I affirm resolved: In the United States, the private ownership of handguns ought to be banned.

Theories of oppression attempt to establish binaries between the oppressor and the oppressed, but this notion is misguided. **hooks:** bell hooks, “*Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice*.”; Routledge. 2013; Accessed 2/29/16; PE

**Casting blame and calling for vengeance** was an aspect of militant movements for black power that have really **failed to sustain the climate of unlearning racism** previously forged by nonviolent anti-racist struggle. **In the aftermath of sixties rebellion**, **the more black[s]** folks **were encouraged to vent rage**, **to “blame” all white folks for race-based exploitation** and domination, and to eschew any notion of forgiveness, the more an internalized sense of victimhood became the norm. Tragically, today many black folks are more despairing of any possibility that racism can be effectively challenged and changed than at other similar historical moments when white supremacist aggression was more overtly life threatening. Unenlightened white folks who proclaim either that racism has ended or that they are not responsible for slavery engage a politics of blame wherein they disavow political reality to insist that black folk are never really victims of racism but are the agents of their own suffering. **Dualistic thinking**, which is at the core of domination thinking, **teaches people that there is always the oppressed and the oppressor**, a victim and a victimizer. **Hence there is** always **someone to blame**. Moving past the ideology of blame to a politics of accountability is a difficult move to make in a society where almost all political organizing, whether conservative or radical, has been structured around the binary of good guys and bad guys. Accountability is a much more complex issue. A politics of blame allows a contemporary white person to make statements like, “My family never owned slaves,” or “Slavery is over. Why can’t they ust get over it?” In contrast, **a politics of accountability would emphasize that all white people benefit from the privileges accrued from racist exploitation past and present and therefore are accountable for changing and transforming white supremacy and racism**. **Accountability** is a more expansive concept because it **opens a field of possibility wherein we are all compelled to move beyond blame to see where responsibility lies** .Seeing clearly that **we live within a dominator culture of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, I** am compelled to **locate where my responsibility** lies. **In some circumstances I am** more likely **to be victimized** by an aspect of the system, **in other** circumstances **I am** in a position to be **a victimizer**. If I only lay claim to those aspects of the system where I define myself as the oppressed and someone else as my oppressor, then I continually a fail to see the larger picture. **Any effort I might make to challenge domination is likely to fail if I am not looking accurately at the circumstances that create suffering, and thus seeing the larger picture.**

The oppressed/or oppressor dichotomy is a falsehood. We are always advantaged in some way and disadvantaged in others. We in this room are advantaged by the opportunity we have to debate and be in Kentucky on this weekend, even if other aspects of our social location disadvantage us. Dualistic thinking creates a politics of blame because the thought process believes that there is always an absolute somebody to blame for our condition. But a politics of accountability emphasizes an acknowledgement of where victimization comes from and allows for people to see where their responsibility lies.

Patriarchy is “dominator thinking.” Few will say something blatantly racist or sexist out loud, but these phenomena exist in our psyche. However, dominator thinking extends to the way we approach the question of oppression. We must look towards interlocking systems of oppression in order to avoid the contradiction of embracing the same dominator thought we criticize. **hooks 2:** bell hooks, “*Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice*.”; Routledge. 2013; Accessed 2/29/16; PE

Even though origin stories, which find the invention of patriarchy to be the root of domination may seem inaccurate, what is true is that **in** dominator culture the family is one of the primary pedagogical locations for the teaching of dominator thought and practice via the acceptance and perpetuation of patriarchy. Hence, working to **challenge** and change **patriarchy continues to be essential to any effort to transform dominator culture.** Progressive folks, especially prominent male thinkers and activist s on the left, openly denounce imperialism, racism, and capitalism but rarely talk about the need to challenge patriarchy. And **while** all people of color, **all black people, are socialized to embrace white supremacist thinking, few**, if any individuals **from these constituents openly advocate racism.** Individual black people who straighten their hair because they have been taught to believe their natural hair texture is ugly are perpetuating a white supremacist aesthetic even as they may be adamantly anti-racism. These **contradictions reveal the myriad ways dominator culture shapes our thoughts and actions in ways** that are unconscious**.** It is precisely **because dominator thinking is so deeply embedded in our psyches that efforts to decolonize minds through the cultivation of consciousness needs to be an essential aspect of resistance struggle**. When individuals who are psychologically confused engage in resistance struggle, they often are dysfunctional and act out in ways that undermine or negate their efforts to create constructive change. **Since dominator culture relies on interlocking systems (imperialism, white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy) to sustain itself, it seeks to cover up the connections between these systems. Or it allows for only one aspect of the system to be challenged at a time: for example, allowing anti-racist critiques while silencing anti-capitalist or anti-sexist voices.**

Thus we must combat oppression through the lens of white supremacist capitalist patriarch, or WSCP. Every other method of answering the question of oppression that is not this intersectional leads to the oppression of omitted sources of oppression. **hooks 3:** bell hooks, “*Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice*.”; Routledge. 2013; Accessed 2/29/16; PE

I began to use the phrase in my work **“white supremacist capitalist patriarchy”** because I wanted to have some language that would actually **remind us** continually **of the interlocking systems of domination that define our reality and not to just have one thing** be like, you know, gender is the important issue, race is the important issue, but for me the use of that particular jargonistic phrase was a way, a sort of short cut way of saying all of these things actually are functioning simultaneously at all times in our lives and that **if I really want to understand what's happening to me**, right now at this moment in my life, as a black female of a certain age group, **I won't be able to understand it if I'm only looking through the lens of race.** I won't be able to understand it if I'm only looking through the lens of **[or] gender**. I won't be able to understand it if I'm only looking at how white people see me. To me an important break through, **I** felt, in my work and that of others was the call to **use the term white supremacy, over racism because racism** in and of itself **did not** really **allow for a discourse of** colonization and **decolonization**, the recognition of the **internalized racism** within people of color **and** **it** was always in a sense keeping t**[kept] things at the level at which whiteness** and white people **remained at the center of the discussion.** In my classroom I might say to students that you know that when we use the term white supremacy it doesn't just evoke white people, it evokes a political world that we can all frame ourselves in relationship to. And I think that I was able to do that because I grew up, again, in racial apartheid, where there was a color caste system. So that obviously I knew that through my own experiential reality, you know, that it wasn't just what white people do to black people that was wounding and damaging to our lives, I knew that when we went over to my grandmother's house, who looked white, who lived in a white neighborhood, and she called my sister, Blackie, because she was dark and her hair was nappy and my sister would sit in a corner and cry or not want to go over there. I knew that there is some system here that is hurting this little girl, that is not directly, the direct hit from the white person. And white supremacy was that term that allowed one to acknowledge our collusion with the forces of racism and imperialism. And so **for me** those **[the] words [white supremacist capitalist patriarchy]** were very much about the constant reminder, one of institutional construct, that we're not talking about personal construct in the sense of, how do you feel about me as a woman, or how do you feel about me as a black person? But theyreally seem to me to **evoke a larger apparatus** and I don't know why those terms have become so mocked by people because in fact, far from simplifying the issues, I think they actually **when you merge them** together **[they]** really **complicate the questions of** freedomand **justice** globally**, because it means then that we have to look at what black people are doing to each other in Rwanda, we can't just say racism**, what have you. **We have to problemitize nationalism beyond race,** in all kinds of ways that I think there's a tremendous reluctance, particularly in the United States to do, to have a more complex accounting of identity.

Embracing the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy theory of oppression means we must embrace love. **Nienhuis:** “Revolutionary Independence,” Critical Perspectives on bell hooks, Nancy Nienhuis, 2009; Accessed 4/26/16; PE

For hooks the goal of theoretical work must be to seek the highest good for all, and it is from this conviction that her call for revolutionary interdependence emerges. hooks argues that **until we see how colluding with some systems while resisting others will never enable us to work together effectively, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy will win:** “Until we are all able to accept the interlocking, interdependent nature of systems of domination and recognize specific ways each system is maintained, we will continue to act in ways that undermine our individual quest for freedom and collective liberation struggle.” Too often for those of us with privilege, border crossing is something we merely dip our toes into before retreating into the safety and comfort of our privileged existence. Genuine solidarity recognizes that our interdependence can sustain life on the planet. **The only way to ensure that our actions foster true solidarity is to return to the love ethic that hooks claims was prevalent in early liberation movements**: “**Unless love is the force undergirding our efforts to transform society, we lose our way.”** hooks has spent time explaining this love ethic and its transformative potential in great detail throughout her work for many years: “**Love is profoundly political. Our deepest revolution will come when we understand this truth.”**

And, domination, of the absence of love, is the root cause of all forms of oppression.. **hooks 4:** bell hooks; “Love as a Practice of Freedom”; Accessed 4/19/16; PE

**In** this **society**, there is no powerful discourse on love emerging either from politically progressive radicals or from the Left. **The absence of a** sustained **focus on love** in progressive circles **arises from a** collective **failure to acknowledge** the needs of the spirit and an overdetermined emphasis on **material concerns. Without love, our efforts to liberate** ourselves and **our** world **community from oppression** and exploitation **are doomed. As long as we refuse to address fully the place of love in struggles for liberation we will not be able to create a culture of conversion where there is a mass turning away from an ethic of domination. Without** an ethic of **love** shaping the direction of our political vision and our radical aspirations, **we are** often **seduced**, in one way or the other, **into** continued allegiance to **systems of domination—imperialism, sexism, racism, classism**. It has always puzzled me that women and men who spend a lifetime working to resist and oppose one form of domination can be systematically supporting another. **I have been puzzled by** powerful **visionary black male leaders who can** speak and act passionately in resistance to racial domination and accept and **embrace sexist domination** of women, **by feminist** white **women who work daily to eradicate sexism but** who **[or] have** major **blind spots** when it comes **to** acknowledging and **resisting racism** and white supremacist domination of the planet. Critically examining these blind spots, I conclude that **many** of us are motivated to **move against domination solely when we feel our self-interest directly threatened.**

**Thus the role of the ballot is the ethic of love**. I define love as agape, that having authentic care for one another and empathy for each other. This is not saying that we must consider every person a friend, or even like everyone we met. However, love does mean that we must fundamentally care for and embrace each other even in the face of great opposition and hatred. Love is the answer to all forms of dominator thinking, this also means anti-ethical approaches fail. **hooks 5:** Gloria “Bell Hooks” Watkins, *All About Love: New Visions,* 2000- bell hooks PE

**Domination cannot exist in any social situation where a love ethic prevails**. Jung’s insight, that if the will to power is paramount love will be lacking, is important to remember. When love is present the desire to dominate and exercise power cannot rule the day. **All the great social movements for freedom and justice in our society have promoted a lov ethic**. Concern for the collective good of our nation, city, or neighbor rooted in the values of love make us all seek to nurture and protect that good. **If all public policy was created in the spirit of love,** we would not have to worry about unemployment, homelessness, schools failing to teach children, or addiction. Were a love ethic informing all public policy in cities and towns, **individuals would come together and map out programs that affect the good of everyone.** Melody Chavis’s wonderful book *Altars in the Street: A Neighborhood Fights to Survive* tells a story of real people coming together across differences of race and class to improve their living environment. She speaks from the perspective of a white woman who moves with her family into a predominately black community. As someone who embraces a love ethic, Melody joins her neighbors to create peace and love in their environment. Their work succeeds bus undermined by the failure of support from public policy and city government. Concurrently, she also works to help prisoners on death row. Loving community in all its diversity, Melody states: “Sometimes I think that I’ve been trying, on death row and in my neighborhood, to gain some control over the violence in my life. As a child I was completely helpless in the face of violence.” Her book shows the changes a love ethic can make even in the most troubled community. It also documents the tragic consequences to human life when terror and violence become the accepted norm. **When small communities organize their lives around a love ethic, every aspect of daily life can be affirming for everyone.** In all his prose work Kentucky poet Wendell Berry writes eloquently about the positive values that exist in rural communities that embrace an ethic of communalism and the sharing of resources. In Another Turn of the Crank, Berry exposes the extent to which the interests of big business lead to the destruction of rural communities, remind us that destruction is fast becoming the norm in all types of communities. He encourages us to learn from the lives **of folks who** live in communities governed **by a spirit of love** and communalism. Sharing some of the values held by citizens of these communities he writes: “They **are people who** take and **hold a generous and neighborly view of self-preservation; they do not believe that they can survive and flourish by the rule of dog eat dog; they do not believe that they can succeed by defeating or destroying or selling or using up everything but themselves**. They doubt that good solutions can be produced by violence. **They want to preserve the precious things of nature of human culture** and pass them on to their children. . . . They see that no commonwealth or community of interest can be defined by greed. . . . They know that work ought to be necessary; it ought to be good; it ought to be satisfying and dignifying to the people who do it; and genuinely useful and pleasing to the people for whom it is done.

Thus, the **standard** is consistency with an ethic of love*.*

Impact Calculus:

1. Debates about empirics and whether guns are instrumentally good are bankrupt; the real debate is whether guns promote solidarity. **Braman and Kahan:** Donald Braman professor at George Washington University and Dan Kahan Professor at Yale Law; “Overcoming The Fear Of Guns”; <http://scholarship.law.gwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1028&context=faculty_publications>; 2006; Accessed 4/25/16; PE

**So what is the gun debate about**? If one peruses academic journals or tunes in to the debates that pervade legislative chambers, **the gun debate appears to** **hinge on a narrow factual** **question: whether more guns make society less safe or more.** Control supporters. we are told, believe that the ready availability of guns diminishes public safety by facilitating violent crimes and accidental shootings; opponents, that such availability enhances public safety by enabling potential crime victims to ward off violent predation. **Hoping to settle this disagreement social scientists employ** a wide array of **empirical methods**—rnultivariate regression models, **contingent valuation studies** public- health risk factor analyses-to investigate these conflicting claims? **But so long as statistics continue to fund the parties‘ arguments, the gun debate, we believe, will remain bankrupt. Purely instrumental arguments lack the power to persuade because they ignore what really motivates individuals to favor or oppose gun control-—namely their cultural worldviews.’** Their prominent (and in many respects fabled) role in American history imbues guns with a surfeit of social meanings. **For one segment** of American society. **guns symbolize** honor, human mastery over nature, and individual **self-sufficiency**. By opposing gun control. individuals affirm the value of these meanings and the vision of the good society that they construct. **For another segment** of American society, however. **guns connote** something else: the perpetuation of illicit social hierarchies. **the elevation of force over reason. and the expression of collective indifference** to the well—being of strangers. **These individuals instinctively support gun control as a means of** repudiating these significations and of **promotion** an alternative vision of the good society that features equality, **[of] social solidarity**, and civilized non-aggresion.

We focus too much on the whether guns are instrumentally good and not what guns symbolize. A state exists to create interaction between citizens so you we care about actions intrinsic to the aff policy. Individuals can promote a policy even if it is misused in certain situations. So reasons why the state is bad or state imposition is bad don’t negate- because the aff is an evaluation of a world where no one owned handguns.

Additional Reasons to Prefer:

The embracing of love and communal care is the way we can liberate society to create political movements empirically proven via the civil rights movement. **hooks 6:** “Love as the Practice of Freedom” bell hooks

**The civil rights movement** had the power to **transform[ed] society because the individuals who struggle** alone and in community **for** freedom and **justice wanted these gifts to be for all, not just the** suffering and the **oppressed**. Visionary black leaders such ¶ as Septima **Clark**, Fannie Lou **Hamer**, **Martin Luther King, Jr., and** Howard **Thurman warned against isolationism. They encouraged black people to** look beyond our own ¶ circumstances and **assume responsibility for the planet**. This call for communion with a ¶ world beyond the self, the tribe, the race, the nation, was a constant invitation for ¶ personal expansion¶ and growth. **When** masses ofblack **folks start**ing **thinking** solely **in terms of "us and them," internalizing the value system of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy**, blind spots developed, **the** capacity for **empathy needed for the building of community was diminished.** To heal our wounded body politic we must reaffirm our ¶ commitment to a vision of what King referred to in the essay "Facing the Challenge of a ¶ New Age" as a genuine commitment to "freedom and justice for all." My heart is ¶ uplifted when I read Ki¶ ng's essay; I am reminded where true liberation leads us. It leads ¶ us beyond resistance to transformation. **King tells us that "the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption, the end is the creation of the beloved community." The moment we choose to love we** begin to **move against** domination, against **oppression.** The moment ¶ **we** choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that **liberate ourselves and others. That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom.**

**Offense:**

1) The pleasures of guns stem from dominance and power over everyone else, this prevents love and solidarity. **Wilkinson and Fagan:** Deanna L. Wilkinson and Jeffrey Fagan; “The Role Of Firearms In Violence “Scripts”: The Dynamics Of Events Among Adolescent Males”; <http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4312&context=lcp> ; 1996; Accessed 4/25/16; PE

**Power and dominance were** also salient **themes in our** preliminary **data**. Previous research suggests that "bad asses," **robbers** and other fighters, **seem to gain much pleasure from** violence, including **the use of guns** and other weapons. 59 There are several possible explanations, **from the feelings of power and security that** **weapons** may **provide**, **to the pleasures of dominance** **and unrestrained** "**ultimate" aggression that guns provid**e. One subject describes why he got a gun and how it made him feel to have it. Interviewer D: When did you get your first gun you know? At what age? G-51: What age. I got my first gun at age of I think was sixteen. D: Why **why'd you get [a gun]** it? G-51: **'Cause I wanted to be bad**. D: You wanted to be bad huh? G-51: I wanted to be like I had a reputation to keep so maybe with a gun would have boost it up a little bit more. D: Have you ever fired a gun ? ... G-51: Yes. D: How'd it feel firing a gun, how'd it ... ? G-51: It felt, it felt good. **The use of weapons may reflect a total identity that is geared to dominate if not humiliate adversaries**. Some **adversaries are created in order to express this dominance.** Another subject reported how his identity as being "trigger happy" gave him status and also brought him into many additional conflicts. G-61: Yeah it might turn out tragic.... Interviewer R: So when you shot the guy you shot, when you shot him, or when you found out he was dead or something, how did that make you feel, did that give you, did that boost you up? G-61: It ain't hype me; it didn't make me feel like going out there and doing it again; it just made me feel like ... I just gotta stripe; that's how that made me feel, I got a stripe. R: Did you get a reputation after that? G-61: Well, I kept a reputation but,. .. 'cause I was into a lot of stuff, . . and thing I did came to where I was like one of the people, I was like one of the most people they would come and get when it was time for conflict, then anybody... that I really be around, when there bee, when it's beef time they know who to come get and outta those people, I was one of the top ones they would come and get. . . 'cause they always known me ... for being trigger happy and .... While **this from of violence has a long history, its recent manifestation** as ''senseless" violence may in fact simply **reflect the changes brought about by the availability of weapons** and the meanings ("scripts") attached to them. The perpetuation of the sense of self and the image in the minds of others also is an instrumental goal of much weapon use. There is a very low threshold for the use of violence for these ends. Some subcultures or networks may also reflect norms where excessive violence, including weapons use, is valued, gains social rewards, and gives great personal pleasure. For example, this is true in some gang contexts where "locura" acts of violence establish one's status in the gang. It is senseless only in the fact that the violence is an end unto itself. The use of weapons, especially **guns, has elevated the level of domination**. **Guns can be used tactically to disable an opponent, or to humiliate an opponent by evoking fear** (begging, tears, soiling his pants, etc.), **even if there is little advantage gained by using the weapon**

Thus, guns prevent any self-actualization because they are rooted in power and dominance. They give us an illusion of freedom over everyone else in society and functionally alienate individuals. When we associate a material good with power and freedom it functionally alienates individuals because they believe there is no need to communal interaction. Huge impact under the framework because it prevents solidarity and love.

2) Ownership of handguns parallels a worldview of domination- analysis proves that support for gun bans is consistent with a worldview of love. **Braman and Kahan:** Donald Braman professor at George Washington University and Dan Kahan Professor at Yale Law; “Overcoming The Fear Of Guns”; <http://scholarship.law.gwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1028&context=faculty_publications>; 2006; Accessed 4/25/16; PE

**Aversion to guns** and support for control. in contrast, **cohere** naturally **with** more **egalitarian** and communitarian (or anti-individualistic) **worldviews**. Precisely because they help to construct traditionally male roles and virtues, guns are often equated with a hyperrnasculine or "macho” personal style that many individuals. male as well as female. rescnr.” **This egalitarian aversion is** **reinforced by** **the association of guns with** the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and **resistance to civil rights** generally in the modern era.” **and** with **social** and legal **controls** **that made the possession of guns “an important** **symbol of** white male **status**"’° in earlier times. And while control opponents see guns as celebrating individual self-sufficiency, control supporters see them as denigrating solidarity: “**Every handgun owned in America is an implicit** **declaration of war on one's neighbor**. When the chips are down, its owner says, he will not trust any other arbiter but force personally wielded?" We have confirmed the fit between the cultural theory of risk and gun control attitudes. Working with our colleagues Paul Slovic and John Gastil, we conducted a nationwide survey of I800 individuals.” Our survey instrument included scales for measuring individual worldviews along two dimensions corresponding to hierarchy and egalitarianism. on the one hand. and individualism and solidarism, on the other. It also included various measures of individuals’ attitudes toward the risks associated with guns and with both excessive and insufficient gun control. The study found that the **relationship between cultural orientations and gun control** attitudes **was** large, **statistically significant**, and consistent with our hypotheses: **the** **more** **hierarchical and individualistic individuals were** in their orientations, **the more** **they opposed control**; **and the more** egalitarian and **solidaristic they were, the** **more they supported it.”**

3) Only a handgun ban will recognize value beyond individual goods and promote an ethic of love. **DeBrabander:** Firmin DeBrabander, *Our Armed Society*. America Magazine. September 14th, 2015.

Among the so-called advanced societies of the world, only in the United States are there regular scenes of gun violence and suffering like that witnessed in July in Lafayette, La., after an apparently unbalanced middle-aged man fired off 20 rounds in a movie theater, killing two and injuring nine, or like the even more devastating spectacle that engulfed Charleston, S.C., the month before that when a hate-filled young man began a murderous rampage inside a historic African-American church, killing nine people during a Bible study. And in the month just before that in Waco, Tex., on May 17, a dispute among biker gangs erupted into an epic gun battle outside a chain restaurant in a suburban shopping center. A witness likened it to a war zone, with “maybe 30 guns being fired in the parking lot, maybe 100 rounds”; families with small children were forced to scatter for cover. In the end, that violence left nine people dead and 18 injured. Authorities collected more than 100 guns from the brawling bikers. Amid reports of other bikers pouring in to Waco to take up the battle, the city was locked down. People were afraid to leave their homes. This is what passes for normal life in our armed society—enjoying the “freedom” that the National Rifle Association promises as the number of civilian firearms in the United States soars and easy access to guns continues. The gun rights movement has made sure of this. The N.R.A. has fought universal background checks for prospective buyers and uses its political power to limit the ability of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to regulate gun dealers and track illegal guns and guns used in crimes. **The gun rights movement’s solution to gun violence is more guns**—always more guns. Its supporters argue that we must ensure that the “good guys” among us are well armed, as Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president and chief executive officer of the N.R.A., memorably put it, and we must expand the number of public venues where guns can be legally carried. After the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., where 20 first-graders were killed, the N.R.A. recommended placing armed guards in every school in the nation and training and arming teachers and staff. Many school districts obliged. Since the shooting in 2007 at Virginia Tech, where a gunman killed 32 people, the gun rights movement has persuaded legislators in nine states to allow students and faculty with appropriate permits to carry their weapons on public university campuses. Ten more states are considering similar legislation this year. It seems the very notion of gun-free zones is endangered. In April 2014 Georgia passed a controversial law—a so-called guns-everywhere statute—allowing residents to bring firearms into bars and restaurants, airports and government buildings. The ‘Shoot First’ Society In a lesser known and heralded policy position, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has called for **stronger gun control**. The bishops released an impassioned plea to lawmakers shortly after Sandy Hook, urging them to support bills that would make guns safer and restrict easy access to firearms. But American Catholics have not embraced gun control as **[is] a central tenet of** their parish **social justice agendas**. This must change. The gun rights ideology, which says we need ever more guns to deal with the threat of violence, that we must expand the number of public places where people may carry weapons and that we must legally protect people who use firearms, is opposed to the message of the Gospel and Catholic social teaching. The radical agenda of **the contemporary gun rights movement undermines** the very basis of civil **society**, **reduc[es]**ing **community members to atomistic, alienated individuals** and contradicts the Catholic doctrine of the common good. The gun rights movement is busy creating a shoot-first society. This is the upshot of so-called stand-your-ground legislation, now on the books in more than 20 states. Stand your ground is the logical, legalistic extension of our armed society; it effectively emboldens gun owners to use their weapons in public. Indeed, what good is owning and carrying a gun for self-protection if you are not also legally protected in using it? Please support our journalism. Subscribe now! Stand your ground was invoked in the case of the retired police officer Curtis Reeves after he shot an unarmed man he argued with in a Tampa movie theater in January 2014. The victim had allegedly thrown popcorn in Reeves’s face. His lawyer said Reeves did not know his assailant’s only weapon was popcorn; in the darkened theater, he feared his opponent was better armed. Fair enough. In a stand-your-ground society, it makes sense to suspect and fear your neighbor. You do not know what weapons he may have, how he might use them and over what complaint, no matter how trifling. What if he decides, like George Zimmerman, who in 2012 confronted and killed an unarmed teenager, Trayvon Martin, that you look suspicious, and he picks a fight with you? The law effectively can offer legal cover to shooters who, fearing for their personal safety, feel justified in using deadly force in self-defense. Ironically, of course, that is precisely the feeling they are more likely to have thanks to stand-your-ground ordinances. The **armed society obstructs our ability to** fulfill the church’s teaching and **work for the common good**, a foundational concept in Catholic social teaching. St. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that **we are political by nature and** that **the aim of the political community is to advance this common good**. The personal success and welfare of each individual is bound up with it, and **people cannot hope to advance individual goals without accepting and contributing to it**; **but the common good is not the mere accumulation of individual goods**. As the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church puts it: “The human person cannot find fulfillment in himself...apart from the fact that he exists ‘with’ others and ‘for’ others. This truth does not simply require that he live with others at various levels of social life, but that he seek unceasingly—in actual practice...the good...found in existing forms of social life.” **Cooperation and interaction are necessary conditions of this social life**, the compendium affirms. But stand-your-ground laws drive people apart; they sow and then validate mutual mistrust. **America’s profusion of arms makes us instinctively wary of reaching out to others**, **even in acts of charity. It becomes impossible to** “**seek the good of others as though it were one’s own good**,” as the church urges, **because an armed society opposes the primary and requisite identification with others**. In a stand-your-ground world , other people are a source of fear—a source of danger. I have to worry about even minor misunderstandings, should my actions and outreach be interpreted as a threat. A Deadly Force Busy making guns a fixture in public spaces, the gun rights movement ironically compels a radical retreat from the public sphere. **Guns are inherently isolating.** **A gun** indeed communicates; it **communicates a threat**. **This is its nature**, and gun rights proponents admit as much when they proudly assert that the weapon on one’s hip serves as a warning—a warning of deadly force. This is a disincentive to look for Christ in others, as the Gospel urges us to do—as Jesus’ disciples discovered on the road to Emmaus, when they invited a stranger to dinner and discovered he was the risen Christ. Jesus tells us that **we encounter** him in **others when we reach out to them and serve them**, **when we extend the bonds of love**. Jesus is found precisely in a rich, open public life. What is more, he urges us **to reach out to those we would be least inclined to engage because we fear them or disdain them, or suspect them**. “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me,” Jesus tells us. A favorite saying of the gun rights movement is that “an armed society is a polite society.” That is, guns sprinkled liberally throughout a community will effectively scare people straight. People will behave lest they insult or offend gun owners, and God help any prospective criminals. But I imagine it otherwise: an armed society is distinctly uncomfortable, treacherous and electric. The gun rights recipe for peace sounds more like a constant tense and tenuous standoff between warring parties. It is no prescription for lasting social peace and security. **Guns by their nature frustrate discourse**; they chasten speech. If you should spy an armed citizen on a street corner, you are not more likely to walk up to greet him unannounced, but less so. Most people will hurry the other way. Gun rights proponents will object at this point, saying that if or when guns are a regular feature of everyday life—in other words, a commonplace—they will not hinder conversation. Perhaps. But this does not change the fact that guns certainly do not invite conversation and interpersonal contact. **Guns are mutually alien**ating. The theologian Jacques Maritain suggested how an armed society violates natural law. “**Each one of us has need of others for his material, intellectual and moral life**,” Maritain explained in The Rights of Man and Natural Law, “but also because of the radical generosity inscribed within the very being of the person, **because of that openness to the communications of intelligence and love which is the nature of the spirit and which demands an entrance into relationship with other persons**.” Of our nature, we are outwardly directed, driven and disposed. **We cannot live without others**; we require their contribution and interaction. **On our own**, **we are incomplete**. The church teaches that we must work in and with a political community advancing the common good in order to perfect our nature. Mr. LaPierre declares that supporting the gun lobby’s agenda “is a massive declaration of individual rights.” To be sure, gun-rights absolutism demands nothing short of radical individualism, sliding into a dangerous and foolhardy, and ultimately destructive, insistence upon self-determination and self-sufficiency. Mr. LaPierre is prone to listing the many hostile forces that oppose individuals in society, beginning with the government, which “can’t or won’t, protect you.... Only you can protect you!” To gun owners, he declares, “We are on our own!” Seeking Security But **an individual cannot ensure his security on his own for long**. Real **security rests on the integrity of society at large**, **which is contingent on the cooperation of others** and, in a democracy, the rule of law. The N.R.A. touts gun ownership as the best way to protect your private property, your person and your family. But in a society without the rule of law and its recognition by others, your property is hopelessly imperiled, no matter how great your arsenal. The gun rights movement willfully, at times happily, ignores the rule of law, but the rule of **law** is what **ensures the seamless functioning of modern democratic societies**. Everyone can go about their business because they assume their neighbors recognize and respect the rule of law. They share the conviction that invisible, **tacitly accepted and understood laws govern society** and that everyone will behave accordingly and predictably. **If**, by contrast, **good behavior must be ensured at the barrel of a gun**, as gun rights proponents maintain, **then all bets are off**; I can assume nothing about anyone else’s behavior. Needless to say, it fundamentally changes my everyday life and makes it impossible to pursue ordinary business. “In the world that surrounds us,” Mr. LaPierre told the 2014 Conservative Political Action Committee convention, “there are terrorists and home invaders and drug cartels and car-jackers and knock-out gamers and rapers [sic], haters, campus killers, airport killers, shopping mall killers, road rage killers, and killers who scheme to destroy our country with massive storms of violence against our power grids, or vicious waves of chemicals or disease that could collapse the society that sustains us all.” The implication is clear: **The rule of law is** quite **nearly vanished**; civil **society is on the brink**, if not already destroyed in parts of the country. These are no harmless, idle pronouncements. In the hands of the gun rights movement, they become a self-fulfilling prophecy. **A proliferation of guns in society**, increasingly prevalent in public spaces and used in stand-your-ground states to neutralize imagined threats, **undermines the conviction that the rule of law still pertains**. **People who have no gun start to think they too should be armed**—and ready to use their weapon. **That erodes the rule of law even more**. In short, the gun rights movement creates the world it warns us of—where differences are decided by gunfire, as in Waco. To that extent, Mr. LaPierre gives up on humanity; he would reduce us to our mere physical being, engrossed in selfish, material concerns. “In this uncertain world, surrounded by lies and corruption,” he told the crowd at the convention, “there is no greater freedom than the right to survive, to protect our families with all the rifles, shotguns and handguns we want.” The church maintains far higher aspirations. “**The human being is a person, not just an individual**,” the compendium tells us, **and** “**does not find complete self-fulfillment until he moves beyond the mentality of needs and enters into that of gratuitousness and gift**, which fully corresponds to his essence and community vocation.” Political society is not an end in itself, according to the church. We have a higher destiny, an ultimate end in Christ. But we cannot hope to attain that end, Aquinas knew well, unless we inhabit a society that promotes the fullest development of the human person in all its capacities and encourages and makes possible outreach and service. We require such personal preparation to invite grace, and this is achieved in a political society devoted to pursuing the common good. **The common good demands that we resist the radical agenda of the gun rights movement** and work to bring peace to this armed society.