

## Mass shootings

# God, good guys and guns

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

**An understandable impulse to self-defence is nevertheless mistaken**

**H**OSPITABLE, diminutive and currently reliant on a wheelchair, Brenda Stevenson, pastor of the New Outreach Christian Centre in Charlotte, North Carolina, makes an improbable gunslinger. So averse was she to weapons when her children were young that she wouldn't let them play with water pistols. But "there is a time and a season for all things," Mrs Stevenson recently informed worshippers that "two new members are joining the church": Smith & Wesson.

Her anxiety is understandable. Known for feeding the homeless, her centre attracts some unsavoury types. Its previous building burned down 20 years ago, the first of many chapels destroyed in a spate of suspected arsons in the state in the 1990s. A nearby Baptist church stands partially charred and collapsed, one of several black churches torched in the South since a racist massacre at a black church in Charleston in June (Mrs Stevenson's congregation is mixed). That finally prompted her to take the training course required to carry a concealed weapon. She plans to keep her gun in a Bible-shaped case, Wild West-style, when she preaches; it is hard to imagine her using it, and she hopes she never has to.

Churches are scarcely the only targets of murderous rampages. After the atrocity in Charleston came an attack on two military facilities in Tennessee; five servicemen died. A double killing at a cinema in Louisiana on July 23rd, by a man with a history of mental disorder, highlighted the ramshackle system of background checks for gun-buyers. Statistics support the impression created by this grim sequence: mass shootings have become more common in America, averaging one a day this year according to the Mass Shooting Tracker, an online record that includes multiple injuries as well as fatalities.

Gun lobbyists and their allies say the answer is for more law-abiding Americans to carry guns in colleges, or shopping malls, or churches (many states allow guns in houses of worship, either expressly or under general firearms rules, if religious officials consent). Mike Huckabee, a Republican presidential candidate, suggested more armed worshippers would have meant fewer deaths in Charleston. Like Mrs Stevenson, others have already reached that conclusion: Chuck Chadwick, of the Texas-based National Organisation for Church Security and Safety Manage-



Alexander Hamilton

## Fun with federalists

**The Founding Father without a dad becomes a Broadway star**

**"H**OW does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean, by providence impoverished in squalor, grow up to be a hero and a scholar?" So begins the opening rap in "Hamilton", a hip-hop opera about Alexander Hamilton, which is about to open on Broadway.

The co-author of the *Federalist Papers*, first treasury secretary, creator of the national bank and America's financial system, is having a moment. In addition to his musical, suggestions that Hamilton should be removed from the \$10 bill to make way for a woman brought howls from his admirers, who pointed out that if anyone is to be taken off a greenback it should be the uncouth Andrew Jackson, whose portrait adorns the \$20 bill.

Hamilton, a rather pompous sort, would probably disapprove of musicals. But his life, which came to an end on the banks of the Hudson in a duel with Aaron Burr, the sitting vice-president, is ready-made for one. The show's off-Broadway run at the Public Theatre earlier this year collected a trophy-case of awards and attracted theatre-lovers as well as Beltway types like the Clintons,

Michelle Obama and Dick Cheney (who understands about vice-presidential accidents with firearms). Advance tickets sales for the Broadway run are robust.

The musical is really two stories in one: Mr Hamilton's and America's. The songs, which mix R&B with rap and pay homage to comic operas by the likes of Gilbert and Sullivan, are catchy. A number sung by George III evokes a 1960s break-up ballad: "I'll send a fully armed battalion to remind you of my love," he croons to the colonists. The rap battles between Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson depicting clashes in fiscal policy and states' rights are particularly fine. "Man, when the British taxed our tea, we got frisky. Imagine what's gon' happen when you try to tax our whiskey."

Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Hamilton's" lyricist and composer, stars as the man himself. Mr Miranda, the son of Puerto Rican parents, clearly feels an affinity for his fellow transplant from the Caribbean (Hamilton was born on Nevis, an island about the size of Manhattan). The political history of America is sometimes simplified to a scrap between the heirs of Hamilton and of Jefferson. Right now, the federalist-in-chief seems the friskier.

ment, says demand for its programme, which includes firearms instruction, is rising, partly because of fear of Islamic State.

This impulse to self-defence in kind is natural—but mistaken. A recent FBI study of 160 public mass murders (committed or attempted) with guns between 2000 and 2013 found most ended when the assailants fled or killed themselves. In 21 instances the attacker was restrained by un-

armed people; in only one did the shooting stop after an intervention by a civilian armed with a gun (rather than by a security guard or policeman). The Violence Policy Centre, an advocacy group, points out that Americans who legally carry concealed weapons are far more likely to perpetrate mass shootings than prevent them; it counts 29 such events since 2007. And while gun-wielding bystanders rarely cur-



tail killings, they may aim badly and confuse the cops.

This dilemma is an iteration of a broader question: whether keeping guns makes people safer. A growing majority of Americans think it does—another mistaken conviction. Daniel Webster of the Johns Hopkins Centre for Gun and Policy Research says that, other factors being equal, keeping a gun at home is associated with a double or triple risk of homicide. What holds for homes is also true of states and countries: more guns mean more gun-related murders, tragic accidents and suicides.

Yet, amid the drumbeat of bloody news, well-meaning, fearful individuals take the seemingly rational decision to arm themselves. Almost all plan to be prudent with their guns. That, alas, is what everyone thinks. ■

## Abortion

# The tissue trade

NEW YORK

Dislike of abortion and support for Planned Parenthood should go together

**E**VEN ardent advocates of a woman's right to an abortion may grow queasy from watching a series of undercover videos of meetings with representatives from Planned Parenthood, a national group that offers reproductive-health services, including abortions. In order to harvest hearts, lungs and "as many intact livers as possible" from aborted fetuses, providers use ultrasound to make sure they do not "crush that part," explains Deborah Nucatola, a medical director for the group, between sips of wine. Another shows a medical executive named Mary Gatter apparently negotiating the sale of fetal "specimens".

The videos come courtesy of the Centre for Medical Progress, an anti-abortion pressure group. The three released since July 14th have been watched millions of times, and the group promises "thousands of hours" more. It says the videos show that Planned Parenthood is running a "black market for baby parts", which is illegal. Planned Parenthood denies this claim, and the recordings do not quite prove that the organisation is profiting from these transactions. But abortion providers at their health centres are apparently aware of the value of fetal tissue, which scientists need for a wide array of medical research. And the videos, with their casual talk of "suction" or a "less crunchy technique", make for powerful propaganda.

Ted Cruz, a senator from Texas, stirred crowds at an anti-abortion rally on Capitol Hill on July 28th with calls for a federal criminal investigation. Rand Paul, a sena-

## Inequality and exercise

# Spin to separate

Sweating on purpose is becoming an elite phenomenon

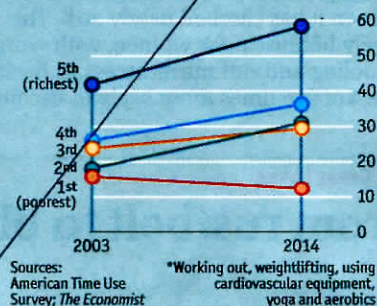
**I**N A darkened room at the edge of downtown Washington, D.C., electronic music pulses over the speakers as a crowd of mostly sweaty young women bop up and down. Candles burn at the front and inspirational slogans cover the walls. Sadly, this is not a drug-fuelled rave, but rather a mid-afternoon spin class. It is run by Soul Cycle, which promotes the idea that riding an exercise bike to loud music is akin to entering a "soul sanctuary". The experience, which also involves awkwardly lifting weights while cycling, costs about \$35 for 45 minutes. This does not deter its well-heeled customers: "Some of the women pay a lot of money to go here", says a staff member, her eyebrows raised.

The recession of 2008 damaged many industries. One which emerged remarkably unscathed was exercise. According to figures from the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association, an industry group, gym members now number 54m, up from 45m in 2009. Twice as many Americans subscribe to gyms as in the mid-1990s. Yet the population has not got visibly healthier. According to the Centres for Disease Control, a government agency, in 2013 a quarter of adults engaged in no leisure-time physical activity at all beyond the bedroom. Between 2001 and 2012, the age-adjusted proportion of the population who are obese or extremely obese grew from 36% to 41%. That increase has slowed of late,

but it has not yet reversed. The explanation of this paradox lies in who is doing the exercising (see chart). Where once "prosperous" was a synonym for overweight, being fit (and thin with it) is a marker of status. Outposts of Soul Cycle are to be found in the Hamptons and Westchester County in New York. In such places small gyms, yoga studios and the like, which make their money from hosting classes rather than through membership fees, proliferate. They advertise fitness as something close to religion. At CrossFit, which describes itself as a "word and a phenomenon", though it mostly involves weightlifting, customers are described as "athletes". Exercise is not quite yet a luxury good, but it may be getting that way.

## The rich get fitter

Average time spent exercising\* each week  
Full-time workers, by income quintile, minutes

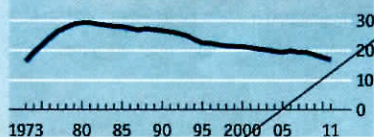


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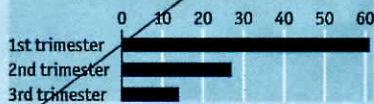
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## Legal and rarer

Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44



% agreeing that abortion should be legal during:



Sources: Gallup; Guttmacher Institute

organisation before the August recess.

Polls show that pro-life voters are in the minority, but they punch above their weight because they care more about where politicians stand on the issue. Surveys find that most Americans support keeping abortion legal within the first weeks of conception; but this sympathy plummets once the woman enters her second trimester, and nearly disappears when she reaches her third (see chart), by which time ultrasounds offer more detailed pictures of fingers and toes. Campaigners have worked with this discomfort. Twelve states now require abortion providers to proffer details about a fetus's ability to feel pain; ten mandate an ultrasound (though it is not medically necessary); and 14 have introduced bans on an abortion 20 weeks after conception.

Defunding Planned Parenthood may seem a logical next step. But federal funding for abortion is already banned, except in cases of rape, incest or where a woman's