

**Guns Don't Die, People Do.** *Pete Shields. Arbor House, \$12.95.* Last year, 42 people in West Germany were killed by handguns. Fifty-two died from handguns in Canada, and eight in Great Britain. The figure for the U.S. was 10,728.

Pete Shields, a former Du Pont chemical company executive whose son was shot to death in a random street killing, has put all the relevant handgun statistics into this important new book. Shields is chairman of Handgun Control Inc., an anti-pistol lobby he helped found with some other people from Silent Majority backgrounds, including a retired CIA agent. The book is Handgun Control Inc.'s manifesto. It's not well written, but that's not the issue. The presence of a sensible anti-gun lobby run by straight-arrow types like Shields, who are interested in appealing to average working-class voters rather than left-wing intellectuals, might make all the difference in ending handgun madness.

Shields's book (and campaign) starts by explaining the basic distinction that the gun-nut faction has generally succeeded in concealing from the public—it's *handguns*, not all guns, that have to go. Rifles and shotguns are used for hunting and home defense, which the book says is fine. The sole "virtue" of a handgun, meanwhile, is that it can be hidden under a coat. Only criminals require this feature.

If the NRA were really a rifle association, it would be easy to live with. But it's not. It's a manufacturers' lobby, and the main thing manufacturers want to produce is handguns, since criminals keep the demand for them so high (currently two million a year). The NRA tries to promote the line that handguns are useful for self-defense, but that's

sales propaganda. At home, you're better off with a shotgun. On the street, you're better off with nothing. Street criminals take you by surprise—once they have the drop on you and their guns out, it doesn't matter whether you're carrying a .45 or a 40 mm antiaircraft cannon, as you can't draw without getting shot.

Shields and his group advocate handgun control, which would be better than the fire-when-ready system we have now. Control would make it easier to jail those caught standing over the bodies of their victims. It would not, however, stop the carnage. Only handgun *abolition* will accomplish that.

True, abolishing handguns would not immediately remove them from society. It might take years, even decades. But just because a problem that took a long time to create will take a long time to solve is no reason to stand idly by as things get worse. True also, if handguns were abolished, organized criminals still might get them. But mobsters aren't the problem—they use their handguns mainly to kill each other, and it's hard to get worked up about that. Street punks, drug addicts, and jealous husbands are the problem; they commit almost all murders of the innocent. Handgun abolition would make it very difficult for disorganized, dope-addled types to obtain the tools of casual slaughter.

For those who really believe the NRA's argument that handgun abolition would be unfair to collectors (which is like saying heroin should be legal because a lot of people have invested in needles), try this on for size—*ammunition* abolition. If handgun ammunition were abolished, people could have all the handguns they wanted, and use

them to pound nails. In fact, ammunition abolition might spread its life-saving effects through society faster than handgun abolition, since there would be no need to round up the hunks of steel, and stored ammunition eventually becomes useless.

—Gregg Easterbrook

**Mission to Iran.** *William H. Sullivan. Norton, \$14.95.*

**Mixed Company.** *Helen Rogan. Putnam's, \$14.95.* A look at the modern coed army by the author of "Racking with Missey," *The Washington Monthly*, November 1980.

**Organizing: A Guide for Grass Roots Leaders.** *Si Kahn. McGraw-Hill, \$11.95/\$5.95.*

**Radwaste: A Reporter's Investigation of a Growing Nuclear Menace.** *Fred C. Shapiro. Random House, \$14.95.*

**Speech and Law in a Free Society.** *Franklyn S. Haiman. Univ. of Chicago, \$22.50.*

**Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections.** *Gary C. Jacobson, Samuel Kernell. Yale, \$15.*

**Technology in America: A History of Individuals and Ideas.** *Carroll W. Pursell, Jr. MIT, \$9.95.*

**The Tobacco Industry in Transition: Policies for the 1980s.** *William Finger, ed. Lexington, \$23.95.*

**The Trouble with France.** *Alain Peyrefitte. Knopf, \$17.95.*

**The University and the Public Interest.** *A. Bartlett Giamatti. Atheneum, \$12.95.*

**Watershed: The Campaign for the Presidency, 1980.** *John F. Stacks. Times Books, \$16.95.*

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The main defect of Cooper's *Class* is that, for all her mockery, she totally buys the system she describes. For one thing, she presents as differences in taste what are really differences in means. The upper classes "prefer" natural fibers to those tacky polyesters. I bet a lot of nonaristocrats have also figured out that wool is nicer—along with pearls, big houses, fine restaurants, and handsome cars. All those things happen to cost money. She also describes as an upper-class virtue something that should really be independent of class

standing. Time and again in the book, she gives us illustrations that the upper classes can afford to do what they please. The lower-middles are absurdly genteel in their language, for fear of giving offense; but an earl pisses into a chamberpot at a party. "The true aristocrat is a law unto himself," Cooper says. If by aristocrat she had meant not those born with money but anyone willing to carry out his goals without the fears of the Jen Teales, she would have been on the money—and would have helped explain the ambition to do. □

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