



Americans Against Gun Violence
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No Defense for the Second Amendment

By

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In 2003, the year I was born, there were 11,920 firearm related homicides and 16,907 firearm related suicides in the United States. By my 18th birthday, the numbers of annual firearm related homicides and suicides had both increased by about 60%. On my ninth birthday, the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting took the lives of twenty children, all of whom could have been my classmates. Since I have begun crafting this essay, hundreds of Americans have been killed or injured from gun violence, including a horrifying mass shooting on a subway in Brooklyn. These tragedies punctuate my generation's childhood because of the passivity of a nation that prioritizes guns over people.

The desensitization of our citizens is highlighted as we casually debate whether human lives are worth changing the interpretation of an amendment ratified in 1791. The late Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger asserted in 1991 that the Second Amendment, which had been interpreted for the first two centuries of our country's existence as conferring a collective right for states to maintain armed militias for the common defense, was being fraudulently misrepresented by special interest groups as conferring an individual right to own guns unrelated to militia service. The National Rifle Association, Gun Owners of America, and countless other "gun rights" organizations believe that their invented "right" to own guns is more important than the safety of not just school children, but the tens of thousands of other Americans who die from gun violence each year. Their fraudulent claims have allowed people's blood to stain our nation's foundation as they block the adoption of effective gun control legislation, suppress gun violence research, and earn millions of dollars for themselves and the gun industry while doing so.

A common argument made in support of the gun lobby's "individual right" interpretation of the Second Amendment is that it's essential for law-abiding Americans to own guns for self defense. There is overwhelming evidence, though, that guns in the homes and within communities are much more likely to be used to kill, injure, or intimidate individuals and their family members than to protect them from attackers. Even in the case of a stranger barging into your home, legally owning a gun will not necessarily protect you and your family. Amir Locke picked up his handgun to defend himself after being awakened by police who stormed into his apartment for no apparent reason early one morning. Before Mr. Locke could fire a shot in self defense, a police officer shot him twice in the chest, fatally wounding him. Rather than protecting Mr. Locke, the handgun he grabbed to defend himself enabled the officer, who was the actual aggressor in the situation, to escape prosecution by claiming that he (the officer) was the one who was acting in self defense.

Additionally, the Founding Fathers could not have had the foresight to know the extent of future technological advancements and that the misrepresentation of the Second Amendment would allow private ownership of exceedingly lethal firearms to remain largely unregulated. During the revolutionary era, the deadliest guns were muskets and flintlock pistols. A typical musket could fire 3 rounds each minute and accurately aim up to 50 meters. A modern AR-15 fires 45 rounds in the same 60 seconds while aiming 10 times farther. Their contrasting abilities highlight the unimaginable leap in technology which, in the case of firearms, allows people to be killed at faster rates and from farther distances.

The Constitution and Bill of Rights have been altered hundreds of times since their inception. Without these changes, Black Americans would still be enslaved. Women and people of color would not be able to vote. Every aspect of our nation would remain true to the ideals of white, privileged men who lived in the 1700s.

I agree with Chief Justice Burger's statement in 1991 that the misrepresentation of the Second Amendment by the gun lobby is a fraud. I doubt, though, that Justice Burger, who died in 1995, could have envisioned that in 2008, when I was five years old, a narrow 5-4 majority of Supreme Court justices would become a party to this fraud in the rogue *Heller* decision. In this holding, the Court reversed over two centuries of legal precedent by ruling for the first time in U.S. history that the Second Amendment conferred an individual right to own guns unrelated to service in a well regulated militia. While the gun industry and the associated gun lobby profit from this fraud, tens of thousands of Americans are paying for it annually with their lives. In the short term, the *Heller* decision must be reversed. In the long term, the antiquated Second Amendment should be repealed. Americans have many rights that allow us to freely conduct ourselves, but feeling entitled to own deadly weapons despite innocent lives being taken should not be one of them.

Resources

"Firearms and Crime Statistics." Bureau of Justice Statistics, bjs.ojp.gov/content/guns.

"Gun Control and Gun Rights: Advocacy Organizations." Library, library.ship.edu/c.php?g=21651&p=126895.

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