

Playing Deadly Games with 'Gun Rights'

Pro-gun extremists routinely edit out of the Second Amendment its stated purpose of having "a well-regulated militia" maintain state "security." The tampering lets them pretend the Founders would be okay with slaughters like the Newtown massacre, as Bill Moyers and Michael Winship reflect.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

The grim anniversary of the Newtown, Connecticut, killings, with 28 dead, reminded us of that moment back in 2000 when Charlton Heston made his defiant boast at the NRA convention that gun control advocates would have to pry his rifle from his "cold, dead hands."

You would have thought he had returned to that fantasy world of Hollywood where, in a previous incarnation, he portrayed those famous Indian killers Andrew Jackson and Buffalo Bill Cody, whose Wild West, as Cody marketed it, still courses through the bloodstream of American mythology.

For sure, Heston wasn't channeling his most famous role, as Moses in *The Ten Commandments*, striding down from Mount Sinai with a stone tablet on which had been chiseled God's blueprint for a civilized society, including, "Thou Shalt Not Kill!"

But the Good Lord seems not to have anticipated the National Rifle Association, its delegates lustily cheering Heston as his demagoguery brought them to their feet. Started after the Civil War by two former officers of the Union army who were disconsolate that their troops had shown such poor marksmanship in battle, its purpose was to "promote and encourage rifle shooting on a scientific basis."

Now, its conscience as cold and dead as Charlton Heston's grip on his gun, the NRA has become the armed bully of American politics, the enabler of the "gunfighter nation," as cultural historian Richard Slotkin calls it, whose exceptionalism of which so many patriots fervently boast, includes a high tolerance for the slaughter of the innocent.

There has been a lot of killing in America since Newtown a year ago, perhaps more than 30,000 gun deaths since that fatal day. And gun purchases are way up. The biggest publicly traded firearms manufacture in the United States, Sturm Ruger, had more than half a billion dollars in sales for the first nine months of this year, 45 percent higher than two years ago, with a 67 percent profit rise over the same period.

Bloomberg Businessweek reports that for the first 11 months of 2013, FBI

background checks for gun purchases rose to more than 19 million, up from less than 9 million in 2005: “Not every background check leads to a firearms sale, but the direction of the statistics is compellingly clear.”

Mother Jones has counted 194 children shot to death since Newtown a year ago; probably more by the time you read this. Average age: 6. The magazine’s Mark Follman writes that after Newtown, “The National Rifle Association and its allies argued that arming more adults is the solution to protecting children, be it from deranged mass shooters or from home invaders.”

But what *Mother Jones* discovered is a “stark rejoinder to that view” – 127 of the children died in their own homes and dozens more in the homes of family, friends and neighbors, not strangers. Seventy-two pulled the trigger themselves or were shot by another youngster (only four adults have been found liable in those cases). At least 52 of the deaths involved a child handling a gun left unsecured.

Texas leads the country in the number of young ones killed by guns. While 11 states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws making it tougher to own guns since Newtown, Texas passed ten new laws *against* sane restrictions on guns.

Which is partly why last month, four women had lunch at a restaurant in Arlington, Texas, just outside Dallas. It was a planning meeting for Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, a group started after the Newtown slayings that describes itself as “the Mothers Against Drunk Driving of Gun Reform.”

The founder of Moms Demand Action told a reporter, “We’re not anti-gun. We’re not against the Second Amendment. We just believe in common sense to end the growing epidemic of gun violence in America.”

Nevertheless, as the four women ate and talked, about 40 members of a pro-gun group called Open Carry Texas champions of guns anywhere and everywhere: church, school, shopping mall gathered outside the restaurant, many of them with their firearms. They said they were there not to intimidate but to make a point. Sure, as if real men need guns to make a point.

“Thou Shalt Not Kill,” but if you do, hide behind the Second Amendment made holier and more sacrosanct by the NRA than God’s own commandment.

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