

# The Role of Youth in a Hoped-for Transformation

The massive turnout for the March for Our Lives demonstration in Washington on March 24 has given rise to hope that a new youth movement can spur a social transformation in the United States, write Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers.

**By Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers**

The eruption of youth protests over gun violence in schools and other issues is another indicator that the 2020s could be a decade of transformation where people demand economic, racial and environmental justice as well as peace. Students who are in their teens now will be in their twenties then. They will have experience in how protests can change political culture.

Some view the youth awakening in these protests as reminiscent of youth movements in previous generations, others are less optimistic. We cannot predict the role this generation will play, but throughout the history of mass movements, youth have been a key factor by pushing boundaries and demanding change.

One of the slogans in the actions against gun violence is “adults failed to solve the problem.” The truth is, as many youth are aware, those currently in power have failed on many fronts, e.g. climate change, wealth disparity, racial injustice, never-ending wars and militarism, lack of health care and more. These crises are coming to a head and provide the environment for transformational changes, if we act.

## **Beware of Democratic Party Co-option**

One of the challenges youth, and older, activists face is the Democratic Party. Democrats have a long history of co-opting political movements. They are present in recent mobilizations, such as the Women’s March and March for our Lives, which both centered on voting as the most important action to take.

Big Democratic Party donors, like George and Amal Clooney, provided massive resources to the March for Our Lives. The corporate media covered the students extensively, encouraged attendance at the marches and reported widely on them.

As Bruce Dixon writes, “It’s not hard to see the hand of the Democratic party behind the tens of millions in corporate contributions and free media accorded the March For Our Lives mobilization. 2018 is a midterm election year, and November is only seven months away. The Democrats urgently need some big sticks

with which to beat out the vote this fall..."

Democratic politicians see the gun issue as an opportunity for the 'Blue Wave' they envision for 2018, even though the Democrat's history of confronting gun violence has been dismal. When Democrats controlled Congress and the presidency, they did not challenge the culture of violence, confront the NRA or stop militarized policing that is resulting in hundreds of killings by police.

Ajamu Baraka writes, "Liberals and Democrat party connected organizations and networks have been quite adept at getting out in front of movements to pre-empt their radical potential and steer them back into the safe arms of liberal conformism." Indeed the history of the Democratic Party since its founding as a slave-owners party has been one of absorbing political movements and weakening them.

For this new generation of activists to reach their potential, they must understand we live in a mirage democracy and cannot elect our way out of these crises. Our tasks are much larger. Violence is deeply embedded in US culture, dating to the founding of the nation when gun laws were designed for white colonizers to take land from Indigenous peoples and control black slaves.

When it comes to using the gun issue for elections, the challenge for the Democrats is "to keep the public anger high, but the discussion shallow, limited, and ahistorical," as Bruce Dixon writes. Our task is to understand the roots of the crises we face.

Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz describes this in her new book, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*. The culture of violence in the US goes beyond the horrific shooting in schools to the militarization of our communities and military aggression abroad. The US military has killed more than 20 million people in 37 nations since World War II.

One step you can take in your community is to find out if there is a Junior ROTC program in your local school and shut it down.

### **Potential for Youth to Lead in Era of Transformation**

One of the reasons we predict the 2020s may be an era of transformation is because issues that have been ignored or mishandled by powerholders are becoming so extreme they can no longer be ignored. Bruce Dixon of Black Agenda Report writes the gun protests present an opportunity to highlight all the issues where Democrats (and Republicans) have failed us.

Youth are already involved, often playing leadership roles, in many fronts of struggle. Rev. Jared Sawyer, Jr. writes that when racial violence arose at the

“University of Missouri in recent years, student athletes and scholars united in protest, prompting the administration to take action. Organizations like Black Youth Power 100 have arisen in the wake of police” violence against black people. Youth are on the front lines of the environmental movement, blocking pipelines and carbon infrastructure to prevent climate change. Youth are leading the movement to protect immigrants from mass deportation.

This week, Hampton students took to the streets over sexual violence, housing, food and other problems on campus. Students at Howard University started HU Resist, to “make sure that Howard University fulfills its mission.” They are in their third day of occupying the administration building.

At March for Our Lives protests, some participants saw the connections between gun violence and other issues. Tom Hall reported that those who “attended the rally had far more on their minds than gun control and the midterm elections—the issues promoted by the media and the Democratic Party. Many sought to connect the epidemic of mass shootings in American schools to broader issues, from the promotion of militarism and war, to poverty and social inequality.” Youth also talked about tax cuts for the rich, inadequate healthcare, teacher strikes, the need for jobs and a better quality of life. He noted those who attended were “searching for a political perspective,” and that, while it was not seen from the stage, opposition to war was a common concern.

Robert Koehler writes, “This emerging movement must address the whole spectrum of violence.” He includes racist violence, military violence, mass incarceration and the “mortally sinful corporate greed and of course, the destruction of the environment and all the creatures.” What unites all of these issues, Koehler writes, is the “ability to dehumanize certain people.” Dehumanization is required to allow mass murder, whether by a single gunman or in war, as well as the economic violence that leaves people homeless and hungry, or for the violence of denying people necessary healthcare and to pay people so little they need multiple jobs to survive.

### **Movements are Growing, Now How Do We Win?**

We have written about the stages of successful social movements and that overall the United States is in the final stage before victory. This is the era of building national consensus on solutions to the crises we face and mobilizing millions to take action in support of these solutions.

Protests have been growing in the US over the past few decades. Strong anti-globalization protests were organized under Clinton to oppose the World Trade Organization. Under the Bush administration, hundreds of thousands of people took the streets against the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. The anti-war

movement faded under the Obama administration, even though he escalated US militarism, but other movements arose such as Occupy, immigrant's rights, the fight for 15, Idle No More and black lives matter. Erica Chenoweth posits that current youth activists "did their first activism with their moms. It's a quicker learning curve for kids."

At present, large drivers of mass protests are reaction to the actions of the Trump administration and the Democrats using their resources to augment and steer anti-Trump anger into elections. To prevent what happened to the anti-war movement under President Obama, people will need a broader understanding of the root causes of the crises we face, not the shallow analysis provided by the corporate media, and will need to understand how social movements can be effective.

To assist in this education, **Popular Resistance is launching the Popular Resistance School**. The first eight week course will begin on May 1 and will cover social movement theory – how social movements develop, how they win and roles people and organizations play in movements. All are welcome to participate in the school. There is no cost to join, but we do ask those who are able to donate to help cover the costs.

**For more information on the school and to sign up, click here.** Those who sign up will receive a weekly video lecture, a curriculum and an invitation to join a discussion group (each one will be limited to 30 participants). People who complete the course can then host the course locally with virtual support from Popular Resistance.

The next decade has the potential to be transformative. To make it so, we must not only develop national consensus that issues are being mishandled, that policies need to change and that we can change them, but we must also educate ourselves on issues and how to be effective. We have the power to create the change we want to see.

*This piece was first published on PopularResistance.org*

**Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers are co-directors of Popular Resistance.**

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## Gun Rights and 'Freedom's' Perversities

The concept of personal freedoms is relatively new to human history but has often, ironically, been exploited by people in power to achieve or maintain a sociopolitical goal, posits Lawrence Davidson in this analysis.

By Lawrence Davidson

For much of human history, the idea of freedom had little meaning. This was because life was, as Thomas Hobbes put it, “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” And while he thought this descriptor applied to life outside of society, for a long time it did not really matter – life within pre-modern societies often had the same limiting character. Religious belief in these same times reflected this depressing fact by asserting that there was no hope of meaningful freedom in this life. To achieve it you would have to die and go to Heaven. So, what set you free was death.

Around the end of the 18th century, progress in technology and science suggested an alternative to this “life is a vale of tears” scenario. It was at that point that different types of freedoms started to become viable goals. However, as the use of the plural implies, the idea of freedom manifested itself in discrete categories: political freedom, economic freedom (here defined as freedom from want), religious freedom, freedom of speech and press, and so forth. It really had to be this way. Total freedom produces anarchy and – here is the irony – anarchy will quickly make any particular freedom meaningless.

Thus it was that over time, as constitutions came into vogue, freedoms were written down, usually in the form of rights. Yet, not surprisingly, their translation into practice often ended up reflecting the needs and desires of the powerful and influential. This was the case whether we are considering democracies or more authoritarian forms of government. This customizing of freedoms by select groups inevitably led to less than satisfactory, and sometimes quite perverse, results.

Let’s take a look at an example of such a conceptual deformity taken from the practice in the United States, “the land of the free.”

### **Gun Rights – A Perversion of Freedom**

Perhaps the most perverse American definition of freedom is the one that promotes largely unrestricted gun rights. The champion of this definition is the National Rifle Association (NRA). We are not just talking about guns used to shoot at targets or for hunting game. One can actually make an argument for ownership of the latter weapons along the same line as bows and arrows, slingshots and fishing rods. However, according to Wayne LaPierre, the NRA’s executive vice president, freedom demands more. His stand is that citizens have a fundamental right to own almost any firearm, including military-style assault weapons. His position is that this right is the sine qua non of American freedom. And only by exercising it can you really ensure individual freedom.

LaPierre insists that gun ownership is enshrined in the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and the NRA has taken an out-of-context fragment of that amendment as its motto – “The Right of the People to Keep and Bear Arms Shall Not Be Infringed.” The fact that this phrase is part of a comprehensive statement that ties gun ownership to the government’s need to maintain “a well regulated militia” is disregarded by the NRA leadership. In truth, if we are to take the Second Amendment in its entirety as describing a discrete “freedom,” Mr. LaPierre and his buddies would have to join the National Guard in order to play with guns.

So here is a case where a definition of a freedom or a right has been customized to meet the demands of a politically powerful subgroup of society, and it has had predictably disastrous results. The largely open-ended access of U.S. citizens to military-style weapons has resulted in a prolonged bloodbath. It is estimated that between 2011 and 2014, there was a mass shooting (defined as the killing or wounding of 4 or more people) in the United States every 64 days. This rate has not slowed down in the last four years. As the world now knows, the latest of these massacres came on 14 February 2018, when 17 high school students were shot dead in Parkland, Florida.

Soon after this massacre, Wayne LaPierre gave the NRA’s response to those surviving students and their supporters who were demanding greater gun regulation laws. He accused them of being “socialists” who want to make “law abiding” citizens “less free.” If these “leftists” manage to “seize power ... our American freedoms could be lost and our country will be changed forever.”

LaPierre’s answer to the bloodbaths caused by guns is to have more guns. “The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is with a good guy with a gun.” In the case of the Parkland high school shooting, where, in fact, there was an armed guard present at the school, as well as with previous school shootings, LaPierre’s formula translates into arming teachers as a way of “hardening the schools.”

By the way, President Trump initially agreed with LaPierre. He too called for arming teachers, suggesting that if 20 percent of teachers were armed and “adept with the firearm, they could end the attack very quickly.” Assuming Trump meant giving teachers a sidearm while the usual assailants continue to use military-style automatic weapons, one can only call such a suggestion naive. He also praised the NRA leadership and specifically LaPierre, saying that “they are great people and great American patriots who will do the right thing.”

Subsequently, Trump suggested that the country may well need to toughen its gun laws, much to the dismay of all those “patriots” at the NRA. Twenty-four hours later he was back on track with the NRA. Perhaps his flip-flopping was a

tactical maneuver. Throw out some reforms and then do nothing. Later he can then say to the general public, perhaps during a reelection campaign, that he proved more willing to sign off on gun control reform than any president in history. Trump is famous for such mendacious hyperboles.

In the end LaPierre and all the the other gun fanatics who whittle their definition of freedom down to the nearly unrestricted right to own weapons are archaic primitives whose idea of freedom harkens back to those pre-civilized times so well described by Thomas Hobbes. In a perpetually dangerous world, one that is “poor, nasty, brutish and short,” the armed man is the only one with any chance of being “free.” And so, he is the “real man,” the man who can protect himself, his family and his country.

But that is not the way the world is, at least in the West. It is a relatively settled and safe place where the major threat is not so much crime, and certainly not socialists, but rather LaPierre’s own demand – the proliferation of guns. What we are all threatened by is the perversion of this discrete freedom.

The gun rights issue is not the only perversion of freedom one can come up with. The whole issue of economic freedom (as defined as freedom from want) is another. One can argue that, in an era of sufficient resources, this should be an undeniable right. Yet, in the United States, economic freedom is defined in such a way as to satisfy the desires and needs of a particular powerful group. Economic freedom is the freedom of the capitalist to operate within a “free market.” Unfortunately, such a definition, applied in practice, has left many people economically disadvantaged.

As is the case with the issue of gun rights, those who want to alter the definition of economic freedom so as to minimize such conditions as indebtedness and poverty are accused of being socialists and wanting to take away “our freedoms.”

So, really, just what does freedom mean? Well, it means what the powerful and the influential say it means. And, having it manifested in discrete categories makes it easy to customize. Nonetheless, part of civilizational progress is assuring that freedoms are sane and beneficial to larger and larger groups – but, obviously, progress in this sense is a real struggle.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest; America’s Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.**

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# The Right's Second Amendment Lies

From the Archive: In the wake of the latest gun massacre in the United States, we republish an article by Robert Parry debunking some of the right-wing myths about the Second Amendment that have prevented common sense gun laws.

By Robert Parry ([first published December 21, 2012](#))

Right-wing resistance to meaningful gun control is driven, in part, by a false notion that America's Founders adopted the Second Amendment because they wanted an armed population that could battle the U.S. government. The opposite is the truth, but many Americans seem to have embraced this absurd, anti-historical narrative.

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.

Daniel Shays, the leader of the revolt, was a former Continental Army captain who joined with other veterans and farmers to take up arms against the government for failing to address their economic grievances.

The rebellion alarmed retired Gen. George Washington who received reports on the developments from old Revolutionary War associates in Massachusetts, such as Gen. Henry Knox and Gen. Benjamin Lincoln. Washington was particularly concerned that the disorder might serve the interests of the British, who had only recently accepted the existence of the United States.

On Oct. 22, 1786, in a letter seeking more information from a friend in



Connecticut, Washington wrote: "I am mortified beyond expression that in the moment of our acknowledged independence we should by our conduct verify the predictions of our transatlantic foe, and render ourselves ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of all Europe."

In another letter on Nov. 7, 1786, Washington questioned Gen. Lincoln about the spreading unrest. "What is the cause of all these commotions? When and how will they end?" Lincoln responded: "Many of them appear to be absolutely so [mad] if an attempt to annihilate our present constitution and dissolve the present government can be considered as evidence of insanity."

However, the U.S. government lacked the means to restore order, so wealthy Bostonians financed their own force under Gen. Lincoln to crush the uprising in February 1787. Afterwards, Washington expressed satisfaction at the outcome but remained concerned the rebellion might be a sign that European predictions about American chaos were coming true.

"If three years ago [at the end of the American Revolution] any person had told me that at this day, I should see such a formidable rebellion against the laws & constitutions of our own making as now appears I should have thought him a bedlamite – a fit subject for a mad house," Washington wrote to Knox on Feb. 3, 1787, adding that if the government "shrinks, or is unable to enforce its laws anarchy & confusion must prevail."

Washington's alarm about Shays' Rebellion was a key factor in his decision to take part in and preside over the Constitutional Convention, which was supposed to offer revisions to the Articles of Confederation but instead threw out the old structure entirely and replaced it with the U.S. Constitution, which shifted national sovereignty from the 13 states to "We the People" and dramatically enhanced the power of the central government.

A central point of the Constitution was to create a peaceful means for the United States to implement policies favored by the people but within a structure of checks and balances to prevent radical changes deemed too disruptive to the established society. For instance, the two-year terms of the House of Representatives were meant to reflect the popular will but the six-year terms of the Senate were designed to temper the passions of the moment.

Within this framework of a democratic Republic, the Framers criminalized taking up arms against the government. Article IV, Section 4 committed the federal government to protect each state from not only invasion but "domestic Violence," and treason is one of the few crimes defined in the Constitution as "levying war against" the United States as well as giving "Aid and Comfort" to the enemy (Article III, Section 3).

But it was the Constitution's drastic expansion of federal power that prompted strong opposition from some Revolutionary War figures, such as Virginia's Patrick Henry who denounced the Constitution and rallied a movement known as the Anti-Federalists. Prospects for the Constitution's ratification were in such doubt that its principal architect James Madison joined in a sales campaign known as the Federalist Papers in which he tried to play down how radical his changes actually were.

To win over other skeptics, Madison agreed to support a Bill of Rights, which would be proposed as the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Madison's political maneuvering succeeded as the Constitution narrowly won approval in key states, such as Virginia, New York and Massachusetts. The First Congress then approved the Bill of Rights which were ratified in 1791. [For details, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.]

### **Behind the Second Amendment**

The Second Amendment dealt with concerns about "security" and the need for trained militias to ensure what the Constitution called "domestic Tranquility." There was also hesitancy among many Framers about the costs and risks from a large standing army, thus making militias composed of citizens an attractive alternative.

So, the Second Amendment 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." Contrary to some current right-wing fantasies about the Framers wanting to encourage popular uprisings over grievances, the language of the amendment is clearly aimed at maintaining order within the country.

That point was driven home by the actions of the Second Congress amid another uprising which erupted in 1791 in western Pennsylvania. This anti-tax revolt, known as the Whiskey Rebellion, prompted Congress in 1792 to expand on the idea of "a well-regulated militia" by passing the Militia Acts which required all military-age white males to obtain their own muskets and equipment for service in militias.

In 1794, President Washington, who was determined to demonstrate the young government's resolve, led a combined force of state militias against the Whiskey rebels. Their revolt soon collapsed and order was restored, demonstrating how the Second Amendment helped serve the government in maintaining "security," as the Amendment says.

Beyond this clear historical record that the Framers' intent was to create security for the new Republic, not promote armed rebellions there is also the

simple logic that the Framers represented the young nation's aristocracy. Many, like Washington, owned vast tracts of land. They recognized that a strong central government and domestic tranquility were in their economic interests.

So, it would be counterintuitive as well as anti-historical to believe that Madison and Washington wanted to arm the population so the discontented could resist the constitutionally elected government. In reality, the Framers wanted to arm the people at least the white males so uprisings, whether economic clashes like Shays' Rebellion, anti-tax protests like the Whiskey Rebellion, attacks by Native Americans or slave revolts, could be repulsed.

However, the Right has invested heavily during the last several decades in fabricating a different national narrative, one that ignores both logic and the historical record. In this right-wing fantasy, the Framers wanted everyone to have a gun so they could violently resist their own government. To that end, a few incendiary quotes are cherry-picked or taken out of context.

This "history" has then been amplified through the Right's powerful propaganda apparatus Fox News, talk radio, the Internet and ideological publications to persuade millions of Americans that their possession of semi-automatic assault rifles and other powerful firearms is what the Framers intended, that today's gun-owners are fulfilling some centuries-old American duty.

The mythology about the Framers and the Second Amendment is, of course, only part of the fake history that the Right has created to persuade ill-informed Tea Partiers that they should dress up in Revolutionary War costumes and channel the spirits of men like Washington and Madison.

But this gun fable is particularly insidious because it obstructs efforts by today's government to enact commonsense gun-control laws and thus the false narrative makes possible the kinds of slaughters that erupt periodically across the United States, most recently in Newtown, Connecticut, where 20 schoolchildren and six teachers were murdered in minutes by an unstable young man with a civilian version of the M-16 combat rifle.

While it's absurd to think that the Founders could have even contemplated such an act in their 18<sup>th</sup> Century world of single-fire muskets that required time-consuming reloading right-wing gun advocates have evaded that obvious reality by postulating that Washington, Madison and other Framers would have wanted a highly armed population to commit what the Constitution defined as treason against the United States.

Today's American Right is drunk on some very bad history, which is as dangerous as it is false.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).

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## Vietnam's Lessons and the U.S. Culture of Violence

In the wake of another deadly school shooting in Florida, the lessons of past massacres in Vietnam can teach us about U.S. violence and the need to reform unchecked gun culture, discusses Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

Back in October 2016 I wrote an analysis entitled "[Are Humans Natural-Born Killers?](#)" It described and commented on research on the origins of human violence published in the science journal *Nature*. The conclusion offered in the article is that humans come from an evolutionary line that has the capability for violent behavior genetically built into it. It is a reasonable hypothesis. As just about every serious historian knows, the human propensity for lethal violence goes back as far as the evidence can take us – so far that there can be little doubt that this trait is inherited from our pre-human ancestors.

Yet, as the *Nature* scholars also point out, in the case of our species, culture has the ability to "modulate our bloodthirsty tendencies."

I bring this up now because there is new interest in the slaughter and massacres that took place during the Vietnam War. This may in part be a response to the fact that last month marked the 50th anniversary of that war's Tet offensive.

America waged war in Vietnam roughly from 1961 to 1975. The starting date is a "rough" one because the United States never actually declared war. In this 14-year span it is generally accepted that the turning point in the struggle came during the Tet offensive of 1968. Tet is the term used for the Vietnamese new year, and that celebratory time in 1968 was when the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong launched attacks in some 100 South Vietnamese towns and cities, in an effort to change the course of the war in their favor.

Though very costly (there were an estimated 50,000 Vietnamese casualties) the offensive worked, at least in the long run. Within a year the United States started a gradual withdrawal from the country. Although the fighting dragged on

for another seven years (until the fall of Saigon in 1975) it was Washington's stubborn search for face-saving terms that largely kept it going.

By the time of the Tet offensive, the war had degenerated into mutual slaughter. The U.S. ended up killing some 3 million Vietnamese, many of them civilians. The massacre at My Lai on 16 March 1968, has often been cited as the "singular" American example of such criminal behavior. It was on this date that a company of soldiers of the 23rd Americal Division murdered, without provocation, 504 peasant villagers of all ages and both sexes.

The massacre itself, and its background year of 1968, have been accurately described in a recent book, *My Lai: Vietnam, 1968 and the Descent into Darkness*, by Howard Jones (Oxford University Press, 2017). In turn the book has been expertly reviewed and elaborated upon in the popular *London Review of Books* (LRB) (25 January 2018) by Max Hastings.

It is to be noted that both the publisher and the reviewing magazine are located in the United Kingdom. The reviews of the book offered in the United States have been, to date, in academic journals, including the U.S. Army's own *Army University Press*. Just about all of them have described Jones's work as definitive and a seminal important read. Whether this will translate into public attention in the U.S. is doubtful.

### **Explaining Wartime Massacres**

Modern efforts to explain happenings like the My Lai massacre usually bring up the problem of waging war when it has become hard to know who the enemy is – in other words, when not everyone is wearing a uniform and a lot of resistance is coming from irregular forces. The *Army University Press* review raises this issue.

Another possibility is that such behavior is an "inevitable consequence of combat." In his LRB review, Max Hastings gives a long introductory account of a number of other massacres committed by soldiers in modern times, including in Vietnam. As a consequence one comes away with the feeling that, within a war zone, these criminal acts are almost common.

While it is no doubt true that a combat situation (or perhaps we can say the culture of combat) does raise the probability of massacres, they do not make them "inevitable." Suggesting that they are, sounds more like an excuse than an explanation. After all, most combat soldiers are not participants in massacres.

This brings us back to the judgment of the research published in *Nature* – we all might well be potential natural born killers who are restrained or encouraged by cultural variables. Within the combat scenario, Hastings suggests that a culture

of self-restraint accepted and enforced by the officer corps can forestall mass killings.

This is of particular interest when it comes to the peculiar culture of the United States. In Vietnam many of the massacres (My Lai was by no means unique) were perpetrated by soldiers as well as their officers from the so-called "land of the free." I use this descriptive term intentionally because one of the things that is often declared to be constitutionally "free" from rational regulation in the U.S. are guns. And, as a consequence, these troops came out of a "gun culture."

It should be kept in mind that the American gun culture, with its accompanying violence, is not new. The 2014 book *Gun Violence and Public Life* documents this history. If anything has changed from the 1960s to today it is that the public now has access to military grade weapons. What also existed then as now is a culture of bigotry and racism. In the 1960s this was just being confronted by the Civil Rights Movement. It all made for an explosive mix that carried over to influence perceptions of and behavior toward the Vietnamese.

### **Manipulating Culture**

If the *Nature* study's conclusions can be believed, modern violence both of military and civilian origin can be moderated by manipulating culture. In the American case this means overcoming the gun culture as well as racism. There are many ways to do this. It can be done through public education as well as the way a society designs and applies its laws.

However, if any of these approaches to a safer, less violent society is to work, citizens must commit to a consistently enforced, long-term, indeed multi-generational, effort of reform. None of this will happen until politicians and the courts understand the Second Amendment of the Constitution (the present interpretation of which underpins the nation's gun culture) in a more literal and reasonable way. And that won't happen until public opinion overwhelms the ideological rigidity of the U.S. gun lobby.

In the United States the desire for rational reform of the gun laws goes up after each mass shooting and then is stymied by a rigid, but very politically influential, gun lobby. This scenario is part of a "culture war" that is ongoing within the American body politic. It involves not only the issue of gun control but also other issues such as abortion, gay rights, the promotion of racial equality and immigrant rights. So heated is this "culture war" that one might see it as a (so far) non-violent form of civil war.

The lessons of Vietnam, and a greater awareness of the massacres that occurred

during this war, speak to the need to reform U.S. culture – to make it less violent and more tolerant. Thus the Vietnam experience should be incorporated into the current debate about guns in America. It would be a major achievement if the 1968 slaughter at My Lai could help stop today's slaughter on the streets of the U.S.

Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest; America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood; and Islamic Fundamentalism. He blogs at www.tothepointanalyses.com.

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## Uncle Sam: The Ultimate Gun Nut

The murky motive behind the Las Vegas massacre – carried out by a heavily armed “gun nut” – parallels the incomprehensible rationales for the global wars waged by the ultimate “gun nut,” Uncle Sam, writes JP Sottile.

By JP Sottile

It's beginning to look like we may never fully understand Stephen Paddock's “military-grade” assault on the Route 91 Harvest Festival in Las Vegas. Law enforcement keeps looking in vain for some sort of motive in the dark abyss of Paddock's odd life. Alt-Right conspiracists are churning out click-baited concoctions that often border on the comical. And the rest of us are left to ponder how and why a wealthy cipher amassed a huge arsenal of weapons that allowed him to become a one-man army.

Frankly, what would motivate anyone to buy 33 guns in 12 months if it wasn't to plot a spectacular, action movie-style attack on human beings? To wit, much of Paddock's year-long spending spree ended-up in the 23-gun “armory” he assembled in the fully-comped Mandalay Bay suite that served as his ghoulish sniper's nest. And that wasn't all. Police found additional caches of weapons, ammunition and explosives in Paddock's car and in his homes in both Reno and Mesquite, Nevada. By the time Paddock murdered 58 non-combatants in his inexplicable war, he'd stockpiled 47 guns and many thousands of bullets.

Stephen Paddock is not alone. His high-powered hoarding made him one of America's 7.7 million “super-owners” who on average possess 17 firearms. That's 3 percent of Americans loaded for bear with half of America's approximately 265 million guns, according to a report in Newsweek. And the Pew Research Center

found that another 42 percent of Americans either “own a gun themselves or live in a household” with at least one gun.

Taken together, that means America is *by far* the world’s leading gun-toting country, with nearly 90 firearms per 100 residents. But it’s those “super-owners” like Paddock who truly stand out as the troubling exemplars of America’s well-documented “gun culture.” As Newsweek succinctly put it, Paddock was a “gun nut.”

### **The Biggest ‘Gun Nut’**

But when it comes to gun nuts, can any one individual super-owner ever compare to the gargantuan gun-nut known as “Uncle Sam”? Just like the disproportionate arsenal held by America’s corps of one-man armies, super-owning Uncle Sam represents about 4.4 percent of the world’s population but accounts for over one-third of the planet’s total military spending. And like Paddock during his pre-attack buying binge, Uncle Sam keeps adding to his already ample collection.

In 2017, Uncle Sam is slated to lavish \$700 billion-plus on just the defense budget alone. There will also be more defense-related spending on “upgrading” America’s 6,800 nuclear weapons, on funding the opaquely-named “Overseas Contingency Operations” account that fuels various wars, on floating the titanic Department of Homeland Security and on the militarization of law enforcement. That’s a gun-buying bonanza that’d make Rambo blush. But unlike the murderous “lone wolves” who pass through the news cycle with alarming regularity, Uncle Sam and his taxpayer-funded gun-nuttery – along with the civilian casualties those weapons often produce doesn’t seem to garner anything close to the level of media scrutiny, political hand-wringing or somber opinion-eering that accompanies each new All-American slaughter.

In fact, the Fourth Estate completely ignored a made-to-order chance to examine the broader contextual implications of Uncle Sam’s gun obsession just four days after Paddock used a bump-stock to hit the bullet-spraying “happy spot” that deluged almost 600 people in roughly ten minutes. That opportunity came from the gun-friendly Heritage Foundation. It is perhaps *the* most aptly-named think tank to ever weigh-in on Uncle Sam’s unabashed, yet widely unacknowledged, gun addiction.

### **Super-Duper Gun Owner**

On Oct. 5, Heritage issued its annual assessment of the world’s largest, most powerful and most widely-deployed military. But just like last year, this year’s “Index of U.S. Military Strength” described an “unsettling trend” that, according to Heritage’s Center for National Defense, “leaves no room for



interpretation – America’s military has undoubtedly grown weaker.” That’s right. The head-knockers at Heritage believe Uncle Sam desperately needs more guns ... and more bullets, more bombs, more missiles and ever-more powerful nuclear weapons.

That also means more pilots to fly more sorties and, logic dictates, to drop all those new bombs. Like Paddock’s 12-month shopping spree, it stands to reason that buying more weapons will ultimately lead to using more weapons. That’s certainly how it’s gone since Uncle Sam designated the entire planet as a *de facto* (but not *de jure*) battlefield back in 2001.

But you don’t have to take Heritage’s word for it. Right before Paddock unleashed his arsenal, Defense Secretary James Mattis and Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson went to the Air Force Association’s annual gabfest to cry poverty over America’s recently-passed \$700 billion splurge. Secretary Mattis bemoaned the existential threat posed by the “caps” on defense spending and Secretary Wilson lamented the fact that Uncle Sam was depleting his stockpile of “modern” and “mature” Tomahawk Missiles (Stock Tip: buy Raytheon).

That’s because Uncle Sam is actively using his prodigious arsenal of weapons, drones, missiles, fighter jets and bunker-busters ... and he has done so on a continual basis for years. One might even say that Uncle Sam is an “active shooter” in Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria and Somalia and Yemen and, it was revealed the same week Paddock went ballistic, in Niger. The four Green Berets who died in the little-known African nation are just one small part of the often-overlooked deployment of 1.3 million well-armed Americans around the world.

Civilians are dying overseas, too ... and at an alarming rate since President Donald “Non-Interventionist” Trump loosened the Rules of Engagement to make killing innocent bystanders more acceptable. In Las Vegas, 58 died (plus Paddock) and over 500 more were injured. In one airstrike in Mosul last March, more than 200 men, women and children were killed in one fell swoop by what is essentially a flying gun.

### **Rising Casualties**

Over in Afghanistan, the United Nations found a “50% increase” in civilian casualties this year. The last nine months of Uncle Sam’s longest war killed 205 civilians and wounded another 261 non-combatants ... and “more than two thirds of the civilian victims were women and children,” according to Reuters.

And then there’s Somalia, where a horrific terrorist truck bombing that killed over 300 people was likely in response to a “botched” U.S.-led raid last August

that killed 10 civilians, including three children. It would seem that “botched” is in the eye of the beholder.

However, one thing is certain ... all of this shooting is taking a toll on Uncle Sam’s stockpile. And that’s really what Heritage is driving at with their warning about “weakness.”

The world is, in fact, getting more dangerous as America uses more weapons that generate more enemies. Heritage thinks that danger requires even more weapons, which, in turn, will make the world more dangerous as they are used in new and exciting places. It’s a self-fulfilling prophesy, but, of course, the Heritage think-tankers don’t make that obvious connection.

For Heritage, this is all part of a supposed “readiness crisis” resulting from an overstretched military that is, some say, particularly strained after engaging in multiple relief efforts after a series of hurricane-wrought disasters. But Mattis, Wilson and the Heritage Foundation are not suggesting that Uncle Sam stock-up on packaged meals, bottled water and “beautiful” paper towels that President Trump will no doubt gladly distribute himself.

Instead, the thrust of these assessments – like many of those churned-out by the Beltway’s bevy of defense-interested war-partiers – is that Uncle Sam needs more weapons and more ways to deliver those weapons to more places around the globe. That’s sometimes called “peace through strength,” but it’s really just hoarding on an epic scale.

Not surprisingly, the reality show-like excessiveness of the hoarding doesn’t even enter the thinking of Heritage’s analysts or the Pentagon’s public-facing representatives or the denizens of Capitol Hill. It is simply taken as a given that more weapons is the answer to every question.

And why not? Hoarding guns is a logical response when the globe looks like a great big movie set just waiting for Uncle Sam’s action heroics to come save the day from a world stage teeming with villainy. The only real question left to answer is: How much firepower is needed to do the job?

### **Size Matters**

First, let’s recall that the United States, a.k.a. Uncle Sam, is home to around 4.4 percent of the world’s population, yet somehow accounts for over one-third of all military spending. That spending may have something to do with how 4.4 percent of the world’s population is able to consume, on average, about a quarter of the world’s various resources, but that’s another issue.

Instead, let’s look at China. Considered to be something between a cordial

competitor and a full-blown adversary, China is home to approximately 20 percent of the world's population (about five times America's share), but it only spends about **one-quarter** of what the U.S. does on its arsenal. Still, that makes China the world's second biggest spender with a budget of \$151.43 billion for 2017. Frankly, that's dwarfed by America's \$700+ billion. But that doesn't tell the whole story. Compare the two side-by-side (thanks to globalfirepower.com) and you might start thinking of Uncle Sam as a committed gun nut.

For example, Uncle Sam has 20 aircraft carriers ... and China has one, with one on the way. Uncle Sam has 41,062 armored fighting vehicles ... and China has 4,788. Uncle Sam has 6,065 helicopters ... and China has 912. Uncle Sam has 2,785 attack aircraft and 2,296 fighters. China has about half of that with 1,385 attack aircraft, 1,271 fighters.

The Chinese do have about 600 more tanks and a bunch more small naval craft, but that's more a function of their geographical challenges than some willy-nilly binge by the world's third-strongest military. After all, they do have land borders with historically hostile powers. And Uncle Sam does continue to pressure them at sea. Apparently, it's Uncle Sam's job to control what the Chinese do in the South China Sea.

### **Russia's Piddling Sums**

It's also quite telling to make these same comparisons to Russia. It is the world's "second-strongest" military and, according to the drumbeat of conventional wisdom-makers, it is Uncle Sam's main global competitor. Home to less than 2 percent of the world's population, Russia is "now the world's third largest military spender," according to a grabby headline by CNNMoney.

Sounds ominous ... that is, until you see that it only takes **\$69.2 billion** for Russia to secure the third spot. For perspective, that's **less than** the amount (\$80 billion) Uncle Sam's **added** to this year's budget over last year's budget. That's also **less than** the amount of money (\$75.9 billion) Uncle Sam made for the defense industry this year by **selling weapons** to other countries.

Still, Russia is fairly well-armed. Unlike Uncle Sam, Russia is not surrounded by two oceans and two friendly, militarily weak allies. Quite to the contrary. In fact, Uncle Sam and his proxies have crowded Russia with forces to its West, South and East. U.S. forces also encircle China, but let's stay on target.

As a result of their geography and history, Russia is heavier on tanks (20,216) and armored fighting vehicles (31,298) than Uncle Sam. Yet, the Russian Bear lags on attack aircraft (1,428), on fighter aircraft (806), on helicopters (1,389) and it is way behind on power-projecting aircraft carriers with just one

“notoriously rickety” ship.

Russia does have 7,300 nuclear warheads, but it is nowhere near America’s capability to deploy forces through its vast network of approximately 800 bases and facilities in more than 70 countries. On the other hand, scholar David Vine estimates that “Britain, France and Russia ... have about 30 foreign bases combined.”

These significant imbalances probably account for Russia’s recent move into “non-violent” forms of hybrid and asymmetrical warfare. It’s one way to close current and future gaps. And both Russia and China are making inroads on drones, but neither has the reach of Uncle Sam’s fleet ... which is advancing and growing all the time. So far, neither China nor Russia has demonstrated a willingness to use drones as roving kill machines in other people’s countries. That remains Uncle Sam’s gun-slinging claim to fame ... as does the unchallenged ability to dwarf the next eight biggest military spenders combined.

### **Gun Showmanship Of Fools**

Let’s face it, Uncle Sam is, globally speaking, an armament “super-owner.” Like many of America’s civilian “super-owners,” it could be said that Uncle Sam just likes guns ... or that he’s just an avid collector ... or that guns are not just his hobby, but also his business. And that’s true, too.

As a matter of fact, Uncle Sam has turned foreign policy into a great big, rolling gun show. He often attends actual, government-sponsored military “trade shows” like the bi-annual Special Operations Forces Exhibition and Conference in Abu Dhabi. Each year there are dozens of these military-themed events and air shows around the world. These glorified gun shows are golden opportunities for the State and Defense Departments to attract buyers to America’s growing supermarket of weaponry.

America used to be “the Arsenal of Democracy.” Now it is the “World’s Gun Shop,” and Uncle Sam is selling everything from THAAD missile defense systems (Stock Tip: buy Lockheed Martin) to boondoggled F-35 jets (still buy Lockheed). And in an amazing bit of gun nut symmetry, the “Trump administration is preparing to make it easier for American gun makers to sell small arms, including assault rifles and ammunition, to foreign buyers,” according to Reuters.

That final bit of salesmanship is probably a response to the sharp decline in domestic small arms sales after Trump replaced President Barack Obama in the Oval Office. Under President Obama, federal gun background checks increased for 19 straight months. By the end of Obama’s tenure the gun industry had grown by a staggering 158 percent and the “total economic impact of the firearms and

ammunition industry in the U.S. increased from \$19.1 billion in 2008 to \$49.3 billion in 2015," reported Forbes. It rose to \$51.3 billion in Obama's final year.

This buying binge was stoked by gunmakers' *de facto* sales reps in the National Rifle Association and in the Right-Wing media ... who told gun-loving Americans that the first Black President was coming to take their firearms. So, they went out and stocked-up before Obama and George Soros could deploy an army of U.N. gun-grabbers in powder blue helmets deep into the blood-red heart of America. The grabbers never came, but the profits spiked handsomely for Sturm Ruger, Remington Outdoor, Smith & Wesson and seven more of America's leading gunmakers.

Ironically, the party ended when the NRA's most beloved candidate of all-time took the oath of office. Trump purposefully and quite effectively ran as a defiant gun nut. He repeatedly touted his love of guns and his admiration of his sons' love of killing animals with guns. And when he won, gun-lovers stopped hoarding guns at a record pace. For them, the prophesied "gunpocalypse" had been avoided, so they relaxed a bit. But the collateral damage of America's exceptional gun-nuttery keeps on mounting, both at home and abroad.

### **Uncle Sam Is A Gun Nut**

The Independent (UK) found that "nearly 1,400" people were shot around America in the week following the Las Vegas massacre. That's just one week's worth of shooting. Even more daunting, they determined that "24,862 [Americans] have been injured and 12,208 have been killed as a result of gun violence" so far this year. It's a bloody, but sadly unsurprising addendum to the ponderous aftermath of the "worst mass shooting" in U.S. history.

At the same time, Americans remain largely ignorant of the "mass casualty event" that's unfolded around the world over the last 16 years. Fortunately, the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University has done the thankless job of keeping tabs on Uncle Sam's Global War on Terror. Their "Costs of War" project estimates that Uncle Sam's wars are directly responsible for 370,000 deaths, responsible for another 800,000 indirect deaths and that some 200,000 civilians died "at the hands of all parties to the conflict" America instigated.

And like those solitary super-owners who spend freely on guns without batting an eye, Uncle Sam seems decidedly nonplussed by the \$4.8 trillion "price tag" for his post-9/11 wars.

Even more telling, this prolonged, costly slaughter has done little to slake Uncle Sam's thirst for more guns. In fact, one of the hallmarks of Donald

Trump's candidacy was not just his full-throated praise for the NRA, but his constant claim that America's military had been "depleted." Of course, he promised a Paddock-like spending spree to make it bigger than ever before. Trump essentially presaged Heritage's lament about Uncle Sam's supposed military weakness. And it set up a spike in defense spending that will ensure that America stands alone as the world's sole "super-owner."

All of which points to some obvious, if seldom asked, questions: Is the Heritage Foundation's report on the U.S. military really that different from the NRA's repeated exhortations to individual gun owners? Don't the makers of weapons big and small both profit from the thinly veiled salesmanship of Heritage and the NRA, the collateral damage be damned? Really, what's the difference between Smith & Wesson and Lockheed Martin? Or between bystanders being shot with lead bullets or struck by a high-tech Tomahawk?

Aren't we as a military power much like those 7.7 million super-owners who stockpile arms like a paranoid survivalist who sees boogymen and gun-grabbers around every corner? And don't we as a globe-trotting nation differ little from the individual Americans who "open-carry" guns into a Wendy's or Walmart ... as if they are not just looking for a chance to flaunt them, but also for a reason to use them?

Sadly, though, that's not where it ends because just like Stephen Paddock had his outsized arsenal of weapons stashed in his homes and his car, so too does Uncle Sam have his arsenal dispersed in caches strewn around the world. And the only logical reason to build up an arsenal well beyond what's needed to protect your personal safety or national security ... is because you intend on using that arsenal to kill people. That much is clear about Stephen Paddock. Isn't it also clear about Uncle Sam? It is certainly clear to millions of people around the Muslim world.

Ultimately, is Uncle Sam really that different from Stephen Paddock? More to the point, if we are looking for answers to the Las Vegas shooting, perhaps we should ask if Stephen Paddock is really that different from Uncle Sam? Because the truth is that Uncle Sam – the collective "we" also known as America – is the world's paragon of gun-nuttery. He is the author of many senseless slaughters with inexplicable motives and unclear ends. And it seems unlikely that we'll ever be able to explain Stephen Paddock's gun-craziness until we finally make some effort to look in the mirror and examine Uncle Sam's exceptional role as the world's leading gun nut.

**JP Sottile is a freelance journalist, radio co-host, documentary filmmaker and former broadcast news producer in Washington, D.C. He blogs at [Newsvandal.com](http://www.newsvandal.com) or you can follow him on Twitter, <http://twitter/newsvandal>.**

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# The Second Amendment's Fake History

**Exclusive:** A numbness followed the latest mass shooting this time at a community college in Oregon. Many Americans were frozen in futility as powerful political forces asserted that the Second Amendment prohibits any gun laws. But that claim is historically false, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

False history continues to kill Americans, as we saw once again last week at Umpqua Community College in Oregon where a disturbed young man whose mother had loaded the house with loaded handguns and rifles executed nine people and then committed suicide one more mind-numbing slaughter made possible, in part, by an erroneous understanding of the Second Amendment.

A key reason why the United States is frozen in political paralysis, unable to protect its citizens from the next deranged gunman and the next massacre, is that many on the American Right (and some on the Left) have sold much of the country on a false history regarding the Second Amendment. Gun-rights advocates insist that the carnage can't be stopped because it was part of what the Constitution's Framers designed.

Republican presidential candidates have been among the leaders in promoting this fake narrative, with surgeon Ben Carson saying the latest slaughter and all the other thousands of shootings are just part of the price of freedom. "I never saw a body with bullet holes that was more devastating than taking the right to arm ourselves away," Carson said, noting that he had removed bullets from a number of gunshot victims.

But the Constitution's Framers in 1787 and the authors of the Bill of Rights in the First Congress in 1789 never intended the Second Amendment to be construed as the right for individuals to take up arms against the Republic. In fact, their intent was the opposite.

The actual goal of the Second Amendment was to promote state militias for the maintenance of order in a time of political uprisings, potential slave revolts and simmering hostilities with both European powers and Native Americans on the frontiers. Indeed, its defined purpose was to achieve "security" against disruptions to the country's republican form of government. The Second Amendment 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.” In other words, if read in context, it’s clear that the Second Amendment was enacted so each state would have the specific right to form “a well-regulated militia” to maintain “security,” i.e., to put down armed disorder and protect its citizens.

In the late Eighteenth Century, the meaning of “bearing” arms also referred to a citizen being part of a militia or army. It didn’t mean that an individual had the right to possess whatever number of high-capacity killing machines that he or she might want. Indeed, the most lethal weapon that early Americans owned was a slow-loading, single-fired musket or rifle.

### **No Anarchists**

Yet, one of the false themes peddled by some on the Right and the Left is that the Framers, having won a revolution against the British Crown, wanted to arm the population so the people could rebel against the Republic created by the U.S. Constitution. This vision of the Framers of the Constitution and members of the First Congress as some anarchists wanting an armed population to overthrow the government if the people weren’t happy with something is completely opposite of what was intended.

Whatever one thinks about the Federalists, who were the principal constitutional Framers and the leaders of the First Congress, they constituted the early national establishment people like George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and Gouverneur Morris. They feared that their new creation, a constitutional republic in an age of monarchies, was threatened by the potential for violent chaos, which is what European aristocrats predicted.

According to the idea of a representative democracy, the Framers sought a system that reflected the will of the citizens but within a framework that constrained the passions of democracy. In other words, the Constitution sought to channel political disputes into non-violent competition among various interests. The Framers also recognized how fragile the nation’s independence was and how domestic rebellions could be exploited by European powers.

Indeed, one of the crises that led to the Constitutional Convention in the summer of 1787 was the inability of the old system under the Articles of Confederation to put down Shays’s Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786-87. So, the Federalists were seeking a system that would ensure “domestic Tranquility,” as they explained in the Constitution’s Preamble. They did not want endless civil strife.

The whole idea of the Constitution with its mix of voting, elected and appointed representatives, and checks and balances was to create a political structure



that made violence unnecessary. In other words, the Framers weren't encouraging violent uprisings against the Republic that they were founding. To the contrary, they characterized violence against the constitutional system as "treason" in Article III, Section 3. They also committed the federal government to protect each state from "domestic Violence," in Article IV, Section 4.

One of the first uses of the new state militias formed under the Second Amendment and the Militia Acts, which required able-bodied men to report for duty with their own muskets, was for President Washington to lead a federalized force of militiamen against the Whiskey Rebellion, a tax revolt in western Pennsylvania in 1794.

In the South, one of the principal reasons for a militia was to rally armed whites to put down slave uprisings. Again, the Second Amendment was meant to maintain public order even an unjust order rather than to empower the oppressed to take up arms against the government. That latter idea was a modern reinterpretation or distortion of the history.

The Constitution's Framers were not some early version of Leon Trotsky favoring permanent revolution. The most radical-talking leader at the time, Thomas Jefferson, had little to do with either the Constitution or the Bill of Rights since he was serving as a diplomat in France at the time.

Yet, the revisionists who have transformed the meaning of the Second Amendment love to cite provocative comments by Jefferson, such as a quote from [a 1787 letter](#) criticizing the Constitution for its commander-in-chief provisions. Jefferson argued that violence, like Shays's Rebellion, was to be welcomed. He declared that "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is it's [sic] natural manure."

It is ironic, however, that Jefferson was never willing to risk his own blood as that "natural manure." During the Revolutionary War when traitor Benedict Arnold led a force of Loyalists against Richmond, Jefferson, who was then Virginia's governor, declined to rally the state militia in defense of the capital but rather fled for his life. Later, when British cavalry approached Charlottesville and his home of Monticello, Gov. Jefferson again took flight.

However, Jefferson was eager for Virginia to have a state militia of armed whites to crush possible black slave rebellions, another prospect that terrified him. As a slaveholder and a pseudo-scientific racist, Jefferson surely did not envision blacks as having any individual right to own guns themselves or to fight for their own liberty. Reflecting on blacks who fought bravely in the Revolution, Jefferson concluded that their courage was an illusion resulting from their intellectual inability to recognize danger.

Yet, whatever one thinks of Jefferson's racism and cowardice, it's a historical error to cite Jefferson in any way as speaking definitively about what the Framers intended with the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. He was not directly involved in either.

### **A Collective Right**

The real history of the Second Amendment was well understood both by citizens and courts in the generations after the Constitution and Bill of Rights were enacted. For most of the years of the Republic, the U.S. Supreme Court interpreted the Second Amendment as a collective right, allowing Americans to participate in a "well-regulated Militia," not an individual right to buy the latest weaponry at a gun show or stockpile a military-style arsenal in the basement.

It's true that many Americans owned a musket or rifle in those early years especially on the frontier, but regulations on munitions were still common in cities where storing of gunpowder, for instance, represented a threat to the public safety. As the nation spread westward, so did common-sense restrictions on gun violence. Sheriffs in some of the wildest of Wild West towns enforced gun bans that today would prompt a recall election financed by the National Rifle Association.

However, in recent decades understanding the power of narrative on the human imagination a resurgent American Right (and some on the Left) rewrote the history of the Founding era, dispatching "researchers" to cherry-pick or fabricate quotes from Revolutionary War leaders to create politically convenient illusions. [See, for instance, Steven Krulik's compilation of apocryphal or out-of-context gun quotes.]

That bogus history gave rise to the image of the Framers being wild-eyed radicals encouraging armed rebellion against the Republic. Rather than people who believed in the rule of law and social order, the Framers were contorted into crazies who wanted citizens to be empowered to shoot police, soldiers, elected representatives and government officials.

This false history was advanced particularly by the American Right in the last half of the Twentieth Century as a kind of neo-Confederate call to arms, with the goal of rallying whites into a near-insurrectionary fury particularly in the South but also in rural areas of the North and West. Many fancied themselves an armed resistance against the tyrannical federal government.

Southern whites brandished guns and engaged in violence to resist the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, when the federal government finally

stepped in to end Jim Crow laws and racial segregation. In the 1990s, "citizens militias" began to pop up in reaction to the election of Democrat Bill Clinton, culminating in the Oklahoma City bombing of 1994.

While designed primarily for the weak-minded, the Right's faux Founding history also had an impact on right-wing "intellectuals" including Republican lawyers who worked their way up through the federal judiciary under Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush.

By 2008, these right-wing jurists held a majority on the U.S. Supreme Court and could thus overturn generations of legal precedents and declare that the Second Amendment established an individual right for Americans to own guns. Though even these five right-wing justices accepted society's right to protect the general welfare of the population through some gun control, the Supreme Court's ruling effectively "validated" the Right's made-up history.

The ruling created a political dynamic in which even liberals in national politics, the likes of Barack Obama and Joe Biden, had to genuflect to the supposed Second Amendment right of Americans to parade around in public with guns on their hips and high-powered semi-automatic rifles slung over their shoulders.

### **What the Framers Wanted?**

As guns-right activists struck down gun regulations in Congress and in statehouses across the nation, their dominant argument was that the Second Amendment offered no leeway for restrictions on gun ownership; it's what the Framers wanted.

So, pretty much any unstable person could load up with a vast killing capacity and slouch off to a bar, a work place, a church or a school even an elementary school and treat fellow Americans as targets in a violent video game. Somehow, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness was overtaken by the "right" to own an AR-15 with a 30-or-100-bullet magazine.

When right-wing politicians talk about the Second Amendment now, they don't even bother to include the preamble that explains the point of the amendment. The entire amendment is only 26 words. But the likes of Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, another Republican presidential candidate, find the preamble inconvenient because it would undercut the false storyline. So they just lop off the first 12 words.

Nor do they explain what the Framers meant by "bear arms." The phrase reflected the reasoning in the Second Amendment's preamble that the whole point was to create "well-regulated" state militias to maintain "security," not to free up

anybody with a beef to kill government officials or citizens of a disapproved race or creed. (The Oregon gunman targeted practicing Christians; a previous gunman in South Carolina went after African-Americans in a church.)

Yet, after the massacre of 20 first-graders and six educators in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012, Fox News personality Andrew Napolitano declared: “The historical reality of the Second Amendment’s protection of the right to keep and bear arms is not that it protects the right to shoot deer. It protects the right to shoot tyrants, and it protects the right to shoot at them effectively, with the same instruments they would use upon us.”

At the time, the clear message from the Right was that armed Americans must confront the “tyrannical” Barack Obama the twice-elected President of the United States (and the first African-American to hold that office) especially if he pressed ahead seeking commonsense gun restrictions.

But Napolitano is simply wrong on the history. The Second Amendment was designed for states to maintain “security,” whether that meant putting down a tax rebellion in Pennsylvania, a slave revolt in the South or a Native American uprising on the frontier. One can disagree about the rightness of those actions by state or federal authorities, but the history is clear.

The Second Amendment was not designed to encourage violence against the government or for that matter to enable troubled individuals to murder large numbers of their fellow citizens.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

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## The Power of False Narratives

**Exclusive:** The defeat of a modest gun-safety bill in the Senate is further vindication of Orwell’s cynical observation that “who controls the past controls the future” since the American Right has persuaded millions of Americans that a false narrative about the Second Amendment is true, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Over the past several decades, the American Right has invested heavily in media outlets and think tanks with the goal of imposing right-wing historical narratives on the nation. That investment has now paved the way for defeat of modest gun-control legislation in the U.S. Senate.

Because of this well-financed right-wing propaganda, millions of Americans have been convinced that the Framers of the U.S. Constitution wanted individual Americans armed to the teeth so they could kill policemen, soldiers and other government representatives. Thus any restriction on gun ownership, no matter how sensible, is deemed as going against the nation's Founding Fathers.

The fact that the key Framers, such as James Madison and George Washington, actually believed that the people would be protected against tyranny through a representative Republic operating within the rule of law and the checks and balances of a Constitution has been lost amid the Right's propaganda and paranoia.

Madison only grudgingly agreed to incorporate a Bill of Rights at all as a deal to secure the necessary votes for the Constitution's ratification, with the Second Amendment essentially a concession to the states which wanted to protect their right to maintain citizen militias.

At the time, the right to bear arms within the context of "a well-regulated Militia" was not understood as a "libertarian" right to have an unregulated arsenal in your basement or the right to stride into public gatherings with a semi-automatic assault rifle with a 100-bullet magazine over your shoulder. In 1789, when Congress approved the Second Amendment, muskets were single-shot devices requiring time-consuming reloading.

And, as the Second Amendment explains, its purpose was to maintain "the security of a free State," not to undermine that security with mass killings of civilians or insurrections against the elected government representing "We the People of the United States." Under the Constitution, such insurrections were defined as "treason."

But the Right has successfully abridged the Second Amendment as it is now understood by many ill-informed Americans. The 12-word preamble explaining the point of the amendment gets lopped off and only the last 14 words are left as the unofficially revised amendment.

So, when Tea Party favorite Sen. Ted Cruz lectures fellow senators on the Second Amendment, he doesn't include the preamble, "A well-regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State." He only reads the rest: "the right

of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed.” Nor do the Tea Partiers note that to Madison and the Framers the term “bear Arms” meant to participate in a militia, not to have as many guns as you want.

The real history has gotten lost in a swamp of false narrative, the sort of ideological deceptions that have come to dominate the current American political scene and have given us an Orwellian present in which he “who controls the past” really does “control the future.”

### **Obama’s Bow**

Now, even intelligent politicians like President Barack Obama genuflect before the mythology of the Second Amendment as he did on Wednesday when he stood with parents of children massacred in Newtown, Connecticut, and repeatedly argued that a defeated compromise on background checks for gun buyers in no way impinged on anyone’s Second Amendment rights.

No one, it seems, wants to get into the reeds on this issue and take on the Right’s false narrative, apparently hoping that those distortions can be simply overridden by public outrage against the thousands upon thousands of Americans who are killed by gun violence every year. But the failure to contest false narratives, especially ones as powerful as the nation’s founding myth, effectively dooms rational policy discussions.

If the Right can rile up a lot of people with neo-Confederate appeals against the “tyranny” of the federal government, the United States cannot face its future challenges, whether stopping school massacres or effectively regulating Wall Street or reducing income inequality or addressing the existential threat of global warming. All such efforts will simply be dismissed as federal assaults on “liberty.”

Most perniciously, the Right through its propaganda has equated the federal government with the British Crown, treating any national effort to deal with domestic problems as the same as British troops marching on Lexington and Concord. That’s the message in the Tea Party’s hijacking of Revolutionary War imagery.

Yet, that would mean that Revolutionary War heroes like George Washington and Alexander Hamilton as well as the Constitution’s chief architect James Madison are stand-ins for King George III, since they were the ones who organized the Constitutional Convention in 1787.

The Constitution dramatically strengthened the central government from its status as a “league of friendship” dominated by “independent” and “sovereign” states under the Articles of Confederation. The power grab in Philadelphia was

what gave rise to the first claims about a powerful central government imposing federal “tyranny.”

Anti-Federalists rose to oppose the Constitution, in part, by claiming that federal authorities might destroy the system of state militias and then crush the individual states. Madison ridiculed that argument in Federalist Paper 46, which ironically is one that the gun-rights advocates often cite in arguing in favor of a fully armed population.

But Madison’s key point in Federalist Paper 46 was that when critics cite the Constitution’s potential for a tyrannical central government, they miss the point that it would consist of representatives from the states and the people.

“The adversaries of the Constitution seem to have lost sight of the people altogether in their reasonings on this subject,” Madison wrote. “These gentlemen [the Anti-Federalists] must here be reminded of their error. They must be told that the ultimate authority, wherever the derivative may be found, resides in the people alone.

“If the people should in future become more partial to the federal than to the State governments, the change can only result, from such manifest and irresistible proofs of a better administration. And in that case, the people ought not to be precluded from giving most of their confidence where they may discover it to be most due.”

### **Mocking the Paranoia**

In Federalist Paper 46, Madison then went on to offer a series of reasons why the Anti-Federalists’ fear of the strengthened federal government was absurd, especially since Congress would consist of representatives from the states and those representatives would assert the interests of their states.

Madison also rejected comparisons between the imagined tyranny by the federal government over the states and the violent imposition of authority by the British Crown over the American colonies. He wrote:

“But what would be the contest in the case we are supposing [between the federal government and the states]? Who would be the parties? A few representatives of the people, would be opposed to the people themselves; or rather one set of [federal] representatives would be contending against thirteen sets of representatives [of the states], with the whole body of their common constituents on the side of the latter.

“The only refuge left for those who prophecy the downfall of the State Governments, is the visionary supposition that the Federal Government may

previously accumulate a military force for the projects of ambition.

“That the people and the States should for a sufficient period of time elect an uninterrupted succession of men ready to betray both; that the traitors should throughout the period, uniformly and systematically pursue some fixed plan for the extension of the military establishment; that the governments and the people of the States should silently and patiently behold the gathering storm, and continue to supply the materials, until it should be prepared to burst on their own heads, must appear to every one more like the incoherent dreams of a delirious jealousy, or the misjudged exaggerations of a counterfeit zeal, than like the sober apprehension of genuine patriotism.”

In other words, Madison judged this alleged danger of the federal government tyrannizing the states as nuts.

It is true that he continues in Federalist Paper 46 to play out what to him was the absurd notion of federal tyranny, noting that this imaginary federal army of oppression also would have to contend with state militias consisting of armed citizenry which is the point frequently cited by gun-rights advocates but the context of those quotes is that Madison had already dismissed the possibility of such an event as crazy.

### **The Civil War**

Granted, one could argue that Madison failed to fully see into the future as he argued for the ratification of the Constitution, which he had worked so hard to create. For instance, as slavery became a contentious issue in the mid-1800s, Southern states rebelled in defense of the rights of whites to own blacks and then violently resisted President Abraham Lincoln's efforts to bring the Confederate states back into the Union.

To this day, some white Southerners call the Civil War the War of Northern Aggression. In the 1950s and 1960s, the pattern played out again, albeit much less violently, when many white Southerners resisted the federal government's outlawing of racial segregation. To some white Southerners that was another example of federal “tyranny.”

You could also say that Madison missed the emergence of the post-World War II Military-Industrial Complex in which military contractors accumulated so much political and economic power both within states and inside the federal government that the American people did “silently and patiently behold the gathering storm, and continue to supply the materials, until it should be prepared to burst on their own heads.”

However, it is a gross distortion of history to cite Madison as someone who



avored a “libertarian” right for citizens to operate on their own in the killing of police, soldiers and other representatives of the Republic. Rather, his proposal of the Second Amendment was a concession to what he regarded as paranoia among states’-rights advocates within the Anti-Federalist circles.

Indeed, one could argue that the Second Amendment has never been used to protect individual liberty, unless you’re talking about the “liberty” of white Southerners to own African-Americans as slaves.

Beyond the language in the amendment’s preamble about “a well-regulated Militia” and state “security,” that is exactly how the Second Amendment was used. After being approved by the first Congress and ratified by the states, the amendment was given real meaning when the second Congress passed the Militia Acts, which mandated that all military-age white males obtain a musket and supplies for militia service.

President Washington then federalized several state militias and led them on an expedition into western Pennsylvania in 1794 to crush an anti-tax revolt known as the Whiskey Rebellion. The uprising was treated as an act of treason as defined by the U.S. Constitution, although Washington used his pardon power to spare rebel leaders from execution by hanging.

Over the ensuing years in the South, state militias were called up to put down slave revolts, with the rebellious slaves not as lucky as the white Whiskey rebels. For instance, in 1800, Virginia Gov. James Monroe called out the militia to stop an incipient slave uprising known as Gabriel’s Rebellion. Twenty-six alleged conspirators were hanged.

Southern militias also were instrumental in the secession by the Confederate states after Lincoln’s election in 1860. Again, the central concern of the Confederacy was the maintenance and protection of slavery.

### **Jefferson’s Words**

Yes, I know some on the Right have cherry-picked incendiary comments by other Founders, such as Thomas Jefferson and his remark that “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants” (although the context was Jefferson’s boasting that the new United States had seen little violence since its founding, with the exception of Shays Rebellion in Massachusetts in 1786-87). Jefferson also had very little involvement in writing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights since he was serving as the U.S. representative in Paris.

Many other right-wing citations of Founders favoring armed insurrection against the elected U.S. government have been taken out of context or were simply

fabricated. [See [a summary](#) of dubious quotes compiled by Steven Krulick.]

But the key point about the Second Amendment is that it was never about an individual's right to possess guns without restrictions. It was framed mostly out of concern that a standing federal army could become excessively powerful and that the states should maintain their own citizen militias. [See Krulick's [detailed explanation](#).]

Only in modern times, with the emergence of an American Right angry over the idea of racial equality, has the Second Amendment been reframed as a "libertarian" right to kill representatives of the elected government. That attitude flared up after Bill Clinton's victory in 1992 and the rise of the "militia movement," which found a voice in the angry white radio talk show hosts who popularized the supposed linkage between the Framers and modern-day insurrectionists.

After President George W. Bush claimed the White House and added two more right-wing justices to the U.S. Supreme Court, a slim five-to-four majority formed giving the Right's reinterpretation of the Second Amendment some official sanction in 2008. The five justices overturned longstanding precedents recognizing only a collective right to bear arms and endorsed a limited individual right to own a gun.

Then, with the election of the first African-American president and the demographic change that Obama's victory represented, the frenzy surrounding the Right's false founding narrative heated up, with anti-government extremists naming themselves after the Boston Tea Party, an anti-British protest in 1773, and waving "Don't Tread on Me" Revolutionary War banners.

This symbolism merging the American Republic with the British Empire was profoundly wrong especially since many Revolutionary War leaders including General Washington and his aide-de-camp Alexander Hamilton were central to expanding federal powers in the Constitution. But the Right's use of the Founding symbols was powerful nonetheless.

Essentially, however, the Tea Party operatives were not harkening back to the Constitution as much as they were to the Articles of Confederation, which the Constitution replaced, and to the Southern Confederacy, which sought to withdraw from the Constitution in the early 1860s. Today's Tea Partiers are advocating a restoration of a system of states' "sovereignty" that Washington, Madison and Hamilton overturned in 1787 and which Lincoln defeated in 1865.

But the modern Right has figured out a new way to circumvent the real Constitution, which granted broad powers to the central government and which as

amended guaranteed equal rights for all citizens. The Right has simply invested billions of dollars in a propaganda system that has revised American history.

The absence of any determined or well-funded effort to counter the Right's false narratives has allowed this fabricated history to become real for millions of Americans. And, on Wednesday, it meant that even modest attempts to impose some sanity on the national gun madness, including the slaughter of children, was stopped in the U.S. Senate.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).**

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## Crazy Gun-Toting Insurrectionists

**Exclusive:** Just a few months after 20 first-graders were mowed down by a deranged killer wielding an assault rifle, the prospects of restraining this gun madness are fading. A major factor is the Right's success in promulgating a bogus history of what the Framers were doing with the Second Amendment, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Tea Partiers and their Libertarian allies fancy themselves the true protectors of the Constitution, but they consistently demonstrate profound ignorance of what the Framers were doing and why. It's as if they are all *summa cum laude* graduates of Glenn Beck's unaccredited online university.

Their sloppy history might not be a matter of particular concern if the consequences weren't so severe, such as how it has frustrated common-sense gun control by promoting a false interpretation of the Second Amendment that the Framers wrote it because they wanted individual Americans to be heavily armed so they could kill representatives of the U.S. government.

A common view on the Right and among a few on the Left is that the Framers, having emerged from a war against the British Crown, wanted to arm the American people so they could battle the "tyranny" of their own Republic. This wacky interpretation has fed an insurrectionist mood in some circles, where these modern extremists assert that the elected government of the United States must be resisted through violence and that no limits on gun ownership can be

tolerated, that citizens must be armed to a level comparable to the government's police and military.

It doesn't seem to matter that George Washington, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and other key Framers considered the creation of a Republic led by elected leaders to be the best protection against "tyranny" and that the Constitution's intricate system of checks and balances would further shield the country from the possibility of tyrannical leadership.

To the Framers, American liberty was not dependent on having a discontented minority of citizens shooting the representatives of a majority of the people, which has become today's twisted view of the American Right. Liberty was dependent on the rule of law and the wisdom of the electorate, though the Framers' idea of liberty was selective, excluding African-American slaves, Native Americans, women and other groups.

These Framers and the first Congresses enacted laws for arming white military-aged men in "well-regulated" militias not so they could fight the government but so they could defend the young nation's security, including putting down armed insurrections. Yet, whenever anyone tries to explain this obvious history, there comes a flood of e-mails and comments citing some inflammatory remarks by Thomas Jefferson or some other cherry-picked quotes.

These constitutional "scholars" don't seem to know that Jefferson did not write the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. He was the U.S. representative in Paris from August 1784 to September 1789. By the time Jefferson returned from Paris, the Constitution had been written and ratified and the Bill of Rights was moving through the first Congress.

While Jefferson was in Paris, the actual Framers of the Constitution, especially Washington and Madison, led the national effort to confront the failure of the Articles of Confederation, which governed the nation from 1777-1787. The Articles had made the 13 original states "sovereign" and "independent" and had marginalized the central government as not even a government but a "league of friendship."

### **Pragmatic Nationalism**

Washington and Madison were what you might call "pragmatic nationalists." They were profoundly afraid that the hard-won independence of the United States and the dreams of having a free country governed by the people, not a king, were threatened by the nation's fragmentation under the Articles of Confederation.

Those fears were both economic and military. Washington and Madison believed that a strong central government was necessary to build the young country that

needed roads and canals to connect the states and permit the development of the interior. With Washington's support, Madison had proposed an amendment to the Articles of Confederation that would have put national commerce under the control of federal authorities, but his amendment was blocked in the Virginia legislature. [See Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.]

Washington and Madison also worried about violent disorders, such as the Shays Rebellion that rocked western Massachusetts in 1786 and early 1787. The weak central government was incapable of putting down the revolt or defending the nation's security. Washington fretted that the British might be behind the uprising.

So, with Washington as the presiding officer and Madison serving as the chief architect, a new Constitution was drafted in Philadelphia in 1787 transferring sovereignty from the 13 original states to "We the People of the United States." Among other expanded powers, the central government was given the authority to regulate national commerce and federal authorities took on the responsibility to protect the security of the country and the states. Federal law was made supreme.

The Framers also made clear what they thought should happen to people who took up arms against the Republic. Article IV, Section 4 committed the federal government to protect each state from not only invasion but "domestic Violence," and treason is defined in the Constitution as "levying war against" the United States as well as giving "Aid and Comfort" to the enemy (Article III, Section 3).

However, the Constitution wasn't embraced with enthusiasm by some prominent Americans, including important Revolutionary War leaders such as Virginia's former Gov. Patrick Henry. These Anti-Federalists objected to the surrender of so much authority by the states. Others, such as northern Virginia's George Mason, insisted on the inclusion of protections of individual rights.

So, as part of a compromise to win ratification of the Constitution, Madison promised to incorporate a Bill of Rights, which included specific protections for the states and for individual citizens. The Second Amendment was added primarily as a concession to the states, explaining its preamble. The amendment 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 reason for the right to "bear arms" was to have citizens who could fill the ranks of "a well-regulated Militia" for the purpose of maintaining "the security" of the states and country. Indeed, the key words for understanding the Framers' intent are "militia" and "security." This was never intended as a

“libertarian” right to wield whatever weapon someone might wish to own for the purpose of insurrection. Instead, it was meant to support “a well-regulated Militia” responsible for ensuring the “security of a free State.”

Yet, the words of the preamble routinely disappear whenever Tea Partiers or Libertarians spout off about the Second Amendment. For instance, when Tea Party favorite Sen. Ted Cruz lectured Sen. Dianne Feinstein about the Second Amendment, he distorted the 26-word amendment by cutting off the first 12 words, all the better to confuse the true-believers in the Right’s faux history of the United States. The Texas Republican apparently couldn’t bring himself to say the words, “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State ”

### **Reinterpreting the Constitution**

The struggle to distort the meaning of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights began almost as soon as the two documents were ratified. Though the Anti-Federalists lost the political battle to block the Constitution, they never relented on their determination to reestablish the lost “sovereignty” of the states.

Over the next two-plus centuries, forces that were pro-slavery, pro-corporate or pro-segregationist have sought to dial back the Constitution’s expansion of federal power every time the nation has moved toward a more progressive recognition of human rights. Over the last few decades, the Reagan Revolution succeeded in building a right-wing majority on the U.S. Supreme Court and those five Republicans have essentially rewritten the Constitution in many ways, including changing the traditional interpretation of the Second Amendment.

In 2008, the five right-wing justices threw out the old view of a collective right for the states to maintain militias (or National Guards) and replaced it with a new interpretation asserting a limited individual right to possess a firearm outside the context of a militia. It’s true that even that radical change by the right-wing majority of the Supreme Court detected only a very limited right to own a gun for protection of one’s home while respecting the countervailing needs of a society to impose reasonable restrictions for public safety.

However, within today’s era of Tea Party madness, the narrow Supreme Court ruling has taken on a much-broader life of its own. It has encouraged new insurrectionist fantasies among some extremists to the detriment of the lives of thousands of Americans whose lives, whose liberties and whose pursuits of happiness have been cut horribly short by gun violence, including those 20 first-graders in Newtown, Connecticut.

[For more on this history, see Consortiumnews.com's "[More Second Amendment Madness.](#)"]

[For a limited time, you can purchase Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush family for only \$34. For details, [click here.](#)]

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## Bowing to Second Amendment Myths

Even as Democratic leaders propose gun-safety laws after the slaughter of 20 first-graders in Newtown they try to sound "reasonable" by genuflecting to the myth of Second Amendment "rights." But this acceptance of right-wing propaganda is dooming these life-saving initiatives, says Beverly Bandler.

By Beverly Bandler

I sent a message to Vice President Joe Biden after reading [an article](#) by Josh Lederman in the *Huffington Post*, which quoted the Vice President as saying that: "the notion of registering guns crosses a cultural line, noting that unlike cars, which must be registered, guns are explicitly protected by the Constitution."

But guns are *not* "explicitly protected by the Constitution."

I am an ardent Democrat, but frankly, being an active member of the Democratic Party is increasingly frustrating in the extreme. We have so many intelligent, decent and hardworking progressives (*real* Democrats) in the party, but too frequently the impression left by prominent leaders is that either they are insufficiently educated about the Constitution and U.S. history (and Democratic principles). Or perhaps they have momentary lapses of memory and/or disconnects between brain and lip so typical of politicians with superficial "convictions." Or maybe they are spinelessly intimidated by the National Rifle Association.

As Mark Twain once said: "A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." That the Second Amendment lie perpetrated by the NRA and others has been costly is an understatement. It is time to correct it.

It is comforting to see that at least one major U.S. newspaper is trying to set

the record straight: The Newark, New Jersey, *Star-Ledger* interviewed law professor and author Adam Winkler last December. The *Star-Ledger* quotes Winkler:

“We think of gun control as a modern 20th century invention, but in fact we’ve had gun control since the beginning of America. The Founding Fathers had gun laws so restrictive that the leaders of today’s NRA wouldn’t support them.

“The Founding Fathers did not view the Second Amendment as a libertarian license for anyone to have any gun, anywhere he wanted. They restricted large portions of the population who they thought to be untrustworthy from possessing firearms.

“Not only were slaves and free blacks barred from having guns, but at times even law-abiding white men. If you weren’t willing to swear an oath of loyalty to the revolution, you were subject to disarmament. We’re not talking about traitors here. We’re talking about Americans who were exercising their freedom of conscience to oppose the war.

“The Founding Fathers also had very strict militia laws that required gun owners to appear at mandatory musters with their firearms in tow. The militiamen’s guns would be inspected and even registered on public rolls.”

A similar reality regarding gun control existed in Wild West towns, Winkler noted: “When you went into a frontier town where the civilized people lived, you had to check your guns at the marshal’s office. The famous gun havens of Dodge City, Kan.; Tombstone, Ariz.; and Deadwood, S.D., had the most restrictive gun laws in the nation. They all banned carrying any firearms in public.” [See [“Why the NRA once led the fight for gun control.”](#)]

Here is my letter to Vice President Biden:

A key reason the Assault Weapons Ban bill failed and the nation continues to face an uphill battle for gun control as a means to help combat the crisis of gun violence is the mindless repetition of the falsehoods that: “guns are explicitly protected by the Constitution” and gun laws infringe on “rights” provided by the Second Amendment.

Conservatives in both political parties believe they have “gun rights” that they do not have. Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution and the Second Amendment do not give them the right to own and maintain personal firearms and arsenals of military design or any other kind. The Framers were clear:

Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution: “The Congress shall have Power...To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions; 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;" (1787)

The Second Amendment: "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." (1789)

The right "to keep and bear Arms" is in the context of a "well regulated Militia." A "well regulated Militia" is defined by Congress in Article 1, Section 8. Today's "Militia" is in effect the National Guard. The language is not ambiguous, neither is the historical record.

We appreciate your personal efforts and those of the President in the gun violence fight. But with all due respect, the President's plan to reduce gun violence and all gun control efforts are undermined when the deliberate propaganda disseminated by the National Rifle Association and other radical, right-wing operatives is reinforced by Democratic leaders.

**Beverly Bandler's public affairs career spans some 40 years. Her credentials include serving as president of the state-level League of Women Voters of the Virgin Islands and extensive public education efforts in the Washington, D.C. area for 16 years. She writes from Mexico.**

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## **Thin Line: 'Good/Bad Guy with a Gun'**

**Exclusive:** For years as a police officer and Navy reservist, Christopher Dorner was what the NRA would call "a good guy with a gun," but something snapped when he was fired from the LAPD, transforming him into "a bad guy with a gun," an important new argument for gun control, says Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The tragic case of Christopher Dorner, who allegedly killed four people before dying of an apparently self-inflicted gunshot to the head during a fiery standoff in California last week, underscores the central fallacy of the National Rifle Association's idea about arming "good guys" with guns to kill "bad guys" with guns.

One obvious problem with the NRA argument is that "good guys" can very quickly become "bad guys." Dorner, a former Los Angeles police officer and Navy reservist, experienced what he considered racist injustice at the hands of his police superiors and that seems to have driven him into a vengeful rampage.

Indeed, most shooting deaths in the United States involve ordinary people who would pass a background check and thus obtain a gun legally. It is only after some event sets them off some grievance, some failed romance, some flash of temper, some perceived threat that they use a gun to kill another person (or to take their own life).

While ending loopholes in background checks clearly makes sense, it is not so easy to define when a person's mental illness is severe enough to disqualify him or her from acquiring a gun. Nor is it easy to know when an intervention is necessary to disarm someone. Even how to disarm a person is a challenging and potentially dangerous issue that could touch off violence rather than prevent it.

Adam Lanza, the troubled young man who killed his mother and 26 others (including 20 first-graders) in Newtown, Connecticut, used his mother's legally purchased AR-15 semi-automatic assault rifle to carry out the murders, first shooting his sleeping mother in the face before heading to Sandy Hook Elementary School. Lanza's mother presumably misunderstood how serious her son's mental instability had become.

For many years, American shooting rampages were known as "going postal" because some earlier mass killings were committed by postal workers who snapped under the time pressures of their work environment. Presumably, these postal workers were "good guys" until they suddenly became "bad guys."

In Dorner's case, his work grievances accumulated over time, after he reported what he claimed was excessive violence used by one of his police superiors. However, an internal police investigation sided with Dorner's superior and deemed Dorner a liar who was then dismissed from the force.

Dorner's dismissal sent his life into a downward spiral, finally leading to the shooting spree which ended last Tuesday in the mountains above Los Angeles.

Dorner, 33, was cornered in a cabin before apparently shooting himself as the cabin burned, police said. Dorner's charred remains were pulled from the wreckage.

### **An Anti-Gun Manifesto**

Ironically, even as Dorner armed himself, he condemned the ease with which he obtained powerful weapons, including semi-automatic assault rifles that could be converted into fully automatic weapons. In a 6,000-word manifesto recounting his grievances and condemning the LAPD as racist Dorner also praised legislative proposals to restrict access to guns.

"The time is now to reinstitute a [weapons] ban that will save lives," Dorner wrote. "Why does any sportsman need a 30 round magazine for hunting? Why does anyone need a suppressor? Why does anyone need a AR15 rifle? This is the same small arms weapons system utilized in eradicating Al Qaeda, Taliban, and every enemy combatant since the Vietnam war.

"These do not need to be purchased as easily as walking to your local Walmart or striking the enter key on your keyboard to 'add to cart'. All the firearms utilized in my activities are registered to me and were legally purchased at gun stores and private party transfers.

"No more Virginia Tech, Columbine HS, Wisconsin temple, Aurora theatre, Portland malls, Tucson rally, Newtown Sandy Hook. Whether by executive order or thru a bi-partisan congress an assault weapons ban needs to be re-instituted. Period!!! Mia Farrow said it best. 'Gun control is no longer debatable, it's not a conversation, its a moral mandate.'"

Despite the obvious contradictions between Dorner's opinions and his actions, the final days of his life underscored why many of the more modest proposals to reduce gun violence would fail to achieve the sort of public safety that could begin to make shooting deaths much less common.

While requiring background checks and expanding mental health care surely make sense, a strategy that doesn't restrict the sale of assault weapons and high-quantity magazines would just as surely guarantee many more massacres in the future.

Further, the Dorner case exposes the nuttiness behind the declaration by NRA executive Wayne LaPierre that "the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun" – and his suggestion that school personnel should be armed to fend off the next Adam Lanza.

As the example of ex-police officer Dorner demonstrated, the only thing between

a good guy with a gun becoming a bad guy with a gun is some extreme experience of anger, disappointment or desperation. So, arming up the U.S. population instead of beginning a process of de-escalation only assures more senseless killings.

Putting more guns in the hands of teachers, principals, janitors or even police guards at schools simply multiplies the chances for the next Christopher Dorner to snap.

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