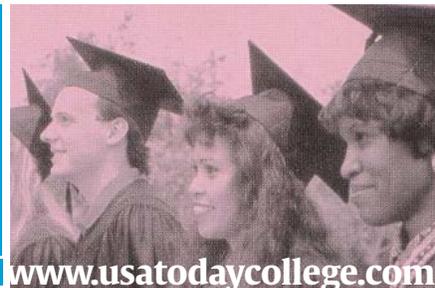


**Collegiate
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Study**



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'Christian values' set the tempo of daily life in Franklin

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Director, The Pew Research Center
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One nation, divided

Special report

Part II: Religion

One nation, united or divided? Americans are all over the map on important issues ranging from gun control to politics to religion. Yet, in spite of all the diverse opinions, we remain one nation. We have the ability to rally around the flag and the presidency and present a united front. What is it about the fabric of these United States that allows us to disagree, vigorously and sometimes even angrily, and still come together as a nation with a common purpose? What enables us to unite when other countries are violently torn apart by their differences?

Church aisle is wide cultural divide

To some, faith provides all answers; for others, it raises only questions

By Jill Lawrence
USA TODAY



When terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, a Christian rock band based in Franklin,

Tenn., considered whether to cancel an appearance two days later in Canton, Ohio.

manager. "As Christians, we've got the answers, so why should we sit home?"

Today: Religion

Next: Changes

The band, Audio Adrenaline, kept the date. Why?

"The world's looking for answers," says Scott Brickell, the group's affable

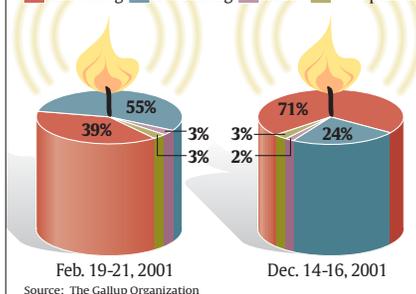
In Montclair, N.J., some Jews and Christians reacted to Sept. 11 by visiting mosques and exchanging views with Muslims at potluck dinners. They wanted firsthand

USA TODAY Snapshots®

Leap of faith

In the past year of upheaval, the percentage of Americans who said the influence of religion on life was:

Increasing Decreasing Same No opinion



Source: The Gallup Organization

By David Bellis and Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2002

exposure and a lively debate.

Religion lies at the heart of the cultural divide that split American voters evenly in the 2000 election. USA TODAY selected Franklin and Montclair as representative of that fundamental split, as dramatic now as it was before the terrorism of Sept. 11.

In Franklin, which voted overwhelmingly Republican in the 2000 election, religion provides answers. In heavily Democratic Montclair, it raises questions – when it's relevant at all.

Nearly half the people in Montclair say they never attend a religious

activity or go less than once a month, according to a USA TODAY/Gallup Poll. Nearly two-thirds in Franklin go once a week or more. Christianity permeates life in Franklin to a degree that most people in Montclair would find astonishing.

The chasm is also wide on guns, another issue that separates those who support Democrats from those who support Republicans. Nearly seven times as many people in Franklin as in Montclair own guns. Two-thirds in Montclair want new gun-control laws – while two-thirds of Franklin residents say such laws are not needed.

In Montclair, President Bush's support for gun-owner rights stirs uneasiness; in Franklin, it makes people more comfortable with him.

The same contrast applies to religion. Bush is a born-again Christian who reads the Bible through every couple of years. His first White House Christmas card, departing from a tradition of secular messages, featured a psalm. His faith does not create an automatic bond with the diverse, often non-observant voters found in Montclair and urban America, and even alienates some of them. But it's key to his strong appeal in Franklin and heartland America.

'Christian values' set the tempo of daily life in Franklin

By Jill Lawrence
USA TODAY

FRANKLIN, Tenn. — Religious leaders here advertised their second annual "Gathering," a public call to prayer, as a celebration of the diversity of God's people. Held in the downtown public square at the end of September, it drew throngs to a Sunday evening service conducted by black, white and Hispanic clergy.

But the diversity went only so far. The prayers and those leading them were all Christian.



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

Fundamental faith: Scotty Smith tells his Christ Community Church congregation, "There's only one kingdom that's going to stand."

Christian evangelicals dominate religious life here, and they are straightforward about their convictions. Rick White, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, also called The People's Church, describes the

mindset as "a strong belief in the exclusivity of the Gospel . . . the exclusivity of the Christian faith."

Franklin has dozens of churches that range in size from six people (the



"Swimming upstream": Ruth Lebovitz, shown with daughter Lisa, 14, and son Michael, 19, moved to Franklin, Tenn., in 1984. "We may well be the first Jewish people that these families ever met," she says. Michael has a twin sister, Robin.

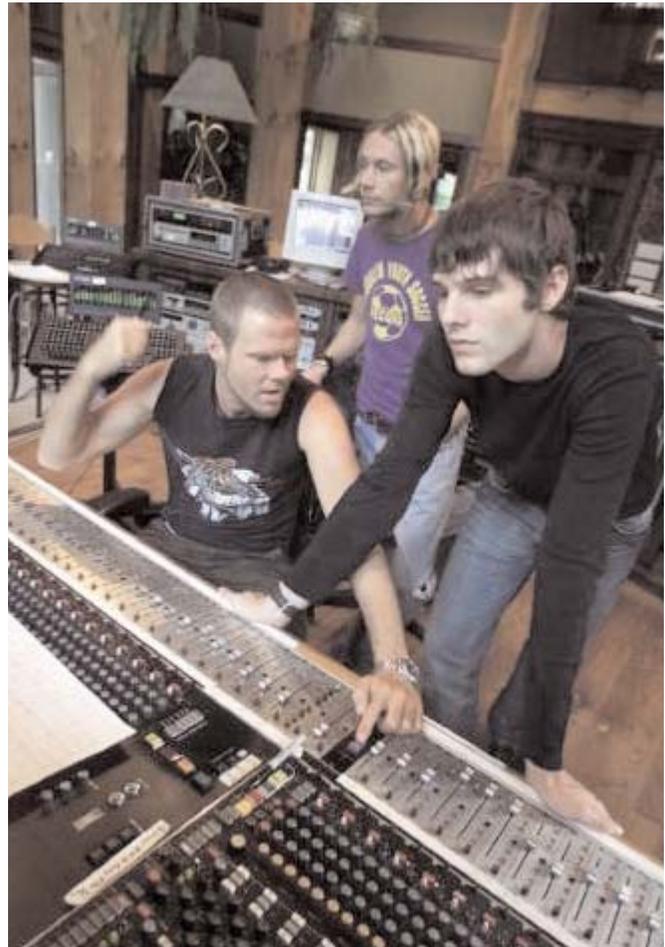
oldest black church in town, open since 1867) to 5,300 (White's church, which draws worshipers from 30 miles away). There are two Catholic churches and a Mormon temple, but no synagogues or mosques.

Church now must compete with Sunday morning soccer and other activities. Even so, 27% of people in Franklin report attending church or another religious activity twice a week or more. Few activities are planned on Wednesday nights, when people are busy with Bible study. Newcomers are invariably asked which church they will join, and some say it's hard to make friends if they don't join one.

The centrality of religion here is evident in many ways. A sign at a farm on Franklin Road announces, "The Son Rises Here." A high school principal says the most popular extracurricular activity is the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. The manager of Franklin Booksellers, Carol Ann Shull, says everyone who works there is Christian, and "we're mindful of our responsibility to this community. We try to avoid having things that aren't wholesome."

When Franklin schools and businesses launched a character-education drive to encourage responsibility and other principles valued by every religion, the school board sent Patsy White to urge evangelical pastors to participate. "We all want to be Christians, and we want this to lift the Lord," she told them -- before adding that conversion was not the goal.

Church-state conflicts arise here regularly, and the terrorist strikes haven't changed that. The county



Christian rockers: Mark Stuart, left, Will McGinniss and Tyler Burkum of Audio Adrenaline work on their latest album at Dark Horse Recording in Franklin, which has become the center of the Christian music industry.

commission recently defeated a proposal to post the Ten Commandments in public places. The county school board chairman, citing a renewed focus on values since Sept. 11, promoted a resolution to allow students to pray together in classrooms.

Susan Cremin moved here with her husband, a union Democrat, from Westchester, N.Y., in 1993, when a Saturn plant opened nearby. She says Franklin is appealingly stable and traditional, partly because of the religious atmosphere. "There are a lot of families with strong Christian values," says Cremin, an active PTA mom with three children. "Whether or not they are my values, that does help lead to strong families."

Black congregations here tend to be small, devout and Democratic. One congregation is integrated: the conservative, fundamentalist Strong Tower Bible Church. Franklin's two white mega-churches feature the religious

equivalent of President Bush's compassionate conservatism. Their pastors oppose abortion and homosexuality, support social services and mission work, dress casually, use modern music and generally skip the hellfire.

"I don't believe in bashing," White says. "I believe that there's a way to hold people accountable without the rigid condemnation." Preaching in khakis and a Hawaiian shirt in his 1,900-seat church, White has keyed his sermons to the Survivor TV series and used rock tunes such as Don Henley's New York Minute to "unmask" the emptiness of material success. "There's no tinkering with the message, but the methods are up for grabs," he says.

Scotty Smith, senior pastor at the fundamentalist, 5,000-member Christ Community Church, wore jeans, socks and sandals as he tried to reinterpret -- and make more palatable -- the apostle Paul's instruction in Ephesians 5:22-24 that women submit to their husbands. "Some of you hate those three verses," Smith conceded. He argued that the roles they defined amount to "mutual submission. . . . They are so not about power. They are so not about who has the final vote."

For a few Sundays after Sept. 11, mirroring what happened across the country, church attendance here surged, and terrorism was the only subject from the pulpit. Smith, preaching Sept. 16 for the first time in a new 80,000-square-foot church, assured his traumatized congregation that God existed and was good. "There's only one kingdom that's going to stand," he told them. "Brothers and sisters, you're part of an unshakable kingdom that will last forever."

White encouraged worshipers to confront their illusions about security and the nature of God. "He gave us free will. Sometimes men and women are going to make evil choices," White says he told them.

Both White and Smith, a self-described " '60s guy" and conscientious

objector during the Vietnam war, say you'll never hear gay-bashing from their pulpits. But like most in Franklin, taking their cue from Scripture, they view homosexuality as a sin.

Gay people here prefer a "don't ask, don't tell" approach. "You may walk all around the subject but never use the word," one says. "If you force somebody to face something, you force a response."

As difficult as it is to find gay people here (one gay person says there may be fewer than two dozen), it is even harder to get them on the record. They have businesses and relatives to worry about, and a small-town way of life they value highly.

Some say they can function here because the conservative business community is more concerned about taxes than how others live. More irksome are people driven to change anyone they think is gay. "It's difficult with fundamentalists," one says. "They want very much to be involved in your life."

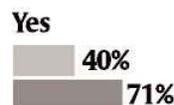
One gay person, raised in that tradition, tried to "pray myself straight. It just didn't work." So why does this person stay in Franklin? "I love the land around here. I have really bonded with the rolling hills."

Ruth Lebovitz, one of the few Jews who live here, loves the hills, her friends, the seasons and the grazing horses she can see from her second-story window. Though she feels sometimes like "a salmon swimming upstream," she says she's gotten used to living in a place where most teenagers listen to the local Christian rock station and the word ecumenical doesn't mean all faiths, it means "all Christian faiths."

A year or two after Lebovitz moved here from New Orleans in 1984, she learned that her twin toddlers were praying "in Jesus' name" before exercises at a private gymnastics class. Last spring, her daughter Robin was invited to participate in a baccalaureate

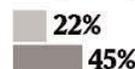
Montclair
Franklin

Does it matter to you how Bill Clinton conducted his personal life?

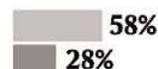


How often do you watch or listen to religious TV or radio programs?

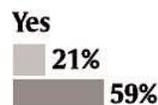
Frequently or sometimes



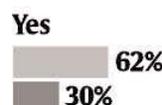
Never



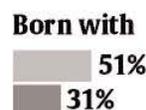
Is it morally wrong to have a baby if you are not married?



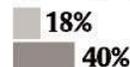
Is Darwin's theory of evolution well supported by evidence?



Is homosexuality something a person is born with, or is it due to environment or upbringing?



Upbringing or environment



Both



religious service marking high school graduation. Robin told several students and teachers that she was worried about people praying "in Jesus' name." That's what happened.

"People of other faiths like myself were left by the wayside as the group prayed to Jesus en masse," Robin wrote last June in a letter to students and faculty. "I was disappointed at the lack of sensitivity displayed at such an important event for a high school graduate."

John Calton, principal at the time, conceded in a response that "we were not considerate of you." He said he was bothered that she was hurt.

He also said he could not fully empathize because "I have always

been the one in the majority," and added, "I have no regrets for my part in the ceremony."

Ruth Pressman, a substitute teacher who is Jewish, says her older son declined when asked to participate in a bacalaureate service. But a few years later, in what she saw as a purposeful nod toward diversity, her younger son was invited to give the benediction at his high school graduation.

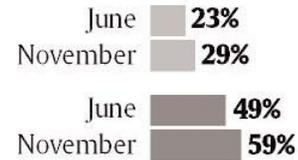
Earlier, when he wanted time off to participate in a "march of the living" through Poland and Israel, the principal was enthusiastic and asked him to share his experiences upon his return.

Her verdict: "It's progressed."

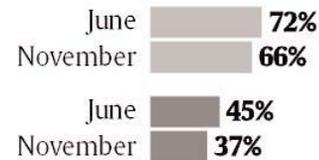


Which is the better penalty for murder?

Death penalty



Life imprisonment without parole

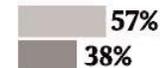


Which is more important to you when voting for president?

Candidate shares your values



Candidate agrees with you on most issues



Source: USA TODAY/Gallup Polls of 400 adults June 22-28, 2001, and 405 adults Nov. 9-15, 2001. Both have a margin of error of ±5 percentage points.

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2002

Tending a more secular flock

In Montclair, worship is a pursuit of balance

By Jill Lawrence
USA TODAY

MONTCLAIR, N.J. -- Alison Barnett trod gingerly when she started organizing holiday decorations for the downtown business district of this New York suburb.

"We're calling it seasonal lighting instead of holiday lighting because I don't want to get into trouble with anybody," she told merchants at a planning meeting last year. "We're thinking of doing the snowflake thing," she added. "We are looking at the snowflake theme because it seems very non-denominational."

That's the politically correct side of religion here, a hypersensitivity to offending anyone in any way. But there's another side, a kind of mix-and-match theological exchange. A rabbi attends midnight Mass and invites the priest to his home for Passover. Another rabbi teams with a black pastor to host a talk by James McBride, author of *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*. A Baptist church goes out of business and bequeaths



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

Fourth of July parade: Gays and lesbians have found acceptance in Montclair, N.J., and its churches. Many congregations welcome gay worshippers.

\$34,000 in assets to a synagogue renovating an old mansion.

Montclair offers a smorgasbord of worship opportunities at churches, mosques and temples: Islam, Quaker, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientist and Hebrew Christian (Jews who believe Jesus is their savior), as well as Catholic, Jewish and virtually every stripe of Protestant. Some are led by women, in contrast to Franklin, Tenn., where pastors are almost all male.

People who live in Montclair say it's a religious town, but by some traditional measures it is not. Only a third of residents attend any form of worship once a week or more, and nearly half say they go rarely or never. Some who do go have non-traditional beliefs. Others are seeking community. Many religious institutions mirror Montclair's fondness for having a debate while not necessarily resolving an issue — in contrast to the certainties and absolutes of evangelical Christianity.

Rabbi Dan Ehrenkranz of B'nai Keshet, the smaller and more liberal of two Jewish congregations, says he teaches from the Torah, then opens the service to discussion. "The most important thing is not necessarily what the rabbi says, what the rabbi thinks. My job is to help them think deeply," he says. The Rev. Robert Schiesler of St. Luke's Episcopal Church says, "I'm not here to give answers. I'm more here to break open the questions of our lives in a faith context."

The Rev. Stephanie Weiner, pastor of Union Congregational Church, served earlier in Miami and suburban St. Louis. She has not forgotten the time she remarked to a church member here, "See you Christmas Eve." Forget it, she was told, that's the best night to get tickets for hot Broadway shows.

"This is a more secularized environment than I've been in before," says Weiner, whose 650-member church once numbered 2,100. "Certainly there are more quality

opportunities to vie for people's time. There are other communities where the church is more central."

Maureen Edelson is the kind of churchgoer common in Montclair and rare in the Bible Belt. She stopped attending Catholic church at age 14, turned off because "all they preached was anti-abortion and 'we want more money.' " She later married an Orthodox Jew, had two sons and now attends the Unitarian Church.

Clergy in Montclair sermonized after Sept. 11 to people who had lost family, friends or acquaintances in the attacks, or who had narrowly escaped death that day themselves. Death is more real now to their young, hard-driving congregations, they say, and religion is more complicated.

Ehrenkranz says he has tried to impart the idea that having a sense of God in one's life has nothing to do with personal protection and may in fact lead to danger. His examples are New York firefighters, police and rescue workers. They showed "evidence of the divine spark," he says, by risking their lives to save others.

Monsignor Tim Shugrue of the Church of the Immaculate Conception says he can't explain the tragedy to his 3,000 parishioners but has tried to help them draw lessons from it. The main one: "Value the important things while you can."

The folly of materialism was a common theme before Sept. 11 in this ambitious, well-off community. Now Shugrue and others find it is even more relevant. On the Sunday before Thanksgiving, the Rev.



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

Competing for time: The Rev. Stephanie Weiner, pastor of Union Congregational Church, tries not to make too many demands on her busy congregation.

Charles Ortman told his Unitarian congregation that he, and they, had become consumed with "getting our own kids into the best schools, building McMansions and driving SUVs. Then Sept. 11 came along, and we were awakened from our confusion."

In Montclair, as in most of America, most congregations are racially segregated. Ironically, given the town's liberal politics, its two largest and most integrated churches are conservative.

One is Immaculate Conception, which has added about 200 households over the past 10 years and is about 20% minority. Shugrue is passionately anti-abortion and annoyed that Planned Parenthood of Montclair is directly across the street from his Catholic church. "The church did protest it on the grounds of propriety," he says. "But we live in a pluralistic society. They have as much right to be there as anyone else, assuming they have a right to be doing what they're doing, which is another question."



Viewpoint: The Rev. DuWayne Battle of St. Paul Baptist Church preached that "God's greater judgment" would fall on those who spent \$40 million to impeach Bill Clinton.

The other huge congregation here is Christ Church. Pastor David Ireland founded it in 1986 with six people after having a vision of racial reconciliation one night in an Irvington, N.J., supermarket. Now 3,500 people, many from out of town, come each Sunday to pack three services in the downtown church of stained glass and cream-streaked turquoise marble.

Although a third of the church staff and pastoral team are non-black, Ireland is falling short of his own goal of racial diversity: Only 15% of the congregation is white. Those who come

get "Bible-believing" fundamentalism packaged for the media age: professional-level musical performances, sermons keyed to best sellers or financial management and admonitions against adultery and homosexuality.

Gay worshipers are welcome at many churches here, reflecting the town's acceptance of gay people and gay families. One unconventional family is heavily involved in church, school and neighborhood activities – and encountered no problems along the way.

"Everyone knows the whole story," says Terry McKeon, the gay father of a 12-year-old daughter and 10-year-old twins. The story is that he moved to Montclair in 1991 with the children and their mother, a lesbian. A year later, she found a life partner. That made three adults – two moms and a dad – in the household.

"We insisted we were going to be a family and be respected as a family," says McKeon, who administers group homes for the mentally retarded and teaches Sunday school at the Unitarian Church. "Most of our friends are straight couples. We're about the kids and the things that revolve

around them – parties, sports, school events."

McKeon says the family has faced no harassment or overt discrimination, and the kids "are proud of who we are. They feel very secure." They've even encouraged him to date, he says.

Ron Kamann and Ken Fraser, a gay couple with two dogs and a big house next to a park, poke fun at Montclair's obsessive political correctness. But they know it's what enables them to live lives of what Fraser calls "lovely mundaneness."

"The religious right would rather show two guys in hot pants than two guys who live in the suburbs, pissed off about the taxes and 'God! I gotta mow the lawn this weekend,'" says Fraser, a retail clothing executive.

Adds Kamann, who does intake interviews at a psychiatric hospital: "I used to think you had to change everyone. Now, I think there will always be people who think you'll burn in hell. Why waste your time?"

Towns on opposite sides of gun debate

Do arms threaten life – or protect it?

By Jill Lawrence
USA TODAY

When the jets hit the World Trade Center in New York City, old feelings of loss surged in Peter Gross. "Since Matt was shot by a Palestinian terrorist at another landmark in New York, it was a very evocative moment," he says.

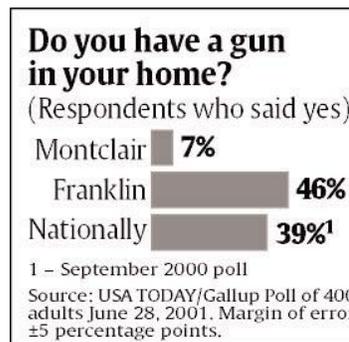
Gross' son was a gifted guitarist with a rising rock band when he was almost murdered five years ago. His frontal lobe and his future were destroyed by a man shooting a semiautomatic on the Empire State Building observation deck. "How did this guy get this gun?" Peter Gross wondered. "Did anyone check out why he was trying to buy the gun? Why should there be guns like this?"

Gross, an entertainment lawyer in Montclair, N.J., is now a committed gun-control activist, his views stiffened by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. "One of the more effective steps against terrorism would be to limit access to guns, not make it easier to purchase them and carry them into public places," he says. Furthermore, he contends, unreeling a list of statistics, it's "irrational" to think having a gun can keep

you safe from terrorism.

That's hardly the view in Franklin, Tenn. Brian Hassler, owner of the Franklin Gun Shop, says business rose 30% after Sept. 11. Most of the sales were handguns. "People feel they need one for protection in these times," Hassler said after the attacks. "I've just been working eight days a week. I've really had to increase my hours to keep up with all of the demand."

Hassler opened his clean, bright shop two years ago in a strip mall next to a hair and tanning salon. He gets help behind the counter from his wife and mother, both nurses, and his retired father. The family business also aims to be family-friendly. The store is light-years from the dark, seedy image of a pawnshop. "Just think of us as the Williams-Sonoma of guns," Hassler says.



By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

Women awaiting haircuts next door like to browse among the racks of targets, holsters, pepper spray and rifles. Christian and country musicians and Tennessee Titans football players come by. A traveling sports equipment saleswoman bought a handgun after someone broke into her car. A teenager came in with his mother; he was leaving for college and wanted her to be safe. The customers are ordinary, the transactions routine, the guns just guns -- not steel symbols of mayhem and death.

"If you have grown up in New York, only criminals and police have guns," Hassler says. "Rural people have access to land, places to shoot. They like to go hunting. Urban people don't. The whole issue is largely urban vs. rural."

In 2000, that translated into Al Gore vs. George W. Bush: urban gun-control advocates for Gore, rural and small-town gun rights advocates for Bush.

Even as development sweeps through Franklin, parts of town and most of its surroundings remain rural. Two-thirds of people there say current gun laws are sufficient, while two-thirds in Montclair say new laws are needed. Gun ownership in Franklin is slightly above the national rate, but near zero in Montclair.

Several traumas have reinforced Montclair's aversion to guns. Seven years ago, a friendly little post office turned into a combat zone. Within a few moments, a gunman killed four, wounded one and forced the whole town to reconsider its pastoral, neighborly sense of itself. Two years later, a despondent woman shot and killed her three little daughters and then herself. Matt Gross was shot a month later by a Palestinian gunman who had been in the country about a month and gave a motel address when he bought the gun in Florida.

Matt, now 32, has seizures and no sense of smell. He can still play the guitar and talk politics, but he doesn't know how to use the Yellow Pages. "He has a lot of problems



Photos by Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

Franklin, Tenn.: Brian Hassler, owner of Franklin Gun Shop, shows a reproduction of an 1866 Winchester rifle. Geared toward families, the shop did brisk business after Sept. 11.

understanding the way the world works," his father says.

Dorothy McGann had no personal connection to the post office shootings, just a compulsion "to do something positive out of the shambles." So she started a Montclair chapter of Ceasefire New Jersey. The group sponsors peer mediation, counseling and conflict resolution programs in the Montclair schools, and offers scholarships to students involved in them. The schools, police department, town council and mayor have come through with "tremendous support," McGann says.

Gun-control advocacy is nearly as prevalent in Montclair as Christianity is in Franklin, and it creates a similar class of outsiders. John Montenigro and Joan Furlong discovered that at a memorial service for the post office victims, one of whom was a friend.

"It was groups presenting political positions to a captive audience. We were peripherally part of it," says Furlong, a landscape architect and mother of two. Adds her husband, a National Rifle Association member whose business is making lubricants for military equipment: "There was this great assumption that everyone shared one point of view. I felt isolated."

The couple say teaching people to handle guns safely is as much a responsibility of citizenship as voting and paying taxes. They have tried to crack the prevailing attitudes, at the expense of a couple of friendships. They were rebuffed when they tried to get gun safety materials distributed in the schools.

Peter Gross says gun safety education is dangerous because "it makes kids feel comfortable with

guns. The gun does not seem like such a foreboding thing. That doesn't solve our problems."

He says he wishes the gun debate were less polarized. "My guess is that if I really sat down with some people from Franklin, we'd agree on a lot of things."



Montclair, N.J.: Peter Gross, left, sits with son Matt, who was injured in a shooting at the top of the Empire State Building five years ago. Six other people were shot in the incident, one fatally. Peter Gross has become a gun-control activist.

Behind the Story: A Reporter's Notebook



Jill Lawrence
Politics reporter,
USA TODAY

I got the idea for this series from the exit polls after the 2000 election. The country was divided equally between the two presidential candidates, and you could almost predict who voted for Bush and Gore by a few key characteristics — among them where they lived, what they thought about guns, and how often they went to church. I wondered how different people and communities would seem up close. I thought it would be interesting to get to know a community on each side of the divide and in effect introduce one half of America to the other.

Some of the hardest work came in the next couple of months as we looked for communities that reflected the two Americas. I spent a lot of time on the Internet, looking at Census and marketing data. I settled on Franklin, Tenn., as a Bush town because of its good mix of economic and religious conservatives and Montclair, N.J., as a Gore town —

a little slice of city in the suburbs.

I didn't know anyone in either place, but I was able to find natural networkers — real estate types, school publicists, pastors — to introduce me around. I went to all kinds of meetings and got to know lots of people. It was harder in Franklin than in Montclair, just because people are more reserved there. But in the end it worked out. We also polled each community to confirm the differences in attitudes.

I was in Montclair on my final day of research (on what by then was an eight-month project), when the photographer's pager went off. The World Trade Center had been hit by a plane. We raced up the mountain above Montclair to see the smoking skyline and watched both towers fall. I remember thinking, 'that's the end of a nation divided.'

But in the next couple of weeks, we realized we had the makings of a terrific revised project. Since we had baseline data, we could now go back to our communities and see if the Sept. 11 attacks had caused any fundamental changes in political and cultural attitudes. The result: the three-part series "One Nation, Divided."

One of the most interesting aspects of the project was its aftermath. The Franklin business community did not like the depiction of Franklin as a religious town with conservative attitudes on social issues and the racial issues linked to its Civil War heritage. There was a great hue and cry in the Franklin and Nashville newspapers, but many observers and analysts felt the town had been captured accurately. Montclair was depicted as a confrontational place where people think they're religious but they're actually not, and the town's collective preoccupation with race can sometimes turn ugly. But nobody in Montclair complained. In fact they recognized and approved of the way their town was portrayed.

Jill Lawrence is a political writer at USA TODAY. Prior to joining the paper in 1996, she was a columnist for The Associated Press and a free-lance magazine and newspaper writer. She has covered every presidential campaign since 1988. She won a National Headliner Award for her AP columns in 1995 and taught journalism at American University in 1997.

Jill received a music history degree from the University of Michigan in 1975 and a masters degree in journalism from New York University in 1976. She started her journalism career with UPI in Charleston, W.Va., where she covered coal, floods, politics, triple-A baseball and the state legislature. She joined AP in Harrisburg, Pa., in 1979 and became the primary reporter on the Three Mile Island nuclear accident. She moved to Washington with AP in 1982.

She lives in Washington, D.C., with her two sons and her husband, John Martin.

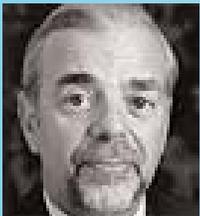
For discussion

1. Think about the community you live in or the one you grew up in. Does it have more in common with Franklin, Tenn. or Montclair, N.J.? In what ways?
2. Jill Lawrence's article states that "Religion is the wellspring of the culture gap." The political map shows strong support for Gore in the northeast and west coast, while most of the "middle" of the country supported Bush. Are there other important factors besides religion that you think causes the map to look this way?
3. In a Pew Research Center poll conducted in March, most Americans said there is either the right amount (54%) or too little (24%) expression of religious faith and prayer by political leaders, while just 16% thought there is too much. What are your views on whether political leaders should refer to religion, faith and prayer when they are speaking to the American public?
4. According to these articles, many candidates from both the right and the left have found that expressing their own religious faith publicly is a good way to establish trust among voters. Can you think of a recent example of a political leader or candidate referring to their own religious faith or beliefs? What was your reaction?
5. Why do you think guns are such a divisive issue in American society and politics? Do you think, as a result of the terrorist attacks, this issue will become less of a dividing line or more of one? Why?
6. In describing the "Cultural Divide" in America, a lot of attention is paid to the differences between cities like Franklin, Tenn. and Montclair N.J. Are there other values which Americans tend to share, regardless of where they live? Are there views Americans hold that set them apart from citizens of most other countries?

Future implications

1. Stuart Rothenberg says "Below the veneer of unity is still a deeply divided nation." Over the next twenty years, do you think America will remain largely unified, or will the cultural divide grow deeper over time? Explain.
2. Recent elections and polls suggest that there are about the same number of people on each side of the "Culture Divide," leading to closely contested presidential elections and a closely divided Congress. Over the next 20 years, do you think one side of this culture divide will become more dominant? If so, why?
3. Based on the actions and personal lives of recent political leaders, do you think that the values gap will have more or less of an impact on future presidential elections? Explain how future electoral maps will compare to the one from 2000.

About The Expert



Andrew Kohut is Director of the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press in Washington, DC. Kohut was President of The Gallup Organization from 1979 to 1989. In 1989, he founded Princeton Survey Research Associates, an attitude and opinion research firm specializing in media, politics and public policy studies. Kohut is a press commentator on the meaning and interpretation of opinion poll results. In recent national elections he has served as a public opinion consultant and analyst for National Public Radio. Kohut has been a regular contributor to the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer. He has written widely about public opinion for leading newspapers and magazines, as well as for scholarly journals. Kohut has co-authored three books: "The Diminishing Divide," "The People, The Press and Politics" and "Estranged Friends? The Transatlantic Consequences of Societal Change." Kohut received an A.B. degree from Seton Hall University and studied graduate sociology at Rutgers.

Additional resources

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press
<http://people-press.com>