

Up in Arms: Gun Imaginaries in Texas

Edited by

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Contents

- Acknowledgements VII
List of Figures IX
Notes on Contributors XI
- 1 Loaded with the Past, Coloring the Present: The Power of Gun Imaginaries 1
Benita Heiskanen, Albion M. Butters, and Pekka M. Kolehmainen
 - 2 We are Texas Because of Guns: Firearms in Texan and “American” Imaginaries 16
Laura Hernández-Ehrisman
 - 3 The Founding Fathers in the Temporal Imaginaries of Texas Gun Politics 52
Pekka M. Kolehmainen
 - 4 “I Forgive Him, Yes”: Gendered Trauma Narratives of the Texas Tower Shooting 83
Lotta Kähkönen
 - 5 Triggered: The Imaginary Realities of Campus Carry in Texas 109
Benita Heiskanen
 - 6 Radical Political Imagination and Generational Utopias: Gun Control as a Site of Youth Activism 134
Mila Seppälä
 - 7 Pro-Campus Carry Video Imaginaries at The University of Texas Austin 164
Juha A. Vuori
 - 8 Firearms Fetishism in Texas: Entanglements of Gun Imaginaries and Belief 191
Albion M. Butters
 - 9 Imaging Texas Gun Culture: A Photo Essay 221
Albion M. Butters, Benita Heiskanen, and Lotta Kähkönen

- 10 The Explanatory, Social, and Performative Power of Gun
Imaginaries 239
Benita Heiskanen and Pekka M. Kolehmainen
- Index 247

Loaded with the Past, Coloring the Present: The Power of Gun Imaginaries

Benita Heiskanen, Albion M. Butters, and Pekka M. Kolehmainen

Up in Arms: Gun Imaginaries in Texas explores the imaginaries and stories that guns tell about U.S. history, society, and culture, with a specific focus on Texas. Since the Second Amendment to the Constitution grants citizens the right to keep and bear firearms, in the United States guns have a significance unlike anywhere else in the world. The vast number of guns inevitably impacts the everyday maneuvering of people in various ways, but imaginaries constructed about them also have significant performative power and ramifications for individuals, communities, and the nation. Conceived here as gateways between the real world and ideological abstractions, imaginaries serve various important functions, driving legislative efforts, political agendas, community building, and social divisions. As readily seen in gun debates historically and today, gun imaginaries create and reflect divergent social realities, power relations, and lived experiences. On the one hand, contemporary gun imaginaries are loaded with the past through nostalgia, cultural artifacts, and a continuity of identities; on the other, they color a temporal horizon of expectations. This volume thus uses both historical and contemporary imaginaries as a lens through which to explore and better understand a range of cultural aspects intertwined with gun debates in the United States, and in Texas in particular.

Up in Arms offers an illustrative and timely example of the manners in which gun policy, legislation, and culture have become part of an ongoing contestation between state and federal levels. As the right to keep and bear arms has been fundamentally tied to the understanding of individual and collective rights to defend oneself and one's property and family, the act of being armed is laden with spatial and place-based meanings in different contexts and locations. The Lone Star State—which is clearly a part of the U.S. but in many ways has sought to differentiate itself from the rest of the Union—has built its history, identity, and cultural mythology on stories based on various aspects of gun culture. Imaginaries provide a particularly useful operational tool to delineate the ways in which Texans have negotiated local versus national identities and historical legacies in contemporary debates, and for the chapters in this volume to dissect a range of issues, touching upon, among other things,

individual versus collective security, de jure versus de facto policies, and political versus social hierarchies.

This book contributes to a recent body of scholarship that uses imaginaries as ways to conceive the workings of cultural signification and the formation of communities.¹ First and foremost, imaginaries provide a range of dis/connecting nodes through which cultural, social, and political phenomena come together or collide. Imaginaries are a means by which groups of people forge connections, interact, and shape shared narratives and belief systems; they are also explicit sites of conflict when the projected imaginaries differ from one another. Sharing or communicating imaginaries with others are a powerful way to assign meaning to individuals, groups, communities, and the nation.² The gun debates examined in this volume are filled with imaginaries that people share with like-minded peers, though they may appear entirely unintelligible to those on the opposing side. In this way, gun imaginaries reflect convergences as well as divergences in cultural, social, and political processes that are negotiated within different temporal and spatial spheres.

Each contributor has been given the freedom to delineate their own theoretical and methodological approaches to the concept of the imaginary, but some shared principles guide the overarching framework. The volume's discussion approaches gun imaginaries as a three-tiered process, focusing first on the ways in which people imagine firearms as constituting their identities, social relations, and physical surroundings. Secondly, it sheds light on how such imaginings about weapons are channeled into stories, images, beliefs, and myths. And, thirdly, it reflects upon how gun imaginaries affect sensory perception, spatial maneuvering, and embodied reactions. The range of topics, temporalities, and approaches discussed allow the chapters to focus on gun imaginaries, images, and/or imagi(ni)ng from distinct viewpoints. By not defining *the imaginary* in any narrow sense for the entire volume, our aim is to demonstrate the range of its manifestations, readings, and interpretations, some of which are frequently—and deliberately—in conflict or contestation with one another. Given the volatile sentiments surrounding U.S. gun culture, the volume seeks to demonstrate the ways in which imaginaries serve as tools to explicate such discordant social realities.

1 For an overview, see Claudia Strauss, "The Imaginary," *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 3 (2006): 322–44; Hans Alma and Guido Vanheeswijck, "Introduction to Social Imaginaries in a Globalizing World," in *Social Imaginaries in a Globalizing World*, eds. Hans Alma and Guido Vanheeswijck (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

2 Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23–30.

Opening with a historical discussion of guns as part and parcel of Texan history and identity, the book turns to other watershed moments in which gun debates assumed special relevance in Texas and had an impact on broader gun debates in the United States. Forever imprinted into the national consciousness was the mass shooting at The University of Texas at Austin on August 1, 1966, the first of its kind on a U.S. college campus. Due to its highly mediatized nature, the “Tower shooting” has been repeatedly referenced as the progenitor of the contemporary phenomenon of public mass shootings, even if other instances of mass gun violence had previously occurred.³ Despite being a tremendous source of trauma for Austinites, the flagship university’s failure to find ways to deal with the shooting in a satisfactory manner left an open wound for generations to come. With a lack of any collective discussion or space for the local community to mourn, the emergence of cultural imaginaries finally provided tools for locals to begin to come to terms with the tragedy and try to comprehend the incomprehensible. Drawing on cultural and media texts, as well as firsthand accounts, *Up in Arms* brings up the multiple ways in which vestiges of the shooting that took place half a century earlier linger on and on, resurfacing and assuming new significance in policy debates, specific cultural contexts, and media texts.

Fifty years to the day after the Tower shooting, Texas yet again became the epicenter of U.S. gun debates with the implementation of the Campus Carry (SB 11) legislation in 2016, allowing licensed gun carriers to bring firearms into public university buildings, including classrooms. Once more, as if history were repeating itself, outside of legislation and policymaking, administrators found it hard to address the potential impact of guns penetrating educational establishments. And again, against the backdrop of the iconic Tower from which the sniper had fired his deadly rounds, a whole host of individuals and groups took it upon themselves to confront and contest the administration’s viewpoint by resorting to imaginaries that the official eye was unwilling to see. In addition to the Campus Carry legislation, the contributors to this volume address a range of other relevant efforts—such as the passing of SB 60 in 1995, which allowed licensed Texans to carry concealed handguns in most public areas across the state—elucidating the construction of gun imaginaries amidst important legal milestones.

Introducing original research data comprising fieldwork, interviews, and visual materials as well as cutting-edge cultural and media analysis, the volume poses three main research questions: (1) How are guns used to explain

3 See Jaclyn Schildkraut and H. Jaymi Elsass, *Mass Shootings: Media, Myths, and Realities* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016), 29–53.

history, identity, culture, and social relations? (2) How do different generations of Texans depict and negotiate the ramifications of gun legislation in their quotidian contexts? (3) What do the imaginaries and narratives surrounding gun culture reveal about issues that ostensibly have no bearing on firearms? The volume's ten chapters probe these questions by focusing on temporal, spatial, social, political, narrative, and visual imaginaries that display and contest the meanings of guns during watershed moments that bring the gun question to the forefront of societal debates. Building a bridge between theoretical and everyday viewpoints, the volume contextualizes the multiple sets of imaginaries associated with gun culture in Texas and the United States. The connection between the theory and praxis behind gun imaginaries demonstrates the various ramifications, scales, and significance that firearms—and debates about guns—have beyond their actual, technical function.

1 Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production Processes

The history of scholarship on guns in the U.S. has been caught up in an ideological battle between forces behind the gun debate. For decades, for example, the National Rifle Association (NRA) sought—and successfully managed—to prevent government-sponsored research on gun violence. The Dickey Amendment, passed in 1996 as a rider for funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, effectively prevented the CDC from studying connections between gun ownership and public health. Moreover, according to investigative journalism, the CDC even worked internally to quash research, restricting language on guns and gun policy and also flagging research on guns for the NRA.⁴ Though gun studies as a field did continue to exist in academic institutions and other organizations throughout this period, the tide has only recently begun to turn. A limited repeal of the Dickey Amendment was passed in 2019, and government-funded scholarship on guns is now resuming. At the same time, there has been increased support by universities and the academic press to promote gun research, such as “MUSE in Focus: Addressing Gun Violence,” through which open access has been granted to select books on the subject.⁵ Supported by the Academy of Finland, the current volume similarly

4 Michael Luo, “N.R.A. Stymies Firearms Research, Scientists Say,” *New York Times*, January 25, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/26/us/26guns.html>, accessed April 16, 2021.

5 “MUSE in Focus: Addressing Gun Violence,” Project MUSE, <https://about.muse.jhu.edu/muse/gun-violence/>, accessed April 16, 2021.

offers open access in order to promote easy accessibility of research on guns to scholars across disciplinary boundaries. Also, by expanding the research beyond scholarly sources, this project not only exposes the ways in which different modes of communication are tied to questions of grassroots activism and collective agency, but also opens the discussion to a wider audience.

Because gun debates in the United States intertwine a range of historical and legal aspects with social, cultural, and political ramifications, gun discussions are highly fraught (and often volatile), being contingent on the particular viewpoints from which the subject is approached. Given their complexity, research on guns springs from multiple scholarly frameworks, often emphasizing monodisciplinary approaches that employ singular methodologies, from nationwide surveys to local ethnographies. Some of the most prominent lenses through which guns have been researched fall under the domains of sociology, criminology, and public health, whose quantitative methods afford strong statistical data on gun ownership and the opinions and experiences of those who own guns and those who are affected by them.⁶ Primarily due to two factors, the rise in school shootings in the U.S. and the passing of so-called Campus Carry laws in multiple states, which allow licensed carriers to bring handguns on university grounds and even into the classroom, education has also become an important aspect of gun studies.⁷

While these approaches provide a helpful background for this volume's discussion, the purpose of this book is to explicitly move beyond any monodisciplinary or quantitative frameworks toward transdisciplinary knowledge production processes. The shift from quantitative evidence as the primary site of inquiry presents an opening for scholars from other fields—from anthropology to philosophy and American Studies—to further problematize the

6 Amongst others, see Gary Kleck, *Targeting Guns: Firearms and their Control* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997); Kristin Goss, *Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Scott Melzer, *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); Angela Stroud, *Good Guys with Guns: The Appeal and Consequences of Concealed Carry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Robert Spitzer, *The Politics of Gun Control*, 8th ed. (New York: Routledge, [1995] 2021); Mark R. Joslyn, *The Gun Gap: The Influence of Gun Ownership on Political Behavior and Attitudes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

7 On Campus Carry, see, in particular, the various works published by the research team at the University of Turku, funded by the Academy of Finland, which provide an overview of the different types of existing literature on the subject, while respectively approaching it from such diverse angles as American Studies, Gender Studies, Urban Studies, Religious Studies, and Security Studies (<https://sites.utu.fi/jmc/campus-carry/publications/>).

complex reality of guns and bring fresh theoretical approaches to the subject.⁸ By going beyond disciplinary viewpoints, we offer a discussion that takes into consideration quotidian experiences, grassroots activism, policymaking, and cultural discourses that reveal the tensions inherent in debates about guns in the United States, as manifested through the case studies in Texas.

Indeed, the burgeoning literature addressing the significance of guns in society has led to self-reflective examination of the scholarship itself beyond polemics of “gun control” and “gun rights.” Jennifer Carlson, for example, has underlined the need for researchers to understand the impact of their work on gun policy. Thus, drawing a parallel to David Yamane’s *Gun Culture 1.0* and *Gun Culture 2.0*, she differentiates between *Gun Studies 1.0* and *Gun Studies 2.0*.⁹ As discussed by Butters in this volume, *Gun Culture 1.0* refers to gun ownership for hunting and sports and *Gun Culture 2.0* involves self-protection. If *Gun Studies 1.0* has emphasized “seeing scientific evidence as a foundation for generating consensus for the betterment of society with regard to guns,” including generating consensus about public policy, *Gun Studies 2.0* “addresses the question of guns in society by focusing on the conditions that shape the form that the gun debate takes, as well as the meanings that are attached to guns as objects of danger, on the one hand, and safety, on the other.”¹⁰ In making this distinction, Carlson seeks to encourage researchers to transform the larger debate by looking not only at *what* things matter, but *why* they matter.¹¹

This volume uses the concept of imaginaries to answer Carlson’s challenge. A foundational text for this approach is Charles Taylor’s *Modern Social Imaginaries*, published in 2004. For Taylor, imaginaries have to do with the way that people conceive their social existence, how they connect themselves to their peers, and how they form expectations and normative notions of what is commonplace in their society.¹² Understood in this way, imaginaries are

8 As the briefest of examples, see Charles F. Springwood, “Gun Concealment, Display, and Magical Habits of the Body,” *Critique of Anthropology* 34, no. 4 (2014): 450–71; Firmin DeBrabander, *Do Guns Make Us Free? Democracy and the Armed Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); Mike Bourne, “Guns Don’t Kill People, Cyborgs Do: A Latourian Provocation for Transformatory Arms Control and Disarmament,” *Global Change, Peace & Security* 24, no. 1 (2012): 141–63.

9 David Yamane, “The Sociology of U.S. Gun Culture,” *Sociology Compass* 11, no. 7 (2017): 1–10.

10 Jennifer Carlson, “Gun Studies and the Politics of Evidence,” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 16 (2020): 185, 190.

11 Moving beyond the limitations of monodisciplinary approaches, albeit still with a focus on policy, see also Jennifer Carlson, Kristin Goss, and Harel Shapira, eds., *Gun Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Politics, Policy, and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

12 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 23.

the conditions which allow social practices to take place, and they can only be gleaned by observing these practices.¹³ Imaginaries are instilled in and mediated by symbols, stories, and representations that members of a social group share with one another.¹⁴ Thus, the concept is related to the well-known formulation by Benedict Anderson of nations as “imagined communities,” where people frame themselves as a singular community by means of an act of imagination.¹⁵ Similarly, describing the “imaginary institution of society,” Cornelius Castoriadis notes, “The social world is, in every instance, constituted and articulated as a function of such system of significations, and these significations exist, once they have been constituted, in the mode of what we called the *actual imaginary*.”¹⁶ In this account, imaginaries are the basis for the constitution of a social existence. Castoriadis’s imaginaries encompass both internalized understandings of societal norms and imaginative and creative projections of what society might entail, that is, the actualized understanding of the realities of the status quo and the projected utopias and dystopias that can be envisioned.¹⁷

As a theoretical lens, imaginaries also allow consideration of the various agencies involved in the debates we examine. Through their connection to imagination, imaginaries are fundamentally *creative* processes and are constantly shaped by the people who use them. They are the constructed platforms upon which political and social actions take place.¹⁸ For example, Molly Andrews has emphasized how aspects of imagination are ubiquitous in people’s everyday existence, not just on a level of abstraction but in the ways people maneuver through their daily lives.¹⁹ Meanwhile, in the tradition founded in the thinking of Jacques Lacan, the imaginary has been conceived of as a fantasy that has the power to obscure reality.²⁰ The concept of the imaginary thus

13 Alma and Vanheeswijck, “Introduction,” 3.

14 Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, “Towards New Imaginaries: An Introduction,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 5. See also Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 167–73.

15 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

16 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975), 93.

17 Strauss, “The Imaginary,” 324.

18 Emiliano Treré, *Hybrid Media Activism: Ecologies, Imaginaries, Algorithms* (London: Routledge, 2019), 107.

19 Molly Andrews, *Narrative Imagination and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

20 Strauss, “The Imaginary,” 326–29; Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2005), 17–32.

allows the chapters in this volume to move between creative visions and everyday assumptions as well as shared conceptions and conflicting testimonials.

Given that guns invite such fierce polemic and debate, it is not uncommon for authors working on the topic to take positions on either side. In some cases, this can take the form of activism, such as the case of faculty feeling threatened by Campus Carry and the perceived encroachment of guns—actual or imagined—onto their territory.²¹ A recent volume edited by Patricia Somers and Matt Valentine, for instance, is advertised as follows: “While making the case that campus carry legislation is harmful, the book gathers some of the very best thinking around enacting such policies and offers valuable recommendations for mitigating its effects and preserving university values.”²² In other cases, the motives for writing from a specific point of view are less clear, but the scholarship has been called into question. Prominent examples include the controversy ensuing from pro-gun advocate Clayton Cramer’s critique of Michael A. Bellesiles’s history of guns or the furor surrounding the work of gun apologist John Lott, who finally left academia altogether to form the Crime Prevention Research Center.²³

The purpose of the current volume is not to take a stand on activist debates ranging around specific legislations; rather, its point is to explicate the multiple viewpoints through which the gun issue is comprehended and rationalized. In other words, we do not take any moral stand on the issue but seek to help readers understand why the groups promoting and opposing guns think the way they do. On an individual level, for both the advocates and opponents of various gun legislation, guns are often understood as a safety issue, entailing various conflicting perceptions of security and insecurity. In addition to addressing grassroots activism, the discussion also delves into rhetorical tropes and online videos produced during the contestation of the Campus Carry law. Finally, an examination of both official and activist images reveals a dynamic visual landscape, offering new insights into reactions to armed

21 See, e.g., Firman DeBrabander, “How Guns Could Censor College Classrooms,” *Atlantic*, March 4, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/03/the-steep-cost-of-allowing-guns-in-the-college-classroom/472296/>, accessed April 16, 2021; Christopher M. Wolcott, “The Chilling Effect of Campus Carry: How the Kansas Campus Carry Statute Impermissibly Infringes Upon the Academic Freedom of Individual Professors and Faculty Members,” *University of Kansas Law Review* 65 (2017): 875–911.

22 Patricia Somers and Matt Valentine, eds., *Campus Carry: Confronting a Loaded Issue in Higher Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2020), <https://www.hepg.org/hepg-home/books/campus-carry>, accessed April 16, 2021.

23 Evan DeFilippis and Devin Hughes, “The Bogus Claims of the NRA’s Favorite Social Scientist, Debunked,” *Vox*, August 30, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/8/30/12700222/nra-social-scientist-claims-debunked>, accessed April 16, 2021.

academic space and also contributing new overtures to transdisciplinary and multimethodological approaches to studying the ramifications of guns in people's lives. Such types of investigation, we argue, particularly advance knowledge production processes within the field of American Studies.

While recent scholarship demonstrates that there is a growing demand to understand the presence of guns in U.S. history, society, and culture, American Studies discussions on the topic are few and far between. Thus, *Up in Arms* contributes to the literature by providing a timely and transdisciplinary treatment of guns as a complex nexus that includes ideological assumptions, policy-making, everyday experiences, cultural expressions, and individual senses of security and insecurity. By offering a snapshot of Texas gun culture—a goldmine for imaginaries—it also contributes to broader debates about the visceral ramifications of the U.S. Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms. In relation to the existing body of literature related to guns in the United States, this book's decidedly transdisciplinary lens and strong component of media, cultural, and visual analysis open up a pathway for a phenomenon-based discussion that demonstrates the significance of gun culture beyond disciplinary boundaries.

The volume's multimethod approach is based on team fieldwork, personal interviews, visual materials, media and social media sources, and a representative survey of UT Austin's undergraduate student body. The viewpoints presented in *Up in Arms*, including those of both pro-gun and anti-gun groups but also covering social media discourses, help to illuminate the gun issue for a wide readership rather than merely participating in nation-based debates alone. By teasing out and identifying various strands—locating the relationships between race, class, and gender in activism against Campus Carry, for example, or revealing how the history of Texas bears on the way in which guns are formative for contemporary Texan identities today—the volume directly engages the competing ideologies of the pro-gun and anti-gun movements. On the other hand, the authors' shared theoretical use of imaginaries provides a coherent point of focus and reveals similarities between the various forces. By the same token, explicitly concentrating on Texas as the epicenter of gun debates frames a discrete context for the study and supports concrete analysis of specific aspects of gun culture, enabling a review of their interrelated historical, social, and cultural significance.

2 Chapters in this Volume

Alongside historical materials and sources, the original research of this volume is based on fieldwork and interviews conducted by the Academy of

Finland-funded Campus Carry research team in Austin in the spring semesters of 2018 and 2019.²⁴ Considering a range of temporal contexts within which gun debates have assumed particular relevance, the chapters highlight the ways in which campus communities have experienced, negotiated, and challenged the legislation on multiple fronts. Alongside the lived experiences, the volume underscores visual cultural ramifications of the legislation by examining the official and unofficial images related to the legislation. The multiple imaginaries employed by members of the community to delineate and critique legislative efforts exemplify the dynamic relationship between the various power players involved, ranging from state legislators, university administrators, stakeholders, and members of the university community, each with their own ideological and political leanings.

Laura Hernández-Ehrisman opens the volume with an examination of the history of Texas and Texan identity in relation to gun culture, focusing in particular on such foundational symbols as the Alamo and the Texas Rangers. As a powerful imaginary, the Alamo sets the stage for the Texas Republic and a shared collective identity of fierce independence. The Rangers, the original “good guys with guns,” embody frontier masculinity but also represent the first Western vigilantes to be endowed with legal authority. Drawing on the scholarship of historical memory and power, the chapter examines how these stories have been remembered and are retold by gun enthusiasts today—despite their checkered reality. Even as Texas mythologies are utilized in the construction of a “usable past” of heroic white masculinity, they ignore the trauma of manifest destiny and negate the history of enslavement and the violent removal of indigenous and Mexican settlers. Through this diachronic overview, Hernández-Ehrisman reveals how these symbols continue to shape contemporary imaginings, state policy, and the popular and consumer culture of Texas.

Pekka M. Kolehmainen continues the historical angle of the volume by exploring the act of political imagining around guns, centering specifically on the temporal imaginaries constructed about the Founding Fathers in gun debates in Texas. The chapter questions how the groups on both sides invoke the Founding Fathers as both objects and subjects of political imaginations. On the one hand, political activists have created imaginary historical versions of the Founding Fathers to place in relation to their own political imaginations in the modern day, using them to describe their stance as a continuum of a wider

24 The research was conducted by the John Morton Center for North American Studies at the University of Turku, Finland. In the United States, the project was hosted by the Department of American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin. The team also collaborated with St. Edward's University and Austin Community College.

arc of history. On the other hand, the debates have touched on the potential limits of the imaginations of the Founding Fathers themselves, sparking discussions and disagreements on what those historical figures could have imagined in their own times. Using a body of materials drawn from media, activists, and fieldwork interviews to explore these two points and to elucidate through them the larger dynamics of political conflict in the contemporary United States, Kolehmainen asks how the temporal imaginaries of the Founding Fathers constructed around guns are drawn into larger ideological tensions that govern modern politics.

Lotta Kähkönen shifts the frame to the infamous Tower shooting at UT Austin on August 1, 1966, with a focus on public memory. Despite being one of the first and most memorable mass shootings by a single individual in U.S. history, in large part because of the wide media coverage it received, memorialization and discussion of the event was also suppressed by the institution. This chapter explores the mediation and narrativization of the Tower shooting as a kind of cultural trauma, a product of history and politics which was subject to reinterpretation. To this end, it examines a KTRC special news report, aired immediately after the shooting, and two narratives, Elizabeth Crook's novel *Monday, Monday* (2014) and Keith Maitland's animated documentary film *Tower* (2016), created in response to a collective need for commemoration several decades later. Serving as an imaginary of community experiences and providing a means for mourning, these narratives are shown to reify a particular type of imagery with the power to shape the collective trauma and its affective resonance. The chapter specifically focuses on the gendered figures of heroes, victims, and survivors in constituting the collective trauma that emerges as a result of a cultural crisis. Analyzing how these figures are highlighted in the narratives, and what cultural values and concerns the gendered imagery reveals in relation to mass shootings as traumatizing experiences, Kähkönen opens perspectives on how the collective trauma of mass shooting is processed.

Fast-forwarding fifty years, Benita Heiskanen keeps the focus on UT Austin by examining the imaginaries surrounding the SB 11 legislation on Campus Carry. Despite previous failed efforts to make it legal for holders of concealed carry licenses to bring their guns onto public university premises, including classrooms, the Texas legislature garnered enough votes to finally pass the law in 2015. The campus community, local newspapers, and activist groups tried to make sense of the hypothetical realities of an armed campus. The following year, on the very anniversary of the Tower shooting, the new law was implemented. Drawing on two town hall-style public debates organized on campus and internet responses related to them, newspaper reporting from the *Austin*

American-Statesman, and firsthand experiences from students, faculty, and administrators, this chapter probes the discussions surrounding the Campus Carry legislation before and after its implementation. It thereby reveals that debates about firearms frequently have little—if anything—to do with guns. And therein lies their power. For example, what may ostensibly appear as a narrative of self-protection upon closer look exposes implicit assumptions about race, gender, and class relations. Disentangling the multiple layers triggered by the gun debates, Heiskanen reveals a heterogeneous community not only grappling with firearms but multiple social conflicts amplified within the armed campus space.

Mila Seppälä engages with radical political imagination in youth-led gun control advocacy groups in Texas by investigating the types of actions, activist subjectivities, and utopian visions for the future that it has produced. Continuing the discussion of Campus Carry, this chapter traces how the “absurdist direct action campaign” staged by a group of young women at the flagship campus in the fall of 2016 radically reimagined political action in the sphere of gun violence prevention. In the absence of political opportunities, the so-called “Cocks not Glocks” protest against Campus Carry saw students brandishing dildos in order to draw attention to what they felt was the ridiculousness of U.S. gun laws. Seppälä argues that the event used humor as a way to mitigate the precarious experiences and feelings of helplessness that firearms on campus produced among certain segments of the university community. Pivoting to an examination of how radical imagination has also been evoked in Texas during demonstrations of the national gun control movement March For Our Lives, the chapter exposes how a protest built around an imagined generational community led to a confluence of different issue-based groups, facilitating collective processes of imagining larger—even utopian—political projects that are uniquely “American” in nature. As Seppälä reveals, these examples of everyday resistance and broader collective action in Texas represent an important moment in the re-emergence of political hope among the Left in the United States, which has been missing since “the Long Sixties.”

Juha A. Vuori approaches imaginaries as a social phenomenon manifested in vernacular practices of representation. Affecting what we are able to comprehend, through what Jacques Rancière calls the “distribution of the sensible,” our sense of reality, or a “common sense,” imaginaries construct different realities; they affect what can be seen, heard, and felt in and through their popular representations. This chapter focuses on visual performances and videos promoting Campus Carry that were produced during the contestation of the SB 11 legislation at UT Austin in 2016. To examine those supporting gun rights, it analyzes a video of a performance of a “mock shooting” on the streets of Austin,

close to campus premises, made to reveal the vulnerability caused by gun-free zones, and a professionally produced short that caricatures a prominent student activist from the “Cocks Not Glocks” group against Campus Carry. In this way, Vuori argues that imaginaries shape how public morality and a sense of virtue relate to such contentious issues, mediating socially constructed meanings and understandings of both security and insecurity, and thereby allow exploration of visions of the political that are contained in them.

Albion M. Butters locates the religious aspect of firearms in terms of fetishism, which has become increasingly manifested through a shift in gun culture over the last fifty years. While the analysis follows the traditional definition of the fetish as a power object that offers affordances to the religious individual, alternative definitions of fetish are applicable as well, that is, understanding the gun as a sexual symbol or commodity. Over the decades, as the reason to own a gun has increasingly become a matter of self-defense and security rather than sporting or hunting, it has opened a space for new imaginaries of modern-day masculine heroes with religious undertones. In Texas, this is exemplified by the passing of laws to allow concealed or open carry of guns in churches, and local parishes sanctioning licensed gun owners to protect the faithful. After establishing the predominance of Christianity in Texas and the proclivity among white evangelicals to favor guns, the chapter traces the nature of faith as intertwined with both politics and ideology. Butters concludes that firearms fetishism and gun imaginaries inform identity, particularly in the construction of a new moral order.

The penultimate chapter of the volume by Albion M. Butters, Benita Heiskanen, and Lotta Kähkönen is a photo essay that uses materials collected during fieldwork in Texas to illustrate the visual arc of the research project on Campus Carry. Comprising 17 full-color images with captions, the photo essay displays both formal and informal imaginaries dealing with the “before and after” of the implementation of the SB 11 legislation. The purpose of the photo essay is to provide an alternative interpretative lens to the conceptualization and experiencing of firearms in the campus space. Through the visual materials, we get a broader and more complex understanding of the ways in which people take a stand on policymaking. Moreover, the visual imagery provides a useful tool to penetrate official discourses that might not be revealed otherwise. This chapter calls attention to imaging as an alternative modus of knowledge production, one which not only carries powerful meanings but also shapes the delineation of the campus landscape. The visual treatment in this volume provides an important linkage between theoretical discussion and the experiential component, which focuses on both the research subjects’ and scholars’ spatial maneuvering within and outside of academia.

The concluding chapter by Benita Heiskanen and Pekka M. Kolehmainen wraps up the volume by pointing to the explanatory, social, and performative aspects of gun imaginaries, as understood through the various historical contexts and interpretive lenses that the contributors engage. The transdisciplinary American Studies explications of gun debates demonstrate the great significance invested in weapons culture in the United States, be it on societal, cultural, or academic levels. *Guns as imaginaries* galvanize individuals who are *up in arms*, while their actions and reactions reverberate into further imaginaries; thus, individuals and communities simultaneously shape and are shaped by the broader power relations that they are necessarily a part of. Ultimately, the exploration of *Texas as a gun imaginary* and *guns as a Texan imagery* provides a toolbox and a roadmap for future discussions of the significance of firearms in other geographic contexts beyond the United States.

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