

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Gun Curious: A Liberal Professor's Surprising Journey Inside America's Gun Culture

I strongly encourage people to read both *with the grain* and *against the grain* of any text. When you read *with* a text, you are trying to understand what the author's point is on their own terms. When you read *against* a text, you take a more critical approach by questioning or challenging the author's claims. Both are important aspects of being a strong reader.

Practically speaking, you can do this by taking note of something that you found surprising, something you found interesting, and something you found problematic for every chapter. You can also record something you could relate to and something you could not relate to in each chapter.

Following are some specific questions for each chapter to think about while reading and to discuss with your group.

Introduction. How a Liberal Professor Became an Armed American

- What is your background with guns and shooting?
- If you have shot before, what do you remember about your first time shooting?
- If you own a gun, why? How did you get started?
- What is your "gun story"?
- If you don't own a gun, why? What previous exposure do you have to guns and shooting? Would you say you are "gun curious"?

Chapter 1. Guns are Normal, Normal People Use Guns

- If someone says "gun," what immediately comes to mind? What ideas, events, experiences, or emotions do you associate with guns?
- In your experience are guns normal? Do normal people use guns?
- Would you say that most of the people you know are gun owners or not gun owners? How does this compare to your own gun owner status?
- Do you have different feelings toward your friends who are gun owners versus gun non-owners?
- What are your thoughts on the statistics presented in this chapter about the normality of gun ownership?
- What do you think of the author's comparison of attitudes toward alcohol and attitudes toward guns?
- Discuss the author's observation that suggesting "one cannot simultaneously recognize the normality of gun ownership and seek to reduce negative outcomes with firearms is a pernicious

false economy" (p. 21).

Chapter 2. Top Shot and the Human-Weapon Relationship

- Was there some element of popular culture that shaped your views about guns, good or bad? A television show or movie or book or something else?
- What do you think of the argument that the use of projectile weaponry is deeply rooted in the history of humankind?
- Can you imagine a world without guns? What would it look like?

Chapter 3. Becoming a Gun Super-Owner

- Before reading this chapter, think to yourself: Does anybody need to own 13 guns? Why or why not? Compare your answers to your thoughts after finishing the chapter.
- If you own guns, do you remember the first gun you owned? What was it and what were the circumstances around your acquiring it?
- Is there anything that you collect that you have a lot of that doesn't make sense to other people? Do you see any parallels between that collecting and gun collecting? Are there differences?
- What are your thoughts on Gun Super-Owners?

Chapter 4. Living with AR-15s

- Do you own an AR-15? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Should civilians be able to own AR-15s?
- How do you feel about the author's idea of LIVING with, but not loving or hating, AR-15s?
- Did you learn anything new about AR-15s from this chapter?

Chapter 5. Swept Up in the Concealed Carry Revolution

- Do you have a concealed carry permit? Why or why not?
- If you do have a carry permit or live in a permitless carry state, do you carry a gun in public regularly? Why or why not?
- What are your thoughts on training requirements for concealed carry, and how has this chapter changed your views, if at all?
- If you could write a concealed carry law for where you live, what would it look like?
- Has the movement toward more permissive concealed carry laws in the United States been good or bad on balance?

Chapter 6. Pascal's Wager and Firearms

- What do you think of the author's application of Pascal's wager to the question of defensive gun ownership?
- Many people maintain that defensive gun ownership is based on irrational fear. What are your thoughts?
- Do you look at gun ownership for home defense differently than you do public gun carrying?
- Have you ever been in a situation in which you wish you had a gun? What about the opposite?
- Discuss the idea that "risk is a currency and we get to choose where we spend it."

Chapter 7. Guns as a Risk Factor for Negative Outcomes

- Chapter 6 concludes with the statement, "Before you ever consider any 'good' you might do with a gun, consider all of the ways it can go 'wrong.'" How do you think through these pros and cons?
- What experiences do you have of negative outcomes with firearms? How does that shape your perspective on guns?
- The author tries to put gun violence in the United States in a broader international context. How does that information compare to your understanding?
- Everyone is in favor of gun safety. Do you find yourself drawn more to the safety from guns or the safety with guns perspective? Why?

Chapter 8. Becoming a Responsibly Armed Citizen

- Whether you are a gun owner or not, what does being "responsibly armed" mean to you?
- Have you taken any gun training courses yourself? If so, how do they compare to the courses the author describes?
- Discuss the common idea that people who train to carry guns for self-defense are being taught to "shoot first and ask questions later."

Conclusion. What the Professor Learned

- What do you think of the author's overarching lesson on "the paradox of guns"?
- Of the five major lessons the author outlines, which one resonates most with you and why? Which one do you find it hardest to relate to?

- The author concludes on a hopeful note about the possibility of civil conversations across differences on guns. Do you share his hope? Why or why not?
- What have you learned after reading this book? Has it broadened your perspective on guns, gun owners, or gun culture in America?