

Silent on guns: Why aren't we talking about this?

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [May 19, 2009](#) issue

Why aren't we talking about guns? A week before Easter, three Pittsburgh police officers were shot and killed while responding to a domestic disturbance. Apparently they were met by a 22-year-old man wearing a bullet-proof vest and armed with several guns, including an AK-47 assault rifle. On the same weekend a man in Graham, Washington, shot and killed his five children before turning the gun on himself. The previous Friday in Binghamton, New York, a man shot 17 people in the office of a civic association, killing 13 of them, and then killed himself. Several days later in Priceville, Alabama, a man with a handgun shot and killed his wife and 16-year-old daughter, his sister and her 11-year-old-son and then killed himself. In Chicago a staggering number of public school students—more than 30—have been shot and killed so far this school year, either caught in gang crossfire or deliberately targeted by gangs.

In an April 14 column in the *New York Times*, Bob Herbert recited the grim statistics and said, "This is the American Way. Since Sept. 11, 2001, when the country's attention understandably turned to terrorism, nearly 120,000 Americans have been killed in nonterror homicides, most of them committed with guns. Think about it—120,000 dead. That's nearly 25 times the number of Americans killed in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Herbert says that we've stopped even paying attention to the relentless carnage and that the idea of trying to do something about it is a nonstarter. The gun lobby is so powerful, well funded and politically effective that most smart politicians won't touch the issue. The National Rifle Association and its minions want to get as many guns into the hands of as many people as possible.

In the meantime the United States is deeply implicated in the murderous war between drug cartels and police and the military in Mexico. Americans' appetite for drugs provides a huge market. And our easy gun laws supply the

weapons—purchased in the U.S. and smuggled across the border into Mexico.

Is it inevitable that we will continue to be the most heavily armed people in the world and among the most vulnerable to gun violence?

I do not favor the banning of all guns. I grew up in western Pennsylvania, where the opening of deer season used to be an excused day from school and where everyone hunted and owned rifles. I learned to shoot when I was ten; an uncle taught me and then made me sharp-shooter medals which I wore proudly. I still like to shoot, and I belong to a gun club; when I have the opportunity I enjoy shooting clay targets with a 12-gauge shotgun. But I do wonder every day why, amid the relentless reports of gun violence, nobody seems to even talk about the issue.