

**THE
MYTH OF THE
SATURDAY NIGHT
SPECIAL**



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ACTION**



The firearm adorning the cover of this brochure is reproduced actual size. It is a Smith & Wesson K-38—a handgun measuring 17-inches in total length, weighing nearly three pounds, and costing well over \$200.

That same K-38 would have been banned as a so-called "Saturday Night Special," under legislation considered in 1976 by the House Judiciary Committee. In fact, under that legislation, the Russo amendment to HR 11193, over 75 percent of all handgun models ever produced would have been banned—including the Colt Single Action Army, the revolver carried in virtually every Western film ever produced.

But how did the nation's major newspapers report the amendment:

The Wall Street Journal—"The legislation would have banned the sale and manufacture of small, easily concealable handguns. . . ."

The Washington Star—"The proposed legislation would have banned importation, manufacture, sale or distribution of new 'concealable' handguns by licensed manufacturers and dealers. . . . It would have banned the manufacture of handguns from cheap metals—the type that fly apart when fired."

The Washington Post—"The key amendment (Russo) would ban the sale or manufacture of concealable handguns on the basis of size and safety devices."

Clearly, a great deal is lost between press reports of a so-called "Saturday Night Special" bill, and what the letter of the law spells out—in large measure because most newspaper editors know little or nothing about firearms.

Yet, under the Russo amendment—a landmark for the concept "Saturday Night Special"—the definition was stretched to an extreme limit. In fact, it was expanded to a point where a mere handful of handgun models would have survived the law and been allowed for purchase and ownership by private citizens.

Congressman Russo's amendment, more than any other single act or effort, has exploded the myth of the "Saturday Night Special." In that, it serves as a benchmark.

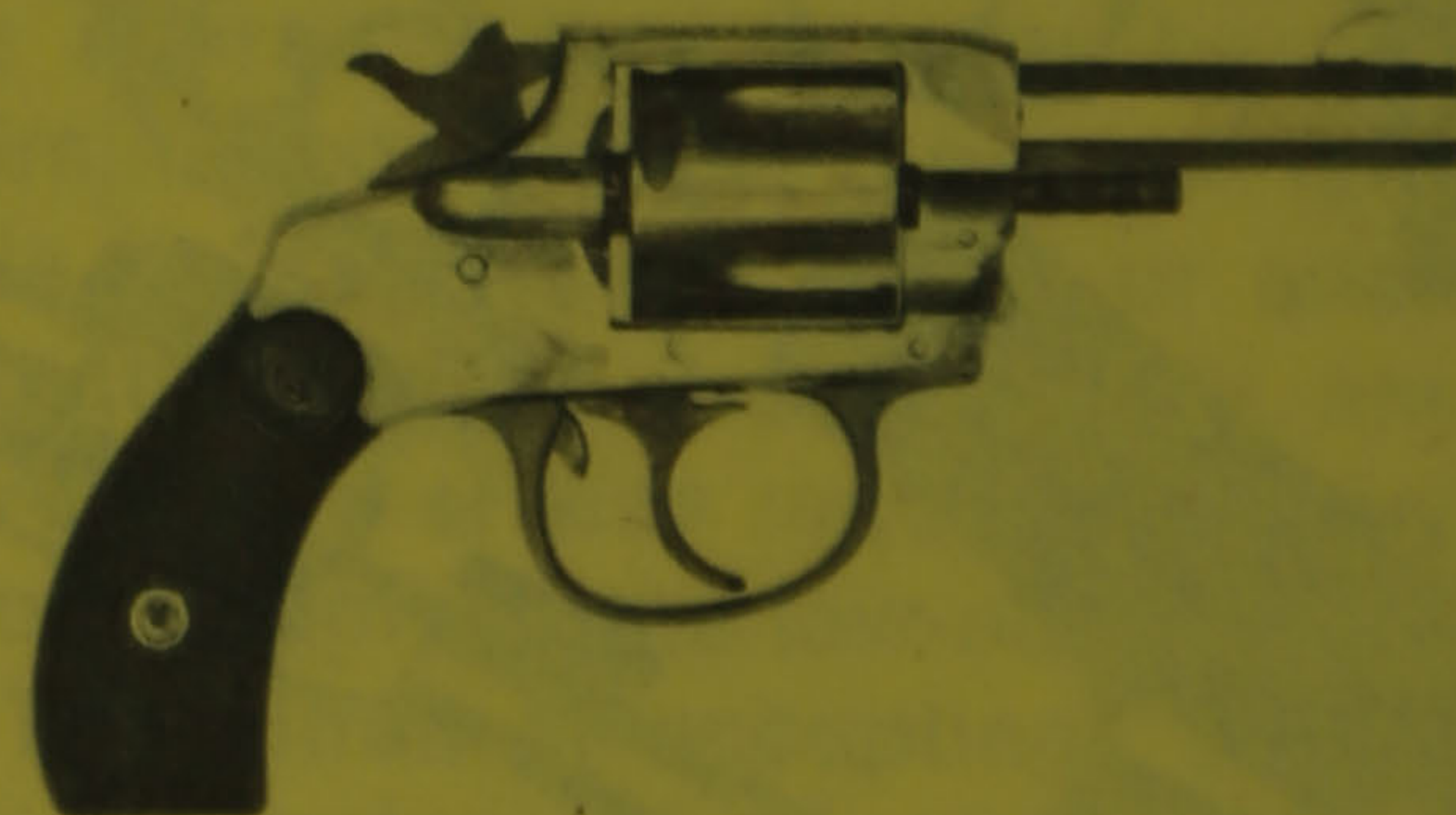
After more than ten years of common usage—since the expression "Saturday Night Special" was invented—it has become more than a familiar term to most Americans.

Everybody knows what it means. Or do they?

Ask yourself.

In truth, the term is so elastic that it means anything to everybody. It has become meaningless.

Take the typical definition, and analyze it.



"Saturday Night Special" equals a handgun that is "cheap, easily concealable, unsafe, readily obtainable, non-sporting, and preferred by criminals."

We've all heard that before. But what do those words mean?



CHEAP—What is cheap? Is it \$50? Is it \$140? What prevents a cheap handgun from becoming an expensive handgun through a simple price rise? Wherever the line is drawn, any law that banned a particular make and model of handgun on the basis of its low price would discriminate against the poor. It would allow only the people who could afford an "expensive handgun" the means to self-defense in their home, while denying those of little wealth that same means to defend themselves, their family, and their homes. Such a measure denies a large segment of law-abiding citizens the right to equal protection under the law.

EASILY CONCEALABLE—Literally any handgun made today is easily concealable. If concealability has anything to do with bulk, barrel length, or weight, any of those factors can be altered within minutes by criminals. Any criminal could make a firearm more concealable by sawing the barrel or altering its other features. The provisions of any such arbitrary length or size requirement definition would only apply to the law-abiding.

The pitfall of accepting "concealability" as a criterion for banning any category of handgun was recently demonstrated by the U.S. Supreme Court. In *U.S. v. Powell* (No. 74-844), handed down December 2, 1975, the Court held that a sawed-off shotgun with an overall length of 22 inches was a firearm "capable of being concealed" on an average person and is therefore covered by a Federal law forbidding the mailing of concealable weapons.

UNSAFE—Violent crime and criminal use of any weapon has nothing to do with the safety of the weapon. Whether a firearm will withstand any measure of "drop tests" or whether it has a manual safety, grip safety, hammer block, magazine safety or whether it is proof tested using maximum loads has nothing to do with crime. Safe or unsafe, liable to explode or liable to fire when dropped means nothing to the victim of crime. And neither does it mean anything to the criminal.



READILY OBTAINABLE — Presently under the Gun Control Act of 1968, convicted felons, adjudicated mental defectives, drug or alcohol addicts are all prohibited from legally obtaining any type of firearms. In fact, under GCA '68 and under many state laws, handguns are anything but easily obtainable. One of the fallacies in the "Saturday Night Special" question is the idea that the public needs a law to prevent a New Yorker, say, from purchasing handguns in a state where local laws are less stringent, and transporting those handguns back to New York for street sale. It is already illegal under GCA '68.

If all legal commerce in firearms were to end tomorrow, criminal underground sale of firearms would continue unabated, and smuggling, as seen during prohibition with liquor and as is seen today in the drug trade would flourish. Criminals could still get guns.

But we are not the only people saying that. Senator Edward M. Kennedy, commenting on the handgun confiscation question in his home state of Massachusetts, said, "... we won't keep guns out of the hands of criminals."



NONSPORTING—This is perhaps the most meaningless and misleading of any of the so-called definitions of “Saturday Night Special” proposed. It makes the assumption that there is no lawful reason to own a firearm for self-defense. In the Second Amendment of the Constitution there is no mention of “sporting arms.” The drafters of the Constitution—had they meant for Americans to hold the right to private ownership of firearms only for sporting purposes—would have put it that way: “A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people

to keep and bear sporting arms only shall not be infringed.” They didn’t say it that way.

The majority of the 50-million handguns now held by individual Americans are owned for the purpose of self defense. It has been estimated that nearly 2.5-million new handguns are manufactured and sold (under careful Federal scrutiny) into legal channels. Most of those firearms are bought by law-abiding citizens for the lawful purpose of defending themselves and their families against deadly force in their homes. Any such “nonsporting” designation would deny them that right.



FOR CRIMINAL USE—This phrase, or the phrases, “often used in crime,” or “preferred by criminals,” is simply not supportable.

Criminals will use whatever weapons they can get—whether they be long-barreled, heavy, safe, large caliber, pistols or revolvers—or if they be small caliber, alloy-frame, low melting point guns.



In fact, a recent study by the Police Foundation in Washington, D.C. found that "more expensive handguns of well known manufacturers, notably Smith & Wesson and Colt, are as likely to be used in felonies such as murder and robbery as are handguns bearing less familiar brand names and selling for less than \$60."

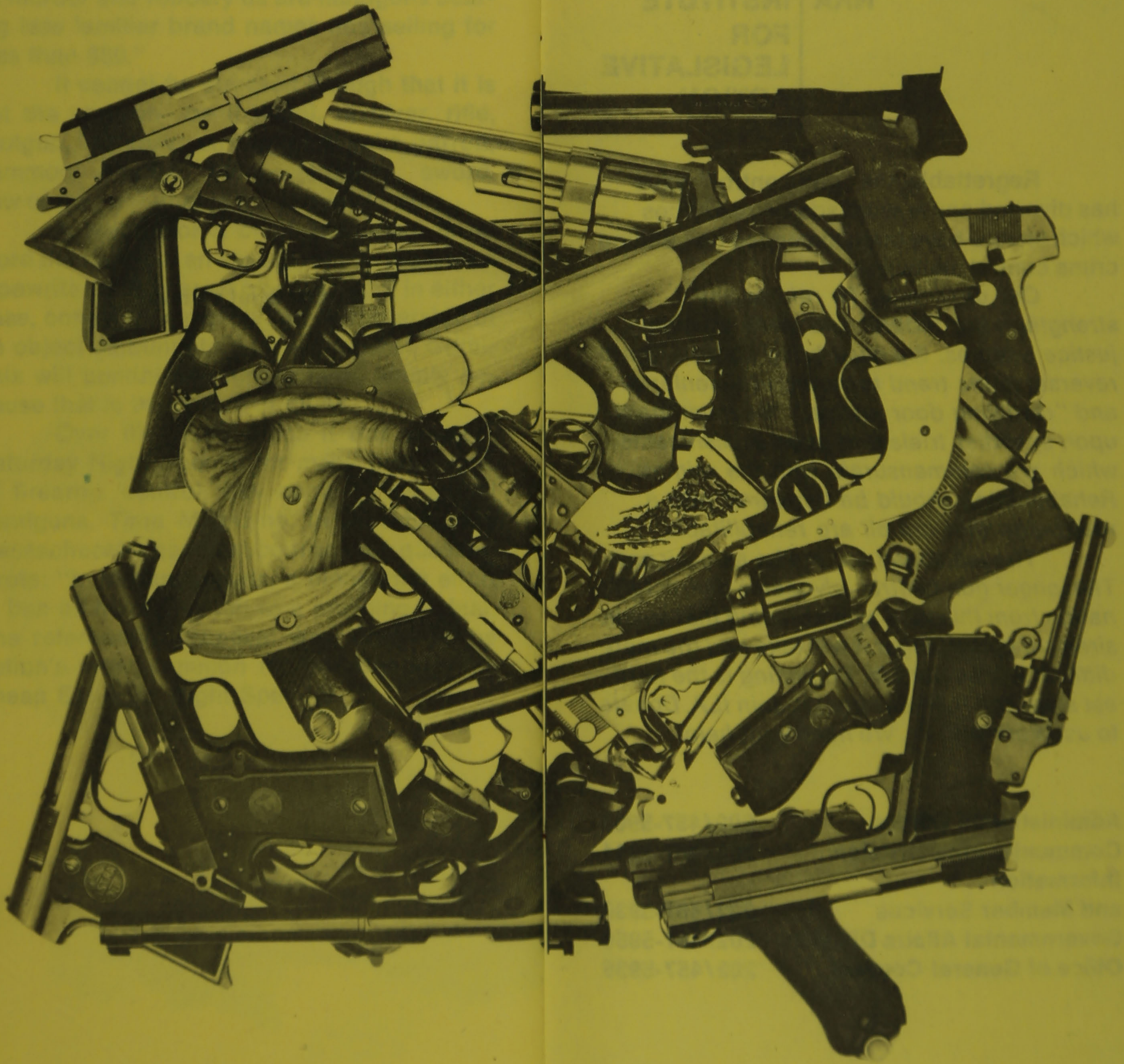
It cannot be stressed enough that it is not the weapon—be it pistol, revolver, rifle, shotgun, fist, knife, ax, bludgeon, yoke, garrott, hammer, ice-pick, blunt-instrument, sword, saw or poison—that is the cause of crime.

A firearm or a blunt-instrument is no more the cause of an assault, than a reporter's typewriter is the cause of a libel. And in either case, control or a prohibition on ownership of an object amounts to a prior restraint. Criminals will continue to ignore laws, simply because that is the nature of crime.

Over the years, since it was created, Saturday Night Special for many proponents of firearms control, has come to mean all handguns. *Time Magazine*, in reporting the Massachusetts handgun confiscation question wrote: "In Massachusetts, a pioneering effort to ban all handguns fell to a crushing defeat. The referendum proposal was aimed at the nation's most common murder weapon, the cheap Saturday Night Specials. . . ."

So what's next?

All hand guns, then . . . all firearms.



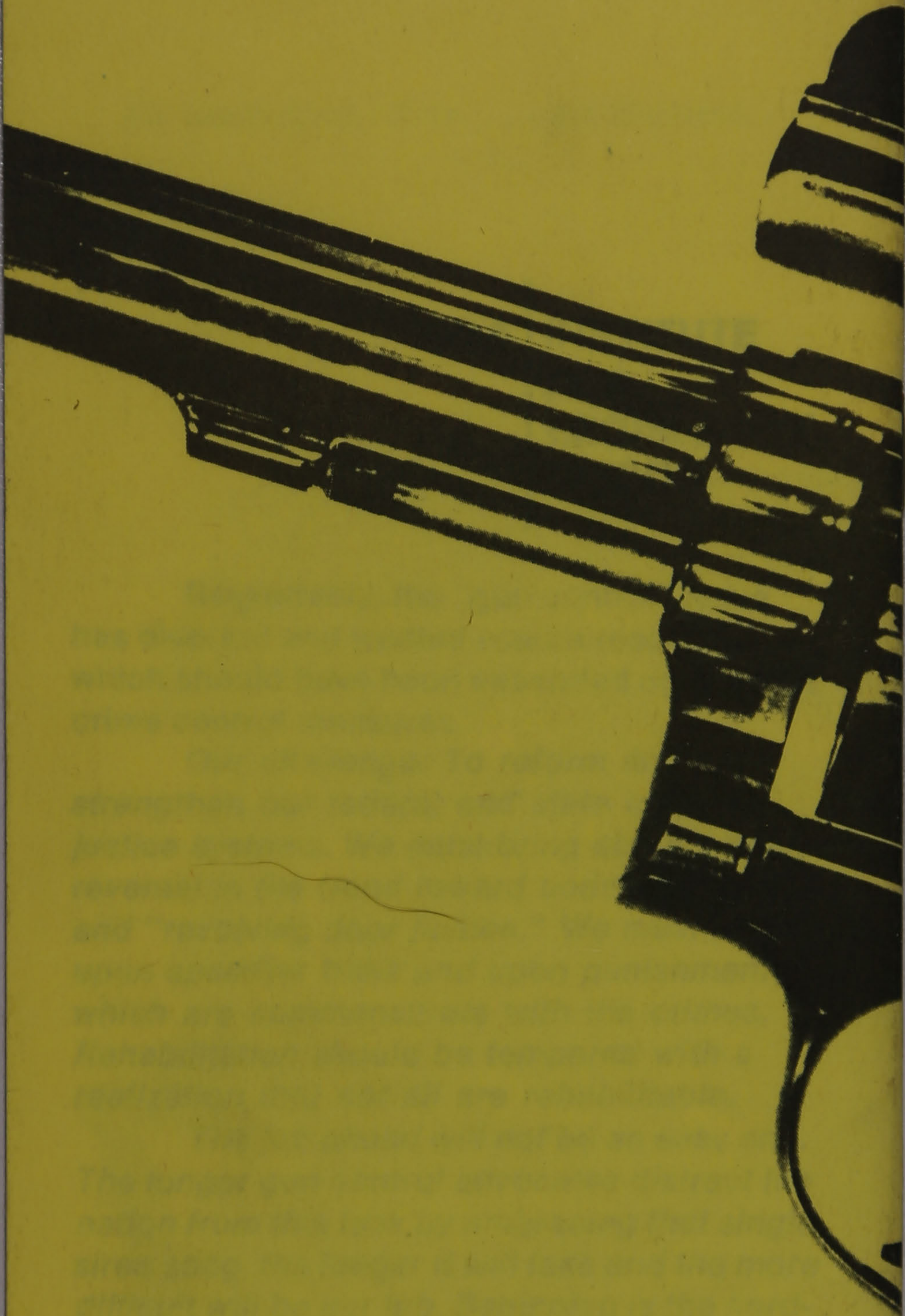
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Regrettably, the "gun control" issue has diverted and wasted scarce resources which should have been expended on genuine crime control measures.

Our challenge: To reform and strengthen our federal and state criminal justice systems. We must bring about a sharp reversal in the trend toward undue leniency and "revolving door justice." We must insist upon speedier trials and upon punishments which are commensurate with the crimes. Rehabilitation should be tempered with a realization that not all are rehabilitable.

The job ahead will not be an easy one. The longer gun control advocates distract the nation from this task by embracing that single siren song, the longer it will take and the more difficult will be our job. Beginning is the hardest step, and ILA has taken it. Join ILA. Donate to us. Work with us. We need your help.

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