

# CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF GUNS AND SOCIETY



22

23

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

**03**

**Mission / Objectives**

**10**

**Courses**

**04**

**Staff & Governance**

**11**

**Research**

**05**

**University & Museum  
Collaborations**

**13**

**New Initiatives**

**07**

**Firearms Technology &  
Lethality**

**14**

**Communications**

**08**

**Guns & Movies / Narrative Art**

**15**

**Media**

**09**

**Conferences**

**17**

**Key Take-Aways & Goals**

# MISSION & OBJECTIVES

## **Mission**

The Center for the Study of Guns and Society (CSGS) at Wesleyan University, under the leadership of Director Jennifer Tucker, was established in April 2022 as a first-of-its-kind research center dedicated to interdisciplinary humanities study and teaching on the social and culture history of guns. By supporting and encouraging faculty and student research, scholarly conferences, and convenings of museum professionals, CSGS is primed to become a primary national nucleus for advancing academic scholarship and undergraduate teaching on firearms history and the study of guns and society.

## **Objectives**

- Support and encourage faculty and student research on topics related to firearms history.
- Organize scholarly conferences and convenings of historians, students, museum professionals, and other professionals whose work focuses on firearms.
- Develop innovative pedagogies related to guns and society.
- Create a national network and promote sharing of information and resources among professionals dedicated to the study of guns and society.

# STAFF & GOVERNANCE

## Center Staff

Director: Jennifer Tucker (History Department and Science in Society Program)

Associate Director (2022-24): Joseph Slaughter (History)

Administrative Assistant: Deidre Goodrich

Communications Consultant: Lauren Rubenstein

## Faculty Advisory Board (2022-23)

Logan Dancey (Government)

Demetrius Eudell (History)

Maryam Gooyabadi (Quantitative Analysis Center)

Alyx Mark (Government)

Jesse Nasta (African American Studies)

Amanda Nelson (University Archivist)

Joyce Powzyk (Biology)

Peter Rutland (Government)

Roberto Saba (American Studies)

Richard Slotkin (English and American Studies, Emeritus).

## External Advisory Board (2022-23)

Crystal Feimster (Yale)

Leah Glaser (Central Connecticut State University)

Amy Glowacki (National Park Service)

Stephen Hargarten (Medical College of Wisconsin)

Ruth J. Katz (The Aspen Institute)

Darrel A.H. Miller (Duke University School of Law)

Matthew Miller (Northeastern Univ. College of Health Sciences, Co-Director, Harvard's Firearm Injury Prevention Research Center)

Shannon Perich (Nat'l Museum of American History, Smithsonian)

Stephen Pitti (Yale)

Donald Zilkha (Zilkha Partners, LP)

# UNIVERSITY & MUSEUM COLLABORATIONS

---

The Center established at its inception three key initiatives, which aim to: 1) Foster historical research through university and museum partnerships and collaborations; 2) Advance knowledge of the evolution of firearms technology, lethality, and manufacture; and 3) Explore the history of guns in movies/visual narrative. The Center has made progress in all three areas.

## University collaborations

The Center has quickly become a resource for other historians and museums, as well as policymakers. We started a database of scholars and others interested in the Center's activities, which has grown to more than 500 people. The Advisory Board membership reflects the diversity of professionals interested in this topic, from specialists in public health to law, and emergency medicine to historians, curators, and political scientists. This year, the Center provided resources and information on a variety of firearms history topics to historians, journalists, judges, lawyers, public health specialists, and museum curators, in the U.S. and internationally.

We established many collaborations with other universities. This includes new and emerging research collaborations with institutions, including USC Center of the American West, Harvard, Northwestern, Northeastern, Oklahoma State, University of Connecticut, and Yale, and curriculum/public humanities collaborations with Brown, RISD, Trinity, Amherst, Yale, and CCSU. The Center's Director and Associate Director also engaged in syllabi sharing and conference/guest presentations.

# UNIVERSITY & MUSEUM COLLABORATIONS

---

## New museum partnerships

The Center also advanced its aim of strengthening public humanities through partnerships with museums. In addition to the ongoing Coltsville project with the National Park Service, the Center hosted conversations with over 25 other museums this year. The Director visited a dozen museums around the U.S. to consult on firearms collections, including the Woolaroc Museum in Bartlesville, OK; the John Browning Museum in Ogden, UT; the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles; and more.

The Center will be represented at an upcoming panel on firearms history at the Springfield Armory Historic Site in August. This year, the Director received \$5,000 in funding from the New England Humanities Council for a 2023–24 workshop reflecting on the Coltsville project.

The Center is expanding the Coltsville project—a collaboration between Wesleyan, the Rhode Island School of Design, and Brown University—next year with a new partnership with the Autry Museum of the American West. Students, faculty, and curators are working over summer 2023 to develop a research and exhibition plan that flows into a cross-institutional collaboration course with Brown (public humanities, taught by Prof. Steven Lubar), RISD (exhibit design, taught by Prof. Francesca Liuni), and Wesleyan (firearms history, taught by Director Tucker).

Director Tucker was invited to lead a seminar this fall on gun rights and regulations at the Bonnie and Richard Reiss Graduate Institute for Constitutional History (ICH) at the New York Historical Society, a leading national forum for interdisciplinary study of American constitutional history.

# FIREARMS TECHNOLOGY & LETHALITY

---

A key area of the Center's focus is the study of firearm as a technology. Through analysis of firearm data (from patents, ballistics, manufacturing, gun deaths, and marketing), Director Tucker and Assistant Professor of the Practice Maryam Gooyabadi, a data scientist at Wesleyan's Quantitative Analysis Center, are tracking advancements in firearms, from innovation to use in broader society, with research support from Wesleyan students. Textual analysis of firearm patents will give insight into how various mechanisms (e.g. safety features) have been adopted in guns available in the market today, while analyzing gun manufacturing, deaths, and marketing data will illuminate factors that influence the supply, demand, and beliefs around firearms.

The results of the research will be presented at the Center's annual fall conference in October 2023, and will be made publicly available to researchers.

# GUNS AND MOVIES/ NARRATIVE ART

---

In 2022–23, the Center began a working group that explores the connections of films and guns. We hosted a September 2022 talk at Wesleyan by the Paris-based documentary filmmaker, Prof. Christian Delage, whose newest film explores the trauma of silent bystander witnesses including testimony by victims of gun violence at Parkland. This has led to a collaboration between Delage and Director Tucker on a documentary film project exploring America’s history of guns and gun violence.

Tucker met with scholars of visual studies at USC and UCLA, as well as filmmakers and curators, to explore future projects centered on visual storytelling related to firearms. These projects were discussed at a major conference at the Huntington Library (“New Media and Law”) that Tucker organized in September 2022. Tucker was also an advisory consultant on the new Getty-funded exhibition (“The Future in Our Past”) at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in LA in March, when she met with the filmmaker Paul Verhoeven (“Robocop,” “Starship Troopers”) to explore a potential future exhibition on speculative guns in modern movie-making.

In June, Wesleyan’s Center for the Arts awarded the Center \$1,500 in funds for a fall and spring workshop on guns and visual storytelling, to be held in October 2023 at Wesleyan with filmmaker/director John Mossman (Northwestern). Mossman’s film “The Good Guy with a Gun” (2023), will be screened for the first time in Connecticut in the fall.



# CONFERENCES

---

During the 2022–23 academic year, CSGS hosted two major national conferences and one regional student conference:

## **Inaugural Fall Conference, “Current Perspectives on the History of Guns and Society” (October 14–15, 2022)**

Convened approximately 150 historians, museum curators, students, and others for two days of discussions about a wide range of historical topics related to firearms. The event featured a headline panel discussion on history, race, and guns, moderated by CNN Opinion Editor Richard Galant. Plans are underway for the second annual Fall Conference, to be held on October 13–14, 2023.

## **Inaugural Spring Symposium, “Lessons From History on Domestic Violence, Firearms, and the Law” (May 5, 2023)**

One-day symposium convening approximately 60 leading researchers and practitioners from a variety of perspectives for a wide-ranging conversation about how firearms and domestic violence are entwined, historically and today.

Coverage in *The Wesleyan Connection*.

Live panel recording broadcast on the podcast ‘Our Body Politic’ (June 3, 2023)

## **Inaugural Undergraduate Research Conference, “Historical & Current Perspectives on Guns and Society” (April 28, 2023)**

One-day event featuring presentations from students and faculty at Wesleyan, Trinity, Amherst, Yale, and Brown. Dozens of students presented on a diverse range of topics related to history, religion, literature, visual arts, material culture, public health, medicine, and more. Shannon Perich, Curator of the Division of Science and Industry at the Smithsonian Museum of American History, delivered the headline talk on “Hunting for History Through Photography” in conversation with Tucker.

# COURSES

---

During the 2022–23 academic year, CSGS offered its first three undergraduate courses at Wesleyan: *Guns & Society* (taught by Director Tucker), *God & Guns: the History of Faith & Firearms in America* (taught by Associate Director Joseph Slaughter); and *War and Society* (taught by Professor of Government Peter Rutland).

In addition to their work in the classroom, students heard from powerful guest speakers and visited local sites of importance to the topics they studied, including the Greater Middletown Military Museum and Coltsville National Historic Park. In *Guns & Society*, students delved into individual research projects. Students wrote on topics such as historical gun satire in novels, from *Don Quixote* to Mark Twain; visual arguments in *Harpers Weekly* about the role and importance of firearms in Reconstruction society; use of YouTube by gun influencers; and visual analysis of guns in Prohibition-era advertisements, among others.

For their final projects in *God & Guns*, students used Geographic Information System (GIS) tools to map the intersection of firearms and violence. For example, one student mapped the religious revivals of the early 19th century along with decade-by-decade maps of the growth of firearms laws, including anti-dueling laws, to show how the two were connected. Another used GIS to explore the relationship between Islamic, Christian, and Jewish houses of worship and gun violence in New York City. Many students in this course reported that they discussed what they were learning weekly with their families, and one student shared that she even discovered new common ground with her grandmother on the issue of gun violence in America.

The Center also featured individual speakers at talks open to the Wesleyan community and connected with courses. These included Prof. Christian Delage (discussed above) and Prof. Dan Williams, the noted historian of American politics and religion who visited Wesleyan on April 18-19, 2023 to discuss with students and faculty the history of southern evangelicalism and firearms. His lecture, "Pro-Life and Pro-Gun?" attracted a standing room-only crowd of nearly 70 students, faculty, staff, and community members as Prof. Williams explained the theological and cultural rationales for how southern evangelicals reconcile their positions on abortion and firearm regulation. Prof. Williams also met with faculty to discuss mutual areas of research interest.

# RESEARCH

---

## Faculty Research

Director Tucker published an article, "Gundamentalism," in *Modern American History* (2023), which explores our understanding of the role of gun rights in American society through history. She also published an article, "Common Use, Lineage, and Lethality," with D.H. Miller in *UC Law Review* 55/5 (2022). The article discusses the need for a common denominator to inform discussions about constitutional doctrine and public policy around firearms, and suggests a lethality index as a shared metric. She organized a late-breaking panel session at the American Historical Association annual meeting in Philadelphia on "Originalism, the Supreme Court, Gun Laws, and History" on January 6, 2023. Both Tucker and Slaughter presented at the session, which was well attended.

Tucker is Principal Investigator of two new externally funded research opportunities in 2023-24. She received a New England Humanities Council grant (\$5,000) awarded for creating exhibits about New England's hidden gun history in collaboration with the National Park Service's Coltsville Historic Park in Hartford. She also received an Arnold Ventures Foundation Award (\$26,000) as Principal Investigator of a study in 2023-24 to explore the viability of an updated, civilian-oriented lethality index for modern firearms.

Slaughter presented a paper, "Making Colt Christian," at the Business History Conference (Detroit, MI, March 16-18, 2023) based on his current and ongoing research into the Church of the Good Shepherd, built in the late 1860s by Elizabeth Colt to honor her husband, after Sam's unexpected death in 1862. Slaughter also organized panels on the history of firearms that were accepted by two conferences: the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (Philadelphia, PA, July 13-16, 2023) and the American Academy of Religion (San Antonio, TX, November 18-21, 2023). Slaughter is chairing and providing comment at the summer conference and presenting research at the fall meeting.

Tucker and Slaughter have had publications and talks accepted in 2023-24 which, along with new media articles and radio/print interviews, etc. will be included in next year's report.

# RESEARCH

---

## Undergraduate Research

CSGS fostered student research in several different areas, often in collaboration with other groups at Wesleyan, as well as other higher education institutions and partner organizations.

Undergraduates from Wesleyan, Brown, and RISD have been working in collaboration with the National Park Service Coltsville Historic Park in Hartford on a cross-disciplinary research and design project that will result in exhibits about the hidden gun history of New England. The project has received support from the New England Humanities Consortium (NEHC).

Students are also conducting individual and group research projects on the long history of Connecticut as a major manufacturer and promoter of weapons, including the impact on the socioeconomic development of the early Connecticut River Valley, as part of the Carceral Connecticut Project (CCP). In summer 2022, students and faculty toured Springfield Armory Historic Site (Springfield, MA), Coltsville National Historic Park (Hartford), Eli Whitney Museum and Workshop (New Haven), and the Middlesex County Museum and Historical Society (Middletown), and documented sites of gun manufacturing in Middlefield, CT as part of field site research on early gun manufacturing in New England. This CCP public humanities, place-based project is funded in part by a three-year, \$1 million curricular grant from the Mellon Foundation.

# NEW INITIATIVES

---

In summer 2023, in a collaboration between CSGS and the Wesleyan Quantitative Analysis Center (QAC), ten undergraduates are contributing to several research projects to analyze firearms data from a variety of sources in order to track advancements in firearms, from innovation to use in broader society. Textual analysis of firearm patents will give insight into how various mechanisms (eg. safety features) have been adopted in guns available in the market today. In addition, analyzing gun manufacturing, deaths, and marketing data will give insight into some of the historical factors that influence the supply, demand, and beliefs around firearms. Their findings will be presented at the Center's fall 2023 conference.

With this new initiative, CSGS is becoming the primary leading center for training in innovative and interdisciplinary mixtures of qualitative and quantitative methods in the study of firearms and their historical uses and impacts. We look forward to expanding this research with grants leading to publications and other public formats.

In 2022–23, the Center received a \$26,000 grant from the Arnold Ventures Foundation to host a historic meeting at Wesleyan to discuss the viability of a metric to compare the lethality of individual firearms across time. Titled "Developing and Evaluating a Civilian Arms Lethality Index for Firearms, c. 1776 to the Present," the study will be the first of its kind. The one-day planning meeting will be held at Wesleyan on October 12, 2023 to explore the prospect of developing a Civilian Lethality Index (CLI) for select small arms for possible application in firearms-related policy decision-making. The meeting will lead to a written report and research plan with a timetable and estimated project costs. The final report also will identify potential implications of a civilian arms lethality index for different users, including historians, consumers, lawmakers, policy makers, security studies, and the judiciary.

Also in 2022–23, the Center began laying steps for an initiative to create the foundation for academic research projects on firearms, visual culture, and history, drawing from collections of photographs and technology at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. In June 2023, Shannon Perich, Curator of the Photographic History Collection, Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, was invited to join the Center's External Advisory Board.

# COMMUNICATIONS

---

## Website

CSGS continued to grow its web presence in the 2022–23 academic year, sharing news, media coverage, information on student research and coursework, and event information. The website also now includes a link for supporters to donate to CSGS.

## Newsletters

CSGS issued three e-newsletters between January and May 2023 to its growing mailing list, keeping them informed and connected to the Center and its programming.

## Surveys

CSGS conducted surveys of participants in its Annual Fall Conference and one-day symposium, “Lessons from History on Domestic Violence, Firearms, and the Law,” yielding over 40 responses. See sample responses in Appendix A.

## HubSpot

The Center and Director’s professional network is growing very quickly due to the high interest in the Center’s work. With the expertise of the Center’s AA, Deidre Goodrich, the Center established a CRM (customer relationship management) database on HubSpot to organize contact information and to track each contact’s expertise, interests, activities, and correspondence with CSGS. This database supports relationship building and resource sharing.

# MEDIA

---

## **The New York Times: “In the Gun Law Fights of 2023, a Need for Experts on the Weapons of 1791” (March 14, 2023)**

This article about the demand for expertise on firearms history and laws following the landmark Bruen Supreme Court decision cites CSGS and Director Tucker:

## **Washington Post: “What Did I miss America? Violence. Violence. Violence.” (May 5, 2023).**

**Washington Post columnist Karen Attiah** mentioned she would be speaking at Wesleyan at our spring conference: “As it happens, this weekend, I’ll be at a conference that aims to examine America’s gun violence problem. Later today, I’ll be moderating a panel of experts and historians on domestic violence, firearms and the law at Wesleyan University’s new Center for the Study of Guns and Society. (If you’d like to listen in, the panel will be featured on a future episode of the podcast “Our Body Politic.”)

## **Washington Post: “How to Reckon with the Cult of the Gun” (May 12, 2023)**

Washington Post columnist Karen Attiah, a participating panelist in the May 2023 CSGS symposium on “Lessons from History on Domestic Violence, Firearms, and the Law,” discusses ideas raised at the symposium.

## **Politico Magazine: “The Surprising Geography of Gun Violence” (April 23, 2023)**

Associate Director Slaughter is quoted about the role of religion in this article on regional disparities in gun violence in America.

## **Brady Podcast: “The Rising Lethality of the 2nd Amendment” (May 2023)**

In this 35-min. interview, civil rights attorney Kelley Sampson talks with CSGS Director Tucker about her research on firearms; the inspiration behind CSGS; and the impact of recent court decisions related to guns; and debunks common myths and distortions about American gun culture.

# MEDIA

---

**Current: “Ideas in Progress: Joseph P. Slaughter on Christianity and Gun Culture” (March 22, 2023)**

Interview with Associate Director Slaughter about his new research on Christianity and gun culture.

**The Conversation US: “God and Guns Often Go Together in US History—This Course Examines Why” (January 10, 2023)**

Interview with Associate Director Slaughter about his “God and Guns: The History of Faith and Firearms in America” course at Wesleyan.

**National Park Service Newsletter (Winter 2022–23 issue)**

Spotlight on the partnership between CSGS and Coltsville National Historic Park, including student research conducted at Coltsville and the Springfield Armory, Rhode Island School of Design, Brown University, and Wesleyan, and staff from both parks participating in the CSGS 2022 Fall Conference.

## Internal

**The Wesleyan Connection: “Center for the Study of Guns and Society Explores the Histories of Firearms at Inaugural Conference” (October 25, 2022).**

**The Wesleyan Connection: “Center for the Study of Guns and Society Delves into the Links Between Firearms and Domestic Violence” (May 17, 2023).**



# KEY TAKE-AWAYS & GOALS

---

## TAKE-AWAYS

- The center made significant progress in its core key objectives in its first full year.
- Summer 2023 is dedicated to student research, grant writing, and continued expansion of professional networks.
- We will continue to explore new avenues for funding and infrastructure support to continue to grow the Center.

## GOALS 2023-24

- Research deliverables: publications, white papers, exhibitions, conferences.
- Apply for new grants.
- Grow university and museum partnerships.
- Hire one or two postdocs.
- Expand research opportunities, drawing on a mixture quantitative and qualitative methods.
- Support teaching and training.
- Continue building the Center's network of professionals, foster new collaborations, and invite participation from a broad range of people interested in the Center's work.

## Contact

### **Center for the Study of Guns and Society at Wesleyan University**

Allbritton Center  
222 Church St.  
Middletown, CT 06457  
860.685.2856  
[csgs@wesleyan.edu](mailto:csgs@wesleyan.edu)  
[gunsandsocietycenter.com](http://gunsandsocietycenter.com)

---