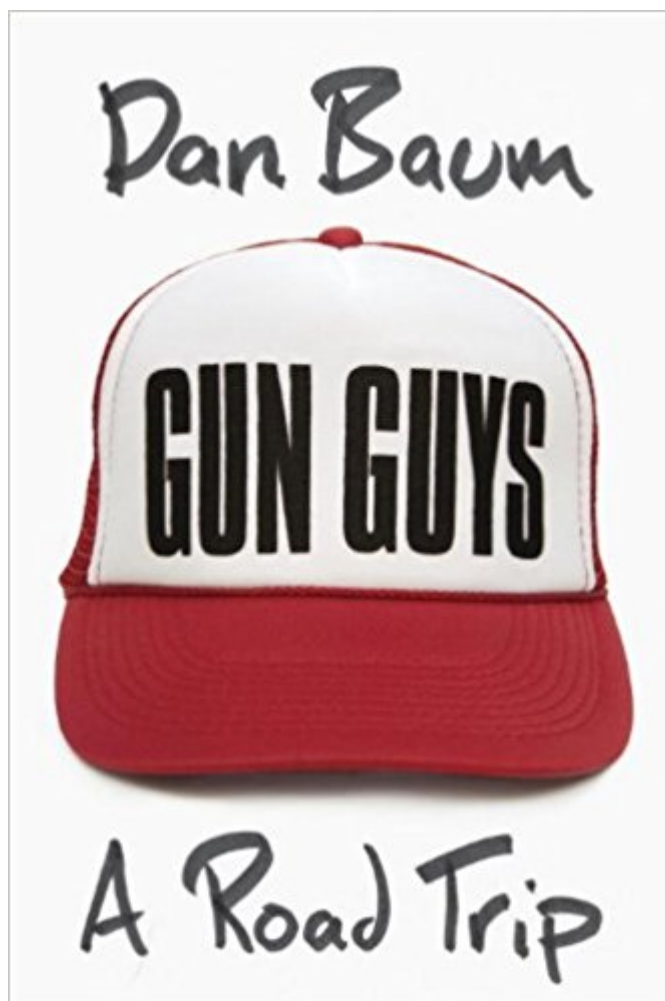


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Gun Guys: A Road Trip



Synopsis

Here is armed America—a land of machine-gun gatherings in the desert, lederhosened German shooting societies, feral-hog hunts in Texas, and Hollywood gun armories. Whether they're collecting antique weapons, practicing concealed carry, or firing an AR-15 or a Glock at their local range, many Americans love guns—which horrifies and fascinates many other Americans, and much of the rest of the world. This lively, sometimes raucous book explores from the inside the American love affair with firearms. Dan Baum is both a lifelong gun guy and a Jewish Democrat who grew up in suburban New Jersey feeling like a “child of a bitter divorce with allegiance to both parents.” In *Gun Guys* he grabs his licensed concealed handgun and hits the road to meet some of the 40 percent of Americans who own guns. We meet Rick Ector, a black Detroit autoworker who buys a Smith & Wesson after suffering an armed robbery then quits his job to preach the gospel of armed self-defense, especially to the resistant black community; Jeremy and Marcey Parker, a young, successful Kentucky couple whose idea of a romantic getaway is the Blue Ridge Mountain 3-Gun Championship in Bowling Green; and Aaron Zelman, head of Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership. Baum also travels to New Orleans, where he enters the world of a man disabled by a bullet, and to Chicago to interview a killer. Along the way, he takes us to gun shows, gun stores, and shooting ranges trying to figure out why so many of us love these things and why they inspire such passions. In the tradition of *Confederates in the Attic* and *Among the Thugs*, Baum brings an entire world to life. Written equally for avid shooters and those who would never touch a firearm, *Gun Guys* is more than a travelogue. It gives a fresh assessment of the heated politics surrounding guns, one that will challenge and inform people on all sides of the issue. This may be the first book that goes beyond gun politics to illuminate the visceral appeal of guns—an original, perceptive, and surprisingly funny journey through American gun culture.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review You don't hear about a lot of preteen gun nuts, but Baum was one of them, discovering when he was five years old that he was a crack shot. He's always known why he loved guns (natural skill in using them and their beauty and efficiency as mechanical devices), but as an adult, he began to wonder why other people loved them. So he decided to do something he'd never done: join the gun culture, meet its people, and find out what made them tick. Along the way, he encounters a 24-year-old young man who lives with his mother and became interested in real guns by playing with simulated guns in video games; a gunmaker who's upset to the point of distraction about the passing of President Obama's health-care bill; a Hollywood armorer; and an expert in the history and manufacture of machine guns. He also deals with the murder of a friend, a victim of exactly the sort of gun violence that sparks the politically polarizing debate that Baum has been witnessing nearly everywhere he goes. Baum is careful not to take a political stance; he's reporting the story, and he's also, as a gun enthusiast, a part of it, but he's not writing an apologia. If you come into the book convinced of the need for tighter gun control, you'll probably leave the same way, although you will leave with a deeper understanding of the many reasons, political and personal, why people love their weaponry. --David Pitt

The most intriguing of a new crop of books about America and guns. •Jeff Sharlet

Baum's a good conversational journalist. He captures people really well, to the point where I had "I *know* that guy!" moments. Interesting, even-handed, respectful treatment of all parties. I enjoyed the gotcha moments with the NRA and Brady Center coming so close together. I think he's right about gun folks: they are some seriously sore winners. He manages to show how unsympathetic and unreasoning they can be, even though he agrees with them. He sorted through the BS stats on defensive gun use and settled the question for me. Even at the low end, using stats preferred by gun control advocates, defensive gun use offsets "bad" gun violence. He also raises the interesting question of why all the gun control efforts are in directions that will do no good at all. (The scary

assault weapons are used in less than 3% of the crimes committed with firearms). And how attacking the supply is not going to have much of an impact, since the supply has tripled during a time of drastically lower crime. And how pursuing this has turned off generations of working class voters. His call for understanding on the part of liberals resonated. It's hard to bridge gulfs that wide. Look at the reviews...

Even though I don't own a gun I thoroughly enjoyed Baum's book. A Jewish Democrat from suburban New Jersey and lifelong gun guy he grabs his concealed-carry handgun permit and hits the road to explore the American love affair with guns. "It's like Barbie for men," suggests one gun shop owner. Baum's attraction to firearms is visceral. "I came to love the snap of the rifle, the rich aroma of burned cordite, the magical geometry of the bullet's razor-straight trajectory connection to a tiny, distant point." My favorite part of the book is when Baum gets to train with a Prism machine where active shooter scenarios are projected on a rubber screen. His bullet holes are cauterized then scored by a computer. Scenarios involved a high school, a city council meeting, and a patrol in Afghanistan. After "dying" several times he finally learns how to take out the bad guy. "By the end," writes Baum, "I was soaked in sweat and needed to sit down and eat something with sugar in it." Baum lists three laws that could make us safer: Universal background checks, making gun owners responsible for crimes committed by their stolen firearms and requiring more rigid gun training because, he writes, "a well-trained armed citizen is more effective in a crisis." His advice to the anti-gun crowd borrows a phrase from the pro-choice movement. "Don't like guns? Don't have one."

I love Baum's style as a writer. I first encountered his work in Popular Science, and I'll read anything he writes. His work is vivid, lyrical, and solidly grounded in fact, concrete details, compelling ideas and memorable characters. So when I heard that Gun Guys was coming out, I snapped it up. I was not disappointed. Gun Guys is a wild ride, addressing a serious topic with a healthy dose of humor, as in this, my favorite line, about a guy stuffing a loaded gun down his pants: "It seemed to me that clawing that thing out during the panic of a gun fight would be a good way for Bill to shoot off his wedding tackle." Besides

providing a read that is as enjoyable as any work of fiction, Gun Guys makes some very strong arguments in favor of both extreme sides of the gun-control issue taking it down a few notches. Yes, some regulation of guns is a good idea, but, no, outright bans aren't going to significantly reduce violence and are therefore needlessly provoking to law-abiding citizens who happen to dig guns. Baum argues that more tolerance is in order, on both sides. My favorite character in the book, Janet Bewley, a member of the Wisconsin State Assembly, sums up this point of view nicely: "People want to be able to drive their ATVs through town to go ice fishing, and there's a whole lot of people against it because they don't like those people. Some people are just so antigun their brains explode when you try to talk about it. Same thing: it's those people. My own husband, he's a UCC minister and he says, 'I don't like guns.' And I tell him, 'It does matter what you like or don't like. That's not how we make law!' Gun Guys is an enjoyable read about a polarizing topic. Whatever side of the issue you're on, you'll find something to think about here.

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