

# Episode 121-- Reckoning with Gun Culture with American Totem...

Fri, 3/19 1:04PM 47:53

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, gun, film, gun violence, firearms, brady, kris, totem, object, sue, gun violence prevention, conversations, mass shootings, nra, talk, marketing, country, society, real, podcast

## SPEAKERS

Sue Hilderbrand, JJ Janflone, Kelly Sampson, Kris Brown



JJ Janflone 00:08

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JJ Janflone 00:37

Welcome back everybody to another episode of Red, Blue, and Brady. And yes, surprise, we are still working from home. In fact, Brady marked a full year of pandemic work from home on March 13th.



Kelly Sampson 00:47

Yeah, I don't even know what to say about that. Other than it's just very surreal to think that it's been a year.



JJ Janflone 00:52

Yeah, it's a full 365 days. I don't know about you, but I definitely reached the point in the pandemic, where after a year, I broke and cut off all of my hair and dyed it. You know, I highly recommend it, do something, get a face tattoo, do whatever suits you. It's been a year.

 Kelly Sampson 01:07

Yeah, actually, I really look forward to seeing everyone's transformations when we meet again, because I mean, even when you see people on Zoom it's very different than seeing them in person. So I'm sure that'll be a very, there'll be lots of emotions on that day.

 JJ Janflone 01:18

Yeah, I haven't seen anyone's full bodies for a year. People could have tails now Kelly, I wouldn't know.

 Kelly Sampson 01:25

Is this a bad time to tell you I have a tail? Just kidding, for those listeners out there.

 JJ Janflone 01:31

Well, and, and speaking of emotional responses, like I would have when I interact with all of my new tail friends, that's exactly what we're talking about today. The emotional feelings that sort of get wrapped up for better or for worse with, with guns and gun ownership. And, and so to do so, we're joined by Kris Brown, Brady's excellent president. She's been on the podcast before, and Sue Hilderbrand, political theorist and documentarian.

 Kelly Sampson 01:54

Yeah, and this is a great chance to kind of step back and consider the context that we live in every day but may not be aware of.

 JJ Janflone 02:01

Yeah, exactly. Especially I think, if you whether, you know, if you're a gun owner, if you're a non gun owner, if you're for gun violence prevention, if you're not for gun violence, like

what if, no matter who you are listening to this, I highly recommend you check out the documentary because it talks exactly about what we're discussing today, people's relationships to their firearms and how people perceive gun violence prevention as a movement.

 Kelly Sampson 02:20

Yeah, I totally agree. It is definitely a documentary well worth your time. No matter where you fall, it's a really meaningful way to sort of expose some of the underlying norms that are shaping our relationships between ourselves and firearms, regardless of where we fall on the spectrum. So highly recommend, very, very interesting.



JJ Janflone 02:41

Sue, it's wonderful to be able to see you, even virtually. This has got to be a little bit different for you. I know you have a radio show. So to not be running the interview has got to be strange, but I want to go ahead and just kick it off by having you and then Kris, introduce yourselves.

 Sue Hilderbrand 02:54

Sure, I'm Sue Hilderbrand. I am a longtime community organizer and activist, and I happen to teach political science at the local university and the local community college and I stumbled into making a documentary film. So I'm a filmmaker as well.

 Kris Brown 03:10

And Kris Brown, I'm the president of Brady, lawyer by training, mom by the birth of both of my daughters, and a gun violence prevention activist and advocate.



JJ Janflone 03:21

We're gonna start with, a what I think is a very stereotypical question, but also is a very important question, which is what prompted you to make a film about gun ownership?

 Sue Hilderbrand 03:30

So I do talk radio, and I talk to a lot of people every single day and, about guns about, you know, community and society. And over the course of, it seemed like, out of nowhere, we

started to hear about these mass shootings. And, and it seemed like it came from nowhere. And then the Sandy Hook shooting took place on a Friday. And I know that it came on a Friday, because Saturday morning, I was supposed to be live radio, right after the shooting. And I had my guests all in place. And then Sandy Hook happened. And even as I think about it, I mean, it kind of, I can feel it in my chest, and my eyes start to water. I mean, that was the epitome of the most awful moment for this entire country. And it was really that the next morning, when I was on live radio, and I cried. And it was, it was really that moment of I have to participate in some way I need, and the, and the arrogance that I had, and I think many folks have is, for some reason, I can figure this out. I'm going to explore and I'm going to say it in the right way. And I'm going to figure out and get to the bottom of this, this, this real issue of gun violence. And that's what got me going, and I set out to make this film with a real clear idea of what the film would say. And that I could sort this out and the only thing we lacked was a real understanding and political will. And through the process, I realized that this is very complicated. And everything I thought was true, really it's, it's true, but I don't think it's helpful of the way that I approached it. And so that's what kind of got me going was just the, enough already kind of moment.

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Kelly Sampson 05:20

I'm so interested in what you mean by everything you thought was true, and was true, but not in the way you thought. But before we get there, I just want to dial in on the title of the film, which is American Totem. And it's such a great title and so evocative. So I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about what makes a firearm a totem in American culture?

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Sue Hilderbrand 05:39

Yeah, it's a, it's a really good question. It's an important question. And to preface this by saying, I really struggled with the title. And we, you know, we had working titles and they weren't very interesting, and we played on words. And, and finally, one of my producers said, you've got to come up with a title, you know, we're getting too far down this road, you've got to come up with it. And I turned off my phone, and I and I, literally for about 48 hours, I live on this wonderful farm on the outskirts of Chico, California. And I kind of wandered around, sort of open heartedly and thought, what is this film about? And out of nowhere, this, this came to me and I, I was, I was nervous. I was skeptical, and I presented it to people. And they all went, yeah, that's exactly right. So the definition of the text, the dictionary definition of a totem is, it's an object serving as the emblem of a family or a clan. And it often serves as a reminder of ancestry. And as I kind of opened my heart, like, what is this film really about, that appeared and as I really played with it, and I really thought about the hundreds of conversations I had with people all over the political

spectrum, that was the right word, because whether you are, you know, a gun owner, if you're a hunter, or you are a gun control advocate, it doesn't matter. So many people have this emotional reaction. And as I explored the history of it, the marketing of it, the Hollywood glorification of this object, it, it just fit that, that as Americans, I would run into people at the airport and just, you know, end up talking about, you know, yeah, what do you do? And, and whenever I said, I'm working on a documentary about firearms, people, first question was, are you for them or against them? And I said, Well, you know, I'm just sort of exploring. And then the next thing that would happen is people would tell me this emotional story about it. It wasn't facts and figures and statistics. It was an emotional story that they shared with me about this object. And so that's, it just made sense that we elevate this object as being fraught with meaning. And your experience tells you if it's a good object or a bad object, but there's very few people that I ever ran into that said, oh, I have no opinion, just like I have no opinion about a hammer. So it just seemed to fit.

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Kris Brown 08:10

Yeah, I think it's impossible to be a living breathing organism in the United States of America without recognizing that firearms are a totem. And I think the title really captures something that is important in a title. And I appreciate that it took you a couple of days wandering around Chico, which is just a gorgeous area to come up with this, because it's really important what it conveys. And I think we could talk for hours and hours about the importance of how we discuss these things, and words really do matter. Part of the reason that we were able to bring you on is because of a relationship we have with Firmin DeBrabander and he wrote a book, *Do Guns Make Us Free*, that we discussed on this podcast with him. It was a great podcast. And he talked about that a little bit not using the term totem but recognizing that, when we talk about rights, right, and the manner in which the Second Amendment has been morphed in America to be something that for those who are strong supporters of gun rights seems to outstrip all of the other rights and freedoms that are provided by our Bill of Rights and our Constitution. He talked about the fact that a gun can speak, and I harkened back to my own experience, not growing up with guns, but I have shot skeet. I mean, I'm a Virginian, and I went to school at Virginia Tech. You can't possibly grow up and go to Blacksburg, Virginia and not have some familiarity and see people who have guns. I was never afraid of guns. It's very different though as the leader of a gun violence prevention organization to go to a rally, as I did in Richmond, which was about the passage or the desire to pass gun violence prevention legislation and stand next to someone who's openly carrying what is in effect an assault weapon, right next to you. And it is extraordinarily chilling. It stands for something. And that's obviously the, it's the fact of it, that that could do danger to me, that is so chilling. And then it's also the representational role that the gun plays or has attempted to play, is marketed to play, in our society, which I think really stands for a risk free proposition, an

empowering kind of object or tool with no downside. I think your title really provides the opportunity to understand why that's the case. Sometimes to understand an issue or a problem, it's really important to step back from it and look at it as someone who is outside the structure and understand what's going on. I think that was really important for me, living overseas and being outside of America, to see this epidemic for what it is, which is harming us. And to some extent, holding up a value proposition that is a myth, that hurts all of us every single day. And so that's why a gun in our culture is a totem. I'm not sure it's all that different, I will say, in other cultures, but the way we wrap it around, or those at the NRA have tried to wrap it around, things like manliness, love of country, that is unique to our culture and our society.

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Kelly Sampson 11:34

One of the real strengths of the film is that it really engages all the interviewees' emotional relationship to their guns, or if they don't have guns, just their emotional relationship to firearms in general. So Sue, I was wondering if you could explain some of what you've seen and observed about the very deep relationships that people have with their firearms that they own, or just the idea of firearms in general.

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Sue Hilderbrand 12:02

The approach that I took was, I'm going to make a completely neutral film, I'm not gonna, you know, push my agenda. And I, in the very beginning, I had many, many, many arguments with people that were very pro gun rights. And, and it was through those nasty conversations that I realized that I was sort of consumed with my own worldview. And so it was through those nasty conversations where people said, I just don't believe that you can create a film that doesn't pick a side, and I was, you know, being stubborn. And I said, Oh, well, you watch me. And it was through those initial arguments that made me realize that in order for me to understand, what I really used to believe, was just an irrational, crazy worldview, as I really listened to what people were saying, I realized that they did make sense if I understood the data points that they were using. And often we have this, this, every side has the same data points often, and they just connect them very differently. And so you bring up A Girl & A Gun, and then there's also the Huey P Newton Gun Club. And these, and even Defense Distributed, the makers of the ghost gun, those folks, they didn't say, oh, yes, come on in, bring your cameras, and we'll tell you anything you want. It was me, you know, working with a third party, you know, mutual friends to say, no, really, I do want to hear what you have to say. I really want to understand where you're coming from, then my job was to figure out, how do they see the world that makes what they're saying rational? And as I did that, I won't say I walked in their footsteps. I didn't or walked in their shoes. I didn't. But I did. I sort of suspended my judgment for a little while. And,

and then people just open up. People want to be heard.



JJ Janflone 14:02

But we are talking about what, what people are saying what's shaping people's feelings, you know, I think we do have to talk about what groups like the NRA, or what just marketing in general by some of these gun companies, or just by the media, what that does to sort of people's perceptions of what a firearm is,



Sue Hilderbrand 14:19

We could talk about the NRA. I see them as a business trying to make money. And as businesses, you know, the business strategy is how do we make as much money as possible? I think if we're really going to reduce gun violence, I think the don't, we need to recognize the NRA as the business that it is, and I, and its business strategy is guns make you a man. Guns make you safe. Guns make you free. That's a marketing strategy. And I think as people that would like to see a reduction in violence in our society, I think we're wasting our time by trying to engage the NRA because their interest is not in reducing gun violence. All the gun violence perpetuates fear, which causes people to want to buy more guns. And, and so again, as people that want to reduce violence in our society, I think we need to look past the object, quit focusing on the object itself. But think about why people have that object. How do we work on the root causes of the violence, because even if we get rid of the guns, the problems are still there.



Kris Brown 15:31

The biggest concern I have, what I think has been the most dangerous, and I'll be honest, Brady has a case with the FTC about this very thing is the marketing of weapons intentionally, to young people. And that's where our loopholes that we have allowed to have happen in the law, and the use of the gun as a totem intersect in a extremely deadly way. And when I talk about that, the kind of marketing I'm talking about is the marketing that the NRA was behind, get your man card here, just as an example, with a picture of a semi automatic weapon. Like if you just had this object, then suddenly, you'd be a man. I can only think about the marketing research, which the NRA spent a lot of money on, not on gun safety, but on marketing of their weapons, that led them to believe that this was something that they could market to people who needed that sense of security, right? It relates Sue to the answer that the woman that you talked to gave, which is she, if she sees a gun, she sees it as a sign of weakness. The NRA is preying on that that's exactly where the genesis is. The danger is, it seems to work. And that's a concern that I have, I think

there's a real role for regulation of how these things are marketed just like with smoking, to be honest, and also of Hollywood in not just glorifying a gun, but also showing the everyday gritty reality of what happens when that gun is used. And, and the fallout from that, which is lifelong.

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Sue Hilderbrand 17:12

I want to kind of even just sort of remind us that, you know, back in the 1850s, back in the 1860s, guns were just a tool. They really and truly were just a tool. And all of a sudden, with the Industrial Revolution, the first application was firearms. And so these gun manufacturers, they could produce a lot of guns, and and who needs a lot of guns, not civilians. And so what the gun manufacturers did was they armed the American military, and then they went abroad, and they armed France, and the Vatican, and Russia. And they did all of those things. And then in the, in the 1880s, Oliver Winchester goes to his board of directors, and he says, we have no more contracts. We essentially, we've armed the world, but we still have the capacity to make a lot of firearms. What are we going to do? And so that was the beginning of the shifting of the advertising. And it was this idea of we have this product, and it's not selling anymore. So how do we manufacture the demand? How do we manufacture demand? Well, you only, you can only shoot one gun at a time. And so how do we have different kinds of guns that you need? And how do we continue to infuse people with the need to have a gun? Well, the obvious thing is, if you think it's dangerous out there, then you need a gun. But also, as we highlight in the film, there was a, there was a marketing campaign by Winchester, and it was called the Real Boy campaign. And they had all these advertisements that said, every real boy wants to gun, every parent of every real boy knows that their boy wants a gun, give your boy a gun. And, and it was this constant, you know, connection between a gun and masculinity. And that was intentional. Because just like any business, when you run out of customers, how do you find more people to sell it to and they, and we saw the shift in the 1910s, 1900s, 1910s from this is what your tool will do to you need a tool to defend yourself and to be a man. And that was the amazing shift. That was the beginning of I need a gun to be a good American, a manly American. And then, so that was a big part of it. Yeah, this, this, this narrative of I need this, this object, this totem. It represents me and my heritage. And then of course, you know, as you, as you mentioned, JJ, then Hollywood really took it from there. Those, the Rifleman and, you know, this idea that what we highlight in the film is the movie Shane, right and that was a pivotal film for the for the, for firearms and the narrative around firearms is that yes, a gun is just a tool. But if you're the good guy, it's a good tool. And that's where that narrative from the NRA comes from. Only, you know, the only way to, to defeat a guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. That comes right from the Rifleman that comes right from Shane. It comes from Hollywood. And the reason that I just love this section of the film, is that people on the left tend to say, it's that evil

marketing. And people on the right, say it's that evil Hollywood. And the truth is, it was that just evolution of who we are. And if you think about it for a second, this country sort of evolved from this notion of a clean slate. And we know that, that's not really true. But it's this notion of you come to this country, and you shed your identity, and you pick up the American identity. And so if we think about it, this idea of we're in this, this melting pot, what that is saying is that we have to create an identity, an American identity. The problem is marketing and, and Hollywood crafted that identity, that, that, that manufactured the American identity. And what that identity says is, as an American, as a manly American, as an independent, rugged individual, you got to have a gun. And so it's so deep in our culture, that it is going to take time. I think we need short term measures, we need more domestic violence shelters, we need more mental health clinics in rural areas, we need more economic opportunity in cities, we need all of those things. We also need change of public policy, we also need a change of what it fundamentally means to be an American. And that's a hard one. That's a hard nut to crack.

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Kris Brown 21:59

Yeah. When you talk about the solutions to gun violence, you first have to acknowledge that we have a problem with gun violence in this country and clearly we do. We have 25 times the gun violence of any other major industrialized country. So the role of the gun in that is, is the thing. What you're saying, though, is that the causes that lead people to say, well, I want more guns, or I want to use guns in this way, isn't just about the gun. It's about a lot of other complex things that if we want to address this issue, we really need to and I guess I have a question I, I always get on the podcast, and then commandeered. So, let me just get to this because they have a lot better questions. But we launched about three years ago, something called the End Family Fire campaign, and that campaign is focused on speaking directly to gun owners. One of the things that we did was lots of research with gun owners all over the country, to understand how we should shape this campaign. And one of the key pieces of feedback, no matter where we were in the country, was the way you talk to gun owners makes them feel stupid. You're making a judgment. And I just wonder if you have ideas and thoughts for how organizations like Brady, who are full of gun owners and non gun owners, that's the legacy of what we do, how we can do better at bridging that perception divide that if you are a gun violence prevention organization, it automatically means that you must hate guns, which just isn't the case. We hate gun violence, not guns.

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Sue Hilderbrand 23:40

Boy, you're asking me what's the answer and I, and I don't know. I don't know what the answer is. One of the moments of pure clarity for me, and it made it into the film is it

came from Dr. Harel Shapira, and he's a sociology professor down at University of Texas in Austin. And I was with him, you know, we had a big meeting here in California. A lot of the folks that ended up in the film were, we were all together. And I basically said, you are all the experts, help me, just help me guide the way that I think about this film. I mean this was very in the beginning. Dr. Shapira said the biggest problem that gun, I want to say gun control advocates, but that, but i think that's putting it too simply. Activists, advocates that want to figure out how to reduce gun violence. He said the worst thing that, that continues to happen is that what we talk about is gun control. How do we take guns away? And the, and that, what he said to me was that's the worst thing you can say to a gun owner because as you're saying, Kris is what that says to a gun owner is we don't trust you. We think you're stupid. We don't think you're responsible. And, and, I don't, I don't know the statistic. I don't know if I should say most are some or whatever. And so, Dr. Shapira made that comment to me, and, and that that idea made it into the film. And because of the marketing and because of the Hollywood glorification of this object, it is people really kind of wear it as a totem. It's like, this is who I am, this is who my family is. And when, when gun violence groups seek to reduce, you know, seek to reduce gun violence, the worst thing we could say is, let me have that. Let me take that away from you. And the my favorite example is, you know, in the film, every single interview, the first question, and the very last question for every interview was, what does a gun mean to you? And then in the film, I piece those together, and there's just a whole string of people saying what that what that means. And Rakem Balogun, one of the cofounders of the Huey P. Newton Gun Club in Dallas, Texas. He said, I asked him, what is it gonna mean to you? And he said, freedom. There was no explanation. There was no nothing. And so, that has burned into my brain. Because when I say to somebody, what does a gun mean to you? And he goes on in the film to talk about I don't know, where I'm from, probably West Africa, because he knows that his family, his ancestors were slaves. So when he says to me, a gun represents freedom. He's not going to give it up anytime soon. If I say, well, I don't trust you with that object. I don't, what I'm saying is, I don't trust you with that freedom. Give it back to me. And so, Kris, I don't know the answer. I wish I did. The whole goal of the film was to get people to think a little bit differently. And so I don't know the answer. But I do think that if we understand what this object represents to people, then we can be more skillful. We can be more respectful in focusing on, the issue is the violence as opposed to the issue is this object. I don't want to pretend I know the answer. I think we I think that's the first sign that we're on the wrong track when we think we know the answer. But I think a piece of the answer is, if we don't understand the emotional connection to this object, there is no way we're going to have, you know, a focus on how do we reduce the violence in our society that is amplified by having so many guns circulating?

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Kelly Sampson 27:28

I love one of the insights from the film that I think is really profound is when you talk about how guns do have this emotional connection, and that people's emotion towards it will be connected to how they're situated in society or their experiences. And so that's why for someone who's, you know, experienced domestic violence, or for a black person who may feel like, they have very little reason to expect protection from the state. A gun may mean oppression, whereas for, you know, a black person who feels like I need to defend myself or for a person who, you know, a woman who like the, the gun club is featured sees it as empowerment, will experience it as freedom. And so I'm wondering if both of you, Kris and Sue, wouldn't mind talking a little bit about how firearms may track with where people are situated in society.

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Sue Hilderbrand 28:22

There's a woman from Austin, Texas, Fatima Mann in the film, and she makes a very and answer the question, what does a gun mean to you? It means, it means people are afraid. The person holding the gun is afraid. So as we focus on the object itself, and we use those statistics, things like that, it doesn't, it doesn't resonate with a lot of people. And the reason for that is if we talk about, we do a big part in the film around, you know, what we euphemistically called inner city violence. What we're talking about is the real, the poverty in our society, in black and brown communities that as a society, we just ignore. And so one of the ways you know, we could say, put that gun down, or let's take guns out of the inner city, which I'm not saying is a bad idea at all. But you're still left with the poverty. You're still left with the lack of dignity. You're still left with all of the problems, all of those issues that result in somebody saying, well give me a gun. That brings me dignity. That brings me freedom. How do we, how do we start really addressing gun violence is we focus on the poverty in inner cities. And you know, and Kris, you brought up earlier about, you know, I think you're five times, and I don't remember the statistic, you're five times, you're 10 times more likely to kill yourself or your, or somebody in your family if you have a loaded gun in your house. Well, you can tell somebody that, but if they believe, and they have been, indoctrination, that's not the right word. But if you are raised with this idea of the rugged individual, if you are raised on this idea of I take care of myself and my family, and a gun allows me to do it. If I tell you that you're more likely to kill yourself or your kids than anybody else, it doesn't matter. So you know, what we, what we often don't talk about is most mass shootings that, when we talk about mass shootings, we're talking about public mass shootings. People that are strangers are the ones that are getting shot. But the truth is, as you all know, mass shootings happen every single day in this country. And they are not publicized, because they're dismissed as domestic incident. This is, you know, a guy that shoots his wife, and then his kids run in and he shoots the kids, and the neighbors, and it's considered private violence. And as a society, we're okay with private

violence, right? That's your, you know, that's private world. We're not going there. And so, how do we deal with those mass shootings? Let's acknowledge that most of them start with domestic violence. And so, let's put more money in domestic violence shelters, Let's have more, you know, let's have public policy that allow women to get out of that situation before they end up dead.

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Kelly Sampson 31:21

You know, it's interesting when, as we're talking about the subject of firearms versus a societal condition that lead to violence. And one issue that I know we run up against at Brady, and I'm sure you've seen as well, Sue, and this isn't, I wouldn't ask anyone this question, because I don't think it's a fair one. But it's more just the observation, that one of the tricky parts, I think, with that is that some of the, the same societal conditions that may lead to gun violence, whether you're talking about you know, quote, unquote, neighborhood violence, or domestic violence, or even suicide, which are, you know, economic conditions or issues around the way that we're structuring our society and people feeling hopeless, because of the way the political system has sorted, the constituency that will address those underlying issues or not address those underlying issues often travels with a constituency that's predisposed to be pushing for, or resisting any efforts to regulate firearms. And so it's, I think that's like, the tricky part when the rubber meets the road is how do we, how do we find the political or we have the political will, but how do we end up getting the results that we need?



JJ Janflone 32:30

Well yeah Kelly, but to that, to the point we even see all the time the idea, people saying the idea that you know, that gun violence prevention isn't a bipartisan effort when, when in fact it is. But I think that goes to the fact that this is such a rich and textured conversation. And too often it gets, it gets really reduced and the context gets pulled out of it.

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Kelly Sampson 32:47

And to Kris's point, even in that, in the 1700s or 1600s, that tool would have been experienced differently by Native Americans or enslaved Africans. And so I think, to tie it all together, just thinking about the object within the cultural space, how we address the concerns of people and culture is a huge point. And I did want to ask, Kris and Sue, you know, we talked a lot about all these different ways that firearms as a totem mean different things to different people and they're situated in our culture, and if, if people are

rational, and want to be safe and want to protect themselves and their families, how do we move this conversation forward? And you can take that as broadly or as narrowly as you want because that is a broad question, but I'm just curious.

K

Kris Brown 33:33

Well, I think that it is both simple and complex, right? It's simple in the sense that I'm not thinking we could change the world in a day. But a big part of this is the cultural shift, that allows us to have the conversation. That allows someone in the door and Sue you, I'd love to hear your perspective on Kelly's question, which is, I think, just an incredible question, because you have this in setting up the interviews, right? And if people feel that you're approaching them with good faith and wanting to get to a common ground, I think still, even in the America of 2021, the opportunities are endless. I think the problem we have with our causes, it becomes about something else. It becomes about people digging in, instead of getting to the essence of, we both want safety, how do we figure that out? And that's where I think there's huge opportunity. The way I think about our work, Kelly is it starts with community. It starts with these conversations. It's built on making sure that gun dealers who some of them right now, you know, very well are not following the law. It starts at the next step is enforcement. The last step is policy. So it's, it's the reverse of the way a lot of people think about this. Let's start with the conversations and community building first. I think that's the most important thing.

S

Sue Hilderbrand 35:02

And, and that's the perfect answer for, to throw it to me. As, as the filmmaker, my, my answer to that question Kelly is watch American Totem with people. Because the, the number one thing that the first answer I get every time somebody watches the film is they say, ooh, there's a lot in there. I want to watch it again. Or how do I give this to my brother? Or how and, and so I really think and again, Kris, you're right is that is once I realized that I was approaching this film, from the perspective of I can find the answer. And then everybody will say thank you for that answer. And we'll just fix it. Once I realized that my perspective was only my perspective, then I could really listen to what's going on. And what I realized is, people have guns for a reason. And sometimes it's because they're afraid, and sometimes because they got extra money, and they're bored. But often, it's because of the stories that we tell ourselves. And what society confirms with us, always, we're always confirming it mostly through popular culture, and, you know, in the media and all of that. And so I think, absolutely, we need to do public policy. Absolutely, we need to have, you know, real tangible action steps. But I think a lot of it comes down to having those conversations, and really, really, really trying hard to listen to hear what somebody is saying. And one of the people in the film, Bob Trouss, he's the guy with the long gray

hair, and he's my neighbor. And I, you know, I talk with him all the time. And what he always says to me, is people listen for the pause, they listen so that when that person pauses, they can infuse their, their idea. There's a pause, so I'm going to tell him how it really is. And so what Bob Trouss tells me all the time, is that we need to stop waiting for the pause, and really be present, and listen and listen between the lines. And, because somewhere between the lines is our common humanity. And I think that is, from my perspective that I can we can only do you know, 16 hours of work every day. Right? And, and the way that I spend a lot of my waking hours is how do I listen? And how do I offer people safe space to share where they are? And, and what are their hopes and their disappointments and all of that stuff. And I, you know, I'm a real, I will say I'm not a Pollyanna, but I, but I am an optimist. And I think that's how we do this. But that's really hard. And but what I think really comes down to is we need to shift our culture. And it took, oh, you know that the marketing of guns to equate this object with your manhood, or your sense of I'm an American. That started at the turn of the 20th century. So we've been dealing with this acculturation for 120 years about, you need this object to be truly American. And then again, Hollywood jumped in starting in, I think the Great Train Robbery was the first time that we, we noticed this, this glorification of an object. And I think that was, I think that was made in 1910. So we've had a long time in creating a culture that puts meaning into this object. And I think, unfortunately, it's going to take a long time to move away from that culture. The struggle is, well, if we just imposed these things, the culture will follow. But as a people that loves our individual freedom, it's, it's hard to, it's hard to move in that direction. And so I think while we have these conversations, and I think we can't deal with something, if we don't know it's there, I think, while we have these conversations and policy gets passed, that says, not everybody needs a semiautomatic firearm in their, you know, in their glove box. While we do those things, I think we also, you know, do the best we can to deal with that inequality. And so, Kelly, I appreciate you, you know, pointing out that there is a whole group of people that say, why is public money being spent on providing economic opportunity for, for these folks that I'm not connected with? Or I don't beat my wife, why do I care about domestic violence? And I'm hoping, I'm hoping, I'm an eternal optimist, is that we are in a really crazy moment. As we all know, January 6 was one of the craziest, but I'm a real firm believer in that as long as everything is stable. It's hard to make any real moves. And so the way I approached this moment and, and, and Kelly to, you know, get back to the question is, it's a crazy moment. I'm in it. How do I take this opportunity and plant those seeds and, and have that conversation so that it forever changes and that we don't go back?

K

Kris Brown 40:21

I think that's a really important point, Sue. And I guess I just add one layer on as the head of Brady, which is very focused on multifaceted solutions, right? And I think that if you take

a page from other social change movements, we can learn, right? And historical perspectives around these things are quite important. In the 70s and 80s, you know, high schools around this country had smoking courts. I remember the smoking court at my public high school was banned the year that I started as a freshman. As an asthmatic, that was never a thing for me, right? But there were a lot of people who were up in arms about this, right? Now, today, no, no public school has a smoking court. The multifaceted public health approach that was taken in the United States to really combat smoking, to deal with Joe Camel and the marketing that had been so successful from Big Tobacco, was multifaceted. There were legal and policy campaigns underpinning it, there was a major marketing campaign. And as a result, we had the use of cigarettes plummet in every age category across this country and all of the concomitant risks and diseases, including lung cancer, drop dramatically, as compared to in Europe, for example, where I lived for a while where it seemed like every 10, or 11 year old, literally had a cigarette. It was a major, so I want to harken back to the fact that we believe at Brady, that we do need comprehensive solutions across the board, there needs to be a cultural shift. Sometimes I feel like when I'm talking about that, it's like Dorothy talking about Oz to non believers. And I'd like to anchor the conversation and the fact that this is not Pollyanna, we have done it before. But you're right, Sue, it takes a multifaceted commitment. And it's not a short term thing, we can do it. But it takes an investment, and we're looking at some time over the next five years, actually making a meaningful dent on the 41,000 on average, people who die from gun violence, and the nearly 100,000 more who are injured for a uniquely American problem. That seems like an investment worth making.



JJ Janflone 42:44

And speaking of investment, I really think people should invest their time and taking the time to go and watch American Totem. And I'm wondering if you could tell folks about the, the viewing parties that you have available for the film, obviously, how to get the film and how to watch it, that's going to be in the description of this episode. But I think you and your team have something really unique, offered, you know, just for the week, right?



Sue Hilderbrand 43:06

So there's a wonderful platform, it's called Show and Tell. And on March 15, we will launch two weeks where anybody can go and watch the film. I strongly encourage people to watch it with others because, and you can stop it, because it really is, there's so many new ideas. And actually, they're all the same ideas. They're just presented in a way that you might not expect. But all you need to do is remember two websites. One is AmericanTotem.com, and the link will be on there. Right, you can, it'll be the Show and Tell link, so AmericanTotem.com. And then you can also go to showandtell.fm. So we'll, we'll

offer it for the first week from the 15th until I guess the 22nd that Sunday, and then we're gonna do a Q&A. We'll do a live Q&A that night. And then we'll let the film run for another week. So there's two weeks to watch it on the Show and Tell platform but go to AmericanTotem.com and that'll give you all the information you need.



JJ Janflone 44:07

Kris, Sue, thank you both so much for joining us. Sue, thank you so much for this film and and if any of them are listening, I want to really thank the participants in your film for being so, so candid and so open in their interviews. It's really, I think, a great way for us to start this conversation.



JJ Janflone 44:25

Well, Kelly, this week's story hits that unbelievable category, as what I have to share with you is the exact opposite of what I would personally deem relationship goals.



Kelly Sampson 44:34

Oh, boy. Sounds like a Netflix special to be or something. I don't know. I'm very intrigued.



JJ Janflone 44:42

It could be I almost had hashtag relationship goals. And then I was like, I'm gonna get roasted for being a millennial. So I pulled back, but I thought about it.



Kelly Sampson 44:48

Hey, don't never fear. It's, I we got to accept it.



JJ Janflone 44:52

Yeah, millennial pride. Well, someone who's probably not proud of themselves right now, in Epping, New Hampshire, a husband and wife both suffered gunshot wounds in an unintentional shooting.



Kelly Sampson 45:02

I mean, I guess on the bright side, it's, it's unintentional. So I mean sadly that is something to call a relief, but it's also still really bleak.



JJ Janflone 45:13

Yeah. And in particular, what's what's interesting about this one is that it's, so it's a Sunday afternoon, the husband's cleaning his nine millimeter handgun. It unintentionally discharges. And that single bullet passed through his thigh and then hit his wife's thigh.



Kelly Sampson 45:26

Terrifying like that, like if you're, for listeners who may not have been listening as long like, you may think, Oh, well, it's just a thigh, no, there are some major arteries in your legs. That is serious business.



JJ Janflone 45:37

Yeah, thigh wounds are really serious business. And I think for me, it's also this misconception too, that like bullets can't travel through multiple things. We've had to talk about that a few times on this podcast. And so the couple was taken to a local hospital for treatment. And, as Kelly like, as you just mentioned, their injuries were serious, but luckily, they're okay.



Kelly Sampson 45:55

I mean, I'm glad they're okay, at least physically, who knows about emotionally. But yeah, this is a terrible story. In an awful developing story, a mass shooting has left eight people dead in Atlanta at the time of our recording. Three Atlanta area spas seem to have been targeted by one Georgia man who is now in custody. While the motive is not immediately clear, the Asian American civil rights group Stop AAPI Hate called the shooting an quote unspeakable tragedy for the families of the victims first and foremost, but also for the AAPI community, which has been reeling from high levels of racial discrimination end quote. In a new report linked in the description of this episode, Stop AAPI Hate identified 3800 anti Asian hate incidents nationwide, mostly targeting women since last March.



JJ Janflone 46:48

Want to share with the podcast?. Listeners can now get in touch with us here at Red, Blue,

and Brady via phone or text message. Simply call or text us at 480-744-3452 with your thoughts, questions, concerns, ideas, whatever. Kelly and I are standing by.



Kelly Sampson 47:03

Thanks for listening. As always, Brady's life saving work in Congress, the courts, and communities across the country is made possible thanks to you. For more information on Brady or how to get involved in the fight against gun violence, please like and subscribe to the podcast. Get in touch with us at [bradyunited.org](https://bradyunited.org) or on social at Bradybuzz. Be brave and remember, take action, not sides.