

The Tea Party's Confederate Roots

For “branding” purposes, the Tea Party pretends to reflect the views of the Constitution’s Framers but it actually follows the Slave South’s hostility to the strong federal government that the Framers created. That historical link to the Confederacy is crucial for understanding the Tea Party’s goals, as Beverly Bandler explains.

By Beverly Bandler

The political movement known as the Tea Party (a historically distorted label derived from the famous 1773 anti-British protest in Boston) is not a structured, accountable political party with a constructive, coherent agenda based on any recognized economic or social principles. It is even devoid of any real historical frame of reference, although some anal

ysts have likened the Tea Party obstructionist tactics to the behavior of the pro-slavery South before the Civil War.

Historian Garry Wills, for instance, notes how some Tea Party activists and politicians “do not recognize laws and Supreme Court decisions, or constitutional guarantees of free speech.” Some states under the sway of the Tea Party have blocked the work of “navigators” assigned to help people obtain health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, or have prohibited health centers from advising women about their abortion rights, or have restricted voting in defiance of constitutional and federal protections.

“The people behind these efforts are imitating what the Confederate States did even before they formally seceded in 1861,” Wills wrote recently. “Already they ran a parallel government, in which the laws of the national government were blatantly disregarded. They denied the right of abolitionists to voice their arguments, killing or riding out of town over three hundred of them in the years before the Civil War. They confiscated or destroyed abolitionist tracts sent to Southern states by United States mail. In the United States Congress, they instituted ‘gag rules’ that automatically tabled (excluded from discussion) anti-slavery petitions, in flagrant abuse of the First Amendment’s right of petition.

“The Southern states were able to live in such open disregard for national law because the national Democratic-Republican Party needed the Southern part of its coalition so badly that it colluded with the Southern states’ violations of the Constitution. In 1835, for instance, President Andrew Jackson did not enforce the sacredness of the US mail, allowing states to refuse delivery of anti-slave

mailings unless a recipient revealed his identity, requested delivery, and had his name published for vilification.

“Just as the Old South compelled the national party to shelter its extremism, today’s Tea Party leaders make Republicans toe their line. Most Republicans do not think laws invalid because the president is a foreign-born Muslim with a socialist agenda. But they do not renounce, or even criticize, their partners who think that. The rare Republican who dares criticize a Rush Limbaugh is quickly made to repent and apologize. John Boehner holds the nation hostage because the Tea Party holds him hostage.”

A Mouse That Roared

Yet, the Tea Party is a relatively small movement, drawn from the estimated 10 percent of Americans who make up the Far Right defined as the overwrought, hypervigilant, paranoid ultraright wing authoritarians, the “True Believers.” Another 20 percent of Americans are considered conservative by temperament but usually hew closer to the political center-right, keeping some distance from the wild-eyed ultra-right.

Though this less radical faction is a bit more tethered to reality, it will embrace hard-right conservatism under extreme social or economic stress, such as the confluence of the Great Recession of 2008 and the recognition that America’s demographic changes are creating a more diverse and less white country. The radicalization of some from the center-right also has been influenced by the sheer political momentum of the Tea Party, which is viewed as the right-wing faction that is “standing up” to Barack Obama, the first African-American president.

Thus, this “swing” group of more moderate conservatives has been actively decoupling itself from the center-right GOP mainstream and creating a worrisome super-right-wing faction that is capable of destabilizing the governing of the United States. As we’ve seen in recent weeks with the federal government shutdown and the threatened credit default, this Tea Party-driven movement can neutralize the interests of the 70 percent of Americans who comprise what is characterized as the rational, moderate majority, ranging from the center to left of center.

For John Dean, a former Republican and White House counsel to President Richard Nixon, the Tea Party “conservatives” are not conservative in any traditional sense but rather a group of rash and radical authoritarians the “same old authoritarian conservatives with a new label a notoriously nasty crew delighted with the chaos they have created [who] actively work to screw up federal government in the hope of literally destroying it.”

Indeed, the Tea Partiers repudiate what political conservatism has meant historically. "True conservatism is cautious and prudent," writes Dean, who has described himself as a Goldwater conservative.

Extraordinary Anger

Traditional conservatives are not on some social mission to create a "Christian America," nor are they so extreme that they would use a threatened default on the national debt to extract ideological concessions. The vitriol directed at Barack Obama also is unprecedented to many longtime political observers. Many Tea Partiers insist that Obama has no right to be president, calling him a Muslim, a foreigner, a gangster, a fascist, a communist, the anti-Christ.

For writer Gary Kamiya, Tea Party Republicans are comparable to wailing babies, "disturbingly infantile," a group that has "reverted to a pre-potty-trained state." The infantilism is underscored by Tea Partiers dressing up in period costumes with tea bags hanging from their heads. And there is something not only infantile but destructive when the Tea Partiers confuse the cause of liberty from the Revolutionary War with the cause of pre-Civil War slavery as it was rationalized across the South behind extra-constitutional theories of states' rights and nullificationism.

Kamiya reminds us that historian Richard Hofstadter traced the long tradition of irrational, conspiratorial and paranoid thinking in America history. Yet, Hofstadter's work is a chilling reminder that the right-wing was considered mostly marginal a half century ago but has since entered the mainstream propelled by a confusing (and often contradictory) mix of fundamentalist Christianity, fear of the Other, unfettered capitalism and unchecked libertarianism.

Author Sarah Robinson argues that Southern conservatives have blended their nostalgia for Plantation America with the narcissistic selfishness of Ayn Rand who "updated the ancient slaveholder ethic for the modern age," i.e. the Old South's concept of personal "liberty" as a force that justified slave-ownership and was divorced from any societal good.

"The Tea Party became the voice of the unleashed id of the old Southern order, bringing it forward into the 21st century with its full measure of selfishness, racism, superstition, and brutality intact," Robinson wrote. "From its origins in the fever swamps of the lowland south, the worldview of the old Southern aristocracy can now be found nationwide."

An Anarchic Mob

The Tea Party acts like an anarchic, "libertarian mob" that appears to define

“liberty” as a “divine right to do whatever we damn well please” and that finds all expertise and authority (the paradox of authoritarianism) inherently suspect and who believe the so-called “elites” historians, constitutional lawyers, economists, political scientists and teachers can’t possibly know anything worthwhile. The Tea Partiers reveal not only a profound ignorance but an extraordinary arrogance.

Commenting on American culture, author Isaac Asimov once said: “Anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that ‘my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge’.”

English writer George Monbiot asks: “How did politics in the United States come to be dominated by people who make a virtue out of ignorance?... In the most powerful nation on Earth, 1 adult in 5 believes the sun revolves around the Earth; only 26 percent accept that evolution takes place by means of natural selection; two-thirds of young adults are unable to find Iraq on a map; two-thirds of U.S. voters cannot name the three branches of government.”

We Americans also appear to have made a virtue out of bad manners and coarse discourse. Yet, perhaps most threatening to a functioning democratic Republic, the worst elements of this ignorance and extremism, which were on the margins of society in the 1950s, have expanded into the mainstream. For the Tea Party and its unhappy, fearful sympathizers, belief trumps facts; government by extortion trumps the forming of a rational consensus; indeed verifiable facts and careful reasoning are suspect as some tell-tale sign of liberal elitism.

Centralizing Authority

Tea Party leaders also have sold their followers on a false understanding of the U.S. Constitution and what the key Framers the likes of George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and Gouverneur Morris were trying to create.

The Framers despised the idea of states’ rights and were determined to concentrate governing power in the federal government. In other words, what the Tea Party leaders are selling their followers is a neo-Confederate interpretation of the Constitution that turns the document inside out.

“They don’t realize that the Constitution represented the most important assertion of central authority in American history,” writes investigative reporter Robert Parry, who notes that the Constitution must be understood in the context of the Articles of Confederation which it replaced. The Articles guided the new country starting in 1777 and granted broad authority to the 13 original states with only a weak national government, described as a “league of

friendship.”

George Washington was among the fiercest of the critics of the Articles, having experienced their ineffectiveness firsthand while watching his Continental Army suffer when states reneged on promises of support. Virginian James Madison, then a protégé of Washington and a chief architect of the Constitution, saw the Articles “holding back the nation’s economic growth” and wanted to take the states from being dominant to “subordinately useful,” Parry wrote.

So, with the Articles of Confederation failing and the young nation’s hard-won independence in danger the Constitutional Convention met in secret in Philadelphia in 1787 and replaced the Articles with a new system that granted sweeping authority to the federal government, including to “provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States.” Congress was empowered to pass all laws deemed “necessary and proper” to carry out those powers.

That the Constitution centralized power was well understood at the time, prompting fierce opposition from so-called Anti-Federalists, who protested that the earlier system in which the states were independent and sovereign was being swept away. Some Southern slaveholders feared that the Constitution eventually would be used by the North to eradicate slavery. However, after a contentious ratification process in 1788, the Constitution became the law of the land.

Still, the political fight wasn’t over. In the decades that followed, Southern whites used their disproportionate clout since they got to count their black slaves as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of representation to argue for what, in effect, was a reinterpretation of the Constitution as something more like what it had replaced, the Articles of Confederation, with states’ rights preeminent and the federal government tightly constrained.

The Tea Party has essentially convinced its followers that this slaveholders’ interpretation of the Constitution is what the Framers intended, but that’s simply distorted history, writes Parry.

Disinterest in History

The American Bar Association has pointed out that the image of education in civics, government and history as “dry, dull and irrelevant” was a product of the 1960s. Many of that decade’s rebellions were welcome (challenges to sterile conformity, bigotry, segregation, inequality, and double standards among them), but the marked deterioration of American education in general that is said to have begun then has had dire consequences.

While more people have attended higher grades, the quality of education has been characterized as low, many Americans are considered functionally illiterate. The

United States has fallen to “average” in international education rankings, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, receiving scores around 500 on a scale that goes up to 1,000: 487 in math, 500 in reading and 502 in science. Lack of education about their own government and the nation’s history is clearly demonstrated in Tea Party rhetoric and activism.

The current crop of anti-government (and anti-institutional) libertarians appears to be a destructive combination of the Sixties’ version of anarchism and the Eighties’ “greed is good” selfishness with ample doses of narcissism reflective of both periods. In the process, much critical thinking has been lost.

Essayist and historian of ideas Mark Lilla describes the Tea Party as a makeshift “movement whose activists rage against ‘government’ and ‘the media,’ while the hotheads of talk radio and cable news declare that the conservative counterrevolution has begun.”

For Lilla, it is “a manifestation of deeper social and even psychological changes that the country has undergone in the past half-century.” We have a new political type: *the antipolitical Jacobins*, who have, he writes: “two classic American traits blanket distrust of institutions and an astonishing, and unwarranted, confidence in the self. They are apocalyptic pessimists about public life and childlike optimists swaddled in self-esteem when it comes to their own powers.”

Lilla views it as a new strain of populism that is “metastasizing before our eyes estranged, aimless, and as juvenile as our new century.”

Confederate Heritage

But is the Tea Party really a new national “grassroots” movement as frequently portrayed by the mainstream media, or does it have national pretensions while being basically regional? There are those who describe it as essentially an extremist neo-Confederate movement.

Texas-born writer Michael Lind noted in 2011 that while there may be Tea Party sympathizers throughout the country, the House of Representatives Tea Party faction was overwhelmingly Southern in its origin, 63 percent that year. After the 2012 election, the Tea Party Caucus in Congress weakened, but it still has some 46 members in the 435-seat House of Representatives and six in the 100-seat Senate. Some 34 of those members come from the South or 65 percent of the total Tea Party Caucus.

“The fact that Tea Party conservatism speaks with a pronounced Southern drawl may have escaped the attention of the mainstream media, but it is obvious to

members of Congress who have to try to work with these disproportionately-Southern fanatics,” Lind wrote two years ago.

There are also troubling parallels between the coercive tactics that the politicians from the Old South used in the decades before the Civil War and those employed by today’s Tea Partiers.

As Lind wrote, “From the earliest years of the American republic, white Southern conservatives when they have lost elections and found themselves in the political minority have sought to extort concession from national majorities by paralyzing or threatening to destroy the United States. In 1861, the South tried to destroy the United States, rather than accept a legitimately elected president, Abraham Lincoln, whom it did not control.”

In Lind’s view, it’s clear that the Tea Party in Congress is merely the old Confederate Southern right-wing in new packaging. Even the Confederate battle flag makes regular appearances at Tea Party rallies, though for “branding” purposes the movement favors the Revolutionary War era’s yellow banner with a coiled snake and the “Don’t Tread on Me” motto.

Going to Extremes

Americans should understand that the GOP attempt to sabotage the Affordable Care Act was “unprecedented well beneath any reasonable standards of elected officials with fiduciary responsibility of governing,” according to congressional scholar Norman Ornstein.

In the recent government shutdown crisis instigated by the GOP (the cost of which has been estimated at \$24 billion), the Democratic Party and, eventually, some moderate Republicans stood their ground and stood up for the Constitution.

In effect, the Tea Party Republicans were trying to rewrite the Constitution (again) and its principles of majority rule to give a determined Southern-based minority (themselves) the power to coerce the majority of elected officials into either scrapping a duly-enacted law or watching the economy be sabotaged (via a government shutdown and debt default).

Of course, polls show that many Republicans, especially moderates, reject the Tea Party and its radicalism. It’s also clearly true that many Southerners reject neo-Confederate hostility toward the federal government and see themselves as Americans first. The South also boasts many fine and respected scholars and educational institutions, and has a good number of progressive organizations.

But it’s time that rational Americans from the South and everywhere else

recognize the threat from the Radical Right and its overlapping ideologies of Ayn Rand capitalism, Christian fundamentalism and neo-Confederate white supremacy forces that are corrupting and crippling the nation's political and economic system, while putting at risk the "general Welfare" of 317 million Americans.

As historian Garry Wills has noted, "The problem with modern Republicans is not fanaticism in the few but cowardice in the many, who let their fellows live in virtual secession from laws they disagree with."

The madness must be ended. The nation has been paying a high price for the fanaticism of the few and cowardice of the many.

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The Second Amendment's History

In his Second Inaugural Address, President Obama reaffirmed his intent to seek gun safety laws in the wake of the Newtown massacre, but the Right insists the Second Amendment protects the right of individuals to own assault rifles. What is the real history of the "right to bear arms," asks Beverly Bandler.

By Beverly Bandler

"A majority of Americans tell pollsters that they believe the Second Amendment protects private ownership of guns," wrote Garry Wills, historian and author of *James Madison*, in 1995.

What is the basis for this belief and why was Wills focusing on this issue in 1995? Does the sparse language of the Second Amendment actually guarantee an individual right to bear arms? Protect private gun ownership and the right to

carry firearms without restriction?



What does “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms” mean in the context of the entire Second Amendment language? In the context of the Constitution? In the context of the historical record? What was the feeling among the constitutional delegates about standing armies? Militias? Indeed, what were the politics of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights?

Is the meaning of the Second Amendment clear? If the “original meaning” of the Constitution is clear and unambiguous, why have we been paying the Supreme Court to interpret it for over 200 years? Why do some express a “majority opinion” and others dissent? Why do we have *constitutional scholars*?

James Madison was the author of the militia clause in the Constitution and the Second Amendment. What was Madison’s thinking and how do we know it? Are Madison’s words undebatable?

Have all the Supreme Court justices agreed on the interpretation of the Second Amendment? Why did the Court have one interpretation this amendment for almost one hundred years and then seem to reverse course? Was there a consensus on the Court?

What was the purpose of the Second Amendment? Was it to address self defense? To save slavery? To pacify the delegates from the South who were resisting support of the Constitution at the 1787 Convention because of the slavery issue?

No one would deny that slavery played an important role in the early development of the nation, but just how important was it? What do we know about the role slavery played in the Constitutional Convention and how do we know it?

Historian Gordon Wood notes that: “If we are to understand accurately the role of slavery in the making of the Constitution, we have to try to rid ourselves of our knowledge of what happened in the succeeding decades. The founders did not know the future, any more than we do, and most of them at the outset lived with the illusion that slavery in the United States was dying away and would somehow

eventually disappear, especially with the ending of the slave trade. Of course, they could not have been more wrong.”

Politics in Philadelphia

What were the politics of the delegates to the Philadelphia convention in that hot summer? Was the Amendment designed to ensure that citizens are armed and ready to fight against their own government should it become tyrannical? Did the Framers consider the possibility of a “tyrannical” new government a priority consideration as they worked to produce a document designed to unify and stabilize thirteen colonies? Does such an idea make sense? What evidence supports the idea that the Framers feared that the new government might become tyrannical?

Were the Framers concerned about individual ownership of firearms or about “security” and “domestic tranquility?” Or, were the Framers concerned about maintaining order and avoiding chaos in the new nation, discouraging threats to its “security,” instability that could discredit the Revolution, and benefit its “enemies” abroad?

Has the belief that the Second Amendment protects private ownership of guns always been so? Or is this belief born of a *disposition* to believe that the Second Amendment is a “sacred principle” that protects gun ownership? Is this disposition of recent vintage?

Has the Second Amendment been “hijacked”? Have gun advocates intentionally misstated the law, repeating their misstatements and investing heavily in propaganda in order to persuade the public? Persuade the corporate media? Persuade courts?

The Right, the National Rifle Association and the gun lobby and even some on the Left given to romanticizing history have a “boiler plate,” knee-jerk response to the gun control issue, they would have Americans believe that the argument that the Second Amendment guarantees the right of individuals to own firearms is moot. Is that true?

And what about the term *liberty*? Just what does that word mean? To whom? Why?

“The American Right is fond of putting itself inside the minds of America’s Founders and intuiting what was their ‘original intent’ in writing the U.S. Constitution and its early additions, like the Second Amendment’s ‘right to bear arms,’ ” writes investigative reporter Robert Parry. “But, surely, James Madison and the others weren’t envisioning people with modern weapons mowing down children in a movie theater or a shopping mall or now a kindergarten.”

Abusing the Second Amendment

Historian Garry Wills wrote: "The recent effort to find a new meaning for the Second Amendment comes from the failure of appeals to other sources as a warrant for the omnipresence of guns of all types in private hands. Easy access to all these guns is hard to justify in pragmatic terms, as a matter of social policy.

...

"That is why the gun advocates appeal, above pragmatism and common sense, to a supposed sacred right enshrined in a document Americans revere...We must put up with our world-record rates of homicide, suicide, and accidental shootings because, whether we like it or not, the Constitution tells us to. Well, it doesn't."

Few Americans know much about U.S. history, or specifically know history in relation to guns and the gun control issue and they do not do their homework, a comprehensive review of the related history.

The American public generally has the reputation for being anti-intellectual, ill acquainted with scholarship and considered to have short memories and even shorter attention span. Indeed, Americans appear to have given up reading altogether.

The result is that millions of Americans have embraced the dangerous and false notion that the Framers of the U.S. Constitution incorporated the Second Amendment in the Bill of Rights so an armed population could fight the government that the Framers had just created. This belief is not accidental, it has been deliberately taught, the result not of serious scholarship and study but the result of an *agenda*.

The gun industry, an interested party of the first order in the *individual right* interpretation of the Second Amendment, has averaged about \$3.5 billion a year in inflation-adjusted terms going back to the mid-1990s. Journalist Lee Fang reports in *The Nation* magazine: "For every gun or package of ammunition sold at participating stores, a dollar is donated to the NRA."

Too many Americans, frustrated and confused by a host of issues, and perhaps easily given to irrational fears and paranoia reinforced by a shallow and narrow frame of reference, have willingly embraced the Right's well-funded propaganda and attempt to re-interpret the Second Amendment and re-write American history. They are all too willing to embrace anti-government hysteria and succumb to manipulation.

As Parry writes: "Today's American Right is drunk on some very bad history, which is as dangerous as it is false." The Right has been repeating lies about

the Second Amendment and U.S. history for several decades, but as Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, "Repetition does not transform a lie into the truth."

Americans are being cheated by a Right that is trying to reduce American history to simplistic, comic-book levels and steal our history right out from under us. (Revisionism can come in "Left" clothing as well.)

Longstanding Precedents

Few Americans know that there are two opposing views of the Second Amendment: the *collective right* model and the *individual* model. They are unaware that the first view prevailed for almost one hundred years, that it was not only widely accepted it was uncontroversial.

Professor Robert J. Spitzer discovered in the course of his research for the "2000 Symposium on the Second Amendment" that from the time U.S. law review articles first began to be indexed in 1887 until 1960, all law review articles dealing with the Second Amendment endorsed the collective right model.

The first law review article asserting an individual's right to own firearms for self-defense (or sport) did not even appear until 1960. Eleven articles discussing the Second Amendment were published during this 73-year period. All endorsed the collective right model.

"If there is such a thing as settled constitutional law," wrote law professor Carl T. Bogus in 2000, "the Second Amendment may have been its quintessential example." The United States Supreme Court addressed the Amendment three times in 1876, 1886, and 1939 and on each occasion held that it granted the people a right to bear arms only within the militia. [See *United States v. Cruikshank*, 92 U.S. 542 (1876); *Presser v. Illinois*, 116 U.S. 252 (1886); *United States v. Miller*, 307 U.S. 174 (1939).]

The Second Amendment was adopted on December 15, 1791, along with the rest of the Bill of Rights. As passed by Congress, it read: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

The Right (and those who have bought into their argument) would appear to completely dismiss the first phrase relating to the militia, the phrase that gives the leading, primary meaning of the sentence and to which the second phrase relates. The word "militia" is defined in the Constitution itself:

"The Congress shall have Power . . . To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the Militia, and for governing such Part of them as may be

employed in the Service of the United States, reserving to the States respectively, the Appointment of the Officers, and the Authority of training the Militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress.” [Article 1, § 8.]

Law professor Carl T. Bogus points out that the founders disagreed about how the militia ought to be organized: For example, “Madison favored a universal militia while [Alexander] Hamilton argued for a select militia. However, they agreed as a constitutional matter to leave this up to Congress; and the Constitution expressly gives Congress the power to organize the militia. Thus, the militia is what Congress decides it is, regardless of whether it differs from an eighteenth-century model. Currently, the militia is indisputably the National Guard because Congress has so decided.”

Twisted Quotes

Historian Wills’s lengthy and scholarly argument in 1995 was not to deny any private right to own and use firearms. He simply maintains that Madison “did not address that question when drafting his amendment.” He suggests that gun advocates lobbied using shoddy scholarship that included quotations that were “truncated, removed from context, twisted, or applied to a different debate from that over the Second Amendment” in order to find “new meaning for the Second Amendment” in effect, to sell the American public the idea that there is a “sacred right enshrined in a document Americans revere.”

It has been suggested that the basis for the majority opinions of the Court in the 2008 and 2010 cases that provided support for the individual model (in 2008, for the first time) is also based on questionable scholarship and intellectual leaps. It should be noted that in both cases the Court was divided 5-to-4. [See *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570 (2008); *McDonald v. Chicago*, 561 U.S. 3025 (2010).]

Reporter Parry emphasizes: “The reality was that the Framers wrote the Constitution and added the Second Amendment with the goal of creating a strong central government with a citizens-based military force capable of putting down insurrections, not to enable or encourage uprisings. The key Framers, after all, were mostly men of means with a huge stake in an orderly society, the likes of George Washington and James Madison.

“The men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 weren’t precursors to France’s Robespierre or Russia’s Leon Trotsky, believers in perpetual revolutions. In fact, their work on the Constitution was influenced by the experience of Shays’ Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786, a populist uprising that the weak federal government, under the Articles of Confederation, lacked an army to defeat.”

Law professor Geoffrey R. Stone strongly suggests that: "It is time for opponents of gun control to stop mindlessly shouting 'The Second Amendment!!' as if that ends the discussion. It does not. Just as there is no First Amendment right to falsely yell fire in a crowded theatre, there is no Second Amendment right to carry an AK-47 there. And that is only the *beginning* of what the Second Amendment does *not* guarantee."

We citizens don't have to become constitutional lawyers or scholars on the Second Amendment. We do need to take the time to do some basic homework—and not be intimidated by right-wing bullies and their deep-pocketed propaganda campaigns. We need to reach a comfort level as to what is known, what is *not* known, what is debatable, and what is a misrepresentation or outright lie.

The Right has given us nothing but destruction and death. Irrational right-wing extremists and their so-called "conservatism" have transformed the United States into a nightmare.

They have given us not simply extraordinarily bad manners but conscience-less coarseness; distracted us with nihilistic obstructionism that prevents our being able to effectively solve major national problems; made us look like backward, ignorant, unworthy and *reckless* fools before the entire world; militarized our culture with an authoritarianism that would echo the Third Reich; robbed us of our joy, our peace of mind, our dignity and our self-respect; de-civilized us with fear, violence and ugliness; "drenched us in Bloodshed;" indoctrinated citizens with misrepresentations, distortions, and blatant lies; attempted to make superstition respectable and madness the norm; polarized our national community; and they want to steal our past, our American history as well. Enough.

Alternative Reality

I am on the side of the *collective right* argument, the argument that the Second Amendment does *not* protect individual gun ownership, an argument supported by credible real scholarship by real scholars that supports the *collective right* argument.

I emphasize the word *real* because it is clear that too many Americans live in an alternative reality that confuses belief with facts, and are unable to distinguish scholarship from fanciful propaganda and scholars from lobbyists.

We may even have members of the U.S. Supreme Court who have succumbed to what is nothing less than a National Rifle Association (NRA) and gun lobby sales pitch that fits their right-wing, corporatist, authoritarian mentality.

I believe too many of the American public, politicians and mainstream media have

been hoodwinked by the radical Right, the billion-dollar gun industry and the NRA. Yes, we are over 300 million individuals, but we are individuals who do not live in isolation but share a *society*.

On a personal note: I know what it is like to face a 22 revolver in the hands of a 9-year-old boy (reputed to have been disturbed) just two inches off my forehead (in the U.S. Virgin Islands in the early '70s). Believe me, I remember what the color "gun metal" looks like and know the sensation of feeling that all the blood has left my body. I want to see strong, sensible gun regulations.

I want the country of my birth to regain its sanity.

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