

# #1409 The Change We Want and Deserve (Gun Violence)

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of Left podcast in which we shall learn about the need for reform to our gun laws through the lens of the recent mass shootings, of course, but also through the fact that support for various reform measures reaches as high as 90% approval in the US making it one of the most stark examples of our broken, unresponsive, non-democratic government. Clips today are from NBC News Now, the Late Show with Stephen Colbert, Vox, the Rachel Maddow Show, Deadline, Counterspin, the Thom Hartmann Program, Breaking the Sound Barrier with Amy Goodman, the Take-away and the Chauncey DeVega Show.

## How The Covid Pandemic Changed Mass Shootings And Gun Violence In America - NBC News NOW - Air Date 3-26-21

**JACOB WARD - REPORTER, NBC NEWS NOW:** [00:00:43] The shootings in Atlanta and Boulder are part of a specific category of violence that experts had hoped we had left behind during the pandemic. There were only two public mass killings of strangers in 2020, both before major lockdowns. That's down from nine and 20, 19 and 10 in 2018, according to an associated press study.

The pandemic seems to have slowed these shootings down. And that makes sense because FBI data found that most such attacks happen in places that we have not been gathering during the outbreak. And with that slowdown came another effect. Criminologists have shown that one shooting often inspires another as the perpetrators strive for notoriety.

The pandemic seems to have broken that cycle for awhile, but don't be misled. The narrow way that some defined public mass shootings obscures the fact that 2020 saw an incredible uptick in gun violence. In fact, if we define mass shootings instead as four or more people injured, but not necessarily killed, 2020 had the most mass shootings in years.

Comparing countries can be difficult when we're talking about mass shootings, because one event in a small country can skew the data, but even when you look at large continent sized populations, the US still stands alone on this issue. What sets the US apart? Well, the big factor is gun ownership. The estimate is that as of 2017 Americans already owned nearly half of civilian guns in the world. Then, in 2020 Americans, bought a record 23 million guns, that's a 65% increase over the prior two years.

What about mental illness? The stereotype is a madman with a gun, but the reality is likely much more complex. One study found that fewer than 5% of people killing others with a gun had been diagnosed with a mental illness. An FBI study found that most shooters had struggled with their mental health in some way, but that most shooters also had an average of at least three separate stressors in their lives, from financial strain to conflict at work or school.

But it's hard to study this stuff. There is no national registry of gun ownership for instance. And for 20 years, Congress effectively prevented federal agencies like the CDC and National Institute of Health from meaningfully studying gun violence. They do have new power to do it now. As of 2019, several national studies are underway.

For now, as we emerged from the pandemic and resume something like normal life, the question here is whether we're going back to this terrible brand of normal as well.

## **Now's Not The Time To Fix America's Gun Problem, Says GOP In Familiar Refrain - The Late Show with Stephen Colbert - Air Date 3-23-21**

**STEPHEN COLBERT - HOST, THE LATE SHOW WITH STEPHEN COLBERT:** [00:03:27] Yesterday was another grim day for America, when a gunman walked into a Boulder, Colorado supermarket and killed 10 people, including a police officer.

This story is unspeakably tragic, and I cannot imagine for a moment the grief of these families and this community can be approached with words alone. The only suitable way to honor these victims is with action, but our government continues to do nothing.

Now due apparently to pandemic shutdowns, it has been a year since there has been a large-scale shooting in a public place. Now we've had two in the last week, Boulder and Atlanta. Evidently the only solution for America's gun violence is putting all of us under house arrest. The responses from gun apologists of course have been predictable. The Colorado State Shooting Association released this statement: "There will be a time for the debate on gun laws. There will be a time for a conversation on how this could have been prevented. But today is not the time."

Why not? That's what they say every time this happens. And that's what I say about what they say every time they say it every time it happens. Even the idea of it being in a Groundhog situation is itself a Groundhog situation.

Remember Einstein said, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting different results. Also, same day gun purchases, whose stupid idea was that? Thanks, Einstein.

Another gun fetishist weighing in on the tragedy is Colorado representative and HR supervisor for John Wick, Lauren Bobert. Last night, Bobert tweeted, "While we are still awaiting important information and details in this case, random public shootings and senseless acts of violence are never okay." Where does she find the courage? Senseless acts of violence are never okay. Implying of course, that intentional violence is fine. You know, the kind her buddies plan on Parler.

Oh, speaking of Capitol Hill, there was a Senate hearing on gun violence already scheduled for today, and Republicans on the Hill know the majority of voters want some form of gun control. So they immediately tried to change the subject. Case in point, Louisiana Senator John Kennedy who offered this dollop of distraction:

**SENATOR JOHN KENNEDY:** [00:05:48] I do think we ought to keep this in perspective. What has happened in the last few days, what's happened in the last years is of course tragic. And I'm not trying to perfectly equate these two, but... we have a lot of drunk drivers in America that kill lot of people. We ought to try to combat that too.

**STEPHEN COLBERT - HOST, THE LATE SHOW WITH STEPHEN COLBERT:** [00:06:18] Okay. I'll take that deal. Let's regulate guns the way we regulate alcohol and cars. You gotta be 21, you got to pass a test to get a license. You got to have registration and insurance for your gun. If you move to a new state, you got to do the whole damn thing over again, and you can't go out loaded. Later, Senator Kennedy spun a different line of folksy BS:

**SENATOR JOHN KENNEDY:** [00:06:40] I don't believe we have a gun control problem in America. I believe we have an idiot control problem.

**STEPHEN COLBERT - HOST, THE LATE SHOW WITH STEPHEN COLBERT:** [00:06:48] Oh, we definitely have an idiot control problem. It's people who don't recognize that this country has long had a gun problem, John Kennedy.

So when it is, like John Kennedy refused to do anything about getting rid of idiots' guns, it's clearly time to get rid of idiots like John Kennedy. And that means voting them out.

## **The gun solution we're not talking about - Vox - Air**

**Date 9-11-19**

**MADLINE MARSHALL - HOST, VOX:** [00:07:10] Every time there's a, another mass shooting in America, politicians have the same idea.

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** [00:07:16] It's time to require a background check for anyone who wants to buy a gun.

**PETER KING:** [00:07:21] I'm one of the Republicans who does believe there should be background checks.

**SENATOR CHRIS MURPHY:** [00:07:24] It is an open secret that the existing background check system is broken.

**PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP:** [00:07:28] Oh, I have an appetite for background checks. We're going to be doing background checks.

**MADLINE MARSHALL - HOST, VOX:** [00:07:32] Here's what they want to change. Right now, gun buyers in the US only have to go through a background check at a gun store, but they don't have to go through one if they buy a gun from an unlicensed dealer, like at a gun show or a private sale. But with universal background checks, everyone who buys a gun would have to go through one. Pretty much every American is in favor of it. There's only one problem, universal background checks won't solve America's gun crisis, but there's something else that might.

To understand how background checks work it helps to imagine two very different people who both want to buy a gun. The first person is dangerous, maybe he has a history of domestic violence or mental illness, and most importantly, he has a record. And the second

one is not dangerous. He just wants a gun for protection or to go hunting or because shooting guns is kind of fun. Before either one can buy a gun, they first have to go through an FBI instant background check and I mean, instant, it only takes an average of a hundred, eight seconds to get a response from the FBI's database.

That database is made up of records sent in by state police and other agencies. And it's checked to see if the buyer has things like a criminal record addiction or a restraining order, or has been hospitalized for mental illness. Under a universal background check system anyone buying a gun, whether in a gun store or through a private sale would have to be checked through that database. That means our second person walks out with a gun and our first person with a criminal record doesn't or at least he shouldn't.

**GERMAN LOPEZ:** [00:09:01] I've done a lot of reporting on this. We have just seen time and time again. The background checks do not stop people who we don't want having guns from actually getting the weapons.

**MADLINE MARSHALL - HOST, VOX:** [00:09:11] There are a couple problems with the background check system. One is at the FBI database is about as outdated as its logo. It's missing millions of records. That's why the Charleston church shooter was able to buy a gun despite having a record. Or why the man who killed 26 Texan churchgoers was also able to pass a background check after the Air Force failed to send his domestic abuse convictions to the FBI. So even with a background check for every type of sale, there's still a chance this guy gets a gun.

That's partly why study after study has found that while background checks prevent or make substantially more difficult, the criminal acquisition of firearms, making them universal doesn't have any effect on the actual gun crisis in America, gun deaths. The Johns Hopkins study of California, where comprehensive background checks were implemented in 1991, found that the law was not associated with changes in firearm suicide or homicide, thanks in part to those incomplete and missing records.

The other problem with background checks is that they only look at good people and already bad people. But there is an in-between.

**GERMAN LOPEZ:** [00:10:16] The background checks are supposed to catch people who have a record already. It just misses all the people who are haven't done anything bad yet, but might do something bad in the future.

**MADLINE MARSHALL - HOST, VOX:** [00:10:27] German is not advocating for a Minority Report situation. He's talking about someone like this guy, who's also dangerous, but who doesn't have a record. Under a universal background check system, he could get a gun in 108 seconds. But there's another system that could prevent this.

12 States and [Washington] DC have gone one step further and established a licensing system. How's it different? Well, here's how it works in Massachusetts. Before you ever go to a gun store, you first have to take a firearm safety course. Then you have to go to the police department and submit an application, give references, and give your fingerprints for a background check. Then not only is the FBI database checked, but all local law enforcement agencies, wherever you've lived, are directly contacted along with the department of mental

health. That entire process in Massachusetts usually takes about three weeks and most people, about 97%, pass.

**DR. CASSANDRA CRIFASI:** [00:11:24] Nothing about a licensing system will prevent a law abiding citizen from going through the process and obtaining a firearm.

**MADLINE MARSHALL - HOST, VOX:** [00:11:31] That's Dr. Cassandra Crifasi. She researches health policy at Johns Hopkins and she's one of the authors from the studies earlier. She says the reason licensing works is that it's designed to do both of the big things background checks fail at.

**DR. CASSANDRA CRIFASI:** [00:11:44] A, to properly identify and screen out people who shouldn't have guns. And B, create a system to reduce impulsive gun purchases.

**MADLINE MARSHALL - HOST, VOX:** [00:11:55] The licensing system is more comprehensive than the one database background check system. So our criminal will be reliably denied a gun. But because it's so meticulous, it also stands a chance of keeping our third guy without a record from getting the gun.

**DR. CASSANDRA CRIFASI:** [00:12:09] There are people who may want to impulsively acquire a firearm, for example to harm themselves or others. And the process of obtaining a license can at least delay that person during that time of crisis, or maybe deter them from getting that firearm at all.

**MADLINE MARSHALL - HOST, VOX:** [00:12:27] In 1995, Connecticut implemented a licensing system. Over the next 10 years, they saw a drop in gun homicides and gun suicides. Compare that to Missouri, which once had a licensing system, but got rid of it in 2007. Over the next decade, they had a huge spike in gun homicides and gun suicides. In both States, there were lots of factors involved, but researchers say this shows that licensing works. It's also pretty popular. Among voters who live in a house with a gun, more than two thirds think that it's a good idea. Ask all Americans and more than three quarters support it. Background checks are supposed to stop bad people from getting guns, but they often don't. Licensing picks up that slack.

**GERMAN LOPEZ:** [00:13:10] By making sure that people are crossing these hurdles, we just make sure, in a much better, stronger way, that people are not getting firearms when they shouldn't have them.

## **How Manchin & A Broken Senate Squandered U.S. Will Fair or Gun Reform After Sandy Hook - The Rachel Maddow Show - Air Date 3-24-21**

**RACHEL MADDOW - HOST, THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW:** [00:13:23] You might remember how this all unfolded. You're forgiven if it has blurred together over the years, because of the way these things always resolve. But remember how this happened. After Sandy Hook, vice-president Biden put in charge of a task force which moves with incredible alacrity, incredible speed, to come up with concrete proposals for things that can be done, to try to reduce the number of people killed by guns in this country.

President Obama proposed just what you heard there: universal background checks. Background checks should be run on the buyer anytime anybody wants to buy a gun in this country. 90% plus support for that among the American people. It's simple. You have to have a background check if you want to buy a gun. That's a simple idea. Overwhelming support, near unanimous support among the American people. But Republicans in Congress, including Republicans in the Senate, are not among that 90% plus apparently. And they decided instead that they would go for something even lower than that smallest unambitious simple goal.

Conservative Democrat Joe Manchin and Republican Pat Toomey, both with A ratings from the NRA, they said that they wouldn't pursue, they wouldn't allow the pursuit of a simple rule that there ought to be a background check if you want to buy a gun. Instead, they had their own idea and they said they could get it done. They had their own way, they had something that they said they could pass. We wouldn't actually do what more than 90% of the country wanted to do. We instead just do a tiny little piece of it because they said so.

So instead of that simple thing, saying you have to have a background check in order to buy a gun full stop, Senator Manchin and Senator Toomey said, No, no, no, we think that's a terrible idea. We're against that. We know that more than 90% of the public is for it, we're against it, but we've got another idea. Our idea is that the law will be changed to just say you have to have a background check if you buy a gun at a gun show or on the internet. We'll only extend background checks that far: gun show purchases, internet purchases, that's it.

It is hard to imagine a smaller reform, but that is what they said they would do. That's what they said they could do. And so the rest of the country, again, more than 90% of whom just want fricking background checks for gun sales, full stop. The rest of the country stood back to let these very serious, very credible senators pursue this basically rinky-dink tiny reform instead, because they said that was something they could get done. And they failed. They couldn't even get that done. Not through the United States Senate, not even right after the Sandy Hook massacre, Joe Manchin and Pat Toomey were convinced. They convinced the whole political class that they had magic gravitas on this issue to show that the legislative process in the United States Senate can be trusted to work, to do at least the smallest imaginable thing on an issue of overwhelming public concern. They were wrong.

They could not even do that one pitiful thing. Not in the US Senate. Not with filibuster rules in place that say a majority vote doesn't count. And so nothing happened in American law. No law changed. Nothing made it through Congress.

## **Guttenberg After Another Mass Shooting: "This Is Not About The Second Amendment" - Deadline - Air Date 3-23-21**

**ALEX WAGNER - HOST, DEADLINE:** [00:16:40] Fred, what are these moments like for you when you hear about a new set of parents grieving over their loved ones?

**FRED GUTTENBURG:** [00:16:50] Just watching your segment before -- you probably didn't see me cause I was off camera -- the report moves me to tears because watching the flowers, everything else, it brings me back to Parkland. It's such a visceral, horrific wake.

These families are now broken. And to the police officers who are watching. I often . . . I say every chance I get, gun safety is police safety. So, join us in this effort to do something about this epidemic. And to the other families, okay, that were affected -- I saw Mr. Mahoney's photo up there, and his daughter had a beautiful message out on Twitter today about how thankful she is that he got to walk her down on the aisle on her recent wedding and how she's now pregnant, and he's not going to get to meet her baby, he's not going to get to meet his grandchild. This is the reality of gun violence today. And to those failures on the Republican side of the Senate hearing today, who engaged dishonesty and BS. I've had it, okay. This is not about the Second Amendment. Stop with the BS. Nobody is trying to take your weapons if you're a legal, lawful gun owner. This is a public health epidemic. We ought to be working together on how do we reduce the gun violence death rate, on how we stop these instances of gun violence and on how we decrease the severity of these injuries when they happen. And if they don't want to join in that effort, that we move forward without them. Let's end the filibuster.

**ALEX WAGNER - HOST, DEADLINE:** [00:18:26] Fred, I think a lot of people are looking at some legal realities that unfolded in Colorado over the course of the last week. I know you're well aware of this, but six days ago, an ordinance that had been passed banning assault-style weapons in the state was basically overturned through a lawsuit. Tell me more about that and what that tells you about the fight ahead for gun safety reform.

**FRED GUTTENBURG:** [00:18:52] States and cities across this country since Parkland have done amazing work to pass gun safety measures to protect the people in our communities across this country. And every time that's happened, the NRA has been there filing lawsuits to make us less safe. They are a terror organization that is making us less safe.

You can't make up these things. I mean literally six days ago, the NRA achieved its goal, and they called it victory for Colorado. That's what they called it. And here we are, 10 people dead, including a police officer because of what they believe was victory for Colorado. It is time to break the hold that terror organization has on our legislators and our legislation.

It is time to focus on this public health epidemic. It is time to work together to save lives. That is all that should matter right now.

## **Igor Volsky on Ending Gun Violence - CounterSpin - Air Date 3-26-21**

**JANINE JACKSON- HOST, COUNTERSPIN:** [00:19:49] When we hear about horrible things like the killing in Atlanta, in Boulder and all of the places that we could name, there's a tendency journalistic and maybe just human, to seek more information, more details. What were the circumstances, the motivations? Who is this individual? Somewhere along the way, one gets the sense that the problem of gun violence is too complicated to address, you know, whatever measure is being suggested wouldn't have prevented Atlanta, you know, and that's somehow not a reason that it's not enough, but a reason to abandon the whole project.

You know, I'm wondering, first of all, does pushing past that hopelessness call for a different way of thinking? New goals or, or maybe just clarity about what our goals are?

**IGOR VOLSKY:** [00:20:46] You're absolutely right. There's really this sense, oftentimes in the press, that this problem is just too hard. That we already have 400 million guns in circulation, and there's nothing we can do about it, that we somehow have to pay the price of a hundred people dying every day from gun violence, because we have a Second Amendment.

And the reality is that none of that is true, that we know exactly what needs to be done in order to save lives. And we know that because states across America have strengthened their gun laws, have invested in communities that are suffering from cyclical everyday gun violence, and have seen significant reductions in their gun suicide rates and in their gun homicide rates.

So these models of democracy or these laboratories of democracy, as Republicans in particular often like to point to, really serve as an example of what we need to do on the national level, in order to have a standard that fits the entire country. And secondly, we just need to look overseas at some of our great allies who have dramatically reduced gun violence by doing three basic things. By number one, ensuring that gun manufacturers and gun dealers are actually regulated and can't produce incredibly powerful weapons for the civilian market.

Those countries raise the standard of gun ownership by requiring gun owners to register their firearm, to get a license to have a firearm in the first place.

And they've also addressed the root causes of gun violence, things like employment opportunities, housing security, healthcare.

So we have the blueprint. We just need to follow it.

**JANINE JACKSON-HOST, COUNTERSPIN:** [00:22:47] Well, you will hear that assault weapon bans don't help because most murders happen with handguns, or background checks don't help, you know, because there's a lot of resales and, well, it's a lot of suicides. But if you spell it out to the goal being fewer guns, if you make that the goal, well then that addresses all of those things. And it sounds like what you're saying has worked in other places. It has a goal of just there being fewer guns out there.

**IGOR VOLSKY:** [00:23:21] Yeah. The reason why the United States has a death rate that's about 25% higher than our other peer nations is exactly what you just identified. We have way too many guns and they are way too easy to get. And until our media and our leaders can have the courage, the political courage to recognize that reality and to begin communicating about it to the American people, it's going to be a challenge to meet the goal of saving lives.

And I have to say we now have a president in the White House who has done this work before, who, when he was running for the presidency, released the boldest, one of the boldest gun violence prevention programs of any presidential candidate, who promised us that his experience in Washington, DC gave him the skills to work with Democrats and Republicans to get big things done.

And so he has a heavy responsibility to follow through on those promises, to address the nation fully about this crisis, and then to work through Congress, diligently and aggressively, to get tighter gun laws across the finish line.

**JANINE JACKSON- HOST, COUNTERSPIN:** [00:24:45] Well, let me just bring you back to media for a second. When media tend to move from incident coverage to policy coverage, then reporting on gun control gets often into this kind of static frame where you hear from opponents and proponents of a particular measure, they both get quoted, sometimes they get quoted in equal amounts, you know, but there's this kind of backdrop, which is that in this country, any restrictions on individual gun ownership face an uphill battle because it's enshrined in the law, because the lobby is all powerful, and because this country just loves its guns. These are presented as blanket impediments to change. But how true is that? Is that really an accurate current depiction of the lay of the land?

**IGOR VOLSKY:** [00:25:34] Yeah this false balance that you're identifying is that you often see in media stories this effort to perpetuate really what is a myth about the NRA's great power and abilities, and this notion of just regurgitating claims that the Second Amendment somehow impedes us from doing anything about this problem is a real hindrance, I think, to the kind of conversations we have publicly about this issue, to the kind of conversations we have with our friends and families particularly, some of them are gun owners or more politicized gun owners.

And you know, the truth of the matter is, the kind of coverage we need on this issue, the kind of press we need on this issue, is one that reflect the science and the real history. The overwhelming science in the gun violence space tells us one simple truth: where there are more guns there are more gun deaths. And that's really, it. That's the reality that you have to start from.

So any kind of argument about if you have gun restrictions, you're disarming the good guys, or if you have gun restrictions, that means it will only harm the good guys because the bad guys will never follow it --that kind of argument that the NRA has so successfully gotten the press to parrot for decades is a real hindrance. And so, you know, I think we hopefully, hopefully have reached a point where gun violence is so ubiquitous and support for actually doing something is so widespread, that we will hopefully see less of this effort to just pretend that well, nothing at all is possible, right?

And just a second on the Second Amendment, that the history of this very intriguing to me because for decades and decades and decades, really up to about 1972, it was hard to find anybody in the press or within even the gun community, who argued that the Second Amendment is somehow an impediment to gun regulation.

That argument is actually quite new. And it was developed through NRA-funded researchers and NRA-funded lawyers. They birthed this idea that the Second Amendment somehow prevents us from doing what we know we need to do. And oftentimes the media just parrots that invented notion without actually recognizing that it is certainly not what the founding fathers intended, but also doesn't reflect the reality of how most courts, the Supreme Court to some degree, but also courts across the country, have ruled repeatedly that the amendment allows for pretty significant regulation.

And so my hope here is that we can have a different kind of conversation about this issue.

**JANINE JACKSON- HOST, COUNTERSPIN:** [00:28:56] That was one of the points that scholar Howard Friel made in an important piece for Extra! for FAIR's magazine back in 1996, that media seemed to feel they're charting some middle ground when they say there could allow

for some restrictions on gun ownership. And the other point is no, there should be no restrictions whatsoever. And they kind of chart a middle course Freil's point is they're ignoring all of that legislative judiciary history that you just mentioned, you know, which actually says, no, there's no conflict between the Second Amendment and some measures of gun control.

## Can You Look At The Carnage Of Gun Violence? - The Thom Hartmann Program - Air Date 3-24-21

**THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THE THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** [00:29:33] This whole mass shooting thing. Of course, after the show, after the shooting in Boulder, Colorado day before yesterday, and then, a few days before that in Georgia, there has been a renewed push to do something about gun violence in America. But it's still, you still had Ted Cruz basically filibustering this yesterday on the floor of the Senate. You had John Kennedy, the Congressman from Louisiana talking about drunk drivers. It literally. He was like --

**JOHN, PRODUCER, THE THOM HARTMANN SHOW:** [00:30:01] We got drunk driving is a problem too. Why don't we do something about that?

**THOM HARTMANN - HOST, THE THOM HARTMANN PROGRAM:** [00:30:04] John actually we did, we we require people to get a driver's license so that their car, they know how to run their car. We don't require people to get a shooter's license. We require people to have liability insurance for their car. We don't require shooters, gun owners to have liability insurance.

We require cars to have seat belts. We don't require guns to have safety locks. Even the Republican arguments like Senator Kennedy's argument " drunk driving problem and rrr rrrr rrr" just devolve, disintegrate into BS.

Here's what I think needs to be done.

And I'll just lay this out. If you want the links and the deep dive and the background information and the links to anything I'm saying here, they're all over -- excuse me-- on the article that I published today at HartmannReport.com, which is essentially this:

Back in 1955, down in Mississippi, a young black man named Emmett Till was visiting from Chicago, which is where he lived. A white woman claimed that he whistled at her. Husband and his brother, as I recall, maybe his cousin kidnapped Emmett Till, took him out, beat him brutally, tied him to a 50 pound cotton gin fan after they had made him drag it across up to the river, and then after they beat him to death, turn his face into pulp, threw his broken body into the river, where it was later retrieved.

His mother, Mannie Bradley, made an extraordinarily courageous decision. When his body was brought back to Chicago and said, we're going to have an open casket funeral. I want people to see what they did to my child, to my baby. Jet magazine sent a photographer who took a picture of Emmett Till in his casket. That picture went viral, particularly across Black America, for lack of a better phrase, across the Black community in the United States. But it also broke into the white mainstream, back -- keep in mind, this was 1955, there were literally no black people on television except as criminals. But it not only invigorated the civil

rights movement, and does to this day, that coffin-- Emmett Till is buried, but they the original coffin is now a centerpiece at the Museum of African-American History in Washington, DC, which is just by the way once you've got your COVID vaccines, you need to get there and check this thing out, it's extraordinary. And our friend, Joe Madison. From Sirius XM, Urban View, I think it's channel 129, every morning from six to 10:00 AM, helped raise that money to make that thing happen, among others. There's a lot of great people that worked on that. But anyhow, those pictures or that picture made real for many Americans the horrors of white violence against Black people, which have been going on forever in this country.

But, the old saying a picture tells a thousand words, there's such a reality to this. You'd think in America, after seven shootings and seven mass shootings in the last seven days that America would have some sense of what this means. We've all heard the words, Newtown and Stoneman Douglas and Las Vegas, and we know intellectually what that means.

But have you ever seen a picture of a pile of bodies that have been ripped apart? Their heads exploded by two 23 caliber bullets? The things that are fired out of air. There's a reason why this guy shot 10 people, and they're all dead. No survivors, no wounded. These are weapons of war.

But in any case, back to my question, have you seen the pictures? No, of course not. Because the American media doesn't show those kinds of pictures. And there's some good reasons for that.

But back in the 1980s, the anti-abortion movement made the decision, in part egged on by the Reagan bipartisans in the Reagan administration, to start carrying around posters that showed bloody aborted fetuses. It turned out actually some of those pictures were actually pictures of stillbirths, miscarriages or medical crises the mothers had, it didn't matter. They were bloody pictures and they're using those to this day. But what happened when they started using those in the eighties was that by the nineties, even people who were in favor of a woman having the right to choose an abortion, Bill Clinton, were saying yeah, abortion, yeah, they should be legal, safe-- and rare. If you talk to people in the abortion rights movement, they will tell you that when they started using that picture, that was the moment when, quote, "abortion became real for Americans."

Think about that picture back in 1972 of Phan Thi Kim Phuc-- she's referred to as "napalm girl," she was nine years old, running down the street with a bunch of other little kids in rural Vietnam, having ripped the clothes off her back because they were on fire from napalm. That picture in 1972 helped turn the tide completely. Even the hardcore right-wing Republican pro war bunch, after that picture went around the world and won the Pulitzer prize, that was the point at which the Vietnam war was really and truly ended. The actual end came two years ago and Jerry Ford ended it. But there you go.

Now I think that we should be showing at least a picture of the violence of these shooters. Now this is going to be a very controversial thing, and there are really legitimate reasons to not sensationalize violence, to not satisfy morbid curiosity, and concerns about warping young people's minds or triggering PTSD for people who are survivors of violence.

And yet pictures show reality in a way that words can't do. Our mass shootings in the United States were kicked off in 1966 with Charles Whitman. That was August 1st '66. And then we

had a string of killings that happen during the Reagan-Bush administration, 84 San Ysidro, McDonald's; the Edmond, Oklahoma post office in 86; the Luby's cafeteria in '91 in Killeen, Texas.

I can tell you, I worked in advertising for years, I used to teach advertising and marketing through the American Marketing Centers. The NRA's biggest fear is that these pictures start showing up. That's their biggest nightmare. And we did this with tobacco. We showed pictures of people who half their jaw had been eaten away. We showed those pictures in the nineties, and it changed public opinion. Mothers Against Drunk Driving-- I don't know if that group specifically, but we did this with drunk driving-- we showed, not necessarily the bodies, but the bloody remains of mashed-up cars.

Now this isn't something that we should just throw up on some website or in some newspaper. Major American journalism groups, the print, television, web based stuff. They need to get together and decide which pictures to publish and how to publish them in a way that maximizes their impact while minimizing the probability that they will produce trauma or trigger PTSD in other people. This has to be done carefully.

## **Ban Assault Weapons Now - Breaking the Sound Barrier by Amy Goodman - Air Date 3-25-21**

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, BREAKING THE SOUND BARRIER:** [00:37:13] The massacres in Boulder, Colorado with ten killed and in metro Atlanta with eight dead are just two more instances of senseless gun violence enabled by the NRA, gun manufacturers, and the corrupt politicians they control. Here is a short reminder of some others for any who might need it:

Columbine High School, Colorado, 1999: 15 dead, 24 injured.

Virginia Tech, 2007: 33 dead, 17 injured.

The Aurora theater, Colorado, 2012: 12 dead, 70 injured.

Oak Creek, Wisconsin Sikh temple, 2012: 7 dead, 4 injured.

Sandy Hook Elementary, Connecticut, 2012: 28 dead, 2 injured.

Charleston, South Carolina, Emmanuel AME church, 2015: 9 dead, 1 injured.

Orlando's Pulse nightclub, Florida, 2016: 50 dead, 53 injured.

Las Vegas, Nevada, 2017: 61 dead, 411 injured.

Parkland, Florida, high school, 2018: 17 dead, 17 injured.

El Paso, Texas Wal-Mart, 2019: 23 dead, 23 injured.

Dayton, Ohio, 2019: 10 dead, 27 injured.

These are just some of the notorious massacres, each surrounded in time by countless others, with three, four, five killed, lives lost in acts of violence that lack the bodycount sufficient to join the canon of American mass shootings. This carnage was wrought with

powerful semi-automatic firearms, almost all of which were assault weapons. This is why we need a federal assault weapons ban now.

“Assault rifles, all that does is put the ‘mass’ into shootings, allowing them to kill more people quicker,”

**REPRESENTATIVE TOM SULLIVAN:** [00:39:27] Democratic Colorado State Representative Tom Sullivan said on the Democracy Now! news hour shortly after the Boulder grocery store massacre this week.

“Here in Colorado, in 2013,” Sullivan continued, “We actually passed five common sense gun bills; we passed the background check bill. We passed limiting high-capacity magazines. We passed making people pay for the background checks, doing things about domestic violence, making people actually show up in front of somebody to get a concealed carry permit...But if you want to drive 20 minutes and go into Wyoming, you can buy whatever it is you want and come back down. That’s why it is imperative that we get the federal government to partner with us.”

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, BREAKING THE SOUND BARRIER:** [00:40:14] Tom Sullivan’s route to gun control and elected office was difficult. His son Alex was killed in the Aurora theater massacre, celebrating his 27th birthday. When politicians subsequently ignored Sullivan’s pleas for common-sense gun control, he ran for office himself -- he lost then won -- in a district that had been held by Republicans for decades.

In the wake of the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School massacre in Parkland, Florida, and absent national legislation to address recurring mass shootings, the Boulder City Council passed ordinances banning the sale and possession of assault weapons and extended ammunition magazines. Just days before this week’s massacre in Boulder, a state judge declared the ordinances illegal, legalizing possession of the very weapon used in the slaughter.

Now the Democratic-controlled Colorado state legislature, with the support of Democratic Governor Jared Polis, himself a longtime Boulder resident who said he had shopped many times at the King Soopers supermarket where the massacre occurred, is considering a statewide assault weapons ban.

Within hours of the Boulder massacre, while the victims’ bodies were still on the supermarket floor, Republican Colorado Congresswoman Lauren Boebert, whose defense of unlimited gun rights borders on maniacal, at her restaurant in Rifle, Colorado called Shooters Grill -- she encourages her staff to carry guns while working — sent out a fundraising email declaring “Hell No” to gun control. The NRA responded to the massacre by tweeting the text of the Second Amendment.

Meanwhile, the federal Ninth District Court of Appeals ruled Tuesday that state laws prohibiting “open carry” of firearms are constitutional. Its 215-page order detailing the history of gun regulation in colonial America and the development of the Second Amendment should be required reading. “The Second Amendment does not guarantee an unfettered, general right to openly carry arms in public for individual self-defense,” the court concluded.

In Washington, DC, President Joe Biden says he supports a national assault weapons ban, but with the razor-thin Democratic majority in the Senate, passage of gun control would depend on the support of pro-gun Democratic West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin as well as a decision by the entire Senate Democratic Caucus, including Manchin and conservative Democratic Arizona Senator Kirsten Sinema, to eliminate or alter the filibuster. Gun control legislation will have to navigate a narrow path to become law.

In the United States, Tom Sullivan concluded:

**REPRESENTATIVE TOM SULLIVAN:** [00:43:05] "A hundred people die every day from gun violence. Twenty-two of those are veterans who are dying by suicide. But also, over 200 people are injured by accidental shootings. A lot of those are children."

**AMY GOODMAN - HOST, BREAKING THE SOUND BARRIER:** [00:43:19] No legislation will bring back his son Alex nor any of the millions killed by gun violence in the U.S. over the decades. But we can prevent future violence with a national, enforceable ban on these weapons of war.

## **A Look Back at Colorado's History of Mass Shootings - The Takeaway - Air Date 3-26-21**

**TANZINA VEGA - HOST, THE TAKEAWAY:** [00:43:35] When you see the events unfold in Boulder, what are your immediate thoughts having witnessed Columbine and others?

**REPRESENTATIVE DIANA DEGETTE:** [00:43:44] [For] everybody who has been around these shootings, it's really PTSD for all of us. It's just, this can't be happening again. I was a very new congressperson when Columbine happened, and now Columbine is in my congressional district. And I just remember sitting there watching with horror the whole event unfold. And then, of course, Aurora Planned Parenthood. There've been a couple of other smaller ones that didn't even get covered on the national press, and now, of course, Boulder. And everybody knows somebody who was there or somebody who goes there; that's a very popular grocery store in Boulder.

And so, the circles get wider, and pretty soon the whole state is just grieving over it.

**TANZINA VEGA - HOST, THE TAKEAWAY:** [00:44:34] What are you hearing from your constituents about the shooting?

**REPRESENTATIVE DIANA DEGETTE:** [00:44:39] People are angry. As always, people are very sad. They're committed to supporting their friends in Boulder. And of course they're recommitted, in my district, they're recommitted to comprehensive gun safety legislation which I've worked on, not just in Congress, but even back when I was in the state legislature in the mid 1990s. It's very difficult because we're pushing against the gun groups, the NRA, and the other ones who have a really extraordinarily disproportionate amount of power among particularly Republican politicians.

**TANZINA VEGA - HOST, THE TAKEAWAY:** [00:45:16] We know, Congresswoman, that the NRA in particular has been significantly weakened in terms of its financial power and others. So does this go beyond the NRA's influence?

**REPRESENTATIVE DIANA DEGETTE:** [00:45:28] I think having had a broad historical view of this, I do think the NRA has been weakened. And I do think that the public has become much more supportive of common sense gun safety regulations. But I still think that in parts of the country, the gun lobby, including the gun manufacturers, has a disproportionate amount of influence. But I do think over time it's changing. Unfortunately it's just not changing fast enough to save those 10 people in Boulder this week, or the eight people in Atlanta last week.

**TANZINA VEGA - HOST, THE TAKEAWAY:** [00:46:07] What is your message to the residents of Colorado, who, and Americans across the country, I think, are reliving the fear of being in everyday public spaces? But what is your message to the residents of Colorado who've been at movie theaters, at high school, at supermarkets, and it increasingly feels that no place is safe.

**REPRESENTATIVE DIANA DEGETTE:** [00:46:30] One of the problems that we have is that we have these high-capacity magazines and these assault rifles. So for example, the Boulder and also in the Aurora theater where you might have somebody who's mentally ill or deranged, they go in. But if they had a pistol, they might've been able to shoot one or two people before the police rushed in because in both Aurora and in Boulder, the police were there within moments. But in Boulder, of course, the police officer was immediately shot. And in Aurora you had actually military personnel who were in the movie theater who couldn't stop the shooter. So, we need to, obviously we need to strengthen our mental health counseling. We need to do everything we can as a society, to identify folks. We need to have background checks and waiting periods. But if we start now working on eliminating these assault rifles and the high capacity magazines, at least you could eliminate the carnage that happens when you have a shooter go into one of these places.

**TANZINA VEGA - HOST, THE TAKEAWAY:** [00:47:37] Congresswoman, I'd like to play you a clip from December, 2012. This was days after a horrific shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, where a gunman killed more than 20 people most of them children at Sandy Hook elementary school.

**REPRESENTATIVE DIANA DEGETTE:** [00:47:53] I'm Congresswoman Diana DeGette from the first district of Colorado. Columbine's in my district now, and Aurora is right down the street from my house. And as you can hear from all of us, and as you can see on our faces, even today, the horror of Newtown remains unspeakable. And as Congresswoman McCarthy said, we've been here before, over and over again.

**TANZINA VEGA - HOST, THE TAKEAWAY:** [00:48:20] Congresswoman, many people said that if the events at Sandy Hook couldn't make gun policy change, that nothing would be able to.

In that clip, the exasperation is clear how we've been here over and over again and yet nothing seems to happen. Let's talk about policy in Colorado. There are mandatory background checks, but the court blocked a measure to ban assault weapons just days before this latest shooting. Is it realistic to expect gun policy reform, at least in the state of Colorado?

**REPRESENTATIVE DIANA DEGETTE:** [00:48:56] I was just talking with some of our state legislators yesterday, and they are looking at ways to bolster our gun safety legislation. The reason why the Boulder court blocked that provision was because there's a supremacy

clause in this state statute that says that local governments can't go beyond that. Now, in Denver, which is my district, we don't have assault rifles. And so I think that you could strengthen the laws. When I heard that clip you just played for me, it sounds like something I might say today, but I will say that after Sandy Hook, it was so horrifying, but there have been positive things that happened. As I say, they just didn't happen very fast. A lot of the parents and a lot of advocacy groups have gotten much, much more powerful.

And of course, after the terrible shooting of my former colleague Gabby Giffords, she started a gun safety group. They've been enormously powerful, too. So over time it the movement is developing momentum. As I say, it's just so frustratingly slow. And even though the public agrees with us on many of these gun safety measures, that it's difficult to get it through the legislative bodies.

**TANZINA VEGA - HOST, THE TAKEAWAY:** [00:50:19] Congresswoman, Colorado ranks eighth in the country for experiencing mass shootings. Why is it? Why do these keep happening in the state of Colorado? Is it something, is there something that we need to understand about it or is it purely a function of gun laws that need to be updated?

**REPRESENTATIVE DIANA DEGETTE:** [00:50:39] Actually, Colorado, as you said, Colorado has more gun safety laws than many states do which have fewer mass shootings than we do.

And in fact, what I was talking about with the legislators and some of the rest of the congressional delegation yesterday was the idea of trying to do some study or put together a panel to see why this happens in Colorado, because we really don't have any idea. Boulder is a very quiet, progressive college town, and the idea that something like this would happen in a grocery store in Boulder is just unthinkable to us. I was asked the other day by a reporter how you could tell the difference between people who were carrying their weapons safely and weren't, in a grocery store. I think this reporter was assuming everybody out here in Colorado walks around carrying assault rifles, and that's just not true. I've never seen anybody carrying a gun in a grocery store in Denver or in Boulder. So, we just can't figure out why this is happening in places like this.

## **Why Do People Kill? Lt Joe Kenda Explains The "Killer Triggers" - The Chauncey DeVega Show - Air Date 3-23-21**

**CHAUNCEY DEVEGA - HOST, THE CHAUNCEY DEVEGA SHOW:** [00:51:52] I'm reading this new book. It's not a question. It's observation. This is scary. How many murders are just random? Is it folks next door on the street? This is a scary reality.

**JOE KENDA:** [00:52:01] And people don't like to focus on reality. They prefer fiction. They prefer not thinking about the fact that it's someone they know, maybe even someone they think loves them that's going to kill them. But that is the reality. That is often the reality. It is a sad fact that only 5% of homicides occur with strangers. 95% of homicides occur from someone, and in some cases now rather maybe even related to. That's reality. Again, humans are violent. We're the most dangerous animal on this planet.

That's why wild animals run from us because they know what we are. And it's true. It's always been true and it always will be true. Within all of us, what is the trigger that's going to get pulled in you that makes you kill. Everybody has them. Most people are able to cover them. Their judgment causes them to calm down.

Some people don't have that level of control, and when the emotion rises, judgment passes, and violence is the result.

**CHAUNCEY DEVEGA - HOST, THE CHAUNCEY DEVEGA SHOW:** [00:52:57] How has this pandemic impacted investigating murders? You got all of these things you got to be wary of: touching things, being around people.

**JOE KENDA:** [00:53:05] It has had an impact, and violent crime is up. Homicide is up. Domestic disturbances are up. Child abuse is up. All the things that happen when you confine people and put them under stress, it's happening. It's going to continue for another year, at least. And if we still keep having the idiots demanding to go into a restaurant of 100 deep, because by God, they're Americans, and you can't tell them what to do.

This might never end. And that's the reality. No one wants to think about that either, but that's what's going to happen. No one is alive today that has ever experienced a pandemic.

**CHAUNCEY DEVEGA - HOST, THE CHAUNCEY DEVEGA SHOW:** [00:53:39] It's nuts

**JOE KENDA:** [00:53:39] pandemic

**CHAUNCEY DEVEGA - HOST, THE CHAUNCEY DEVEGA SHOW:** [00:53:39] It's nuts and bolts on the ground. If you were investigating murders today, or they called you in the consult during this pandemic, would it change how you actually go about investigating the crime?

**JOE KENDA:** [00:53:48] Yeah. It adds more things to the list. The investigation technique, it remains the same. It expands the theories as to what the motive could be. It expands personal risks for the personnel involved. You've got to make sure everybody's got PP. You got to make sure you have gloves. masks, all that sort of thing. When you're around all these people, it complicates things a little bit. And of course the nature of it complicates the motive factor, and the potential list of suspects gets bigger, but it's ultimately still the same work. It's just a little more complicated.

**CHAUNCEY DEVEGA - HOST, THE CHAUNCEY DEVEGA SHOW:** [00:54:18] Scenarios, real life scenarios, things that happened in the book you're recounting.

So here in Chicago, I'm sure this happens everywhere all over the country. A few weeks ago, they had a murder spree. And I was outside, and there was a man driving around Chicago, randomly shooting people. And if I had been on that corner, I'm sure everybody in this neighborhood thought the same thing, it could have been them. I think he killed eight people, people he passed by on the street in the car he stole. So that's my way of asking about the randomness of life. You can be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and that's it. And it's all over.

That is the point. That's what no one likes to think about. People like to believe that they lead a well-planned and orderly life, and they don't engage in bad behavior and they don't

associate with narcotics users or dealers, and they've married well, and they don't make enemies out of people and they don't rock the boat and life is just going to go on for them.

They don't want to consider the fact that life in fact is random. When shots are fired, don't worry about the bullet that has your name on it. Worry about the bullet that says to whom it may concern. And that is true.

We had a homicide in Colorado Springs that drove us crazy for several months: 17 year old kid, promising young man, Eagle scout planning to go to the service academy. So they were recruiting him to go. He was an athlete. He was a brilliant student. He's waiting on a bus. Doesn't drive. He drives, but he doesn't have a car. So he's waiting on a city bus. He's going to go to a food kitchen to pass out meals as part of his boy scout work. So, at three o'clock in the afternoon, he's at a city bus stop. He takes a nine millimeter through one temple and exits the other temple, and he [inaudible] hits the ground. No one hears the shot. Nobody sees their shooter. This kid has been murdered by person or persons unknown. After four months of beating the bushes and dragging every informant I had off the street, we discover that two idiots are having a dispute over the purchase of narcotics four blocks away. One of them has a nine millimeter. As a way to scare the other guy, he fires a shot not aimed at him but fires wide. And that's the bullet that killed that kid. He had no idea who they were, wasn't part of it. He was waiting on a bus to go perform of civic duty, and he dies. Right now. What is that? It's called random.

## Summary

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:56:38] We've just heard clips today, starting with NBC News Now giving the stats on gun violence from 2020; the Late Show with Stephen Colbert dismantled the nonsense arguments against gun reform; Vox highlighted the effectiveness of gun licensing, a lesser known reform recommendation; the Rachel Maddow Show explained to the utterly broken Senate and its inability to address gun laws; Deadline took direct aim at the NRA; Counterspin explored some of the solutions we should put in place; the Tom Horton Program argued that if the news media would begin to show the real carnage are brought about by gun violence we would see a massive change in political will; and Breaking the Sound Barrier with Amy Goodman argued to ban assault weapons.

That's what everyone heard, but members also heard bonus clips from the Takeaway looking back at Colorado's history of mass shootings and the Chauncey DeVega Show exploring the reasons why people kill and how the stresses like those we've seen during the pandemic can exacerbate those reasons. For non-members, those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and are part of the transcript for today's episode so you can still find them if you want to make the effort, but to hear that and all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support) or request a financial hardship membership, because we don't make a lack of funds a barrier to hearing more information. Every request is granted. No questions asked. And now we'll hear it from you.

## Maintaining beliefs and cognitive dissonance - Nick from California

**VOICEMAILER: NICK FROM CALIFORNIA:** [00:58:14] Hey, Jay, it's Nick from CA, just calling to answer a question I think you've asked about a year ago. I usually try to listen to the repost at double speed at least. But if I don't, because I think I remembered it for, I just don't have time, I'm a little behind on podcasts, I sometimes at least skip to the end, to see if there's any new commentary and the other thing is, make sure there's none at the beginning. Sometimes you'll make a little announcements at the end, just enough so I scan through it.

Anyway, I happen to catch you ask questions said, what's the phenomenon in which someone latches on to an idea, an explanation and narrative they first hear, and then they double down on that from there on forward. It's harder to change their mind after they get exposed to that initial narrative.

And I don't think that people necessarily just glom onto the first thing that they hear. But if they do hear a narrative that explains something and they have no other countervailing narrative or explanation, then it's easier to accept, right, if they just say, "Oh, well, that's that explains that", there's not as much resistance. And so I think that that first encounter is advantaged. I do think if you discount it, if you heard it from a source that you didn't trust, you might discount it or put up some resistance. But even then you may actually forget the source, that can happen, you can actually forget where you heard something and still maintain that belief. So you could hear something on Fox News. Most of the time we would just discard it. But it is possible that you can hear something on Fox News and then forget you heard it on Fox News and have that be a narrative you hold on to.

But regardless of the case, I think the explanation is once you form a narrative in your head, it's just plainly cognitive dissonance. I think that cognitive dissonance explains maintaining the belief when you're encountering a countervailing narrative after you've established one.

So I think that there's two issues here.

I think that the first explanation you hear about something is usually advantaged for the reasons I just said. And then in addition, I think that there are probably many mechanisms of belief preservation, but one of them, once you take on a narrative or an explanation and you believe that, then you hold onto it probably just simply straight up cognitive dissonance.

So you said in your voicemail or not your voicemail, but your commentary section, I mention Nick in California will answer about this and I don't think I did. I might've been on my hiatus then, but also, , for my kid, little too young, and I was a little too emotionally distressed. But also it was, the fact is I think it was two issues, one is the fact that we have beliefs that we, how we acquire those initial beliefs. And I think that only one component is that's the first belief you presented with, the first narrative on something, is advantaged. And the second one is just like, why do we maintain that? Why do we maintain belief even when we are given another narrative that's actually better and more accurate, more aligned with reality. And it's not to say we don't shift our beliefs, but it's hard probably through a variety of mechanisms, including just cognitive dissonance.

So that's my answer a year later or whatever it was, since the first time you posted it. I heard it. Didn't know, and now I have lots of opinions I think I'd share.

All right. Stay awesome.

## Final comments on the cognitive biases related to acquiring new information

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:01:38] Thanks to all of those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as a VoicedMails. If you'd like to leave a comment or a question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at (202) 999-3991, or write me a message to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com).

Thanks to Nick for finally getting back to me. Nick from CA today, I think that's a first. I mean, he's only been listening for more than a decade and, I don't know that I've ever heard him refer to himself in any way other than Nick from California, but maybe he's in a rush today or something. I can completely appreciate that Nick's young kids are probably preventing him from doing the deep dive research that this topic really deserves. So no sweat, I've done it for you Nick.

I finally got around to looking at, I guess I just went to a giant list of cognitive biases and figured out which ones sort of fit the bill. Because, like Nick, I was just trying to come up with terms on my own, "first information preference" or the "phenomenon of the initial idea stickiness" or something. Here's the closest thing that I think describes this. And it's actually a concept I'm familiar with, it's called anchoring or alternately focalism, but we'll stick with anchoring.

And whenever I have thought about anchoring, I think of it in terms of numbers. So for instance, if I tell you that I have a special donut to sell you and they cost \$100, but I tell you what for you, I'll give it to you for \$50. I set the anchor at \$100, and even if you still think, "I don't know, a \$50 donut sounds expensive." there's a major part of your brain that just sparked and was like, "wow, only \$50, that's like half off. What a cheap donut!"

So that's the cognitive bias of anchoring. It works really well with numbers, which is why any late night infomercial will tell you that something costs five times more than it really does, and then as the minutes tick by they will subtly reveal that, no, actually we're going to give you three times as much as we said before, and it's going to cost one fifth of what we said and now, how could you not buy it, it's so cheap? Because they used anchoring against you.

So here's just the first sentence of what Wikipedia says about anchoring. It says it's a cognitive bias where an individual depends too heavily on an initial piece of information offered, considered to be the anchor, to make subsequent judgements during decision-making. So it is focusing on decision-making, but I think it is the closest thing I could come up with to describe the same phenomenon that when you have a piece of information, it's a new piece of information that you have on a topic, you didn't have any information before, and now you have this one piece, that becomes your anchor and then the decision that maybe is being made is whether or not to stick with that judgment, stick with that piece of information, or to discard it in favor of something else.

Another concept that Nick actually touched on is that it's really hard to get someone to move away from their initial opinion, unless you have something really good to put in its place. That's sometimes referred to as the sort of table leg phenomenon. If you're going to take a table leg away from a table, it's going to collapse, and so that doesn't work. The only

way to keep a table a table when you take away a table leg is to replace it with something else. And the same happens with people's perception of information. If you're going to tell someone that something they believe is wrong, you had better put something in its place to fill that gap, otherwise they'd prefer to stick with the wrong information.

And this actually harkens back to sort of a funny comparison that I think I've made more than once over the past decade, but because I always just remember this from when I heard it, the author of a parenting book, I think the book was *How Not To Kill Your Baby* - it's a parody, comedy, parenting book. But when doing an interview, the author said, my biggest piece of parenting advice is if you're going to read a book about parenting, then read half a dozen books about parenting. And the point is that if you only read one book about parenting, then that's your only frame of reference and you will latch onto that as though it is gospel. And if you only read two books about parenting than the first one you read is going to get preferenced and the second is always going to get compared to the first, and you're going to think of the second with a little bit of judgement, a little hesitancy. There's going to be some suspicion. But by the time you read half a dozen parenting books, you realize that they're all a mixed bag. They all come with good advice and bad advice and everything in between. And then you can kind of pick and choose what you like, but the preference for the initial one fades away.

Now this second bit is interesting. It's separate, but I found it while I was looking at the list of cognitive biases and I came across the cognitive bias called conservatism bias. And Nick actually touches on this too. He didn't frame it in terms of conservatism, but it's sort of related to the concept of anchoring, but maybe is more broad. And conservatism bias refers to the tendency to revise one's beliefs insufficiently when presented with new evidence. And I would argue that this is not something that is only applicable to political conservatives, but it is a cognitive bias which impacts everyone to some degree because when you have your own way of thinking, it is hard to get you to update your understanding of the world with new information, because you're always going to be a little hesitant about that new information. Is it really trustworthy?

But I do think that that explains, and I'm pretty sure we talked about this to some degree on the most recent bonus show for members, so they'll have heard me talk about it at greater length. I do think that this goes a long way to explaining the differences between liberals and conservatives. That a person's the ability to integrate new information and update one's beliefs has a huge impact on whether they are liberal or progressive and sort of more forward thinking and willing to embrace change, or whether they are not willing to update their previous beliefs, even with new evidence, and they end up a little bit stuck in the past, which we call conservatism.

And now finally, just this last point is a really interesting thing that I heard about recently. *On the Media* did an episode, I think several weeks ago now, about extremism, but I only caught up on it recently. And this isn't about replacing someone's idea that they already have, but it's actually a strategy to undercut conspiracy theories, which often lead to extremism which is why it wasn't part of that show, and undercut them by getting to people first. And it's a bit of an inoculation phenomenon. You get to the person first who is maybe likely to be targeted by any particular given conspiracy theory, and you explain that conspiracy to them.

And you say, "look, I know you haven't been converted to this, you don't believe in this, but people like you have been targeted by this conspiracy theory and they have bought into it. And so we want to explain to you just what it is just so you can be on the lookout for it." And you don't have, you don't have to give them a big seminar, you just explain the basic tenants. And what ends up happening is that people like that who you warn about a conspiracy theory will go on to fight against the conspiracy theory, more forcefully if they've been exposed to it with that explainer than if they are just a person who comes across it and doesn't believe it.

Because, I suppose, that if you tell them like you're being targeted, people like you are being targeted, then they can see themselves as a bit of a guardian for themselves and those like them. And it actually creates, I guess to extend the metaphor, white blood cells who go out and actually attack that virus more than they would otherwise. So I just thought that was another really interesting example of how we integrate or don't integrate new information or how we inoculate ourselves against bad information and so on and so on.

Anyways, anchoring, that's the answer, Nick anchoring. That is the idea of the first purse of information you get being privileged over the subsequent pieces of information. I'm glad it only took us a year and a half to get that squared away.

As always keep the comments coming in at (202) 999-3991 or by emailing me to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com). That is going to be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionists Trio, Ben, Dan, and Ken for their volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism, segments, graphic design, web mastering and so on. And of course, thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift membership ships [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support) as that is absolutely how the program survives.

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So coming to you from far outside, the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay!, and this has been the *Best of the Left Podcast* coming to you twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from [bestoftheleft.com](https://bestoftheleft.com)..