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IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

How Fear Helps the Gun Business

In the June 27, 2016, issue of *The New Yorker*, in “Making a Killing” (p. 36), **Evan Osnos** reports on the business and politics of the gun industry and the rise of the concealed-carry phenomenon, talking at length with gun owners, gun-industry executives, lobbyists, and activists on all sides to better understand a business that is more profitable—and powerful—than ever before. High-profile massacres—such as the June 12th attack in Orlando, one of the most devastating shootings in American history—can summon our attention, and galvanize demands for change, but in 2015 fatalities from mass shootings amounted to just two per cent of all gun deaths. “Most of the time, when Americans shoot one another, it is impulsive, up close, and apolitical,” Osnos writes. Two decades ago, leaving the house with a concealed weapon was illegal or strictly controlled in twenty-two states, and fewer than five million Americans had a permit to do so. Since then, it has become legal in every state, and the number of concealed-carry permit holders has climbed to an estimated 12.8 million. The broad expansion of the concealed-carry movement goes hand in hand with the N.R.A.’s shift from focussing on rifle training and recreation—in 1934, the president of the N.R.A. said, “I do not believe in the promiscuous toting of guns”—to lobbying politicians to allow more people, in more venues, across more states, to carry guns. In recent years, in response to three kinds of events—mass shootings, terrorist attacks, and talk of additional gun control—gun sales have broken records. “You know that every time a bomb goes off somewhere, every time there’s a shooting somewhere, sales spike like crazy,” Paul Jannuzzo, a former chief of American operations for Glock, the Austrian gun company, tells Osnos. In January, President Obama announced executive actions intended to expand the use of background checks, and by the end of that day the share price of Smith & Wesson, the largest U.S. gun-maker, had risen to its highest level ever. Last Thursday, Smith & Wesson reported record revenues for the past fiscal year.

Osnos travelled to the N.R.A.’s headquarters, in Fairfax, Virginia, to take a class that qualifies him for a nonresident concealed-carry permit issued by Utah. (States compete for the revenue generated by carry permits, and Utah’s permit is popular because it is valid in at least thirty states.) His instructor announced that students would not be touching any guns, explaining, “At the end of this class, you will have weapons familiarity as defined by Utah. They do not require live fire.” By the end of the course, Osnos writes, “We had been there four hours, and I had fulfilled all training requirements to receive my concealed-carry permit. I was home in time for lunch.” In May, Osnos joined seventy thousand members of the N.R.A. at the organization’s annual meeting, in Louisville. The centerpiece of the meeting was the endorsement of Donald Trump for President; Trump, the most fervently pro-gun Presidential nominee in history, has called for a national right to conceal-carry and an end to gun-free school zones. When Trump took the stage, he told the audience, “We’re going to bring it back to a real place, where we don’t have to be so frightened.” Osnos writes, “If Donald Trump reaches the White House, he will bring with him a moral logic of concealed carry. If he falls short of the Presidency, his admirers will have gained, at a minimum, fresh evidence of their encirclement.”

Syria’s War on Doctors

In “The Shadow Doctors” (p. 28), **Ben Taub** reports on the underground race to spread medical knowledge in Syria, amid rampant attacks by government forces on hospitals and medical personnel in the country. He travels to London, where he meets David Nott, a renowned surgeon who has operated on thousands of patients in war and disaster zones, and who trained almost every trauma surgeon in the opposition-held half of Aleppo. Since the earliest days of the insurrection in Syria, the Syrian regime has assassinated, bombed, and tortured to death almost seven hundred medical personnel, according to Physicians for Human Rights, and more than ninety-five per cent of Aleppo’s doctors have fled the city. Earlier this month, pro-Assad warplanes attacked three medical facilities, including a health center for newborn babies, in the span of three hours. Recent headlines announced the death of the last pediatrician in Aleppo and the last cardiologist in Hama. A United Nations commission concluded that “government forces deliberately target medical personnel to gain military advantage,” denying treatment to wounded fighters and civilians in opposition-held areas “as a matter of policy.”

“Despite the onslaught, doctors and international N.G.O.s have forged an elaborate network of underground hospitals throughout Syria,” Taub writes. “They have installed cameras in intensive-care units, so that doctors abroad can monitor patients by Skype and direct technicians to administer proper treatment.” Taub also speaks with Syrian doctors living in Aleppo, as well as with medical stu-



dents who adopted code names and established secret medical units to coordinate patient care. Living under the constant threat of assassination and bombardment, and working with limited medical supplies, Aleppo's medical workers treat thousands of patients each month, many of whom are children wounded in barrel-bomb attacks. Meanwhile, in London, David Nott—the British surgeon who spent months in Aleppo, in 2013 and 2014—continues to advise the Syrian medical workers from afar, even sending instructions for complex battlefield operations via text message. Ammar Darwish, a Syrian doctor living in Britain, tells Taub, “If you go to Aleppo and ask the doctors in any hospital, they will tell you that since David Nott came to Aleppo, there was a huge leap forward in the performance of medical practice.” Darwish added that Nott is “still saving lives down there, because he taught these doctors how to do a good job.”

Lee Berger Digs for Bones and Glory

In “Digging for Glory” (p. 46), **Paige Williams** profiles the paleoanthropologist Lee Berger, a research professor at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, whose discoveries have stirred controversy in his field, causing critics to question his bold evolutionary claims and his credibility as a scientist. “I realized, There’s a field that if you made even one tiny discovery you could have this huge effect,” Berger tells Williams, about his decision to enter paleoanthropology. Berger has announced stunning fossil finds, but to some people he has long seemed more interested in acclaim than in careful science. In 2013, two cavers working on behalf of Berger found a collection of fossils in a cave in South Africa, in a small chamber a hundred feet below the surface. Other scientists have said that, upon finding such a promising site, they would have moved with extreme deliberation, consulting experts in deep-cave excavation. “I’d have assembled the best, most experienced senior scientists in the world,” William Kimbel, the paleoanthropologist who directs Arizona State University’s Institute of Human Origins, tells Williams. Instead, Berger sent his fourteen-year-old son into the chamber to take pictures of the fossils, because he could not fit himself. After seeing the photographs, Berger decided that history “wouldn’t forgive” him if he didn’t “act quickly.” National Geographic bankrolled the excavation, and Berger used Facebook to recruit a team. They recovered some fifteen hundred fossil elements, and in less than a year—an extraordinarily fast turnaround, by traditional standards—Berger had submitted twelve papers to *Nature*, one of them asserting that the cave fossils represented a new species, *Homo naledi*. (Berger later withdrew the papers, after the peer-review process.) Though a documentary about the discovery claimed that *naledi* could “revolutionize our understanding of human origins,” Berger’s team has not yet succeeded in dating the fossils.

Some paleoanthropologists believe that the evolutionary picture has become overcomplicated, and that certain creatures described as “new” are mere variations, leading to “species inflation.” Yet any scientist who wants to see Berger’s research can do so: he shared his data from the project, posting digital shape files of the fossils online so that anyone could replicate *naledi* on a 3-D printer. Fifteen individuals had been found at the site, and many paleoanthropologists agreed that it was stunning to find so many specimens. But the field was split, largely between those who consider Berger a visionary for sharing data and those who consider him a hype artist. Donald Johanson, the discoverer of Lucy, a 3.2-million-year-old fossil, tells Williams that the project was a “glaring example of how not to do fieldwork.” An excavation that took twenty-one days should have taken “more like twenty-one months.” In defense of his system, Berger tells Williams, “I’ve never seen any rule about a time stamp on how great science is produced.” Scott Fitzpatrick, an archeologist at the University of Oregon, tells Williams, “To Lee’s credit, he gets people excited about things, and with *naledi* he’s found what are probably some amazing fossils. He’s going against the grain of established paleoanthropology and doing it in a way that brings in young scholars and social media. And he’s a reasonably smart guy and knows the literature. But he gets excited and wants to publish something on the data he has, without going through those careful steps.” Berger is used to such criticism. “When people attack me, that’s a way of trying to distract the media and other scientists,” he tells Williams. “They’re trying to prevent people from noticing that the science is changing.”

Plus: In “The Woman Card” (p. 22), **Jill Lepore** explores the history of women in American politics and how, long before Hillary Clinton, female activists and voters carried the moral crusade into the party system. In Comment, **Amy Davidson** reflects on Donald Trump’s vitriolic response to the attack in Orlando, and considers how his favorite phrase, “We have no choice,” also embodies the ethos of Republican Party leaders, a group eager to explain that it has no choice but to support Trump (p. 17); in Shouts & Murmurs, **Paul Rudnick** imagines the rumination of a woman whose greatest fantasy is to become Mrs. Donald J. Trump (p. 27); **Joan Acocella** reviews Robert Wilson’s show “Letter to a Man,” in which Mikhail Baryshnikov, the foremost male ballet dancer of the late twentieth century, portrays Vaslav Nijinsky, the foremost male ballet dancer of the early twentieth century (p. 64); **Elizabeth Kolbert** considers how political redistricting turned America from blue to red (p. 68); **Alex Ross** attends this year’s NY Phil Biennial, a three-week survey of new and recent music in the classical tradition (p. 72); **Anthony Lane** watches Todd Solondz’s new film, “Wiener-Dog,” and Nicolas Winding Refn’s “The Neon Demon” (p. 74); in a Sketchbook, **Barry Blitt** depicts testimonials for Trump University (p. 55); and new fiction by **Paul Theroux** (p. 58).

Podcasts: **David Remnick** speaks with Samantha Bee about her on-air response to the shootings in Orlando; **Dorothy Wickenden** and the playwright and novelist Ayad Akhtar discuss Muslim identity in Trump-era America; and **Paul Theroux** reads his short story “Upside-Down Cake.”

Digital Extras: In an animated video, **Evan Osnos** explains why so many Americans carry guns; and **Max Ritvo** reads his poem “Poem to My Litter.”

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