

Appel Fellowship Project
Summer 2020
Desmond Mantle

Author's Note

The following manuscript consists of the results of my Appel Fellowship project, conducted over the summer of 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I was unable to travel as planned and therefore interviewed far fewer people than I had initially expected. I hope to conduct another set of interviews next summer pursuant to the adjusted Appel Fellowship guidelines.

This project was inspired by Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, which compiled the oral histories of several individuals from diverse perspectives speaking about the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. My hope was to use that same technique to give the reader a sense of the breadth of the gun culture of the American West. Gun culture has become a polarized and politicized issue. My goal is to augment the reader's understanding of its complexities by providing a series of oral histories that showcase the diversity of individual gun culture experiences and humanize the issues so often discussed as part of debates on government policy.

The first four interviewees approved their transcripts for inclusion in this project; the fifth, final transcript is pending approval and has therefore been included anonymously. The others were offered anonymity, but none of them chose to take that option. Two of the interviews included here took place over phone, and two took place over Zoom. One of the things that excites me most about next summer is my hope that I will be able to conduct interviews in person.

I would like to thank Claremont McKenna College; the Appel Fellowship benefactor, Joel Appel; my advisor, Professor John Pitney; the Appel Fellowship Coordinator, Professor Christine Crockett; the Sponsored Internships and Experiences Director, Evan Wollen; my Mock Trial coach and CMC Deputy General Counsel, Marcie Gardner; my peers in the 2020 Appel cohort; and all of my interviewees thus far: Ron Maass, Yafeuh Balogun, Ryan Lopez, Tracy DuPrez, and Angela McArdle.

Readers should be aware that the following content contains profanity, descriptions of violence, and discussions of racism, sexism, and sexual violence. I felt it essential to include these elements due to the nature of the debate around guns. In many ways, the gun debate is a debate about the causes, the effects, and even the definition of violence. The views expressed by the individuals quoted in this project are not necessarily the views of the author, advisor, coordinator, benefactor, or Claremont McKenna College.

Without any further delay, I welcome you to read the words of those who generously donated their time to speak with me.

Ron Maass is a retired Captain of the San Bernardino Police Department. He and I were connected through Claremont McKenna College Deputy General Counsel, Marcie Gardner. After getting in touch, we set up a phone interview and spoke for an hour. The following are his words from that exchange.

"I just wish we had gotten there faster."

Ron Maass

Retired Captain, San Bernardino Police Department

Interview conducted July 13, 2020, 10:02 A.M. Pacific Daylight Time

I worked for over 25 years in law enforcement,
from '93 when I started as a reserve
to my retirement in 2019.

I originally was interested in federal law enforcement,
um,
coming out of college
and was pursuing that path,
um,
and had actually gone through the entire application process for the FBI
and was awaiting a selection for the academy
when they went into a hiring freeze.

Um,
this was in the early 90s,
and
while they were in that hiring freeze,
they did not know how long that would last,
and so they kinda kept updating me on the- the extent of the hiring freeze
and in one of those conversations,
the-
the agent that had been in charge of my oral board was -
who was the one that was calling me all the time -
I asked him a question, uh,
What could I do to
improve my resume, so to speak,
in this
internal period of time
while we were waiting
for the conclusion of the freeze
so that I'd increase my chances even further of getting selected,
uh,
'cause what they told me

was that I'd missed by, you know, just a sliver
of getting in that last academy class
and one of the recommendations had been -
actually, there were three recommendations.
Er, a selection of three.

Um,
law school,
law enforcement,
or sit for the CPA's exam.
And I'd been in finance for a number of years,
I- I believed I qualified
to prob'ly sit for the CPA's exam.
Not interested in doin' that.
At the time, I was not interested in goin' back to school again.
I was pretty burned out on college.
And I had looked at
municipal and local law enforcement
on the East Coast
and
had not found it en- enticing because,
um,
most agencies back East are structured very differently than they are in California.
Uh, a patrol officer - a regular patrol officer - when they encounter a major crime,
regardless of the day or night,
they'll call out detectives;
they have 24-hour detectives.
And then they sit around and don't do a whole lot after that.

And that sounded pretty darn boring to me.
I'm a
very hands-on kind of person.
And I made the- the improper presumption
that that's what law enforcement was like across the country.
And so,
when they suggested
law enforcement,
I thought, well, I'll take a look,
but I- I just can't believe-
I'm not sure I'd enjoy doin' that.

And I got into lookin' at it,
and realized
there was such a thing as a Reserve Police Officer,
which meant I could stay in finance, banking,
and be a part-time police officer for free,
and called, um, the agent back,
and
discussed that with him.
He said, oh yeah, that'll work.
And so I started seeking out the opportunity to become a Reserve Police Officer.
Ultimately, I was hired by the Pomona Police Department
to be a reserve.

Um,
it just so happened that I,
through that process,
discovered that West Coast law enforcement's very different
than the agencies I'd looked at back East.
And,
a regular patrol officer is much more engaged in their investigations.
I, uh, I like using the brain.
And so,
um,
I found that that was
a much more satisfying job than I thought it would be,
and then also realized that I was more of an adrenaline junkie than I've ever
truly understood.
And, I got started in that
and decided to go full-time,
um,
and while I was at the regular academy
for full-time for San Bernardino PD,
the- the FBI came out of its hiring freeze,
followed me up,
wanted to put me through an accelerated
application process,
'cause they'd revamped their entire process,
and
I said,
thanks, but no thanks,

I realized I was enjoying municipal law enforcement more than I thought I would enjoy, uh, federal law enforcement.

Um,

[on December 2nd, 2015,]

I was in my office at the station.

At the time, I was the Operations Captain.

Um,

doin'

my day to day

paperwork in the office.

I always monitored the primary channel of the police radio in my office;

there's a speaker in there.

Um,

I heard the initial call go out, um,

shots heard, shots fired,

down in that area.

Um,

unfortunately, in our city,

that

was a very common occurrence.

And, um,

it doesn't

quite-

[*he sighs*]

doesn't quite raise the radar,

quite as hard as it might in other communities.

Um,

but very shortly after that,

the dispatcher,

um,

came over the air and said, uh,

possible active shooter.

And that changed everything,

at that moment.

That instant.

Um, I proceeded to
jump up from my desk.
I yelled out to the other administrators,
active shooter,
and its location,
1365 South Waterman.
Um,
I rushed out of my office
down the stairs.
I saw
an investigation sergeant
comin' toward me down the hallway
doin' the same thing,
um,
jumped into my police car -
it's an unmarked police car,
lights and sirens -
uh,
exited the station,
noticed that that sergeant was exiting the station in his car right behind me,
um,
noticed he lost traction a little bit comin' out of the station
and kinda fish-tailed,
he came out so hard.

Um,
we were kinda getting updates on the- the radio still,
of, um,
you know,
numerous suspects,
anywhere from two to five suspects,
dressed in black,
all armed with some sort of assault rifle.
Um,
I am
movin' along pretty good,
lights and sirens.
I see the sergeant
behind me.

After a couple of blocks,
um,
couple of black-and-whites
ended up in front of me,
and so I was able to get behind them.
You'll find that traffic moves out of the way of a, uh,
black and white police car with lights and sirens on
much better than it does
an unmarked car with, um, just those few lights on it.
Um,
so I was able to trail them,
headed down to the, uh, IRC.
Um,
as we turned
eastbound on
I believe it was Orange Show Road,
um,
from Sierra Way,
I happened to glance back,
and I saw that same sergeant,
um,
went into a spin,
couple of 360s.
Um,
and I'm watchin' that in my back-
my rear-view mirror,
and now I'm wonderin',
is he gonna crash,
and if he crashes,
do I need to go back to help him?
Or do I continue on?

Fortunately, he-
he came to a stop before striking anything,
um,
so I continued on,
I got there,
um,
right behind those two black-and-whites.

We were probably -
well, part-way there, I heard that,
uh,
one of the lieutenants
had gone on-scene,
the first to go on-scene,
and called out information that
they believed the shooters were still inside,
um, it is an active shooter,
um,
unknown number of subjects possibly down,
um,
and
as I pull into the parking lot,
um,
I'm poppin' the trunk -
I'm always a very hands-on, very active,
uh,
person.
Um,
as a sergeant, as a lieutenant, and continuing as a captain,
I always would get involved
in
uh, critical incidents in the field,
so I always carried a tactical vest in the trunk.
I was in a shirt and tie that day.

So I'm goin' to my trunk
to get my vest out -
actually, I'm poppin' the door open
and poppin' the trunk.
And a sergeant,
an old academy classmate of mine,
who was one of the cars in front of me,
is-
turns to me and asks,
you know,
do you have a vest?
And I said yeah,
I'm grabbin' it right now.

And, uh,
the lieutenant has called for a team to set up to go in
on the north side of the building
in question,
which is the southernmost of the three IRC buildings,
while he is taking a team in from the east side.

So I've got
myself,
a sergeant,
a patrol officer,
and a patrol trainee,
and we moved to that north side,
we're kind of parked to the
northwest corner of the building,
in the parking lot,
prob'ly a bit too close.
Actually, we were too close.
It could've gone wrong,
uh, we were just trying to get there.
And, uh,
I noticed that that building -
and I've been in that building before for some training,
years prior -
really noticed for the first time that that building,
at least on the north side in particular,
was floor to ceiling tinted glass
for both stories.
So you couldn't really see inside, but
people inside could probably see out.
And we went to the door, to try to open the door.
The door was closed; it had a- a card reader
lock on a pedestal,
maybe ten, fifteen feet -
twenty feet -
north of the- the door itself.

We were feeling very exposed at that point,
or at least I was,

and so I- I turned to the other officers,
let's take cover.

There was, to the northwest corner,
or, I'm sorry, northeast corner,
of the building,
there was a-
a concrete structure kind of like a,
uh, I think it's an emergency generator and a trash enclosure.
So we started to move over towards that to try to get some cover,
and, just as we started movin' that way,
that north - one of the north doors popped open.

A person ran out in, you know, just in headlong flight.

I mean, absolutely panicked.

And, uh,
the door closed before we could get close to it.

So I directed

the, uh,

trainee,

don't let that door close again.

I figured the trainee would be the fastest of us.

The others of us were
much older.

And,

I started moving back towards that door expecting more people to come poppin' out.

And, as I got closer to the door,

I'm on the pathway immediately north of the door -

it's a set of double doors -

both doors popped open,

and I was in a flood of

eighty-plus people.

Just coming out, all of 'em just

absolutely panicked.

Uh, fear-stricken.

Frantic.

Um,

and as they're-

they're

comin' out,
I start scanning their- their hands and eyes.
Um,
hands are- are what kill you,
that's what can, uh, hold a weapon.
And eyes are what can tell you, uh,
what's goin' on in their mind.
So I was kinda lookin' for what I referred to as the-
referred to as the "angry eyes," or, or "evil eyes."
Somebody that didn't show just, that level of panic in their eyes.
'Cause I was very concerned about
one or more of the suspects
tryin' to- to sneak out
in and amongst this crowd.

We started directing the crowd,
towards the center building of the IRC,
the security- unarmed security guard that was there was helping with that.
And, um,
a couple of our plainclothes detectives came runnin' up,
and I directed them
to go stand by with all these people we were evacuating,
so that, uh,
there would be armed security for them
in this other building.
'Cause I still wasn't absolutely convinced that-
I was worried that I would miss
a suspect comin' out,
who would be in and amongst that crowd,
and I didn't want the suspect to be in a room full of unarmed people
and have, uh, just all-out more targets.

Um,
in fact,
when I was getting ready,
before I'd made it to the building,
while I was putting my vest on,
one of our off-duty sergeants came runnin' up to me.
And he and I had been in the SWAT team together,
uh, years prior.

And in fact,
he'd kind of been one of my mentors on the SWAT team,
Good friend.
He was off-duty and heard what was goin' on on his, um,
portable radio
and responded to the scene to help,
and I'm lookin' at him,
and he's in-
he's in plain clothes.
All he's got is his badge and his gun,
um,
and I ask him,
does he have anything he can put on that says "police" on it.
Because I was essentially worried that there would be a,
uh, and accidental shooting
or a blue-on-blue incident,
where somebody that did not recognize
that he was one of us
might engage him mistakenly,
and we would have a- a casualty
that I just, I didn't want to see happen.
Um,
he said he didn't have anything that had "police" on it.
I told him he couldn't come in.
I assigned him to, uh,
establish our first, um, rally point
for incoming assets,
um, north of the buildings on Waterman.
Um, I knew we would need
some sort of marshalling point like that,
and I knew that particular sergeant
could handle it quite readily.
Very skilled, very organized man.
Um, and he did in fact do that,
and he ended up getting a medal for it.
He did a great job.
Um,
though he did have some choice words for me because I wouldn't let him in.
He would be-
tactically, he would be an incredible asset to have inside

because of his knowledge of SWAT.
But I was really worried that he'd get shot accidentally by someone from another agency that didn't recognize him,
and I just,
I,
I didn't want to have that happen.

And so,
goin' back to that stream of people comin' out,
um,
I'd sent those detectives off to-
to stand by with them and provide security for them.
Uh,
we made entry to the north side of the building,
myself and those other three officers- uniformed officers.
And just inside those doors,
there we met up with the lieutenant and those officers that he had made entry with,
um,
in that foyer,
uh, hallway area.

The- the noise inside there
was just
almost beyond description it was so loud.
The fire alarm was goin' off.
You could barely communicate with each other, it was so loud.
As- as soon as I came into the doorway,
the smell of, uh, cordite, burnt cordite gunpowder,
was overwhelming.
The- the strongest I've ever smelled it in my life.
And I've shot in a lot of indoor
shooting ranges.
This blew all of those away.
It was, it was just such a strong odor.
Um,
at that point there were about twelve of us.
Twelve officers.
Um,
couple guys from another agency,
uh,

a neighboring agency,
one of whom had a long gun, a rifle,
uh,
he was on that agency's
Interagency SWAT team,
he was a detective.
Two other detectives with him,
they all had police vests on.
Um,
uniformed personnel from our agency,
with one shotgun and everybody else with handguns.
So we had
one rifle,
one shotgun,
and ten handguns.
And at that point,
we're still under the belief that our shooters are inside,
that they're probably still shooting people,
but we just can't hear it because of the darn sirens.
And we've got anywhere from two to five suspects
actively, um,
killing people.

So we began clearing the-
the first floor,
um,
moving to our west first,
and then along the-
the south-
along the west side of the building, inside,
there was a
bunch of offices and cubicles and whatnot,
through the first door
where we came through.
And as we'd gone through that doorway,
I noticed a staircase to our left,
and as
all the officers came into that office,
I realized nobody was watchin' behind us.
I looked back,

and I happened to look up
and realized that there was a balcony above where we had just walked through
which would've
just been a-
a horrendous kill zone
if somebody had been up there waiting for us.

And so I'm-
I'm trying to communicate with the other officers,
to get some support with me.
I'm trying to cover both the balcony
and the staircase at the same time.
Um,
I got
a couple officers from that first twelve with me.
We held our back,
just to make sure nobody could come in from behind us
while the other officers finished clearing that cubicle area.
When they were done and got to where they couldn't get any further,
they came back to where we were.
And,
we went up the stairs.

Um,
I was one of the-
I think I was the first guy up the stairs,
or one of the first guys up the stairs.
It was-
it was-
there were
about three of us that went all at once
to take that upper landing.
Um,
we got up there.
Nobody to be seen in any direction.
A long, north-south hallway
that pretty much mirror-imaged the north-south hallway that had been on the first floor
for the length of the building.
Um,
there were some restrooms up there.

A couple officers went into the restrooms,
cleared the restrooms.

We found,
uh,
a number of people hiding in the restrooms
and ushered them out of the building.

At this point, more officers are arriving to assist us
from multiple agencies.

Um,
we continued to clear the second floor for every doorway that we could get into,
but we're having trouble getting some doors open.

They're locked.

Um,
that sergeant that I
first encountered -
the one that I'd had -
I'd been a classmate with
and had asked me if I had a vest,
had been in the marked unit ahead of me -
I directed that sergeant to -
to
exit and find somebody in the crowd
that had, uh, a master key
to get us in these other doors, 'cause
all the doors were- were card readers
or some sort of physical key,
as well as
get us breaching tools.

Uh,
breaching tools being a battering ram and a pick.
We carried those in all of our sergeants' cars,
so I knew
that sergeant would have the-
that equipment in the trunk
of their car.

So while we're waiting on that
equipment
and

access items,
so to speak,
to, uh, make it to us,
we continued clearing what we could.
We had several doors
on that second-floor hallway
that we were unable to make entry into.
And so we were holding,
um,
what you'd call long cover
on those doorways in case somebody came pop- poppin' out
while we were clearin' other doorways.
Um,
we cleared everything we could on the second floor.
We had three doorways left
that we could not access.

And,
at that point,
the first breaching tool started to showed up,
and the first SWAT officer from our agency showed up.
We used the breaching tools
to
get into those other three doors,
cleared those,
and
realized at that point that there was no one else-
there appeared to be no one else left in the building.

Um,
'bout that time,
the rest of the SWAT team showed up.
The SWAT team got there very, very quickly.
It just so happened they were in training that day,
uh,
on the north end of the city,
one of their regularly-scheduled training days,
and so-
so they were there
easily within fifteen minutes of-

of the-
fifteen, twenty minutes of the call
that it was an active shooter,
they started arriving.
Uh,
they'd had to transition their weapons.
They'd been doing,
uh,
simunitions training,
which means
that all of their regular guns
had been trans- transformed to fire
the uh, soap rounds,
which requires a different spring and
different barrel,
different mechanism,
um,
in their weapons,
and so they had to switch all that stuff out
while en route down to
the IRC.
'Cause they didn't think the-
the soap rounds,
simunitions rounds,
really aren't gonna
stop anybody.

Um,
so once we finished that initial clear and the-
the SWAT team showed up,
um,
I turned it over to the SWAT team
to do what's called a secondary clear,
which is a more deliberate clear.
Our initial clear is essentially,
we are there,
and we are trying to get people out,
but most importantly,
we're trying to find the shooters
and engage and stop them.

Um,
up to that point in time,
you'd be hard pressed to-
to show, uh,
an active shooter event
in which the suspect fled
prior to the arrival of the police.
Columbine High School,
Aurora, Colorado,
all of those incidents,
the shooter was still there.

Um,
so we were-
I was,
I can't speak for everybody else's
internal thoughts, but
I was absolutely convinced our suspects were still there.
I was absolutely convinced
that we were going to be
engaging them and trying to stop them.
And so every doorway you're goin' through,
every hallway you're entering,
every room you're goin' into,
you're convinced that there may be
one or more of your suspects in there
waiting for you.

Um,
I was-
I was
surprised that we did not
encounter them.

Uh,
and then I was very concerned
that they had slipped out amongst the crowd
that had gotten past me
and those couple of officers that were with me at those north doors.

Um,
I went downstairs again
and walked back out the-
the north doors that I'd come in.
I walked around to the east side of the building
and looked south,
and I saw a gentlemen
sittin' on a-
a park-style bench
alongside the east side of the building.
A civilian, he's just sittin' there.
I'm thinkin',
he doesn't,
he shouldn't be there,
um,
why is he still sitting here?
And I
started to walk toward him, and then I realized that
he was deceased.

And then I saw another gentleman
laying across
a table,
a little
café table that was outside.
Uh,
also deceased.
He had his-
his lunch there.
Um, cigarette pack with
the
cigarette lighter
carefully centered on top of the-
the cigarette pack.

Um,
and I saw a third
deceased person
splayed across the ground.
Looked as though they had been in-

in
headlong flight when they were shot and killed.

Um,
and,
you know,
I'm lookin' at them to see,
is there any chance they're still alive?
And then they-
all three of them were clearly not.
You know,
over the course of the career,
I've seen enough,
uh,
uh,
deceased people to-
to realize
that unfortunately, these three were beyond help.

Uh...
[long pause]
then I walked in the, uh,
doorway
into the main training room,
which is where
the training event had been goin' on
that
Syed Farook had been a part of and then came back and attacked and killed his-
his coworkers.
And I stepped in that doorway,
[long pause]
give me a second.
[long pause]

I remember seeing the Christmas trees,
you know,
fake presents at the bottom of the tree,
or, I assume fake presents.
The room was clearly decorated for hol-
holiday festivities.

There's water spraying,
the sirens are still goin' off.
The tables and chairs are in complete disarray in the room.
There's bags and backpacks all over the place.
I'm standin' there
maybe
ten feet inside the door,
and I hear a voice in the back of my head,
and I'm scannin' the whole room,
I'm lookin' for
injured people that could possibly be assisted.
And I hear a voice
in the back of my head,
one of my former trainees, who,
at the time,
was later on on homicide,
I think he was on homicide then,
um,
back of my mind, it's
that particular detective saying,
hey,
captain,
do you really need to be in this crime scene at this point?
There's-
there's nothing to be done at this point.
I realized
I did not need to be in that room any further.
All I could do
would be
contaminate the scene
more than it had already been.

What I don't remember seeing
are all the dead bodies that were in the room at the time.
[long pause]
I don't remember seeing any of 'em.
I was standing within feet of them
based on
diagrams I've seen since.
I don't remember it.

[*long pause*]

You know,
you pride yourself
on being able to
look at a scene,
catch all the details that you keep later for court.
And I've been doin' it for decades.

I just-

I

don't remember those bodies.

[*he sighs*]

So I-

I backed out of the room.

Um,

I later found out

what had been goin' on,

uh,

was

while we were still

clearing the building,

other officers,

multiple agencies and ours,

probation,

et cetera,

had cleared all the wounded out already,

moved them over to a,

um,

staging area for medical aid

out on Waterman,

right there at the entrance to the golf course.

Um,

one of the-

our Peacekeeper,

which is the

armored vehicle-

er, it wasn't the Peacekeeper, it was the-

the Bearcat.

Peacekeeper was what we had when I was on SWAT.
Um,
the-
the armored vehicle for SWAT was in the parking lot
to the east of the building.
And I walked past it.
And I saw
a whole bunch of officers from another agency
that are not normally first responders,
but they are peace officers,
standing behind that thing in,
you know,
looking in all directions
and pointing guns in all directions,
concerned about threats,
and I'm just walkin' through the parking lot at that point.
I've walked out of the building,
I'm just-
I'm walkin' along.
And they're-
they're like conforming to the shape of that Bearcat
for cover.
There's probably twenty or thirty of 'em
packed in tight like sardines right there.
[he clears his throat]
And uh,
I realized they,
you know,
they hadn't been inside the building,
they didn't
know that everything was truly safe yet.
I didn't know that everything was truly safe yet.
You know,
they're still doin' that secondary,
deliberate clear.

Um, shortly after that,
one of my homicide detectives came up to me,
and, uh,
wanted me to assist him

with getting, uh,
a bunch of people that were
starting to mill around the-
the-
the actual crime scene,
that didn't need to be in that crime scene,
if I could help him
get them out.

So I went to that group of officers,
asked who was their supervisor,
who was in charge of them?
Um,
that person stepped forward,
and I directed them
to
check all of the buildings on the periphery
outside of the IRC
to look for bullet strikes,
cameras,
but most importantly,
potential victims
that,
you know,
somebody who
might've been struck by a stray bullet.

There are a number of buildings in that little ring
along the southeast and north sides
of the IRC.
Those folks went and started doin' that for me.
Um,
immediately.
Without complaint.

Um,
and then,
uh,
after that I worked my way to
where we had evacuated all the wounded to.

By the time I got there,
the last couple of people were being transported.
Um,
there was a fire engine parked
in the driveway there
of the golf course.
It kind of faced in a
not quite east-
not quite east-west direction.
Kind of angled.

And I'm-
I'm looking at all the detritus
everywhere,
um,
you know,
all the-
the remnants of the-
the treatment
for all the different victims.
And one of my officers comes up to me
and says,
hey cap,
there's a dead body behind the-
the fire engine.
And it-
it didn't-
it was like I didn't
quite
hear what he was tellin' me.
Or like,
I was processing it,
you know, like,
I'm sorry,
what was that?
He goes,
there's a dead body on the other side of that-
that fire engine.
And the press were within
thirty feet of it.

The first people from the press were showing up.
And- and looky-loos
and all that.

And I walked around
and
found this tarp covering the-
the deceased.
Her hair-
part of some of her hair
was
comin' out from underneath the tarp,
in such a fashion that if
any of the reporters had looked in that direction,
they could've seen that
and maybe taken a photograph of it,
and,
you know,
I wouldn't want
a family-
some family member of theirs
to be having to see that on,
you know,
newspaper
or
whatnot.
Or worse,
somebody coming to get closer,
and-
and
move the tarp.

There were a bunch of,
uh,
school PD officers in the area.
I grabbed their supervisor
and
asked them to
push our crime scene perimeter,
uh,

further south down Waterman,
at least the equivalent of a couple of city blocks,
um,
to give us more working room.

Um,
while they were doin' that,
we were, at that point,
collecting our witnesses out on the golf course,
our folks were separating the witnesses into
three-
three separate groups:
uh,
those who told us,
on initial contact,
that they had not seen or heard anything,
in one group,
those who'd said they'd only
heard
something,
in the second group,
and those that had seen and heard
something, in the third group.

And that-
that group of witnesses is growing
seemingly exponentially.
We're dealing with hundreds of people there.
And,
it's startin' to get warm.
Or at least,
it feels warm to me,
prob'ly 'cause I've got the vest on,
and,
maybe the adrenaline's startin' to come down.

Uh,
but I'm realizing at that point
that I am-
I am still the ranking officer

on scene,
um,
and we've got
hundreds of witnesses
that
we can't stop them if they want to leave.
We cannot
keep them from leaving.

Uh,
I noticed that the pathway down to where the witnesses are
goes right by the dead body.
Um,
so I'm cognizant of that.
We're working on plans, so,
you know,
where are we gonna be able to transport these folks?
How are we gonna transport them?
To get them
interviewed
as-
as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Once we learned that the plan was that we were gonna be bringing a bunch of buses over -
and initially they were gonna park those buses on Waterman -
and I- I put the nix on that
and said,
no,
we need to bring the buses actually into the golf course,
and I need
another vehicle
to help
screen off the view
of
the
deceased victim,
so those people on the buses wouldn't have to look at
their coworker
on the ground
like that.

Um,
you know,
we can't move the body.
Uh,
once they're clearly deceased,
uh,
we cannot disturb the body in any way
until the coroner has been there.
But I really
just didn't want those people to have to see that
and wonder which of their coworkers it-
it might be.

And so,
uh,
we altered the plan,
brought the buses into the golf course,
loaded them
in an area that
the path where they took was not
by their-
their
coworker,
and while we were waiting for that to happen,
I went amongst the three different groups,
introduced myself,
thanked them for being patient,
uh,
explained what the process was going to be,
and implored upon them to
please not talk about what they had seen,
and explained that
you know,
discussing amongst themselves
what they had seen
could actually taint their memory
and make it more difficult for us
to
identify, track down, and hold accountable those that were responsible.

Um,
people started requesting
to go to the bathroom.
I grabbed a,
uh,
group of probation officers.
I sent somebody over to talk to the golf course staff,
to see if we could use their restrooms,
and maybe borrow a golf cart or two
to transport
people to the restroom and back.
They were super gracious,
I mean they just,
they bent over backwards.
They started bringin' out,
or providing us with,
bottled water and whatnot
to distribute amongst the witnesses.

Um,
had some probation officers manning the-
the golf carts,
transporting people to and from
the bathrooms.
I wanted there to be somebody
armed
with them at all times
to help them
feel
protected.
These were very, very frantic people.
Very scared.
Um,
and in time,
we were able to get everybody loaded onto buses and transported
out for,
uh,
interview.

Um,
I had one
of the witnesses come up to me
and explain to me that she-
she was unable to reach
her family on her cell phone
to let them know she was okay.
And it just so happened that she was a relative of one of our
employees,
and so
I was able to send an email,
or text,
I don't remember which one at this point,
to her family member
that worked for us.
Um,
because neither of us
could really get out on our cell phones.
We're,
you know,
you can imagine,
how clogged the cell lines were at that point.
I was able to send out that text or email,
I think it was an email,
uh,
to her-
her relative
to let her know that she was okay
and to let,
you know,
try to disseminate that information to the rest of the family.

Um,
it was about then,
they were doin' the same with my family.
Um,
'cause they- they know me,
they know,
if something like that's gonna happen in our city,
I'm gonna be there.

So I texted my wife, and-
and she communicated out to everybody else
in my family.

While
this was goin' on,
we got a call
of
officers on the golf course encountering a vehicle
coming onto the
golf course from the
back
side.
And we're worried that
this could be
our suspects coming back.
I've got news copters
overhead
televising
these hundreds of people
I've got corralled on the golf course.
Now I'm thinking,
oh,
crap,
could this be
our suspects coming back to do more damage?

Uh,
they were stopped
by those people that observed them,
the officers that observed them.
Turned out it was a-
a mentally unstable gentleman
that had seen what was goin' on
and decided to
help the police
and- and
take care of those
terrorists.
And so he'd armed himself with a bunch of knives,

jumped in his car,
and was drivin' onto the back side of the golf course.

Uh,
just after we'd gotten all the witnesses away on the buses,
you know,
we got all kinds of suspect vehicle descriptions out there at this point,
um,
an outside agency
gets into a chase
of a vehicle
to the west of us,
a pursuit,
and
at one point that pursuit starts comin' down a back road over by the,
uh,
animal shelter.

That's another back way into the golf course.

And I'm,
you know,
thinkin' this time,
okay,
it's-
it's matching
the description
of
one of the vehicle descriptions we've got
for our suspects.

So we're really thinkin' that this one
is bad guys.

And all I had left with me at that point,

I-

I had a golf cart

and

a number of, uh,
probation officers.

I grabbed them up,

and

we went to the west side of the golf course
and set up a skirmish line,

essentially,
uh,
waiting to engage that vehicle if it came
towards us.
Try to stop it.

Turns out it U-turned,
continued in pursuit,
um,
pursuit terminated a few blocks away,
ended up it was a stolen car.

Just as that pursuit's terminating,
uh,
our narcotics unit gets on the air
and advises that,
uh, they are in pursuit of the suspects,
and the suspects are shooting them,
shooting at them from their car.
The black SUV.

It's maybe
a mile and a half from us,
where I was at that point,
two miles at most.
My
police car
is still parked to the front of the IRC building.
I've got that
stupid little golf cart.

Before I could've even made it to the-
my patrol car,
my- my unmarked car,
with the golf cart,
the-
the shooting is goin' on now,
full-on shootout,
hundreds of rounds being exchanged both directions.
I'm having to listen to all that on the radio.

Um,
[long pause]
I made sure everything was secure at the-
the golf course
at that point,
and I moved up to our
temporary command post
which was up the street
and essentially
spent most of the rest of the night there
as we were
still trying to filter out
and sort out
what had happened,
were there additional suspects,
um,
the whole bit.

[he sighs]
And in a nutshell, that was my day.

Um,
I have always been a-
I'm a former Boy Scout,
Eagle Scout.
I learned gun safety as a child.
Um,
just like in
any other implement of harm,
the gun doesn't cause it,
the gun is the instrument.
Um,
I've seen enough incidents
where
something that could've been worse
was stopped
because of
an armed civilian.

I'm a firm believer in
the registering of firearms
and background checks
and cooling-off periods or waiting periods,
and I've always been, uh,
a fan of that:
to do everything responsible,
and possible,
to make sure
that
the wrong person can't
quote-on-quote legally obtain a gun -
somebody that is legally precluded from doing so.

I've always maintained my firearms
in,
uh,
locked safes
at home
that the kids have never had
the combination to.
Um,
I- I believe like in many other things,
there are ways to- to
maintain
the right to bear arms,
but to do so responsibly as a public.

I'm not a fan of open carry.
Um,
I am a fan of regulating
concealed carry,
but allowing those that
can demonstrate
a need or a- a legal justification
to concealed carry.

Um,
the fact that the rifles were
straw purchases ultimately,

um,
kept
Syed off the radar
as far as the- the acquisition of the assault rifles.
Um,
they had tried-
somebody had tried to modify the weapons to fire automatic
but was unsuccessful.
Um,
so they were still in semi-auto mode.

Um,
I think
more so than just,
um,
you know,
West Coast culture or anything,
I -
and I'm not an expert on this part -
but the-
the attitude that you see in the movies,
and I've seen in the movies for decades,
uh,
the cavalier
use of firearms,
um,
I think has done a disservice.
Um,
decent chance
that
maybe the violent video games have done that.

But at the same time, I-
I have trouble
understanding that,
in that
no movie or video game has ever influenced me in that regard,
that I can think of, at least.
Um,
but I-

I think that's more because of the-
the
training and respect I was trained to have,
uh,
by my father and grandfather
and Boy Scouts
for firearms
from an early age.
Um,
that superseded any influence I could've had
from
any type of media forum.
Um,
and it makes for a
hard balance.

I did my
master's degree overseas,
in England.
And,
in one of the sessions I was there at Cambridge,
um,
some officers
were ambushed
in the UK
by a suspect armed with
firearms and grenades.
And those officers were unarmed
and killed.
So,
they did not even have a chance to try to defend themselves.

And I found that there was a,
you know,
I was in a program
for,
uh,
police executives
at Cambridge
with

police personnel from all over the world.

And,

we had many a debate about

the arming of,

uh,

British law enforcement.

So they-

they've got far more armed response units than they used to have,

but still, the vast majority of their officers are unarmed.

Um,

and again I think it comes down to-

to proper training,

uh,

responsible,

uh,

actions

on the part

of the officer.

Uh,

I was involved in numerous critical incidents

over the course of my career.

Um,

I was able to avert

quite a number of those incidents

just based on

talking to the people I was dealing with

and talking them down.

Um,

I'm not a little guy.

You know,

in

my patrol days,

6'3", 240, 250 pounds.

Uh,

pretty strong.

I could stop most physical altercations pretty quickly

and get people into custody.

Um,

I could arrive on scenes
where there was already a physical altercation going on
and bring it to a-
a swift conclusion,
um,
just by
actively engaging the suspect
physically,
getting them on the ground,
and getting them in handcuffs.

Um,
so the-
you know,
I'm dismayed that the culture seems to,
you know,
violent TV shows,
violent movies,
things like that
seem to influence people.
Uh, it disturbs me.
I'd like to think-
think that people are-
are more responsible,
more sophisticated than that.
But,
over the course of my career,
I realized that that's not
necessarily the case
at all times,
with all people.

I think
many of our-
our
incidents,
uh,
are the result of,
uh,
individual hatred

or some sort of mental
defect.

And there needs to be a way to try to address those,
and a success in doing that,
I think,
would
show results in a-
for an overall community
that goes beyond all bounds.

You're-
you're getting rid of violent crime,
you're-
you're getting treatment for
those
that have mental health issues
and precluding them from engaging in
violence
knowingly or unknowingly.
Um,
being in a position to,
um,
reduce overall crime
and
people's perception of what's okay and what's not okay.

You know,
I was watching a news report this morning of,
um,
a congresswoman out of New York talking about how -
this is taken a little bit out of context, but in essence -
talking about how she can see how it's okay for somebody to steal food.
Um,
and rather than trying to solve the problem of
access to the food,
she's looking to give justification for the-
the unlawful taking of it.

The laws that we have
in our society

are brought forward by society itself.

Um,

the Constitution is a living document.

It has evolved over the course of over 200 years.

Um,

our laws have evolved over the years.

We had laws on the books

in the past

that were-

that were just wrong.

Uh,

anything to do with slavery,

it was just wrong.

And

in time,

we got rid of those laws.

As a community,

we made those changes

to what was,

at one point in time,

considered to be acceptable conduct

and recognized that it was not acceptable conduct,

and that needed to change.

And we've done that.

And our Constitution allows us to do that.

It allows us a format within which to do that.

And I just-

I don't see-

I don't see people

understanding the process.

Uh,

a lot has changed over the years.

A lot has changed just in the course of my career.

Uh,

I guess that

I would like to see

more universal laws as it pertains to background checks and that sort of thing

for firearms.
Um,
uh,
a better follow-through process
for
retrieving those firearms from people once it's-
they've been deemed
no longer legal to possess or own.

And we haven't come up with that process yet.
Some states have, but others haven't,
um,
and even then the process we have in California
is
a bit convoluted.
I don't want to take anybody's rights cavalierly,
um,
but- but in certain cases,
people who-
once somebody's been convicted of a felony,
there should be a streamlined process for
obtaining their firearms from them.
Um,
and you don't necessarily see that follow-through all the time.
I don't
believe there's any agency that is,
you know,
specifically
tasked with following up on that on a routine basis.
It's more an agency-by-agency or case-by-case basis.
And that's-
that's a failing on
our structure
overall at that point.

One very important thing I forgot to mention:
How
absolutely proud I was of the response
of our officers
and those from the surrounding agencies that day.

Their
unflinching
willingness to put their lives at extreme risk
to try to save the lives of innocent strangers.

[he sighs]
It would have been great if we could have gotten there quicker that day.
And stopped them before they killed 14.

[long pause]
You know,
I got there as fast as I could.
I know the other officers got there as fast as they could.

Um,
[long pause]
it's just a would've, could've, should've, but
I
just wish we had gotten there faster.
That's about it.

I next spoke with Yafeuh Balogun, the Co-Founder of the Huey P. Newton Gun Club based in Dallas, Texas. After responding to an inquiry I made on the HPNGC website, he and I scheduled an interview. We spoke for approximately half an hour by phone. The following are his words from that exchange.

"A weapon... becomes like a microphone."

Yafeuh Balogun

Co-Founder, Huey P. Newton Gun Club

Interview conducted August 19, 2020, 6:03 P.M. Central Daylight Time

The purpose and mission
of the Huey P. Newton Gun Club
is to educate,
uh,
Black, Brown, and poor people
about their rights
to self-defense.
Uh, the purpose
is to educate
specifically
African-Americans
about issues of fratricide.
And also,
um,
third and finally,
the purpose is to
set a course
on
patrolling the community,
so that the community-
the community can learn
how to be, uh,
self-determining.
Uh,
these three things,
uh, were the principles
for the founding of the Huey P. Newton Gun Club,
which, uh, originally started
August 20th, uh,
2014.

My first community patrol,
uh,

was originally back in 2007,
uh,
with an organization called Guerilla Mainframe.
This organization ultimately,
uh,
helped create the Huey P. Newton Gun Club.
The Huey P. Newton Gun Club
was the formation of a coalition of
a number of different groups,
which again, uh,
Guerilla Mainframe was the spearhead
of that organization.

Uh,
I originally,
um,
patrolled,
uh,
in, uh,
East Dallas
and a number of different apartment complexes
based upon, uh, our efforts to, uh,
show examples of crime watch efforts
and also, uh, initiate
community patrols
and efforts to slow or deter
what we call police terrorism,
which essentially is police brutality.

I can tell you,
by the mere fact that
we were open carrying weapons,
um,
that definitely did deter police aggression.
I can tell you,
by the mere fact that
we were open carrying weapons,
uh,
definitely did deter,
um,

certain segments of the community,
that don't mean well to our community,
from being unnecessarily aggressive with us.

So, our usage of the weapon,
which first and foremost is a political tool -
it's a political tool, I feel,
to organize the masses of people -
and then second, uh,
we use it as a self-defense mechanism.
Um, and so definitely
it has been,
uh,
a very good way to deter a number of different things
but also create a number of different conversations with people from around the world.

I- I think the fear [of armed Black people]
is in the culture.
It's ingrained,
uh,
within America,
probably since the first,
uh,
African-American,
Black man,
African,
et cetera,
came over on the slave ship.
The idea, of course,
I feel,
is to keep,
uh,
Black people specifically,
uh, unarmed.
I think that's somethin' that started,
uh, back then.

Now, of course,
uh, currently,
there's a hysteria,

uh, as relates to the media.
And the media capitalizes on this historical fact.
But I think, uh,
that, uh,
that fear
was initiated
at the founding of this country,
or I should say,
when the first, uh,
Black person, uh,
came, uh,
to America
via a slave ship.

As a person that has done,
uh,
hundreds of
patrols,
a person that's done hundreds of 'em,
and that's dealt with law enforcement,
I can you emphatically that
law enforcement,
at least those here,
the Dallas Police Department
and those in the State of Texas,
seem to be more respectful,
and to be more disciplined,
when they know that
they are faced,
uh,
with an armed group.

Now, granted,
we're not an armed group,
necessarily, uh,
positioning ourselves to attack the police, per se.
But we *are* a group that's tryin'
to educate our community
about their rights.
And,

with that being stated,
in times that we've dealt with the police,
they seem to be
very respectful.
They seem to,
uh,
be courteous.
And I think it's because we
have this position where
we're, uh,
exercisin' my Second Amendment rights.

But also, um,
we have this thing
where we're attracting,
uh, groups of people,
uh,
to our position.
Anytime that we, uh,
bear arms,
it's a-
a weapon becomes our political tool,
so it more or less becomes like a microphone.
And with this microphone,
we have used that
to speak to millions of people around the world.
And so, uh,
the policeman sees
the dignity that it is
for a Black man or woman, et cetera,
to bear arms.
So I think they have learned,
instinctively,
to have respect for that.

The most important thing that we ever do
is to practice on how to properly, uh, defend ourselves,
with shootin' and communicatin' drills.
Um,
you know,

educatin' ourselves about
different types of firearms,
things of that nature.
Different capabilities.
I think,
uh,
initially,
our particular group,
uh,
was the first to probably come out,
uh,
in this contemporary sense,
to openly bear arms.

And what I've seen is
since then, since 2014,
a number of different African-American groups have followed our lead.
And it's-
it's because
we used open carry,
uh,
to promote our position
that more African-Americans need to be
openly bearing arms.
And because of this,
more African-Americans have begun to train,
uh,
more so now.

Uh,
because we have,
uh,
Donald Trump
and other
right-wingers in office now,
of course,
that's caused a situation
where more Black people are considerin' self-defense.
I think because Donald Trump is in office,
and other right-wingers are in office,

more Black people are wanting to, uh,
essentially
protect themselves,
protect their homes,
uh,
get politically educated.

And that's one thing I do want to mention,
is that
anybody can have a weapon,
anybody can have a firearm,
but if you lack political education,
uh,
you could potentially become,
uh,
a killer, if you will.
And so with political education,
political education teaches you
why you're doin' what you're doin',
and so,
that's very important to our process,
political education.

I think that,
uh,
for human rights,
people should have a right to defend themselves.
Um,
I definitely think that
legislation,
uh,
should enforce that idea.
Uh,
there have been different times, situations,
where,
um,
we went to Austin, Texas
to promote gun rights for African-Americans.
At that particular time, in 2015,
again,

there wasn't a lot of activity.
Now, I think
because we made it our initial position,
I think it's probably hundreds of different types of
small cadres of African-Americans
talking about gun rights
and, uh, doin' open carry
and doin' trainin'.
But I think we were the first of the contemporary set.

But we definitely do support, uh, people's rights, uh,
African-American,
or anybody else,
if they want to
be able to defend their homes
and
protect their families.
We think that's important.
Um, but let me just say this,
uh,
we don't think that-
we don't want to see a lunatic with a weapon either.
Uh,
so,
I think
weapons are important
to an extent.
Uh,
ultimately,
we would like to see a society at some point
that possibly could exist,
uh,
without weapons,
but we realize that that point is not
at this time.
So that's what we've been saying.

I remember when we first made our initial patrols,
uh,
there was a question posed to the National Rifle Association,

would they support us, our group?
And the National Rifle Association was very quiet upon that.
So, uh,
the fact that when Philando Castile
was murdered
and legally, uh, beared arms
and advised the officer of the fact that,
hey, I have a weapon,
I have a license,
the fact that he was murdered
while in his vehicle,
with his girlfriend
and his child in the back seat,
um,
and the National Rifle Association and other groups didn't say much,
really doesn't surprise me,
because there have been other instances
where,
uh,
they have said little.
We think that those types of groups,
um,
don't represent our interests,
and when I say our interests,
I mean Black people,
and specifically poor people.

That's why other groups,
such as NAAGA [National African-American Gun Association],
are in support of an African-American
association alternative,
uh,
to the NRA,
that's probably better suitable,
um,
for us to join
because they
should, for the most part,
have our interests and understand us better
for our relations, so to speak.

So, it doesn't surprise me.

The NRA, in fact,
has a history
of not supporting African-American positions.
I think initially,
when the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense,
which was organized in 1966 by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale,
uh,
made their maneuver,
uh,
to Sacramento
in early 1967,
it was the NRA
that supported,
uh,
the idea
of keepin' weapons
out of the hands of
Black Americans,
or African-Americans,
via the Mulford Act,
and so with that type of historical context,
and you flash forward,
uh,
forty plus years or so,
maybe fifty years or so,
with Philando Castile,
it's not a surprise,
at this particular point,
even at this time,
that they're still silent,
which shows the continuous history
of the NRA and other groups, uh,
mainstream groups,
not supporting,
um,
African-Americans',
um,
right to bear arms

fully,
as they should.

Uh,
we-
we personally,
uh,
well, I can say myself personally,
um, I do not support,
uh,
ideas of
xenophobia.
I don't support, uh,
the ideas of anti-white.
I don't support the-
the ideas of
Black Capitalism,
Black Imperialism,
Black Supremacy,
any of that.
I don't support it.

Um,
so as it relates to the New Black Panther Party,
it's like talkin' about
a ghost.
Meaning that,
there's a number of different
groups and organizations
that identify with that name.
Um,
so it's kind of hard to state
exactly, when you say that,
whom you're really discussing.
But I can tell you, personally, um,
I have been a co-founder of the Huey P. Newton Gun Club.
The ideas that I believe in
are, uh, deeply entrenched
with intercommunalism.
And if a person

would read the speeches of Huey P. Newton,
specifically the Boston College speech in 1970,
Huey P. Newton, uh,
laid down, uh,
the ideas of kind of where we're at now in,
uh,
a very
modern sense.
Uh, he kind of defined
our reality here in 2020.

So I challenge, uh, the reader,
or the listener,
what have you,
to read Doctor Huey P. Newton's works.
Study intercommunalism.
Uh, I went as far,
uh, to promote political education,
I went as far
as to create a patch,
if you will,
with, uh, the words
that read "Intercommunalism" on them
because I want people to read.
Again, political education is so important.
You have to understand what and why
you're doin' what you're doin'.

So to simply-
to call yourself,
um,
a part of an organization,
and not to have full understanding of that organization,
or the history of that organization,
is futile.
So that's what I say
about a number of different people
that are posturin' themselves
but do not have political education.
They're posturin' themselves and do not have understanding.

They have not read,
and they have not been guaranteed.
And so that's what I would say
in regards to
the, uh, NBPP,
or the New Black Panther Party.
They're not politically educated.

Um,
we try to, uh,
have trainings, uh,
for women, uh,
consistently.

Um,
and I think that that's very important,
especially in this day and time,
where, uh, women are so easily attacked
with domestic violence.

Uh,
and women are so easily attacked with, uh,
sex trafficking.

This has to be the forefront of our platform.

Uh,
this has to be the forefront-
the forefront of any organization has to be women.

Um,
Malcolm X stated it best,
he said,
you know,
you can define the intelligence of a
particular group by the-
by the-
how high the woman is in the society.

So if we
look at America as a whole,
and we talk about educating women,
uh,
and not from a sense of being secondary,
as relates to a man,

but I think women have to be primary.
And I think that in this day and time,
women have definitely proven themselves
to be
if not, uh, equal to men,
then I think, uh, greater than men.
And I think oftentimes, what I've seen,
especially as relates to arms training
and things of that nature,
often women are able to shoot better
than men.
Uh, I think largely because of
how they carry themselves.
And think this is, uh,
has been very consistent.

I think that
we want to,
uh,
kill or murder that misogynistic attitude
that oftentimes,
uh,
is represented
in these particular movements.
I think this is something that needs to be killed.
This patriarchy that we have
needs to be murdered.
Uh, that's the ideals
that we have.
And I think that there are a number of different women
that are qualified, uh, to be in leadership positions.
And I think that
if most organizations allowed the women to lead,
I think that they would, uh, be better suited
for- for their mission, ultimately,
to try to reach the masses of people.

Uh, we have a diverse,
uh, religious composition.
Um, we-

we don't identify
with Islam,
any more than we identify with Christianity,
any more than we identify with Buddhism,
and more than we identify with anything else.
Uh, I think that, uh,
an individual can have their own spiritual understanding.
Um,
one man can't define another man's spiritual perspective
or understanding.
That's something for that individual
to define for themselves.
And so,
in fact,
I'm personally,
very much so, um,
against these, uh,
organizations or groups,
these theocracies, uh,
these types of groups
that are very conservative
in their position,
as relates to, uh,
religion, per se.
I think we can afford to-
to rid ourselves
of, uh,
of- of
what they're doin' to the community.
And I think, um, these types
of groups and organizations
are not allowin' the necessary growth,
uh, to develop,
and especially as relates to the youth.

The youth are, uh,
should be allowed to define their reality.
And oftentimes,
those with conservative positions,
oftentimes, they stomp that out.

And a lot of that is fine
within their religious perspective.
And so, to me,
I think, uh, spirituality,
if you will,
is something that is very
individual-based.
I can't define your perspective on God
any more than you can define mine.

And I think
that all of us,
uh,
in a sense,
are leaning in the right direction.
I think some religions call God Jesus,
and some call Allah.
Well, that just depends upon the culture
and understanding that you have.
Um, some say Olodumare,
and others say that Buddha, um,
led a divine life and
achieved, uh,
I think Nirvana,
I think that's what it states.
Um, and so, um,
I think that it's very important
for a person to be spiritual,
however,
any conservative ideas behind religion
I think should be gotten rid of.

I think the pandemic has, uh,
slowed down, um,
the rat race.
I think a lot of people, uh,
before the pandemic,
was caught in the rat race.
And now they have to
maybe deal with the reality

of
being home
a little more.
Having to deal with family
a little more.
Having to have conversations
a little more.
And frankly, I think that
some people have become
tired, if you will,
with cabin fever.
But I think
the positive is
you can be home more,
you can talk more,
you can relate more,
uh,
you may disagree more,
however, uh,
through that disagreement,
uh, there will be some growth.

And I think that's the positive part
about this pandemic.
It has allowed people to do that,
versus having to work forty or fifty hours consistently,
and maybe not being able to take the kids to school,
or even see the kids at night.
And I think it's good,
in a sense.
Um, of course,
uh, I don't like the,
you know,
the hundreds of thousands
of deaths that've occurred, uh,
but on the positive
end of it,
it's definitely allowed us
to spend more time with family,
and I think that-

that's the reason why we get up every day,
and work, and try to produce income for ourselves,
is to get to spend more time with the family.
Well, the pandemic has kind of allowed that.
So, that's, uh, that's one positive
that I will say about the pandemic.

My plan for the future is to allow autonomy.
Um, I created,
uh, the Huey P. Newton Gun Club
Alpha Formation.
And that formation itself,
uh,
has allowed,
uh,
different types of people,
uh, to join.
Um,
and it's clearly,
um,
founded
in the ideas that were stated,
um, with intercommunalism.

Um,
Alpha
will allow
brown people to join,
Alpha will allow
white people to join,
anyone that's under that particular spectrum
that's clearly, uh,
followin' the line of Huey P. Newton.
Uh,
we think it's very important for political education,
uh, and that's the direction
that we're working into,
uh, to kind of be more class conscious.
To produce, uh,
and- and allow people

to develop ideas
of socialism, if you will.

Uh, all of this
is

very important.

The ultimate goal, of course,
is to change the society that we're in.

And in order to change the society that you're in,
your movement has to reflect the society.

So we-

we wanna challenge the system headstrong.

Right now, we're dealin' with, uh,
a megalomaniac that's in power.

And with this megalomaniac bein' in power,
everybody has to get active.

And so,

we're tryin' to allow a situation where
people

can get active, uh,

and use

our particular group

as a vehicle to organize.

We think this is very important.

I think on the East Coast,

and for a lot-

lot of those states,

uh,

of course, they can't,

uh,

bear arms.

Well,

particularly some states,

legally if you will,

like New York

and

places like that, uh,

especially in New York City,

I know they can't.

So they have a different culture

as relates to firearms.
And I know that same culture exists
on the West Coast,
and via the Mulford Act,
um,
which, uh, you know,
is very strict as relates to firearms.
Um,
I think
some of those laws may be enacted
for Chicago,
and perhaps Illinois as a whole,
which makes it very difficult.

All of this, of course,
affects, um,
African-Americans' ability to bear arms
legally, if you will.
I know here,
in most Southern states,
um,
open carry is something that's,
uh,
a part of the culture.
I know that
a lot of states allow Constitutional Carry
as well.
I think that a lot of the
most prolific revolutionary figures
come from the South.

You look at Robert F. Williams,
um,
who was a,
uh,
revolutionary,
um,
thinker,
initially with the NAACP,
um,

out of, uh,
Monroe, uh,
Monroe, North Carolina,
um,
again was from a Southern state,
which, you know,
reflects the culture.
Um,
if you, uh,
look at Huey P. Newton himself,
uh,
his family was originally, uh,
from, uh, Louisiana.
And if you look at Bobby Seale,
um,
again a founder of the Black Panther Party,
he was originally from West Dallas.

And so,
I think
havin' that relationship
to the South,
oftentimes with firearms,
allows people a different view,
once they,
I guess,
see other places.
They have a different perspective on firearms.
A lot of times, they're more educated
and a lot more open to firearms usage.
And so I think that, um,
interlaced with those, uh, attitudes,
I think a lot of the Southern states
have, uh, have an advantage.
And I think that
African-Americans that are in those Southern states,
though they may or may not reflect
the cultural value of-
of, you know,
of that, uh, environment,

it definitely gives them an advantage,
uh, over some other things
because legally,
they can bear arms.

And so,
uh,
as I take it for example,
back in 2007,
when I
initially started patrollin' the community,
I did so without fear
'cause I understood state statutes in the State of Texas,
State Statute 4601.
I realized,
just being a student of paralegal studies,
uh, at that particular time,
that I can legally
walk with a firearm
and open carry,
so long as I wasn't pointing it at anyone
or assaulting anyone,
or anything of that nature,
I could do so.
So once I-
I challenged this and put this to the test,
and actually interacted with a police officer,
and I found out that I wasn't goin' to jail,
just like I read in the book,
once I did that,
I- I-
I got other people to do it,
too.

And I think that,
you know,
this sort of thing kind of put me at more sort of advantage,
compared to someone in,
say,
Chicago.

And so if you have more of an opportunity to do those sort of things, then you probably have more opportunities to train with firearms.

Then if you can train with firearms, then, probably, you'll get more confident with firearm usage than, say, in other places.

You know, carrying, um, carrying them correctly.

Uh, using,

uh,

learning how to zero your weapon.

Proper sight alignment.

These sort of things.

And so,

um,

you know,

that just,

uh,

geographical-wise,

it just gives us

an advantage,

if you will.

I just want to stress the-
the point that political education is important.

Um,

and when I say political education,

particularly from,

uh,

from me and my development,

I would say that

I challenge anyone that's wanting

to understand

anything about the Huey P. Newton Gun Club,

uh,

I would challenge them to read

about intercommunalism.

I would challenge them to read

Huey P. Newton's Boston College speech.

Um,

I think this is very important

for us to understand the-

the modern-day situation
that we're in.
And we can't
have,
uh,
we can't call ourselves,
uh,
with- with the-
with his name
without having that-
that proper understanding.

And so,
that's what I challenge your readers to do.
Don't become sensationalized by weapons.
Don't become sensationalized by things
that you've read about
or you may've heard about in the media, per se.
Actually take the time to sit down,
to read and understand,
and I think
when a person does that,
they have a more serious demeanor
about what they're dealin' with.
So that's what I challenge
to your readers:
That intercommunalism is a-
a way of
understanding that -
I hope personally -
that can help us develop, uh,
over the next-
over this next century.
And that's toward
self-determination and freedom.

I next spoke with Ryan Lopez and Tracy DuPrez, both officers in the Libertarian Party of Los Angeles County. Ryan is a Region Representative serving on the Executive Committee, and Tracy is a member of the Judicial Committee. I had previously known them before beginning this project, and they graciously volunteered to participate as interviewees. I conducted my interview with them over Zoom. The following are their words from that exchange.

"If I have a gun, that's an equalizer."

Ryan Lopez and Tracy DuPrez

Officers, Libertarian Party of Los Angeles County

Interview conducted September 2, 2020, 5:04 P.M. Pacific Daylight Time

Ryan:

What do I like about guns?

Personally,

uh,

I like,

uh,

the freedom

of being able to,

uh,

defend yourself

at will.

Uh,

and I also enjoy

just the sport of guns

in general.

I like-

I like-

I'm a guy,

it's what guys do.

Tracy:

I like practicing marksmanship.

I think it's interesting,

and it's fun.

It's just a fun activity.

Um,

if you know how to use a gun correctly and safely,

you can use it for

enjoyment.

Um,

I also am a business owner.

I am a veterinarian.

I own a business,

and I'm responsible for the safety of
twelve employees and myself.
Medical establishments have been victimized
by active shooters.
So I need to know how to use a weapon
to defend myself as well.
And then,
I'm not *as* worried about home invasion,
but that's also another concern.
Police take too much time to get to
a place
when there's something going on.
If someone's actively shooting,
you're not gonna have time,
you have to be able to defend yourself,
and I do consider that.

For me,
it wasn't a matter of gender or identity
or anything like that.
I grew up with guns.
I had my first gun when I was 13.
My father bought me a Winchester
youth 12, uh,
20-gauge pump.
And, uh,
I was a junior member
of the Rod and Gun Club.
And, uh, we used to
go-
I used to go shooting with my father,
my grandfather,
and
a whole host of other,
uh,
older,
you know,
um,
gentlemen that I looked up to
as sort of father figures.

And,
it was sort of
just
how I grew up.

And it was-
I know it's a little odd,
for somebody that grew up living in Southern California.
I mean, I was born and raised
in San Gabriel, California,
essentially,
and,
uh,
it just-
it was just part of the-
of my upbringing.
So it was never odd to me.

It was never a
racial issue.
It was never a gender issue.
One of the greatest things about being in the Rod and Gun Club was that
there was people of
all different races in there.
So,
to me,
the gun culture isn't really about
race.
Or about,
uh,
anything
other than it was just,
uh,
some of my earliest memories
of growing up
and-
and
learning what it was to be,
kind of,
a man,

really.

And that was my intro into
the gun world.

So I think, uh,
maybe if you-
if you would like to
lead the question
a little bit more,
or if there was something else you were kind of looking for,
you could kind of let me know, but
just in general, the question
doesn't really resonate with me.

It makes sense to me,
because
I do have a gender
association with guns.
Because,
growing up,
I always thought that
that really wasn't a feminine thing.
You know,
women didn't really own guns.

But
we're the ones who need to equalize the fight.
You know,
if someone comes in,
you know,
and is threatening me in a parking lot,
you know,
to try to
kidnap me or something,
if I have a gun,
that's an equalizer.
You know,
for a woman to know how to use a gun,
I think it's a good thing.
And I think it's also a confidence builder.

I grew up with guns,
and for me it was just
natural
that you would
own a gun,
that you would have a gun.
Um,
I'm always responsible about it,
and
I think what really reinforced my
opinion about guns
that I already had,
which is that they're generally good
to have
and use
if you know how to use,
is that,
uh,
the-
the-
the,
you know,
the
concept of understanding violence,
especially,
you know,
in the last decade,
uh,
with,
you know,
I- I think, uh,
we had a-
we enjoyed a period where
violence was at an all-time low.
And
I think we're-
we're-
we've come out of that trough
and are heading back up again.

And I think that's for a lot of political reasons.

And,
um,
couple that with all of the most recent
shootings
involving,
uh,
police,
and I've never,
growing up,
had a-
a good experience with a police officer.
Ever.
It's always been a point of contention.
It's always been,
you know,
get out of the car,
uh,
hands behind your back,
I'm gonna cuff you for my safety,
you're gonna sit here while I run your license,
all that stuff.
You know,
that's just
how I've always-
that's every single-
so for me,
uh,
institutional racism
in the police force
has always been an issue
and always been there.
And,
uh,
and I never feel safe with cops around.
So I
always
feel like I need to have a gun
so that I can protect

myself.

I'm not the kind of person who's ever gonna call a cop
to come and save me
or protect my property,
I'm gonna do that.

There the ones that get called to clean up the mess.

Nothing personal.

There are no personal experiences
that have affected my opinion,
but just
some instances that I've read.

Particularly a situation
where a doctor
in an office
had a
disgruntled,
um,

patient's husband-
a patient had died.

Her husband came in,
pulled a gun on the doctor,
and shot him in his office.

In the face.

Killed him.

I am a doctor.

It concerns me.

The Second Amendment is a
guarantee
that the government is going to
stay out of your way
from owning,
uh,
any kind of weapon or firearm
that you deem necessary
to protect yourself.

And

I think that a lot of people
don't see it that way anymore.

But I believe that that was the
original intent
of the Second Amendment.
And
that doesn't change
based on the fact that
it was written
200+ years ago,
and-
and technology and firearms
has changed.
That just means,
in my opinion,
that if somebody has
bigger, badder, awesomer guns
than they had back then,
when it was just muskets,
as they like to say,
then I have a right
to have those same things
in order to protect myself.
And that is a very
unpopular
way of looking at the Second Amendment,
but it's the
actual way
everybody should be looking at the Second Amendment.

I guess I just see the Second Amendment
as
the right to
bear arms.
A very simple way
to look at it
as
the way that the Constitution was written,
the citizens have the right to bear arms.
And that includes guns.
And there shouldn't be any question about that.
I guess that's a very simplistic way of looking at it,

but that's just
kind of my thoughts on it.

Tracy and I have been doing tactical training.
It starts off with kind of
concealed carry training,
where,
uh,
we practice techniques
on quick draw,
uh,
proper sighting,
focusing on the front sight,
uh,
targeting -
there's some legal aspects involved in that.
Like,
you're responsible for every bullet that leaves the chamber,
and
that means,
you know,
if you miss
your target,
and it goes through a window,
and it goes through your neighbor's window,
and it hits somebody there,
then you're ultimately responsible for that.
A lot of legal things.
It's a lot of,
uh,
things that you don't necessarily know about.
You don't get that type of training
through basic safety courses.

So I think it's really important,
if you're going to be -
I like to use the term
responsible gun owner,
rather than *law-abiding*,
because I think

that carries
some
interesting connotations
because if they change the law,
then
all of a sudden,
you go from law-abiding to not law-abiding -
does that mean you're going to give up your guns?
No, of course not.
But I'm going to be a
responsible
gun owner,
and I think it's important to
take this kind of,
uh,
this kind of training.
So you start off,
like I said,
basic training for concealed carry,
situational awareness,
um,
training
for,
uh,
for,
you know,
different
situations,
and getting yourself into situations,
uh,
when to pull your gun,
when not to pull your gun,
how to handle situations,
'cause sometimes you don't need to pull your gun,
sometimes you don't want to,
you're gonna wanna always
de-escalate, if possible
first
before
resorting to

using your gun as a last resort.
Things like that.

And,
then,
you can move
through the same training
more into
tactical training,
in terms of
how to actually
handle active shooter situations,
where there might be
other people involved,
or whatever the case may be.
So it's-
it's-
it can go
to the nth degree,
and it could be,
you know,
exterior training,
interior training,
where you're going around
doorways and hallways
into different rooms,
and things like that.
How to handle carjackings,
situations where you don't
have the ability to
draw,
[he mimics drawing a gun]
aim,
[he points his finger gun directly in front of him]
and look down your sight,
'cause the person's right here next to you,
[he gestures toward the space to his left]
so how do you deal with that?
All kinds of-
of

situational types
of
training on how to
properly use your firearm.
And I think that's
really good stuff.

I think that,
you know,
we're at the very beginning of that,
of course,
um,
and so we'll
move on to a lot of the other
advanced training courses
that they have.
But right now,
I think we're getting
exactly the kind of training
that probably everybody
ought to have.
I don't say *should*,
ever,
or I try not to,
but
some level of higher training,
if you're gonna call yourself
a responsible gun owner,
is probably
a really, really good idea.

Yeah.
I'm in the same classes that he's in,
and I am,
as of today,
a brand-new gun owner.
I actually picked up my handgun
today.
It's a Beretta.
It's awesome.

Um,
before I even did that,
I had done eight weeks of tactical training,
so
I was practicing with a plastic gun,
holding it,
you know,
because
I really think that if you're going to
own a gun,
you
should
know
how to use it.
You should know not only
how to pick it up,
and how to clean it,
and how to shoot it.
But you should know
situations where
it's okay to shoot,
you should,
you know,
have awareness
of
what's around you.
You need to have marksmanship
in order to
hit your target
and not spray bullets
into,
you know,
other areas -
your neighbor's house,
or,
you know,
other people
that you aren't intending to shoot.
Um,
so

I think everybody who
owns a gun
for the purposes of defense,
or whoever considers that they might need to use it,
needs to have tactical training.
I'm not advocating for that to be a requirement.
I just think that,
you know,
it's a mindset
that
I think is responsible,
as Ryan said.

Yeah,
it's a footnote that we should say that
we're not saying that these should be -

No.

dictates handed down by government -

Definitely not.

by any means.
Um,
we're just saying
they should be voluntary things
that people
ought to consider
if they want to be responsible gun owners.

I wouldn't have driven a car
without being taught
how to drive a car first.
You know,
I get that anybody can get into a car
and probably drive it around,
but if you don't have the proper training,
you're probably gonna cause an accident.
You know,

so the same kind of thing
could be applied to having a gun.

I just assumed that the entire United States is
fairly similar
in terms of,
you know,
you're always gonna find
people who hate guns
and think they're icky.
You're always gonna find
people who think that it's their right
to bear arms,
which it is.
It's their right to own,
uh,
whatever means they find
necessary to protect themselves.
And,
uh,
and then there's gonna be this
huge gray area in between.
And I just kind of assumed
that,
uh,
it's gonna be the same
around the entire United States.

Maybe that's wrong
to-
to assume that,
but
it seems like it turns out that
even in the most
Democratic-controlled states,
which have some of the highest,
or the most restrictive,
gun,
uh,
policies,

they still have quite a few people
who still own firearms
for various reasons,
all kinds of reasons.

And,
uh,
they have inner-city training now,
Maj Toure
is one of those people that goes
into inner cities and teaches.
Uh,
you have,
uh,
Kevin Dixie,
who owns
No Other Choice Firearm Training
out of St. Louis, Missouri,
who goes around and
teaches,
uh,
firearm safety,
and training,
and more advanced courses
than what you would get
from just
a basic safety course.
You have
a lot of that
coming out of-
that seems to be coming
out of inner cities,
more now than ever,
at least we're hearing about them
more than ever,
so
I would say
there's not-
there probably isn't
as much,

uh,
difference between-
also, don't forget,
when you look at California,
so California is probably fairly
equivalent to
East Coast,
uh,
like
New York,
it's like that.

So,
we're probably one of the most restrictive places.
Whereas,
you know,
places like Nevada,
you can open carry
legally,
you know,
and
you can buy
gun types that
they just don't allow in California.

Uh,
so
I think that's something
that's important to consider
is that,
you know,
it might not be so much of an
East Coast - West Coast thing,
maybe,
it'd be interesting for me to know,
what the difference is between the gun culture
between the United States and *other* Western cultures
that are outside the United States.
Um,
because it seems to me like that's a

very
much more
interesting
dynamic,
like,
you know,
what do people think about guns in,
uh,
the UK,
where they're largely banned.

Uh,
and even knives are being banned in the UK
because after they banned the guns,
they started carrying knives,
so now that's a big problem.
They're gonna be
cutting off people's hands pretty soon
because they're gonna start throwing punches.
I mean,
that,
to me,
is a
bigger
difference
than probably the East Coast - West Coast mentality
about guns,
but,
um,
yeah,
I just assume that it's
fairly similar.
[to Tracy] How about you?

Uh,
I don't know if I can comment
on the entire West
versus the entire East
of the country,
but I can comment on gun culture in California,

which is where I've lived my entire life.
I've never lived in another state,
so
I really-
growing up, I had a lot of fear around guns
because there
isn't
really any education or discussion
about guns
in everyday life.
You know,
largely,
in California,
it's not a part of life.
It's only certain people who have guns.
You know, so
there's a lot of ignorance around guns
in California.
And I think that's where a lot of the fear comes from.
There's a lot of *fear* about guns.

You know,
when I learned about guns,
I had to seek out that information.
You know,
it's not readily available.
You know,
it's not like you're seeing commercials
about guns on TV in California.
You don't.
It's hidden.
It's the cops who have guns.
It's hunters who have guns.
And nobody else should have a gun.
That is what most people seem to act like here.
Um,
and I find that there's this subculture
that I didn't know about,
where a lot of people do have guns,
they just don't talk about it.

That's me!
[*he chuckles*]
I grew up with that subculture,
so to me,
that's like-
that's *culture*.
To me,
it's weird that the subculture just came out,
especially when I was in high school,
and college,
that,
like,
people had these weird
misconceptions about guns and gun ownership,
I'm like,
pshh!
I own five guns,
and I'm a sophomore in high school!
You know,
it's like,
to me,
that's just, like,
normal.
[*he chuckles*]

But,
you know,
that's just how I grew up,
and I grew up
in this tiny, little microcosm, I guess,
of people who
just grew up as hunters
and grew up as-
and-
and again,
being
really brought in
into this group,
all these adults that I was, uh,

kind of raised by
in the gun culture,
especially through the local
Rod & Gun Club.
You know,
it was-
it was fun.
We used to just
have a good time.

And,
there was
nothing wrong about it,
there was nothing bad about it,
it was just sport.
It was fun.
And we just all had a really great time.
And there was, of course, respect for it,
I mean,
it can be a dangerous weapon.
But I mean,
I can name any one of a million things
that people will use on a daily basis
that can be a dangerous weapon
if they wanted it to be.

A car.

A car can be a dangerous weapon
if you wanted it to be.
You can easily take somebody out
who you don't like,
or whatever,
crossing the street,
you know,
so,
to me,
it never made sense
that they would focus
on

guns
as being an issue of-
of-
a safety issue.
But, you know,
here we are, so...

And again,
as we see from the UK,
once they get rid of guns,
if that's the ultimate goal,
and they succeed,
it won't be long
before they get rid of knives,
before they get rid of nunchucks,
before they get rid of sticks,
and trees,
and branches,
and pots and pans,
you know,
all these things that you can use as melee weapons,
basically,
and then-
and then,
when they start going to throw rocks and fists,
they'll get rid of those, too, I guess.
I don't know what the ultimate goal is,
but it's,
um,
to me it's pretty silly
when you take it to the ad absurdum,
uh,
level
of watchful,
you know,
kind of
thought.

Well, it's kind of funny
because when you think about it,

Hollywood tends to glorify gun ownership
a lot of times.

I mean,
every adventure-action movie,
there's always somebody with a gun,
you know,
uh,
as far back as I can remember.

I mean,
even Indiana Jones,
it was hilarious,
you know,
you used to-
the famous scene with the guy who comes out with his,
uh,
his machete
things
and starts floatin' 'em around
and
basically challenging him to a fight?
And like he literally has no time,
so he just pulls his gun out and shoots him
and then turns and looks to where he's gonna go next,
you know?

I mean,
it's like
a level of glorification
that's always been there,
yet the very same people
are so anti-gun in reality
that it-
that it's like a bizarre hypocrisy
that is happening
in
that particular genre.

Now, of course,
media
is just media.
They're always going to

find the next big thing to scare people.
Um,
as soon as-
as soon as
they glommed onto the gun,
uh,
the gun pandemic,
you could call it,
'cause they're always looking for the next
scare pandemic,
uh,
whether it's a viral pandemic
or a gun violence pandemic
or a whatever pandemic,
they're just looking for the next thing to scare people with.

'Cause the reality is
that,
uh,
our culture has devolved to such a degree
that we don't look for
things that are good
in-
in everything in life,
in humanity,
we look for all the bad things.
And we want to,
uh,
express
our
discontent with things.

We want to
share our latest problems.
And that's how people-
you ever notice how people just sort of
relate to each other based on their problems?
"Oh, that's a nice problem,
but let me tell you about *my* problem."
Okay?

And, so
this is how culture has devolved
over the decades.

And
I think that this is just sort of a-
another
manifestation of
that kind of evolutionary-
de-evolutionary devolvement.
I don't know how you would even say that, but-
with culture.

And so, we-
on the one hand, we
grew up with all these movies
and we still have all these movies that glorify gun culture,
yet now the same liberal,
uh,
liberals especially,
and a lot of conservatives too,
believe it or not -
'cause let's be clear,
it hasn't been wasted on us
that Trump has signed more anti-gun legislation than Obama did
when he was in office.
So they're all-
they're all
commie gun grabbers
if you wanna call 'em that,
but
[Tracy laughs]
there is that weird dichotomy
when they glorify it for-
for action and adventure,
yet,
uh,
demonize it in reality.

[She laughs]
Okay,

I've gotta follow that?
Um,
okay.
I do agree with what he's saying about
there being some glorification of gun violence,
plus like video games.
I mean,
kids can pick up
guns
and play video games and shoot people,
stuff like that,
so,
in a way,
it seems like
it's kind of approved of,
you know,
using guns,
and
there's almost a desensitization to it,
where we think that,
boy,
now we can watch a movie where
two hundred people get murdered
in two hours,
and,
it's just,
they're forgettable people.
They weren't real people.
They were just some guy
that this guy shot.

I-
I don't like that kind of stuff.
I really don't,
but
it *is* very popular.
And,
at the same point,
yeah,
you have

Hollywood,
and you have the news media,
pretty much
being progressive across the board,
where guns are bad
and private citizens shouldn't have guns.

Because
I remember growing up,
we would hear so many stories
about children
getting a gun
and killing themselves with it,
or killing their friends.
I remember,
any time that would happen,
it was all over the news.
But if somebody uses a gun
that they have a permit for,
and they have a concealed carry weapon,
and they shoot
an offender,
they shoot someone who is dangerous,
that doesn't get covered on the news.

And we are finding that out
because on social media,
we see these stories,
you know,
of gun owners who stopped crime,
and have stopped criminals,
and there are statistical reports on this.
It happens,
and it is
life-saving.

I mean,
my friend,
his sister knows someone
whose ex-boyfriend

was stalking her,
and was going to kill her.
She had the gun with her
everywhere.
In the *bathroom*.
And one day,
he broke into her apartment,
he came in to kill her,
and she shot him,
and she saved her own life.

Did that get put on the news?
Did people know about that story?
We don't get to hear those stories.
All we hear are the bad things that happen
from people getting guns.
From kids going and shooting up a high school.
You know,
from someone going in and shooting up
a business.
Those things are horrible,
but if more people owned guns,
and more people knew how to use them,
less of those incidents would happen.

And no one wants to talk about that.
They media *never*
presents that as-
as a solution.
And I think it should be discussed
publicly,
and it doesn't get any attention at all.
And that makes me very upset,
because
I want to be protected as a citizen.
And
I want my fellow citizens to have guns.
There's a lot less cops out there than there are
citizens
who can own guns

and protect us all.
Um,
but
nobody really presents that
opinion
in the media.
And I wish they would.

Yeah,
it might be worth mentioning,
too,
uh,
on
that
that there are more
as a product of social media.
One of the best ones that I've seen,
especially lately, is,
uh,
I can't remember,
you know,
The *Pholosopher*,
yeah she does her-
her video casts,
but she also
does a,
uh,
shares daily defensive gun use,
where she actually goes and finds,
uh,
from the day before somewhere in the United States,
somebody who actually used a gun in self-defense
successfully
and saved their life
and probably the lives of,
uh,
countless numbers of other people.

And
she reports on that,

so that's
a
fantastic
example of where you can find
information
like that,
of,
uh,
daily defensive gun use,
where you'll never hear that on mainstream media.

The pandemic made me buy a gun.
Honestly.
I had a gift certificate to buy a gun
that was left over from,
what,
two years ago?
[They both laugh]
And,
I just got it out,
like,
I'd better go get a gun now
because
when people are locked up,
when they're deprived of their jobs,
when they lose their jobs,
and once the dust settles on this,
there's gonna be a lot of businesses
that have gone under,
there's gonna be a lot of unemployed people,
when there is higher unemployment,
there's more civil unrest,
there's gonna be more violence,
there's gonna be more home invasions,
there's gonna be more substance abuse,
there's gonna be more people
who,
you know,
don't care anymore
and will commit suicide

and take people down with them.
There's gonna be a lot of that going on.

And,
yeah,
it did influence my decision
to buy a gun
and become a gun owner
and learn how to use it
properly.
And try to control myself,
so I'm not suddenly trying
to use a gun
when I'm not familiar with how to use it
in a pressure situation.
I wanna know already,
or at least have some experience,
with how to use it.
Because
could it happen?
Could I be a victim of violence during all of this?
It's more likely now than it was a year ago,
I would say.

And it's,
uh,
it's,
you know,
we always want to, kind of,
say
the pandemic started this.
Really,
what created all this unrest
and all this uncertainty
is not the pandemic,
it's the government.
And
the government
is,
uh,

is,
whether you wanna have a conspiracy theory around it,
or you just wanna chalk it up to them being a bunch of idiots
who don't know what the hell they're doing,
which tends to be my go-to,
uh,
thing,
'cause they're all followers,
there's no way that you're going to get all these people
in a room together
to come up with a conspiracy theory
to all act as one,
you know,
thing.

You know,
the reality is that
it was a knee-jerk reaction,
a *stupid* reaction,
to a pandemic that they had *no* idea
how horrible it was,
how bad it was gonna be,
or-
or anything,
and they decided that they were going to
follow the nuclear option
that-
that Fauci recommended,
uh,
of locking everybody down,
and calling it "quarantine,"
which is absolutely bullshit,
'cause you don't quarantine healthy people.

Uh,
they were able to use the media
and social media
and everything
to fool people into believing that they could be sick
without having any kind of symptoms,

and,
you know,
that's like lasting problems here.
You know,
they created
major problems
for absolutely no reason whatsoever,
as we're finding out.

A lot of us never believed it in the first place.

Uh,
even Ron Paul called it a hoax,
which
was not saying,
of course,
that the *pandemic* was a hoax,
but that the
government's knee-jerk *reaction* to it
was
what was the hoax.

And,
uh,
of course,
you're never gonna get
the Branch Covidians to,
uh,
understand the difference between those two things,
uh,
the nuance there,
but,
uh,
but the reality is that
it's-
it's not just the pandemic -
the pandemic might've been the start of it -
but all this-
all this civil unrest you're seeing
around Black Lives Matter,
and all this other stuff,
I mean,

this is stuff that's been going on
for years.

What about it all of a sudden changed?

Where now,
everybody is up in arms,
they're in the streets,
they're in-
you know,
they're rioting,
there's armed
people on both sides
of-
of the-
of the issue,
if you want to call it that.
Uh,
there's-
there's *tons* of stuff going on right now,
uh,
the police and the politicians are largely
staying silent
on a lot of these issues.
They're allowing,
uh,
these things to occur,
even though they're technically illegal -
during any other time period
in history,
they would be considered illegal.

So there are elements of this
where the government is seeing this as a
Rahm Emmanuel moment.
Rahm Emmanuel was famous for saying,
"You never want to let a good crisis go to waste."
So
there
was writing on the wall,
and all of this stuff

couldn't have been better-timed.
Uh,
they want civil unrest,
they want civil strife
right now
because they've mismanaged the economy
and
everything
so poorly
over the last-
since the last-
since 1971,
when gold went off the-
when the dollar went off the gold standard,
uh,
after the breakdown of Bretton Woods.

They have lost
so much control
over everything.
They are
happy that this happened
'cause they can blame it on us.
Well,
the reality is
there's a lot of people out there that can be fooled.
We're not.
It's not the pandemic,
it is the government who created these problems,
and they're gonna ride this pandemic
for everything they can,
so they can use it to blame
everything on us.
So that means,
if the government's gonna sit back and let all this
civil unrest happen,
it is absolutely up to us
to be able to protect ourselves
any way we see fit.
And that's where guns come in.

We're gonna keep doing tactical training for a while.
We were talking about it,
and it's actually pretty far away.
It's down in Costa Mesa.
So,
um,
we were thinking about maybe trying to find a place
that's a little closer to us,
so that we're not wasting such
huge portions of the day
with our drive.

At some point,
of course,
over the next several years,
everything's gonna go back to normal,
so
traffic's gonna be an issue,
you know,
back and forth,
things like that,
so...
But I'd like to keep going.
I'd like to-
and maybe Tracy at some point will stop,
she'll feel like,
okay,
I've got the basics down,
I don't need more,
but *I* would love to take
more military-style tactical training,
uh,
courses,
where we start getting more advanced.

And,
it's something I've been thinking about for a long time.
I've always been interested in
pursuing

things like long-distance shooting,
you know,
kind of sniper training,
stuff like that.
Uh,
I would love to get a,
uh,
either a Remington,
you know,
or
something like that,
that would be,
you know,
a really good long-distance gun
and really start taking tactical training around that.

Um,
but,
at the same time,
my next gun will probably be an AR.
Uh,
and,
uh,
and
we'll get some nice tactical training around that.

Of course,
in California,
we have a problem.
I don't want-
I will never buy an AR in California
because California has
horrible
restrictions on ARs.
They put these stupid-ass paddles on them.
Make it really cumbersome and awkward to shoot.
And they put these locking mechanisms
on the,
uh,
on the ejection

for the,
uh,
clips.
So you can't just eject it.
It's not a button.
You have to use this little tool to eject it.
So,
like,
I would *never* buy one of those in California.
They've completely ruined the gun
for any kind of
practical safety reasons
that you would want to buy an AR.

But at some point,
I will have an AR,
one way or the other.
And,
uh,
that's gonna be
pretty much my next gun.
I'm gonna continue to buy
guns for different situations
that I don't already have
and learn how to use those guns properly
for the-
the
situations and the reasons that they were invented.

So,
I plan to have
a gun for my home
and a gun for my business.
Right now,
I only have one.
Um,
I
do want to continue to do tactical training
because
mastery of anything takes ten thousand hours,

you know,
just a few hours of training
isn't going to be enough
to be,
you know,
to be comfortable in a gunfight,
okay?
So I do-
I do intend to continue doing it.
I like the confidence that it gives me.

Um,
I like the social connection around it too
because there is,
you know,
when I talk to people in my life,
I'm finding a lot more people
are gun owners
that I had no idea were.
And,
you know,
they want to go shooting,
and they want to,
you know,
encourage that,
so there is something around that
that I find encouraging
and I do enjoy.

Um,
and I would encourage
anyone
to
take tactical training,
even if they're scared of guns,
to actually get comfortable with it
and to learn about this
because it is-
it does transform your attitude,
and it gets rid of that fear,

when you know how to do it.
And
I truly
think it's great.

I love when she told me the other day
that the ladies she plays tennis with
are pretty much all gun owners,
and they were talking about it,
and they were thinking about starting a female,
uh,
shooting club.
I thought that was cool.
I thought that was really cool.

Well, and I think
women and guns.
I think that more women
should be able to feel comfortable
with guns.
And should feel comfortable shooting them.
When I go to these
tactical classes,
most of the time I'm the only woman,
or there may be one other woman in the class.
There's just not a lot of women
out there,
trying to learn how to use a gun.
At least that's my impression.
And maybe that's because
it's a cultural thing,
you know,
that women aren't supposed to use guns.
But personally,
I think that it's good for everybody.
Especially women.

Well,
like you said,
it's a great equalizer.

And
the more women who know how to properly handle a gun,
um,
if that is just a known quantity
in the culture,
then,
uh,
I think a lot more men would be a little bit more careful
around women,
honestly.
I mean,
even if they don't know if they're carrying a gun or not,
at least
the fact that they know
she had tactical training at some point in her life,
she knows how to handle herself,
you know,
it puts a-
it puts a red flag up
in the minds of anybody who is going to consider,
you know,
being aggressive against you.

So, I mean,
you know,
and again,
from a cultural standpoint,
if I said,
like you were saying,
more women knew how to handle guns,
and it was okay for women to concealed carry,
and you never knew as a guy
if that woman is concealed carrying,
you would
treat them very differently,
I would think.

So
I think that that would be
a really good thing.
I think as a

deterrent mechanism,
that would be fantastic.

And another aspect of that question is
that,
um,
the tactical classes that we are taking
are actually geared towards people
to get concealed carry licenses,
and we are taking this in Orange County.
We currently live in LA County,
where it's pretty much impossible
to get concealed carry.
I am going to move out of LA County.
You know,
so we are gonna move into San Bernardino County,
eventually,
you know,
maybe it'll be a little easier out there,
and I will probably pursue it
when I live in a county that
is
friendly to it
because there is no open carry in California,
so I would have to get
a CCW.

There's a big difference between a
responsible gun owner
and a-
and
somebody who just wants to have a gun for protection
but has no real
intention
on
learning to use it properly.
And I think that there is a big misconception
because of that.
That-
that-

the people who take guns,
and don't want anybody to own a gun,
and want to use the force of government
to take those guns away from people who are
good, responsible gun owners,
that is the reason why.

So I think that,
um,
people need to change -
people who want to have guns,
like Tracy and I,
who see them as being
an integral part
of
the American culture
and
for all kinds of reasons,
but mostly for protection,
of course -
uh,
that we need to all collectively
show the people
who don't understand guns,
who know nothing about them,
who have all these misconceptions
about guns and gun owners,
we need to show them where they're wrong about us
and-
and why
they are-
why they have a misconception.

And it's not that we need to try and explain it to them,
we just need to
embody
those-
those things
as gun owners.
So it's not like we're trying to go out there

and convince anybody.
That's not what I'm trying to say.
We just need to collectively embody that.
And so that's
our responsibility as the gun owners.

And so,
like I said,
I don't actually care about the term "law-abiding,"
I think that's
a
horrible way to look at it.
I don't believe that the government has
any
right to say
what you can and can't own,
or how many,
you know,
or whatever it is.
You should be able to own whatever you want for any reason
or no reason at all.
The government has no-
should have no say in that whatsoever.
Okay.
Clear,
right?
I just want to say that if you are going to be a gun owner,
it's important to
really take it on
and be serious about it.
You wouldn't own anything else,
probably,
without really knowing how to use it to its full potential
and in the safest way possible.

So,
treat the gun
equally
as anything else that you would own
and take seriously.

I think everybody-
well, the culture,
or the attitude,
in society will start changing over time
around that.

And-
and be cool about it!
Take your friends out shooting with you!
Teach them!

Be-
be good about it.
Teach them how responsible a gun owner actually is
and what it means to be a gun owner.
That's another great way.

So I would say,
just be,
uh,
just be cool about it,
don't be a raving lunatic around it,
'cause when you say,
you know,
when you come off as a raving lunatic,
and
say,
you know,
screw all you gun grabbers,
and,
come and take it over my dead body,
or something like that,
you know,
it-
it doesn't,
uh,
it doesn't
inspire
or-
or change anybody's minds.
I think if somebody's
anti-gun,

that's just going to-
or that kind of attitude is going to
just reinforce their
pre-existing misconceptions about
what
gun owners,
uh,
how gun owners actually are
and what they believe.
That's it.

Yeah,
um,
I guess there's something that I want to say around
the politicization
of
guns.
And,
I think it's very unfortunate
that there's been this polarization in opinion.
You know,
if you're pro-gun ownership
and you're pro-gun freedom,
then
you have to be,
you know,
you are a Republican.
Or if you're a Republican,
you have to think that way.
And if you're a Democrat,
you have to think the opposite,
that no one should own guns except for the
government.

You know,
and
I think that's unfortunate
because I think
people
sometimes get a little too crazy

in their political identity,
where they
would never consider,
you know,
that guns have a place in society.
That guns can be
a useful thing
for protection.
That guns can be a form of recreation and entertainment.
They're closing themselves off of that because of
their political identity.

And,
you know,
I think that if they weren't so politicized
and so polarized,
then
more people would be open to actually
learning how to use one
and
potentially considering that
there are alternatives
other than increasing government security
for the country,
you know,
that there could be more freedom
around that.

And,
I just,
I think it's very unfortunate
because
it is a very polarized issue,
and
I really think
guns should be just
looked at,
specifically,
as to what they can contribute
and what harm they can do

and
trying to figure out
how,
potentially,
citizens owning guns
could be a benefit for society as a whole.
'Cause I personally think
they are.

That's interesting.
I have an actually different
opinion about that,
or,
uh,
different take on that.
Um,
especially in the last,
say,
ten or fifteen years,
the majority of the people that I know
who are extreme gun owners
and-
and more likely to go off
in the desert
and blow up Tannerite,
binary explosives,
um,
propane tanks
and all these things,
they're crazy
nutjob progressives.

Look at
Kevin Flynn.
Ex-marine.
He's a fucking
nutjob progressive.
That's why I always said,
progressives are the most,
in my opinion,

most dangerous,
most,
uh,
you know,
violent
people,
who are gun owners.
I think that's the reason why the left
tends to hate guns
and gun owners
and gun ownership
because
they see the potential evil in that
based on their own bubble that they live in.

They think that if *they* can see themselves using a gun
for
anything other than recreation or self-defense,
that *everyone* who owns a gun
must feel the same way
or must be potentially-
no!
The reality is
that,
um,
they are looking at it from their own
personal biases.
And if they see the world
as being,
um,
too violent to own guns,
that's only based on their own
self-understanding
about people in general.

That's why I always,
constantly
say,
uh,
progressives are the most incredibly violent,

uh,
individuals on the planet right now.
I mean,
they're the ones that are out there
burning things down,
uh,
throwing rocks -
not that I care,
I think the police are just as horrible as them -
but I mean honestly,
they're-
they're domestic terrorists who're cut from the same cloth,
the police
and these Antifa,
BLM thugs
that are out there,
uh,
destroying cities.
They're just-
they're one and the same,
as far as I'm concerned.

So no,
I see it very differently
than you.
I think conservatives are very, very,
um,
responsible
gun owners.
And the,
uh,
the,
uh,
the progressives
are the ones who are out there,
being more,
uh,
likely to use guns
in a
aggressive,

non-defensive way.

And so,
again,
I think that's even more of a reason why
I
think it's more important
now than ever
that more people who are responsible,
um,
own guns as well.
Because
there's a lot of crazy progressives out there
that are,
uh,
very violent,
and I don't think
in a second,
if the economy goes downhill,
and there's no jobs,
and they're starving to death,
they won't think-
they won't even think a second thought about
using that weapon
to take something from somebody else
for their own benefit,
for their own survival.

Yeah,
so,
no,
it's gonna be,
you know,
that's the way I see the world,
and,
um,
yeah.
I don't know,
I guess you see it a little bit differently.

I'm not saying that progressives don't own guns
 or that they aren't violent.
 I'm saying that progressive culture
 and progressive politics
 basically demonize guns.
 And a *lot* of people I know who identify as progressives
 are automatically anti-gun
 because of that.
 Because that is the political platform.

Again,
 I guess I just find myself in these subcultures,
 somehow, then,
 because the majority of progressives I used to hang out with
 before they went totally bat-shit crazy,
 uh,
were gun owners.
 So,
 I mean,
 a lot of 'em were ex-military,
 so,
 you know,
 I guess like I said,
 I tend to find myself in these subcultures
 that aren't gun-hating,
 or something like that.
 They could be on either side.
 So that's an interesting-
 that might be something interesting to look more into.
 Interesting.
 All right.
 Well, that's pretty much all I have.

Yeah, I'm not gonna say any more.
 That devolved a little bit.

Yeah, well, I mean,
 it devolved because
 we were pondering it.
 It wasn't something that we were ready for.

Uh,
we didn't have an exact answer for it,
and it wasn't a direct question,
so
that's part of it.
All right,
well,
that was interesting!

Finally, I spoke with my last participant, who is anonymous pending her approval of the transcript. I had previously known her before beginning this project, and she volunteered to participate when I mentioned it to her. I conducted my interview with her over Zoom. The following are her words from that exchange.

"I pulled a revolver out of my purse."

Anonymous

Interview conducted September 9, 2020, 3:06 P.M. Pacific Daylight Time

I like a lot of things about guns.

I think shooting guns is really fun.

I

enjoy

having something that helps me

be protected in times of civil unrest,

or if there was a home intruder.

And I believe that guns are an equalizer

for me as a woman

when I'm potentially faced with an attacker

who's larger than me.

And I really like

that

it's something that I can use to defend myself against government tyranny

if that ever

comes to-

I guess I would say,

if I'm ever faced with a choice

of having to defend myself against government intruders.

I don't pay a lot of attention

to racial, ethnic, or gender identity,

but

guns definitely level the playing field for me

as a woman who's got a small frame

and deals with chronic illness.

Guns make me

safer

and that puts me

well, at an advantage

against an attacker who's larger than me

if they're unarmed

and at the same level

with an attacker who's armed.

Over ten years ago,
I was walking home
from working at a nightclub,
and I had
over a thousand dollars cash in my purse.

And
I got
stalked and followed,
and it was about two in the morning,
or later,
by a guy
who was taller than me,
heavier than me,
mumbling things incoherently,
like he was on drugs,
or he might've just been crazy,
and he followed me
for about
maybe two blocks.

And at a certain point
he
crossed the street
'cause he was following me from the other side
and came at me
quickly.
He quickened his pace,
he wasn't running,
but he was walking really fast
and seemed obviously agitated.
And
as he got
closer to me,
within earshot,
I stopped,
and I turned around,
and I said something to the effect of,
what do you want,
as assertively as I could.

And he mumbled something
and then said,
"I'm gonna bend you over the hood of that car
and fuck you till you bleed."
And I pulled
a revolver out of my purse
and squared off with him.
And at this point, he was maybe
ten feet away from me.
And he stopped in his tracks
and immediately walked backwards quickly
through the middle of the street
and mumbled something about me being a crazy bitch
and left me alone.

So, for me
that experience
really solidified
my opinion and perspective
that
gun safety-
that guns make you safer
as long as you know how to use them
and that carrying a gun is really important
and that everyone should be allowed to do it.

I believe the actual purpose of the Second Amendment
is to protect citizens from government tyranny.
There are a lot of other things
that are beneficial about guns,
but I think that that is expressly why
guns were-
the Second Amendment was written into the Constitution
in the Bill of Rights.

I see gun rights under threat
from the federal level.
I believe Donald Trump has enforced
more gun laws

than any president in the past
thirty years,
I believe that's correct.
And at the state level,
especially in California,
our gun rights are under legislative attack
all of the time.
We have a limited magazine capacity,
we can't have automatic weapons,
semi-automatic weapons are constantly mischaracterized.
I believe state government is constantly looking for ways
to reduce our Second Amendment rights.

Hollow-point ammunition, I believe,
is illegal in California now.
In addition to having to have
gun registration
and pay a lot of
regulatory fees,
you now
can't get ammo
shipped directly to your house,
I believe that's illegal.
You have to have it shipped to an authorized dealer,
at least in Los Angeles County.
I believe that there's been an
aggressive, orchestrated attack
from
left-leaning anti-gun activists
to smear Second Amendment rights
and gun owners.
And that's not necessarily
directly coming from the government,
but it is coming from people with
certainly some sort of position
of authority and power.

I think that there's a lot of misinformation out there,
and a lot of organizations
that

really want to see guns
removed from the hands of ordinary citizens.
I think that gun rights are also under attack from
police
and local agencies,
which is unfortunate because they have guns.
And so,
stop and frisk policies and things like that,
I believe,
are designed to undermine Second Amendment rights,
especially the Second Amendment rights of minorities.
That's
the most I can think of off the top of my head.
I'm sure there's more.

I think the first time I shot a gun,
I was eight.
I live in Los Angeles now,
but I grew up in Texas,
so
I remember shooting guns with my Aunt Helen
in the creek
behind my grandparents' house.
It was very normal back then,
um,
shooting guns is normal
in
Texas culture.
And
I moved to California when I was a teenager
and didn't shoot guns
again,
I think,
until I was about twenty years old,
and then I would go to the shooting range
in my early twenties
at least once a month.
And then I started to go
very regularly,
uh,

twice a week.

I got a couple of handguns,
and I was going
until
the lockdown started,
maybe once a month.
I was going a little bit less
because I got-
I've been really busy.
But I think I've been consistently
shooting
for most of my adult life.
I don't think I've gone
a year
ever
without shooting guns.

Well I guess that really depends,
how I interact with people who oppose guns.
I mean,
when we're not talking about guns,
I interact with them the same way I'd interact with anyone else,
nicely, politely,
depending on the circumstances.
Generally when people are telling me they oppose guns,
I try to let them just like
get it out
and tell me why they oppose guns.
And,
when people are really emotional,
I try to-
if I feel that there's any way to reason with 'em
at all,
I try to meet them with the emotional appeal
of how
gun control origins are racist,
how gun control
doesn't actually save lives,
lots of really good stories about people defending themselves,

especially women
and children, even, defending themselves with guns
from home invaders and things like that.

I try to remind them
that
it's good to stay armed against your government
because
government tyranny is very real,
especially people who oppose Donald Trump.
I say,
why would you
want to give up your guns
if you're very concerned about police brutality
and fascism in the United States,
you need an effective method to fight back against it.

For people who are concerned about
mass shooter events,
I try to remind them statistically
about all the other ways that people die
and how unlikely mass shooter events are.
For people who
think that they need to ban
what they misunderstand as
an "assault weapon,"
I try to remind them
that rifles
are just rifles,
and usually,
"assault weapon"
is talking about a rifle that's a hunting rifle
or a home-defending weapon.
That that term
is
grossly misused
and misapplied.
And I
try to really hit home
that assault weapons bans,

quote unquote,
don't ban handguns,
and that that's what kills people the most.

I think
that's about-
I think that about covers most of the points
that I bring up with people
who I think are
somewhat reasonable
when talking about guns.

I believe that gun control was,
um,
enforced in its origins
to suppress Black uprisings.
And the Black Panther movement in the 19-
I think it was the early 1970s,
really showed that.
They did not want Black people marching in militias.
They did not want Black protesters,
armed,
marching on capitol buildings.

I think-
I think the future of gun rights
does not look great,
considering our current state of affairs
because people are very concerned.
People are frightened
over a lot of things,
and guns also scare them.
And when people are frightened
and they're looking to government for help,
they're more likely to go along
with whatever government suggests
even if it doesn't make any sense
like taking away guns.

So right now,

everyone is very upset about police brutality.
I am
hopeful
that people will
see that
taking guns away from citizens
and allowing only the cops to have guns
doesn't make a lot of sense if you're worried about cops killing people.
But I believe the reality is
that people are not thinking clearly
about
how gun control works
logistically,
and that we're much more likely to lose our gun rights
when people are panicked
and
fearing for their lives
as they are right now
over the coronavirus lockdown,
over civil unrest and riots,
over police brutality killings,
and, I guess,
the Donald Trump hysteria.

Uh, historically,
we're way less violent now.
Violence has gone down.
Our average life expectancy is
much greater.
The chances of dying from violence
are much diminished.
Uh,
it's unfortunate that we still have war across the world,
but war has gone down dramatically.
People
don't realize
the perpetual state of warfare
that they entire globe
lived with
just like,

300 years ago.
So I think-
I think that things are actually looking great
on the violence spectrum.
It's unfortunate that we have so much civil unrest right now,
but overall,
it's just tremendously better.

I support people being able to own anything.
I am for legalizing nukes.
If I could have a nuke in my purse,
I would have a nuke in my purse.

I absolutely think that people who oppose guns
might change their minds,
and I have
seen
several people on the far left,
who were very pro-gun-control,
change their minds
once Donald Trump took office,
and they were very concerned about
the rise of facism and white nationalists.
I personally know several people who have gone out
and bought guns for home defense.

I had an owner of a gun store
come and talk to a local Libertarian group
a couple years ago.
I try to
educate my friends,
as much as I can,
in the politest, most compassionate way possible.
I am a big fan
of Black Guns Matter,
which is a
gun advocacy group for minorities.
I have
tried to work to promote that group
a little bit in Libertarian circles,

encourage people to see
Maj Toure,
the founder,
go and speak.

I have-
I had a small awareness campaign
when the governor was considering
a letter written by one of the state representatives
in Los Angeles,
whose name escapes me currently,
but he wanted to suspend
all gun and ammunition sales,
so I tried to
put that out on my email list,
and encourage people to write that representative,
their own representatives,
and the governor
to oppose that.

And
I have put together
some group shooting events
at local gun ranges
to
promote when I was running for Congress,
and also to promote, uh,
women
becoming more familiar with guns.

I have a restraining order against,
uh,
a stalker,
and so,
it's important for me to be armed.
Definitely.
As well as several people who really hate my guts.
I think it's really important for me to be armed.
During the coronavirus
lockdowns,
I led two protests,

and I got a lot of death threats.

And,

although I think it's unlikely that people who are afraid to leave their home
are going to come and kill me,

I think it's still wise

to be prepared if they do.

Gun sales have gone through the roof,
which I think is great.

And

I think that it's made it a lot easier to advocate for guns
in the short term

because people see a reason why now.

People are objectively afraid,

and even though I do think people are more likely to give up their rights
to government

when government demands it,

those demands haven't been explicitly made yet,

or at least not increased,

so people are going out and purchasing guns.

So

I've been able to encourage people.

I've been able to point them in the direction of their gun stores.

I've been able to help people

prepare to study for

the little, uh,

safety exam that you have to take.

And I have,

um

I have promoted some other gun rights
advocacy groups.

Gun Owners of America is a really good one.

Gun Owners of California.

So I've just been tryin' to,

I guess,

work to increase people's awareness,

as much as I can,

about what their options are.

I don't think the NRA has been great on
advocating
for
gun rights
across the board.
They've-
they're the first advocacy group to sort of
compromise,
and sell us out,
like with the ridiculous bump stock ban.
I believe that they were really soft on red flag laws,
and things of that nature.
That's probably something I should've mentioned before,
that's been really disturbing,
the rise of red flag laws in the past couple years.
So no,
I'm not-
I'm not a big fan of the NRA.

I prefer
Gun Owners of America,
Gun Owners of California,
and there is a concealed carry organization
across the country
that provides safety and training
and also insurance in the event that you,
um,
end up shooting
or harming someone
who's a home invader,
or
you end up hurting someone in self-defense.
They also do a lot of great gun advocacy.
I wish I could remember their name.
But those are the three that come to mind.

I think that my future advocacy will probably involve
making more people aware of legislative issues,
especially in California,
and on the federal level.

And I think it will also involve reaching out more to Republicans to really highlight the level of gun law enforcement that's been done during the last three and a half, four years under the Trump administration. I think it's really important for people to know that the Trump administration has not been good on gun rights.

Jo Jorgensen is definitely my candidate in 2020, and she fully supports the Second Amendment. She will not support any legislative efforts, to, uh, infringe on our rights. And I know that she will work to undo what she could, from an executive position, any federal, um, anti-gun legislation.

But the state government has a lot more restrictions than the federal government does right now. California is one of the worst places to live for gun rights. New York and New Jersey are worse, but California is not great at all. The limited magazine capacity, the restrictions on ammunition, the restrictions on quote unquote "assault weapons," automatic weapons, all sorts of little accessories to rifles we're not allowed to use, California's just a disaster

on gun rights.

Californians need to
stop voting for
Democrats who want to
restrict our gun rights.
They really do.
I think the best thing to do is vote Libertarian.
The second-best thing to do is to stop voting for *anyone*
who says they're gonna restrict our gun rights.

I think it's important for everyone to go out
and at least shoot a gun.
Even if you don't want to buy a gun.
I think it's-
I think it's really safe,
and it's
really prudent and smart
to go out and learn how to use a gun.
Because if you're ever in a situation where you need to use a gun,
and you're never shot one before,
you should at least know how to handle it.
Or if you're ever in a situation where you come across a gun,
and you need to remove it
so the situation is safer,
you'll know how to handle it safely.
You'll understand what the safety is,
you'll understand how to check to see if it's loaded,
things of that nature.
I think the more familiar you can make yourself with guns,
the safer you'll be in society.