CBS-TV *60 Minutes*
What Assault Weapons Ban?
produced by Rome Hartman
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Lesley Stahl (in studio): When you spend time at a gun show, as we did last week, it's difficult to figure out why the National Rifle Association is mounting such a vigorous campaign to repeal the banning of assault weapons. Maybe nobody told them, but assault weapons are still for sale, no matter what the President's crime bill decrees. They're being sold by the thousands. One gun dealer in Louisville, Bill Perkins, even goes so far as to call the ban "a joke."

[cut to Bill Perkins' gun store]

Bill Perkins: As far as the ban doing what it was intended to do... it's silly. It's not doin' it. It's not gonna do it.

Stahl [voiceover, footage of people shopping at gun show in Miami]: Perkins says that the minute it looked like the ban would pass, people who never thought about an assault weapon rushed out, determined not to let the government tell them what they *couldn't* have. And *bought* one. Or *two...*

Perkins: Clinton and that administration's been good to the gun business.

Stahl [interviewing Perkins]: Clinton's been *good* to the gun business.

Perkins [smiles]: He's been... he's been one of the best salespeople around. No doubt.

Stahl: Bill Clinton?

Perkins: Sure.

Stahl [smiles]: When he signed the assault weapons ban, you're saying that *that* act itself spurred the sort of...

Perkins: That act did *more* to put more firearms out there on the streets...

[Reaction shot of Stahl looking dejected]

Perkins: ... as far as in the hands of citizens. He accomplished what gun dealers have tried to accomplish for years, and that is to get these sales *up.*

Stahl: So it's like an *advertisement?* Is that what you're saying?

Perkins: That's *all* it was.

Stahl: But why would...

Perkins: It was the best advertising campaign you could imagine!

[cut to Lesley Stahl at Miami Gun show]

Stahl: Advertising *so* good that it made 1994 the best year for gun sales in a *generation,* and the best year for the sales of assault weapons ever. And yet, even with that uprecedented *demand,* there is still an enourmous *supply* of these so-called "banned" guns available, and it's all legal. At this Miami gun show, there are literally hundreds and hundreds of the AR-15, like this [picks up AR-15 from display table], the TEC-9, and all the others on the banned list. And this is just *one* show in *one city.*

Stahl [voiceover, footage of various semi autos at Miami show, people shopping]: Now, why are all these guns *still* legal to sell? Because *they were made before* the law took effect last September. The ban lists 19 guns that can't be made or imported anymore. But those already in circulation? They're fine.

[cut to footage of President Clinton's speech]

So when President Clinton signed the bill and said:

President Clinton: We will finally ban these assault weapons from our streets that have no purpose other... than... to... *kill!*

Stahl [voiceover, footage of gun shop wall full of semiautos, ad for TEC-9s featuring the legend "BANNED" and price $299, with additional 32-rd factory mags for $39.99, footage of customers a Miami show]: ...it was a good applause line, but these "banned" weapons are still *everywhere,* on the streets, in gun shops, advertised in every gun publication, and at gun shows all over the country.

[cut to Bob Smith at Miami gun show]

Bob Smith is the promoter of the Miami show.

Bob Smith [banner over his left shoulder reads "Weapons Unlimited, Inc." and "Instant Cash for Guns"]: Right now, there is so much product on the market it's actually overwhelming. The prices are falling in some cases.

Stahl [interviewing Smith]: Would you call it a *glut?*

Smith: In a way, yeah. Exactly.

Stahl: That is almost the opposite...I won't say almost...that *is* the opposite of what was intended by this ban.

Smith: It's had an opposite effect, absolutely.

Stahl: Can you *guess* how many of these assault weapons are out there for sale right now? Are...are we talking hundreds of thousands?

Smith: At *least* that many.

Stahl [voiceover, footage of MAC-10s and TEC-9s on table at Miami gun show]: Actually, the government estimates that the *total* number in circulation is closer to a *million and a half.*

[cut to Bob Perkins' gun shop]

Perkins: I presume that most of the distributors and manufacturers saw this thing coming. It's sort of like playing the stock market. You're taking a *bet* whether... "will they be banned or will they not be banned." And if you hedge your bets by, you know, stockpiling these things, gettin' them in the warehouse, gettin' 'em manufactured, gettin' 'em stamped *before* the enactment of the bill and if they *are* in fact banned, then you're gonna come out on top.

Stahl: And some did that?

Perkins: Sure they did.

Stahl [voiceover, footage of Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D- CA) at podium, holding up an AR-15]: California Senator Dianne Feinstein worked for more than a year to get the assault weapons bill passed, in the face of ferocious opposition from the National Rifle Association. She says she got the *best* she could.

[cut to Sen. Dianne Feinstein's office]

Sen. Dianne Feinstein: If I could have gotten 51 votes in the Senate of the United States for an *out right ban,* picking up every one of them... "Mr. and Mrs. America, turn 'em all in," I would have done it. I *could not do that.* The votes weren't here.

Stahl [interviewing Feinstein]: But are you worried that it got watered down so much that it's lost its *real* effectiveness?

Feinstein: Let me... let me tell you, there is a *very* potent part of this legislation and it is the ban on the manufacture and sale of clips of more than ten bullets.

Stahl [voiceover, footage of gun show display table piled high with high-capacity magazines]: But just as with the guns, it's not so potent after all, because all magazines or clips manufactured before last September are perfectly legal to own, buy, and sell, no matter how many bullets they hold. Ten... 20... 30... *50.* And there are *mountains* of them out there.

Unidentified Magazine Dealer [banner in background behind him and (his wife?) reads "Easy Cash Pistols Assault Rifles Revolvers & Accessories Buy Sell Trade"]: So I might have what's on this table, there may be... hundreds of thousands of more mags just like 'em that are still pre-ban date.

Stahl [interviewing dealer]: So if I wanted to buy a gun with 30 rounds, or 50, or 20, I wouldn't have any trouble?

Dealer: Not at all.

Stahl: How?

Dealer: It's not against the law.

Stahl: Because these were made before.

Dealer: Right.

Stahl: But is there just an *endless* supply of these mags with more than ten rounds?

Dealer: Actually, *yes.*

Stahl [voiceover, footage of boxes of mags, policeman at desk, panning down to service pistol, policeman loading double-stack mag]: To make sure that supply remains endless, some gun distributors have come up with a creative strategy. *They're* trying to get old pre-ban magazines back from *cops* to be resold to the public, because the law applies to *all* magazines, including those for pistols.

[cut to photo of gun-swap flyer advertising]

- Your Dept's Glocks +$0 = New Glocks,
- Your Dept's Mags +$0 = New Mags

The flyer, sent to police chiefs, offers to make an even swap: brand new pistols and magazines, in exchange for the police departments' used ones.

[cut to Louisville, KY police chief Doug Hamilton's office]

Doug Hamilton: At first, of course, it seems to violate the first law of fraud, you know "if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is"... (laughs)

Stahl [voiceover]: Doug Hamilton is the police chief in Louisville, Kentucky. He got the swap offer from his local distributor, Kiesler Police Supply.

Stahl [interviewing Hamilton]: They were trying to get around this *ban* because they could sell *your* gun...

Hamilton: They could sell our weapon...

Stahl: ...with the 15 rounds...

Hamilton: ...and they could sell our magazine, out on the street, retail over the counter, and it was strictly, like I say, legal.

Stahl [voiceover, footage of police on indoor firing range, policeman loading Ruger P-89? 9mm service pistol]: Legal, because the law says that new magazines that hold more than ten bullets can be made *only* if they're sold to law enforcement, while the old ones can be sold to anyone. That's why gun dealers are so eager to get the old 15, 17 or 20 round clips back from the police.

Stahl [interviewing Hamilton, handing him a double- stack pistol mag]: And this is what the manufacturer (sic) wants when he offers you a swap. This is the thing.

Hamilton: In the final analysis, that was the thing in Louisville, Kentucky that was wanted by the distributor...was our magazines. 2,100 of 'em.

Stahl [voiceover, exterior of Kiesler Police Supply]: The owner of Kiesler Police Supply wouldn't talk to us on camera, but defended the offer as a simple and legal business deal.

[cut to sign on gun store display case, which is held up to the camera via electronic graphics, it reads: Glock M-17 Police Trade-Ins 9mm Fixed Sight $550 9mm Night Sight $609]

Several police departments have taken them up on it, and police trade-ins are *already* on gun shop shelves.

Hamilton: I thought for *us* to participate in it, would be a violation of the spirit of the law.

Stahl [interviewing Hamilton]: But what about for *them* to make the offer?

Hamilton: I think that they're just exploiting...a loophole.

Stahl: The obvious question is...there...the police gun that gets traded, *could* turn around and be sold to someone who goes out and shoots a policeman.

Hamilton: Sure. There's no doubt about that, there's no doubt that...that's the worst case scenario and your greatest fear.

[cut to Sen. Diane Feinstein's office]

Feinstein: Does this violate the spirit and intent of the law? *Absolutely.* Should they be doing this? *No.* And, I think it does say that there are craven interests out there who simply wanna use this legislation to profiteer wherever they possibly can, and I can assure you if I can figure a way to stop it, I'll try to do that.

Stahl [voiceover, pan along display table with UZIs and Tec-9s]: Senator Feinstein *thought* she had figured out a way to stop another problem. She wrote something called a "physical features" test into the law, designed to keep gunmakers from turning their banned guns into legal ones by making just a few minor changes. The law bans any new gun that has two or more of these military-style features: [closeup of hand pointing out features on gun show table] a pistol grip, a folding stock, a bayonet mount, a flash supressor, or a *grenade* launcher.

Feinstein: It also, in its physical features test, is aimed at copycats, and one of the things that we found if you just *ban* 19 specific weapons, suddenly the *name* changes, and instead of an AK-47, you have a Mitchell this, or a Norinco that. And to a great extent we get at this.

Stahl [voiceover, footage of Norinco MAK-90 rifle]: But once again, the ban has *backfired.* Five months after it took effect, the copycats are *already* out. [cut to photo graphics] This is the TEC-22, banned by the assault weapons bill. *This* is the new Sport 22 from the same manufacturer. The only difference? The new gun has no threads on the barrel. [footage of AK-47 and the MAK- 90] The ban *specifically* outlaws the AK-47, but it doesn't do anything about the MAK-90.

Stahl [interviewing unidentified dealer at Miami gun show about the MAK-90]: Isn't this exactly the same gun as the AK-47?

Dealer: It's very similar.

Stahl: What's different? Can you show me?

Dealer: It's got a thumbhole stock, which is necessary for importation, and it does not have a bayonet.

Stahl [pointing]: No bayonet, which would have gone here...

Dealer [pointing]: Which would have gone here.

Stahl: And, just a different grip, really...

Dealer: Exactly.

[cut to Bill Perkins' gun shop]

Perkins: One of the most ludicrous things I think that I'm aware of is banning the bayonets on the end of a rifle...

[reaction shot of Stahl nodding]

Perkins: That's a knife blade. Why ban that in the first place? You mean, if somebody walks in with, you know, some one of these alias assault-type weapons, and it has a blade, you're going to look to see if it has a knife before you get scared? I mean, it doesn't make any sense!

Stahl [voiceover, footage of Colt assembly line]: People in the gun business say Congress *asked* for what's happening by writing a *cosmetics* law, focusing on how guns *look* rather than how they shoot. Colt, based in Connecticut, is one of America's oldest gunmakers. Ron Whittaker is president.

[cut to Ron Whittaker's office]

Ron Whittaker: We had a crime bill that was supposed to focus on crime, and hopefully, criminals. We end up with an assault weapon ban that has nothing to do with defining an assault weapon, but it had a lot to do with what something looks like.

Stahl [voiceover, footage of Colt AR-15 Sporter]: *No question,* Colt's Sporter rifle looks menacing. It failed the features test because it has both a pistol grip, and a flash supressor on the end of the barrel. [cut to photo of Colt Match Target brochure] They can't legally make it anymore. So now they make the "MatchTarget." *Can you tell the difference?* No flash supressor on the end...

[cut to Sen. Dianne Feinstein's office]

Stahl [showing Colt brochure to Feinstein]: And now, it will be legally sold, with a new name, and this tiny little feature on the end removed.

Feinstein: Well, that's true.

Stahl: Well, what is your reaction when I tell you this? Are you... I mean, you wrote this legislation in *such* good faith, and both you and all the other people, the police chiefs...

Feinstein [smiles]: My reaction is that there is a very *craven* set of people out there who are going to essentially traffic in these arms if they can, one way or another.

[cut to Colt president Whittaker's office]

Stahl [interviewing Whittaker, footage of Whittaker looking dour and expressionless, blinking his eyes (as the question is asked?)]: The charge is, that you are just taking advantage of a loophole in the law, basically subverting the spirit of what Congress intended, which was to get this gun off the streets. So, what's your answer to that?

Whittaker: Well, that's flat out not true. They passed a cosmetic law, and now they're sitting back saying, "oh, woe is me... people are changing the cosmetics!" I don't understand that logic!

Stahl [voiceover, footage of shoppers at Miami gun show]: Whether he understands the logic or not, the law doesn't seem to be working. [cut to closeups of TEC-9s] Take the TEC-9, made by Intratec of Miami. It has shown up several times on the government's top ten list of guns used in crime. It's small and easily concealable, and comes standard with a 32 bullet clip. It's banned *by name* in the assault weapons law.

[cut to Bill Perkins' gun shop]

Perkins: That gun is not exactly known to be well made... but now *since* the ban, all the sudden it's became (sic) quite desirable. Now it's the... mysterious item that everybody wants to come look at and buy...

Stahl [interviewing Perkins]: Because it's banned.

Perkins: ... because it's banned. Exactly.

Stahl [voiceover, footage of Stahl looking at and handling a TEC-9 in Perkins' gun shop, footage of trade show]: It'll be a *long time* before gun dealers run out of *old* TEC-9s, but when they do, Intratec is *ready.* They're displaying a new version, slightly altered, that they're calling the AB-10.

[cut to Sen. Feinstein's office]

Stahl [interviewing Feinstein]: Do you have any idea what AB stands for?

Feinstein: No... no...

Stahl: After ban. And they're selling it with the old clip... [of] 32 rounds, they're actually *selling* the new gun with the 32 round...

Feinstein: ... with the 32 round...

Stahl: ... that was manufactured before.

Feinstein: Well... ah... I'll take a good look at that. If their attitude is just to thumb their nose at 67% of the American people who are supporting something with a view that it's gonna get these guns off the street... If they're gonna violate that, then the Congress needs to see that.

Stahl: But would you admit that because of the composition of the new Congress, that it's unlikely that you're going to get any *more* gun control laws passed, in *this* Congress.

Feinstein: Oh, I think that's true. In this Congress.

Stahl: So no going forward?

Feinstein: I think that's true. [end]