

The Obsolescence Of The 2nd Amendment

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In exploring this topic, it is worth considering the tendency for some to become mired in delusive thinking.

The “illusory truth effect” arises from the tendency for one to believe false information when one has been routinely fed NOTHING BUT that information for as long as one can remember. To have such “truths” challenged can be jarring. As a consequence, ideologues are strongly inclined to reject—out of hand—any information that undermines the narrative with which they have become smitten.

This is, after all, how dogmatism works: The passion with which one espouses a certain tenet is seen as attesting to the truth of that tenet. “I believe it so strongly, I simply MUST be right.” Emotional attachment is thus taken as a sign of credence. So people will become infatuated with phantasms (as with a “god-given right for everyone to carry guns”), forgetting that they are figments.

Meanwhile, utility is construed as a sign of veracity. If believing a proposition seems to confer some sort of advantage, we will be strongly inclined to espouse it, no matter how farical. Being eminently pragmatic creatures, sheer practicality is sometimes sufficient to persuade us that something is true (or, at least, should be considered “true”). For the gun-fetishist, believing that the 2nd Amendment confers an inalienable right to amass firearms at one’s own discretion provides immense gratification; and that is enough to sustain the delusion. Meanwhile, those who stand to benefit financially from gun-mania (gun and ammo manufacturers / retailers) have a staunch, vested interest in perpetuating the myth.

Before embarking on this (admittedly contentious) critical analysis, some preliminary comments are in order. This is not an anti-gun diatribe. Rather, it is an observation of certain historical exigencies, followed by speculation about the social psychology that undergirds misconceptions of those exigencies. Much of the misconception stems from conceiving the purported “right” for civilians to bear arms as a precondition for civil liberties and a secure / safe citizenry; thereby seeing such a right as a proxy for freedom-in-general. Such thinking, I contend, is misguided. Worse than misguided, it has fueled a peculiar social pathology, born of neuroses, that amounts to a fetishization of guns.

The implication of the conclusion reached here is that if a person wants to own / use firearms in the U.S., there would need to be recourse to something other than the U.S. Constitution’s 4th-cum-2nd Amendment to do so—notably: gun licenses (e.g. for hunting). This means that bearing arms would be treated as a special privilege, not as a categorical right. What is indicted here, then, is a misreading of history, and thus a misreading of a single statement in a vaunted historical document.

How is it that such a misreading occurs? There is an eisegetical trick employed—whereby a clause extracted from a complete statement is taken out of context (both intertextually and historically). { 1 } Ideologues smitten with a particular document are apt to extract a favored parcel of text from its native

exposition...and then quote it as if it existed in isolation.

Ideologues seeking to leverage the prestige assigned to the designated text are often tempted to engage in such exegetical shenanigans. They will do so in order to get the passage-in-question to SEEM TO say what they very much wish it said. By appealing to (what is purported to be) an unimpeachable source, they can lend their claims a veneer of legitimacy. A familiar case-study of such legerdemain is American gun-fetishists' treatment of the 4th—later rendered the 2nd—Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. {2} Here, we will look at what the statement really means; and then explore what gun-fetishists pretend it means.

The gist of the statement—a single sentence—could not possibly be more plain. It regards the need for civic service in a government-regulated civilian militia for the purpose of protecting the State from domestic insurrection and/or foreign incursion. As we'll see, this need arose under the assumption that no standing army (that is: no professional military) existed—or even SHOULD exist—to perform this vital task. According to the explicit terms of the Amendment (viz. its conditional clause), the existence of a standing army obviates the need for a civilian militia.

Certain questions arise at the start. How can we know what was meant by “militia” in this context? Here, intertextuality comes to the rescue. To see that “militia” pertained to service to the State in a military capacity, we need only refer to where else the term is used in the Bill Of Rights. Sure enough, in the 5th Amendment, it is listed along with land and naval forces as a State resource to be constituted in time of war. (Such resources are mentioned when specifying the exception to the requirement of being indicted by a Grand Jury when answering to capital crimes.)

And so it went: At the time that the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment was composed, the ability for civilians to be called to service in order to ensure the security of the nation-State was deemed necessary in lieu of a standing army. Alas. Today, right-wing ideologues in the U.S. treat this provisional measure as an inviolable license to amass a personal armory for one's own purposes, at one's own discretion. They take this position even as the need for a civilian militia has been rendered obsolete by the establishment of the U.S. Armed Forces (i.e. a standing army). In this view, the license to “bear arms” is eternal—and thus forever irrevocable. Such an interpretation makes sense only if we were to assume that the prerogative for any given person to have lethal weapons—of his own accord—is an integral part of the maintenance of any civil society.

But is this a prudent assumption? In posing this question, we are invited to step through the looking glass and imagine ourselves in some sort of alternate reality in which everyone is safer insofar as they have MORE access to lethal weapons. Proponents of this view see the public square as a Wild West. In this intoxicating reverie, each gun-toting patriot fancies himself a valiant mercenary, tasked with vanquishing the villains of the world with the quick draw of his Colt...presumably before riding off into the sunset. {3} In this fever-dream, patriotism is marked by those ready to met out vigilante justice with a deadly weapon.

Within the Twilight Zone of gun-fetishism, this delusive worldview seems to make sense—and so the “Wild West” mentality is seen as warranted. But the hyper-romanticized imagery of the cowboy (ready for a shoot-out at a moment's notice) is misleading. For, in the REAL “Wild West”, most municipalities had stringent gun-laws—significantly restricting an individual's prerogative to “bear arms”. In many towns, guns were forbidden; and for good reason.

And so it went—not in the fabled “Wild West”, but in ACTUAL HISTORY—that towns routinely enacted gun bans in the name of public safety. At the time, everyone recognized that strict municipal ordinances

were a matter of common sense—whether it was on the streets of Manhattan or in the saloon of a frontier settlement.

Never mind all that. Heedless of history, the 21st-century super-patriot ardently clings to his firearm: a prosthetic for the machismo he so earnestly covets. {5} His hankering for the right to “carry” is an attempt to see himself as a swaggering vigilante...as if the Constitutional Amendment had been included as a contingency for undertaking guerrilla warfare against the very State the document was composed to protect.

The gun-fetishist fashions himself a responsible citizen simply for having armed himself with a weapon he will almost certainly never actually need; thereby further endangering all bystanders. So what of making society safer? As it turns out, the entire planet is a glaring counter-factual to the daft bromide: “The more guns in circulation, the safer everyone is.” {4} In reality, accessibility to lethal firearms is *inversely* proportional to public safety.

I will argue here that honoring the “2nd Amendment” means recognizing its obsolescence. This does not mean that there are not alternate arguments for civilians to own guns (under certain circumstances). Like the right to drive a car, such a right would be provisional, not inalienable. Consequently, it would need to be justified without recourse to the obsolete emendation to the U.S. Constitution so long ago. {31}

Before effecting reform, it is necessary to dispel myths that continue to proliferate. Let’s begin, then, with a review of the actual history of this celebrated Amendment.

The salient exigencies are relatively straight-forward. At the time of its composition (1789), in the absence of a standing army (which, as we’ll see, the Founders were adamant about NOT having), there was an obvious need to specify the means by which the new (Federalized) State would be able to ensure its own security. The Amendment, then, pertained to a right that was contingent on people serving as members in a militia: a public body which was to be thoroughly-regulated by the State, and which was constituted to serve the new Republic.

And so it went that the right to “bear arms” was accorded to white men insofar as said militia was required to effect the security of the State. As long as there was no professional military of which the State could avail itself, there would continue to be such a necessity.

More to the point, the maintenance of a non-professional (civilian-based) militia “necessary for the security of a free State” required the assurance of a collective right, which had nothing to do with the rights of any given INDIVIDUAL.

Here, “The People” is collective—just as it is in the opening of the Declaration of Independence; as well as in the 1st Amendment’s reference to an assemblage of aggrieved citizens (each of whom reserves the right to petition the government). When George Mason adopted this phrasing, it is important to note that he capitalized “People”, indicating a POLIS: the citizenry taken as a whole.

This point is crucial. The ability to assemble was a means of facilitating the commonweal, not an invitation to pursue individual ends. In the 1st Amendment, “the People” was used solely in the clause pertaining to the (collective) right to petition the government for redress of grievances—that is: things done on behalf of the polity. Thus “The People” was used ONLY AFTER the enumeration of *individual* freedoms: those of speech and the press. (Recognizing the lexical demarcation of such clauses requires one to know the difference between a comma and a semi-colon.) To reiterate: Freedom of speech and of the press are a matter of individual rights, not collective rights; hence the key locution “The People” is NOT used in that

clause. It appears only in the NEXT clause.

This is in keeping with the wording that is used for individual rights in subsequent amendments: “any person” as opposed to “The People”. The 5th Amendment specifies: “nor shall ANY PERSON” be deprived of life, liberty, or property. Indeed, it would not have made any sense to begin that amendment with “The People shall not be...” Likewise, the 14th Amendment pertains not to “The People”, but to “all persons”; and warns against denying “ANY PERSON” equal protection. In other words, it pertains to (individual) “citizens” rather than to the (collective) “People”. The wording of the 15th amendment is also consistent with this hermeneutic; as it refers to “citizens” when conferring the right to vote on each and every individual qua individual. Again, it would not have made sense to refer to “The People” in this context.

Thus an enumerated right pertaining to “The People” was seen as a function of civic-minded-ness (“We’re all in this together”) rather than of self-interest (“It’s primarily about what I want for myself”). For the first draft of the 3rd-cum-1st Amendment, Madison used this locution when he wrote: “*The People* shall not be restrained from peaceably assembling and consulting *for their common good.*” In other words, the right of assembly had to do with the public interest; so was about ensuring the “general welfare” (as articulated in the Constitution’s Preamble). Such a right was not solely concerned with the domain of the individual; it pertained to what economists would later dub “public goods” (e.g. public education, public health, public safety, and—yes—the security of a free State).

And so it went with the use of the locution, “The People” in the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment. In its capacity as a facilitator of security, the polis QUA COLLECTIVE was designated a resource of the State. {6} This had nothing to do with personal interests. {7} It was the right of “The People” (as a polity) to bear arms that was at issue.

The locution, “The People” was synonymous with the demos. This meaning is in keeping with its use in the 9th and 10th Amendments. Most tellingly of all, when “the People” is used in (what finally came to be) the 4th Amendment, the point at which “security” is intended to refer to individuals, the term “persons” is used instead.

We might note that even the phrase “the People” is problematic; as, at the time, it pertained exclusively to able-bodied, white, land-holding men. Not to non-whites. Not to women. Not to anybody who did not own land. It is no coincidence that these were also the qualifications for the right to vote. Hence the (proposed) demographic composition of the militias (that is: up until the Civil War).

Note that men who were non-white and/or did not own land, YET who were deemed fit to serve in the militia, were provided firearms (muskets) explicitly in their capacity as members of the militia. Thus they were accorded said right insofar as they were serving the State. Tellingly, the federal government REVOKED the right of a civilian to bear arms in the event that, when reporting for muster, he was seen as incapable of maintaining the weapon (i.e. its upkeep); or otherwise deemed unfit to “bear arms” and fulfill his charge. {8} Unaccountable vagabonds tended not to be afforded the prerogative to keep arms for themselves, at their own pleasure.

In sum: A (white) man was permitted to bear the arms solely in his designated role as a militiaman—that is: insofar as he was equipped to serve the State.

It’s worth reiterating the point: In the event that a man was deemed incapable of serving in his appointed

capacity (to wit: in a well-regulated militia), he forfeited his provisional license to bear arms. It is clear that the right was seen as provisional, and was subordinated to the fitness to carry out the civic duty specified. Testament to this fact is that, over the course of the ensuing century, various “imprudent usage” laws were enacted. Such measures accorded local governments the prerogative to revoke insolent civilians’ privilege to keep / bear firearms.

And so it went in April of 1775 with the battles of Lexington and Concord. The anti-British side was constituted of local militias—who fashioned themselves as “American Patriots”. There was no standing army; there was only a mechanism for mobilizing civilians to the revolutionary cause. These militias sometimes even included an espionage department (established to route those who sought to betray the Republic). Notably, the New York militia instituted the “Committee for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies” as a way of identifying those with dubious allegiances (read: anyone conspiring to revolt). {7} This attests to the fact that the appointed capacity was about serving the State.

It is worth looking to the years PRIOR to the composition of the Constitution. After the Revolutionary War, the mechanism for mobilizing soldiers was written into the Articles of the Confederation: “[Each] State shall always keep up a well-regulated and disciplined militia, sufficiently armed and accoutered, and shall provide and constantly have ready for use, in public stores, a due number of field pieces and tents, and a proper quantity of arms, ammunition and camp equipage.” This statement (Article VI) was the precursor to the Amendment-in-question. Clearly, it had nothing whatsoever to do with individual rights. The equipage, from muskets to tents, was inextricably linked to service in a militia...which is to say: in the service of the State. Those accoutrements included boots, canteens, muskets, bayonets, and gun-powder sacks.

The *raison d’etre* of the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment was illustrated by events that prompted a further realization that such an Amendment was needed at the time (that is: the time leading up to the drafting of the Constitution). A propitious event was the uprising AGAINST the militia by Daniel Shays at Springfield in the first couple months of 1787.

Note that the 4th Division of the Massachusetts militia had commissioned officers (Benjamin Lincoln as XO; William Shepard as CO). Such official appoints demonstrated that the militia was—indeed—a body serving the State. What happened AFTER the attempted insurrection was also telling. The governor of Massachusetts offered a pardon to those who’d participated in the rebellion; but only on the condition that they swore an oath of allegiance, and surrendered their arms to the state.

Even the irascible rebel icon, Samuel Adams reiterated the importance of the State being able to mobilize a militia. The timing of Shays’ Rebellion was serendipitous; as the rebellion culminated just as the Constitutional Convention was about to convene (that summer).

The lesson of that uprising taught lawmakers an important lesson: the Articles of the Confederation were far too weak to abide a new Republic (an observation made most adamantly by none other than John Jay). Due to this incident, it was recognized that civilian militias—in the service of a stronger FEDERAL government—were, indeed, necessary for the subsistence and security of a free State. {9}

The concern about such rebellions served as a catalyst for the introduction of the Amendment; and so attests to the *raison d’etre* of the Amendment. Moreover, the potential for uprisings reiterated the fact that the Articles of the Confederation had relegated too much governing power to the local level. That is: Such authority was too dispersed for viable a REPUBLIC, wherein such things needed to be centrally

orchestrated. It became plain to see that more governing prerogative needed to be arrogated to the Federal level.

Hence the provision in the U.S. Constitution that Congress reserved the right to call up an army / navy AS NEEDED, thereby supplementing civilian militias—which, at the time, were (correctly) deemed to be inadequate for major military confrontations. {10}

Alas, gun-fetishists today pretend that the Amendment was drafted so as to FURTHER ENABLE the very thing militias were instituted to pre-empt. It's as though the "right to bear arms" were an effort to ensure more Shays' Rebellions were possible. In effect, the PRIVATE "militia" groups of today, which deign to pose as a countermeasure to the power of the Federal government (with the tacit threat of "rising up") are proposing a reprise of Shays' Rebellion: the very thing the Amendment-in-question was made to DETER. {11}

Progressives recognize that dissent is the highest form of patriotism. (Any idiot can wave a flag.) The 1st Amendment is very clear that any dissent must be "peaceable". It does NOT say: "But if you REALLY want to protest, forget the 'peaceable' part." Nor does it stipulate: "However, in the event that any faction deems it warranted, license is granted for armed insurrection."

Making this treacherous leap (supposing that the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment was written as a provisional abrogation of the 1st Amendment) is not merely far-fetched; it is mendacious. It is harebrained to construe an Amendment about mobilizing a well-regulated militia (enjoined to be sufficiently equipped for its charge) as an invitation to stage a coup.

Pursuant to the Amendment in question: White male citizens—and ONLY white male citizens—retained their own arms at the pleasure of the State; and so THEY were the ones mobilized for the task. It is worth reiterating that the government sometimes REVOKED the license to keep / bear a firearm in the event that—upon reporting for muster—a man was deemed unfit to properly maintain the weapon. Such revocations were a reminder that the right existed at the pleasure of the State. {8}

When it came to keeping / bearing arms, gun registration was de jure. Many states required that a man register his musket with the local militia. Some states even passed laws requiring that men take loyalty oaths (or risk confiscation of their weapons). Why? One's keeping / bearing arms was contingent on one's willingness to carry out one's charge: to ensure the security of the Republic. This right, like one's commission, was provisional (as attested by the qualifier, "well-regulated" in the Amendment).

It is no surprise, then, that gun regulations were put in place for several reasons—including concerns of public safety. In keeping with this, several of the early states stipulated how gunpowder was to be stored and transported; and how much each citizen could own. Notably, Boston prohibited keeping loaded guns in one's home. (One's firearms had to be stored unloaded.) A few states even passed laws about where a person could fire a gun.

This all made perfect sense once the keeping / bearing of arms was contextualized: requisite equipage vis a vis one's (qualified) capacity as a militiaman.

In sum: Any participation in a State-regulated militia is for the express purpose of ensuring the security of the State. It is a collective right; and—more to the point—a CONTINGENCY-based right. Suffice to say: Unless you are a member of a well-regulated militia charged with effecting the security of the State, the 2nd amendment to the U.S. Constitution has nothing to do with you.

Put another way: Unless you are bearing arms to serve the federal government, in order to make the case that you have a right to bear arms (for some other purpose), you cannot appeal to the 2nd Amendment; you need to put forth an argument that prevails on its own terms (the prerogative to hunt with certain kinds of lethal firearms, for example).

So what now? The Amendment's condition was rendered null and void the moment the federal government instituted a professional military; therefore the predicate no longer attains. With the development of the War Department (re-named the "Department of Defense" pursuant to the second World War), this Amendment became categorically obsolete; thereby nullifying the need for the citizenry to remain "armed" (at least, with respect to the reason given in the Amendment).

Tellingly, one of the first APPLICATIONS of the Amendment-in-question was in 1794, when George Washington led a federalized force of militiamen against the a revolt in western Pennsylvania—an incident commonly known as the "Whiskey Rebellion". Tellingly, the President invoked the Amendment in keeping with its legislative counterpart, the "Militia Act" passed two years earlier. He invoked the Amendment so as to require able-bodied men to report for duty; and to do so with THEIR muskets. This was a clear demonstration that the provision was added to the Constitution to put down insurrections, not to facilitate them. And so it went that an actual situation demonstrated the statement's intended application.

Later events corroborated the purpose of the Amendment-in-question. State militias were mobilized by the federal government in the spring of 1832 to put down a Native American rebellion. Members of the Sauk, Fox, and Kickapoo tribes (a coalition led by Sauk chief, Black Hawk) were attempting to reclaim land that had been sold to the U.S. in 1804 (without their consent) as part of the Treaty Of St. Louis—territory in present-day Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. (Included among the Illinois state militiamen was a 23-year-old named Abraham Lincoln, who'd been appointed the captain of his company.) This was yet another demonstration of what militias were (i.e. military bodies formed at the behest of the U.S. government); and what they were for (protecting government interests from insurrections). It was in THAT capacity that bearing arms was salient at the time. It was for THAT purpose that the Second Amendment was composed.

This made practical sense. If the license to bear (one's own) arms had not been afforded, it would have been difficult to ensure everyone serving in the militia was sufficiently equipped to fulfill their charge (in this case, to put down a rebellion by Native Americans). Concern about robbers breaking into one's house to steal one's wares had nothing to do with it.

Thus history furnishes us with a clear account of the meaning behind the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment.

The Civil War, eight decades after the Amendment was written, offers another instructive case. Civilians (within the Union) were called to take up arms at the behest of—and thus in service to—the State (qua Federal government). Sure enough, when the civilian soldiers were called to muster, in the event that their muskets were found not to be adequately maintained, the muskets were confiscated by the army. In other words, the men bore arms AT THE PLEASURE OF—and FOR THE BENEFIT OF—the State. History, then, gave yet another illustration that the "right" to bear arms was not categorical, it was conditional. That right—still necessary at the time—was a license sanctioned by the State in the same way that civilians now have a right to, say, drive a car, operate heavy machinery, serve alcohol, sell real-estate...or even go fishing.

Lest we forget, the capacity to bear arms (as a means to ensure a sufficiently-equipped civilian militia) is

stipulated in the main body of the U.S. Constitution. It is there that we find what the Founders had in mind when they referred to a “militia”; and what that militia was for. **Article I, section 8** endows Congress with the power “to provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining the militia...in the service of the United States.” There was no charter for a professional / standing army.

Section 15 of Article I then states that the Congress shall have the Power “to provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions.”

Clearly, the reason that the “keep and bear arms” language was employed was to enable the federal government to have a ready supply of already-armed citizens available to quash an insurrection and/or stave off invasion, not to arm citizens so that they could stage a coup. (Ramping up production and distribution of muskets to prep for such a mobilization would have been far too slow if prompt response was needed.)

What, then, did “well-regulated” mean? The answer is given in the very next section. Section 16 stated that the Congress shall have the Power “to provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining the Militia, and for governing such Part of them as may be employed in the Service of the United States, reserving to the States respectively, the Appointment of the Officers and the Authority of training the Militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress.”

This is precisely what Congress had in mind when it passed the “Militia Act” in 1792, which declared that “every free able-bodied white male citizen” over the age of eighteen was to be enrolled in the militia... TO SERVE THE STATE. In that capacity, the legislation stated, each man would be under the authority of the “Captain or Commanding Officer of the company” appointed to the place that he resides.

That the Amendment applied exclusively to white men was reaffirmed in the Dred Scott decision of 1857; and again in the U.S. v. Cruikshank decision of 1875. Such exigencies provide a clear historical context for the Amendment-in-question.

Alas. America’s gun-fetishists NOW invoke this simple statement for completely unrelated purposes. They are forced to pretend that the Amendment propounds an inalienable right of each and every individual (qua individual) to stockpile armaments...irrespective of aforesaid membership in a well-regulated militia; AND irrespective of the existence of the necessity for said militia (which no longer attains). Even more preposterous, the imagined inviolability of the right is posited so that individuals may “bear arms” for the purpose of RISING UP AGAINST the State (which would, in effect, amount to waging war against the Armed Forces of the United States of America). {12}

This is one of the most extreme cases imaginable of taking a clause (the predicate) out of context (that is: divorced entirely from the conditional clause). It is not a coincidence that whenever we hear the 2nd Amendment cited by American gun-fetishists today, only the predicate is quoted (with the condition omitted). {13}

It comes as little surprise, then, that over the course of the past two generations, this simple statement has been turned into a marketing tool for the gun / ammunition manufacturing—and retail—industry (which is concerned with maximizing sales). Today, the Amendment—now obsolete—is nothing but a cover for corporate greed masquerading as a measure to protect a civil right. It also serves as pretext for the on-going obsession with guns...which, of course, fuels the demand for the product. Once we consider this, it is quite plain that the vaunted NRA has nothing to do with protecting “rights”. It is a business lobby—analogous to,

say, the Corrections Corporation of America vis a vis the prison-industrial complex (whereby incarceration-mania translates to a bonanza for private financial interests). {14}

So what of “SELF-defense”? Another oft-touted rationalization for this illusory entitlement is that the Amendment was added to ensure people could protect THEMSELVES. The idea here is that personal firearms are a vital means of facilitating the security of homesteads and physical bodies. {15}

Consequently, gun-fetishists pretend the statement reads “necessary to each person’s security in his own home / person” instead of “necessary to the security of a free State”. Presumably, the rest of us are expected not to see what is written before our very eyes; and to then pretend that others’ hallucinations have been written on the page—in black and white—for all to see. {16}

This hoodwink proceeds from what might be described as eisegesis-on-steroids. In fact, it is best to simply call it what it is: lying. Pretending a contingency should be treated as an inviolability defies basic reading comprehension. That so many people countenance such exegetical shenanigans is not so baffling once we understand the motives involved. Yet that so many others oblige their delusion is, indeed, rather astonishing.

The irony of this interpretational boondoggle (that bearing arms is a necessary measure for personal security) is that it depends on sustaining a chronic INSECURITY. {5} The untenable proposition is: More guns means a safer public square. This, of course, makes no sense. {4}

To review: The 4th-cum-2nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution explicitly pertains to a CONDITIONAL provision for the citizenry to serve the State in a certain capacity; yet it is often passed off as a providing an INALIENABLE right for each person to serve himself. With some interpretational acrobatics, a tacit logistical measure (to ensure the security of the State) is magically transmuted into a civil right (protection of individuals).

For the gun-fetishist, tacit provision is taken to confer an IMMUTABLE warrant for any given person to “defend” himself with lethal force (and/or rise up against the federal government) of his own accord. Never mind that the statement concerns the need for the polis to play a certain role (and thus to be equipped with necessary munitions so as to fulfill that role) GIVEN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES.

The exigencies prompting the need for the Amendment were commonly understood at the time of its composition: The lack of a standing army. But let’s inquire further: WHY no standing army? It is worth investigating why a civilian militia was preferred in lieu of a professional military force of the sort that is now subsumed by today’s “Pentagon”.

Many of the statesmen who commented on the matter at the time of the Constitution’s drafting saw a standing army as antithetical to the maintenance of a free polity. Indeed, at the time, the institution of a professional military apparatus, as part of the executive branch, was seen as paving the way for government tyranny, as all firepower would be, as it were, in-house. The drafters believed, not without good reason, that insofar as there was NOT a civilian militia (as a contingency), such an dire eventuality was immanent. {32}

Consequently, there needed to be a sufficiently-equipped civilian militia in order to preclude the perceived dangers of a standing army, which was a hallmark of tyranny. (Only tyrants, it was believed, had professional soldiers.) John Adams thought this. {34} Theodore Sedgwick thought this. George Mason thought this. James Monroe thought this. And, most importantly, James Madison thought this. This

explains why Madison's suggested wording for the Amendment was: **“The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; a well armed and well regulated militia being the best security of a free country.”**

The idea was that, should a demagogue ever arise, he might hijack the machinery of the State, thereby making use of its monopoly on armaments. In other words: If the State had a standing army (as it does now), said demagogue could readily mobilize the military to effect his own agenda, with nothing to stop him. {36} Therefore, the thinking went, it was prudent to disperse military power amongst the citizenry. This was not so that insurgent elements could more readily “rise up” AGAINST the State; it was so that, in the event that such a demagogue tried to seize power, militiamen would be “called to duty” in order to PROTECT the State (from said demagogue's tyrannical designs). {37} A standing army, it was believed, would jeopardize the Republic; so a civilian militia was needed INSTEAD.

At the time, this was an understandable fear. It was the potential perils endemic to a *federalized* military that served as the primary justification for the maintenance of civilian militias (that is: the only viable alternative for ensuring the security of a free State).

In *Federalist Paper no. 46*, James Madison made it clear that THIS was, indeed, the primary concern when it came to a professional military (read: a permanent War Department). He was unequivocal in voicing his concerns about the dangers associated with an aggregation of firepower at the federal level. Indeed, his words show explicitly that, at the time, a professional military was EQUATED WITH tyranny. So he wrote: “An armed citizenry is an essential check against the tyranny of standing armies.”

The sentiments regarding dangers of a professional military were made clear by Thomas Jefferson's quip that private banks were “[even] more dangerous than standing armies.” He thus feared a plutocracy even more than a military junta.

A professional military is an invitation to tyranny: This was a valid concern of a bygone era; which is why the only other option was a civilian militia. But the assumption that a civilian militia is a necessary bulwark against tyranny no longer attains. Indeed, nobody today is concerned that the existence of the Department of Defense PER SE is a threat to a free State. One cannot still fall back on Madison's justification for an armed citizenry (predicated, as it was, on the assumption that a standing army is tantamount to tyranny-in-the-making) and at the same time concede that the existence of the Pentagon (which is a standing army) is consummate with a free Republic; as the latter entirely contravenes the rationalization for the former.

Bottom line: Military power is no longer distributed amongst civilians in order to ensure the security of a free State; as the Republic now DOES see fit to maintain a professional military as part of the Executive Branch—nay, the MOST WELL-FUNDED part of the Executive Branch. For over a century now, this federal apparatus has been deemed UN-threatening to democracy...not only in the United States, but in ALL democracies of the modern world. To now invoke this antiquated Constitutional provision to adduce a universal entitlement to keep firearms (for one's own purposes) is nothing short of preposterous.

The logistics follow. To wit: Arming “THE PEOPLE” was a prerequisite of maintaining said militia—the sine qua non of which was ensuring the security of the nation-State.

It's worth recapitulating: Not only was the militia a necessary security measure (given that, at the time, a standing army was out of the question); the militia was necessary in order to FORESTALL ANY NEED

for a standing army, the very existence of which would—it was supposed—imperil democracy. {10}

This point can't be emphasized enough. An adamant repudiation of there being a standing army prompted the need for a civilian militia, which required civilians be adequately equipped to fulfill that role. (For further evidence that measures needed to be taken AT THAT TIME in lieu of a standing army, see footnote 35.)

This affordance would eventually be obviated by the establishment of the War-cum-Defense Department. To pretend the Amendment-in-question is still relevant, that pivotal development must be ignored.

For gun-fetishists, the contingency on which the provision was explicitly based is elided; and the predicate is clandestinely rendered a timeless mandate (for a completely unrelated purpose). The result is simply: “The right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”

From protecting the State to protecting one's own domicile / person (using whatever munitions one sees fit), national defense is replaced with self-defense. Even more bewildering, the public interest is replaced with self-interest; and the security of the State is replaced with the ability to shoot people one finds threatening. {17}

With a wink and a nod, delimited civilian service (with muskets) is magically transmogrified into unmitigated personal prerogative (with modern fire-arms). Without even the bat of an eyelash, a provisional right can thus be sold as an immutable entitlement.

But what of dissent? As mentioned earlier, the Bill Of Rights does, indeed, afford the citizenry license to “peaceably assemble”. It is, after all, the First Amendment. Assembly amounts to gathering and engaging in non-violent protest. To what end? Well, to petition the State for redress of grievances. That is, after all, what Martin Luther King Jr. did (to express disapproval for the Vietnam war, to advocate for organized labor, and to promote civil rights for African Americans).

Here's the thing: Such an action—a CIVIC action—has nothing whatsoever to do with bearing arms. The irony is that IF the authors had intended protestation to include arming oneself for violent insurrection, they would have SAID SO. More to the point, they would have stipulated such a provision IN THE FIRST AMENDMENT—that is: when they were addressing the right to engage in protest.

In that case, however, “peaceably” would not have been used to qualify “assemble”; and instead the authors would have been clear about the prerogative to take up arms against the State (in the event that some portion of the citizenry deemed it to have become tyrannical). Of course, that is NOT what was meant by “peaceably assemble”—a phrase that simply referred to organizing in the public square and making an open show of dissent.

Had the matter of “arms” been seen as having any connection to protestation, it would have surely been broached in the very next Amendment; but it wasn't. Bearing arms was broached three Amendments later.

The Amendment-in-question was originally the FOURTH Amendment, positioned just before the Amendment addressing the quartering of soldiers. The Amendment that was ORIGINALLY listed second pertained to Congress giving itself raises—a matter that was eventually addressed in the 27th Amendment. Clearly, these issues (dissent and bearing arms) were seen as entirely separate matters.

So what of the inviolability of an individual, and his right to keep property of his own accord? Well, THAT was addressed in the 6th-cum-4th Amendment.

Meanwhile, the 4th-cum-2nd and 5th-cum-3rd Amendments pertained to WAR POWERS. This was made clear in the first draft of the document, wherein the Amendment-in-question (initially listed at the FIFTH Amendment) specified that the “well-regulated militia” would be comprised of “the body of the people”; and that THAT BODY was to be afforded arms...AS A BODY. Why? Because such a body was “the best [means of] security for a free State.”

The original draft then added that this right (i.e. the right of said body, qua militia) to bear of arms was a matter of “render[ing] military service.” It makes sense, then, that the following article addressed the quartering of soldiers.

All of this is corroborated by George Mason’s proposal for a Bill Of Rights, composed in September of 1787, in which he stated that **“a well-regulated militia, composed of the Body of the People, trained to arms, is the proper, natural, and safe defense of a free State.”** Why? **“Standing Armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty, and therefore ought to be avoided as far as the circumstances and protection of the community will admit.”**

And what did “well-regulated” entail? Mason explained in the very next line: **“In all cases, the military should be under strict subordination to—and governed by—the Civil Power.”** (!)

To suppose, then, that this had anything to do with individual prerogative to engage in SELF-defense (and do so with lethal force, at his own discretion), let alone with affording people the prerogative to RISE UP AGAINST said “Civil Power”, is preposterous.

Recall that the worry was that a standing / professional army was seen as a risk, capable of overthrowing the government should certain parties want a coup; and that a civilian militia was to be used instead. By interpreting the Amendment-in-question as an invitation to rise up against the State, one finds oneself invoking a provision to do the very thing it was designed to avoid.

That somebody today would keep an AR-15 under his bed so that he is able to use lethal force against a burglar is patently absurd. To suppose that such an outlandish measure would be justified by a statement pertaining to a “well-regulated militia” is BEYOND absurd. “I need to be able to kill intruders in my own kitchen” has nothing to do with military service...and certainly has no bearing whatsoever on the “safe defense of a free State.”

As it turns out, there are antecedent sources on which Madison based his wording of the Amendment-in-question. First, we might refer to Article 6, Paragraph 4 of the Articles of Confederation:

“...every State shall always keep up a well-regulated and disciplined militia, sufficiently armed and accoutered, and shall provide and constantly have ready for use, in public stores, a due number of field pieces and tents, and a proper quantity of arms, ammunition and camp equipage.”

To elucidate the spirit behind the provision-in-question, we find that the preceding draft of the Amendment is very telling. It read as follows: **“The right of The People to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; a well armed, and well-regulated militia being the best [means of] security of a free country.”** {18}

Here, the absence of a standing army was *presumed*. The key difference, of course, is that the condition on which the predicate was stipulated was initially placed AFTER rather than BEFORE that predicate. In other words, there was a deliberate choice to move the conditional clause to the front, thereby BEGINNING the statement with the militia stipulation (thus indicating its preeminence). One might say that the predicate existed ONLY BECAUSE OF the condition specified.

This was done—in large part—in response to the demands (voiced most vociferously by the state’s largest slave-holder, Patrick Henry) that protections for slave patrols be made more explicit. Subsequently, during the Virginia Ratifying Convention in 1788, James Madison re-worded the Amendment-in-question accordingly. The result is the phrasing of the Amendment with which we are now familiar, which STARTS with the conditional clause (giving it rhetorical primacy). {9}

It is implicit in the condition: “In the event that—at some point in the future—there IS a standing army (of which the State can avail itself), the necessity for a civilian militia for the security of a free State will be null and void.”

That’s how things stood in 1788. Hence militiamen being at the ready (sufficiently equipped) to be called to service by the State. But how was this vision to be realized? On January 9 of that year, Alexander Hamilton had addressed this matter in Federalist Paper No. 29 (“Concerning The Militia”). He wrote that this “can only be accomplished by confiding the regulation of the militia to the direction of the National authority... If a well-regulated militia be the most natural defense of a free country, it ought certainly to be under the regulation and at the disposal of that body which is constituted the guardian of the National security.”

Clearly, Hamilton was arguing that state militias would serve in the place of a standing army. His point here was simple. In order to be effective, state militias would need to all have uniform (that is: Federalized) rules of organization and discipline; and be well-regulated under standards enacted by the federal government. Hence he used the wording: **“If a well-regulated militia be the most natural defense of a free country...”** Sound familiar? It should. This was clearly the same idea expressed in the conditional clause of the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment. (Simply replace “the most natural defense of” with “necessary to the security of”.)

Today, this acutely straight-forward provision is twisted and contorted by gun-fetishists to mean that stock-piling fire-arms at one’s own discretion is an inalienable right for each and every individual qua individual. This outlandish reading is rationalized by any given citizen’s imagined need to (A) protect his domicile or himself and (B) be able to rise up AGAINST the State should he see fit. Such an interpretation is analogous to reading a recipe for chocolate cake and using it as an instruction manual for assembling a bulldozer.

It’s not that people are blind; it’s that some people see only what they want to see. It doesn’t matter what the text actually says; they will go to their deathbeds insisting that it says whatever it is that they desperately wish it said. The problem with eisegesis is that it allows people to launder odious ideologies via the seemingly benign enterprise of just heeding whatever the anointed source says. Such hermeneutic chicanery depends more on perceptions than on realities. When the source is deemed sacrosanct, virtually any conduct can be given a veneer of legitimacy by simply invoking it. For American gun-fetishists, the “Second Amendment” is not so much a citation as it is an incantation.

So the only connection is, well, GUNS. This non sequitur is made possible because a key feature of the

well-regulated, civilian militia referenced in the Amendment is that it would be well-armed. As we've seen, the provisional right was accorded to "the People" so that those serving in the capacity of militiamen could be well-armed. The point was to equip those called to duty, in a body that—in lieu of a standing army—was necessary to the security of the State.

Affording civilians who were to serve in that militia (white men) the license to keep those arms at the ready, then, was merely a MEANS TO that end. After all, in order to be effective, those men needed to be adequately equipped. So guns couldn't help but be involved.

It takes a prodigious amount of semantic acrobatics to take this as an assertion that a free State cannot abide BUT FOR all civilians having guns at their disposal (that is: to use however they see fit). Honoring a civic duty is not about self-interest; it is about heeding a calling (that is: service to the Republic).

Only basic reading comprehension is required to see that the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment pertains to the federal government's need—in the absence of a standing military—to maintain a civilian militia for its own security. Naturally, this required those civilians to be armed with muskets *in order to fulfill their charge*. To construe this as having anything to do with hunting or securing one's own house is daffy. To construe this as carte blanche to stage a coop is downright absurd.

What of the HISTORICAL basis for the particular wording? To the authors, the phraseology of the Amendment-in-question would have been quite familiar. Overall, the Bill of Rights was drawn from four pre-existing state constitutions (bills of rights), which had themselves been adopted in 1776-77 and in 1780. The provision that was to eventually become the "Second Amendment" was—naturally—derived from the MILITIA clauses of those four state Constitutions.

The phrase, "the right of the People to keep and bear arms" (i.e. the subject-phrase in the predicate) was based on already-established militia clauses—most notably: George Mason's phrasing in the Virginia Constitution. {19} Thus, the Amendment was added to the new FEDERAL Constitution for the express purpose of addressing the need for the (federal) State to have a means of defending itself (from enemies both domestic and foreign). {20}

The historical context (and the concomitant genealogy of the phrasing) was demonstrated in the debates at the time. Nobody mentioned "self-defense" or anything resembling an inviolable individual right; as the matter at hand was had nothing to do with securing rights for the individual (qua individual). In fact, the right to "bear arms" as an individual right had been explicitly VOTED DOWN during the process—thereby emphasizing the fact that the clause had nothing to do with inalienable rights. Personal prerogative regarding firearms was entirely beside the point.

Going Forward:

So what are we to make of all this NOW? The question arises: To what degree shall a civilian be allowed to keep / bear weapons the very availability of which endangers his fellow civilians? One might also wonder how patriotic it is to insist that each civilian be equipped to overthrow the very State the document they invoke was drafted to "ordain and establish".

Common sense stipulates that there would be no provision to ensure that civilians—of their own accord—can forcefully overthrow the State included in a document written to enumerate the measures to be taken to ensure THE SECURITY OF that State. {8}

So if not SELF-defense, then what? To recapitulate: The SOLE aim of the Amendment-in-question was to address the only means available at the time by which the State may defend itself (when a standing army was not available), and effect security: a civilian militia. {6} The “right” posited in this Amendment was expressly tied to public service.

Times have changed. We should bear in mind that the provision for civilians to “keep and bear arms” was written at a time when:

ONE: Plantation owners were chronically wary of slave revolts. Putting down such revolts was the exclusive province of white, male landholders (i.e. those who were afforded suffrage under the Constitution at the time). {9}

TWO: Frontiersmen were regularly contending with aggressive push-back by defiant Native Americans against their claims of Manifest Destiny (read: violent westward hegemony); and there was no recourse to a professional military to ensure that such perils could be dealt with.

THREE: In the absence of a standing army, the State would need to count on a capacity to commandeer civilians ON-DEMAND in order to put down insurrections (that is: to SUPPRESS, not to enable, uprisings against the State). A key point of reference was George Washington’s handling of Shays’ Rebellion, which prompted the need for the Amendment when the Bill of Rights was drafted just two years later.

Note that there were not even (official) police for many municipalities; leaving law-enforcement (that is: the implementation of provincial justice) to locals (a sheriff and his deputies—often appointed ad hoc from amongst favored citizens). Local law enforcement was—as a matter of course—constituted by a “good ol’ boys club” of white men.

Moreover, absent such a vital a public service (a local police force), the onus of protecting one’s own property was on the property-holder. This was especially so for plantation-holders; as suppressing unruly slaves was entirely in their own hands. Consequently they needed firearms. It makes perfect sense that the State commissioned property-holding white men to be part of a State-regulated militia (to ensure security was maintained).

In her book, “The Second: Race And Guns In A Fatally Unequal America”, Carol Anderson noted that the amendment was intended—in large part—to keep African Americans “powerless and vulnerable.” (This echoed a point made by the scholar, Carl Bogus in 1998.) At the time, many lawmakers in the South supported the amendment primarily because they were concerned with slave uprisings. It comes as no surprise, then, that in 1788 (during a debate over ratification of the amendment-in-question), Patrick Henry declared: “If there should happen an insurrection of slaves, [the states] ought to have power to call forth the efforts of the militia, when necessary.” (Even after the Civil War, many Southern states banned black citizens from owning weapons.)

Of course, for most of the Founders, a well-regulated militia was about more than dealing with unruly black people. But for Southern plantation owners, keeping state militias armed was a matter of protecting slave-holders’ interests. Testament to this was the *Second Militia Act of 1792*—one of the first laws passed by Congress. It actually REQUIRED white men of a certain age to serve in the militia, and to furnish their own muskets.

Even then, the Federal government reserved the right to call up state militias as it saw fit—as attested by the *First Militia Act of 1792*.

Needless to say, 1, 2, and 3 are now obsolete. In other words: ALL THREE of these pressing concerns that spurred the inclusion of the amendment-in-question no longer apply. Slavery is no more. The violent hegemony against Native Americans is no more. And now government-run police departments exist in every municipality.

While finding the need to address the above three issues in 1789, it is apparent that the authors of the Amendment were cognizant of the problems that might arise if civilians' (in their capacity as militiamen) were not thoroughly regulated. Hence, the Framers were careful to include the qualification "WELL-REGULATED". That is to say: At the time, statesmen were well aware that nascent militiamen who were NOT well-regulated would be prone to using their armaments for their own purposes. It would not have surprised the drafters in the least to find that some might exploit the provision to pursue their own ends (that is: ends which were not necessarily consummate with the public interest). Therefore it made sense that said militia should be thoroughly regulated by the State. It was, after all, designated to SERVE the State. (After all, the Amendment was crafted by FEDERALISTS.)

As discussed, the commission of white men as (nascent) militiamen was predicated on the assumption that there would be no standing army to serve this vital purpose. {38} This assumption no longer attains; which is simply to say that the condition on which the provision was predicated is null and void.

But no matter. American gun-fetishists now routinely peddle a distorted construal of the provision to suit their own interests. The most unscrupulous revisionists treat the Amendment as if it stipulated that stockpiling one's own personal cache of lethal firearms was an inalienable right. And so we now must contend with a rancorous delusion...in which gun-fetishists bask with unyielding obduracy.

As we've seen, the zaniest version of such Revisionism is that the Amendment was composed so that civilians were sufficiently equipped to RISE UP AGAINST the State at their own discretion. It's worth exploring what, exactly, this vision entails.

Such insurgents imagine storming the capitol and/or White House in a blaze of star-spangled glory. Such a putsch would occur, the thinking goes, in the event that a segment of the populace became sufficiently displeased with the federal government that they deemed it necessary overthrow it. This outlandish hypothetical (staging a coup) is absurd for two reasons—one practical, one constitutional:

FIRST: The notion that a band of belligerent dissidents—who have stockpiled a small armory of weapons, and cobbled together a retinue of like-minded folk—could take on the gargantuan military power of the Pentagon (and overthrow the federal government) beggars the imagination. {12}

SECOND: The Constitution itself defines such an act as treason. {7}

Civilian militias were commissioned to PREVENT rebellions, not to enable them. The idea was NOT to afford this or that contingent of citizens the capacity to rebel against the State whenever they saw fit.

This point is lost on today's gun-fetishists. Buoyed by their faux bravura, the more petulant amongst them peddle a cockamamie vision of shedding blood in the name of "liberty". It is a vision of gun-toting super-patriots keeping the federal government in check. How? Well, by holding a potential putsch over the heads

of government officials.

Never mind that the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment was no more written with a putsch in mind than it was written to afford each man a lethal means of protecting himself from the occasional interloper. (It's almost as if the conditional clause read: "In case a coup is warranted, use your gun as you see fit.") {23}

Eisegesis is what enables such a harebrained interpretation of even the simplest statement. American gun-fetishists import the desired innuendo into a text so as to get it to mean whatever they WISH it meant. This is an old maneuver; as such exegetical shenanigans enable ideologues to pretend a statement means something it CLEARLY does not mean—be it a political document or religious scripture.

The notion of arming oneself to defend ONESELF has no connection to the antiquated idiom of "taking up arms" in the spirit of Thomas Paine's "Common Sense". We are all familiar with this idiom—pivotal as it was during the bygone age of democratic revolutions in the developed world. And so the American gun-fetishists TODAY imagine "taking up arms" against a despotic regime as if they were going to storm the Bastille in 18th-century Paris. This (now anachronistic) idiom made perfect sense in the world before the Second World War—when citizenries had to rise up against tyrannical governments. Yet in the developed world of the post-War Era, it is utterly fatuous.

In spite of the fact that such a hostile campaign is outmoded, an insurrectionist pathos pervades the American hinterlands. Hence the comically delusive thinking that exists in the slew of new-fangled "militias"—members of which fashion themselves as intrepid defenders of "freedom". Laying siege to the king's castle—with muskets facing muskets—was one thing; civilians armed with Remingtons undertaking a military offensive against the combined military might of the U.S. Armed Forces is nothing short of insane. The Pentagon is not the Bastille.

"But, sir. Why do you have a Beretta?" Comes the reply: "To protect my freedom."

The ability to unleash lethal rounds is how to stave off tyranny, you see. Proponents of this zany thesis are eager to posit a fantastical state of affairs—a scenario in which a few rag-tag militia groups, cobbled together here and there, conduct a coordinated attack on the Federal government. How? Where? With their pick-up trucks, Gadsden flags, and Rugers, the idea is that they will lay siege to all ~500 military bases across the country...and, presumably, take over CentCom at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida...while dodging missiles and evading predator drones. All this would be done while somehow disabling any (sea-born) naval fleets in all the oceans...plus counteracting the entirety of the airpower distributed amongst the ~750 bases around the world. Make no mistake: This endeavor would be undertaken with the impression that THAT is what the Framers had in mind when they included the Amendment-in-question (about a well-regulated civilian militia) in the Bill of Rights just before Christmas of 1791.

It's worth reiterating: The Bill of Rights was not intended to be an invitation to (try to) overthrow the U.S. government whenever the occasion warranted. (Which occasion? Government tyranny, of course.) But no matter. Those groping for a sense of manhood are apt to seize onto this intoxicating illusion—an opportunity to be valiant. As it turns out, a gun is a handy prosthesis for masculinity.

How, exactly, does this work? The psychical mechanisms at play are relatively straight-forward. Wielding a gun provides a quick fix—a dopamine rush—enabling the gun-fetishist to go from country bumpkin to swaggering buccaneer. Such a burnished self-mage is hard to resist for those dealing with gnawing

insecurities. No longer a bumbling lout, the gun-fetishist is magically transformed into a stentorian guardian of “liberty”, bravely upholding the “American way” with his personal appurtenance of firepower. {3} So long as armament serves as a prosthesis for masculinity, gun-fetishism will persist. {22}

Insecurity is only part of the explanation. For those who feel they will be able to rise up against the full might of the U.S. military (whenever they decide that the U.S. government has become overly “tyrannical”, according to their own definition of the term) are delusional. They envision themselves within a post-apocalyptic video game in which they’ve been cast as the fearless hero who takes down a cabal of despotic rulers in a hail of bullets. Never mind the superiority of the Department of Defense over any conceivable private militia. This fantasy subsists in the minds of men groping in desperation for a way to feel like a badass. Packing heat serves as a surrogate for valor, buoying a hyper-romanticized self-image as some sort of super-patriot.

Gun-fetishists remain un-thwarted by reality. In their own minds, the overthrow of the U.S. government is always one uprising away. Of course, that eventuality never comes to pass. This poses no problem for the private militia-man’s fever-dream. {12}

In the meantime, the wayward gun-fetishist can revel in the fact that he is equipped to use lethal force against anyone who makes incursions onto his property—as if a king protecting his castle. The knowledge that one can KILL an intruder, it seems, undergirds such a man’s sense of manhood. {22}

And so we see an example of people deliberately mis-interpreting a clear statement; thereby creating a problem (logomachy) where none need exist. The “catch” with such misreadings is that it affords an opportunity to hijack a debate. The idea is to divert the discussion away from the crux of the matter; thereby enjoining people to quibble over things that are entirely beside the point. (False dichotomies sabotage the public discourse in large part by simply being a distraction.) The question is thus framed as: Are you FOR or AGAINST the Second Amendment?

As a consequence of all this, we are left with “repeal or not to repeal” as the bone of contention in Constitutional law. This is a false choice. For we don’t need to RESCIND the Amendment, we only need to READ it. *Its obsolescence was already built in.* {24} To truly honor the Second Amendment is to recognize that it no longer applies.

The fact that this hoodwink can be so easily executed with such a simple statement illustrates how easy and effective such hoodwinks can be. Indeed, this exegetical stunt can be pulled off even when it comes to eminently straight-forward text.

American gun-fetishism is illustrative of the larger point about duplicitous “interpretation” schemes vis a vis sacred documents. For if such hermeneutic chicanery is possible for tens of millions of otherwise sane people, then it is no great feat to take a verse from scripture that, say, gives license to roast mutton at dawn...and treat it as, say, a license to crucify annoying neighbors at dusk. Or maybe to burn unruly in-laws at the stake at high noon. Pick your poison. When it’s an exegetical free-for-all, anything can be taken to be a metaphor for, well, anything. It’s customized interpretation on-demand.

This becomes especially dire when bad interpretations can cause extensive harm. In a world where every Tom, Dick, and Harry can carry an AR-15 (at his own discretion) under the auspices of maintaining a well-regulated militia (for State security), almost ANYTHING is possible. The game is quite simple: Pretend a sentence says one thing when it clearly says another. Just a dab of eisegesis, and PRESTO! A statement can

be made to mean whatever one wishes. No “abracadabra” required.

The gun-fetishist’s daffy characterization of the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment is illustrative of a larger phenomenon. Such flagrant distortion of the plain meaning of text is typical of ideologues of all stripes—as with American corporatists’ torturous construal of the FIRST Amendment (whereby the right to freedom of speech is applied to CORPORATIONS so as to legitimize the use of financial power to hijack the political process). Thus financial power is seen as a form of speech; and corporations are treated as people. {26}

Only by willful blindness can such a simple statement be read to say what it obviously does not say. But such is the nature of ideological obstinacy.

This brings us back to the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The degree of delusion surrounding this particular statement is bewildering to anyone with even rudimentary reading comprehension skills. The obduracy with which some people uphold an OBVIOUSLY ERRONEOUS interpretation of this statement is breathtaking to behold. (It is no wonder that True Believers so easily misinterpret text when religion is involved.) The irony is hard not to notice: Ideologues end up making a mockery of the very document they deign to exalt.

Recall that the reason a civilian militia was prescribed was to AVOID having something capable of overthrowing the government. The Framers saw a professional / standing army as a threat to the State; so opted for a “well-regulated militia” in lieu of such an army. It would make no sense, then, for them to insist on a contingency in which a band of disgruntled civilians would be equipped to overthrow the government (should they see fit to do so). The entire point was to NOT have a situation in which a coup could be undertaken by force of arms.

In closing, let’s review some of the key points that are often elided:

When George Washington mobilized a civilian militia to put down Shay’s Rebellion in the months leading up to the drafting of the U.S. Constitution, he was not concerned with men being able to stave off robbers with their muskets; he was concerned with calling men to service in order to resist those who took up arms against the State. And when, seven years later, Washington mobilized a civilian militia to put down the Whiskey Rebellion, he invoked the Constitution’s second Amendment—in keeping with the “Militia Act”—to uphold those same ideals. It would have never occurred to him that the provision might someday be re-purposed to posit an unconditional right for civilians to stockpile arsenals for their own personal crusades.

The Amendment-in-question was written because—in the absence of a standing army—civilian militias were required for maintaining the security of the State. To pretend that this was intended to furnish people with the ability to RISE UP AGAINST the State, or to use lethal force against burglars, is nothing short of preposterous. Yet with some exegetical hocus pocus, extracting the predicate whilst disregarding the conditional clause is as easy as pie.

Subsequently, the imagined text of the Second Amendment is taken to read: *“Each and every individual’s right to arm himself with lethal weapons of his own accord, for his own purposes, is hereby proclaimed to be unconditional; and thus immutable. This prerogative exists so that any person may—by his own devices—use deadly force to protect his person, his private property, and his domicile from perceived threats. Moreover, each person must also be sufficiently equipped to rise up against the nation’s federal government should he / she ever see fit to do so. Hence the entitlement to amass a personal armory of firearms at one’s own discretion, without restriction, must remain inviolate for all eternity, irrespective of circumstances.”*

This may seem to be an overwrought articulation of the American gun-fetishist’s reading of the actual passage. But at the end of the day, people see only what they want to see—regardless of what is plainly before their eyes. When ideological commitments are sufficiently instantiated, reality may be held in abeyance indefinitely.

Considering the conditional clause, it is clear that the Amendment-in-question only protects the right of “the People” to bear arms insofar as they are serving in a civilian militia charged with ensuring “the security of a free State”. In lieu of a standing army, this was a necessary measure at the time the Bill Of Rights was composed. Said “militia” was not merely a contingency in times of war; it was a permanent fixture that existed even in times of peace—as is made clear by the wording of the 5th Amendment. The “catch” was that said militia was to be REGULATED BY the federal government it was chartered to protect.

It was for that purpose, and no other, that the Amendment was written.

Be that as it may, the license to bear arms for other reasons is, indeed, tenable. However, such tenability can NOT be based on this (now obsolete) Constitutional provision. In other words, the case for such a right COULD be made; but it would need to be made independently of said Amendment. In the meantime, given the existence of the Department of Defense, honoring the Amendment-in-question would be entirely compatible with forbidding firearms amongst the citizenry.

Genuine and robust reform will not be possible until Americans disabuse themselves of illusions about the continued relevance of the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment. Alas, those who fetishize the U.S. Constitution effectively blind themselves to the spirit behind it, and render themselves incapable of bringing their critical faculties to bear on its (eminently fallible) text. This should come as no surprise, as we encounter the same delusive thinking when it comes to ANY fetishized document. {29}

Bottom line: Hidebound ideologues often see only what they want to see. And once someone with an agenda has made up their mind, eisegesis has no limits. {1}

Those dismayed by the predicate of the Amendment-in-question fail to recognize that we are still “in the course of human events” that was referenced in the Constitution’s hallowed preamble. It seems not to occur to them that said course did not terminate in the 1780’s.

Footnotes:

{1 Exegesis is the interpretation of what a text actually says—something done by elucidating its intended meaning. This factors in where the authors were coming from as well as what the authors were (ultimately) getting at. It takes into account both historical context (the circumstances in which the text was composed) and intertextuality (how any given passage relates to the other parts of the text; as the latter typically sheds light on the former). Eisegesis, on the other hand, is an ersatz exegesis. The eisegete

imports his desired meaning into the text; and then pretends that it inheres in the text. The trick is to pass this disingenuous interpretation off as legitimate exegesis, hoping that everyone assumes the fabricated meaning was there all along...and that he is only revealing it.}

{2 The first two proposed Amendments were not ratified, thereby rendering the 3rd the 1st, and the 4th the 2nd, in the final draft. The numerical value, of course, has no significance in terms of the substance of the respective Amendments. It is notable that the first two Amendments originally proposed were—on further reflection—seen as not being needed.}

{3 When it comes to gun-fetishism, it is as though being “a real man” were somehow a function of being able to vanquish the dastardly perpetrators that one imagines to be lurking around every corner. (See endnote 21 below.) “Contingent self-esteem” is a common phenomenon; but this particular kind hinges on the perceived ability to defeat some dastardly perpetrator in a confabulated scenario (in which one envisions oneself in the starring role, as the gun-toting hero). Here, overwrought swagger is more affectation—a PERFORMANCE—than it is a sign of (genuine) self-confidence. To wit: Owning a firearm is a means of compensating for repressed insecurities. Fragile masculinity usually translates to a toxic masculinity; and toxic masculinity invariably stems from repressed insecurities. (See footnote 22 below.) And so it goes: Countenancing a revisionist conception of the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment serves as a palliative for the most insecure members of the American populace.}

{4 The “more guns, less crime” myth presumes guns to be a deterrent of—more than a facilitator of—harm. A corollary of this tenet is: “The optimal means of foiling the occasional bad actor with a gun is ensuring more good actors have guns.” If increased access to guns (that is: the augmented proliferation of guns) led to a safer society, then the U.S. would have BY FAR THE LEAST—rather than BY FAR THE MOST—annual gun-based casualties in the developed world. Meanwhile, whenever in New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Taiwan, Britain, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, or Scandinavia, one would be THE MOST likely to be shot. Indeed, those would be the most dangerous countries on Earth. That the exact opposite is the case should put the discussion to rest. (See footnote 15 below.)}

{5 In rural America, there exists a communal gun fetishism. This widespread pathology stems largely from a deep-seated insecurity—especially as it relates to masculinity (see footnote 3 above). One does not have to resort to fanciful Freudian psycho-analyses to recognize that this zany obsession with firearms is a matter of overcompensation on the part of hyper-provincial men grasping for an emblem of machismo. (See footnote 21 below.) Demographically, this translates to poorly-educated, conservative (usually very religious) white males in rural areas. Half of American gun-owners say that having a gun is an integral part of their identity. This is the very definition of pathology. Level-headed people should find this tremendously disconcerting. To burnish his credentials as a swaggering super-patriot, the gun-fetishist fashions himself a valiant, gun-slinging paladin—quick on the draw—ready to bring law and order to his community. Moreover, he envisions himself “armed and ready” to defend his castle, and thus keep his family safe. Thus he fancies himself the star of his own movie. Such delusive thinking enables him to simulate the masculinity for which he pines. With the ability to kill others at his fingertips, such a man can indulge in visions of his own swashbuckling vigilantism. (Think of the delusive protagonist in Sartre’s “Erostratus”.) The problem is that this is not just one person compensating for his own insecurity; it is a widespread, collective pathology—afflicting large swaths of the American countryside. (See footnote 27 below.) Thus the notion that a society that has been super-saturated with guns is somehow a safer society (see footnote 4 above) is taken as gospel.}

{6 Due to the predominance of (pacifist) Quakers, Pennsylvania opted not to have a state militia. This opt-out was very telling, as it clearly had nothing to do with people seeking to relinquish a right to self-defense! It was entirely about participating in a militia. At no point did anyone raise concerns that an absence of civilian participation in a militia might somehow infringe on their civil rights.}

*{7 Article III, Section 3 categorized rebellion against the Republic as “treason”. It would have hardly been the case that an Amendment was made to facilitate rebellion. The federal government’s role was to protect each state from “domestic violence”, as stipulated in **Article IV, Section 4**. This was to PREVENT a scenario in which crime was mitigated by a wild-west-style free-for-all. “The People” (meaning land-holding white men) were charged with equipping themselves with firearms. This license was afforded to them with regards to their capacity as members of a “well-regulated” civilian militia. Said militia-men were charged with ensuring the security of the State, which was needed in the absence of a standing army. The raison d’etre of the Amendment-in-question was the need for the State of the Republic to maintain civilian militias BECAUSE there was no plan for a standing army. It was not a warrant for vigilante justice by use of lethal force (see footnote 28 below). Relevant passages in the main body of the Constitution attest to this fact.}*

{8 The Founders actually orchestrated a sweeping DIS-armament of the civilian population (i.e. of those who were not commissioned to participate in the fighting) during the American Revolution. The provisional right to bear arms was conditioned upon swearing an oath of loyalty to the Union. Those who refused to swear the oath were often deemed unfit for duty, thereby forfeiting their right to remain armed. Another clue that today’s gun-fetishists are not thinking accurately about this provision (which, to be clear, made perfect sense at the time it was written) is that they are NOT eagerly standing by, awaiting a call BY the State—as militiamen—for service to the State. Such a call of duty is anathema to them; as they are only thinking about themselves.}

{9 It is telling that John Jay also thought that those who owned the country ought to run it—as if material wealth were somehow an indication of erudition and moral integrity. That is: White, land-owning men should be in charge because THEY are the one who had the property. (This is the standard “skin in the game” tac used by plutocrats to rationalize the continued disenfranchisement of the disenfranchised.) This was the prevailing mentality at the time a government-regulated civilian militia was instituted. That is: The measure to ensure the security of the State was enacted by those who saw white, land-owning men as the proper stewards of that State. In rare instances where African-Americans were permitted to carry a gun, it was at the pleasure of—and under the supervision of—white men. James Madison even went so far as to RE-DRAFT the Amendment-in-question during the Virginia Ratifying Convention in 1788. He did so in response to the demands of Patrick Henry (the state’s largest slaveholder) that protections for slave patrols be made more explicit. THAT yielded the Amendment’s final form.}

{10 Illustrative of this point were those who were SKEPTICAL that a civilian militia was a prudent alternative to a standing army. Gouverneur Morris, the man who drafted the U.S. Constitution, articulated this concern. He held that, in the future, a civilian militia—being, as it was, comprised of oft-delusive amateurs—may be inadequate to the task of battling professional militaries: “An overweening vanity leads the fond many...to believe...that a militia can [prevail over professional soldiers] in the open field and even play of battle. This idle notion [has] alarmed us for our country, when in the course of that time and chance, which happen to all, she should [come to] be at war with a great power.” Eventually, George Washington would also express his concerns about the shortcomings of a civilian militia; and consequently saw the need for a professional military. In a letter to Alexander Hamilton in 1799 (just days prior to his passing), he wrote: “The establishment of a Military Academy upon a respectable and extensive basis has ever been considered by me as an object of primary importance to this country.” Three years later, Washington would get his wish. West Point Academy was founded in 1802.}

{11 There is a cringe-inducing irony here. Those who are afflicted with 2nd-Amendment-mania claim to be hewing to the “original intent” of the “Founding Fathers”. Yet these are the same people who unabashedly rebuke the most fundamental principles on which the Republic was founded. They espouse such things as plutocracy (allowing political leverage to be a function of financial power) and disenfranchisement (systematically suppressing voting rights of already-marginalized communities). It’s as though affluence was a barometer for merit; and those of low socio-economic status had nobody to blame but themselves. Meanwhile, they deny the right to dissent (pretending their is a mandate to stand for the national anthem, as if they lived in North Korea) and the freedom of speech (advocating for the prohibition of the BDS movement). To top it all off, they neglect the enumerated mission to “promote the general welfare” (refusing to acknowledge the responsibility of the State of ensure universal access to healthcare and education)...even as they promote Christian theocracy. In sum: These self-styled “patriots” betray the highest ideals of democracy. So it should come as little surprise that they pervert the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment.}

{12 An ample dose of delusion is at play here. For one is expected to believe that having a cache of lethal weapons in one’s woodshed makes perfect sense; as it would come in handy should one opt to take on the entire U.S. military in an attempted coup d’état (presumably orchestrated from someone’s front porch somewhere in middle America). This fever-dream of “rising up” against a putatively tyrannical federal government involves a level of conceit that would disqualify anyone from being taken seriously on any other topic. Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that everyone has the right to have a fighter jet in his garage, a tank in his back yard, and an arsenal of rocket-launchers in his attic. Many gun-fetishists concede that such private armament is outlandish. Yet the same logic that undermines the prerogative to amass such weaponry (in order to rise up against the U.S. government) holds for keeping a Glock under one’s pillow at night. In order for the dubious logic of the argument-in-question to hold, one must suppose that the difference between the two scenarios is merely quantitative, not qualitative. Was the Amendment really about what any given private citizen might happen to personally want for himself—be it a pistol or a cluster-bomb? Obviously, this is not how the Amendment was intended. When it comes to “arms”, even at the time of drafting there was indubitably a clear line. In 1789, that line was understood to be drawn before, well, canons. Any advocate for civil society would now wish to establish the most prudent place to draw that line today. The provision, which had been designed for a musket with a bayonet, cannot help us answer this query (given that the statement in question only specifies “arms”). So we must employ new criteria—especially considering the massive transformation in relevant technology. That would render it a legislative matter, not a matter of Constitutional exegesis.}

{13 Imagine a statute were to be written for the physically handicapped, which read: “Insofar as a wheelchair is necessary for ambulation, the right to use elevators shall not be infringed.” Now imagine a cabal of elevator-riding fanatics flying banners that read, “The right to use elevators shall not be infringed.” We would be inclined to bring to their attention that the statute was written to ensure that

certain people (i.e. those unable to walk up stairs) could gain access to all levels of various buildings; it was NOT a proclamation that everyone be entitled to elevator-rides whenever they wished, regardless of circumstances. The inalienable right for an individual to keep / bear arms—at will, for his own purposes—has no more existed than the inalienable right to ride elevators at will.}

{14 The NRA is a business lobby masquerading as a “rights” lobby. Since the late 1970’s, it has been dedicated entirely to ensuring everyone mis-interpret the 2nd Amendment. (Prior to that, it was simply a trade organization, primarily for hunters.) Some of the world’s biggest rubes are those who join the National Rifle Association under the impression that, in doing so, they are somehow fighting for their “rights”. They are too intoxicated by their own gun-fervor to realize they are being duped. The NRA is nothing more than a lobby for arms / munitions manufacturers. Its only concern is maximizing the sales of those—and related—products. It couldn’t care less about anyone’s safety—let alone about what a founding document might actually say. For more on this, see the Appendix.}

{15 Never mind that there is overwhelming evidence that the proliferation of (i.e. increased access to) lethal firearms renders everyone LESS safe, not more safe. The supposition is that one needs to be able to kill people in order to be truly free. Gun-fetishists insist that personal liberty is somehow predicated on one’s prerogative to arm oneself with lethal weapons (see footnote 23 below). This becomes a question of priorities. In America, those on the far-right insist that universal access to firearms is more important than universal access to quality healthcare. Thus the ability kill hypothetical perpetrators is prized over the ability to help actual people. The notion that a civil society does not require an armed citizenry does not cross their minds (see footnote 25 below). To suggest that a society in which access to guns is EASIER is thereby SAFER is asinine (see footnote 4 above).}

{16 This particular misreading requires that one discount the Constitution’s Preamble, which stipulates that the *raison d’etre* of the State is to “promote the general welfare” (as opposed to forcing everyone to fend for themselves to survive) and “insure domestic tranquility” (as opposed to forcing everyone to fight for themselves in a kind of free-for-all). After all, the point of creating a Constitutional Republic was to AVOID the need for vigilante justice, not to encourage it. It should come as no surprise that we rarely hear 2nd-Amendment revisionists quoting the Constitution’s Preamble; as nothing in it serves their dubious purpose. After all, the right to keep and bear arms only existed insofar as it was necessary to the security of a free State; after the Preamble had stipulated that it is the State’s role to (somehow) provide for the common defense. The rest of the Preamble deals with things that are also unhelpful to their cause—like promoting the general welfare and ensuring domestic tranquility.}

{17 Positing the “right” to use lethal force on other people simply because one perceives a threat is born of a similar narcissism that underlies the farcical “right” to not feel offended so often touted by p.c. aficionados. In both cases, we find the attitude: “It’s all about ME and how *I* happen to feel. To hell with anyone else.” Thus one’s own subjective state can be invoked to rationalize the imposition of constraints / mandates on all bystanders. The 2nd Amendment has nothing to do with self-defense. Using lethal force for self-defense is not a “right” that any sane person would claim to have.}

{18 Telling is the choice of the word “infringe” to uphold this particular right (insofar as it attains). If an unconditional right (which, by definition, would be irrevocable) were to be upheld, this would not be the prudent term to employ in the event someone was deprived of said right. (The 1st Amendment uses the term “abridge” to describe the contravention of the freedom of speech and the press.) On the other hand, infraction of a provisional right is simply a matter of encroaching upon something that exists on a contingency basis. If the right to bear arms were an inalienable right (like life and due process and free speech), upholding it would be a matter of never revoking it. For the issue is that such a right is inviolate; and thus un-forfeit-able. By contrast, we do not have an unconditional right to privacy; therefore our right to privacy—insofar as it exists under certain circumstances—shall not be compromised (with respect to whatever boundary conditions have been established). In the event of a violation, we would say there has

been an “infringement” (a trespass) upon one’s privacy—that is: to the extent that one is entitled to it. Such a right CAN be mitigated—or even revoked—under certain circumstances; and thus IS forfeit-able. The same goes for hunting and fishing...and using copyrighted / trademarked material...and owning patented designs: all CONTINGENT rights. Violations of those rights—insofar as they attain—are simply INFRINGEMENTS (that is: infringements on what has been provisionally accorded). Meanwhile, if I kill you, I have not merely “infringed” on your right to life; I have revoked what must never be revoked. This is why violations of human rights (which ARE inviolate) are not described as mere “infringements”; they are betrayals of that which is absolute. In sum: Inalienable rights are either recognized or denied; whereas provisional rights are accorded and rescinded according to whatever conditions have been legislated. It is obvious that the 2nd Amendment pertains to the latter.}

{19 The precedent had been set by the British Bill of Rights, which had been drafted exactly a hundred years earlier. The right was accorded exclusively to Protestants—as the issue was the need to defend the (Protestant) country against Catholics IN THE ABSENCE OF A STANDING ARMY; with the caveat that this was only to be done “as allowed by law.” In other words, the license was subordinate to incumbent legislation. By stipulating that this special license would be regulated by the State (i.e. Parliament), it was made clear that this was not an inalienable right accorded to the individual. The provision was predicated on there being no professional military to protect the citizenry. Moreover, the provision was conditioned on instances where “Papists were both armed and employed contrary to law.” (That is to say, the measure was undertaken explicitly to preclude Catholic sovereignty; not to keep burglars from entering one’s domicile...or to take matters into one’s own hands in vanquishing criminals from the land.) The issue was prompted by the ongoing Catholic-Anglican conflict that existed in England at the time. The measure, then, made perfect sense; as the previous year, the last Catholic monarch (James II) had been ousted after a challenge was posed to his standing army by armed resistance from the Protestant citizenry. Naturally, Protestants wanted to ensure they would be prepared for such eventualities thereafter.}

{20 In the blueprint for the federal government of the new Republic, there was no provision for a standing army, which is precisely why the matter of quartering soldiers in private residences needed to be addressed. And so it was—in the FOLLOWING Amendment (the 5th-cum-3rd Amendment). The issue of quartering soldiers was not unrelated to the previous Amendment, which effectively pertained to civilians in their capacity as soldiers. Indeed, had there been a standing army, there would have been no need for EITHER of these two Amendments. That is: Civilian militias would not have been necessary; and the question of quartering would have been moot (as there would have been federally-administered military bases with barracks). There is a reason we don’t hear about the 3rd Amendment anymore; it was written for a bygone epoch—under circumstances that no longer exist, to address concerns that no longer apply. What is now the 3rd Amendment is no longer relevant; and it is no longer relevant for THE SAME REASON that the provisional license afforded by the previous Amendment is no longer relevant. These Amendments have BOTH been rendered obsolete in the advent of a professional military. The need for a civilian militia is obviated by the Department of Defense and National Guard. For more on this point, see footnote 38 below.}

{21 There are a few theories that explain the monomaniacal fixation on the 2nd Amendment. For many male Americans, a lethal firearm serves as a proxy for manhood. The snarky quip that “the only gun a real man needs is the one between his legs” prompts a chuckle simply because it contains an element of truth. This is a truth that gun-fetishists are—understandably—reticent to concede. It is incontrovertible that, **barring serious hunters**, any man obsessed with owning firearms is compensating for a deep-seated insecurity—not only regarding his own masculinity (as in: “You can tell I’m a tough guy who means business...because, as you can see, I’m packing heat”), but regarding his own safety (as in: “I need to be able to kill people in order to feel safe in my own home”). It is the case that for most—though not all—American men, toting a gun is a way to fortify what psychologists dub “fragile masculinity”. The fetishization of “gun rights” turns out to be compensation for repressed insecurities (see footnote 3 above).

Note that the same insecure self-esteem lay at the root of “fragile patriotism”: the mindless flag-waving bluster of what sociologists sometimes refer to as “super-patriotism”. In the final analysis, “super-patriotism” has nothing whatsoever to do with genuine patriotism (which involves neither sycophancy nor a mob mentality). It is a rather comic irony that this ersatz bravado is predicated on repressed insecurity (see footnote 22 below). Faux masculinity and faux patriotism both stem from neurosis (exemplified by braggadocio and pageantry). It is no secret that men with low self-esteem are most prone to obsessions with militarism...even if that obsession is realized vicariously. Their fragile self-image is sublimated by convincing themselves that they are somehow in peril, thereby enabling them to become heroes in their own mind.}

{22 As is usually the case, an insecure self-esteem underlies the peculiar fascination with guns—especially as it relates to the gun-fetishist’s cartoonish impressions of what constitutes manhood. In the case of the American incarnation of this condition, fragile masculinity is veiled behind the make-shift image of a swashbuckling gun-slinger. A crisis of masculinity can be elided by even the most craven of “tough guy” posturing (see footnote 3 above). When it comes to American gun-fetishism, even the most bumbling oaf can imagine himself as a buccaneering vigilante, quick on the draw—as if cast in his own hair-raising Hollywood production. This pathology, then, is an over-compensation for gnawing insecurities (see footnote 21 above). Fashioning oneself a dashing cowboy—ready to stave off danger at every turn—can do wonders for wavering self-esteem. Such posturing confers bounteous satisfaction to this self-styled defender of “liberty”.}

{23 Specious appeals to “self-defense” are non-starters; as such an entitlement has nothing to do with serving in a civilian militia. More to the point: The urge to KILL anyone who makes illicit incursions onto one’s property is sociopathic. Almost NEVER are intruders looking to slaughter the residents of a domicile; they are simply looking for lucre. Burglary is an opprobrious act; but such a crime does not warrant a death-sentence. Even if we were to assume that guns really do deter some burglars, precluding the gun-related deaths of TENS OF THOUSANDS of Americans each year is worth risking a few extra burglaries. In any case, one actually INCREASES the probability that one will be shot when one enters an encounter with a gun (see footnote 17 above). Bottom line: Exigencies have changed since the 18th century. In the modern age, it turns out that a well-armed citizenry does NOT translate to a safer citizenry (see footnote 4 above). Quite the contrary. More access to lethal fire-arms entails augmented peril rather than augmented security...in direct opposition to the spirit of the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment.}

*{24 There is a simple way to expose the speciousness of gun fetishists’ mis-characterization of this Amendment: Call their bluff. Suppose that there were to be a Constitutional Convention (to wit: a chance to revamp the U.S. Constitution; a measure that is itself addressed in the document). Such an occasion would afford the chance to up-date the document however Americans of the 21st century saw fit. A “re-do” would presumably rectify the original document’s shortcomings and take into account new exigencies. If the statement-in-question really means what gun-fetishists contend that it means, then they would find no need to alter the wording of the Amendment. **Yet there is a virtual guarantee that ALL would insist on re-wording it.** They would almost certainly be inclined to re-write the Amendment to explicitly specify the right-in-question as inalienable—thereby making plain that it exists for the purposes of self-defense and/or to ensure the polity may—of its own accord—rise up against the federal government (in the event a plurality surmised that the State had become unacceptable). Any proposal to re-word the Amendment to that end would expose the spuriousness of their (fraudulent) interpretation; as there would be no need to make such changes if the statement already said what they insist it says.}*

{25 And so it has gone: The U.S. has become a nation that strives to ensure universal access to lethal weapons whilst flouting measures to ensure universal access to healthcare and education—as if it were better that citizens were better equipped to kill each other than to help each other. This makes sense in the “every man for himself” vision propounded by gun-fetishists, who imagine their being armed somehow made society more civil. They construe their way of addressing their own insecurities as a valorous way to

ensure everyone else's security; when, in fact, it does quite the opposite.}

{26 This delusive "interpretation" renders the exercise of financial power a form of speech. It is implemented by those partial to plutocracy to ensure that political leverage (a.k.a. "voice") is proportional to wealth-concentration (which is, after all, the definition of plutocracy). The repercussions of such a precedent are straight-forward: Legislation is bought and sold to the highest bidder. This, of course, has no relation whatsoever to the spirit behind the Amendment; and is entirely antithetical to the principles of participatory democracy. Corporations are not people; and the wielding of economic influence is not "speech".}

{27 Neuroticism and fetishism tend to go hand in hand. The neurosis endemic to gun-fetishism warrants further study. Here, the collective pathology is plain to see: Those who don't feel secure unless they are afforded deadly instruments to vanquish villains. This ENGINEERED mass-hysteria can be distilled thus: "I need to be able to KILL other people; and I don't feel safe unless I'm equipped with the means to do so." The attitude, then, is that if one is not licensed to kill those who one personally sees as needing to be killed, then one is not truly free. And what better way to express that license than with a lethal firearm—a talisman of the valiant hero in American folklore? In this sense, a gun is a surrogate for valor, not a prerequisite for it. The peculiar fixation on personalized fire-power is a reminder that insecurity and delusive thinking are symbiotic; and that together they engender neuroticism (see footnote 22 above). The social-psychology of this particular brand of fanaticism is integral to explaining such a gross misreading of such a straight-forward sentence. Broadly speaking, the remedy for the epidemic gun-fetishism across America is a revamping of how masculinity is conceptualized by provincial men (and women). See footnote 30 below for more on this point.}

{28 Since the establishment of a military was eschewed at the time, the security of the nation was left to a sufficiently-equipped citizenry—which would be at the State's beck and call. The 4th-cum-2nd Amendment was written to ensure the polis qua polis would serve as a necessary resource for the State. A citizen's ability to fend off burglars or kill assailants had nothing to do with this. At a time when a professional municipal police force did not exist in most places, it was understood that wild-west-style vigilantism might often—regrettably—be the default scenario; at least for the time being. Such a scenario was not written in the stars. Indeed, such circumstances have not existed for well over a century. "Taking matters into your own hands" may still sometimes apply; however this certainly does not require one to exercise lethal force. Alas, the boondoggle of 2nd-Amendment revisionism requires one to envision oneself in Hobbesian environs—wherein deference to PUBLIC law-enforcement is seen as tantamount to submitting oneself to the dreaded Leviathan...and/or leaving oneself at the mercy of every imagined scoundrel prowling the streets. The question is: To what degree does civil society (in today's world) resemble the Hobbesian vision? Even more pressing: Do we want to live in a society in which everyone is equipped to kill whenever the occasion arises?}

{29 In a world where religious fanatics can read passages like Leviticus 17:10 (if the Torah's your poison) or Acts 15:28-29 (if the New Testament's your poison), and interpret them as prohibiting blood transfusions to save human lives, anyone can read anything to mean virtually anything. (In reality, the two statements admonish us to abstain from drinking blood. Genesis 9:4 admonishes us against eating the meat of a live animal; and EVEN THAT is sometimes used to rationalize the chimerical prohibition against blood transfusion.) Such is the nature of exegetical shenanigans. Hence some people think the commandment not to mix a calf in its mother's milk entails that turkey-and-cheese sandwiches must be banned for all eternity. How pathological can such delusive thinking be? Such cockamamie interpretations invariably translate to nutty behavior. Certain Christian sects are willing to see a parent, spouse, or even child die instead of receiving a desperately-needed blood transfusion...all because of something a Biblical verse clearly doesn't say (yet ideologues desperately WISH it said). Meanwhile, Heredim will refrain from letting dairy products touch the same dish as meat has touched...lest they offend the Creator Of The Universe. And so it goes with American gun-fetishists vis a vis their boneheaded reading of the Second Amendment. Delusive thinking is the lifeblood of exegetical antics—something we

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{30 The response, “Well, what about women who are infatuated with guns?” misses the crux of this observation—which pertains to the social-psychology of gun-culture (or, more accurately, subculture). Women can be insecure too; and just as susceptible to propaganda. Discussed here is a pathos that undergirds American gun-fetishism. Here we are concerned with a peculiar obsession with re-casting the meaning of the 2nd Amendment so as to comport with what is effectively a holy crusade. Females are often swept up in a fervor (be it mass-mania or mass-hysteria) that stems from an epidemic of machismo on the part of their male cohorts. Note, for example, the countless women who defend the patriarchal nature of Abrahamic fundamentalism; and who even become infatuated with the male chauvinism it engenders. By paying tribute to it, they are enablers of a misogynistic ideology. (We would not be tempted to retort to that obvious diagnosis: “But it can’t possibly be patriarchal in nature considering the fact that so many women willfully partake in it.”) This illustrates how women can support patriarchal orders every bit as much as the men who benefit from such arrangements. There are, of course, myriad other reasons one might like to own a lethal firearm (see footnote 31 below). Women can be brainwashed as much as men—as we see with, say, the donning of the burka / niqab by women in Salafī communities, who are thoroughly convinced that there is absolutely nothing remotely misogynistic about this odious sartorial practice (because they are duped into thinking—against all common sense—that covering their faces in public is somehow a means of EMPOWERMENT).}

{31 Those who retort with “But what about those who just want to use guns for hunting?” have completely missed the point of this monograph. Let’s leave aside the fact that the Amendment has nothing to do with killing game for food—let alone for sport. Given the availability of tranquilizers and other non-lethal munitions as an alternative (the use of which would not compromise the thrill of the sport), this tac is a non-starter (see footnote 33 below). Other matters pertaining to guns are ALSO un-related to the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment. Much of America’s gun-violence is gang-related, and occurs amongst ethnic minorities in high-crime, urban areas. Such scenarios have little to nothing to do with appeals to “2nd Amendment rights”; as “packing heat” is done sheerly out of pragmatism—though of a disastrously dysfunctional sort. Black and Latino youth trying to survive—and gain street-cred amongst their peers—in impoverished city neighborhoods could care less about what the U.S. Constitution (a document written by white men who were oppressing their ancestors) does and does not say.}

{32 It was also specified that participation in said militia was a matter of “rendering military service.” The assumption was that a standing army was a recipe for government tyranny; so the only viable alternative was to maintain an armed citizenry—which would serve as a bulwark against a regime that might try to establish a federally-run (i.e. professional) military as a means to rule over the citizenry (to wit: a police state). At the time, this concern was not unwarranted.}

{33 At the risk of venturing too far afield (too late!), it should be noted that comparisons to casualties related to other implements (knives, cars, pools, etc.) entirely miss the point at hand. Such implements exist for reasons that have no relation whatsoever to causing harm...even though they COULD cause harm if misused. Unlike a lethal firearm, their *raison d’etre* exists independently of their ability to cause harm. In other words: The existence of such tools is justified by their utility in contexts other than inflicting injury. Their *raison d’etre* is justified BY THAT utility. A firearm, by contrast, is EXPLICITLY DESIGNED to be lethal, and so is fulfilling its purpose whenever it is used to cause harm / death. Ownership of a bathtub is justified for reasons that hold independently of any dangers bathtubs may pose to the irresponsible user (as with, say, unattended infants). The *raison d’etre* of a bathtub is not to drown people. Pens can be used to mis-spell words; but they’re not DESIGNED TO mis-spell words. Pens can also—very easily—be used to stab someone in the neck. But their *raison d’etre* is for something else entirely—something that justifies their existence. Ergo the justification for anyone’s possession of a pen (*qua* writing implement) is not undermined by the fact that it is very useful for committing murder. Guns are DESIGNED to discharge lethal rounds. By killing people, they are realizing a function—if not THE ONLY function—for which they were designed.

Original essay at: <https://www.masonscott.org/the-obsolescence-of-the-2nd-amendment>

Virtually anything can cause harm if there is sufficient negligence—a fact that in no way delegitimizes the prerogative to own it. This is no justification to own tools the sole raison d’etre of which is to inflict injury.}

{34 In a letter addressed to the Massachusetts militia, John Adams even noted: “We have no [federal] government armed with the power capable of contending with” discord stemming from the citizenry’s inevitable vices. The upshot: That’s why we have YOU, the militia. This point was commonly understood at the time. The key to remember here is that the new Constitution transferred much of the control of the militias from the state governments to the FEDERAL government. The problem with the Articles Of The Confederation was that it arrogated too much governing prerogative to the states. Much of the point of establishing a Republic (and concomitant Constitution) was to rectify this shortcoming. Even champions of the more agrarian visions of local control—like the Democratic-Republican, Thomas Jefferson—recognized this exigency at the time.}

{35 It was for this reason that the Constitution specified the issuing of letters of “marque and reprisal” (Article 1, Section 8) as one of the enumerated powers of Congress. At the time, such a measure made perfect sense; as it was the way that many States undertook military interventions beyond their borders (that is: when a commissioned military was not available for the task). Hence merchant marines were used during the Revolutionary War and, thereafter, to defend against the Barbary pirates...in lieu of there NOT BEING a full navy to carry out the task. (We might recall that it was the FRENCH navy that clinched the American colonies’ victory in the Revolutionary War.) Pursuant to the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, “merchant mariners” and their vessels were rendered auxiliaries to the (by then constituted) U.S. Navy. They were to be recruited primarily for the purpose of transporting soldiers and supplies. Thus “merchant marines” are civilians except in times of war, whereupon they can be used as “reserves” for the military. This notion of civilian reserves might be juxtaposed against the original use of “militia”, which existed NOT ONLY in times of war, but was a permanent fixture—as illustrated by the wording of the 5th Amendment. Today, unlike before, the primary role of personnel designated as “merchant marines” is in logistics-readiness and water-borne commerce, not in combat. That the drafters of the U.S. Constitution saw the need to broach the topic of “marque and reprisal” is very telling. And so we might ask: In harking back to the (former) need for a civilian militia, shall we also bring back “marque and reprisal”? A well-regulated militia, it turns out, is as obsolete as the “merchant marines” (as originally conceived). “Marque and reprisal” is now no more relevant than is the right to bear arms.}

{36 This is what prompted Patrick Henry to say: “Guard with jealous attention the public liberty. Suspect everyone who approaches that jewel. Unfortunately, nothing will preserve it but downright force. Whenever you give up that force, you are inevitably ruined.” At the time, this attitude made perfect sense. Revolutionary zeal was at a fever pitch; and it was stoked for obvious reasons. The militant defiance exhibited by Henry was indicative of the epoch; and so was a reflection of the circumstances in which such sentiment percolated. Nobody articulated this sentiment better than Thomas Paine, who noted that “these are the times that try men’s souls.” When it came to taking action, the matter was ENTIRELY ABOUT taking up arms. Though the spirit behind such statements is timeless, the particulars no longer attain. To suppose that the “liberty requires guns” approach espoused by Henry and Paine tracks to the 21st-century is indulge in a deranged flight-of-fancy. One need only observe all the developed countries around the world today WITHOUT libertine gun-rights (specifically the ones which are far more democratic than the U.S.) to recognize this incontrovertible fact. The jury is no longer out: Numerous liberal democratic societies around the world today—in which the average person is MORE safe and the government is MORE representative of the will of the People—are conclusive proof that an armed citizenry is NOT necessary for either security or accountability. Moreover, taking up arms is no longer how liberal (participatory) democracies ensure freedom. Hence the “everyone needs to be equipped with lethal firearms to stave off tyranny” rationalization goes completely out the window. Had they taken a time-machine to the 21st century, Henry and Paine would surely have recognized this.}

{37 This is what prompted Thomas Jefferson to write in a letter to James Madison: “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.” Of course, Thomas Jefferson ALSO noted that Americans should revisit the Constitution every twenty years, rewriting it as needed. For he was prescient enough to recognize how exigencies would change from one generation to the next (especially over long periods of time). Jefferson recognized that, even as the underlying principles would remain, each epoch called for different measures. It is safe to assume that, in this post-War era, Jefferson would have acknowledged that the proviso for a civilian militia was obsolete. Had his recommended approach been followed, the provision would now be long-gone.}

{38 As if to verify this point, **the 1903 Militia Act** (a.k.a. the “Dick Act”) was passed because the extant militia had too much LOCAL control. The Act was written to FEDERALIZE the national militia, thereby creating what is now known as the “National Guard”: a federally-regulated body that serves the State. Tellingly, the Militia Act bestowed the privilege exclusively to white men. The crucial change made to the militia system by the Dick Act was that militiamen would no longer procure their own guns. Thenceforth, the National Guard would be furnished with modernized military weaponry—at the expense of the Federal government. Are we to suppose that the U.S. National Guard can be mobilized to rise up AGAINST the Federal government? The need for the Dick Act attests to the original purpose of the very precedent it was designed to amend. So how did the “National Guard” come to be as it now is? In 1916, **Section 61 of the National Defense Act** made it illegal for any state to maintain troops during peacetime (except in ways that were explicitly authorized via the National Defense Act). **Section 82** then stipulated: “The National Guard of the United States shall, as far as practicable, be uniformed, armed, and equipped with the same type of uniforms, arms, and equipments as are or shall be provided for the Regular Army.” Clearly, to be part of the militia was to be acting in the service of the State, at the pleasure of the State. As a result of this Act, citizens were no longer allowed to join state-run militias unless they met the (federalized) qualifications that also applied to membership in the U.S. Army. Moreover, the need for members to equip THEMSELVES with arms was rendered obsolete; as the State now assumed that responsibility. (Hence armories.) To what end? When John Kennedy mobilized the National Guard to enforce federal law in Alabama (against the local police, to protect African American protestors), the guns with which it was equipped were not for empowering insurrection. Quite the contrary. It was to carry out the will of the Federal government. THAT was the Second Amendment in action. Yet, EVEN THEN, the Second Amendment was not invoked. Why not? Because, by then, the Federal government had reserved the right to arm its personnel (the FBI, the DEA, the Secret Service, et. al.) What changed? Abetting tyranny by having armed federal bodies was no longer seen as a danger. In other words: The Second Amendment was no longer relevant. The local-level civilian militias to which the Amendment pertained were rendered obsolete by the Department of War / Defense on the FEDERAL level; and—as the Dick Act illustrated—civilian militias had been transplanted at the level of each state by the National Guard. Since then, a few states have instituted STATE-level guards. But even then, the Second Amendment is no longer salient, as the state’s government equips the members.}

Appendix: A Brief Word On The NRA

The myth that the “right to bear arms” is a pre-condition for freedom was the invention of a teenage acolyte of Barry Goldwater in the 1960’s, who first put forth the wild-eyed supposition in the NRA’s periodical, “The American Rifleman”. The notion that the 2nd Amendment was anything other than a provision for civilian militias (to serve at the pleasure of the State) was not entertained by any serious person until the late 1970’s, when the NRA made the daffy idea part of its plank.

This is not to say that the case can’t possibly be made for certain people under certain circumstances to “keep and bear” certain lethal weapons. It is simply to say that, should such a case ever be made, it would have nothing to do with the 2nd Amendment.

Those who have even a rudimentary understanding of the relevant history understand the the 2nd Amendment has been obsolete since at least the National Security Act of 1947, when the War Department was re-branded as the Department of Defense (an Orwellian onomastic for what is, in reality, the Department of Offense).

Not a single founding document even alluded to a perceived need to have a civilian militia for the purpose

of rising up AGAINST the State. Consider the Federalist Papers—composed during the period of intense deliberations preceding the Constitutional Convention to address every feasible exigency. At no point in any of the 85 essays is it mentioned—even in passing—that a right of the People to bear arms would be needed in order to stage a coup in the event the State’s activities happened to become unpalatable to a segment of the polity. Surely, if that had been a serious idea, it would have been clearly expressed at some point, somewhere, by someone. It wasn’t. But this does not dissuade some Americans from pursuing their fantasies of being a 21st-century Wyatt Earp. As they bask in their fever-dreams of being swaggering super-patriots, they are willing to engage in exegetical acrobatics...thereby fulfilling the wildest dreams of America’s gun- and ammo-manufacturing companies.

It should come as little surprise, then, that in the late 1970’s, the NRA underwent a drastic transformation. Before, it had merely been an association of outdoorsmen, which actually FAVORED regulations. Only later was it hijacked by the gun / ammo manufacturers, and transformed into a propaganda outlet. The NRA is now a business lobby masquerading as a civil rights organization—protecting one particular (chimerical) right; and—so the thinking goes—thereby protecting PEOPLE. In reality, the only thing the NRA is protecting is the profits of the firearms industry. The sham is predicated on the supposition that gun rights trump human rights...or that gun rights somehow ARE human rights. This is a reminder that industry lobbies will go to great lengths to ensure nobody hampers their cash cows—the commonweal be damned.

The absurdity of habitual genuflections to the NRA is analogous to, say, the obligatory kow-towing to AIPAC by proponents of Revisionist Zionism. The entire enterprise is a boondoggle (see Footnote 14 above).

As discussed in the Postscripts below, it is the fetishization of the 2nd Amendment for engendering today’s collective neurosis. (Errant thinking on the matter is the result of some combination of ignorance and obsequiousness.) But we can hardly begrudge the Founders for what became of this particular provision. The NRA is precisely the sort of thing James Madison warned about in his *Federalist no. 10*, wherein he spoke of the dangers of factions (the proponents of which, he recognized, would care only about their own narrow interests). As Madison saw it, factions pursue their own self-serving agenda, breaking down the social cohesion requisite for a well-functioning democracy.

Factionalism occurs to the detriment of the commonweal (in this case: just so some can derive the hallow gratification of “bearing arms”). The fact that the NRA has become little other than a propaganda arm for financial interests (under the guise of protecting an inalienable right) would surely make Madison and the other Founders cringe.

Also put forth is the outlandish proposition that the 2nd Amendment is somehow required to ensure the efficacy of the 1st Amendment. The proposition here is that there can be no freedom of speech / assembly / religion without the ability to kill. The entire developed world is a gargantuan counterfactual to this claim. Pace Switzerland, the countries with the least number of firearms proliferating amongst the citizenry are consistently the most civil.

Bottom line: Firearm-mania is antithetical to civic-mindedness, not a prerequisite for it.

Behold an operation that uses fear to separate rubes from their money. “Gun rights” rackets—from the NAGR to the NAAGA—prey on people’s insecurities. (The most extreme case of this is the GOA.) Politicians who exploit “wedge issues” are thereby afforded a way to keep the right-wing base on edge...and thus riled up (see “siege mentality”; “persecution complex”), leading to a kind of mass hysteria. The trick is to get every disaffected country bumpkin to fixate on imagined perils—persuading

him that he must take drastic measures to survive in a world that is, he is convinced, extremely threatening. Participants in this charade get to give their lives meaning by casting themselves as the gun-toting star in an apocalyptic action movie...where, presumably, they will vanquish all the bad guys in a hail of well-placed bullets.

This is delusive thinking. But—as we find with other lucrative industries that game the system—such delusion can be monetized by special interests.

NRA members are useful idiots. They gleefully pay their NRA dues under the impression they are contributing to a noble cause; but they are, in fact, only siphoning their money into the coffers of the gun lobby. Members believe that they're protecting "freedom"; but they're really just funding the lavish lifestyle of perfidious NRA execs—replete with expensive designer suits, fancy cars, and large mansions. This is not just about insiders allotting themselves exorbitant salaries; membership dues are paying for other treats with which they shower themselves: charter flights on private jets, luxury accommodations, and fine dining during their vacations...er, um...junkets. And, of course, the balance of these contributions goes toward legalized graft on Capitol Hill—effectively bribing politicians to support pro-gun legislation (and quash any proposals for gun regulation). Why? So that gun / ammo manufacturers can sell more wares.

Such gimmickry is a reminder that the best way to bamboozle people is to convince them that they are being empowered...while you're taking advantage of them.

Boondoggles like this are nothing new. However, this instance is so egregious, it borders on fraud. (As I write, the NRA is being prosecuted by the New York A.G.) The NRA is a scam; and its members are suckers. It is no wonder that in 1991, retired Supreme Court Justice, Warren Burger referred to the contorted interpretation of the 2nd Amendment as "the greatest piece of fraud—I repeat the word 'FRAUD'—on the American public that I have ever seen in my lifetime." The fraud, he noted, was perpetrated "by special interest groups". Burger was no bleeding-heart liberal. He was a life-long Republican who was anti-choice, virulently homophobic, and notoriously pompous. He was also an enthusiastic gun-owner. Yet EVEN HE recognized the absurdity of the right wing's treatment of the 2nd Amendment.

When Wayne LaPierre Jr. glibly averred that "the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun" (a statement that is demonstrably false), he failed to consider what enabled the bad guy to come into possession of the gun in the first place. His recommendation (increase the accessibility—and thus the circulation—of guns) was, ironically, the very thing that created the problem in the first place.

The point is to PRECLUDE scenarios in which there are bad guys with guns; not get into shoot-outs with them after the fact.

In sum: The NRA seeks to mitigate access to guns in the same way that the Corrections Corporation of America seeks to minimize incarceration. It cares about the general welfare about as much as PhRMA, AHIP, and the AMA care about public health. That is: Not in the least. To fail to understand the motivations of the NRA is to fail to recognize why its propaganda exists.

Postscript 1

As it happens, I received more than an iota of push-back to the preceding essay. (Imagine my surprise.) Of course, what else might one expect from a brigade of skittish American super-patriots yearning to feel like “real men” by packing heat (and who’s literacy is inadequate to comprehend the single sentence of which the 2nd Amendment is comprised)?

Why the obduracy with which some Americans misinterpret such a simple statement? Why the epidemic of gun fetishism that is so unique to the United States of America? From what I’ve been able to gather, firearms serve as prosthetics for masculinity...even as they are wielded under other pretenses. Behold the enticing prospect of being someone prepared to boldly met out vigilante justice in the perilous hell-scape that is the American heartland. Why guns? American lore has glorified the gun-toting paladin—quick on the draw and ready to hit his target for the next cinematic set-piece. For those taken in by this fever dream, these accoutrements of over-compensation have been rendered symbols of star-spangled manhood.

This enthralling fantasy is realized by imagining oneself engaging in some harrowing feat of derring-do...while brandishing a firearm, of course. (Special-ops gear is a nice added touch. Flag-waving is optional.) These shiny, metallic prosthetics are as pitiable as they are militaristic. It is this peculiar fetish that serves as the primary psychical fulcrum by which some unwittingly misinterpret the 2nd Amendment. And it explains why certain parties are DETERMINED to misinterpret it.

As is generally the case with gnawing insecurity, overcompensation is made manifest by displays of swaggering fatuity, whereby the man feels the need to telegraph his manliness by emulating the latest action star. The key is to employ a trendy surrogate for valor without actually having to do anything valorous.

The comedy of insecure (mostly white) men mistaking their pusillanimity for gumption is a kind of self-parody. It brings to mind hapless adolescents lashing out against a bewildering world in self-destructive ways. After all, it is not uncommon for someone who easily feels intimidated to react by trying to intimidate others. It is no secret that the bully is typically the most insecure kid on the playground. *

Any man with imperiled masculinity is invited to partake in such cos-play—which, he supposes, might salvage his wavering self-esteem (that is: insofar as he manages to convince himself that—by engaging in this daffy masquerade—he is taking a bold stand for “freedom”). The idea—it seems—is that, having cast himself in a titillating cinematic set-piece, the raft of festering anxiety about his man-hood might be magically eradicated.

Thus the gun-fetishist imagines himself to be that swaggering cowboy—or that bad-ass military commando—over which he fawned as a young lad. His hope is that such contrived braggadocio will somehow magically ameliorate his gnawing insecurities.

Pursuant to my disquisition on the 2nd Amendment, there remained the question of why I did not address gang-related gun-violence amongst ethnic minorities in urban neighborhoods. This is, indeed, a very important issue; yet has little relation to misrepresentations of the U.S. Constitution. Such violence occurs due to a confluence of two things. First: Mostly black and Latino youth in impoverished neighborhoods who have become embroiled in gang activity—largely as a matter of course. Second: The proliferation of—and ubiquitous easy access to—guns. Those involved in such activities do not use the 2nd Amendment as justification for “bearing arms”.

The problem in such cases is not psychical insecurity; it is socio-economic insecurity. That is to say, the circumstance is not one of IMAGINED danger; it is one of ACTUAL danger. Moreover, for wayward youth in inner cities with limited options, the bearing of arms oftentimes stems from a (perceived) need for

street-cred. Ironically, though, the demand to be armed with a gun ends up serving as a catalyst for aggression as much as it does a deterrent to aggression. Of course, the same is the case for ANYONE in ANY situation who opts to brandish a firearm in a potentially dangerous encounter. The chances of being shot always INCREASE when one introduces a gun into the equation.

In sum: We are dealing with a situation of GENUINE desperation amongst poor ethnic minorities in urban settings—that is: those who find themselves in a predicament that rarely exists for the legions of (white, middle-class) “gun rights” advocates. For when disenfranchised youth “pack heat” in rough neighborhoods, they are being (tragically) pragmatic rather than (needlessly) neurotic. More to the point: For such youth, there is no pretense that the decision has anything to do with a document that white men—who’d enslaved some of their ancestors—drafted centuries ago.

THAT regrettable gun-culture—highly problematic as it is—is rather beside the point when it comes to assaying misapprehensions about the U.S. Constitution.

Regarding the pathology addressed in the preceding essay, we are concerned with an entirely different phenomenon—one that generally emerges amongst conservative white men. The salient factors in THOSE cases are quite different from gang-related gun-violence.

At the risk of flogging a steed that is already deceased, let’s recapitulate the appraisal. We can then move on to new points that buttress my thesis.

In the final analysis, it is clear that some combination of ignorance (of history) and insecurity is behind the proliferation of myths about the 2nd Amendment—things that are not salient factors for inner-city youths enveloped in gang activity.

As discussed in the preceding essay, the affectation known as “machismo” (a yearning to exhibit masculinity by men who are nervous about the perceived status of their man-hood) stems from deep-seated psychological insecurities; not from realistic concerns about safety. (The same neuroses are at play with the bombastic false pride characteristic of super-patriotism.) It makes sense, then, that gun-fetishists imagine that they need lethal firearms to be safe in what they see as a threatening world...even when the most threatening thing in their life is often their own militant disposition. Naturally, it is they who end up resorting to specious appeals to a chimerical “*right to bear arms*”.

And what of “*arms*”? What range of weaponry does this encompass? At the time that the Amendment-in-question was composed, “arms” referred to muskets—which were manually loaded. The term now encompasses not on arquebuses, but AK-47s; so are we to suppose that the provision applies to such devices.

The question naturally arises: Where does the applicability end?

Suppose, for a moment, that there is no end. Using that logic, we must allow “arms” to include rocket launchers and fighter jets. Indeed, taken to the extreme, “arms” includes NUCLEAR arms. ****

With this in mind, we are forced to concede that a line must be drawn...somewhere...short of affording anyone anywhere the license to stockpile nuclear warheads of their own volition. Yet the moment we concede this point, we realize that said line can be placed anywhere beyond an 18th-century, flintlock rifle. In other words: Somewhere between pistols and ICBMs.

By what criteria shall such a line be drawn? The ultimate standard is the safety and security of the citizenry (viz. the “Free State”). This vaunted ideal seems to be historically salient; and Constitutionally

mandated. So let's grant that the safety and security of the citizenry ("the general welfare", per the Constitution's preamble) is the ideal to which we aspire.

In the early days of the Republic, a civilian militia had to be equipped with arms (in order to fulfill its charge)...toward that very end. Today, as the need for a civilian militia no longer exists, allowing for the proliferation of guns has proven to be diametrically opposed to that end. (Higher availability of guns correlates with higher casualties.) Hence conditions for the specified right no longer attain. In other words, the 4th-cum-2nd Amendment is not relevant anymore. Consequently, the provisions germane thereto are moot.

Another matter remains worth broaching. When challenged on the credence of his chronic apprehension-verging-on-paranoia, the gun-fetishist will typically concoct an outrageous scenario that, it turns out, exists only in his imagination. In other words, to justify his perceived "need" to arm himself, he is apt to posit a slew of melodramatic hypotheticals; then insist every responsible citizen be prepared should those hypotheticals ever become a reality.

Consequently, it has become routine for gun-fetishists to conjecture menacing encounters in which—they presume—ANYONE would wish they had a gun at the ready. The idea is that the gun will be wielded to engage in some sort of spectacular shoot-out with imagined perpetrators. The perilous episode is assumed to culminate in a triumphant conclusion: a grand finale in which the "good guys"—having adeptly availed themselves of their trusty fire-arms—prevail; and the "bad guys" are defeated. Thanks to the former being armed, the latter are stopped before they can wreak havoc on society.

This "just so" story serves a purpose. The dastardly villains are vanquished, we are notified, EXPLICITLY due to the fact that the "good guys" were exercising their "right" to bear arms. This fortuitous exigency is a godsend for which we all have the 2nd Amendment to thank. The "catch", of course, is that—no matter the nature of the confrontation—the end-game is murder. But never mind that. Any hypothetical predicament shall be resolved with lethal force. Film at 11.

The key here, of course, is that all those imaginary scenarios require one to be armed with a lethal weapon...just like the hero in an action-packed Hollywood production. Never mind that such things almost never play out—as such—in the real world.

Undeterred by the implausibility of his musings, the gun-fetishist is obliged to keep speculating: "But what happens if..." followed by some hair-raising situation that is unlikely to ever occur. "You'll sure as heck wish you had a gun THEN," warns the self-proclaimed champion of "gun rights". The punch-line is delivered after having painted a lurid picture of some menacing kerfuffle—a hypothetical predicament that he insists we should all be worried about. "And THAT is why we need the 2nd Amendment." Q.E.D.

Hence: With an ample dose of delusion, insecurity is transmogrified into gallantry. By picturing oneself in any of these imaginary scenarios, one's low self-esteem can be passed off as bravado—as one's fears are washed away by a flourish of ass-kicking. This gratifying psychical perk explains why gun-fetishists really, really, really don't like being called out as gun-fetishists. For it exposes their neurosis, thereby depriving them of their starring role as the stentorian defender of law and order.

The psychology here is relatively straight-forward. In order to compensate for a raft of (suppressed) insecurities, the gun-fetishist imputes to himself a nascent valor...which will be demonstrated the moment he gets to prove himself in this made-for-TV set-piece. He is only able to convince himself that this (ersatz) valor is REAL by conjuring an array of dangerous situations that, he supposes, he could find himself in any day of the week. That way, he is always prepared to “save the day” with his trusty firearm. Every day, he can wake up convinced that he is asserting his ordained role as super-patriot—just as any “real man” should. Who could possibly argue with such a noble aspiration?

In reality, no such (immanent) danger is forthcoming...for the vast majority of people living in a civil society. The comically-contrived scenarios (requisite for this foreboding illusion to attain) turn out to be highly improbable...even for many of those living in higher-crime areas. Indeed, such hypothetical predicaments are no more likely than, say, a lightning strike between one’s eyes. But no matter. For the gun-fetishist FEELS LIKE he’s ready to come to the rescue...that is, so long as he has his trusty fire-arm on hand.

This delusive impression can be tremendously gratifying; for the gun-slinging paladin can revel in the belief that he his protecting himself and his kin...simply by being armed. So far as he’s concerned, that wonderfully exhilarating sensation (of being a “real man”) is ultimately all that matters.

And so it is plain to see that this charade is predicated on festering neuroticism that has been blithely disguised as some stalwart “patriotism”. The problem, though, is that one must suppose a phantom menace may be lurking around every corner...or, at least, on the perimeter of one’s own property. In these daffy hypotheticals, petty thieves who sneak into one’s domicile to pilfer expensive jewelry (or pricy consumer goods or whatever else) shall be re-imagined as fiendish intruders hell-bent on massacring the entire family.

The only way one might protect one’s cowering brood from these criminals, the thinking goes, is by KILLING them...just as it happened in [insert favorite action movie here]. We’re all better off with guns, because someone else somewhere “out there” might have them too. Gotta be ready to fight fire with fire! (And, meanwhile, presume that everyone is a crack shot.)

What are the implications here? Some teen misfits—who’s only designs are run-of-the-mill burglary—can be re-cast as a murderous posse that can only be stopped with lethal force (read: with FIREPOWER). It’s as if murder were somehow the optimal resolution to any and every conceivable confrontation with (potentially illicit) interlopers. Just like in the movies.

By fancying that such a predicament may be immanent, those with low self-esteem can style themselves as heroes-in-waiting...if only in their own minds. The prospect of being someone who has helped vanquish the world’s (perceived) “bad guys” is tremendously appealing for men have few other ways to prove their man-hood. In the meantime, they can bide their time shooting at paper targets...in preparation for that glorious moment of fame that awaits them.

And so we hear outlandish hypotheticals whenever an argument for “gun rights” arises. In proffering such ominous dilemmas, any sense of social responsibility is transmogrified into a hankering to participate in vigilante justice. Confabulating these “just so” scenarios affords the gun-fetishist a rationalization for his obsession—enabling him to pass his fetish off as a civic duty. No longer does his gnawing insecurity seem to undermine his masculinity; for an insecurity can be re-purposed as an opportunity to flaunt the kind of tough-guy image for which he pines. It may be an image he has adapted from first-person shooter video-games and cinematic gun-fights, but so be it. (The same psychical mechanisms are at work with the typical playground bully.)

The attendant attitude can be summarized thus: “Don’t want an AR-15?! What are you, a pussy?!” As usual, the braggadocio is nothing more than compensation for some short-coming. (In the midst of his

self-ingratiating bluster, the gun-fetishist is reticent to admit that the only gun a real man needs is the one between his legs.) For those addled with presentiment, brandishing a lethal weapon is a surefire way to pretend one is a freedom fighter—prepared to heed the call of duty (as soon as he can find his holster). So far as this self-styled super-patriot is concerned, anyone who neglects this sacred call is—ipso facto—a pansy. For to NOT play along in this charade MUST be deemed an obsequious dereliction of American patriotism. (The only alternative is that his OWN patriotism is an illusion.)

The notion that more guns proliferating in society leads to more public safety is downright bonkers. For self-defense, you say? In the late 18th century, a firearm could deploy two rounds per minute—three if one was extremely expedient at re-loading. This limited a gun's utility to a battlefield or to hunting game (and to duels). Clearly, the Framers did not have in mind the ability to fire a gun multiple times during an altercation in a domestic context (e.g. to ward off burglars). Needing only ONE SHOT to use in an encounter with intruders / assailants is the stuff of farce, even if everyone with a gun were expert marksmen. (Consider the time between shots. After half a minute has elapsed, whatever situation warranted lethal force would have developed past the point of relevance. By the time one would have re-packed the musket with gun-powder, presumably in a panic, the pivotal moment would have likely come and gone.) Hence, at the time the Amendment-in-question was drafted, such a purpose would not have made any sense. **

We find, then, that there is an ample dose of delusion endemic to the gun-fetishist's fever dream. For these are the same men—mostly middle-class, white men living in rural areas—who imagine that if they ever opted to mobilize a coterie of their gun-toting brethren, they could take on the full might of the U.S. armed forces...and presumably overthrow the federal government. They are prepared to undertake this quixotic venture whenever they see fit. When might that be? Well, the moment said coterie decides that the government is being insufficiently deferential to their demands. So they imagine—against all evidence—that the license to wage war against the U.S. military has something to do with the 2nd Amendment...which, in reality, was drafted to PREVENT such an occurrence.

Hence a measure undertaken to preclude insurrection is taken as an open invitation to stage a coup. Duty to the State is construed as duty to oneself; and an individual right is born from the aether.

How can we be so sure the 2nd Amendment was written to SUPPRESS insurrections, not to FACILITATE them? Well, if we were to conjecture—against all evidence, and against all common sense—that the recognition of a “well-regulated militia” was to ensure disgruntled civilians could stage a coup at their own discretion, we would be forced to suppose that, on March 3, 1807, Thomas Jefferson signed into law the **Insurrection Act** to COUNTERMAND the very thing that said Amendment was put in place to ENABLE.

Of course, that would make no sense. ***

Clearly, the Act was consummate with 2nd Amendment; and vice versa. Indeed, the “security of a Free State” is precisely what the Act was designed to protect. Given that there was no standing army, invoking a “well-regulated militia” (comprised of white, male civilians...who were already equipped with their own arms) was pivotal. At no point did “We want to make sure civilians can overthrow the government” enter Jefferson's mind. On the contrary, the “Insurrection Act” was passed to make sure civilians COULDN'T overthrow the government. To wit: It was a measure that was perfectly in keeping with the 2nd Amendment.

Such legislation illustrated the spirit behind the 2nd Amendment; which was clearly apprehended at the time. To wit: Such legislation was understood to be in keeping with that Amendment. Otherwise, there would have been strident dissent in the form of: “Well, what about the 2nd Amendment?!” whenever such legislation was deliberated upon.

The *Insurrection Act of 1807* also illustrates the role of said “militias”. Passed just over 15 years after the Bill of Rights was ratified, this legislation gave the FEDERAL government the right to deputize civilians who were serving in state militias (specified at the time as “land and naval forces”) in order to put down (not facilitate) insurrections—that is: to serve at the pleasure of the State. (This was an update to the so-called “*Calling Forth*” Act of 1792, which also pertained to “militias”, as the term was used in the Constitution. That legislation was drafted just 4 months after the Bill of Rights was ratified.) But wait? Would service to the Federal government take precedence over service to state-level militias? Yes. In 1861, a stipulation was added to the Insurrection Act, clarifying that the Federal government could use local militias against state governments in cases where the latter tried to contravene the former. To suppose that “well-regulated militia” had something to do with enabling a coup is therefore bonkers.

An illustration of this Act’s application was John F. Kennedy’s deputization of Alabama’s National Guard to countermand the local police in June of 1963. It did not occur to many that THAT was the 2nd Amendment in action.

The *Civil Rights Act of 1871* empowered the federal government to commandeer state militias to combat anyone who attempted to violate the civil rights of other citizens. In other words, the militia was understood to be working at the pleasure of the federal government—with logistics managed at the state level. This is what President Lyndon Johnson demonstrated almost a century later, when he doubled down on Kennedy’s invocation of the statute. In March of 1965, when there was civic unrest in Alabama, he used the National Guard OF ALABAMA. The federal government thus usurped the jurisdiction of the state’s governor, who had defaulted on his duties.

So when private militia groups TODAY invoke the 2nd Amendment to justify their mobilization as a means to keep the State in check, they are effectively inverting the meaning of “militia” as it was understood in the 18th and 19th centuries. The ONLY meaning of “militia”—as used in the Constitution’s main body—was clearly illustrated with the aforementioned Insurrection Act.

There is an irony here; as the Amendment-in-question was ORIGINALLY intended to address concerns that a militia controlled solely by the federal government would be inadequate to help plantation owners in the event of a slave uprising. The idea was that each state should have its own contingent so that militiamen could be at the beck and call of local slavers, as the occasion arose. This point was articulated during the Constitution’s ratification convention in Virginia (primarily by Patrick Henry and George Mason). Madison was persuaded to include the Amendment in order to mollify Southerners who insisted on being able to use militias at the state level. Why? In order to quell slave revolts.

Madison was also interested in the role that militias would play in colonizing North America. Indeed, the other major concern at the time was the ability to handle Native Americans who resisted the hegemony of white settlers as they moved westward on the frontier.

Hence guns were needed to kill unruly negroes and unruly Indians. This is a long way from wanting to arm school teachers so that they can get into shoot-outs with mass murders who are wielding AR-15s...presumably in a classroom full of students. In our ardor to keep guns in circulation, we find ourselves going from one nightmare to another.

(For further legislation that illustrates the meaning of “well-regulated militia”, see the discussion of the *Dick Act* in Footnote 38 above.)

That leaves us with the matter of judicial developments. When it comes to relevant juridical exigencies, we often encounter the “*But what about D.C. v. Heller?*” rejoinder. This refers to the risible 2008 Supreme Court decision...wherein a cadre of unabashedly right-wing judges countermanded over a century of precedent in a ploy to hold what was theretofore untenable: That the 2nd Amendment leaves some room for individual rights (that is: prerogatives outside the scope of someone serving the State...in a well-regulated militia). Scalia’s majority opinion was utterly dismaying, as it flouted a century of scholarship—notably: *U.S. v. Miller* in 1939, a decision that re-affirmed the provisional right as contingent on someone bearing arms in the capacity of a militiaman.

This was a case of Kafka-esque jurisprudence. In 1991, Chief Justice Warren Burger had characterized such an expansionist treatment of the amendment as “one of the greatest pieces of fraud—I repeat the word FRAUD—on the American public by special interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime.” After the *D.C. v. Heller* decision, retired Justice John Paul Stevens referred to it as “unquestionably the most clearly incorrect decision that the Supreme Court announced during my tenure on the bench.”

This opprobrious decision joined a list of horrible Supreme Court decisions, starting with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896...through *Korematsu v. U.S.* in 1944...to *Citizens United v. F.E.C.* in 2010. In a country where corporations are treated as people and money is treated as speech, it is no surprise that a right-leaning court saw fit to tacitly endorse voter suppression (from *Giles v. Harris* to *Shelby County v. Holder*)...and, in 2008, to contravene the clear intent of the 2nd Amendment.

It was no secret that Scalia and Thomas were extreme right-wing ideologues who cared nothing about “original intent”, and even less about any notion of common law. Yet—tellingly—even in his majority opinion, Scalia included the caveat: “Like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited.” He felt obliged to point out that the amendment did NOT constitute “a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose.” In other words, even the author of this outrageous opinion was forced to concede that there was no CATEGORICAL right to bear arms. The need to hedge in this manner said more about the decision than anything else.

The extremists on the Supreme Court bench even went so far as to proclaim their heedlessness of history. In an “obiter dictum”, the court openly admitted (with surprising candor): “Although we have not undertaken an exhaustive historical analysis today of the full scope of the Second Amendment...” No shit.

It comes as little surprise, then, that rather than the usual single dissent, two separate dissents were issued (one by Stephen Breyer, one by John Paul Stevens), each of which were endorsed by R.B. Ginsberg and D. Souter. Needless to say, both dissents exhibited the erudition of their authors—contrasting starkly with the utter speciousness of the majority opinion.

Alas, the perpetration of judicial fraud was just beginning. In 2022, with the *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen* decision, a new cadre of right-wing judges proffered an outlandish opinion regarding the Sullivan Act of 1911. There was a perverse irony to this; as the Act-in-question actually CORROBORATED the obsolescence of the 2nd Amendment. How so? It was a state-level law enacted in New York that required those applying for a pistol-carrying permit to show “proper cause” (or demonstrate some sort of special need that was independent of upholding the public good) to qualify. In other words, it was recognized that the 2nd Amendment was inadequate for such license, thereby putting the onus on the applicant to show why carrying a firearm was warranted. That the court in 2022 expanded the prerogative

to bear arms UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE 2nd AMENDMENT, and purported to do so based upon the spirit of the Sullivan Act, was downright preposterous. Alas, Orwellian interpretations is the stock in trade of Constitutional revisionists.

History reveals a drastically different precedent. Looking back to *Presser v. Illinois* (in 1886), we find that the court opted to disconnect the provisional “right” from membership in a “militia” OF ONE’S OWN MAKING. The decision made clear that the right was afforded explicitly for the good of the Republic; and pertained to service to the State—whereby a well-regulated militia was something mobilized by the federal government in time of collective need. (It left it to state governments to regulate guns, which—it was careful to note—needed to be regulated.) Clearly, *the right-in-question was recognized as a contingency*, given that the exigency specified in the conditional statement still attained (under certain circumstances). One could have argued that this exigency existed up until the Second World War (read: the birth of the Pentagon). In fact, a professional / standing army had clearly been in place since as far back as the First World War, so the conditional clause of the Amendment no longer had purchase.

And so it went: In 1939, the *U.S. v. Miller* decision linked civilians’ bearing of arms to “the common defense”. Here, the right was limited to males who were deemed physically capable of serving in that capacity; and were “enrolled for military discipline”. Incidentally, the necessary arms were to be supplied by the citizens themselves, not by the State...which accounted for the (continued) need for the Amendment.

Then World War II happened. Thereafter, the Department of War (euphemistically re-branded the Department of Defense) would become a permanent fixture in the Executive Branch, which ensured the Amendment’s condition would remain un-satisfied indefinitely...thereby rendering the predicate null and void.

What the Framers did NOT anticipate is that gun-culture would become a way of life. There is no way they could have foreseen that “bearing arms” would transmogrify into a uniquely American pathos—a pathos that would abide far beyond the original conception of white men keeping muskets at their homestead for the purpose of ensuring the security of a free State.

And so it has come to pass that there exist swarms of insecure white men—most of them Christian nationalists and right-wing libertarians—who imagine themselves to be swashbucklers-in-the-making. They aspire to personify certain coveted ideals (masculinity, patriotism) simply by toting a gun and waving a flag. The enticing prospect of starring in their own action-sequence is difficult to resist—especially when the dream is always (literally) at the tip of one’s fingers.

This pathology is predicated on an illusion, and fueled by a perpetually-stoked neurosis. In any given (hypothetical) scenario, the imagined adversary could be a wayward burglar or it could be a purportedly overbearing federal government. It doesn’t matter. To justify their right to bear arms UNCONDITIONALLY, they need only say one thing—as if it were a magical incantation: “Second Amendment!” What Second Amendment? Well, a fictional one in which the condition is elided.

Such perfidy brings to mind to the cheeky adage: “The only gun a real man needs is the one between his legs.” So what, then, of men who covet guns? As it turns out, having fire-power on one’s person is a way to ameliorate feelings of inadequacy (specifically for self-conscious men with wavering self-esteem). A gnawing insecurity underlies the need to carry a lethal implement to feel safe; or—insofar as it serves as a prosthesis for masculinity—to feel like a “real man”. Here, we’re talking about the kind of people who felt the need to buy more guns during the corona-virus pandemic in 2020. (The thinking seemed to be: “More than medicine, we need to be able to kill people!”)

A pre-occupation with the 2nd Amendment amounts to a collective pathology—a pathology that has been engineered by gun / ammo manufacturers in order to drum up business (see the Appendix above).

Indeed, provincial America’s on-going obsession with guns is the result of a savvy business strategy. It is no secret that epidemic gun-fetishism fuels a booming firearms industry in the U.S. The NRA’s sole purpose is to bolster the revenue of gun and ammunition manufacturers; not to foster public safety. (Gun possession puts people in MORE danger, not less.) Hence the “you need to protect yourself with lethal weapons” narrative is a red herring. Nobody needs to be able to kill others in order to be safe. Yet the MIS-IMPRESSION that this might be the case translates to blockbuster sales for the firearms industry.

The operative principle in this on-going ruse is elementary: Create the demand, then a bonanza awaits. The commonweal be damned.

This perfidious gambit is especially effective in rural areas, where the vigilante mentality tends to have more resonance. Consequently, the absurd “right to protect yourself” bromide is swallowed hook, line, and sinker by insecure white men in provincial settings. They construe this god-given license as a proxy for an ethereal abstraction referred to as “freedom”.

And so it goes: Across America’s hinterlands, a fabricated hysteria (we live in a dangerous world) drives the “self-defense” mania (so you need to protect yourself with lethal weapons). Ergo the pathology from which the gun industry profits...at the expense of everyone’s ACTUAL safety.

Once one sees peril everywhere—from one’s own front porch to every Bed, Bath, and Beyond—, it almost seems to make sense that one should arm oneself with a lethal weapon.

The result of this queer cocktail of machismo and neurosis is an earnest consumer and a highly lucrative arms market. In other words: fear and avarice.

In sum: American gun-fetishists are little more than dupes of a gun lobby that rhapsodizes about chimerical “2nd Amendment rights”, when—in reality—they couldn’t care less what that Amendment actually says.

Such militancy is a reminder that insecure self-esteem is born of repressed existential distress—be it anxiety or resentment or frustration or just a hankering to play the tough guy in a melodrama that exists only in one’s own mind. But here’s the thing: Liberty no more depends on one being able to kill others than patriotism depends on unblinking sycophancy. Alas. The chance to be the embodiment of “LIBERTY” is hard to resist for those who don’t know the first thing about what actual liberty might be.

* * *

{ Ancillary note: Men do not need to be emasculated in order to avert toxic masculinity (i.e. the pathology of machismo that undergirds gun fetishism). Well-adjusted men embrace their masculinity just as well-adjusted women embrace their femininity. The mitigation of sexism does not require the vitiation of gender; it simply entails a judicious treatment of sexual differences, which are perfectly in keeping with an abiding recognition of our common humanity. The problem with a fixation on the “Mr. Tough Guy” ethos is not a surfeit of masculinity; it’s a dearth of it.}*

*{** The kind of shoot-outs we see in cinematic set-pieces from the Old West (wherein guns could be fired multiple times in any given confrontation) involved technology that was not available until almost a century later. Samuel Colt patented the first revolver in 1836, but that was a crude muzzle-loader. Smith and Wesson patented the Rollin White design in 1856. The Colt .45 was first manufactured in 1873. The notion of every Tom, Dick, and Harry walking around with semi-automatic handguns (with spring-*

loaded clips) would have seemed outlandish to those who drafted the Amendment-in-question.}

*{*** Any subsequent invocation of the Insurrection Act would need to be to uphold—among other things—the 2nd Amendment. Given the farcical interpretation, though, this would effectively mean: “We are going to use the powers of the federal government to protect your ability to rise up against the federal government.” How? “By preventing anyone from rising up against the federal government.” It’s not only a paradox; it’s a DUAL paradox.}*

*{**** On the other hand, if we were to employ the logic of gun-fetishists, one might say that nuclear weapons don’t obliterate cities; people obliterate cities.}*

Postscript 2

At the risk of further pummeling a mare that’s already been bludgeoned to death, I offer further elaboration on the preceding Postscript.

To review: In the 18th century, a “well-regulated militia” meant a group of white male citizens who—in their capacity of serving the government—were accorded the right to “keep and bear” muskets. (There is question as to the degree to which “keeping” X entailed OWNING X; as opposed to being equipped with X on a contingency basis. Meanwhile, “bearing” something simply means wielding it.) Approved members were beholden to the State in order to ensure the State’s security; and, in that vain, responded to the orders of the state’s governor...and, as the occasion warranted, President.

As I discussed, such men were subject to inspection by army personnel to ensure they were up to the task, and that their equipment was well maintained. They were provided with flints, bayonets, powder, and even footwear—as needed—to ensure they were adequately equipped to fulfill their charge.

All this was at the pleasure of the State. It had nothing to do with concerns about burglary; and it was certainly not a prescription for armed bands of marauders claiming “militia” status; nor was it a license for (lethal) vigilante justice.

So why did southern politicians lobby so vociferously for an amendment that ensured white, landowning men would be equipped to serve in their capacity as militiamen? The two primary reasons were slave patrols and the ability to fight off Native Americans. (The need for slave patrols was most famously emphasized by Patrick Henry; but it was a concern for ALL politicians south of the Mason-Dixon line.) Today, BOTH of those purposes are categorically obsolete.

To be clear: Slave patrols were a priority at the time the Amendment-in-question was drafted; which is why the ***Fugitive Slave Act*** was passed in early 1793—less than 14 months after the Bill of Rights was ratified. ** Fugitive Slave laws mandated that wayward slaves were hunted down and returned to their owners. During this ignominious period in American history, who was charged with catching escaped slaves? The MILITIAS (in conjunction with Federal Marshals). Slave patrols were officially commissioned by the states, which is why military-style training facilities were established—most notably: the Arsenal at Lexington, Virginia (spearheaded by John Thomas Lewis Preston in 1836) followed by the Citadel and Arsenal Academies in South Carolina (in 1842). ***

State militias also served as local police forces. That has ALSO been rendered obsolete, as municipal police departments were established starting in the 1850’s (then the FBI in the 1930’s).

In sum: We live in a much different world than the one with which the Framers were contending.

Bear in mind, at the time, standing / professional armies were seen as a potential threat to the Republic. This sentiment was virtually unanimous; and was forcefully articulated by Madison in 1788 during the Virginia ratifying convention. Consequently, a well-regulated civilian militia was necessary. Here, “well-regulated” meant “subjected to government oversight” and “sufficiently equipped”. After all, if the militias existed to serve the State, then the State had to MAINTAIN those militias. And if (white, male) civilians were to be charged with this responsibility, then—naturally—they needed to be armed.

Militias as a means of staging a coup, you say? Let’s leave aside, for a moment, the (outrageous) delusion that a battalion of civilians who’ve stockpiled rifles in their basements would somehow prevail over the entire U.S. armed forces; and consider the notion that a “well-regulated militia” was REALLY intended to overthrow the U.S. government...should the need to do so arise. But wait. If the Founders were so concerned about the State being overthrown by a standing / professional army, then obviously they were not eager to create an ALTERNATE means by which the State could be overthrown by force of arms. (!) The point of resorting to a civilian militia was to have something that would NOT be capable of overthrowing the State.

In a democratic country, it’s not an un-armed populace that leaves itself open to tyranny; it’s a populace that doesn’t know how to vote wisely. Ammo-paths are under the bizarre impression that political dysfunction is ameliorated by firing bullets rather than by enacting better laws. Indeed, they seem to miss the point of, well, representative democracy: To elect—then pressure—public servants to pass better legislation.

Susceptibility to tyranny stems from a deterioration in the integrity of the demos. Such a woeful condition is not precluded by ensuring everyone is packing heat. In a civil society, rights are protected by promoting certain public policies, not by lethal force. This is, after all, how participatory democracy works.

What, exactly, drives all the misapprehensions about the purpose of the 2nd Amendment? In a word: Propaganda. Let’s look at three (utterly inane) shibboleths that have become popular in the past half-century.

ONE: If we outlaw guns, then only outlaws will have guns. This statement is merely a tautology. If we outlaw bank robbery, then only bank robbers will rob banks. Shall we conclude from this that it is pointless to prohibit heists? Those determined to have guns are not deterred from acquiring them. If anything, their motivation to acquire guns is AUGMENTED.

TWO: The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. Applying this logic to the nuclear arms race has put mankind on the brink of extinction. Counter-armament is not the best response to armament...lest one desires a positive feedback loop. Antagonism rarely de-escalates a hostile situation. Obviously, if there is an active mass shooter who cares nothing about dying, incapacitating him is the only solution. But most criminals are seeking to save their own hides. When their goal is something other than murder, introducing guns into the equation makes everyone LESS safe.

THREE: Guns don’t kill people, PEOPLE kill people. Similarly, pencils don’t mis-spell words, PEOPLE mis-spell words. But pencils aren’t *designed* to mis-spell words. To wit: A pencil is not realizing its potential by botching language. A pencil is designed to make markings on paper. That’s it. Insofar as it can do this, a pencil has fulfilled its purpose—AS a pencil. Many things with a pro-social raison d’etre can also, unfortunately, play a role in casualties—that is: in the event of a mishap. Be that as it may, pools aren’t designed to drown people; cars aren’t designed to run people over; and butter knives aren’t designed to gouge people’s eyes out. The designated utility of such things justifies their existence, in spite of the

fact that their existence may lead to injuries—or even fatalities—should someone conduct themselves irresponsibly.

By contrast, guns are *designed* to deploy lethal force. One can murder a person by jabbing a pencil into their carotid artery; but that's not what pencils are made for. (Their existence is justified by a different utility.) Using a pencil as a puncturing tool exploits its physical features in ways that have nothing to do with its designated purpose. The same goes for incompetent swimmers drowning in pools, pedestrians killed by reckless drivers, and diners blinded by errant butter knives. To outlaw aquatic recreation, automobiles, and silverware would be to miss the point.

Not so with guns.

Some gun-rights advocates question the efficacy of mitigating the circulation of firearms—pointing to urban centers that have implemented gun-control measures yet still have a surfeit of gun violence. Such advocates fail to realize that unless such measures are taken EVERYWHERE, then guns can wind up ANYWHERE. Clearly, guns used in criminal acts are acquired in places where guns are readily available. Implementing such a policy in only some places is like have a designated non-peeing section in a swimming pool.

When it comes to assessing the results of robust gun-mitigation measures, far better case-studies would be Scandinavia, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, and—most strikingly of all—Japan. The verdict is conclusive: such measures WORK.

The peculiar role of guns in American lore is the semiotic fulcrum for what can only be described as a zany incarnation of hyper-nationalism. In addition to a litany of vapid perorations about (some farcical version of) “the Constitution”, the toting of firearms marks this uniquely American pathology. Such hijinks are lent an air of legitimacy by propounding a farcical version of the 2nd Amendment. The result is (what sociologists refer to as) super-patriotism, wherein a firearm serves as a signifier for, well, some obtuse conception of “patriotism”.

This ersatz virtue is—effectively—a WASP-oriented cult movement characterized by maudlin pageantry. It also involves exhibitions of machismo—as participants fashion themselves as swaggering buccaneers, ready to met out vigilante justice as the occasion arises. Their machismo is enabled by (what amounts to) a prosthetic for masculinity.

So what of amassing a personal arsenal? When it comes to the mobilization of private militias today, we see gun-fetishists trying to ameliorate their insecurities with ever more purchases—as if stockpiling lethal weapons might serve as a proxy for the machismo they so ardently crave. Hence the mere prospect of being deprived of their beloved firearms makes them feel emasculated. For not only would that be like depriving a child of the safety blanket to which he so ardently clings; it would be taking away their prosthesis for masculinity.

The gun-fetishist's self-image as an intrepid paladin depends on his ability to brandish armaments; and even exhibit them as an overt signifier of his status as a super-patriot. As for fashioning himself a valiant hero, he resorts to laughably puerile platitudes like “The only thing that can stop a BAD guy with a gun is a GOOD guy with a gun.” Gadzooks!

We all yearn to be heroes in our own story. When one has low self-esteem, one is apt to grasp onto any narrative that makes this wish come true. In this case, the protagonist is a gun-toting paladin...ready to swoop in and save the day...just like in the movies. When it comes to insecure men, overcompensation

manifests in various ways—be it plain ol’ misogyny or flag-waving bluster or daffy sartorial accoutrements. “After all, the commandos on TV engage in open carry, so I should too.”

Basking in his own (manufactured) machismo, the 2nd-Amendment warrior brandishes his lethal accoutrement—thoroughly convinced that braggadocio is the loftiest form of civic-mindedness. But in order to fancy himself as a valiant mercenary stud-muffin, he is obliged frame everything according to a sophomoric trope: REAL American patriots pack heat, because REAL American patriots are ready to kick ass. Such delusive thinking invariably involves a cartoon version of masculinity.

The irony is that, in their earnest attempts to exhibit toughness, gun fetishists only end up showcasing their insecurities.

In an interview with the American Psychological Association, the clinical psychologist, Hector Torres noted that a “limited understanding of what it is to be male may lead us to aggression... By having a limited scope of coping mechanisms, we go very quickly to explosion and aggression.” In other words: Insecurity often manifests as hostility. In the context of faux masculinity, this typically translates to overwrought exhibitions of machismo.

And so it goes: A gun serves as a totem for the swashbuckling tough-guy: an identity that self-styled super-patriots so desperately covet. What sort of men are taken in by these shenanigans? The kind of men who feel threatened by, say, assertive women; or who feel emasculated by the promotion of gender equality. Such men are convinced that militarist pretensions is the hallmark of being a “real man.”

Of course, the roots of gun-fetishism aren’t **entirely** about masculinity issues. There are other insecurities that “packing heat” may ameliorate. After all, a gun is not just a proxy for masculinity; it is a symbol of self-reliance (which can also be a tremendous source of gratification). For some, firing—or just knowing one is ABLE to fire—a gun can be exhilarating. It offers a “rush” to those who hanker for a surge of dopamine, and are bereft of other options.

In this sense, carrying a fire-arm serves as a kind of narcotic—conferring the same kind of sensation we experienced as children wielding toy weapons (from medieval swords to futuristic laser-guns). Most children grow up; but some insist on playing make-believe into adulthood. (It is no coincidence that gun-toting super-patriots engage in a kind of cos-play. Their makeshift tough-guy ensemble typically comes with an array of rugged-looking sartorial accoutrements—each of which is lifted from the latest hair-raising film involving some dashing lead kicking ass.

The notion that self-reliance is somehow predicated on being able to KILL other people is so preposterous as to elicit both a cringe and a chuckle. There’s a reason Henry David Thoreau did not include any firearms in his essay, “Where I Lived And What I Lived For”. (Walden didn’t have an armory.)

Those clamoring to rationalize their gun-fetishism are inclined to concoct fantastical “just so” predicaments, designed to prompt the need for a gun-wielding hero (themselves) to swoop in and save the day. The problem is that such scenarios are so outlandish as to be comical. (Most are of the variety: “What if someone breaks into my home, and I fear for the life of my family?!?”)

Should such a scenario ever materialize, the thinking goes, it would warrant having firearms in one’s home. Not so. Even if the proposed event occurred, it does not justify keeping / bearing arms. Wielding a gun would actually make the imagined predicament WORSE. After all, things often go sideways in panicked encounters; especially when guns are involved. In concocting their titillating hypotheticals, those who obsess over “personal security” tend to confuse the pragmatic for the cinematic.

Short of mimicking some laughably-contrived scene out of an action movie (where the protagonist—always a crack shot—prevails in a hail of bullets), a plausible scenario has never been suggested wherein someone would be justified in having a gun; let alone killing intruders, who are generally not looking to commit murder. Should robbers be armed, they will be apt to resort to lethal force only if they feel threatened. Introducing guns into the equation—and thus the threat of death—invariably escalates what was already a tense situation; putting one—and one’s family—in MORE danger, not less. To wit: The likelihood that a family member dies is HIGHER if one keeps / bears arms. The dream of subduing the situation in a shoot-out (where the only casualties are villains) is far-fetched. (That; and petty thieves don’t deserve the death penalty.)

The irony here is twofold: One is endangering oneself and one’s family even as one deigns to “protect” them; while one ends up exacerbating gun-violence overall by supporting pro-gun legislation.

So what’s the alternative? Leave the robbers alone; and call the police. Yes, the culprits may get away (for the time being); but nobody dies. Meanwhile, if the perpetrator’s agenda is assassination (a scenario that is highly unlikely), then keeping a Glock in a lockbox is hardly going to resolve the issue. Real life is not like prime-time dramas; as Reality tends not to hew to the choreography one envisions ex ante.

It should go without saying that no well-adjusted person yearns for killing power; especially not when living in a civil society. But for those seeking existential ballast, imagining that they are SURVIVING in some sort of verging apocalypse has an allure. As mentioned, entertaining these illusions enables gun fetishists to be the star of their own, personal action movie: a matinee that plays on constant repeat in their own minds.

“But we must have the right to protect ourselves!” Such contrived neuroses often have a racial component—as exemplified by skittish white suburbanites who dread the scourge of colored folk infiltrating their pristine neighborhoods. This “enemy at the gates” perception of the world does not stem merely from concerns about hordes of depraved ethnic minorities sullying magnificently homogenized suburban enclaves. It is about maintaining real estate values. As is usually the case, a siege mentality translates to militancy...which naturally leads to a hankering for lethal weapons.

Yet “safety” is the ostensive justification—a paranoia that leads such people to believe that “I need guns to protect my home; and keep my family safe!” Of course, no SANE denizen of American suburbia finds the need to keep a Glock handy in a nightstand...on the off-chance an intruder may one day arrive to massacre the entire household. And nobody who’s read the 2nd Amendment with open eyes would imagine it had any relevance to such (outlandish) hypotheticals.

A chronic sense of anxiety invariably stems from this siege mentality (what, in America, has become a collective neurosis). It seems that, morning ’til night, gun-fetishists are haunted by a nagging feeling that the enemy is at the gates—both literal and metaphorical. (So we need to be prepped for battle!)

The right-wing propaganda machine has convinced an astounding number of Americans that anyone who questions the wisdom of profligate “gun rights” is—ipso facto—threatening to deprive you of your “freedom”. The regulation of firearms is not REALLY about public safety, you see; it is about the American Gestapo coming for you!

So we hear zany things like “The Second Amendment is there to protect the First Amendment” and “A person’s right to bear arms is what prevents tyranny”: all of it based on garbled thinking. First: The suggestion that free speech is predicated on the ability to use lethal force at one’s own discretion is

bonkers. Second: The notion that one prevents tyranny by amassing an armory of automatic weapons in one's own back yard is also bonkers. To contend that EITHER is what the drafters of the Bill Of Rights really meant is just plain silly.

It's no wonder the conservative Supreme Court Justice, Warren Burger—an avid hunter—denounced the gun-lobby's narrative as “a fraud on the American people.” And it comes as no surprise that, behind closed doors, even the heads of the NRA refer to their most avid members as a bunch of “wackos”, “hillbillies”, “idiots”, and “fruitcakes”. *

At the end of the day, an abiding obsession with GUN rights trumps any concern for HUMAN rights. Packing heat is not a civic act, let alone an act of humanity; rather, it is an attempt to burnish one's own self image...and, the hope is, to forge a sense of camaraderie with fellow travelers in this big, dangerous world. This neurosis quickly translates to ideology...and eventually to cult-like activity. (Militia groups are often RELIGIOUS in some way.) The first step in addressing this collective pathology is debunking myths about the 2nd Amendment. The next step is disabusing ourselves of the star-spangled semiotics of super-patriotism—wherein men are moved to fashion themselves as modern-day buccaneers.

In light of the scourge of mass-shootings in the past two decades, it bears worth noting: Whereas once it was simply dishonest to pretend that the 2nd Amendment was anything but obsolete, it is now unconscionable. If we cannot appeal to the intellect to sway proponents of “gun rights” from this odious pathology, perhaps we might try appealing to their sense of decency.

In the meantime, we might remind those who are so hopelessly infatuated with “gun rights” that gun regulation is nothing new. Contrary to the laughably glamorized depictions found in American pop culture, during the “Old West” epoch, most frontier towns had strict gun laws. Posted at the entrances to Dodge City, Kansas were signs stating: “The carrying of firearms is strictly prohibited” (as seen in photographs from the 1870's). Think of it this way: There would have been far fewer shoot-outs in the iconic American TV series, “Gunsmoke” had its (fictional) marshal, Matt Dillon, enforced Dodge City's (actual) gun laws.

And so it went: Strict gun control was routine in towns across the Old West. Nevertheless, the prevalence of Wild West mythology in American folklore ended up tying guns to masculinity. The valiant cowboy was rendered an archetype of virulent manhood. Consequently, firearms became a proxy for machismo—which may or may not have been connected to a sense of inadequacy.

A mark of insecurity was thereby passed off as a mark of valor.

It wasn't long until an epidemic of gun fetishism served as a boon to the gun industry. It stands to reason, then, that the gun lobby subsidizes the propagation of this intoxicating mythos. The yearning to be a swaggering super-patriot is now satiated by dressing up as a commando and wielding an AR-15. Propounding this skewed narrative about the 2nd Amendment is stupendously lucrative for gun and ammo manufacturers; as well as for major retailers. Their strategy follows an age-old formula: Create (the impression of) a sickness, then offer the (purported) cure. In this case, the message is quite simple: “The enemy is at the gates, so you better be ready to take a stand! If you're not armed, then you risk being subjugated by a tyrannical regime at some point in the near future.”

And so it goes: A cartoonish “Wild West” mentality fuels American gun culture. The irony is that gun fetishists today reject the types of laws that were commonplace on the frontier in the 19th century. Why? Well, because—like the dashing cowboys portrayed in “Westerns”—they want to swoop in, guns blazing, and save the day. They are heroes in the cinematic extravaganza playing in their own minds. All the

while, they long to be heroes in the real world. This beguiling prospect is only viable, though, if they are packing heat. The idea is to prevail in a shoot-out. After all, that's how the protagonist triumphs over the dastardly villains in action movies. It's not the good guy with a lemonade stand that vanquishes the bad guys; it's the one wielding the gun.

There is nothing valiant about taking the life of other humans. So to justify their (imagined) need for "self-defense" via lethal means, proponents of "gun rights" are forced to confabulate perilous scenarios that reflect hair-raising scenes from the silver screen...outlandish predicaments in which they suppose they might find themselves. (A common example: psychopaths lurking in the dark, plotting to break into their homes and slaughter their families.) Another part of this delusive thinking: Each gun fetishist assumes he's a crack shot, and will somehow MITIGATE the danger to innocent bystanders by introducing gun-fire into the equation.

Alas. The fantasy about mowing down antagonists is too enticing for some to resist. The prospect of doing so is the only way they can fashion themselves as (potentially) heroic figures in the real world. The gun fetishist fancies himself as some kick-ass paladin—boldly holding the flag because America is so star-spangled fabulous that it allows anyone with a pulse to carry around an AR-15 on the off-chance he'll find himself defending the Alamo some Tuesday afternoon between doing the laundry and watching the ballgame on TV. In a world with too much artillery and not enough humanity, perhaps we should aspire to other things.

* * *

{ Articulated by NRA president Marion Hammer, who was secretly recorded in a meeting convened immediately after the Columbine school shooting in 1999. It was also admitted in the meeting that gun-toting was a matter of telegraphing machismo.}*

*{** The original Fugitive Slave Act would be followed by a revised version in 1850.}*

*{*** The former is now known as the Virginia Military Institute. The latter consolidated into the South Carolina Military Academy, and is now the Military College Of South Carolina.}*

Postscript 3

As we've seen, apologists for gun-fetishism routinely recite shibboleths as if they were pearls of wisdom—as with "Guns don't kill people, people kill people." To see if this is a valid point, re-apply the logic in another context, and see if it still holds water. "Nuclear bombs don't incinerate cities, people incinerate cities." In both cases, it only takes a person to pull the trigger (press a button) to bring about the result. The key difference between Glockes and WMDs is the extent of the damage. The underlying (specious) logic of the rationalization is the same. (Imagine suggesting that more nation-States stockpiling more nuclear weapons MITIGATED the danger of nuclear war.)

So to properly assess this position, it is important to unpack the rhetoric. There are four primary mistakes that are made when mis-interpreting the 2nd Amendment.

The first: Ignoring the occurrence of certain words in a sentence. In this case, the words that are ignored are "well-regulated" (addressing the matter of gun regulation) and "militia" (addressing the context within which the "arms" were to be kept). The way gun-fetishists read the Amendment-in-question, one would think these words did not exist.

The second: Disregarding inter-textuality within the broader document. The third: Discounting antecedent documents. And the fourth: Failing to take into account relevant events that inform the motivations for the Amendment. Let's look at each in turn.

- **Eliding the conditional clause, as if the predicate existed in isolation:** It was during the Virginia Ratifying Convention of 1788 that Madison settled on the final wording of the Amendment-in-question. In order to get the statement to say what they want it to say, revisionists are forced to pretend that the phrase, “the right to bear arms” existed in a vacuum. *
- **Eliding the intra-textual context:** This involves refusing to recognize how the Amendment-in-question relates to the (pre-existing) statements made in the main body of the Constitution. Ignoring how an amendment pertains to THAT WHICH IS BEING AMENDED is an elementary mistake. The relevant passages occur in Article I. *Section 8* endowed Congress with the power “to provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining the militia...in the service of the United States.” As there was no charter for a professional / standing army at the time, this specification was needed. Then, *Section 15* stated that Congress shall have the power “to provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions.” It is this “militia” that the Amendment was referencing when it addressed the matter of equipage. (In doing so, the Amendment did not say: “Forget all the things we said about the militia in Article I.”) For further intertextuality vis a vis the main body of the Constitution, see Footnote 35.
- **Eliding the historical context vis a vis documentation:** In formulating the measure, the point of departure was the charter that preceded the U.S. Constitution: the Articles of the Confederation. How did that document address the means by which the security of the new Republic was to be effected? “[Each] state shall always keep up a well-regulated and disciplined militia, sufficiently armed and accoutered, and shall provide and constantly have ready for use, in public stores, a due number of field pieces and tents, and a proper quantity of arms, ammunition and camp equipage.” Recall that the Articles of the Confederation were transplanted by the Constitution because the former wasn't arrogating ENOUGH control to the Federal government. Another guide to the thinking on the matter was George Mason's statement in the Virginia Constitution (discussed in Footnote 19). We might also look at documentation that came long after, and how it was forced to contend with precedent. Note, for example, the Dick Act (discussed in Footnote 38).
- **Eliding the historical context vis a vis events:** George Washington's handling of Shays' Rebellion (beforehand) and the Whiskey Rebellion (afterwards) shows the issue that was addressed by the Amendment-in-question. Moreover, those two incidents provide an illustration of its raison d'être (i.e. the State mobilizing a civilian militia to quash insurrections). In 1787, Washington mobilized the 4th Division of the Massachusetts militia to put down an armed rebellion in Springfield. This not only showed the need for a well-regulated militia (in lieu of a standing / professional army), it set a precedent that was reflected in the drafting of the Amendment-in-question two years later. AFTER the Amendment was drafted, the Whiskey Rebellion in western Pennsylvania occurred. In 1794, Washington invoked the “Militia Act” (which had been passed in 1792), requiring able-bodied, white men to report for duty (under the command of Major James McFarlane). Why? “To ensure the security of a free State.” He thus provided a demonstration of the Amendment's ACTUAL APPLICATION.

But never mind any of that. With a bit of hermeneutic chicanery, revisionists interpret what is a very straight-forward statement as an invitation to arm oneself with as many lethal weapons as one wants, at one's own discretion, for one's own purposes...even if that purpose is to stage a coup (that is: undertake the very action the Amendment was designed to PREVENT).

This spurious interpretation is proffered heedless of any concern for effecting the security of the State; and

without regard to a well-regulated civilian militia.

Recall that the point was to preclude future tyranny by not having a standing / professional army; the point was not to provide a way to respond to a potential (hypothetical) tyranny were it to emerge at some point in the future. ** Why civilian militias? Because, in lieu of a standing / professional army, something was needed “the ensure the security of a free State”. Having militias regulated by the State was the most viable alternative.

Disregarding the conditional clause of this sentence has become somewhat of an art-form. Even when it is obliquely recognized, it is recognized in myopic ways. Take, for instance, a popular t-shirt that reads, “I am the militia.” The shirt acknowledges the existence of PART of the clause (while still ignoring the meaning of the word, “militia”). Leaving aside the definition of “militia”, the obvious retort to this ornery profession is simple: “Well, then, are you WELL-REGULATED?”

It is worth recapitulating that the Articles of the Confederation (operative during the 1780’s) were replaced by the Constitution in order to “form a more perfect union”—upgrading the confederation of sovereign states to a bona fide Republic. The point was to create a more robust government at the FEDERAL level. That was, after all, the original “Federalism”—a cause spearheaded by Alexander Hamilton. The deficiency of the mere “confederation” of sovereign states was soon laid bare, making it clear that more centralized coordination was warranted in order to facilitate the commonweal; and—to this end—that a civilian militia would be necessary to ensure the security of the free State (qua Republic).

Things became more contentious after the Civil War, during Reconstruction. The clarion call for “states’ rights” was then—as it has always been—a claim to assert the prerogative at the local level to FLOUT civil rights...should those rights be propounded at the federal level (thus undermining precedents preferred by Reactionaries). (This trope had a legacy. Note the fear of manumission expressed by Patrick Henry, who sought to sustain “states rights” as a means of maintaining slavery.) The “states’ rights” shibboleth has never held water; as it is patently antithetical to the spirit of liberal democracy.

An element of being willfully blind is being blind to one’s own blindness. (Think of this in terms of optics: Imagine a blind man that goes about his daily life refusing to admit that he’s blind.) Hidebound ideologues only see what they want to see; and are inclined to not see things that they are determined not to see. The message of anyone who dons the aforementioned t-shirt is: “I am my own militia; but don’t regulate me...even though the statement I’m citing clearly stipulates that I be well-regulated.”

As it turns out, it is precisely those who we’d LEAST want to have guns who are those who—invariably—amass the most guns.

With so-called “gun culture”, we are a dealing with a collective neurosis. In assaying the epidemic of gun-fetishism, Chris Hedges put it well: “The specter of societal collapse...reinforces the gun fetish. Survivalist cults, infused with white supremacy, paint the scenario of gangs of marauding black and brown people fleeing the chaos of lawless cities and ravaging the countryside. These hordes of [p.o.c.], the survivalists believe, will only be kept at bay with guns, especially assault-style weapons.”

Hedges’ assessment may over-estimate the racism involved in America’s gun culture. In any case, his focus is on the neurotic thinking underlying America’s epidemic of gun fetishism. He recognizes that we are contending with a collective pathology fueled by widespread insecurity.

The fact of the matter is that, with a gun-acquisition free-for-all, it is the most mentally precarious people who end up with the firearms. (Here, we assume that—on the whole—well-adjusted, mentally-stable

people don't have an irresistible urge to arm themselves with lethal weapons.) Hence those most obsessed with guns are often the LAST people we'd want to have them...and the people most likely to get them. A question arises: Is it worth tens of thousands of people dying from gunfire annually so that legions of insecure men can have their AR-15s?

The bottom line: There are tens of thousands of gun-related casualties in the U.S. each year that would not have happened BUT FOR the presence of guns. Meanwhile, experience in other nations has demonstrated that taking the guns out of the equation (including out of the hands of the so-called "good guys") does NOT precipitate an increase in crime (nor compromise public safety overall). So there is a massive down-side to a society being super-saturated with firearms; and virtually no down-side to a society where such lethal weapons are forbidden.

But what of the fight for civil rights in the United States during the post-Jim Crowe era?

Pace the Black Panthers, guns played no role whatsoever in the civil rights movement—a fact emphasized by the role of Martin Luther King Jr. There is a reason that Frederick Douglas, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Ann Jacobs, Octavius Catto, Harriet Tubman, W.E.B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Bayard Rustin, and John Lewis never devoted a single minute to promoting "gun rights".

Nobody ever furthered the cause of racial justice by firing a semi-automatic weapon.

In a civil society, the demos does not forestall—nor can it dismantle—an oligarchic regime with arms. It does so through the (participatory) democratic process: deliberatively, legislatively, and without violence. It wasn't guns that led to the dissolution of Jim Crowe; it was the right to peaceably assemble—that is: to petition the government for the redress of grievances. Policy is changed via the FIRST Amendment, not the Second Amendment.

So what's left to discuss? Incontrovertible facts refute the three major claims that are often used to rationalize gun rights.

ONE: For a society to be democratic / civil, it is necessary for the citizenry to be armed with lethal weapons. Not so. Quite the contrary. In fact, the United States is the only nation in the world that makes the (preposterous) claim that democracy / civility is predicated on the proliferation of guns.

TWO: For a society to have freedom of speech, citizens must be armed with lethal weapons. Not so. The 1st Amendment is no more predicated on the 2nd Amendment than it is predicated on the granting of fishing licenses. If we look at every other nation that protects free speech, we find that an armed citizenry is not at all required.

THREE: More accessibility to lethal weapons makes a citizenry safer; and reduces crime. Not so. Quite the contrary. In fact, the proliferation of guns makes a citizenry far LESS safe, and it dramatically INCREASES crime—especially violent crime.

How do we know these three things? Because we have at our disposal actual cases around the world—namely: virtually every civil society on the planet (numerous liberal democracies with free speech); and virtually every country with exceptionally low crime. NONE of them have an agenda to disseminate guns amongst the general populace. There are no guns circulating amongst the general populace of South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Singapore. Not coincidentally, these are four of the places with the lowest incidence of violent crime.

So what of other reasons for gun-ownership—like, say, self-reliance and self-defense? These are, of course,

personal matters; not civic matters. But let's briefly address each of them.

The notion that firearms have something to do with self-reliance is nothing short of preposterous. Imagine reading Ralph Waldo Emerson's seminal essay, "Self-Reliance" and coming away wondering: "But where's the part about GUNS?"

Emerson spoke of individualism in the vein of Kantian autonomy. His *bête noire* was conformity. In the essay, he explored the precarious interplay between solitude and community; and he emphasized the importance of critical reflection in realizing this ideal. An ample dose of hysteria is required for one to feel the need to add to his disquisition: "Fine. But one also needs to be able to kill certain people!"

There was no militancy, no aggression, no fear, in Emerson's conception of self-reliance. He eschewed groupthink. He prized novelty over imitation, and did so while resisting the tendency to fall into self-absorption or selfishness. At no point did it occur to him to solve the pseudo-problem: "How shall I defend myself against possible assailants?" Had such a question arisen, he surely would not have concluded that it involved using lethal force at one's own discretion. Vigilantism is not a prerequisite for self-reliance.

Personal prerogative no more precludes social responsibility than social responsibility precludes personal prerogative. Self-reliance and civic duty are not antithetical to one another. Kantian autonomy does not entail an every-man-for-himself view of the world. Even as we are sovereigns over our own lives, we are still interconnected. The point, then, is to be civic-minded while retaining individual liberty. Civil society breaks down the moment everybody is obliged to concern themselves—above all else—with protecting themselves against their fellow citizens. In any case, very rarely does protection require aggression.

Holding that self-reliance (or individual liberty) is somehow based on the ability to kill others is analogous to holding that civil society requires the establishment of an obscenely-bloated military industrial complex. Alas, many insist that to be truly democratic, a nation must have a polity teeming with guns. Not coincidentally, these are the same people who insist that patriotism is born of flag-waving bluster.

To be sufficiently equipped, a civilian militia entails an armed citizenry. Be that as it may, public safety is no more predicated on an armed citizenry than geopolitical stability is predicated on militarism. Indeed, the imbroglio precipitated by an arms race translates between the domestic stage (between citizens) and the world stage (between nations). The answer is NOT to arm everyone to the hilt.

If, upon completing Emerson's "Self-Reliance", the first thing that occurs to you is, "But what about being able to shoot BURGLARS?", you might consider being medicated for neurosis. The chance that someone attempting to rob a domicile is determined to kill people in the process—or that slaughtering the residents is one of their ends—is miniscule. When people want to steal things, they want the process to go as efficiently (read: quickly and quietly) as possible, with minimal complication.

Insisting that one needs to pack heat to effect self-defense is like insisting that one needs to drive around in an armored vitamin truck to maintain a nutritious diet. Yet this mentality has taken hold in the most lethal of contexts. Understood as a pathology, America's gun culture has saturated not just the good ol' boys' club; it has leached into a wider family dynamic. It may have begun by afflicting men who were grappling with insecure masculinity; but it has spread to everyone in their social ambit.

So why the obsession with guns? This is both a sociological and psychological question. As we have seen, gun fetishists provide clinicians with a textbook case of over-compensation: a way of dealing with an array of insecurities. Behold an assortment of men who—we might presume—were not breast-fed enough as infants; and were likely bullied as children. Having made it through the gauntlet of adolescence, legions of

maladjusted adult males are desperate to prove themselves as “real men” in any way they can. Having become smitten with the gun-toting hero on the silver screen, they spend much of their time fussing over how macho they appear to be in real life. As a consequence, they often indulge in flights of fancy—typically involving contrived swagger, militarist sartorial motifs, and some sort of hokey slogan.

A siege mentality invariably leads to the rationalization for the (chimerical) need to “bear arms”...even as there is no more need for a civilian militia. In his fever-dream, the stalwart of “2nd-Amendment rights” boldly struts into the local saloon, locked and loaded...even though he may only be waltzing into a Starbucks, where the only immanent danger is being over-charged for a mocha-latté. He’s not a rube, he’s a bad-ass.

In playing make-believe, such men surmise that packing heat is the best way to come off as a “tough guy”; ready to stave off tyranny should the occasion arise. Moreover, they see “bearing arms” as a pre-requisite for being a “patriot” (a buzz-word for something we should all want to be). Of course, such delusive thinking is not limited to men. Female counterparts often play along with this charade; sometimes even with similar affects—replete with the paranoid suspicion of an impending Leviathan. (There is nothing earth-shattering about this. Obsequious women have been bamboozled into supporting misogynistic norms since immemorial.) The bogeyman of “Big Government” looms on the horizon; so the answer is a “well-armed citizenry”. This queer compulsion is justified by re-reading the 2nd Amendment as a call-to-arms...AGAINST the very State it was drafted to protect.

Ammo-paths (one might call some of them ammo-sexuals) are typically contending with a nagging sense of inadequacy. In times of existential despondency, people want something—anything—to hold onto. While religionists—especially those who are insecure and easily beguiled—cling to antiquated dogmas, and super-patriots cling to flags, ammo-paths cling to guns. (The most insecure Americans end up clinging to all three.)

There are many quick fixes for existential beleaguerment. Unfortunately, regressing to childhood to play cops ’n robbers (with lethal weapons) happens to be one of them. There are preferable remedies to this woeful condition (see Henry David Thorough and Ralph Waldo Emerson).

As all forms of cultic thinking remind us, those grappling with deep-seated insecurities are easily lured into the treacherous precincts of neurotic thinking. By letting one’s imagination run amok, one supposes that someday, somewhere, one might find oneself in predicament...where the only way out is to emerge, triumphant, in a hail of bullets. By indulging in visions of shooting oneself out of a dire situation, one must assume that the only thing standing between the polis and a despotic regime is a cache of guns. (One must ALSO assume that one is a crack shot; and that things will end well for one having resorted to lethal force.)

The gun fetishist envisions himself the protagonist in a hair-razing scene lifted right out of the latest action film—taking down the bad guys, one bullet at a time. Such fantasies are an enticing prospect when those who find themselves plodding along in a rather mundane life, where the most exciting thing one encounters is a play-off game on TV.

And so it goes: By having a gun, the ammo-path can become the star of his own movie. Flights of fancy are the quickest way to add some pizzaz to an otherwise humdrum existence. Some people join cults, some people buy Glocks. Instead of realizing his goal (ostensibly: civil society) via participatory democracy, the ammo-sexual supposes he can do so by being quick on the draw.

There’s no need for psycho-analysis here. As we all know, feelings of inadequacy can be dealt with in myriad ways. In surveying the motley tapestry of mankind, we find that people do the daffiest things to

make themselves feel as though they have social stature. Every culture is a bit different. Here in America, firearms are one of many prosthetics for masculinity—from ostentatious (often un-necessarily loud) automobiles to the gratuitous use of military accoutrements. ***

Insecure self-esteem manifests in ways that are now familiar to all of us. Regrettably, an alarming number of people have lots of emptiness that they're looking to fill...something that can be done by getting copious amounts of (ill-advised) plastic surgery or by purchasing comically over-priced handbags. When it comes to the mania surrounding guns, we are dealing with a societal dysfunction that is deeply embedded in America's culture. What makes this particular dysfunction especially concerning is that it is so dangerous. Tens of thousands of Americans are not killed each year by the proliferation of silicone implants and high couture.

Another myth is that gun control (that is: regulating firearms) is inherently racist toward people of color (p.o.c.) Such a strange notion would be comical if it weren't taken seriously by so many ill-informed p.o.c. The supposition can be easily refuted with the following observation: RACIST gun control is racist. Take the racism out of racist gun control; and one is left with, well, gun control. Indeed, ANY regulation that favors one race over others—or is targeted at one race over others—is ipso facto racist. It doesn't follow that regulation per se is racially biased. If someone stipulated that, say, only p.o.c. weren't allowed to drive over the posted speed limit, this would not be an argument against speed limits.

That some mendacious actors have inconsistently applied strictures is not an argument to do away with those strictures altogether. If there existed a municipal ordinance that only Asians were allowed to rob banks, this wouldn't be an argument against outlawing bank robbery. **** For any number of reasons, gun-fetishists have typically been WHITE MEN. The solution to this exigency is not to simply let EVERYONE have access to guns. Limiting gun-ownership across the board is clearly another way to achieve equity.

Sadly, Ronald Reagan used gun regulations as a political weapon against armed civil rights activists in California who were overwhelmingly p.o.c. (notably, the Black Panthers). To conclude from this that ALL gun-regulation is racist is utterly spurious. In fact, limiting gun-ownership is inherently ANTI-racist, as it ensures that marginalized communities are not disproportionately affected by gun-violence...as they CURRENTLY are due to the fact that access to guns in the U.S. is child's play.

Leave aside the insanity of suggesting that having more guns in circulation would make p.o.c. SAFER; the history of gun-fetishism is inextricably tied to White Supremacy (and to Christian nationalism). It's no wonder that when William Luther Pierce III (a.k.a. "Andrew MacDonald") penned "The Turner Diaries" in 1978, the cover featured a scene of besieged white people wielding guns. In the second edition, the cover prominently depicted a white man and white women pointing semi-automatic weapons at an unseen foe. Starting with the slave patrols that existed in the antebellum South, American White Supremacy would not be what it is without gun-fetishism.

It is no coincidence that the (mentally-stable) p.o.c. who is obsessed with the 2nd Amendment is a very rare occurrence. And it is ALSO no coincidence that the most ardent gun rights activists have always strongly correlated with those who were the most outspoken advocates of Jim Crowe (and its modern incarnations). To this day, such people put gun rights over human rights.

Gun fetishism is not just a sign for gnawing insecurity; it is indicative of a collective pathology. As I've tried to show, America's epidemic of gun fetishism is enabled by a misapprehension of the U.S. Constitution's 2nd Amendment. We can work to remedy such ignorance; but there will still remain a slew of insecurities with which we need to contend. Step #1 is generating awareness.

* * *

{ Consider an analogy. Transplant security with hydration; the free State with a healthy body; muskets with intravenous saline drips; and the (tacit) absence of a standing army with the (tacit) absence of potable water. Now take the following statement: In order to ensure adequate hydration, in lieu of having water available, everyone must be guaranteed access to saline solution. Imagine someone taking this as a license to stockpile IV bags and needles...even when potable water is in plentiful supply. We might suspect such a person missed the entire point of the directive.}*

*{** There is a rather odd irony here. Gun fetishists who hem and haw about the perils of “tyranny” are—invariably—the very people who support fascistic policies here in the U.S. Those on the political right who grouse about verging “tyranny” engage in a risible form of ideological schizophrenia. They fail to see the contradiction because they are convinced that democratic socialism is a gateway to Soviet-style communism—as if New Zealand and Australia (not to mention Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries) were one step away from establishing a gulag archipelago. So far as they see it, the only way to prevent this nightmarish development is to stockpile guns. This zany line of thinking is the result of a semiotic swindle perpetrated by the gun lobby: that “gun rights” is a proxy for “freedom”. Therefore a threat to such rights is a sign of impending “tyranny”.}*

*{*** Overcompensation comes in many forms. A survey of how machismo manifests in different cultures around the world is quite fascinating. It largely depends on prevailing social norms and expectations. In many countries, men who are contending with insecure self-esteem are not hankering for firearms; they settle for beating their wives.}*

*{**** According to the flawed logic here, scalding water burns not because it’s scalding, but because it’s water. (!) Consider “red lining”. This iniquitous practice was racist because it imposed draconian standards explicitly on p.o.c. who were seeking credit or some other form of approval to secure a coveted asset (e.g. real estate in a choice neighborhood, loans for a business venture, etc.) It did not follow from this that there should be no standards for granting credit. Possible illustrations of this point are endless: The problem with “toxic masculinity” is the toxicity, not the masculinity. The problem with “illiberal democracy” is the illiberalism, not the democracy. Oddly, those who are bereft of discernment find it difficult to distinguish between something and a negative modifier that might be applied to it. So it goes with racist regulations on gun ownership.}*

Postscript 4:

The longing to be heroic is nothing new. The psychological underpinnings are timeless, and surely transcend cultures. One can conjecture, in ancient times, Assyrian boys fantasizing about being Gilgamesh; Greek boys fantasizing about being Achilles; Persian boys fantasizing about being Rostam; Indian boys fantasizing about being Arjuna; and Chinese boys fantasizing about being Guan Yu. The phenomenon is as old as human nature itself. The medieval musings of Spanish youth were surely captivated by “El Cid”, while the French told tales of “Lancelot du Lac”. These were heroic figures that served as archetypes—triumphing over dastardly villains, and saving the day. They would have captured the imagination of men aspiring to be heroic figures...whether defeating a dragon, routing an enemy, or rescuing a damsel in distress.

Fast forward to the 20th century. Action sequences no longer involve sword duels; they involve shoot-outs. In America, many a schoolboy played cowboys and Indians, or cops and robbers—running around

back yards wielding plastic pistols, imagining themselves to be engaged in some sort of derring-do (before being called back into their homes for the dinner). When American youth become older, such games of make-believe no longer suffice. Insofar as the urge for such role-playing abides, those who fail to mature find the need for an alternate rationalization for their fanciful escapades. Enter the 2nd Amendment.

A contorted reading of a sentence composed in September of 1789 (by those who lived in a nation with no Pentagon, no FBI, and no State Troopers) turns out to be carte blanche to stockpile weapons for one's own purposes...in the 21st century...where the Department of Defense has a trillion-dollar budget and hundreds of thousands of armed police are patrolling the streets at any given time. The trick is to pass off (what was) a provisional right as an inalienable right.

By pretending that this simple statement says something it clearly does not, disaffected men can still pretend to be paladins—equipped, as they suppose themselves to be, with the weaponry needed for their valiant quest. Quest for what? Well, to eradicate whatever sinister forces they imagine might be lurking in the shadows; like any good patriot. Those swept up in this puerile reverie aspire to be dashing gun-slingers, starring in their own cinematic extravaganza.

The allure of 2nd-Amendment revisionism is relatively straight-forward: By positing this chimerical license, one is invited to cast oneself in the role of the swashbuckling hero. In one shining moment, every man has the chance to be Wyatt Earp, wandering the Wild West, poised for his moment of glory. Where? Maybe in an elementary school hallway; maybe in the vegetable aisle of a grocery store; maybe in one's own kitchen. The mere prospect of saving the day in a hail of bullets enables the day-dreamer to alleviate whatever sense of inadequacy he may be harboring.

For a variety of reasons, there is currently an overabundance of such people—notably: white males—in the United States. Those who are riven with apprehension and a yearning to prove their manhood insist that they need to be armed with a lethal weapon to PROTECT themselves and their kin. From whom? From any bogeyman that might emerge from behind the next hedge. Insecure masculinity is thus buoyed in a fever-dream of braggadocio.

Studies have shown that, across America, feelings of insecurity track with rates of gun-ownership. But why so much worry about “safety”? The answer is complex, but part of the explanation is a parochial mindset. Like in a video game, the idea is to vanquish the dastardly OTHERS. While foreign-ness tend to be embraced in urban settings, it is seen as a potential threat in provincial settings. Those for whom cosmopolitanism is a foreign concept are chronically worried about those who are NOT LIKE THEM, roaming the streets, plotting nefarious deeds. As would be expected, this appeal is prevalent in rural areas, where interaction is limited to kith and kin...and to those who resemble oneself in salient ways.

What does it REALLY say about someone if they need to have a gun to feel safe? At root, the hankering to “pack heat” is born of an odd cocktail of neuroticism and narcissism...with a dash of delusive thinking. The Amendment-in-question effectively serves as a herald for the aspiring super-patriot, who, in reality, cares nothing for civic responsibility...or public safety...or individual liberty; yet is determined to be a “real man”. The thinking is: It's a dangerous world, and each of us needs to cover our own ass when things go awry.

Reality does not comport with gun-fetishists' sumptuous buffet of intoxicating fantasies; as demands for this ersatz “right” are antithetical to any TRUE sense of civic duty. After all, those who are civil recognize that what each of us does in the public square invariably has an impact on everyone else. (Translation: We're all in this together, so we must act responsibly.) This means that, as tempting as it may be, we should not be so eager to arrogate to ourselves special entitlements without regard for how doing so might

impact the commonweal. It also means that we need to resist the craving to be the hero of a feature presentation showing in our own minds...if doing so attenuates public safety. (Every country on earth proves a simple truth: Fewer guns, less violent crime.)

In spite of all this, the myth that the 2nd Amendment is still relevant continues to abound...even amongst those in putatively Progressive circles. Consequently, America winds up with a systematically-inculcated neurosis; and the ammo and firearms industry winds up with overflowing coffers. To this end, they are eager to propagate a slew of myths. Let's look at a few.

The Top Five Rationalizations For America's Gun Culture

In America, the discourse around gun-rights is amped up in bewildering ways. Casuistry abides in an environment where neuroses run rampant and common sense has all-but-vanished. Gun-rights rhetoric is no different on this score. Much of the ideology boils down to the following pitch: Civilians must be able to easily and expediently kill others by availing themselves of weaponry explicitly designed for that task. Why? Because "freedom!" The implication is as follows: If civilians are NOT afforded such license, society cannot truly be "free". Hence the maintenance of civil society—nay, the commonweal itself—is predicated on the ability of civilians to use lethal force at their own discretion. According to this thinking, the provisional right is REALLY an inalienable right.

Sometimes, the sophistry goes a bit deeper. Let's look at the five most daffy pseudo-arguments used to validate gun fetishism.

1. If only the Jews were allowed to have guns in the 1930's, the Holocaust would not have happened. There are myriad variations on this preposterous claim. One can replace "Jews" with "Armenians" and "Holocaust" with "Medz Yeghern", and the argument is roughly the same; and just as absurd. Translation: Genocides happen because of gun control measures. In reality: Had the oppressed people been armed, it is likely that MORE of them would have been killed.
2. I need to protect my family from anyone who might break into my home. Translation: I need to be about to kill intruders. For if they aren't killed, they may decide to slaughter my un-armed spouse / children. An extreme level of neuroticism and/or delusion is required to think that this makes any sense. In fact, one puts oneself in MORE danger, not less, if one brandishes a gun during a burglary. For virtually the only circumstance in which a burglar would be tempted to use lethal force is if his own life is threatened.
3. The 1st Amendment depends on the 2nd Amendment. Translation: In order to exercise my right to free speech, I must be able to use lethal force whenever the need arises. More broadly, ALL liberties are ensured by the ability for any given citizen to kill people (if the occasion warrants). Take that option off the table, the argument goes, and ALL freedom is put in jeopardy. This claim is belied by a mountain of counterfactuals—namely: the many countries that maintain thriving liberal democracies with a completely un-armed citizenry.
4. The 2nd Amendment is a prophylactic against tyranny. Translation: In the event that the federal government becomes "tyrannical" (read: insufficiently right-wing), I must be able to defeat the U.S. military in a head-to-head confrontation; using the cache of weapons that my friends and I have amassed in our basements. Here, there is a fever dream that one shall be ready to take on the combined might of the U.S. armed forces with one's personal arsenal...presumably while waving a Gadsden flag and yelling "freedom" at the top of one's lungs.
5. When simply wearing a "Punisher" t-shirt, a flak jacket emblazoned with the American flag, and camo pants isn't enough, packing heat is a way to prove one's man-hood. There is a desperation amongst certain (insecure) men to feel as "manly" as possible. Toting firearms is seen as the best

way to do this. This engineered neurosis is a boon to the gun / ammo industry, which has a gargantuan financial incentive to feed this social pathology.

It takes a special kind of derangement to use any of the above as an excuse to justify keeping guns in common circulation. In the event a lot of people find the need to stockpile their own personal arsenals, there's little doubt that social dysfunction is afoot.

For the gun industry, the gimmick is based on the (risible) message: REAL MEN own guns, because REAL MEN protect their families (presumably, but using lethal force to ward off burglars). Bushmaster actually had a marketing campaign proclaiming that you are not a REAL MAN if you don't own a Bushmaster. (An apt retort to this is the quip: "The only gun a real man needs is the one between his legs.") Bushmaster may just as well have used the following slogan: "Scared of robbery? Buy our stuff!" Those who fall for this boondoggle show the world how tough they are by cowering behind their AR-15's.

And so it goes with the fatuous didactic annexation of the 2nd Amendment: Misconceptions about such a simple statement are propounded by businesses that stand to gain from such misconceptions; and eagerly embraced by self-proclaimed defenders of "freedom". The result of this boondoggle is plain to see: A bonanza for firearm / ammo manufacturers; and an epidemic of gun violence (not to mention a complete misunderstanding of what "patriotism" means).

But how do we get from insecurity to braggadocio? Simple: By wielding a gun, a sense of inadequacy is parlayed into delusions of being a super-patriot. The key ingredient is a mis-reading of the 2nd Amendment—whereby the fetishization of guns is afforded a pseudo-patriotic justification. Thus: "I'm not over-compensating for my insecure masculinity; I'm realizing my Constitutional rights!"

Men dealing with a sense of inadequacy are grasping at straws—frantically searching for something to make them feel tough (alt. "manly"). As a prosthetic for masculinity, a gun furnishes one with a way to feign "bravado" without actually having to be brave. (After all, who is really THAT terrified of burglars?)

Grifters have used the same formula since time immemorial: Create the (impression of an) ailment, then offer the (alleged) cure. The snake-oil being being hawked does not necessarily have to be a magical elixir in a nifty-looking vial; it can be a PATHOS. (An illustration of this boondoggle—in biological terms—was used in the film, *Mission Impossible 2* c. 2000, in which a plague was manufactured so that the antidote could be sold to a desperate global population.)

What makes some scams especially absurd is that they exacerbate the very problem that they purport to solve. Such is the case with guns: "We feel threatened by 'bad guys' with guns, so we need more guns!" (A similar point can be made about the military industrial complex: It is there to confront a slew of alleged geo-political "threats" that are largely instigated by its own existence.) The result is a Kafka-esqu take on society: We find ourselves in a world wherein guns proliferate; therefore we need to ensure MORE guns are put into circulation.

The conclusion of this topsy-turvy logic is as follows: By making guns EVEN MORE accessible—and thus the likelihood they'll be used EVEN GREATER, we will somehow REDUCE the danger of gun violence.

Let's elaborate upon each point:

ONE: It is absurd to suggest that one will somehow prevent a genocide by flooding society with guns. Fascist regimes don't back down simply because those who are being subjugated / persecuted shoot back. Such regimes simply bear down harder. To suggest that an un-armed citizenry led to pogroms—anywhere, at any time—is bonkers. What makes the claim especially risible is that it can be applied to virtually ANY

tyrannical regime that has persecuted a group of people—whether it was Mao vis a vis Tibetans, dissidents, and intellectuals (as well as tens of millions of peasants) in China; Stalin vis a vis subversives and the various ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union; or Efraim Rios Montt vis a vis Mayans in Guatemala. The same goes for the genocides carried out by Pol Pot, Suharto, et. al. Of course, ALL of those were RIGHT-WING regimes—an irony that is lost on gun-fetishists, who so ardently push for right-wing governance.

Would the Medz Yeghern in Turkey, the Holodomor in Ukraine, the Holocaust in northeastern Europe, the killing fields in Cambodia, and the Genocidio Maya in Guatemala have still occurred had the peasantry in those countries owned guns? Yes. The reason those in power carried out such atrocities had nothing to do with the fact that the victims happened to be un-armed. Had they been armed, the persecution would have simply been more violent. So what WOULD have prevented such atrocities? The answer is complex, as each of these events involved several socio-political factors. One of those factors was not a lack of gun-rights.

TWO: Consider Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, and New Zealand. These countries each have less than 30 guns per hundred people (in the vast majority of cases, for hunting). ALL of them have enacted stringent gun regulations. Their level of guns per capita is actually far above the world average. So we might ask: Is this not enough? Would these countries be LESS susceptible to gun violence if only they had more guns in circulation?

Not according to world statistics. Romania has only TWO guns per hundred people. Shall we be worried that the Transylvanian countryside might be overtaken by criminals because almost nobody there is “bearing arms”? Perhaps not. Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea have no guns in circulation; and they aren’t in any danger of devolving into civil catastrophe. In fact, ALL these countries have extremely low crime.

It’s worth evaluating the proposition that all thieves deserve to die. Generally speaking, a burglar is not aspiring to become a murder. Such an actor would only be tempted to brandish a gun for fear that he may have to resort to lethal force. Under what circumstances? Well, to protect himself from a home-owner prepared to use lethal force. The notion that introducing MORE guns into the equation will benefit the “good guys” over the “bad guys” is unfounded; as it is based on a catch-22. The more prudent approach would be to—in the long run—remove ALL guns from the equation.

The vast majority of thieves are not looking to commit murder. They simply want to steal things. A thief is MORE likely to use lethal force if he believes his own life to be in peril.

What, then, should one do during a robbery? Let the thief perpetrate (what is almost certainly) a non-violent crime, and leave it to law enforcement to apprehend him. In other words: Call 911 and stay out of the way. In the worst case scenario, the thief gets away. In any case, no lethal force is used; and rarely will anyone’s life be in danger.

The mitigation of burglary is achieved by means other than (threat of) violence. When envisioning a burglary, we are tempted to treat it as a set-piece in an action flick rather than as the symptom of an underlying societal problem. Want to mitigate petty crime? Invest in basic public infrastructure and vital social services. Studies show that areas with high-quality public education and universal public healthcare have much less crime.

THREE: Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. both proved that lethal force is not needed to exercise one’s right to free speech...or to mobilize a protest movement...or to petition the government for redress of

grievances. The Constitution ITSELF supports this approach. The 1st Amendment stipulates that the People have the right to PEACEABLY assemble. Clearly, this did not refer to armed rebellion. So it had absolutely nothing to do with toting guns.

The 1st Amendment pertained to redress of grievances via the democratic process, not via a coup. There's a difference between using governmental mechanisms to improve the government and, well, OVERTHROWING the government (because it's a lost cause). Speech is not violence. The exercise of free speech does not require the shedding of blood. After all, that's what makes society civil.

FOUR: Are we to attribute the emergence of Nazism in Germany, Stalinism in Russia, and Maoism in China to an un-armed citizenry? Hardly. To see if that would make any sense, we need only look to the socio-political causes of such regimes. We might also consider the myriad other countries around the world that also had mostly un-armed citizens at the time, noting where tyrannical regimes did NOT emerge.

The notion that citizens having guns in their homes is what prevents a Nazi / Stalinist / Maoist regime from emerging in the United States is absolutely bonkers. Today, neither Germany nor Belgium nor France nor Portugal nor Italy nor Greece nor Lithuania nor Czechia nor Slovenia nor Australia are in danger of becoming tyrannies. Each has less than 20 guns per hundred people; and has enacted strict gun laws.

Behold Scotland, Ireland, England, Spain, Denmark, Netherlands, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Armenia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Tunisia, Bolivia, and Costa Rica. Each has less than 10 guns per hundred people. Yet NONE of these countries are in danger of becoming tyrannies either.

What about Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea? They each have ZERO guns per hundred people. Should we be worried? And what about Canada? Is there any danger of a fascist dictatorship coming to power in Ottawa now that it has enacted stringent gun regulations?

As discussed in the preceding essay, the notion that the 2nd Amendment was written to enable a putsch is not only wrong; it is exactly backwards. The Amendment was included to PUT DOWN putsch attempts. The "well-regulated militia" on which this Amendment was predicated, we should note, existed to suppress insurrections and slave rebellions. The fear of tyranny is what prompted the Founders to NOT have a standing army (that is: to commission a professional military). In lieu of a federalized military, they were obliged to make use of civilian militias instead.

It was explicitly in this context that the right (of white, land-owning men) to bear arms was to not be infringed; as said militias needed to be sufficiently equipped to carry out their civic duty (at the pleasure of the federal government). Thus the right was accorded to white, land-owning men in their (latent) capacity as militia-men.

Visions of contemporary "militia" groups seizing every U.S. military base should elicit a snicker from any level-headed person. It wouldn't be plausible in even a movie...let alone feasible in the real world. Alas, the fever dream subsists—wherein AR-15s are pitted against F-15s, and storming the Pentagon in the 21st century is seen as an updated version of storming the Bastille in the 18th century.

FIVE: A gnawing sense of inadequacy—specifically one that leads to widespread dysfunction—is not unique to men. There is an analogue of this for insecure women: the perfidious messaging that drives the cosmetic enhancement industry—from botox injections to magical skin creams. This boondoggle is obscenely lucrative; though it is not nearly as deadly as the epidemic of gun-fetishism.

The message to women: Doing this to yourself is required if you want to be physically attractive. The

result: Hundreds of millions of women destroying their faces / bodies with plastic surgery...all the while, insisting that they are doing it to empower themselves (note the television series, “The Swan”).

An analogous misapprehension attends the gun-fetishist’s determination to compensate for his (perceived) inadequacies by “bearing arms”. Women want to be pretty; men want to be seen as “tough guys”. Whether the mass pathology pertains to cosmetics or to armaments, it is indicative of a grievous social dysfunction.

Granted, a surfeit of makeup is more benign than a surfeit of lethal weapons. (Sephora doesn’t auger the downfall of civil society.) Be that as it may, the exploitation of insecurity is operative in both cases. And in order to rationalize their participation, those who fall for the scam eventually become disconnected from Reality. *

Obsession can range from benign to malignant. When easy access to firearms becomes more important than the lives of tens of thousands of people, it is the latter. Alas. So long as the checks clear from the gun lobby, perfidious legislators will continue to pretend that ensuring easy access to firearms has something to do with the U.S. Constitution.

This is another reminder that sowing neurosis is an effective way to create demand for snake oil. The idea is to offer a panacea for those dealing with some kind of insecurity—whether it’s women trying to make themselves more physically attractive or men trying to make themselves feel “tougher”. Of course, to drum up business, the idea is to CREATE demand. Hence the engineering of various neuroses.

People will always find misguided ways to address their own insecurities; and others will profit off of those insecurities. Mass neurosis—in all of its grotesque forms—is detrimental to the commonweal. Since it often creates a business opportunity, there will always be those incentivized to encourage it.

The engineered neurosis that undergirds fun-fetishism involves an ample dose of delusion—as with those who are convinced that, when it comes time to overthrow the U.S. government, they will fell Reaper drones with their Glocks. But what better way for those who are existentially beleaguered to be an action hero—starring in a cinematic extravaganza that exists only in their own mind?

The catch, of course, is that tens of thousands of Americans die each year as a consequence of these flights of fancy. But take heart: At least tens of millions of OTHER Americans get to feel more like real men.

* * *

{ A deep-seated insecurity begets a yearning for some sort of elixir. Once a palatable elixir is found, that yearning can quickly turn into obsession. This invariably leads to aberrant behavior of one form or another. In some cases, people destroy their faces; in other cases, they increase society’s mortality rates. When considering plastic surgery and lethal weapons, we find a common thread: Using drastic measures to alleviate anxiety. Whether we’re dealing with cosmetics or firearms, hucksters will always be there to provide those contending with a sense of inadequacy a means of (over-)compensation. And, with blood on their hands, they will laugh all the way to the bank.}*