

Wonkette

Activists Trick Gun Humpers Into Anti-Gun Ad, Just Like NRA Tricked USA Into Endless Gun Deaths

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June 25, 2021

Two prominent advocates for Americans' unlimited access to guns were tricked by gun violence prevention activists into appearing in anti-gun ads. It was pretty effective trolling, resulting in each of the Gun Guys giving high school commencement speeches to over 3,000 empty chairs that stood in for kids who'd been killed by guns before they could have graduated as part of the class of 2021.

As Rachel Maddow reported the other night, they were told it was a dress rehearsal. Then they told them they had to cancel the real graduation, because of threats of violence. Yeah. That's how they did that. And then they turned the graduation speeches into ads.

The resulting two-minute ads and a third why-we-did-this spot were released Wednesday by Change the Ref, an advocacy group founded by Patricia and Manuel Oliver. Their son Joaquin was one of the 17 people murdered at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida in 2018.

NBC News explains the two Gun Guys, former NRA president David Keene and pro-gun author John Lott Jr., were told they would be addressing the graduating class of "James Madison Academy," which doesn't exist. Instead, they spoke to 3,044 empty chairs set up in a vacant Las Vegas lot, with video recorded on the ground by camera operators, and by drones that pulled back to capture all that emptiness. The aerial view calls some other orderly rows of silent markers to mind as well.

We're not sure the Olivers *intended* it as a metaphor for how the NRA operates, but the chairs are set up on a field of astroturf.

As each "graduation" speaker addresses the nothingness, the ads dub in audio of 911 calls from terrified students and parents during actual school shootings, closing with a clip of audible gunshots coming over a student's phone.

Keene, who was NRA president from 2011 to 2013 and is still on the group's board, talked about how special it is to speak at a school named for James Madison, who wrote the Holy Second Amendment. He notes that there are many who want to "gut the Second Amendment," but says he's certain that some of the grads he's speaking to will "stand up to prevent them from succeeding." Again, he had no idea he was being tricked into addressing what the Olivers now call "the Lost Class," who can never stand again. And yeah, trigger warning; there are actual gunshot sounds in the background of a 911 call near the end.

The second spot features John Lott Jr., formerly of the American Enterprise Institute and author of truly garbage "research" claiming that right-to-carry laws reduce violent crime. Lott's claims have been the subject of intense criticism, to say the least. Virtually all the research on the matter finds that more guns do not reduce crime. So of course Lott's dubious assertion that hundreds of thousands of crimes are prevented by law-abiding gun owners every year has become gospel to gun fondlers.

As Vox sums up, Lott's 1998 book, *More Guns, Less Crime*, is weak sad poop:

The central finding in that book — that rates of gun ownership and the existence of "right to carry" laws reduce violent crime — have been the subject of numerous subsequent studies, the most sophisticated of which conclude Lott's results are specious. (A National Research Council report found that the data did not support the theory.)

Oh, yes, and then there was that online fan of everything Lott ever did who turned out to be Lott himself. (Really. Read that. He made up his own biggest fan.)

It shouldn't be surprising that, despite plenty of research showing immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born American Americans, Lott published — from his very own homegrown "research center" — a bullshit study in 2018 claiming that undocumented immigrants are actually far more likely to do crime. The libertarian Cato Institute slapped that one down, noting he'd utterly misread the data, confusing legal immigrants set to be deported for visa violations with "undocumented immigrants." In mere reality, the data set, from Arizona prisons, didn't actually sort out whether non-citizen prisoners were in the US legally or not. Predictably, the utterly bogus research was a big hit with the right, and near the end of the Trump administration, Lott even scored a job in the Justice Department.

TL;DR version: Lott's research is bad and he should feel bad. Unfortunately, the ad doesn't introduce Lott, as Yr Wonkette has, as a "fecal-brained fuckwit." So here's his speech to the kids who'll never graduate. In it, he claims, slightly insanely, that people whose instant background checks prevented them from buying firearms were simply "three-and-a-half million law-abiding citizens who wanted to get a gun."

Not surprisingly, Lott, he of the almost always disputed research, had a hissy over the ad, insisting he'd been victimized by unscrupulous liars. Yes, tricky prank videos do involve deception, although he wrote his speech all by himself. But yeah, Lott was well and truly Boratfucked (*must credit Wonkette and Marty Kelley for the coinage*).

In a statement, Lott said his remarks in the video were taken "out of context" and called the clips "deceptive and selectively edited," adding that he spoke for about 15 minutes — much longer than the one minute included in the video.

Lott called on Change the Ref to release his full speech.

In follow-up remarks over the phone, Lott said he drove 1,000 miles from Montana to deliver the remarks: "I thought I was trying to help out a school there," he told NBC News.

"It's just outrageous that somebody would do that," he added.

Pretty good for a guy who resides in Questionable Data Acres.

Manuel Oliver stands by the video, and told NBC he had definitely not deceptively edited the video.

We have backup to the quote: "universal background checks would not have stopped a single mass shooting this century." Sometimes there's no need for editing and this is one of those cases. Actual words, real space, absolute arrogance, and 3044 empty chairs.

Hey, go ahead and release the full video anyway. Can't think of much context that would make Lott suddenly seem credible.

In conclusion, we suppose we should note that this sort of trolling should probably only be done very, very carefully, without deceptive edits that leave out important context, lest we spawn more James O'Keefes. That said, everything in these videos appears to accurately portray the views of the speakers, albeit contrasted with the horrific outcomes that result from this country having more goddamn guns than people.

If I were using these videos in a media class, I might even show them in combination with Mark Twain's "The War Prayer," in which the heaven-sent Messenger of God Almighty tells a congregation praying for victory in war that their pastor has only spoken half of the prayer.

I am commissioned by God to put into words the other part of it—that part which the pastor—and also you in your hearts—fervently prayed silently. And ignorantly and unthinkingly? God grant that it was so!

If Keene and Lott want an America where people can freely buy and carry weapons of war, then it seems only fair for folks like the Olivers to present the unspoken side of what the pro-gun folks wish for: Panicked voices and gunshots in a school, recorded by 911 dispatchers.

What is our emergency?