duty to protect others, is not a new basis of empowerment but rather an old basis for disempowerment: the social expectation that women should sacrifice for their children is neither new nor feminist.

Most of the men I interviewed seemed to sincerely believe that their promotion of guns *did* empower women, reflecting the extent to which feminist critiques of traditional gender norms (Stein, 2005; Messner, 2007; Schrock, 2007; Durfee, 2011; Heath, 2003; Anderson, 2009) and the erosion of the male breadwinner model (Cha & Thebaud, 2009; Wilkie, 1993; Legerski & Cornwall, 2010) have stigmatized raw expressions of patriarchy and masculine authoritarianism. And men's promotion of guns to women is not necessarily disempowering: it *could* contest the link between guns, masculinity, and the generalized duty to police. Some of the men I met – like Casey – promoted guns to women as co-defenders rather than protectors (see Stiehm (1982)). Yet most men walked a fine, ambiguous line between embracing women's empowerment through guns and domesticating this empowerment through narratives of maternal instinct. This is hardly surprising: gun-carrying men are caught between embracing egalitarian politics and maintaining their unique social worth as protectors. Emphasize women's capacity to protect too much, and men are rendered irrelevant. The result is a queasiness with armed women that exceeds the professed politics of gun-carrying men.

Citizen-Protectors, Citizen-Defenders

A women's decision to arm herself with a gun is embedded in a contradictory politics. On the one hand, the gun is often touted by gun proponents as a "Great Equalizer," and gun-carrying women themselves experience feelings of empowerment and strength from firearms. On the other hand, however, women's decision to carry a gun can easily be domesticated as an extension of *men's* duty to protect women and children (as evoked by the image of a woman, alone in her bedroom, who uses a gun to replace an absent protector) or as evidence of *mothers'* duty to protect their children (as evoked by the Mama Grizzly imagery popularized by Sarah Palin). In both cases, the armed women is contradictory terrain not unlike the female athlete (Messner, 1988), the female soldier, and the female police officer.

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In particular, the armed female shares some common ground with the female police officer: while female police officers are gaining increased acceptance within police forces, they continue to face obstacles as they integrate into the 'old boys club.' Male police officers doubt that women can participate in the masculine heroism that characterizes the esteemed, gun-involved police work (Brown & Sargent, 1995: 12), and they justify the presence of female officers by dividing police work of community-oriented care (i.e., feminized policing) versus crime-fighting heroism (i.e., masculinized policing) (Miller, 1998). Male gun carriers engage in similar demarcations: while women might bring a 'softer face' to gun politics, men oftentimes treat the guns born on the bodies of women as an extension of their (men's) duty to protect. This means that on a woman's body, a gun is *ambiguously* 'hers': "armed women provoke ire and awe because they embody the stereotypical extremes of western gender identity, combining associations of reproductive nurturance with violence to gain temporary access to male aggression, in a way that can transgress gendered boundaries even as it maintains them" (Oliviero, 2011: 18).

Generally, though, it is white women (all of the women I interviewed were white) who are recognized – rather than rendered unintelligible – for playing these liminal roles. Floyd's *She's Got a Gun* and Browder's *Her Best Shot* both show that white women have been long courted by gun culture: "firearms manufacturers have always targeted white middle- and upper-class [female] buyers" (Floyd, 2005: 142). For example, to promote armed self-defense to women, gun advertisements were typically "placed in family magazines designed to attract the gentry, despite the fact that white working-class women, poor women, and women of color experienced greater violence" (Floyd, 2005: 142). This dominant framing continues to obscure armed women who do not fit into this narrative of white domesticity; Browder (2006: 220) finds women of color virtually absent from *Women & Guns*, a magazine devoted to bringing women into gun culture.

The silence about legally armed women of color on both sides of the gun debate is particularly consequential, as some argue that African American women are one of the fastest-growing populations of gun carriers.[6] Yet consider the case of Marissa Alexander, an African American woman who was sentenced to 20 years in prison in May 2012 for three counts of aggravated assault. Despite the "Stand Your Ground" and "Castle Doctrine" laws that declare that a person has no duty to retreat from any place she has a legal right to be (especially her home), Alexander was unable to plead self-defense as she fired a warning shot toward her husband during a violent confrontation that he allegedly started. Her act of firing a warning shot was illegal in that suggested that she did not truly fear for her life, else she would have shot her attacker instead of just "warning" him with a stray bullet. To that extent, some argue, her punishment was warranted.

Yet, self-defense trials not only turn on what is technically legal or illegal but also on what a reasonable person, in fear of his or her life, would have done in such a situation. Generally, the benefit of the doubt is given to the person in the act of self-defense (as was initially the case with George Zimmerman), not his or her attacker. So why did Alexander not warrant more public concern if not

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[6] See "Target Women: Black Women with Guns" by J. Victoria Sanders for *The Utne Reader* (2012).

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outcry? One explanation is that as an African American woman, Alexander stands at the intersection of race and class that makes her an questionable subject of self-defense: women have historically been denied the right to justifiable homicide in the context of their own homes and instead been treated as criminals (Gillespie, 1989), and armed African Americans have been historically treated with particular suspicion. Alexander's case calls to mind Pat Carlen's (2010) observation that even though women are less likely to be punished than men, when they are, their punishment reflects a violation of both the formal control of the law and the informal control of femininity. The case suggests that armed women, particularly armed women of color, remain culturally unintelligible, even in the relatively "pro-gun" context of Florida (Alexander's home state).

This means that the territory of gun politics is complex and contradictory, simultaneously empowering and disempowering. When applied to women, the idealized 'citizen-protector' model of citizenship reinstates, rather than subverts, gender binaries if women's capacity to be armed revolves around her maternal nature to protect her children. While legally armed men gain social status through guns by emphasizing their capacity to protect *others* and positioning themselves as citizen-protectors accordingly, legally armed women have two options. They may use guns either to reinstate their second-class status as women (i.e., by carrying as 'back-up' to men – as per the women who told me that they decided to obtain concealed carry licenses due to their husbands' request – or mainly to protect their children) *or* they might use guns to break down gender barriers by emphasizing *not* the duty to protect others but *rather* their right to self-defense.[7]

One way to make sense of this return to the *right* to self-defense, then, is to unpack Judith Stiehm's (1982) distinction between *protectors* and *defenders*, discussed by Young (2003) in her groundbreaking article on masculinist protection and the state. Stiehm argues that historically, women and men have participated in a problematic and unequal gendered relation as 'the protected' (women) and the 'protector' (men). She emphasizes that this binary in fact provides men with a monopoly on violence, while it designates women as passive recipients of violence. In contrast, she proposes the notion of 'defenders' to develop an alternative model in which the work of defensive protection from violence is not monopolized by one group of people but shared by all. How does this help make sense of armed women? While armed men tend to emphasize guns as a means of achieving the status of citizen-protector, some armed women may instead be charting a new territory of citizenship – the citizen-defender – in which guns are a means *not* of emphasizing a new duty but *rather* claiming a right that has been historically closed off to women, particularly vis-à-vis men, and in equality with them. Of course, their ability to do so is dependent on recuperating and re-entrenching the very individualistic ethos that underlie rights discourse, meaning that a "physical feminism" based on guns may never look like the more familiar (to sociologists) versions of feminism that have emphasized collective social action. This further suggests that armed women

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[7] Recall Veronica's quote above about women protecting their own lives versus their children's. As she notes, "That's really good that you want to defend your children, but your life – not just your kids, is worth it. And I think a lot of women [believe], 'I could kill somebody that was trying to hurt my kids, but if they were trying to hurt me, I don't know if I could do it.' Bull."

occupy deeply ideologically contradictory territory, their politics remaining contradictory and ambiguous both within and outside of male-dominated gun politics.

Conclusion: Fear of an Armed Nation

"It probably became political for me right around '94, and I was just coming of age anyway. I was 21. I turned 21 in 93. So I was 22 when the Assault Weapons Ban passed."
                                                                    - Joseph, white gun carrier and firearms instructor

In 1994, Bill Clinton and the Democrat-controlled US Congress passed into law a significant victory for gun control advocates: the Assault Weapons Ban, part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, prohibited the manufacture of assault weapons as well as "high-capacity" magazines that could hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition. Assault weapons included semi-automatic rifles with pistol grips and bayonet mounts, such as AR-15s and AKs variants. While 18 models of semi-automatic rifles[8] were explicitly banned under the act, there was a detailed checklist of prohibited and permitted features that determined which guns could be sold to civilians. Complex and confusing for gun rights and gun control proponents alike, much of the law targeted cosmetic features of guns, and even when these features did affect firearm function, the difference seemed arbitrary. A slight cosmetic modification on a firearm could be the difference between law-abiding and criminal.

While effects of the Assault Weapon Ban on crime have been controversial and unclear,[9] its effects on politicizing guns were all-too-clear. The mid-1990s ushered in the Golden Age of the National Rifle Association. This was the decade when the organization mustered enough clout within Washington and among Americans to gain Republican control of the US Congress for the first time 50

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[8] A similar ban on the manufacture of fully automatic firearms, or machine guns, had already been implemented in 1986; while it is still technically legal to own fully automatic firearms in some states, very few of these guns in circulation: of the estimated 300 million guns in the US, only 240,000 are fully automatic firearms (and about half of these are owned by law enforcement). Civilian ownership of fully automatic firearms requires also requires registration with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, which involves a background check and a $200 fee. Because supply has been frozen, these fully automatic guns are cost-prohibitive for most Americans. An 9 mm Uzi, for example, costs $5,000 to $15,000. Rather than recreational guns, these guns are often purchased for investment purposes, with the assumption that the supply will continue to shrink.

[9] The law included a sunset clause of 10 years, at which point – its advocates presumed – the law's effectiveness in reducing violent crime could be evaluated. This was a golden opportunity for the gun control lobby to manufacture the kind of natural experiment that would make it possible to show that more guns equal more crime. Indeed, criminologists have not been able to come to an agreement on the effect of guns on crime: some scholars maintain that these laws significantly reduce crime, while others emphasize that they increase crime, and still others provide mixed or inconclusive results (for an excellent review, see Ludwig (2000)). Would the Assault Weapon Ban finally demonstrate – once and for all – that banning at least *some* kinds of guns is at least *part* of the solution to eradicating violent crime in the US?

Social scientists and policy makers have been unable to answer this question decisively. Part of the reason is that that rifles are rarely the weapon of choice for those executing violent crimes. In 1993 and 2004, the years before and after that the Assault Weapon Ban was in place, 4% of murders involved rifles. Evaluating the effect of a 10-year ban on assault weapons with such small numbers of rifle-related crime is difficult enough, but amid decreases in overall crime across the US, it has proven exceedingly difficult to determine what has caused which kinds of decreases in crime (Zimring, 2011). Not surprisingly, then, scholars have equivocated on the effects of the weapons ban. As Jeffrey Roth and Christopher Koper (1999) remark, "the public safety benefits of the 1994 ban have not yet been demonstrated."

years, inaugurating Newt Gingrich's "Republican Revolution of '94." And this was also the decade in which pro-gun America awakened as a visible political force that mattered: for Americans like Joseph, quoted above, the Assault Weapon Ban marked the moment the 'personal' became 'political.' No longer viewing his gun as a fun hobby or personal choice, he now saw his gun as an inherently political issue that led him to become involved in gun-rights activism. Joseph was not alone. The gun carriers I interviewed regularly referenced the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban as a watershed moment in both the history of American gun culture. When I asked some 500 Michigan gun advocates in an online survey what led them to become involved in gun politics, just over 40% said they did so as a result of the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban. Some argue that the ban could have been written and implemented differently to have a greater effect on crime, while others maintain that the sunset clause precluded its effects from fully unfolding. But as it stood, the ban did accomplish one thing, and it accomplished it incredibly well: politicizing pro-gun America. If the gay and lesbian movement had Stonewall and the pro-life movement had Roe v. Wade, gun advocates now had a clear setback around which to rally: the passage of the Assault Weapons Ban.

History Repeats Itself as Tragedy

If the Assault Weapon Ban galvanized pro-gun America in 1994, assault weapons galvanized gun control advocates in 2012. Assualt weapons are not used in vast majority of gun crimes, but they are used in some of the most tragic, egregious, and disturbing massacres. 2012 saw an string of such incidences: from a movie theater in Aurora, CO, to a mall in a suburb of Portland, OR, to an elementary school in Newtown, CT. Even though both Republican and Democrat politicians had strategically avoided the gun debate for the last decade, fearing that it could only lead to political loss, these heinous crimes put gun control at the center of public outcry. Indeed, something was different, gun control advocates started saying, after a shooter in Newtown, CT, took the lives of 20 5- and 6-year-olds at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 5th, 2012. America was ready for a change.

At first, they seemed right: in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, support for an reinstatement of the Assault Weapons Ban, which had expired in 2004, shot up above the critical 50% mark according to some polls, as did support for banning high-capacity magazines and even semi-automatic handguns.[10] Americans in support of greater gun control made their demands heard on television, in print, and online. Facebookers posted pictures of French cheese and assault weapons, wondering why the former were illegal but the latter legal. Others demanded an end to all guns that "spray bullets." As the outcry against guns unfolded in the week after the Newtown Massacre, the NRA stayed silent, with a promise to add a "meaningful" contribution exactly one week after the tragic events that took place in Connecticut.

What were they doing in the meantime? One can only speculate. But their proposal – to introduce more guns into schools by increasing police presence, arming teachers, and ending pistol-free zones – suggests that they were shrewdly

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[10] See "In campaign for tougher gun laws, Obama and allies work to tilt public opinion" in *The Washington Post* (2013).

weighing the strategic contributions they could make: despite the initial public shock at the 'insensitivity' of the plan, the NRA's proposal was deceptively well-crafted. School officials already turn to the criminal justice system to deal with disciplinary problems, and many schools now look more architecturally like prisons, with metal detectors, surveillance, and armed security (Kupchick, 2010). About one-third of American schools already have police presence. The NRA's proposal simply took this development and pushed it further. In doing so, the NRA called the bluff of gun control interests by betting that what happens in the aftermath of the Newtown, CT shootings would depend not only on what Americans think about guns but also on whether Americans were willing to reject the "tough on crime" politics that has penetrated neighborhoods, homes, and schools for the last several decades (Simon, 2007; Kupchick, 2010; Garland, 2002; Rios, 2011).

The NRA's task, then, was to use "tough on crime" politics to make an offer to the American public that left gun rights untouched. And by subsequent polls, it appears that the NRA accomplished this objective, detracting from support for an Assault Weapons Ban by offering a more appealing alternative: in a Gallup poll conducted on December 18th, 2012, 87% of respondents said that increased police presence in schools would be very effective (53%) or somewhat effective (34%) in preventing mass shootings in school (Newport, 2012b). While increasing police presence was ranked at the top of six solutions Gallup included in the survey, the Assault Weapons Ban came in at fourth after increased police presence in schools, increased government spending on healthcare, and decreasing gun violence in the media, with 63% responding that an Assault Weapons Ban would be very or somewhat effective. And despite all of the public outcry against the NRA and its proposal, the organization itself continued to enjoy favor among the American public: 54% of respondents to a Gallup in late December 2012 said they viewed the NRA very favorably (21%) and mostly favorably (33%) (Newport, 2012a).

But perhaps even more surprising than the public's support for the NRA's proposal and the NRA itself is that after the dust had settled and the month of December came to a close, Americans made a profound statement of their pro-gun sensibilities: 74% of Gallup respondents to a late December 2012 poll opposed a ban on handguns, *the highest ever percentage recorded*. And while they supported a ban on high-capacity magazines in the majority, 51% still opposed a ban on assault weapons. Indeed, even though 58% of respondents said that they wanted stricter gun laws *in general*, when given *specific* laws to support, they opposed almost all of them (Saad, 2012). These numbers suggest that far more Americans support gun rights than actually own guns, and far more Americans view the NRA favorably than are members (the NRA has a rough membership of 4 million). Even after a tragedy like Newtown, CT. Or because of it?

The Everyday Politics of Guns

The reason for this continued support – I have argued – is that many Americans do not view guns simply as 'killing machines' that 'spray bullets' to destroy innocent lives. In the right hands, gun advocates maintain, guns are tools of pleasure (i.e., hunting and target shooting) as well as protection and policing. For some, guns provide a straightforward, last-stop measure to address problems of social disorder, and the fears that gun carriers address by turning to

guns are 'rational' in the sociological sense that they are embedded in a contextualized understanding of their surrounding social environs. While some gun advocates rail about the "commencement of 1776" (to paraphrase talk show host and Second Amendment activist Alex Jones's dramatic performance on CNN's Piers Morgan show in the wake of the Newtown, CT, shootings) and "imaginary Hitlers" aiming to take away their guns and institute a Nazi-style totalitarian government (as per John Stewart's analysis of Alex Jones), not all gun carriers and gun activists are driven by paranoid, doomsday fantasies (although some, no doubt, are). In Michigan, I found that by and large, they are driven by an everyday politics that makes it bearable – and honorable – to live in contexts of social insecurity, even as these contexts play out in divergent ways for people situated differently along the lines of race and gender.

Americans who support gun rights for protection purposes and embrace gun carry, then, are viewing the problem of gun violence from the other end of the barrel than gun control advocates; in the eyes of gun rights advocates, gun control advocates believe naively that the state is willing to and capable of protecting Americans. This is an untenable assumption to proponents of gun rights, who see arrogance and elitism: gun rights proponents lament, for example, that gun control advocates – particularly politicians with extensive security detail – promote gun bans in one breath while hiring private security in the next. The NRA, of course, actively cultivates these attitudes: one advertisement put together by the organization after the Sandy Hook shootings asks, "Are the President's kids more important than yours?...Mr. Obama demands the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes, but he's just another elitist hypocrite when it comes to it comes to a fair share of security. Protection for their kids, and gun-free zones for ours."

What does this caricature of gun control advocates – and it is, of course, a caricature than amplifies some aspects of the gun control platform while eliding others – tell us about those who embrace guns?

On the one hand, this lamentation is explained by studies that emphasize gun politics as conservative backlash politics: this indictment of gun control advocates as arrogant elitists can be read as an articulation of the anti-statist, backlash politics that have long rallied Americans into opposition to the federal government, starting with Barry Goldwater's ill-fated campaign in 1964. The NRA's post-Sandy Hook advertisement, and the broader stance of anti-elitism it represents, sits well with analyses such as Melzer's (2009), who emphasizes how the NRA uses culture war rhetoric to galvanize pro-gun America: situating Obama as Public Enemy #1 in the culture wars against traditional American values, the gun lobby channels anti-Obama sentiment into a pro-gun agenda.

However, backlash politics is not the entire story to explaining the anti-elitism embedded in gun politics: this narrative sheds light on the "top-down" dynamics through which organizations like the NRA mobilize pro-gun sentiment, but not the "bottom-up" dynamics that make certain politics and policies appealing. The NRA is a central figure in the story of contemporary gun politics in America – as scholars such as Melzer (2009) have already persuasively shown. But this is not the entire story. Indeed, analyses of the NRA must be understood alongside another story centered on the everyday concerns of those who feel left behind, ignored, and stranded by the political system in the US – concerns that are also expressed through guns and that are not confined to the

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white, conservative men who dominate popular images of gun proponents.

The gun carriers I interviewed in Michigan were aware that they were part of the "flyover states" – a part of America rendered irrelevant to political decision-making and ridiculed in national media. This is the part of America that many are desperate to leave – if they can. Michigan, after all, actually *lost* population from 2000 to 2010 because of the exodus of people leaving the state. For those who staying behind, then, one option is to turn to guns as a form of security. Not everyone chooses to carry a gun, but the number of people that do has expanded significantly since concealed carry legislation was passed in Michigan in 2001.

The act of carrying a gun transforms gun politics from an ideological debate to a concrete part of life. The exercise of gun rights is not a way to *talk* about solutions to problems of social insecurity: gun carry provides a way to *practice* that solution and, in doing so, embrace a particular variant of good citizenship (what I call the citizen-protector) that sets gun carriers off from others. As I have argued, this moral politics of guns is particularly appealing to men looking to distinguish themselves as honorable against criminal, violent or lazy men. The gun represents not an *affront* to life but rather an *affirmation* of one's commitment to life; carrying a gun is thus a powerful mix of practical and moral politics that embeds guns in everyday life. Americans who embrace gun-rights for protection purposes see themselves as responsible, law-abiding people who are unfairly punished by the misdeeds of others; they are angry that guns are misunderstood as criminal objects rather than the tools of responsible citizenship. Indeed, they are offended by being deemed the objects of state control rather than seen as collaborators, with police, in instituting social order and protecting innocent lives.

Echoing Sherman's (2009) attention to the centrality of moral politics that emerge in response to particular kinds of socio-economic outcomes (in her case, poverty), I maintain that any attempt to engage pro-gun Americans that ignores the gendered and racialized moral politics that undergird pro-gun sentiment *and* the problems that this moral politics is rallied to solve (namely, protection and policing) is bound to fail. This emphasis on the moral politics of gun carry, indeed, reveals the significance of racial and gender ideologies in shaping how people understand the guns that they do carry: gun carriers may understand themselves as citizen-defenders (generally, women) or as citizen-protectors (generally, men) who see themselves as *supplementing* (all gun carriers) as well as *supplanting* (gun carriers of color and some white gun carriers) public law enforcement.

The policies proposed by gun control advocates are oftentimes problematic because they do not adequately account for the everyday, moral politics that draw people to guns. On the one hand, by ignoring the moral politics behind Americans' turn to guns in the first place, gun control policies – especially gun bans – may ultimately serve to galvanize pro-gun sentiment in the US rather than ameliorate it. On the other hand, even as gun control advocates promote widely popular and well-intentioned proposals, such as universal background checks, these policies often fail to have the concrete appeal that gun rights offer. Indeed, the gun control lobby emphasizes more abstract legislative solutions that may reduce crime for Americans in general but will not necessarily help any individual American faced with a violent crime. Meanwhile, the NRA

promotes a concrete, tangible solution that gives *individuals* the tool to enact a particular citizen-protector capacity (i.e., buy a gun, get a concealed carry license, and defend yourself should you be attacked) and embeds guns in everyday life not only through concealed carry laws but also an array of other training and firearms-related recreational activities. In other words, my research revealed that the two sides of the gun debate are operating at two very different levels, which disadvantages the gun control movement. If the gun control lobby is absent in this dissertation, it is because it was absent in the lives of the people I studied. This is not to stress the inevitability of one side of the debate or the other as much as critically examine the success of the gun rights movement from a different angle than usually emphasized in the literature on gun politics.

My goal in undertaking this dissertation, therefore, has not been to pontificate about gun control or glorify gun rights, nor has it been it to make a criminological argument about the effect of guns on crime. Had I wanted to enter into a debate on whether more guns equal more or less crime, I would have entered into a quagmire of inconclusive analyses that have failed to adjudicate this deceptively complex relationship. And such criminological calculations are divorced both from political reality and from the concrete, everyday realities faced by the Americans who choose to integrate guns into their everyday lives. Indeed, unpacking the gun debate requires a sociological argument centered on the meanings people attach to guns, rather than the criminogenic significance of guns, precisely because there are multiple truths at work in the gun debate: statistical 'truths' calculated in gun rights and gun control think tanks; legal 'truths' proclaimed by lawyers, legal analysts, and US Supreme Court Justices; rhetorical 'truths' circulated by Americans on all sides of this debate who fear violent victimization; and embodied 'truths' worn on the bodies of gun carriers as they move through contexts of neoliberal insecurity.

But in emphasizing how the complexities of the gun debate pit Americans against one another, we risk forgetting that individuals who fall on both sides of the gun debate *do* share some commonality. They both want a safer America, with fewer murders, fewer violent crimes, fewer rapes. Americans on both sides, I believe, are sincerely motivated by concerns about violence and violent crime. Both sides are afraid of an "armed nation" of criminals.[11] And both rely on armed Americans – whether they have either a police badge or a concealed carry license – to protect them from criminal threat. Whether we talk about banning guns or, alternatively, requiring all residents to own a firearm (a law recently passed by one town in Georgia), guns themselves act as a proxy soluation for problems that concern both sides of the gun debate. The core difference, of course, is that these two camps imagine two different roles for guns: one said stipulates that guns are the *cause* of violence and thus a vehicle of increased insecurity and vulnerability; the other stipulates that guns are the *solution* to violence and thus a vehicle of protection and policing. The gun debate, therefore, is not just about the Second

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[11] In an American context where poverty, Blackness, and crime are linked together (as I argued in Chapter 1), both sides are rallied by racialized fears of Black criminality that *occupy a central – if rarely acknowledged –* position within *both* gun control and gun rights discourse. Of course, both sides also argue that their position is the truly "anti-racist" one: gun control advocates cite the disproportionate gun shot-related deaths among African Americans, while gun rights advocates refer to the Deacons for Defense, the Black Panthers, and the Ossian Sweet case as examples of Second Amendment rights exercised against oppression and inequality.

Amendment or guns themselves: it is about the basic social organization of policing and protection.

From Gun Politics to the Politics of Protection and Policing

As criminologists of the contemporary American carceral system remind us (Bayley & Shearing, 1996; Beckett & Murakawa, 2012; Desmond & Valdez, 2012; Gilliom, 2001; Shearing & Marks, 2011; Simon, 2007), the work of the American criminal justice system is not confined to the boundaries of the prison cell, the courtroom, or the back of a police car. Yet, scholars often treat the coercive gist of this carceral system as if its main effect has been to control (usually socially marginalized) Americans, while the state and market become bloated locuses of ever-changing techniques and modalities of social control, coercion and punitiveness. The statistics often cited – that 1 in 100 Americans are incarcerated; that there are more African Americans implicated in the criminal justice system now than the number of enslaved African Americans at any time during slavery – demonstrate the sheer monstrosity of this neoliberal system of social control.

Yet an exclusive emphasis on Americans as punitively policed, prosecuted and punished obscures how everyday Americans are also actively participating in this system not as *state actors* or as *market actors* (two kinds of actors that scholars have paid a great deal of attention to) but as *political actors, that is, as citizen-protectors*. This participation is an enactment of good citizenship, centered on the Americans' right to defend themselves against criminals and their duty to defend others more broadly. Empowered to engage in the coercive work of policing, these Americans are both *stepping* in for the state and, in some cases, *standing up* to the state. And the statistics here are also startling: there are 200 to 300 justifiable homicides each year, and eight licensed gun carriers for every incarcerated American. This study therefore makes two scholarly contributions that might also shape future public debates on gun politics:

First, *this study forces us to rethink what we mean by "third-party policing,"* "private policing," and other terms that capture the seepage of policing duties outside of the boundaries of formal public law enforcement (Desmond & Valdez, 2013; Loader & Walker, 2001; Monahan, 2010). Rather than emphasizing how police are adopting new strategies of social control (e.g., Beckett and Herbert (2011)), this study shows how new actors are participating in a much more traditional notion of policing – the use of force for the enactment of social order. I want to be careful in summarizing this argument, as gun carriers are not in the habit of enforcing laws more broadly or even intervening in crimes for which they are sanctioned to do so. Yet, gun carry forces gun carriers to think about their obligations to defend not only themselves but also others, and it provides them with a discursive tool – "my gun makes everyone safer" – to navigate the uncomfortable reality of the heavy weight of a lethal tool on their hip. Gun carry further pushes the question of how, and it what contexts, third-party policing and private policing buttress or erode state monopolies on policing and forces us to think in parallel sovereignties, competing police powers, and capillary forms of coercion. None of this is particularly new with respect to market actors; scholars have long documented these trends with respect to those acting on behalf of the market and the state. But gun carriers are poised between the state and the market, acting under a particular notion of "good citizenship" that

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extends the punitive state beyond the market and onto the hips of everyday Americans who wield not the expertise of the state or the market but the everyday experiences of social insecurity. Policing is not simply a state technology or a new kind of market: with gun carry, policing becomes a political culture.

Thus, secondly, this study asks us to rethink policing as political culture rather than a social function of the state or (perhaps) the market. Cultural sociologists emphasize culture as a set of tools and practical schema embedded in practice and aimed at navigating unfamiliar problems embedded in social institutions (social institution that, ironically, may shape the very "solution" for the problem to be solved). The everyday efficaciousness of guns as tools – not in the sense that gun carriers mean when they say that guns are "just a tool, like a hammer" but as tools in a "cultural toolkit" (Swidler, 1986) – does much in explaining the basic attractiveness of guns beyond their rarefied ideological appeal. Policing involves *an embodied involvement with a weapon of force, whether merely carried or actually used.* Gun carry shows that when not monopolized by the state or even by market actors, policing becomes embedded as a everyday, moralized capacity that allows individuals to navigate one set of social problems (i.e., feelings of social insecurity, fear of crime, etc.), even while presenting another set of social problems (i.e., the reality of a lethal object on their hips). The practices and discourses that grow up around these problems – from which holster to use to the insistence that an "armed society is a polite society" – are captured in a particular brand of citizenship that situates civilian guns not only as good for individuals but also good for society in general. This understanding of policing as political culture therefore extends the seminal work of policing scholars such as Bittner (1970), who emphasizes the liminal role of the police in the pursuit of social order. To the millions of Americans who carry a gun, gun carry reworks the "unsavory" nature of police work and remakes it as an attractive ideal of citizenship.

As described in the introduction, the "no duty to retreat" doctrine and the ideology of "patriotic insurgency" together provide the cultural tools for imagining the contemporary gun carrier as a Good Samaritan participating in the maintenance of social order through the generalized practice of gun carry. However, chalking the proliferation and prevalence of gun carry to history effaces the contemporary, everyday *pulls* on a variety of different kinds of Americans to take up guns. It is not simply inertia that motivates Americans to go through the time-consuming and expensive process of obtaining a concealed carry license and navigate the unpleasant reality that they, like the criminals against whom they presumably defend themselves, can kill (Collins, 2009). Rather, guns are taken up and carried by people who are "not so dumb" and "not so passive" (Gamson, 1992) and who must navigate circumstances not "of their own choosing." These circumstances, I have argued, center on perceptions of an ineffective, but at times aggression, police force. Gun carry is both an apology for and a critique of contemporary policing: it is an attempt to *recuperate* policing while also *rejecting* the state's monopoly on it, a strategy that arguably enhances the social status of men by charging them with the social utility of protecting not only themselves but also others. The NRA presses policing as a problem, and it further promotes guns as a solution to this problem by emphasizing, as O'Neill (2007) argues, the masculine heroism of those men *and*

women who do use guns to protect themselves from violent threat. However, this message would be far less appealing without a social context that reinforces the NRA's message.

The Social Context of Gun Politics

This dissertation uses an admittedly unlikely case – the blue state of Michigan – to unpack contemporary gun culture and think about gun culture *not* as an ahistorical example of American exceptionalism but rather as a response to contemporary concerns. Why is Michigan a critical case for doing this? There are, after all, not one but many gun cultures in the US. There is frontier gun culture in the West that has taken root in relatively unpopulated states like Montana, Utah, Arizona, and Wyoming; in many of these states, gun advocates have managed to push through legislation that removes licensing requirements for concealed carry as well as pass the Firearms Freedom Act, which maintains that guns banned under Federal law can be manufactured within-state as long as they do not cross state lines. Meanwhile, Southern states, like Louisiana, Georgia, and Alabama, also have a distinct gun culture, more squarely rooted in the so-called "culture of honor" documented by Nesbitt and Cohen (1996). Then there are the "anti-gun" cultures of the coastal states like New York, Massachusetts and California, where gun control has enjoyed much more popular approval than in other states. And finally, there is the more urban and suburban gun culture of Midwestern, rustbelt states like Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. And while I use geographic markers to distinguish these different gun cultures, I acknowledge that there are significant overlaps across regions. Moreover, the historical trajectories that have shaped these gun cultures in distinct ways (e.g., frontier settlement in the West, or Jim Crow in the South) likewise cannot be fully separated.

So what can the case of Michigan tell us that an examination of gun culture in Texas, Arizona, or Montana cannot? Because of its economic precarity, racial inequalities, violent crime rates, and failing public infrastructure, Michigan has been nationally touted as an "American Nightmare:" a smattering of new books and films, such as Charlie LeDuff's *Detroit: An Autoposy*, Mark Binelli's *Detroit is the Place to Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis* and the film *Detropia*, have attempted to use Michigan as a harbinger of what lies ahead for the US as it adjusts to a new socio-economic landscape in the post-2008 recession. Michigan's gun culture is situated in these broader trends of economic instability and elusive recovery, and this is why Michigan provides a useful case: as a relative newcomer to the concealed carry movement in 2001, Michigan helps reveal the contemporary nuances of American gun politics that other states with more entrenched gun culture cannot. Michigan helps reveal what is *new* about contemporary gun politics: the emphasis on concealed carry is an entirely new phenomenon; the NRA's role in shaping gun culture through concealed carry is new; and the problems that Americans use guns to address are novel as well. While Michigan is not generalizable to all states, the purchase of this research is that as other states follow similar paths as Michigan in terms of the neoliberal reformulation of public services (and it appears that many states are on this path), we can expect to see similar patterns in terms of gun politics. Therefore, Michigan provides a window into dynamics that may increasingly characterize Americans' reasons for turning to guns.

A Pistol Grip on Our Sociological Imaginations

With 300 million guns, the very material preponderance of guns in America is intimidating. When people compare the US to the UK or Australia, both of which implemented gun bans and confiscation programs, they forget that Australia, for example, confiscated about 640,000 guns. This is a flash in the pan compared to the stock of guns in the hands of American civilians.

Gun rights proponents often maintain that "An armed society is a polite society." The gun debate, I would argue, has been focused too much on whether we are, or should be, an armed society and far too little on how we can become the sort of "polite" society compatible with guns. It is wishful thinking to believe that a law passed, no matter how ambitious it may be, could eliminate 300 million guns along with the pro-gun sentiment in the US that is so deeply rooted in the everyday lives of Americans. Such laws may be more likely to *galvanize* pro-gun sentiment than quell it – as happened with the 1994 Assault Weapons Ban. Policies emphasizing the *supply* rather than the *demand* for guns are misguided for this reason. Rather, the concerns of pro-gun Americans should be taken seriously in order to understand the social bases of pro-gun sentiment, rather than eliminate it by legislative fiat. Gun owners, carriers and advocates, moreover, should not be treated as a homogeneous block. Americans carry guns because they deem them relevant and pertinent to their lives, but the reasons they do so are embedded in complex racial and gendered ideologies, structures and practices surrounding the social organization of protection and policing.

Taking their concerns seriously, however, does not mean embracing guns as a panacea to the social problem of violence. Despite catchy phrases like "more guns equal less crime," criminologists have yet to decisively show that to be the case (they haven't, by the way, been able to decisively show the opposite is true, either). And while I agree that the American Bill of Rights distinguishes our country for the better, the Bill of Rights matters *not* because it makes us better individuals but because it makes for a better society. By normalizing guns as tools of self-defense and moralizing their use, we risk making a virtue out of necessity and turning an individual-level response to a legitimate social concern into a cherished value. Focused on what we are doing individually to protect ourselves from crime (whether installing home alarm systems or carrying guns), we may well stop trying to answer – or perhaps stop asking altogether – bigger questions about the nexus of crime, racial inequality, and socio-economic decline that plague many American cities. A gun becomes a substitute for these questions because it makes them irrelevant: after all, this reasoning goes, if someone tries to victimize me, I have a gun. No need to pursue the issue of crime further. This is the real effect of our gun debate – to forestall frank conversations about anything except guns.

If our most important objective is to simply ensure that "I've got mine," we cannot, in the end, address the deep-rooted causes of violence in America. All we can do is react to it. This means that instead of challenging the terms of the so-called "War on Crime" – a mythical war that has sanctioned the growth of the prison-industrial complex, the criminalization of racial minorities, the growth of the police state, and most recently an intricate web of state surveillance – we simply play into it. I do think that self-defense is a legitimate reason to own a gun, and I am more sympathetic than most sociologists on this issue. But at some

point, we must stop and ask ourselves whether the reason we're carrying guns is to stop crime – or to participate in the war. I found that for some gun carriers, the police scrutiny that comes along with carry a gun, in fact, did lead them to a broader critique of racialized social control in the United States. But for most gun carriers, guns served as a block in the sense that they provided a too-easy answer to the problem of crime in America. Indeed, guns provide the illusion of having a solution to the intractable problem of crime. Or, said differently, guns solve problems for the people who carry them, but are they the problems we – both within gun culture and outside of it – should be spending so much time, effort and money trying to solve? This is not an argument against the Second Amendment or the right to self-defense; rather, it is an argument *for* accepting that the Second Amendment allows Americans to use guns for self-defense (as the US Supreme Court has already decided), and then moving on to a better gun debate that does not focus single-minded on guns but engages broader questions of policing, protection and self-defense.

Speramus Meliora; Resurget Cineribus

How, then, do we move forward in this deadlocked gun debate? It is customary for academic books on guns to end with an endorsement of the typical gun control (or, more rarely, gun rights) policies. While it would be nice to tie up the book in a nice bow, I find it self-congratulatory and delusional to whole-heartedly endorse either side. Instead, I'd like to take the conversation in a different direction, one that would take seriously policy proposals that regulate police violation and address inequalities in police protection, with sincere attention to the racialized and gendered organization of protection and policing, and we should be first and foremost concerned with making guns socially irrelevant (as opposed to illegal).[12]

Should we aim to live in a society without guns? The difficulty in answering this question revolves around the fact that we are all implicated in the gun debate in very different ways: the United States is an extremely unequal society, and it is a country where public law enforcement, crime rates, income, access to healthcare, access to education and a variety of other resources are distributed in such a way that we have very different relations to violence, guns and crime. Personally, I think it is naïve and dangerous to advocate for gun control in contexts like Detroit, where police response time is 56 minutes on a good day. But I also think it is unwise and perilous to endorse the normalization of justifiable homicide by police and non-sworn citizens alike, a normalization that is encouraged by the increased reliance of firearms as everyday tools of self-defense. There is no clear-cut answer to the question of guns because guns are embedded in different, and starkly unequal, realities of policing, protection and insecurity. Meanwhile, with an estimated 300 million guns, we will probably never live in a United States without guns – at least not in our lifetimes.

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[12] It is worth mentioning the parallels between the gun debate and the abortion debate. The approach stated here is not unlike a similar "compromise" in the abortion debate: keep abortions legal, but address the factors driving people to abortion so as to minimize the number of people lawfully accessing abortion. Many gun control advocates, not unlike anti-abortion activists, focus on challenging legal structure rather than social structure, even though the latter approach is more politically feasible and faces far fewer Constitutional barriers.

None of this means, however, we should throw in the towel and let the NRA have the final word in the gun debate; indeed, I would argue that by not seriously engaging pro-gun Americans themselves, scholars have become unwitting accomplishes in the wild success of the NRA in driving the gun debate. We should not feel rushed to embrace gun policies that do more to appeal to one side of the gun debate while leaving untouched the deep problems of policing and protection that drive many Americans to guns. Nor should we presume that the policies that comprise gun control, gun rights, and gun regulations are set in stone; after all, most concealed carry laws themselves constitute a form of gun regulation, complete with universal background checks, training requirements and even a registry for CPL holders. And nor should we assume that the preponderance of guns in America dooms us to have a violent-ridden society. It doesn't.

This dissertation shows that guns not only appeal to Americans who embrace the American dream's ideology of self-reliance (i.e., Mitt Romney's "I built it!") but also marginalized Americans who live in an American nightmare that requires this version of self-reliance more as a survival skill than as an ideological "preference." Guns solve problems for the people who bear them. Nevertheless, politicians, policymakers and lobbyist – whether representing gun rights or gun control interests – play a critical role in shaping the contexts in which guns become appealing tools and with what ramifications. As the motto of Detroit goes, *Speramus Meliora; Resurget Cineribus*[13]. Whether, to what extent, and how those "better things" ultimately involve guns is a question of how we – from everyday Americans to top-level lobbyists, politicians and policymakers – address the root causes of demand for firearms.

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[13] We hope for better things; it shall rise from the ashes.

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Appendix A: Population versus Concealed Pistol License Holders in Michigan

Table 1. Population (2010 Census) & CPL Holders (May 2013) by Race	Total Population	Total CPL Holders	White Population	White CPL Holders	African American Population	African American CPL Holders
State of Michigan	9,883,640	393,124 (1 in 25)	7,803,120	328,825 (1 in 24)	1,400,362	60,355 (1 in 24)
Genesee County (Flint & Surrounding)	425,790	20,944 (1 in 20)	320,194	17115 (1 in 19)	88,990	3,753 (1 in 24)
Macomb County (Detroit Suburb)	840,978	34,566 (1 in 24)	716,513	29,661 (1 in 24)	78,211	4,503 (1 in 17)
Oakland County (Detroit Suburb)	1,202,362	53,138 (1 in 23)	934,235	41,093 (1 in 23)	169,533	11,299 (1 in 15)
Wayne County (Detroit & Surrounding)	1,820,584	77,831 (1 in 23)	988,577	41,795 (1 in 24)	733,695	35,557 (1 in 21)

Table 2. Population (2010 Census) & CPL Holders (May 2013) by Gender	Total Population	Total CPL Holders	Male Population	Male CPL Holders	Female Population	Female CPL Holders
State of Michigan	9,883,640	393,124 (1 in 25)	4,672,297	313,010 (1 in 16)	5,001,122	79,537 (1 in 63)
Genesee County (Flint & Surrounding)	425,790	20,944 (1 in 20)	205,231	16,260 (1 in 13)	220,559	4,643 (1 in 47)
Macomb County (Detroit Suburb)	840,978	34,566 (1 in 24)	408,715	28,475 (1 in 14)	432,263	6,047 (1 in 72)
Oakland County (Detroit Suburb)	1,202,362	53,138 (1 in 23)	583,146	41,967 (1 in 14)	619,216	11,095 (1 in 56)
Wayne County (Detroit & Surrounding)	1,820,584	77,831 (1 in 23)	762,299	57,566 (1 in 13)	944,883	20,172 (1 in 47)

Appendix B: Interviewee Demographics

Table 1. Race (N = 71)			
White	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial
62 (87%)	7 (10%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)

Table 2. Class (N = 71)				
Employed or looking for work as…	Blue Collar	White Collar	Security Work	Retired/Not Looking for Work
	28 (42%)	30 (45%)	8 (12%)	5 (7%)

Table 3. Gender (N = 71)	
Male	Female
60 (85%)	11 (15%)

Table 4. Political Identification (N = 71)	
Left-Leaning	Right-Leaning
9 (13%)	62 (87%)

Table 5. Residency (N = 71)		
Metro Detroit & Flint	Other Urban/Suburban (e.g., Ann Arbor, Lansing, Grand Rapids)	Rural
49 (69%)	8 (11%)	14 (20%)