

continue to disproportionately burden those of the global majority, the study of outgroup empathy becomes all the more central in politics. With *Seeing Us in Them*, political science as a discipline has a foundation through which we can begin understanding the contours of our interconnectedness.

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Policing the Second Amendment: Guns, Law Enforcement, and the Politics of Race

By Jennifer Carlson. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 296 pp., \$19.95 Cloth

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Following the horrendous mass shooting of 21 children and teachers at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, the U.S. Congress finally passed some “common sense” gun reforms expanding red flag laws and requiring stricter background checks, especially for those ages 18–21. Perhaps the recorded voices of 10-year-olds begging for help before they died could not be spun by National Rifle Association (NRA)-pocketed politicians?

But is this legislation really “common sense” and can it possibly make a dent in our nation’s fetish for firearms? Jennifer Carlson suggests a resounding no on both accounts. In her book, *Policing the Second Amendment: Guns, Law Enforcement, and the Politics of Race*, Carlson argues that only a reckoning with racial oppression’s role in protecting and promoting mass gun ownership can we meaningfully “advance public debates and public policy about the place of gun violence . . . in American Society” (p.180).

To help us reach this reckoning, Carlson gives us a grand narrative about the history and politics of firearms in the USA. She argues that guns historically occupied an important pivot point between formal and informal policing. While white plantation owners originally handled their own armed policing, increased rebellions and escapes by enslaved workers encouraged 19th Century white southerners to formalize militias and “slave patrols.” “Eventually,” writes Carlson, “these brutal slave patrols worked alongside, and to some degree became institutionalized as, some of the earliest public law enforcement entities in the United States, including the New Orleans Police Department in 1853” (p.28).

In the North, elite urban political machines deployed armed officers to regulate the political and social behavior of ethnic workers. In the West, General Washington ordered the obliteration of the Iroquois people; but eventually, *posse comitatus*

legitimized the *informal* brutality whites used as they protected their stolen settlements and westward expansion. Carlson concludes “policing—whether in the North, the South, or the West—has been a project not just *for* the community but also *of* the community, with community defined narrowly in nativist, white settler and bourgeois terms” (p. 31). In other words, the history of policing and the way Americans talk about guns have always been shaped by white citizens’ need to maintain and expand power and privilege.

To examine the ideological underpinning of contemporary gun laws, Carlson uses the concept of *Gun talk* to represent the stock of prevailing “sensibilities about the proper place of guns in society” (p. 177). The production and mobilization of gun talk are primarily under the control of “brokers” who “shape the symbolic politics of legitimate violence and the practical access to legitimate violence with respect to firearms” (p. 177). Groups ranging from the NRA to local sheriffs and gun board administrators mold the politics and policies around firearms to protect and enhance a race-based system of legitimized violence—formal and informal—against non-whites. In chapter after chapter Carlson gives us local and state police officials who defend and reproduce the racialized system of law enforcement where police routinely stop, search, arrest, and commit violence against Black citizens.

Formal, state-driven police violence is justified through what Carlson terms *gun militarism* where an increasingly militarized police force sees themselves as warriors in combat. In fact, Carlson notes that many officers receive “warrior training” from the likes of David Grossman who teaches “fear-based killology” to police around the country. But gun talk also legitimizes *informal* violence perpetrated by armed, private (white) citizens who are not seen as “threats but assets to the state.” Carlson refers to the “good guy with a gun” image as emblematic of *gun populism*. Gun militarism and gun populism comprise the bulk of gun talk and, in the author’s words, help, “police the Second Amendment” by promoting, “visions of social order that reflect particular understandings of both what constitutes legitimate violence *and* how it should be distributed across society” (p. 15). Most importantly, these visions are implicitly and explicitly embedded in law-and-order activities steeped in racial and class bias.

It is a powerful and persuasive argument backed up by strong ethnographic and archival research. Carlson effectively examines the often-contradictory language of police officials and civic leaders in order to flesh out the sometimes-competing narratives of gun militarism and gun populism. Yet, together, they are both, “deeply embedded” in our nation’s “long historical legacy and ongoing policies of white supremacy and racial inequality, and they appear in contemporary discussions about gun policy as coexisting and mutually reinforcing forms of gun talk” (p. 178). To police the Second Amendment is to police the boundaries of race and class in America, guaranteeing that gun violence will remain an integral part of formal and informal everyday racism.

My reservations about the book are few. I would have liked a few more states included to cover the South and Northeast where I think the urban angle to racialized policing is even more apparent. I also missed any significant discussion of the corporate-driven economics of gun manufacturing and the role their lobbyists play as brokers. My biggest qualm was Carlson’s failure to link the book’s excellent analysis to any sort of political organizing or policy strategies for possible change.

Carlson may be right that *any* alternative to Americans' reductive and often down-right silly debate about "common sense" gun laws and police reform must *begin* with a refusal to see such conflicts as isolated projects. Certainly, Carlson's book is a must read for anyone interested in getting that conversation started.

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The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy

By Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 176 pp., \$21.95 Cloth

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The January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol brought a number of undercurrents on the political right to the attention of a broader audience. In evidence in the crowd on that day were flags and other symbols representing a vast panoply of right-wing groups, to include elements of the alt-right, so-called patriot groups and Christian nationalists. While the assault on the Capitol was an eye-opener for many in the public, academics and other expert observers have been, for some time, warning of the presence of such groups and of the dangers that they pose to democracy. When it comes to the influence of Christian nationalism, few have been sounding the alarm more loudly than Philip Gorski, Samuel Perry, and their various coauthors. Which is why Gorski and Perry's new book on the subject is a welcome addition to the existing body of scholarship on Christian nationalism. Although clearly written for a popular audience, Gorski and Perry weave together an impressive story utilizing both original survey data and historical narrative that helps to define a number of intriguing directions for future research.

They begin by explaining what Christian nationalism is (and what it isn't) before turning their attention to telling what they call the "deep story" of Christian nationalism that traces its presence in American life by drawing a more or less straight line between the late 1600s and today. The third section of the book returns to more contemporary data and attempts to chart the political contours of Christian nationalism in America. Finally, Gorski and Perry speculate as to where Christian nationalist elements on the political scene might be going and what, if anything, might be done to blunt their impact and stave off another event of the same magnitude (or worse) as the January 6th insurrection.

Although intended as a call to arms of sorts, I would be remiss if I didn't also point out some of the shortcomings of *The Flag and the Cross* as a scholarly work.