



# Silly Gun Rhetoric

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## The Gold, Silver, and Bronze Medal Winners

**GOLD:** “Guns don’t kill people; PEOPLE kill people.”

Mapping the logic used in this argument to a larger scale (governments instead of individuals, the international community of nations instead of a local community of civilians) reveals how preposterous this way of thinking really is: “Nuclear bombs don’t destroy cities; people destroy cities. So if cities ever get nuked, don’t blame the proliferation of WMDs.”

An even more absurd version of this argument goes as follows: “If guns kill people, then...cars kill people instead of drunk drivers...and pencils misspell words, not bad spellers.”

Such an argument is null simply because the analogy on which it is based doesn’t work: Cars aren’t designed to kill people; pencils aren’t designed to misspell words. The *raison d’être* of a gun is simple: to be a lethal weapon. A gun is realizing its primary utility when it is used to kill people. The problem with guns is their *raison d’être*, not so much that they can be used in different ways by different kinds of people. The point with WMDs is that NOBODY should have them. Why? Because they have no legitimate role in inter-nation relations. Allegedly “good” regimes stockpiling WMDs doesn’t make the world a safer place. We won’t accept that “If WE don’t do it, then only bad regimes will.”

**SILVER:** “If we outlaw guns, then only criminals will have the guns.”

This tautology is as inane as it is ubiquitous. The analogue of such a statement would be: “If we [nations in the global community] all try to reduce WMDs, then only rogue nations will end up having WMDs. Therefore, WMD proliferation musn’t be regulated.”

Imagine putting forth this argument with a straight face during a foreign policy discussion. “Iran and Pakistan are keeping and bearing such weapons, so WE ALL must keep and bear such weapons—or the bad guys will be the only ones with such weapons.”

**BRONZE:** “Gun regulation doesn’t work because some of the places with the most gun violence have the most gun restriction laws...and some of the places with the most gun restriction laws are the places with the most gun violence.”

Even if this description is sometimes true, such an argument confuses correlation with causation. It would be like pointing to a dangerous swimming area where strict restrictions had been put in place, then to a puddle of water with no swimming restrictions...and concluding: “See! Since some people still drown in the area with dangerous conditions while nobody drowns in the puddle, swimming restrictions don’t curb drowning incidents!”

Those who fetishize guns don’t seem to grasp the simple insight: As long as there is easy access to guns, there will be people using them in destructive ways. We’re a nation that wants the State to guarantee us universal access to guns, but not universal access to healthcare. This is a bizarre order of priorities—not to mention a peculiar way to be “pro-life”. More and more people get shot, and gun fetishists conclude that the solution is more and more guns. This flies in the face of common sense—but makes perfect sense if one is obsessed with firearms.

All these shoddy arguments—commonly employed by gun fetishists—are beside the point. They only amount to rationalizations for the speaker’s own interest in having a gun—for his own purposes. All the while, the gun fetishist’s agenda is based on a myth. The categorical “right to bear arms” doesn’t actually exist in the Bill of Rights—yet this chimerical right is mentioned over and over and over again.

### **Misappropriating The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment:**

Upon reading the single sentence in the U.S. Constitution that is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, it is quite obvious that it pertains to one thing: The members of a State-run militia having the prerogative to keep and carry their own firearms as members of a State-run militia. The sentence couldn’t be more straight-forward. Who were these members? All civilians: because that’s precisely what was available. There was no viable alternative at the time.

Thus, the sentence means: IN SO FAR AS a civilian militia is necessary for the security of the State, those civilians (i.e. white men, who can serve as guardians of the State) should be allowed to keep their own muskets toward that end.

The writers were careful to specify: a WELL-REGULATED militia. Regulated by what? Regulated by THE STATE, in order to protect THE STATE, in the manner THE STATE saw fit...at the pleasure of THE STATE. The context is quite clear. To ignore the context is to hijack one clause of a sentence, extracting it in isolation, in order to suit one's own purpose.

What were militias for? Due to the fact that a standing army did not exist at the time (and were highly-discouraged by the founders), state militias were needed for national security (i.e. protection of the State and enforcement of its laws). The state militias could be mobilized to “execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions.” This was the *raison d’être* of militias—the topic of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment. But for this need, the Amendment wouldn't have been added.

Any talk of using guns for “personal defense”, then, is utterly disconnected from anything specified in the Constitution. There was a very good reason to write the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment at the time, and it is important to recognize what that reason was. Indeed, mobilizing an unarmed militia would have been ineffective in protecting the State. It only stands to reason that the State wanted to make sure members of that militia would be armed if they ever needed to be mobilized to fulfill their charge.

To who's discretion, then, was such mobilization? Article II (dealing with Executive Power) is quite clear on this point: The president “shall be Commander in Chief” of the armed forces—including “the Militia of the several States.” Want to know what “militia” pertains to in ONE part of the Constitution? Just look for where it's mentioned in OTHER parts of the Constitution. Those who penned the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment were well aware of Article II's use of the term, “militia”. That meaning is clearly what they were referencing when they decided to invoke the term later in the document.

This all makes sense when one understands: The entire point of addressing the topic was to establish the means by which the State could protect itself. The need for a militia was predicated on there NOT BEING a standing, professional army. Without a Pentagon, civilian militias make perfect sense. At the time, it was MILITIAS that were “necessary to the security of the free State”...which is why it says precisely that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment.

If civilian militias were NOT necessary for that purpose, then the Amendment would not have been written in the first place. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment EXPLAINS WHY the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment was written. The right to bear arms is a function of the need for a civilian militia—a civilian militia being the primary means by which the State was to be protected. Any other use of guns, therefore, needs to be addressed independently of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment.

The CATEGORICAL right of a civilian to have firearms, then, is a fiction; such a right exists nowhere in the Constitution. It's time this fact was made clear to those who are under the impression that unregulated gun-toting clubs somehow have anything whatsoever to do with the "militias" mentioned in the nation's founding document.

That such gun-toting clubs call themselves "militias" is a perversion of the term, since it is organizations LIKE THEM that State-regulated militias were meant to suppress. If they're not regulated by the State, mobilized by the State, in order to PROTECT the State, then they are little other than guerilla organizations. We should start calling them what they are, and stop pretending that they have anything whatsoever to do with the U.S. Constitution.

But why do we need guns? A response to this question that is often heard: "In case we don't like what the state is doing, we can revolt!" But in a democracy, one votes at the ballot box, not with a gun. If one doesn't agree with what the State is doing, then one petitions the State for redress of grievances; one doesn't attack the State with a guerilla group.

This point was illustrated in 1794 when George Washington used the very "militia" discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to suppress the Whisky Rebellion in western Pennsylvania. How was the whisky tax eventually eliminated? Not by armed conflict, but by the democratic process. In the 1790's, there were no State Troopers, no FBI, no National Guard, no Department of Homeland Security, and certainly no Department of Defense. There were only civilian militias at the State's disposal. It therefore made perfect sense to ensure that all civilians were able to bear lethal firearms.

In contemporary society, if a man has a gun in every room in his house, it doesn't make him secure, it makes him paranoid. Indeed, guns are a handy way of compensating for insecurity...but that is a matter for psychologists, not for legal

scholars. All we need to be concerned with is an accurate reading of a simple sentence—a sentence that has been more abused than any other sentence in our nation's history.

Meanwhile, the next time we hear one of the medal-winning arguments for “gun rights”, we’d be well-advised to point out why such arguments don’t work. In the meantime, we’ll keep hearing them from those who fetishize guns.

### **The Perversion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment:**

Gun-nuts seem to be unaware that President Washington dispatched militia precisely to enforce the payment of federal excise taxes during the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794. Indeed, the civilian militia for which the Amendment was written existed in order to PROTECT the State from uprisings, not to FACILITATE uprisings.

The crackpot rhetoric we hear from gun-fetishizers seems to have no limits to its outlandishness. It doesn’t help that radical right-wing extremists like Scalia and Thomas ABET these nutty views from their seats on the Supreme Court. Their preposterous claims are often swallowed hook, line and sinker by the least educated segments of the American citizenry...which is precisely what they count on. The Scalias of the world know exactly who their target audience is, and so they tailor their sophistry to suit the taste of America’s most ill-informed and credulous.

Right-wing propaganda has, of course, always worked this way. Its vehement anti-intellectual nature has always had tremendous appeal for the provincial, parochial, reactionary elements of society. The thing about ignorance: it can be readily exploited for whatever ends the savvy sophist sees fit.

The perverse myth that the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution has anything to do with the individual’s right to “protect himself with lethal force” has been promulgated by the NRA for decades. The narrative being hawked and peddled is seductive and enticing... and most people are suckers for a good story. Offer them a good story, and TRUTH becomes a moot point. (This has been demonstrated ad nauseum by fundamentalist religions, from Salafism to Scientology to Seventh Day Adventism: each provide a provocative and captivating STORY.) The capacity for human credulity seems to know no bounds.

The endless publications of imposter “history” books by radical right-wing pundits testifies to the fact that there is a MASSIVE audience that is willing to buy such material...under the impression that it is all coming from a legitimate source. The

civically-irresponsible imprints that agree to publish such pulp-trash should be held accountable. This isn't a matter of censorship. This is a matter of full disclosure and honesty. So long as right-wing propaganda is allowed to be published under the guise of legitimate history, with the pretense of scholarship, those who don't know any better will continue to be woefully misled. Of course, the publication houses that agree to publish such material are only concerned about generating revenue. If the book will sell well and make them enough money, then they will publish anything. ANYTHING. There seem to be no boundaries, no standards, no sense of civic responsibility.

This applies not only to gun-nut screeds, but to ALL right-wing propaganda and ALL forms of ersatz history. So long as there's money to be made, the nature of the material being sold is a moot point. Of course, the target audience is not purchasing such publications out of any sincere desire to LEARN anything. They buy such material simply because they seek confirmation of their pre-established conclusions. Dogma-confirmation, not erudition, is their interest. And the right-wing propaganda delivers with aplomb.

Meanwhile, it markets itself as something that it is not: a bona fide source of objective information—or even as genuine scholarship. This is a travesty, if not a patent injustice. Simon & Shuster published “Liberty & Tyranny”, a preposterous book by a ridiculous man, a charlatan, who, we're notified on the cover, is a “Constitutional expert”. This isn't merely disingenuous. It is a lie.

It's time to call a spade a spade, and mandate that those who publish these books specify openly and candidly what they actually are. If it isn't genuine scholarship, it musn't be allowed to pass itself off as such. If it's simply right-wing propaganda, the publisher must be legally obligated to explicitly specify this. In the meantime, people will continue to harbor absurd dogma—like “The Second Amendment gives every individual the categorical right to carry guns” not only because that's what they WANT to thing, but because they read it somewhere.