

The United States of America is a country with more firearms than people. These weapons continue to be used in violent acts, and according to the Gun Violence Archive, there were 340 mass shootings in 2018 alone. The numbers involving gun-related tragedies are staggering and continue to rise. These alarming statistics and the ongoing threat of mass shootings inspired us to create the documentary, *One Nation Under Guns*.

We formed our production team, 1UP Films, in August 2018. We have roots across the country, including Oklahoma, North Carolina, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and New York. Each one of our members has unique experiences and perspectives regarding the role of guns in our society. The diversity of our positions has been a crucial asset in our pursuit of objectivity.

Our team traveled to Pittsburgh three days after the Tree of Life synagogue shooting. The tragedy moved us and directed our attention to the precautions that religious and educational communities take for potential active shooter situations.

Since we began production of this documentary in August 2018, there have been 145 mass shootings in the United States. These frequent shootings developed our thesis for the project: People are dying on a regular basis due to gun violence and mass shootings. Some religious and educational institutions are responding to this crisis with violence of their own.

“We are not a gun free zone,” reads the sign outside a church in Mexico, New York. Over the past few months, we have been filming with this church’s pastor, Ron Russell, a devout Christian who strongly believes in protecting his congregation from potential tragedy, even if that means arming some of his congregates.

Nearly 300 miles south in the Philadelphia suburbs, a high school teacher has the opposite approach. Deb Ciamacca, a former marine with advanced training in combat weaponry, believes that guns are a barrier between her and her students. Deb felt a call to action after watching the Parkland shooting unfold on TV and witnessing her own students’ reactions. In addition to meeting with us, Deb connected our team to her school’s own student anti-gun violence organization.

These high schoolers have grown up in an era where school shootings have become far too regular. Over frequent roundtable discussions, the teenagers share their fears, concerns, and experiences. The high schoolers also actively plan school walkouts, trips to their state capitol, and meetings with local congresspeople.

While the response time for first responders is merely a few minutes in the greater Philadelphia area, the response time in Clearmont, Wyoming can take up to an hour. To protect their students and staff, some of the schools in this area have implemented active shooter training sessions. In addition to standard lockdown procedures, the training also includes tackle drills, barricading doors, and an active shooter simulation using real guns loaded with blanks.

Though their politics and methods may differ, these three communities are all committed to protecting their members. This documentary offers a nuanced perspective on mass shootings and the communities they threaten.

This project was made for our capstone course, *Documentary Workshop*, where we completed our first cut of the 15-minute documentary, *One Nation Under Guns*. In the upcoming months, we are expanding on these narratives as well as developing new ones. Some future shoots include a group of students speaking with their local government in Pennsylvania about their experiences, as well as a teacher's campaign for state legislator to help create common sense gun reform.