

On Gun Rights in America

by Bob Young, February 14, 2013

Before I get into the meat of this issue, allow me to point out a fact about the National Rifle Association that should be obvious but isn't to many. The NRA is a business, people with salaries rely on the success of the NRA, and the NRA's success depends upon people and businesses donating money to the association. A portion of that money goes into the pockets of the people who operate it, from upper level decision makers and spokespersons to regular staffers, and the money contributed also helps to maintain the financial viability of the association, which encourages future donations. This is the case with most non-profit organizations with a political mission, be it the NRA, MADD or the NAACP. They exist in part to profit the people who operate them. That is not to suggest that the people operating it don't believe in the NRA's mission, which is, "to defend and foster the Second Amendment rights of all law-abiding Americans . . . to promote firearms and hunting safety, to enhance marksmanship skills of those participating in the shooting sports, and to educate the general public about firearms in their historic, technological and artistic context." There is no reason to doubt that they believe in it very strongly. But if individuals and groups associated with the NRA didn't stand to profit from its efforts, the positions taken by the NRA would be significantly muted, less aggressive and less extreme. In 2011, the NRA's total cash contributions were \$227 million, which is spent on various shooting instruction and gun safety programs, fundraising, lobbying, political advocacy and, of course, administrative expenses. With political fundraising the number is sure to have been significantly higher in 2012, but those numbers do not appear to be available at this time.^{1 2 3}

Consider the following blurb from an article on foxnews.com: "The group has endorsed Republican Mitt Romney, even though Romney signed a ban on assault weapons as Massachusetts governor. Obama hasn't pushed gun control measures as president and has signed laws letting people carry concealed weapons in national parks and in checked bags on Amtrak trains."⁴

When asked how much the NRA Political Victory Fund planned to spend on ads to defeat Obama, Spokesman Andrew Arulanandam said, "as much money as our members send us."⁵ The point being that the more money the NRA brings in, the higher it makes its public profile, which increases the amount of money individuals associated with the NRA will make. By aggressively campaigning against Barack Obama in the 2012 Presidential Election, and making it yet another Second Amendment life or death survival story, the NRA ensured that its coffers would be filled to their highest levels. Was there reason to suspect that the rights of gun owners would be best protected by a Romney presidency? They could point to Obama's Supreme Court nominations as being questionable on their Second Amendment interpretation, which is one of the arguments that they do in fact make, but it is unquestionable that their stoking fear of an Obama anti-gun conspiracy was their most profitable course of action. All things considered, it is my firm belief that this vein has long been a significant motivator for the NRA's decision making. And it's just one example to illustrate that the NRA doesn't represent the full spectrum of gun owners or people who advocate

Second Amendment rights for individuals.

When the NRA reacts to the Sandy Hook shooting by suggesting that principals be armed, or armed security be encouraged in schools, it is reasonable to conclude that they're acting primarily out of a profit self interest. Personally I find this "solution" a ludicrous overreaction, and one that they have reason to know in advance would never be implemented. I can't imagine too many principals would even want to have access to a gun, or have a gun in schools that children could get access to, and if my child went to a school where a principal desired to carry a gun, or have easy access to one, it would make me uncomfortable. But the NRA probably recognized the Sandy Hook tragedy as a good opportunity for them to make this proposition. At the very least they've taken a proactive stance that supports their purported belief that law-abiding citizens carrying guns will lessen violence. When it is rejected, they can say their good solution was rejected, and what gun violence in schools that subsequently happens is the fault of others. And if by some chance it becomes law, it's a double win for the NRA. They can claim that the 99.99% of schools where no gun murders happened in a particular year, which is the case now, were prevented by the deterrence of good-guy gun wielders, and there will be more gun sales and a higher public profile of guns in any event.

Before I make my genuinely impassioned plea in support of the Second Amendment and that private ownership of firearms ever be protected, I would take issue with an NRA position similar to the one above that has become law here in Ohio and other states in only the last 20 years or so, which is the legalization of carrying concealed weapons on one's person. Certain gun advocates, including the NRA, have argued for the legalization of carrying concealed weapons on one's person as a promotion of public safety. The key word here is concealed. Their argument is that citizens should have the right to get a permit to literally hide a gun or guns on themselves, and this right continues to expand. Only last year here in Ohio it was expanded to off-duty police officers in bars being allowed to hide a gun on themselves, and individuals not intoxicated have been permitted to carry concealed guns on themselves into sports arenas and stadiums. It is difficult for me to conceive that individuals hiding guns among a bunch of emotionally heightened fans at a Cleveland Browns game, including many who are intoxicated, would be a situation that protects more lives than it endangers, all things considered. Granted, Browns Stadium and like venues still have the right to prevent guns on their premises, and most of them do. But this is a question of right permitted or infringed upon by law, and the infringement of the law preventing weapons from being carried by private individuals at such public venues, which was the law for many years, is minor at best. As might be the case in a stadium, concealed carry opponents argue that more people are killed and injured by gun carrying vigilantes than there are shootings prevented, but there is no single database available on the issue. With numbers cited on both sides of the argument, the idea is simply put forward for consideration.

Speaking for myself, when I'm in public, or even with others in someone's private residence, and I learn that someone there is carrying a firearm for their personal protection, it doesn't make me feel safer, and I would imagine many freedom-loving Americans share my opinion on this. For instance, I was at a friend's home, and another friend of his, an individual who carries himself aggressively and looks like he's always itching for someone to start trouble, comes in, sits down, and then takes

out his pistol and places it on the back of the television (back when TVs were boxes). Conversely, the friend I was visiting may or may not have owned a gun or guns kept there in the house. It is likely that he did, and it didn't bother me in the least, whatever the case. Frankly I don't remember if he owned guns or not, because simply owning guns and keeping them put up in your home is an entirely different issue than toting one around. This paragraph is certainly not intended to be included as evidence on the issue, and one could rightly argue that my impression is colored by the threatening demeanor of the particular individual exercising his right to bring a gun into other people's homes. But my impression is that a person who chooses to act in a threatening manner is more likely to exercise this right. I include it to demonstrate that simply believing in the right of private individuals to own guns generally doesn't equate to agreeing with all positions espoused by gun rights advocates. There is a significant difference between choosing to exercise a right that could have lethal consequences in one's home versus exercising that same right in public.

But even if the NRA and gun advocates in general espouse some questionable ideas, and even if the NRA's purpose for doing so is to promote the financial gain of its members and others with associated political interests despite being a nonprofit organization, that doesn't mean that the NRA's overall mission to protect Second Amendment rights for all law-abiding Americans is without merit. So, if allowing private citizens to keep guns concealed on their persons in public is a bad, even dangerous, idea, then what is the argument for letting private citizens keep firearms generally? Trying to state it as elegantly as possible, private gun ownership is a deterrent to tyranny. It is a deterrent to crime as well, at least for preventing home invasions and other crimes that follow, such as rape, theft and murder, and this is generally the first argument made in support of private gun ownership because it's simple to make. Most thieves would be less likely to break into a person's house if they believed that there was a substantial likelihood that they could be killed. Opponents argue that there aren't reliable statistics to demonstrate that crimes are prevented, but it's difficult to demonstrate the number of crimes that have been deterred by the possibility that homeowners could have a gun. And of course the prevention of crime is the argument made in support of the concealed carry laws referenced above, but we have to balance personal rights against social responsibilities in many aspect of life. My argument is that the privacy of one's home and property rights in general shift that balance in favor of the rights of the property owner.

This letter, however, is primarily concerned with the private ownership of firearms as a deterrent to large-scale violence. It's a deterrent that keeps one group with power, such as a government, from coercing or even enslaving another. If you are the leader or member of a group in confrontation with a perceived adversary, and you believe the adversary could significantly hurt you, or your children, friends or fellow citizens, then you have to be more careful and more considerate when dealing with them even if your capacity to harm them is significantly greater. You have to filter out the notion that you might be able to simply impose your will on them, and the reverse is also true. If you attempt to harm that enemy, then you might increase the likelihood that they will harm you or your people. Assuming a certain level of civility that citizens of a lawful society can come to expect, the mentality of all parties shifts toward working toward a consensus that the general public will accept or at least tolerate. If we have weapons, and we know our adversaries also have weapons, even if the balance of power is far from equal, then we are deterred from simply trying to bully or coerce

them and are more likely to look for other means to achieve cooperation. It forces the two sides to at least consider the goals and intentions of the other. Open violence becomes a question of last resort as the offending party has to consider the likelihood that the opinion of society in general will shift against the party which uses violence to coerce others in order to achieve goals.

The deterrence factor of guns can be understood in a way similar to the nuclear deterrence of the Cold War that prevented grand-scale warfare from occurring for the last sixty-plus years. From a historical perspective, the wars and other violent confrontations of the last sixty years have been on a scale that is comparatively small. Personally I'm a strong proponent of continuing to reduce our nuclear arsenal over time, as aggressively as possible, as a tool to encourage potential adversaries who have nuclear weapons to do the same, but I understand the effective reality of the deterrence factor. The United States has the nuclear capacity to destroy society multiple times, yet we're frightened by the prospect of a country like Iran, India or even Israel having nuclear weapons at all. I understand and appreciate the position of the American government and the American people in general that such actual weapons of mass destruction should be limited to as few hands as possible to minimize the likelihood of future nuclear holocaust. But the nuclear weapons example well demonstrates the idea of the ability to harm an adversary as a deterrence to being coerced by that adversary. We don't want to be deterred from our aims by those who might be able to harm us, particularly in the case of Iran, even when our ability to harm them is significantly greater.

Private gun ownership provides just this kind of deterrence against tyranny and large-scale violence. Gun rights advocates regularly cite that private gun ownership in America was a factor in preventing the Japanese from invading the United States in World War II. The argument is that because Japanese military leader Admiral Isokoru Yamamoto studied in America, he believed that the American people were well armed, "a rifle behind every blade of grass," and thus could not be subjugated. There is no evidence supporting this conclusion, but it is not absurd to believe that private gun ownership could be a factor in deterring a foreign invader. There were many reasons that the Axis powers would not have seriously considered invading the United States, including numerous logistical reasons and America's geographical advantages, and many of those would apply today. But before you write off the entire idea of private gun ownership being a deterrent in this situation, consider that at the outset of WWII, mainland Japan had a population of 73 million to America's 131 million. Japan did in fact take over an area of Asia roughly the size of the continental US and subjugated, murdered and enslaved a much larger population of Chinese, Philipinos and others than there were people in America. And, were it not for the Japanese surrender, the United States was, in fact, going to invade mainland Japan. While I don't believe that it justifies the use of the atomic bombs, which ultimately brought about the Japanese surrender, the results of such an invasion would have been across the board considerably more bloody and tragic in terms of lives lost. But the point remains that such an invasion was going to happen, so the idea of the United States being similarly invaded in some unforeseen set of circumstances shouldn't be considered logistically unthinkable.

But rather than enemies abroad, the deterrence that most justifies private gun ownership for some and causes others a great deal of discomfort is the idea of private gun ownership as a deterrence to

domestic tyranny. Fortunately there really aren't good examples of the kind of deterrence at work, because America has largely remained a democratic nation that doesn't wage war against its own citizens, so it's difficult to provide historical examples to demonstrate how an unarmed civilian population could be vulnerable to the American government. The closest comparison I can come up with might be the Cherokee Nation, which cooperated with the U.S. government and turned over their weapons before subsequently being expelled from their land. But using relations with Native American tribes as examples of domestic tyranny is tenuous as they had not been recognized as American citizens at the time, so public consciousness of their rights was not at the level it should have been. Had the Cherokee been armed and fought back, as many other tribes did, they would have been perceived as enemy combatants. There are, however, numerous examples where the lack of such a deterrence has led to large scale mass murder in other countries that aren't necessarily as different from us as we would like to believe but perhaps for the rights guaranteed to our citizens that we espouse and protect.

The well-documented events that took place in Germany following World War I provide a good, simple example to start with. It is generally preached by gun rights advocates in America that Hitler's rise to power included the Nazis banning private gun ownership in the mid-1930s, but this is not precisely accurate. Hitler did pass a weapons law in 1938 that added to the restrictions on Jews and other political enemies of the Nazis, exempting Nazis and government officials and relaxing gun restrictions on German citizens generally, but the foundation for the restriction of gun ownership had been laid down nearly twenty years earlier.

For historical context, it is necessary to understand that the reeling German state following World War I believed itself in danger of the type of Communist overthrow that had occurred in Russia only a few years prior. The Russian Bolsheviks started as armed rabble rousers and ended up bringing down the tsarist government, openly espousing that the workers of the world must rise up and take down all of the world's oppressive governments. And German communists were, in fact, working toward this goal in Germany, so it should not be a surprise that the Weimar Government and the German people in general perceived communism as a serious threat. As a result, the government passed a sweeping reform that outlawed all firearms and ammunition in 1919. All firearms and ammunition had to be immediately surrendered to the government, and failure to do so carried a penalty of up to five years in prison. There was a separate law passed in 1920 as a result of the Treaty of Versailles defining and outlawing weapons of war, including in private hands, but the 1919 law is more relevant to the general issue of private citizens owning guns. Later in 1928 a law was passed that relaxed some restrictions by permit. Separate permits were required to own guns, carry guns, or deal in the manufacture or sale of guns, and the government had wide latitude in determining who could get a permit and who would be denied one. All guns were stamped with a serial number, and the list of gun owners was turned over to police at the end of each year. Applicants for permits were contingent on the applicant's "reliability not being in doubt." Ironically, the 1928 law was intended in part to allow law-abiding citizens to own guns while keeping the Nazis from possessing firearms.⁶

It isn't hard to imagine that the question of the applicant's reliability changed after 1933, when the

Nazis came to power. And later in 1938, when the Nazis began to round up Jews and put them into slave-labor camps, and what few guns their enemies possessed had been confiscated, there was no one to fight them. The conservative figure is six million murdered, but the number is likely considerably higher and includes not only Jews but any dissidents and undesirables declared so by the government, including thousands of the kind of priests and community activists that actually spoke out against slavery and condemned murder.

And the number murdered, more like slaughtering cattle than shooting an enemy combatant, overshadows other atrocities that occurred, such as the hundreds of thousands that weren't murdered but simply starved for years on end. Berlin, the capital of Nazi Germany, was a regular liberal hotbed in strong opposition to the Nazis when Hitler was soundly defeated in his run for President in 1932, and the majority of the city's residents still opposed him when his popularity grew throughout much of the rest of the country. So when the Nazis began to rebuild Berlin the citizens of the city were punished by being rounded up and forced into what amounted to slave labor until the end of the war. Hitler's political enemies, lacking any means to protect their rights or defend their freedom, were forced to build his fortress and new capital at gunpoint. Better than being put into a concentration camp and murdered, but not what most would consider an acceptable life or fair treatment. While mass murder and genocide may be the ultimate tyranny, simple body counts can't be the only factor when determining the merits of this issue.

Now a reasonable question a skeptic might ask here is what would have happened if a gun registry had not been established and privately owned firearms had not been confiscated. If there had been a legal and historical tradition of protecting private gun ownership in Nazi Germany such as currently exists in America that ensured that Jews and other enemies of the Nazis were permitted to own guns, would that have made any difference? Would they have been able to stand against the Nazi army and state police and hope to win? Certainly not. Would they instead have surrendered their arms anyway and quietly been led away to the camps? If they had the tradition of private gun ownership that we have in the United States, many of them would not have surrendered and would have instead fought back. And many of those who might not have chosen to fight back would have been forced to do so once the shooting started. The result would have inevitably been shooting in the streets, and the German people would have seen neighbors shot dead attempting to defend their homes and their neighborhoods, and they would have seen soldiers killed as well. A realization would have been unavoidable: "We're murdering these people." A number of people would have come to this realization early on, well before the Nazi war machine started building an inexorable momentum.

Many German civilians claimed not to know the worst of what was happening in the camps. As incredulous as that claim might seem to us, I believe that many of them didn't, and others who were informed of certain facts but not witness to them were able to ignore it and pretend they didn't know. It's just too easy to ignore things you don't want to believe when you don't see them yourself, particularly when you know that acknowledging them and disapproving could lead to the forfeiture of your own life or the lives of those you love. But had they seen instead Jews and other enemies of the Nazis being gunned down, and open warfare in the streets, their tolerance or acceptance of

National Socialism would have been considerably different. Then the priests speaking out against murder, against genocide, instead of also being rounded up, might have been heard and heeded. Millions of lives could have been saved, and history would have been different in any event. The Holocaust was fueled by widespread hatred, but it was facilitated by a gun registry and selective system of gun ownership permits that ensured that the only people in the country with guns were the Nazis, the army and the police, and others sympathetic to their cause. It led not only to the mass murder in the camps but also contributed to an eventual tens of millions dead across Europe. Perhaps the German people didn't know better, but this is why we study history and learn from the mistakes made by others. Another advocacy group in America with more aggressive positions than the NRA, Jews for the Preservation of Firearms Ownership, exists primarily because of this episode in history, and they strongly believe that it alone more than justifies protection of the right to bear arms.⁷

And it was Hitler's intention that conquered people would be disarmed and prevented from owning guns: no private gun ownership and no militias, well regulated or otherwise. The book, *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944*, attributes to Hitler the following:

“The most foolish mistake we could possibly make would be to allow the subject races to possess arms. History shows that all conquerors who have allowed their subject races to carry arms have prepared their own downfall by so doing. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the supply of arms to the underdogs is a sine qua non for the overthrow of any sovereignty. So let's not have any native militia or police.”

A skeptic would point out that Hitler was speaking here specifically of other conquered nations and not the people of Germany, but the point of the argument is that political enemies of an autocratic state are treated as conquered peoples. When any people is subjugated at gunpoint as enemies of the state, such as the Jews, communists and any others opposed to Hitler's regime in Germany, the difference between domestic enemies and foreign becomes mainly cosmetic.

For a counter example where people are able to defend themselves in similar circumstances because they have guns, the Nazis also invaded Poland and considered the Poles inferior to themselves, and a similar situation existed in the countries we once called Yugoslavia. While the Nazi forces were far superior, and did attempt to subjugate the population and liquidate the Jewish population as well as any resistance they encountered, they didn't have the advantage of disarming the Polish people first. The Polish resistance is credited as being the largest organized resistance movement to the Nazis in all of occupied Europe and is credited with saving more than 50,000 Jewish lives in the Holocaust, which is more than any other resistance movement or government in the war.^{8 9} The related Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of Jews in 1943 was also the single largest armed resistance by the Jews against the Nazi occupiers. Trapped in the Warsaw ghettos, which the Nazis had turned into essentially a walled prison, the possession of a few firearms allowed them to fight back for a month and kill as many as 300 German soldiers before their eventual defeat. It was within the power of the Nazi army to destroy these people, as they did the Jews in the camps, but it would have required an extraordinary effort because those fighting back were armed. The resistance contributed significantly

to Hitler's eventual defeat. The relevant point here is that the ability of the Poles, and the Jews in the Warsaw Ghettos, to simply fight back because they were armed prevented the Nazis from simply murdering them as they had so many others. Had the Jews and other enemies of the Nazis in Germany been able and willing to defend themselves in 1938, the momentum of Nazi expansion would have been slowed earlier on, and millions of lives could have been saved as a result.

How many other examples are necessary to make this point? The Soviets similarly rounded up millions, between six and seven million by the most conservative estimates and possibly upwards of fifteen million people, and killed them, either with a bullet or by working them to death in mines and prison camps. The Communist Party leadership, their Red armies and secret police, were well armed. The people were unarmed and had no hope of fighting back. The government and the police had all of the guns. Referring back to elements of the earlier example involving the Nazis, the fact that the Soviet citizens were unarmed was certainly a significant factor in the Nazis moving through a huge swath of Soviet territory as well, leaving millions of civilians, including Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians and Jews, dead in their wake. A government of tyranny, such as the Bolsheviks under Stalin, cannot allow their people to possess firearms, so the people of the Soviet Union, including the Russians Jews, were largely unarmed when the Nazis came. The conclusion is what it is.

The Communist Chinese in the 1950s, assuming the inevitability of nuclear holocaust, encouraged their population of unarmed peasants to reproduce at astronomical rates. At a mere 563 million people in 1950, the population had nearly doubled to a billion by 1980, and the government oversaw the murder of millions and the starvation of millions more in numerous events. The Red Chinese disarmed their opposition and subsequently killed millions of them, whether with bullets, in prison camps, or simply through starvation. I hope it's redundant at this point to write that the Chinese government forces, the police and their army, were well armed. In a more subtle episode of the effects of tyranny during China's Great Leap Forward, the government decided in 1958 that it should eradicate the sparrow population because they were stealing grain from the harvests. So the peasants were directed to tear down sparrow nests and take shifts banging pots and pans until the sparrows fell from the sky from exhaustion. They failed to realize until 1960, however, that the sparrows were responsible for keeping down the insect population, and the result was hordes of locusts devouring subsequent crops. Ecological imbalance is credited with exacerbating the Great Chinese Famine, in which at least 20 million people died of starvation. It wasn't until the 1980s that the one child policy was implemented, to counter earlier misguided policies, when baby girls were being drowned in rivers, and how many millions of them?

My research assistant asked me why I would include this in an article about gun control, and the answer is that armed peasants with the right to defend themselves and to assert their rights have the ability to say no. When one group possesses all of the guns, the subjugated peoples have no ability to resist, and their mentality changes so that they simply acquiesce to the dictates and mandates of the party in power as a survival mechanism. While they may be citizens of the state, the lack of ability to resist the power of the state becomes the inability to second guess or resist the wisdom of the state. Farmers in America can argue against the wisdom of killing all the sparrows, or being

encouraged to reproduce faster than the land can sustain them. For the most part, Americans can say no. An unarmed population of peasants has no ability to assert its right to education, its right to a voice in the government and decision making that protects the well being of people. When one group of people is unarmed and another group of people is armed and has the discretion to put the first group in prison or murder them without fear of reprisal and similar consequences, the unarmed group does what it is told.

Rwanda. A group of people, the Tutsis, who were more apt to cooperate with their Belgian rulers before that country left in the 1960s, were considered elitist by their Hutu countrymen. The Tutsis, because of their level of education and relative affluence, reproduced much less quickly than the Hutus, who lived a more traditionally agrarian lifestyle. So one day the Hutus decided to murder the Tutsis. 800,000 people were murdered in 100 days in a country with a population roughly comparable to Ohio. Unarmed people were unceremoniously rounded up and cut down with machetes. Though the Tutsis were a minority in terms of numbers, this would not have happened if they were even lightly armed.

Myanmar. Iran under the American supported Shah. North Korea. Ethiopia. Cambodia. More examples than I have time to research and include. The obvious point of these examples is that when a people has zero power to advocate for its rights, with a necessary component of that power being the ability to defend themselves through firearms, human nature allows those in power, the people who have the guns and who will always have the guns, to ignore their rights and their intentions, or to simply take what others have for themselves, often to the extent of enslaving or murdering them. These examples are only a few obvious ones from the past 80 years. How many educated, peace-loving people killed, coerced or enslaved because they lacked the ability to defend themselves and therefore lacked the ability to assemble, to organize and to assert their rights as human beings? You can't advocate for your First Amendment rights if your Second Amendment rights are non-existent. And this is neglecting the numerous instances of colonization, such as by European countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas, or American colonization of the Philippines, where a relatively small and well organized number of soldiers were able to take over entire countries because the colonizers had guns and the natives did not. In virtually every case the citizens of the colonized nations were subsequently prevented from having firearms.

But we have not had anything close to that level of oppression of American citizens here in the United States. We have our traditions and our beliefs, which are borne of plenty and owed to an extent to the fact that we have enough food and other resources for everyone to get by. One of those traditions is the right to bear arms, and we have long come to accept through the entire duration of our short history that the right to bear arms is the right of private individuals to bear arms. But it is practically inevitable that there will come times in the future that resources will be scarce. Opportunities and jobs might become hard to find and even getting enough food could be difficult, particularly in overcrowded cities, if we somehow stray to far from our responsibility to look out for one another. And we would have to stray far from that responsibility given the resources, including food in particular, that we have, but all human history suggests that things like that happen from time to time.

We may believe ourselves to be above the capacity to abuse one another like so many of the previous examples from other countries I've provided here, given our democratic institutions and improving history of human rights that has been applied to more Americans over time, but there are episodes of our history that would suggest otherwise. For instance, we massacred and displaced how many native American tribes that had severely limited access to firearms? Most of them? How many of those were disarmed before subsequently being expelled like the Cherokee Nation? What did the African slaves have to endure? They weren't able to defend themselves or press for their rights as human beings either. While the following examples speak not as much to the right to bear arms but to human nature in general, we have the Tulsa Massacre of 1921, where over three hundred citizens of a relatively prosperous African American community were killed, 6,000 imprisoned, including children, and businesses and homes destroyed with not a single white aggressor arrested. We also have the internment of 110,000+ Japanese Americans beginning in 1942. All of these episodes happened during eras of prosperity. When people are destitute and desperate they are capable of much worse, and when one side is well armed and the other lacks the means to defend their rights, their property and their very lives, it is a recipe for mass murder.

I'll bring up two more related examples from American history speaking to positive aspects of the deterrence factor of the right to bear arms. The first is the labor movement, particularly from the end of the Civil War to the Depression Era. Company owners would regularly use force of arms to keep near-starving workers from striking and organizing while the corporate honchos lived lavish lifestyles. As the economy transitioned from agrarian to industrial, there simply weren't other jobs to be had, and because the ability of poor, modestly-educated people to simply uproot and move away was limited, they were at the mercy of their employers. But because the workers had the ability to arm themselves, though greatly outgunned, they were able to press for their rights and eventually won better working conditions for all Americans. One such example was the Blair Mountain Coal Miners Strike of 1910, where poor, poorly armed miners from which we get the term "rednecks" eventually won better rights and working conditions for miners everywhere.

The other example I want to include regarding an aspect of the deterrence factor of firearm possession is the integration of the Little Rock Nine into Little Rock Central High School. There were many such moments in the 1950s and 60s where federal troops were called in to protect the students from angry armed protestors. Some people who would take issue with what I've written in the preceding paragraphs might argue that both sides being armed would lead to open warfare, or general clashes of armaments that would leave at least hundreds dead. But, despite the angry, inflamed sentiments and loaded guns, open armed clashes didn't happen. This speaks directly to the effectiveness of the deterrence factor of firearms possession. Those committed to keeping African Americans relegated to second-class citizen status had the right to bear arms, but they weren't willing to engage in open warfare to implement their intention. In a civil society, when both sides are armed, both sides are deterred from pulling the trigger. Neither side wants to be responsible for starting that level of bloodshed.

So to conclude this argument, the right to bear arms, the right for private citizens to own firearms and to carry them when necessary, must be preserved. And a necessary component of protecting that

right is preventing a government registry of privately owned guns from being established. So this is clear, Federal law now requires gun owners to register guns when they purchase them, partly because it's necessary for background checks. Most people, including the NRA, agree that we don't want mentally ill people owning guns if we can keep them from doing so without curtailing the gun-ownership rights of private citizens generally. A similar limitation applies to convicted felons. Gun registration is also instrumental in assisting law enforcement when guns are used in a crime. Any gun sold today has a serial number. A person who buys a gun is registered as the purchaser of that gun. There is, however, no law preventing a person from selling a gun to another person, or giving it to a child or relative as a graduation present. An American citizen has always had the right to sell a gun or give a gun to a family member, etc. There are, however, strict laws that prevent gun owners from buying guns and then selling them to avoid registration requirements. If a person sells a certain number of guns in a set period of time, that person meets the definition of a gun dealer and must conform to registration requirements as above. So if a gun is used in a crime and the person committing the crime is caught, or the weapon is later recovered, even if the perpetrator is not the original purchaser of the gun, law enforcement has the means to find the original purchaser and can then follow the sales of the gun until the last owner of the gun is determined. Some people believe that even this is a violation of the Second Amendment, but it has become generally accepted as a middle ground that most people can abide by. Most assault rifles, and practically all modern assault rifles that seem to cause the most concern in terms of public perception, are in fact registered firearms.

There is, however, currently no comprehensive federal gun registry. A federal gun registry would require all people in the United States to voluntarily go to an office and register all of their guns. If it was fully comprehensive, as those who argue in favor of a registry argue, then all guns would have to be registered, including hunting rifles, shotguns, .22 caliber target rifles, antiques, family heirlooms, basically anything that uses the combustion of gunpowder to fire a bullet. Failure to do so may only be a misdemeanor initially, with fines and minimal jail time, but there's no strong jurisprudential reason to believe that the penalty couldn't later be increased to an imprisonable offense. It's not far fetched to imagine that people caught keeping unregistered firearms could end up on a terrorist watch list. And that's what draws the biggest concern with anyone who chooses to defend the Second Amendment as I've laid out here, because it would then put the government in a position to be able to confiscate all firearms. And once we get to that point, it would only take a sweep of public passion for it to happen.

In 1919, after years of protest over the statistical evils of alcohol, a fairly small group of impassioned activists convinced the government that enough was enough with alcohol consumption in the United States. They didn't just restrict the caliber of the weapon or the number of bullets you could have in a magazine when it came to alcohol. They banned it entirely. And what were the results of that? Thousands of legitimate businesses were shut down. Thousands of people were ultimately killed or imprisoned. The consumption of alcohol continued, of course, if a person had the financial means to be above the law, or if they were willing to engage in criminal activity. Millions of otherwise law-abiding citizens were declared criminals overnight. Organized crime as we know it literally sprung into being in only a couple of years time, and those mafia syndicates didn't disappear when

Prohibition was repealed. They just found other profitable criminal activities to engage in. The Roaring Twenties, which ended in the Great Depression. For fourteen years the United States of America had laws comparable to the strictest countries in the Middle East because a number of loud, impassioned people said enough is enough. Again, they may not have known better or understood the consequences that would spring from their actions, but we study history to learn from the mistakes made by others. If no gun registry is established, the government, or anyone else who has access to such a list, would find it exceedingly difficult to confiscate privately owned guns generally. And bear in mind again, if gun ownership by private citizens is banned, the government, and agents of government, the DEA, the police, the armed forces, will still have guns, and they will still use them. These two propositions, the banning of gun ownership by private citizens and the establishment of a national gun registry, should, must, be considered “off the table” in this debate.

While I approach this issue primarily from a position of moral necessity rather than a position of Constitutional protections, I would argue that the Second Amendment is intended to protect private gun ownership, which has been largely permitted throughout our history, and the Supreme Court has held it as such in any event. Every government large and small throughout the planet has the right to bear arms. Those employed by governments to enforce law and government policies, be they legitimately derived or the dictates of tyrants, have the right to do so. Soldiers, and police for the most part, have the right to bear arms and the qualified responsibility to use them. Even the Vatican City has a standing army of soldiers with machine guns. Every government that existed when the Constitution was ratified in 1787 had the right to bear arms as well. Given the historical context, it is confounding that gun-control advocates continue to argue with sincerity that the founding fathers intended that only American governments, or agents of governments, have the right to bear arms. What would have been the point? The majority of households of free people did in fact own firearms when the Second Amendment was ratified, and people had just survived an extremely bloody episode of our history, where British subjects in America weren't simply fighting against the government but against their own loyalist neighbors in many cases. The people lived in fear of having their homes occupied and their guns confiscated by British soldiers, and people were routinely executed for being caught with armaments, assumed to be aiding the cause of the rebels. It was a great fear of citizens and states alike that they would simply be replacing one monarchy with another, and a condition of supporting the new government was that they would be able to keep and bear their armaments in addition to being able to organize militias, which were people bringing their guns to the fight. The protection of individual rights at issue during the British occupation was the focus of the first four Amendments to the Constitution: No establishment of state religion, free speech, free press, the right to assemble; the right to maintain a militia, the right to keep and bear arms; no forced quartering of troops; no illegal searches and seizures. This doesn't mean that criminal activities were protected. The right to free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment, for instance, was not intended to permit libel. But while the Second Amendment was debated, it was generally accepted at the time that people had the right to keep guns. To argue otherwise is intellectually dishonest.

But intellectual honesty often takes a back seat when people are on a mission to save lives. Many who oppose private gun ownership, and have reliable statistics to cite for doing so, believe instead

that they can say anything to further their aims of restricting guns to government control. Because they believe their cause to be a just one, the cause of protecting the lives of innocent people, they believe nothing said in defense of their position is too extreme. And we have to consider that most extremists believe their opposition to be extremists who simply won't listen to reason. I received an article from a liberal professor friend of mine by Garry Wills entitled, "Our Moloch,"¹⁰ which compares defending private gun ownership to the worship of an evil deity mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible to which people would sacrifice their children by throwing them into fire pits. The reasoning of the article was that the Sandy Hook victims were the children that our society was collectively throwing into the fire pits. When I responded to him that the article was well below his usual level of discourse and that he should be ashamed for sending it, his response back to me was, "It's a metaphor, Bob." So if I disagree with his argument, or find it offensive and dismissive of the idea that protecting people's rights to own guns is something other than the worship of an evil deity, then I must be too ignorant to understand that the argument is a metaphor. Yes, it is intended to be understood as a metaphor; a cruel and deeply accusatory metaphor intended to shame people from exercising a deeper level of reasoning or belief other than the body count of innocent children killed.

Really, though, it isn't even a metaphor. The American Heritage Dictionary defines a metaphor as the following: A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison. The followers of Moloch knowingly and intentionally empowered their priests to throw children into fire pits. People who support the Second Amendment applied to private gun ownership oppose murder, and for the great majority of them at least it is their genuine intention to prevent murder. So the Garry Wills article was not really a metaphor, not an implicit comparison, but instead a misleading tactic disguised as a metaphor.

The tactic here is to blame society in general for the terrible actions of a handful of people because many members of this society have long shared a particular belief, but to also blame those who disagree with it for not more aggressively confronting those who hold the belief. If you saw a person throwing a child into a fire pit, as a person of conscience you would have no option but to do everything in your power to save the child, possibly including killing the person who is murdering the child. Most people of conscience would conclude that murdering innocent children is among the most immoral of crimes human beings can commit, and the majority of people capable of killing another person would in fact kill a young man shooting or attempting to shoot innocent children. But, according to the Moloch article, the man shooting the children was not the only murderer; everyone is culpable of the murders the way the worshipers of Moloch and the society that tolerates them are as culpable as the priests throwing children into the fire. Everyone who supports individual gun ownership rights is a murderer, and no one's belief in his or her own right to permit murder can be tolerated. Murderers must be stopped at any cost, and if you don't do what you can to stop them, then you're complicit in the murder as well. That's what people are intended to conclude.

The article is really no different than a person writing an article that inflames other individuals to go out and blow up abortion clinics and kill doctors that perform abortions, because abortion is murder. Granted, there are a significant number of people, no less than tens of millions of Americans, who believe that a fetus is not a human life before it develops a central nervous system and begins to

develop awareness. Those people believe that it is wrong to force a woman to allow the fetus to become a person and then force her to give birth to that person, but the reasoning in the Moloch article would conclude that the people who believe that are all murderers, or at the very least accessories to murder. I have heard it said or seen it written that abortion is murder at least a hundred times in my lifetime. The people who feel strongly about this will go as far as to put up billboards showing a fetus cut into pieces, but we shouldn't be concerned about people attempting to amp up society's level of hysteria, because they are only trying to prevent murder, and when it comes to preventing murder, you just can't go too far. In reference to the billboards, or trailers on semi trucks, showing cut-up fetuses, we also have similar billboards showing slaughtered animals. They increase the overall level of public unpleasantness, but meat is murder. Millions of innocent animals are killed in America on a weekly basis, and the people who slaughter them, as well as the people who eat them or wear their skins, are murderers. In modern America we don't need to eat animals to meet our nutritional needs, and with all land use considerations it's generally much more economically viable to grow crops than to raise livestock. We choose to eat meat because we're murderers. Cigarette manufacturers are murderers. It was only twenty years ago that a large majority of Americans believed that in a free country individuals should have the choice to smoke or not smoke, but that was before we realized that cigarette manufacturers and cigarette dealers, a.k.a. grocers, are murderers. Now governments have begun requiring pictures of diseased lungs cut from human bodies to be placed on cigarette packages. Really, aren't manufacturers and dealers of fast cars murderers? There are roughly 43,000 people killed and 300,000 people injured in America in auto accidents yearly according to the National Highway Safety Administration, and an average of four children ages fourteen and under are killed every single day in car accidents. We need cars, but do we need fast cars? It would make just as much sense to require prints of faces that have gone through windshields placed on the side of every car that can go over seventy. Decapitated heads that have gone through windshield would be even more effective, and the regulators would have no problem finding families that would be willing to sell them the pictures. There must be a very defensible argument supported by numbers that doing so would save lives, so if we don't do it well, that would be murder. Four children on average age 14 and under are killed every day in America in car accidents despite stricter car seat and seat belt laws. Don't think for a second that there aren't millions of American who would look at such an argument and immediately conclude that the statistics dictate that we immediately crack down on auto manufacturers. Fast cars, Our Moloch.

It was suggested to me that the reasoning in the Moloch article isn't really metaphor but rather hyperbole. The American Heritage Dictionary defines hyperbole as, "A figure of speech in which exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect, as in I could sleep for a year or This book weighs a ton." Given that the Moloch article implies intent to murder on the part of those who believe in gun ownership rights for private citizens, it is not exaggerating a legitimate argument but rather exaggerating an intent that is falsely applied. Those who believe in such rights have legitimate, defensible reasons to believe that private gun ownership has a deterrent effect on murder, as well as a deterrent effect on preventing the episodes of mass murder that have plagued other nations in the past. The vast majority of those who believe in the right to defend their freedoms through force of arms would in fact act to defend innocent children as well. The Moloch article is no more an

example of hyperbole than it is metaphor. It is in fact an example of a well-intended person who believes that there is no limit to what can be said to inflame the passions of like minded gun-control advocates, including gun-control prohibitionists, so that people in general will be more likely to agree with his position. And the Moloch article is not considered an extremist point of view but rather a well-reasoned position by gun-control advocates.

I just counted the word murder 21 times in the previous paragraphs, not to mention kill, slaughter and throw into fire. My sincere apology if it sounds trite or written in a jovial manner, or if it creates the impression that I don't approach the fact of murder in America and the killing and mistreatment of human lives that take place throughout the world with profound concern. The opposite is true, which is why I take issue with the level of discourse that encourages people to openly accuse other people of murder, or the worship of an evil devil-god, when they have not done so. When passionate advocates for a cause throw such a wide net over society, it is they who minimize the impact on perception that murder and other crimes of intent that human beings inflict upon one another. Clearly, America has a mass murder problem, and we need to take a serious look at why that is and how do we best way to confront it.

It is important to understand, however, that while the number of mass shootings has been steadily rising, and statistically mass shootings have exploded since 2006, the murder rate has declined significantly in our lifetimes. Disaster Center has posted a comprehensive list of crime rates in the US, and the data shows that the murder rate in the United States has declined significantly over the last 20+ years. From a high of 24,700 murders in 1991 with a population of 252 million, which is one murder for every 10,202 Americans, the statistics show that the 14,612 murders in 2011 with a population of 312 million, one murder for every 21,352 Americans, was the lowest murder rate in America since 1960, which is when the Disaster Center's statistics begin.¹¹ While there have been some fluctuations in the last 21 years, overall the murder rate has declined by 52%. While I was aware that the murder rate had declined in the past two decades, the numbers were still surprising, particularly given the recent intensification of the dialogue on the subject. There aren't statistics readily available to me that specifically consider gun murders over the same period, but it seems reasonable to conclude that murders with guns have declined at roughly the same rate. While I would not call this a cause for celebration, we should still acknowledge that steps taken to combat this problem have had a positive impact. It is not as if America has been sitting on its hands and doing nothing.

Trying to analyze the reasons for the decline in violent crime, and in murders in general, could be a book in and of itself, but I would suggest some of the reasons. The incarceration rate in America has increased over the period. Our rate of imprisonment has roughly doubled since 1991. While it is my personal opinion that having the highest imprisonment rate of any country on Earth should be looked on as a national shame, particularly in the case of non-violent offenders, it seems safe to assume that the murder rate has been positively affected. Another factor is the legislative effort that has been made to prevent gun crimes in particular. In the last 30 years we've put a serious emphasis on preventing gun crimes, so that committing a crime with a gun carries at significantly higher penalty than committing the same crime without one. For instance, Section 775.087 of the Florida

statutes provides minimum mandatory sentences for certain felonies or attempted felonies involving firearms. Called the "10-20-LIFE" law, the mandated sentence for possessing a firearm during the commission of a felony is 10 years, discharging the firearm results in a 20-year sentence, and killing a victim results in a life sentence.¹² Again, no one, pro or anti Second Amendment, defends the right to use guns in the commission of a crime, and laws such as these should be credited in reducing violent crime in general and the gun murder rate in particular. Finally, we should give some credit to education and outreach programs to areas hit hardest by gun crimes. An article in the Huffington Post from January 22, 2013 indicates that high school graduation rates are at an all time high, with the largest increase being reported among minority students.¹³ We've said all along that education is the key to our children's future, and, slowly but surely, the emphasis is having the desired effect. Despite the poor economy, and the increase in the crime rate one might expect from a decrease in economic opportunities, the murder rate has not increased and has in fact continued to decrease markedly since the Great Recession began in 2008. While this is far from an exhaustive analysis, my point is that our efforts as a society have not been wasted and should not be discounted given that the murder rate in the United States has declined by more than half since 1991.

But the increase in mass murders, which has led us to this point of hysteria despite the significant decrease in the murder rate, indicates a significantly different trend. According to data compiled on the Mother Jones website, there have been 62 mass shootings in the United States since 1982.¹⁴ Mass shootings, a.k.a. mass murders with guns, are defined by their occurrence in a public place and having at least four victims. Of those 62 mass shootings in America, 25 have occurred since 2006, and seven happened in 2012 alone. These include the mass murders in the Colorado theater and all of the well publicized school shootings including the Sandy Hook tragedy. So the first question has to be, why this and why now?

The prevailing argument is to blame the increase of guns, and in fact there are more guns per capita in the United States than any other country that shares our relative economic and social position. There are simply too many guns. But it is also true that in 1960, roughly one half of all households had a gun. The number today is more like two-fifths of all households.¹⁵ So relative to the increase in population, fewer people have access to a gun in the home than they did in 1960. And there was not a background check requirement in 1960 the way there is now. To buy a gun from a gun dealer now requires a background check and a four-day waiting period. As things stand, most people, and most of these young people committing mass murder, would have no more easy access to guns now than they would have twenty or fifty years ago. And at least some people have taken the steps to either lock up their guns, or most of their guns, and/or have childproof trigger locks installed, which must certainly remove a significant number of guns from the pool of availability. None of these factors is presented to deny the basic argument that it is easy for a would-be mass murderer to get their hands on a gun or even a duffle bag full of guns purchased over time. The fact that guns were taken from relatives' arsenals in the case of Sandy Hook and Columbine and bought legally by James Holmes in the Colorado theater shootings demonstrates that at least some people who would choose to commit mass murder can get the guns to do it, and it is a fact that Second Amendment proponents need to acknowledge. But with restrictions and waiting periods that now exist that didn't in the past, an increase in safer storage such as gun safes and trigger locks, and far fewer households in general

with guns, if anything, it is marginally more difficult for the average person to get a gun. But even if it's only equally easy to get a gun now as it had been in the last five decades the question remains, why the increase in these incidents of mass murder?

Given the nation's reaction particularly to the Sandy Hook shootings, one would have to conclude that America's tolerance for murder is at an all-time low, especially given the decline in the murder rate in general. While the economy is still first in terms of public priority, the gun-control issue evokes intense emotions from the public, and everyone with an opinion on the issue wants to prevent murder. Most Americans would claim themselves to be absolutely opposed to murder and would genuinely believe that their claim is valid. For many their claim would go back to Biblical teaching, even if the majority of these have never read the Bible and have only a second-hand understanding of what is written in it. But they are generally aware that going back to at least the Ten Commandments of Moses, God commands us, "Thou shalt not kill," or more properly translated, "Thou shalt do no murder," and they are aware of Jesus' teaching of nonviolence, which includes a restatement of this Commandment. Others who don't acknowledge Biblical influence would generally express the same sentiment.

But, given that actions speak louder than words, our American history has had ebbs and flows in our embrace of this anti-murder sentiment. Our belief in it, and our understanding of what constitutes murder, is altered depending on the moral and physical challenges that we face at any given time. We believe that it is not murder when we engage in a Civil War and kill other Americans to end the institution of slavery. We believe generally that it is not murder when we bomb cities of civilians in the Second World War, as we perceive it to be a kind of justified homicide or self defense in the face of an enemy that has shown the propensity to do the same to us or our allies. And there are gray areas, such as dropping the same bombs on North Vietnam to prevent the spread of communism, when the self defense argument is considerably weaker. Other gray areas are abortion, which some believe and others claim to believe to be murder while others do not, or the death penalty, where our society puts incarcerated people to death for crimes even if they represent extremely minimal future danger to society. And many of us believe that killing in the defense of our freedom in general is not murder. So while some might believe killing is not murder when it is in the defense of others, such as freeing slaves, individuals on the other side might be equally willing to conclude that defending their own right to self determination, even at the expense of others' freedom, is a cause worth killing and dying for. We can pray or simply hope that these experiences give us wisdom, that we can look back or look across and acquire a better understanding of when taking the lives of others is more justified and when it is not.

The point of this is that while we have generally always believed ourselves to be opposed to murder, our understanding has been flawed in the past and can be similarly flawed now. While we are opposed to murder, I would posit that we have become a somewhat schizophrenic society on the issue. We claim ourselves to be opposed to it, but we simultaneously justify it on one hand and glorify it on the other. NRA spokespersons are quick to point out the intensification of violent stimulation that today's youth are regularly exposed to as a cause of America's rash of mass murders. While NRA opponents, understanding their aims and their positions, can rightly conclude that the

NRA has both constituent and profit motives in asserting this claim, it would be foolish and hubristic to conclude that the claim is wrong because it distracts from the narrative that the problem is simply too many guns, or any guns in private hands, as many Second Amendment opponents boldly assert. Having little interest in repeating arguments that have already been made, I would briefly point out the obvious. Video games have in fact become considerably more graphic and more violent than in the past. While video games in general have always been violent or combative, the first person shooter games of the modern age allow the player to visualize holding the weapon, aiming and shooting the enemy. These games can be so realistic, in fact, that the US Army, and the armies of other nations, use games like *Call of Duty* and *Halo* to recruit and train soldiers. The games that the army uses to train soldiers for combat are the same games that children can play daily in their homes.¹⁶ And technology now allows movies to simulate violence so well that it actually looks like the real thing. While a well-adjusted young person is no more likely to be influenced to commit violent acts than they would be watching *Star Wars* or playing *Space Invaders*, a similar young person that might be predisposed to committing mass murder has an opportunity to more readily visualize what committing those acts would be like, minus the screaming and the actual death involved. The word people use to describe it is “desensitizing,” and it’s an accurate word. At least on a superficial level it gives young people an opportunity to have their sensitivity to killing and violence dulled. And even if we try to keep our younger children from it, it’s put in front of them in the middle of any given day on television commercials. For instance, I was watching football with my eight-year-old son, and a commercial came on for a horror movie that had him up scared two nights in a row, and he still sleeps with a stuffed lion blocking access to his bed.

But blaming movies and video games for desensitizing people to violence doesn’t really get at the problem, which is the effect that our culture of murder has on adults, both desensitizing and simultaneously hysteria inducing. Going through the channels of basic network television, you’ll find that there’s a *CSI*, *Law & Order* or similar murder-investigation related show on almost every night of the week, sometimes during both the 9:00 and 10:00 time slots. We have long had dramatic cop shows and the like that are full of violence where people are killed and criminals are tracked down and prosecuted. And we’ve had graphically violent movies for the last five decades going back to such films as *The Wild Bunch*, which would give similar movies of today a run for their money in terms of the opulent violence and gore. But these crime scene shows have reshaped the culture in their attempts to seem realistic, dehumanizing the victims of the murders at the crime scenes or displayed in the morgue as the investigators prod them and talk shop. In fact real police departments bemoan the number of calls they get on behalf of crime victims inquiring as to why they haven’t tried different techniques to acquire evidence that the caller saw on *CSI*. The pervasiveness of this programming can make it hard for viewers to draw the line between fact and fiction. There was a particularly relevant piece on *The Daily Show* that originally aired on January 26th of 2012 that descried the Supreme Court’s decision rejecting the right to show even a modest amount of nudity on a crime-scene show while the graphic violence occurring on the same type network shows at the same time slots appears to be unlimited. The montage strings together numerous graphic murder scenes from crime scene shows on prime time television that would have been considered unthinkable thirty years ago, including one close-up, prolonged shot of a young woman in underwear hanging upside down and headless.¹⁷

We can also look at the messages that the government sends us and the impressions we take from it. Unable to find the results to provide a reference while writing this letter, an online survey popped up on the Yahoo home page, along with an article about the reservations of General McCrystal concerning prolonged use of unmanned drone strikes to kill America's enemies. Curious, and not yet aware of my intention to include a reference to it in this letter, I decided to weigh in on the survey. The basic question was, "do you approve of the use of drone strikes against terrorists?", and the answers were a simple, "yes, I approve of the strikes," or, "no, I don't believe they are justified." There was no neutral option, which would have certainly affected the results. I checked No prepared to be disappointed with the number of Yes responses. But I was dismayed to read that 85% of respondents approved of it. I expected to be disappointed with the fact that maybe 60% of people logging onto Yahoo and answering the survey question would click Yes, but instead it was six of seven. While I was not able to find the results of the Yahoo poll while writing this article, I did find the results of a similar survey conducted by ABC and the Washington Post between February 1st and February 4th of 2012 which presented similar results. The survey asked the following question: "Thinking about the following decisions of the Obama Administration, please tell me whether you strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove or strongly disapprove . . . The use of unmanned, "drone" aircraft against terrorist suspects overseas." Of the 1000 Americans surveyed, 59% strongly approved, 23% somewhat approved, 7% somewhat disapproved and 4% strongly disapproved, with 6% expressing no opinion. Similar to the Yahoo poll, the results were 82 to 11, including liberal, conservative and other.¹⁸ In a similar international poll conducted by the Pew Institute, respondents in 17 of 20 countries surveyed express a strong disapproval of the same, with only Great Britain (44% approve to 47% disapprove) and India (32% approve to 21% disapprove) weighing in somewhat favorably with the United States.¹⁹

What seems relevant here in our discussion of the increase of mass murders in America is that we're talking about people often being targeted during the most human moments of their lives. Because we might find it difficult to pinpoint terrorists at particular places, we wait and kill them at weddings and more often funerals. A young person, never in harm's way, sits at a control console and flies an unmanned drone to launch a missile at people that he or she can see on the ground. What most inflames our passion about the murder of 20 children and six teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School is that the perpetrator chose to kill innocent victims at an innocent place, the kind of place we all want to assume to be safe. And yet with the drone strikes we often target and kill our enemies in just these types of situations, and then presume that the other victims of the strikes must be terrorists as well. The acts are nearly universally supported by Americans because on one side you have the supporters of George Bush who started the program, and on the other side you have supporters of President Obama that feel he can do no wrong, who has expanded it significantly. One of Bush's drone strikes is reported to have errantly struck a school, killing 69 children, and of the 259 strikes for which Obama claims responsibility, between 297 and 569 civilians are reported to have been killed, including at least 64 children. But it is difficult to say, because the Administration is secretive about the numbers and the targets. For national security purposes, the Obama Administration doesn't share the data.

There is a particularly relevant article in *The Guardian* by George Monbiot published December 17th

pertaining to the American drone strikes against individuals in Pakistan from which I've drawn some of the above numbers.²⁰ While I urge anyone interested in the subject, or skeptical of my presentation, to read the article, several quotes relevant to my argument regarding America's perception of murder are presented here, and reading the Monbiot article will validate that these quotes are not taken out of context. "The people who operate the drones, *Rolling Stone* magazine reports, describe their casualties as "bug splats", "since viewing the body through a grainy-green video image gives the sense of an insect being crushed." "Justifying the drone war, Obama's counterterrorism advisor Bruce Reidel explained that "you've got to mow the lawn all the time. The minute you stop mowing, the grass is going to grow back." "The wider effects on children of the region have been devastating. Many have been withdrawn from school because of fears that large gatherings of any kind are being targeted. There have been several strikes on schools since Bush launched the drone programme that Obama has expanded so enthusiastically. . . The study reports that children scream in terror when they hear the sound of a drone." "This is how wedding and funeral parties get wiped out; this is why 40 elders discussing royalties from a chromite mine were blown up in March last year. It is one of the reasons why children continue to be killed."

The government's argument, of course, is that such strikes prevent terrorist attacks against the United States and its allies, and the frequency of drone strikes continues to increase over time. It would strongly suggest that the number of potential terrorists in countries we are not at war with just keeps increasing. The government is secretive about the criteria for determining what defines a terrorist targeted for the strikes other than to say that any male over the age of 18 that is killed by drone strikes is presumed to be a terrorist. The President assures the public that there are criteria and that he gives the final approval for each. And the government doesn't specifically report how many are killed by the drone strikes, including the number killed that are considered collateral damage, which is instead left to independent journalists to try to determine. But the trend of increased drone strikes coupled with sentiments like Bruce Reidel's "mowing the grass" comments strongly suggests that the intention is that our government will continue to pump billions into these programs, including the development of more insidious drone strike capabilities, and that they will never end. Well, in fairness it should be conceded that if we eventually win over the hearts and minds of these countries producing the terrorists whose people we keep killing with unmanned drone strikes, then that could eventually bring about a phasing out of the program.

The Monbiot article concludes with Obama, referring to the Sandy Hook tragedy, asking, "Are we prepared to say that such violence visited on our children year after year is the price of freedom?" While we might conclude that the drone strikes are in the best interests of the United States and the world given the disruption of the terrorist network if we had some handle on the statistics involved, it is nevertheless dismaying to realize that nearly everyone is OK with it. We either don't see it as a stain on our national character, or we believe that killing others preemptively to protect ourselves is a worthwhile venture, even if innocents are killed along with those the government declares to be guilty. It gives the impression that we've reached a point where the wars have been too well sold by the government, and too universally endorsed by mainstream journalists that might have provided a dissenting voice in the past. More pointedly, people have been too well conditioned by the government to believe that this kind of murder is acceptable. There should be more than one in six

or seven of us that believes this is unacceptable, that aren't simply willing to see an online survey and check "Yes". The bug splats commentary sounds eerily similar to the callousness displayed by James Holmes, the mass murderer in the Aurora, Colorado theater shootings. Monbiot writes, "Beware of anyone who describes a human being as something other than a human being." There have always been young people on the edge of self destruction and the destruction of others who have entertained thoughts of killing people in mass murders similar to the ones that have brought this issue to the forefront of our consciousness. But we may have reached a tipping point where such individuals feel some sense of validation from a kill-friendly society that validates the idea of the strong killing the weak when the weak are defenseless. While we should also heed warnings like General McCrystal's concern that the killing of civilians is ultimately fanning the flames of hatred against the United States, that the world we are trying to win over is getting a bad impression of our expressed notions of justice, it is a subject for another discussion.

Our rash of mass murders such as Columbine, Aurora, Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook might have seemed unthinkable 20-or-more years ago, as would the idea of using unmanned drones to launch missiles into countries we aren't at war with to kill terrorists and thousands who aren't terrorists who are collateral casualties. But we have also been conditioned to accept a more military-esque style of law enforcement. For instance, in April of 2008 the US government approved \$151 million for Operation TORCH to patrol the New York subways.^{21 22} There are valid reasons to believe that terrorists might choose to strike at major transportation hubs like the New York Subway, as happened in the London subway attacks in 2005 which killed 52 civilians in addition to the 4 terrorists. But it is inexplicable how this justifies the NYPD sending TORCH teams of six in combat gear including submachine guns along with bomb-sniffing dogs to patrol the New York City subways. The bombing of a transportation hub, such as a subway, always involves a terrorist sneaking a bomb onto the train to derail it and kill as many as possible. So it is a practical certainty that the terrorist will want to attract as little attention as possible prior to the commission of the crime. The terrorists will never be carrying a machine gun and will be traveling alone or with as few as possible so as not to attract attention. The goal of preventing bombings of the subway could more effectively be accomplished by sending teams of two or three regularly clothed police with a bomb-sniffing dog on patrol. So what would the New York City Police department have to gain by regularly parading machine gun toting team teams of six in combat gear? When you hear the words "TORCH team" applied to soldiers with machine guns, does it give you the impression of a torch being held aloft to provide a guiding light, warmth and security, or does it more give the impression of torching an enemy? The imagery can only be to strike fear into the hearts of people. It just adds to the level of fear, the level of hysteria. At the Republican Convention in Minneapolis in 2008, hundreds were arrested by police in riot gear for attempting to stage non-violent protests, or simply standing by and reporting on those protests. Amy Goodman, a journalist noted for reporting on politics, was among those arrested and handled roughly, and she was injured by police while covering the event.^{23 24} What kind of message does this send regarding American democracy and protecting the free speech rights of citizens to assemble and to protest?

Yet another fact is the public perception of crime perpetrated by a media blitz that goes on continuously, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is my suspicion that many, if not most, reading

this letter were taken by complete surprise by the fact that the murder rate has decreased by half in the last 20+ years, and that 2011 was the lowest murder rate on record in the United States since at least 1960. But when we step back and look at the news that is pumped into America's living rooms on a nightly basis, we see America under siege from itself. We have always gotten a healthy dose of crime coverage on the nightly news, but now it's on almost continuous. Some years ago local news reported on events, including crime, that were close to home, but with improvements to communication, we now have reports on crimes going on all over the country. If a child is kidnaped in Iowa, that can be news in Ohio requiring up to the minute updates. And there are hour-long news programs on various network time slots that may choose to focus on murders, robberies, kidnappings and home invasions. Or they focus on certain aspects of crime that seem to many viewers close to home, like the War on Drugs or crime along the border with Mexico, not to mention drug wars in Mexico where scores of people are killed on a regular basis. And similarly we have the War on Terror, where regularly looming threats of attack are presented to the American people. And the cable news programs are rife with political accusation. Leading the pack are CNN, euphemistically referred to as the Clinton News Network, and of course Fox News. While it may be argued that they are simply reporting the news, they report it in such a way as to give an accusatory slant so to make politicians and groups opposed to the networks' positions seem more inimical, threatening or simply irresponsible when it comes to public health or safety. The country is full of racist, right-wing gun nuts and climate-change deniers versus communists and people who don't want to work for a living who care more about protecting criminals than protecting you. All of this sends a message to the average American. You aren't safe. Lock your doors and be suspicious of your neighbors.

It has led to a growing level of hysteria in America. A conspiracy theorist might conclude that it serves the government's interest for people to remain afraid, but there is a simpler explanation: The news networks will sell people the news they want to pay for, and any detrimental effects that may have on society is at best a secondary consideration. If people will buy it, which profits news outlets through the sale of advertising space, then a news program is all too happy to run shows about the same crime again and again, or articles about similar crimes that are occurring. In addition to amping up fear about crime in general, it has the effect of sensationalizing particularly heinous events. When Eric Harris and Dylan Kleibold murdered twelve at Columbine before turning the guns on themselves, they became instant folk villains. What might have been inconceivable to a number of morally confused young people became a reality. If you want to go out with a bang, you could kill yourself, ho hum, or you could instead walk into a school, or passenger train, or former work environment, and kill a bunch of the kind of people you hate and then kill yourself. Or not, such as was the case in the Aurora theater shootings. Harris and Kleibold even had a movie made about them, and they're still being mentioned in articles like the one you're reading now.

The United States police presence is more militarized than in the past, more likely to be carrying machine guns and wearing combat gear. Police shows, on network television in prime time nearly every night of the week, simulate crime, law enforcement, and the almost-nightly display of corpses in a manner that is shockingly realistic. Our young people play graphically violent, first-person-shooter video games which mimic the sensation of actually shooting another person so well that the military uses the same games as part of the training of our soldiers. An overwhelming majority of

our population approves of killing suspected terrorists in countries we aren't at war with by bombing them with unmanned drone aircraft even though our closest allies are at best neutral on the subject and for the most part strongly opposed, as is the rest of the world. And all of this supplements an unending news cycle of crime occurring nationwide and never ending campaigns for public office where the candidates try to vilify one another to win votes. Abortion is murder. Guns are murder. There is an ongoing War on Drugs. Cigarettes are murder, and the people who support or defend any of the above are murderers, or simply have a reckless and willful disregard for human life.

I don't know how to synthesize the following example into a factually justifiable argument, so the inclusion of this paragraph relies on the hope that people have generally shared my experience. Days ago while working at a computer terminal at the Lucas County Board of Elections in Toledo, Ohio I overheard a conversation between a woman of around 50 and an elderly gentleman about the detrimental changes in America. Having lived her whole life in the city of Oregon, a suburb of Toledo, she was telling him how in her childhood her mother would regularly pick up hitchhikers. His end of the conversation was that if beggars came to the house during his childhood (which apparently happened with some regularity), they would give them food and send them on their way. It was clear that they were both proud to come from families that helped strangers, and they both bemoaned how crime had changed America so you could no longer do that. Already engaged in writing this letter, I later mentioned to the woman how violent crime was at a fifty-year low, and how the media just makes it seem like things are worse today than they were in the past. The woman's response to me was, "yeah, you just can't help people these days." She seemed generally despondent that things were so bad now compared to when she was a child to the extent that the point of my comment was simply inconceivable to her, and I've had versions of that conversation more times than I can remember. She doesn't believe that Americans can act with the kind of decency and kindness that she grew up with, that her mother demonstrated to her, because of crime, despite the fact that statistics bear out that murder and other violent crimes were much more likely to happen during her childhood. Being from Columbus, Ohio myself, I caught all of five minutes of the broadcast news tonight in my living room, and it was about criminals being caught in a Delaware County break in north of the city. The segment concluded with the homeowner being interviewed and talking about how the experience was an eyeopener, and how people need to be aware of criminals and burglaries in the area because you just can't be safe enough. If there are no murders, the news can always find some other event to strike fear into the hearts of area residents.

And all of this leads to the difficulties many parents seem to have with raising children that both springs from our perception of murder and contributes to it, because many parents who are themselves desensitized to the violence and murder don't know how to tell their children to simply be loving and respectful of others, or to have a good work ethic. Many parents are simply overwhelmed with the amount of information out there, the constant barrage of do this and don't do that, and they don't know how to explain to children the difference between right and wrong. More energy is spent instead telling kids not to drink, smoke or do drugs. If you get caught smoking marijuana you can't get financial aid go to college. Children have been suspended from school for miming a gun motion and saying "bang", or for getting caught with aspirin for migraines because of zero tolerance policies.²⁵ In the cases I'm aware of involving young people, Columbine, Sandy

Hook, Aurora, Virginia Tech, we aren't talking about children who were poor or malnourished. Yet the parents are always seem stunned when their child murders innocent bystanders. While studies seem to focus on the effects that our culture of murder has on young people, not enough attention is spent on the effect they have in shaping the perception of adults.

I have a friend who was several years ago bemoaning that he was unable to motivate his twelve-year-old stepson to do anything. He stopped wanting to play sports or participate in school activities. He just wanted to hang out with his friends, watch tv and play video games. He mentioned how his son was never required to help out with chores around the house. He told me, "he gets good grades and doesn't do drugs, so really I don't feel like we have anything to complain about." But he was right to sense that it was a problem situation, and that he and his wife didn't know how to handle it. It was perhaps a year or two before he was complaining that this same child was doing drugs and failing his classes. More incidents of children killing other children, like the Sandy Hook tragedy, could be prevented by simply raising children to have a sense of responsibility to help and to care about others. Children need to be given love, but they also need to be given responsibility and direction, and parents need to feel empowered with the belief that they can tell their children what to do. They can shape what the child watches on TV, or how much time is spent playing video games, etc., and they absolutely should make sure children have chores and responsibilities to work toward. Good habits are much easier to develop when a child is young. My friend wanted to do right by his kid and simply did not know how, and the likely conclusion of he and his wife's failure to act was what occurred. The boy didn't end up killing anyone, but a bright child who may have had better opportunities just managed to get out of high school and is now looking at a situation where his opportunities are limited.

This is not an isolated incident. Many parents, with both working full time and having lives filled with responsibilities and distractions, or divorced and feeling guilty about telling their children what to do, or single parents without a partner to turn to, simply don't know how to fulfill their children's needs at an early age. They don't find the time to instill a work ethic, a drive to succeed, in their children while they're still young, to teach them how to deal with failure at an early age and how to turn it into motivation to succeed in the future, and how to deal with bullies and other cruelties common to the human experience. There's too much confusion, too many distractions, and right and wrong are more amorphous. Don't eat this, stay off drugs, don't let your seventeen-year-old drive with more than one other youth in the car, don't get caught with aspirin at school, don't let your kids play with toy guns, don't smoke, don't let your children play in the woods, keep them under lock and key. We have zero tolerance for violence, as well as most of the other unmentionables above. We were generally more violent as children, and our parents' generation was more rough and tumble than we were, and they smoked and drank more (whatever age you may be reading this), but the past is yearned for while the present is bemoaned. There are simply too many distractions, too many rules that don't fit the golden rule of, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Too many children are befuddled by basic concepts of right and wrong, by their place in the grand scheme of things, because parents don't know how to explain it to them. By the time at-risk children reach their teenage years the parents might get the sense that there's a problem, and they might want to do whatever can be done to help, but it's difficult to teach a teenager self-discipline when it hasn't

already been taught to him or her as a child.

We grew up in a more violent society than our children, where murder and violent crimes were much more prevalent than they are today, but the idea that a young person could walk into a school and murder twenty children and six teachers was unthinkable. Much has changed in the last thirty or fifty years, but the access to guns is not one of them.

It is necessary here to address an argument in support of the individual right to bear arms, which is that banning ownership generally or limiting the possession of firearms to government would not decrease the death toll. That simply isn't accurate, at least in the short term. If we could simply wish away guns from private individuals, it would, in fact, have a significant impact on murders, suicides and accidental deaths.

Consider suicide. The number of total suicides in America in 2010 according to the Center For Disease Control was 38,285 and 52% or 19,766 of them were suicides with a gun.²⁶ If a potentially suicidal individual has immediate access to a gun and means to go through with it, a gun is the quickest and most effective way to accomplish the act. A person who is serious about killing themselves would be likely to choose this method. We accept generally that the majority, perhaps a vast majority, of people who are serious about killing themselves would still find another method to accomplish the deed if a gun were not available. But we have to consider the likelihood that some people who intend to kill themselves who don't have immediate access to a gun might wait, and the additional time could give them the opportunity to reconsider the decision, ultimately preventing the suicide from occurring. For point of comparison I checked the World Health Organization website where they've published the latest suicide rates available country by country, and I was surprised to find that the United States ranks 35th overall.²⁷

Many of the countries where the suicide rates are higher are those included by gun control advocates who instruct us to compare gun deaths in the United States to other modern, first-world countries including Germany, Sweden, Finland, Ireland, France, China, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. All of those countries have suicide rates higher than the United States, often significantly higher, despite a lack of preponderance of guns. The suicide rate of Canada is only slightly higher than the US. There have been several "happiest countries on Earth" surveys, or reports that have come out lately, and many of those happiest countries have higher suicide rates than the United States, despite stricter gun laws or a lower preponderance of firearms ownership. Those who oppose private gun ownership will use a number like 31,672 total gun deaths per year to make their argument to ban private gun ownership, including the 19,766 gunshot inflicted suicides, and they will argue that the suicides should be included implying that many if not most of them would not have happened if there was not access to a firearm. But when you look at the comparative suicide rates of countries economically similar to our own, it would strongly seem to suggest that access to a firearm provides at best a weak correlation.

To say no suicides would be reduced if private citizens didn't have access to guns is unreasonable and unfair. Certainly some number of people who kill themselves with a gun in the heat of anger

or the depth of despondency would not do so if given time to reconsider their decision, but to suggest that a significant number would not have done so is much more misleading given suicide rates in comparable countries. We can only speculate in any case. Given that we don't have a reliable means to determine how many suicide deaths would not have occurred had the person not had access to a gun, given the numbers we can work with, we can use circumstantial evidence and statistics such as suicide rates abroad to guess at a number. So I would suggest here that 10% of suicides with a gun, roughly 2,000 people per year, would ultimately not happen if private citizens generally did not have access to a gun. They are not victims in the sense that people who are murdered by others are victims, but we as a society would choose to prevent them from killing themselves if we could do so. But even using an estimate like 2,000 is meaningless when we aren't talking about banning all firearms. An assault weapons ban and lower-capacity ammunition clips would have no effect on suicide deaths, which only require a single bullet.

You find a similar conclusion with accidents with firearms. The most recent number I could find was at Tincher.com which indicated that there were 613 accidental gun deaths in America in 2007, and roughly half of those are hunting accidents.²⁸ While there aren't statistics available separating assault rifle accidents or those involving high-capacity clips from more mundane firearms, it's difficult to conceive of banning certain types of guns making any measurable difference. Gun accidents, such as the kind that kill children every year, only require a single bullet. Parents can't be too strongly cautioned of the danger of keeping firearms in a place where children can get them, and they need to understand and believe that children can be taught and disciplined not to touch or go near a family member's firearms. But some people aren't going to be careful enough, and accidents will happen as a result. Four children under the age of 14 are killed every day in America in car accidents despite stricter seat belt and car-seat laws, and that doesn't include children over 14. 43,000 people in America are killed every year in car accidents with another 300,000 injured.

But the issue that has Americans discussing limitations or outright bans on firearms is the issue of mass murders, of people choosing to take up guns for the simple purpose of killing as many innocent others as possible. The solution to this question is first and foremost at issue. As is made clear in this letter, the solution to preventing incidents of mass murder in America such as occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School is cultural. It's an issue of education. If we want to prevent the kinds of tragedies that have become too common, we have to appeal to both parents and children that these simply can not be allowed to happen, that it is the duty of all of us to safeguard against them with both kindness and vigilance. That may sound like a pipe dream or wishful thinking, but that should be our goal. This is a question of a morality-based dialogue that is honest, meaningful, continuous, and not dominated by a profit motive. And if that goal is met in a meaningful way, I predict that we will see meaningful changes. This is not a question of zero tolerance for violence or drug use but zero tolerance for murder and theft and corruption. It is a question of changing our culture in a way that gives people reasons believe in truth, to have faith in one another and to have hope for their futures. It is a question of helping parents to believe in these ideals so they raise their children to believe that there is a reason we are a people that doesn't murder one another.

But that may mean that we have limitations on advertising that has the impact of reducing how much

money advertisers and their corporate clients can make, and it may mean a degree of public involvement in a way that enlightens people's impression of corruption, crime and war. We may, for instance, determine that realistic violence should not appear in advertisements during daytime television, including sporting events. We may determine that the kind of misleading bookkeeping that led to the banking crisis which was a major cause of the Great Recession is criminal, and that those responsible should be treated as criminals. We may find that we want to reign in journalism to a degree when it comes to the constant sensationalizing of violence and crime. Perhaps we will emerge as a society that doesn't have 85% of people supporting the use of unmanned drones to destroy gatherings of people in other countries in order to kill terrorists because those terrorists might attack Americans or American allies at some point in the future if they eventually acquire the means to do so. The government might find it more difficult to use misleading information to promote a war against a country that hasn't attacked ours, that ultimately leads to the deaths of 80,000+ civilians and 3,000+ of our young men and women, that drains our treasury to the tune of three-trillion dollars with nothing gained but multi-million dollar profits for select corporations and private contractors like Haliburton and Blackwater.

With a culture less dominated by media-driven fear it may begin to seem irresponsible to have an annual military budget, which includes inventing and introducing into the world new ways to kill and spy on people, that is six times that of the world's next largest. We may decide that we should have full public disclosure of political contributions so people can know who is contributing how much to influence whom, which has an impact on all of the above issues. In consideration of this, remember that the protections of free speech in the First Amendment were not intended to be unlimited any more than the protection of the right to bear arms in the Second Amendment is unlimited. The vast majority of Americans accept that the Second Amendment doesn't protect the right of individuals to own weapons of mass destruction or even small explosives like grenades, and the Supreme Court has held that there is no Constitutionally-protected right to carry a concealed weapon.²⁹ Likewise the First Amendment doesn't protect all free speech. The right to advertise and sell products is not unlimited and may be regulated. Likewise, as the speech of a person who yells "fire" in a crowded theater isn't protected, the use of demonstrably fabricated political speech to intentionally cause panic can also be regulated and punished. That notion does raise questions of political propriety, but when free speech in the form of money can be used to drown out the free speech of others, we have to believe that the government of the people can take modest steps to right the wrongs.

As many reading this, I am exceedingly skeptical of the notion that our nation will ever have the political will to implement this solution in a meaningful way. There are simply too many people with money to lose. But when President Obama asks, "Are we prepared to say that the violence visited on our children year after year is the price of freedom?", the question should be applied to the media-hyped and money-fed mentality of hysteria in America. If we believe that we can have better faith in our future, in our government and in one another, and we keep working toward the goals we've set of equality before the law, of a country where we can have faith in our institutions that both foster commerce and protect our freedoms, then our reality will become more like that belief. In some ways it is already happening and has been happening for most of our American

history.

The most uplifting message in this letter, other than the fact that the murder rate overall has declined by more than half since 1991 and at its lowest rate on record going back to at least 1960, is the fact that high school graduation rates are at an all-time high. The increase in graduation rates is a victory for those who have sought to teach young people to believe in their future and to work for it. This is money well spent and the result of the kind of education, the teaching of hope and belief in the future, being encouraged here. The programs and education efforts that have produced this result are the kind of public dialogue we need on the subject of gun violence.

Other, more immediate solutions are being considered. The government proposes that we limit assault weapons and limit the ammunition capacity to ten rounds per clip. Most Americans, perhaps even a majority of those who support Second Amendment rights generally, don't find this particularly onerous. I would agree. The first assault weapons ban in 1994 didn't seem to have any detrimental impact on our freedom. The relevant question here, however, is what will we do when the ban passes and it has no meaningful impact on mass murder? As the NRA and other gun advocates rightly argue, the bans are going to have a big impact on at least the property rights of millions without having any significant impact on gun deaths. The impact on suicide and gun accidents will be near zero, and, as nearly all murders could be committed just as effectively with weapons that are less militarized, and criminals will still have a similar degree of access to assault weapons that they currently have, the impact on murder will be negligible. We can hope to see a continued decrease in the murder rate that we've seen for twenty years, and general knowledge of some of the cultural problems considered above will have some impact, but the effect of banning assault weapons will be insignificant. Then do gun control advocates push the ammunition number to seven bullets, as the New York State Legislature has done? Or do they take a more-extreme step, the wrong step for reasons detailed in this letter, and simply ban private gun ownership altogether?

Because that is the goal of the most vocal, most impassioned gun control advocates. And much as with the analysis of suicide casualties, the number of murders would certainly decrease if citizens were prohibited from owning firearms. If private citizens were willing to simply turn their firearms over to the government, another 3,000 murders per year might be prevented nationwide. But that is where history and human nature tell us that we simply cannot go, because we will likely eventually find that we have elected the kind of government that chooses a different way to deal with political dissent with those dissenting having no means to protect their rights, their freedoms and their families. In the not-unlikely event that happens, the price will be the end of freedom as we know it, and the cost in lives may not be thousands per year but millions. Our society has progressed along a mostly-good path for 250 years with private gun ownership protected. We would be more likely to find it unrecognizable in the next twenty or fifty years if the era of private gun ownership, which is our entire history, becomes a memory of the past. The great strides our society has made toward equality, toward the society dreamed of by the likes of Lincoln, Roosevelt and King, can be lost quickly if we don't take the steps to protect them.

It is somewhat ironic that the most liberal of my friends are the most passionate about bringing an

end to private gun rights in America. When a totalitarian government comes into complete power, including total control of firearms, the result is never, NEVER a promotion of social rights in society. The opposite is true. Minorities, whether political, religious or nonreligious, racial, ethnic or otherwise, suffer most. We have many serious issues facing the people of our nation, and we have made great strides forward in most of them. The rights and social position of racial and ethnic minorities have never been more equal to those of the general populace. We are on the precipice of sexual orientation being a non-issue. People may argue that the progress has been too slow, but we are moving in the direction of environmental solvency, with a myriad of energy-saving steps being implemented, including increased wind energy production, reductions in pollution and more efficient transportation being but a few examples. The right to bear arms has existed throughout the entire history of these leaps forward, and millions of Americans consider it one of their core freedoms, that they have the right to bear arms to protect their families and their freedoms. While the drive to disarm the American populace in general may be motivated by a genuine desire to protect the lives of innocent children, the notion of depriving millions of this right, this closely held belief, at this point in time, is lunacy.

I have been careful to write that the number of gun deaths will decrease in the short term if the general population gives up their guns, and that is true. But people aren't simply going to do that. Charlton Heston, the noted gun rights advocate for the NRA, is famously quoted, "I'll give you my rifle when you pry it from my cold, dead hands." He speaks of a heartfelt belief held by tens of millions. Our society is constrained by having to use reason to appeal to people in general to affect changes. While it can be a liability of a democratic nation, it is generally a pillar that has brought us to the place in history we currently find ourselves, and I believe that our history has brought about more good results than bad considering the alternatives. People need to believe that the actions of government are legitimately derived, and as the preceding paragraph demonstrates, it is deeper than a simple case of majority rules. The attempts to simply make health care more broadly available have brought about dissent, encouraged by the conservative media and political pundits, where people in states like Texas talk openly about secession. While such talk should be considered ridiculous and fostered by extreme outliers, it is not a whit of the reality that would occur if the United States government were to take legitimate steps to outlaw private gun ownership. People who support Second Amendment rights applied to private citizens believe in the possibility of the kind of totalitarian government takeover of America that has happened in other nations in the past, and they believe that their right to bear arms is a necessary prevention against such tyranny. As such, it is a question of life or death, and they will defend it with their lives. To even seriously hint at such a thing being a possibility is to fuel the fire of unrest.

And questions of extreme are extremely relevant here. Second Amendment supporters are portrayed as extremists by those on the other extreme. The Garry Wills article "Our Moloch" includes the following quote: "We are required to deny that there is any connection between the fact that we have the greatest number of guns in private hands and the greatest number of deaths from them. Denial on this scale always comes from or is protected by religious fundamentalism. Thus do we deny global warming, or evolution, or biblical errancy. Reason is helpless before such abject faith." It is probably safe to say that many of the most extreme gun advocates profess such beliefs on global

warming, and some hold extreme views on some other issues that might confound reason. But it is extremely unfair and unrealistic to group people who believe in the right to private gun ownership as conservative extremists. Sometimes people have a different viewpoint and different belief systems that yield a different result on issues such as the government confiscating guns from law-abiding citizens. I've been a strong advocate on taking the steps we can take to mitigate the effects of global warming, and I certainly don't consider myself an extremist on the Second Amendment. Most people I know who feel likewise would not consider themselves extremists on the Second Amendment. It is, rather, an issue of deterrence.

And extreme goes both ways. The most serious gun control advocates, like Mr. Wills seems to be, are all too happy to portray people who believe in private gun ownership as nut cases beyond reason. But it would seem that people like Mr. Wills are abjectly unwilling to consider the reasons that reasonable people believe differently. The last fifty years of American history have been turbulent, and we have emerged as the most active nation on Earth in involving ourselves in the world's conflicts. We are the only nation on Earth that has unmanned drones flying around killing people who might be a danger to us, and we are the only nation on Earth that has used atomic weapons to kill others. When our country was attacked by terrorists on 9/11, we responded by starting two wars in the Middle East that ultimately proved to be a knee-jerk reaction. We now have many of our own people advocating the use of spy drones to keep an eye on things here in this country. Is it unreasonable to fear that such a government could shift policy and turn its might against people who actively oppose its policies? What if instead of a planes flying into buildings we have a nuclear weapon detonated in an American city, with a hundred thousand killed, and the subsequent rage leads to a more aggressive president coming to power? Is it unreasonable to think that there are millions of Americans out there who would want to have the ability to protect their families, or to come together to protect their communities? My belief is that President Obama is not among the extremists, and a ban on gun ownership is not going to happen in the near future. But we must continue to lay the foundation that ensures that we don't end up with an extremist government with absolute power down the road, and the protection of Second Amendment rights for private citizens is a necessary rock in that foundation.

Which leads us back to the notion of a gun registry, because if law abiding citizens who want to protect their families, their rights and their communities register their guns, it lays the groundwork for those guns to later be confiscated. And we've shown in our past a great propensity to confiscate what we know others to have. It is said that if guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns. Prohibition created outlaws, and the prohibition of firearms to citizens has resulted in tyranny, and the death of millions, in numerous nations that would have considered themselves to be civilized. Outlawing private gun ownership in America is likely to have grievous consequences from any way the issue is examined. As such, I believe it a reasonable and well-considered position to firmly state that the right of gun ownership for private citizens must be protected.

I am a father of three children, and anyone who knows me would attest to the fact that I consider the duty and the joy of raising my children as seriously as anyone else. It would be customary here to say that I can't imagine the pain of losing a child to a murderer, but that would not be accurate.

Losing one of mine is among the many terrible possibilities I worry about all the time. Many parents likely feel the same burden, but the opportunity to need to love and protect in that way is a special burden that most would not trade or walk away from. I've taken the time to write this letter in part to protect their futures, and the futures of children both here in the United States and outside of our borders. To really love one child is to love all of them. I've often been critical of the direction this country has taken and the decisions our people have made, but I believe that we can continue working toward a world where we have less to fear and more of an abundance to share. I don't have faith that such understanding and enlightenment will happen but rather faith that it can happen. And if you believe that a better future, a better understanding, is possible, then there really is no choice but to make it happen. Any of us able to conceive of better would hope to see a future world where young people don't take the lives of innocent children out of rage, whether we're for private gun ownership rights or against them. But until we reach a point of understanding where everyone feels safe laying down their guns, I believe that we need to protect the rights of the common people to have them. While I would withhold these warm sentiments from no one, for any who have read this letter to the end, whatever your position on the gun issue, please be encouraged or strengthened in your conviction that it is within our capacity to leave this world at least as good as we found it.

So it is.
 Bob Young

Statistics from Disaster Center website

Year	Population	Violent	Property		Murder	Rape	Robbery	assault	Burglary	Theft	Theft
1960	179,323,175	3,384,200	288,460	3,095,700	9,110	17,190	107,840	154,320	912,100	1,855,400	328,200
1961	182,992,000	3,488,000	289,390	3,198,600	8,740	17,220	106,670	156,760	949,600	1,913,000	336,000
1962	185,771,000	3,752,200	301,510	3,450,700	8,530	17,550	110,860	164,570	994,300	2,089,600	366,800
1963	188,483,000	4,109,500	316,970	3,792,500	8,640	17,650	116,470	174,210	1,086,400	2,297,800	408,300
1964	191,141,000	4,564,600	364,220	4,200,400	9,360	21,420	130,390	203,050	1,213,200	2,514,400	472,800
1965	193,526,000	4,739,400	387,390	4,352,000	9,960	23,410	138,690	215,330	1,282,500	2,572,600	496,900
1966	195,576,000	5,223,500	430,180	4,793,300	11,040	25,820	157,990	235,330	1,410,100	2,822,000	561,200
1967	197,457,000	5,903,400	499,930	5,403,500	12,240	27,620	202,910	257,160	1,632,100	3,111,600	659,800
1968	199,399,000	6,720,200	595,010	6,125,200	13,800	31,670	262,840	286,700	1,858,900	3,482,700	783,600
1969	201,385,000	7,410,900	661,870	6,749,000	14,760	37,170	298,850	311,090	1,981,900	3,888,600	878,500
1970	203,235,298	8,098,000	738,820	7,359,200	16,000	37,990	349,860	334,970	2,205,000	4,225,800	928,400
1971	206,212,000	8,588,200	816,500	7,771,700	17,780	42,260	387,700	368,760	2,399,300	4,424,200	948,200
1972	208,230,000	8,248,800	834,900	7,413,900	18,670	46,850	376,290	393,090	2,375,500	4,151,200	887,200
1973	209,851,000	8,718,100	875,910	7,842,200	19,640	51,400	384,220	420,650	2,565,500	4,347,900	928,800
1974	211,392,000	10,253,400	974,720	9,278,700	20,710	55,400	442,400	456,210	3,039,200	5,262,500	977,100
1975	213,124,000	11,292,400	1,039,710	10,252,700	20,510	56,090	470,500	492,620	3,265,300	5,977,700	1,009,600
1976	214,659,000	11,349,700	1,004,210	10,345,500	18,780	57,080	427,810	500,530	3,108,700	6,270,800	966,000
1977	216,332,000	10,984,500	1,029,580	9,955,000	19,120	63,500	412,610	534,350	3,071,500	5,905,700	977,700
1978	218,059,000	11,209,000	1,085,550	10,123,400	19,560	67,610	426,930	571,460	3,128,300	5,991,000	1,004,100
1979	220,099,000	12,249,500	1,208,030	11,041,500	21,460	76,390	480,700	629,480	3,327,700	6,601,000	1,112,800
1980	225,349,264	13,408,300	1,344,520	12,063,700	23,040	82,990	565,840	672,650	3,795,200	7,136,900	1,131,700
1981	229,146,000	13,423,800	1,361,820	12,061,900	22,520	82,500	592,910	663,900	3,779,700	7,194,400	1,087,800
1982	231,534,000	12,974,400	1,322,390	11,652,000	21,010	78,770	553,130	669,480	3,447,100	7,142,500	1,062,400
1983	233,981,000	12,108,600	1,258,090	10,850,500	19,310	78,920	506,570	653,290	3,129,900	6,712,800	1,007,900
1984	236,158,000	11,881,800	1,273,280	10,608,500	18,690	84,230	485,010	685,350	2,984,400	6,591,900	1,032,200
1985	238,740,000	12,431,400	1,328,800	11,102,600	18,980	88,670	497,870	723,250	3,073,300	6,926,400	1,102,900
1986	240,132,887	13,211,869	1,489,169	11,722,700	20,613	91,459	542,775	834,322	3,241,410	7,257,153	1,224,137
1987	242,282,918	13,508,700	1,483,999	12,024,700	20,096	91,110	517,704	855,088	3,236,184	7,499,900	1,288,674
1988	245,807,000	13,923,100	1,566,220	12,356,900	20,680	92,490	542,970	910,090	3,218,100	7,705,900	1,432,900
1989	248,239,000	14,251,400	1,646,040	12,605,400	21,500	94,500	578,330	951,710	3,168,200	7,872,400	1,564,800
1990	248,709,873	14,475,600	1,820,130	12,655,500	23,440	102,560	639,270	1,054,860	3,073,900	7,945,700	1,635,900
1991	252,177,000	14,872,900	1,911,770	12,961,100	24,700	106,590	687,730	1,092,740	3,157,200	8,142,200	1,661,700

1992	255,082,000	14,438,200	1,932,270	12,505,900	23,760	109,060	672,480	1,126,970	2,979,900	7,915,200	1,610,800
1993	257,908,000	14,144,800	1,926,020	12,218,800	24,530	106,010	659,870	1,135,610	2,834,800	7,820,900	1,563,100
1994	260,341,000	13,989,500	1,857,670	12,131,900	23,330	102,220	618,950	1,113,180	2,712,800	7,879,800	1,539,300
1995	262,755,000	13,862,700	1,798,790	12,063,900	21,610	97,470	580,510	1,099,210	2,593,800	7,997,700	1,472,400
1996	265,228,572	13,493,863	1,688,540	11,805,300	19,650	96,250	535,590	1,037,050	2,506,400	7,904,700	1,394,200
1997	267,637,000	13,194,571	1,634,770	11,558,175	18,208	96,153	498,534	1,023,201	2,460,526	7,743,760	1,354,189
1998	270,296,000	12,475,634	1,531,044	10,944,590	16,914	93,103	446,625	974,402	2,329,950	7,373,886	1,240,754
1999	272,690,813	11,634,378	1,426,044	10,208,334	15,522	89,411	409,371	911,740	2,100,739	6,955,520	1,152,075
2000	281,421,906	11,608,072	1,425,486	10,182,586	15,586	90,178	408,016	911,706	2,050,992	6,971,590	1,160,002
2001	285,317,559	11,876,669	1,439,480	10,437,480	16,037	90,863	423,557	909,023	2,116,531	7,092,267	1,228,391
2002	287,973,924	11,878,954	1,423,677	10,455,277	16,229	95,235	420,806	891,407	2,151,252	7,057,370	1,246,646
2003	290,690,788	11,826,538	1,383,676	10,442,862	16,528	93,883	414,235	859,030	2,154,834	7,026,802	1,261,226
2004	293,656,842	11,679,474	1,360,088	10,319,386	16,148	95,089	401,470	847,381	2,144,446	6,937,089	1,237,851
2005	296,507,061	11,565,499	1,390,745	10,174,754	16,740	94,347	417,438	862,220	2,155,448	6,783,447	1,235,859
2006	299,398,484	11,401,511	1,418,043	9,983,568	17,030	92,757	447,403	860,853	2,183,746	6,607,013	1,192,809
2007	301,621,157	11,251,828	1,408,337	9,843,481	16,929	90,427	445,125	855,856	2,176,140	6,568,572	1,095,769
2008	304,374,846	11,160,543	1,392,628	9,767,915	16,442	90,479	443,574	842,134	2,228,474	6,588,046	958,629
2009	307,006,550	10,762,956	1,325,896	9,337,060	15,399	89,241	408,742	812,514	2,203,313	6,338,095	795,652
2010	309,330,219	10,363,873	1,251,248	9,112,625	14,772	85,593	369,089	781,844	2,168,457	6,204,601	739,565
2011	311,591,917	10,266,737	1,203,564	9,063,173	14,612	83,425	354,396	751,131	2,188,005	6,159,795	715,373

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