

David Farrell - TED @UPS

A Solution to Gun Violence Found in US History

So let me start by telling you I know my way around a gun. I've fired everything from handguns to sixty caliber machine guns, most of that while I was in the army. Now I believe that we can end mass shootings in the United States and allow responsible gun owners to own guns—and I think we already know how to do it. We just have to apply “make America great again.”

See, whenever there's a mass shooting, we *love* to compare the US to other countries. There was a study by criminology expert Dr. Adam Langford, and he found that 31% of the mass shootings occur in the United States. That's more than any other country. And every time one happens, almost on cue, we start fighting about video games and the number of guns, and meanwhile the mass shootings continue. What we forget is that we didn't have regular mass shootings here in the United States 40 years ago. So, if we want to make here safe, we don't need to compare ourselves to other countries. What we need to do is we need to compare us to us. What is different about us from 40 years ago? You know what's different? Our relationship to guns, and our relationship to fear.

See, for the first 200 hundred years of this country, mass shootings weren't the norm. Also, for the first 200 years of this country the primary reason people owned guns was for hunting and sport. Guns actually brought people together to enjoy the outdoors. Guns equaled fun. And, gun ownership equaled responsibility. As a matter of fact, there was an organization that used to promote the sport of shooting and worked with the federal government to make sure that guns were safe and regulated. That organization was the National Rifle Association. Most people don't know or they've forgotten that the NRA used to drive most of the gun legislation in this country. So, we used to all, for the most part, agree on guns, and we didn't hear about a mass shooting every other week. But then something changed.

In the '70s there was a crime spike in this country, and the media went nuts. TV, newspapers, magazines all started running these stories, constantly about crime, and so we became afraid. Also in the '70s, the debate about gun rights started to gain national attention. In 1977, the gun rights' activists took over the NRA from the sportsmen, and they shifted their mission from sport shooting to gun rights.

First it was the rights of hunters, but then it became just gun owners. Then, in the early '80s, there was a slump in handgun sales, and the NRA started marketing self-defense—primarily to women. Then in the mid-'80s they started running ads in newspapers promoting concealed carry weapons. And the themes that they used were the threat of being beaten, of being robbed, and of being raped. So, if you're afraid, if you want to defend yourself, you better get a gun.

And it's also about this time that we started seeing a rise in mass shootings. So, how does a fearful citizen buying a gun lead to mass shootings? Well, today the number one reason for gun ownership is self-defense. And what that means is that we've unconsciously started buying guns to kill people. Let's talk about that.

If I go into a store, and I buy a gun for self-defense, I've crossed two very specific lines. The first line is I've already decided that I'm willing to take a human life, and the second line is I'm willing to use a gun to do it. And crossing those lines collectively represent a significant shift for America's psyche. See, as human beings it isn't a big leap to go from fear to anger. The big leap is “Will I take a human life, and will I use a gun?” And what we've done over the last 40 years, is we've made fear the starting point, and we've eliminated those other two barriers.

Don't just take my word for it. Listen to Dick Heller himself. Dick Heller was the plaintiff in the 2008 Supreme Court case where the Supreme Court said that individuals have a right to keep and bear arms for self-defense. In an interview after the decision, Heller said, “It was a great day for freedom in America, a great day for the Constitution, a great day for citizens. It was a great day for gun owners. It was a great day for fearful people.”

So let's recap. In the '80s, we had fear and were told to get a gun for that fear. In 2008 the Supreme Court said we have a right to our fear. Also about that time, we started writing laws that made fear a reasonable excuse to shoot somebody.

Take Florida Stand-Your-Ground law. An adult with a gun, George Zimmerman, followed and shot an unarmed child, Trayvon Martin. And then, shot the kid during a confrontation. Now 40 years ago, if you followed somebody with a gun and then shot them in a confrontation that you started, you're probably going to be charged with murder. In some states maybe even premeditated murder because you brought a gun to a fight. But Zimmerman didn't break the law. The law was written in a way that was he was allowed to shoot an unarmed person because he felt—afraid. So, somebody can shoot somebody because they feel afraid.

So, what we've done is we've created this culture that says, "If I have a problem, here's the tool to solve it." And in a culture that allows us to use a gun to address our own fears, it's not hard to believe that somebody who's troubled, or angry, or disenfranchised would then use a gun to solve their problems. And, if you're mentally disturbed, we've now made guns a rational decision. So, let's face it. Mass shootings aren't the giant leap they used to be.

Oh, and it gets worse because now, it's not just fear of crime; it's fear of losing our freedom. After mass shootings, gun sales go up, and it's not because we're afraid of the next mass shooter. It's because we're afraid of losing our freedom. In President Obama's two terms in office, gun sales went up 158% because we were constantly told he was coming for our guns.

You may recall about a year after the Columbine shooting, Charleton Heston gave a speech at the NRA national convention. In the speech he was encouraging members to vote pro-gun in the upcoming election. But listen to the words that he chose: "As we set out this season to defeat the divisive forces that would take freedom away, I want to say those fighting words for everyone within the sound of my voice to heed and to hear—from my cold dead hands." So is it any wonder we can't agree?

When one side says "Gun control," the other hears "You want to take my freedom away." But it didn't used to be that way. We used to agree. So, how do we turn back the clock? How do we get back to being the America before all of this? Well, I'm not going to tell you to get rid of your guns, and I'm not going to tell you to stop fighting for gun legislation. What I am going to tell you is if we want to make here safe again, we have to suck out this poison that has infected us for the last 40 years. Fear.

FDR warned us. He said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." That's not because there isn't anything that can harm us, it's because there's nothing more destructive than what we do to ourselves when we act out of fear. So before you repost that sensational news story or you retweet that angry tweet, just ask yourself, "Am I being a part of the solution, or am I being a part of the problem?" And most importantly, we need to end fearful gun ownership.

If you own a gun out of fear, or worry know what you're being sold. And it's not in your best interest. I know you thought you were buying peace of mind, but what you were really being sold was something that has failed this country for the last 40 years. And if you're an NRA member, convince your leadership to go back to its roots. Go back to promoting safe gun ownership instead of this fear of not having a gun. And lastly, if you're a responsible gun owner, America needs you to go back 40 years and lead the way again on responsible gun legislation because the only way we lose the right to bear arms is if we keep fighting for irresponsible gun ownership because a fearful gun owner and a safe society do not mix. But if we stop buying into the fear and we go back to safe, responsible, fun gun ownership, we can make America safe again. Thank you.