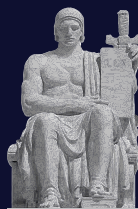
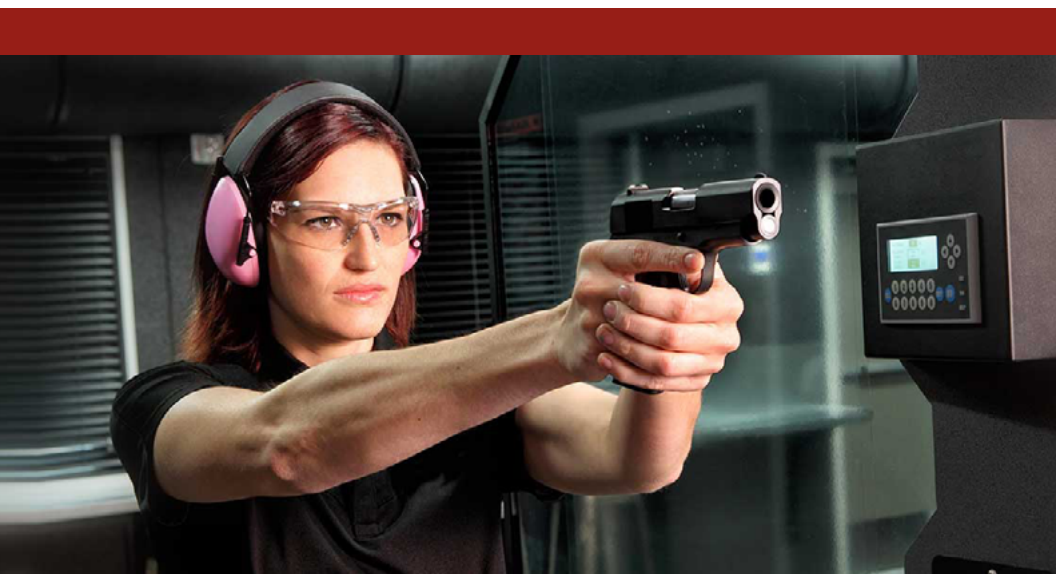


# THE TRUTH ABOUT GUN CONTROL, RACISM AND GENOCIDE



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# *Foreword*

*By Ken Blackwell*

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America's founding fathers understood that the right to own firearms—the right to use effectual force to defend oneself, one's family, one's neighborhood, one's nation—was the difference between a mere subject and a free, independent, *equal* citizen. The United States was designed to enjoy a government of, by, and for the people, as President Lincoln put it. To that end every citizen was entitled, and often required, to own firearms. On the frontier, defending the community was the responsibility of every man.

For black communities, however, the threat has rarely come from invading Redcoats or marauding Indians. Few Americans remember today, as this ACRU paper reveals, that the first task of the Ku Klux Klan was to disarm the black population in the South. Even fewer know that citizen militias repelled white mobs attacking black neighborhoods in many Northern cities in the days before the Civil War. On at least two occasions, those militias were composed entirely of black gun owners. Few Americans realize that during the freedom struggles of the 1960s, civil rights workers of all races were protected by organized black militias in at least three Southern states.

In spite of this heritage of responsible and effective use of firearms, equal citizenship has frequently been denied to black Americans through the use of gun control laws. Such laws were used to keep firearms out of the hands of African-Americans—to deny their very equality as human beings—from the earliest colonial days through the end of Jim Crow in 1965. Many would argue that even today, blacks continue to suffer disproportionate harm from gun control laws, as major cities deny legal firearms to the residents of high-crime urban neighborhoods.

Many black political leaders need to rethink their opposition to the Second Amendment. By supporting government infringement of the right to bear arms, they are not only violating the Constitution, they are robbing their fellow blacks of the ability to defend themselves, and relegating them to second-class citizenship.

One last thought: the coincidence between gun control and the bloodiest genocides of the twentieth century is alarming. If some tyrannical government ever decides to wipe out the black community, their first step will be to confiscate our guns. We must never allow that to happen.

*J. Kenneth Blackwell, the former Mayor of Cincinnati, Ohio, is a Senior Fellow and Policy Board Member of the American Civil Rights Union and a member of the board of the National Rifle Association.*

# *Introduction*

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Gun control laws have been with us almost as long as guns have existed, long before the founding of the United States, but the term “gun control” is a misnomer. A gun is not a sentient being—it is a tool. Gun control laws, in reality, are systems for controlling people. Wherever they’ve been enacted, such laws have usually had more to do with keeping down people who might threaten the political regime or the social order than with regulating firearms for the common good.

This paper will address the role played by gun control laws during the bloodiest genocides of the twentieth century. The paper will also address how gun control has been used historically to control blacks, particularly in America, and how blacks continue to suffer disproportionately from gun control legislation today.

Gun control has a very checkered past. In America, gun control has continually been used to oppress ethnic minority groups. Around the world, disarming the population has been a top priority for tyrants and for ideologues planning to “break a few eggs” to build their earthly utopias. The U.S. Constitution’s recognition of the individual’s right to keep and bear arms as a check against tyrannical government is an enduring testament to the wisdom of America’s Founding Fathers.

## *Amendment II*

**A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.**

# *I: Gun Control and Genocide*

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Dictionary.com defines genocide as “...the deliberate and systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group.”<sup>1</sup> While scholars debate which of a couple of dozen twentieth century mass atrocities should be classified as genocides, there is no question that in each of the six great genocides, in which at least one million people were murdered, mass slaughter was preceded by laws restricting gun ownership for the targeted populations. Three of the six guilty regimes, Mao’s China, Lenin’s Soviet Union, and Pol Pot’s Cambodia, made it their business to disarm the entire population soon after they took power. If the murderous regimes did not enact their own gun control legislation, they preyed upon populations already disarmed by previous governments.

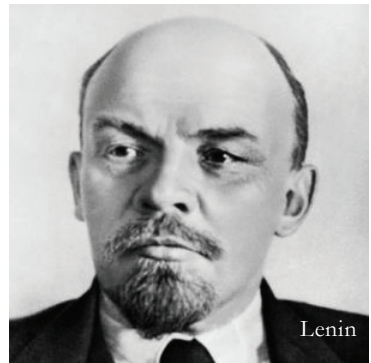
The greatest genocide took place in Communist China, where, according to Jews for the Protection of Firearms Ownership, Mao Tse-tung’s regime killed between 20 and 35 million people between 1949 and 1976.<sup>2</sup> Under the leadership of Chairman Mao, these murders, mostly through mass starvations, were committed mainly during three periods: 1949-52, Communist consolidation of power after overthrowing the Nationalist government; 1957-1960, the “Great Leap Forward,” during which the economy was communized; and 1966-1976, the “Cultural Revolution,” Mao’s attempt to eradicate traditional Chinese culture and customs.<sup>3</sup> The regime’s targets were “political opponents, rural populations, and enemies of the state,”<sup>4</sup> which included Buddhists and Confucians.



By the time Communists took over China, the civilian population had already been disarmed by Nationalist Chinese gun control laws. In 1951 and at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward in 1957, however, the Communist government added its own gun control laws, the Act of Feb. 20, 1951 and the Act of Oct. 22, 1957. These laws denied weapons to “counterrevolutionary criminals,” or “people who resisted any government program,” and specified the death penalty for people who “supplied weapons” to such “criminals.”<sup>5</sup> The 1957 law banned the manufacture, purchase, repair, or possession of firearms or ammunition by the public.<sup>6</sup>

The second greatest genocide took place in the Soviet Union, where Lenin’s and Stalin’s Communist government used mass starvation and labor camps (gulags) to kill off approximately 20 million of its own citizens between 1929 and 1953.<sup>7</sup> The targeted populations were “anti-communists and anti-Stalinists,”<sup>8</sup> and “farming communities,” primarily the owners of private farms (the kulaks) in Russia and the Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> During the collectivization of the farms alone, between 1929 and 1939, “Stalin killed about ten million people, more than all the people who died during the entirety of World War I.”<sup>10</sup>

The regime enacted a variety of gun control laws between 1918 and 1929, beginning with the licensing of gun owners and eventually banning gun possession altogether.<sup>11</sup> Registration of guns was introduced by decree on April 1, 1918,<sup>12</sup> and in October 1918, Lenin ordered “the surrender of all firearms, ammunition, and sabres.”<sup>13</sup> These decrees, issued during the Russian Civil War, were codified in law during the 1920s. In 1935, Stalin added new weapons controls of his own: one law banned carrying a knife, and a gun control decree extended “all penalties, including death, down to 12-year-old children.”<sup>14</sup>



The third great genocide was conducted by Nazi Germany. Between 1933 and 1945, somewhere between 13 and 20 million people were killed in Germany and the portions of Europe overrun by the Nazis.<sup>15</sup> The principal targets were Jews.

In 1928, the German government preceding the Nazis, the Weimar Republic, enacted gun control laws requiring the registration of guns already owned, and permits to acquire new guns and ammunition. The police were given wide discretion to approve or deny applicants, and guns became very difficult to obtain.<sup>16</sup>

The Nazis added to the already restrictive Weimar gun control laws in March 1938. “Persons under eighteen were forbidden to buy firearms or ammunition; a special permit was introduced for handguns; ...Nazi officials were exempted from the firearms permit system; silencers were outlawed; twenty-two caliber cartridges with hollow points were banned; and firearms which could fold or break down “beyond the common limits of hunting and sporting activities” became illegal.<sup>17</sup> Ominously, “Jews were barred from businesses involving firearms.”<sup>18</sup>

Severe persecution of Jews began on November 9, 1938 with Kristallnacht, the “Night of Broken Glass.” Jews throughout Germany were physically assaulted, Jewish shops vandalized, and synagogues burned down by mobs incited by the government.<sup>19</sup> On November 11, Hitler issued a decree forbidding Jews from possessing guns, and demanding the immediate surrender of any guns they did own.<sup>20</sup>



Mass murders of Jews did not begin until after the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941.<sup>21</sup> At first, German SS units slaughtered Jewish populations in Soviet territory; their weapons had already been taken away by the Soviet regime. Later in 1941 the death camps went into operation, and extermination began for Jews and other undesirables from Germany and throughout Nazi-occupied Europe.



*A mother tries to protect her little girl from a German soldier.*

The fourth great genocide, during which ten million people died, was committed by Nationalist China between 1927 and 1949. The Nationalist regime’s genocide targeted its plentiful political opponents. The period was marked by the civil war against Mao’s Communists and the conventional war against Imperial Japan.



According to MSCC, a 1912 gun control law intended to deny weapons to warlords “made it illegal to import or possess rifles, cannons or explosives without a permit.”<sup>22</sup> Article 205 of the Criminal Code (1914) and Articles 186-87 (1935) imposed a permit system and banned private gun ownership altogether,<sup>23</sup> leaving the population unable to defend itself against Nationalist depredations.

The fifth great genocide, the infamous Cambodian Khmer Rouge atrocity of 1975-1979, claimed as many as two million lives from a tiny nation of six to seven million.<sup>24</sup> The Cambodian communists led by Pol Pot targeted political enemies and all educated people,<sup>25</sup> in their ideologically driven crusade to remove all Western cultural influence from their fantasized socialist utopia. The regime starved most of its victims to death during forced marches and relocations, and in Soviet-style labor camps.



*Stacked skulls, the totemic image of  
Cambodia's killing fields*

The Khmer Rouge never bothered to write their own gun control laws, relying instead on a number of statutes left over from the French colonial government. A series of 1956 laws, Articles 322-28 of the Penal Code, required licenses for “guns, owners, ammunition, and transactions,” complete with photo ID and fingerprints.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps it’s a misstatement to say the Khmer Rouge “relied” on the French colonial gun laws, as Pol Pot’s regime respected no laws at all, but the French colonial firearms licensing provided handy lists of gun owners for the Khmer Rouge.

Gun confiscation was at the top of the agenda for the Khmer Rouge. “As soon as the Khmer Rouge took power, they immediately set out to disarm the populace.”<sup>27</sup> Soldiers would occupy a village, demand the surrender of all firearms, and search

all the houses. Once they were satisfied that the villagers were disarmed, they marched the people to labor camps.

The sixth great genocide of the twentieth century was committed by the Ottoman Turks, a Muslim government that murdered between 1 million and 1.5 million Armenian Christians between 1915 and 1917.<sup>28</sup> Severe persecution of the Armenians began after the Ottomans put down an Armenian revolt in 1893. Tens of thousands of Armenians were killed by mobs stirred up by the government, which armed the mobs while attempting to persuade the Armenians to surrender their weapons.<sup>29</sup>

The government began imposing new gun control laws in 1903, by restricting manufacturing and importing gunpowder. In 1910, the Ottomans banned importing and manufacturing, and even carrying, guns and ammunition without permission. In 1915, confiscation of Armenian guns began, with local leaders required to surrender quotas of weapons from their districts.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, Armenian homes were searched and weapons seized.

The genocide began in 1915 with official relocation of Armenians to the Turkish interior.<sup>31</sup> The Turks killed off hundreds of thousands of Armenians by forcing them to march under conditions likely to cause death through exposure and starvation.



*Armenian Christian women crucified, 1915*

Five of the six greatest genocides of the twentieth century were committed by the regime governing the people, not by an invading army. The sixth, the Nazi genocide, involved the slaughter both of German citizens and people in regions occupied by the German Army. Gun control laws proved to be indispensable tools for the guilty regimes in each of these genocides. For totalitarian regimes, disarming the population was consistently a top priority as soon as they took power, and they passed their own gun control laws if the preceding governments had not bequeathed them sufficiently restrictive legislation. Also, as the Germans and Cambodians learned, even a benign government that disarms its citizens leaves the population at the mercy of any future malevolent dictatorship.

## *II: Gun Control and Race*

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The principal purpose for controlling gun ownership over the centuries has been to preserve the power of ruling elites, but gun control has also proved useful in reinforcing the inferior political and cultural status of ethnic minorities and the poor. In the United States, the principal targets of gun control laws, at least until the conclusion of the civil rights era, have been black Americans. Even after civil rights legislation forced gun control laws to be racially neutral, blacks continue to suffer from the disparate impact of gun control legislation in practice.

In feudal England, gun control laws were intended to preserve the power of the nobility. The nobles relied on highly skilled armored knights to enforce their will, but any peasant with a primitive firearm and rudimentary training could easily dispatch the finest lancer. Peasants with firearms were also more effective poachers.



*The earliest gun control laws were designed to preserve the supremacy of the armored knight, enforcer of the nobility.*

Early English gun control laws were used to defang potential rebels. In addition to restricting ownership of handguns to the wealthy, a sixteenth century English gun control law deprived all Catholics of access to firearms. “As early as 1541, England enacted a law that limited legal possession of handguns and crossbows (weapons that were considered criminally dangerous) to those with incomes exceeding 100 pounds a year, though long-gun possession wasn’t restricted—except for Catholics, a potentially rebellious minority after the English Reformation.”<sup>32</sup>

In the Americas, in contrast, the English colonies imposed no class or religious restrictions on gun ownership. In fact, virtually every white colonist was required to be armed, even if government had to provide the weapons. “Initially all Englishmen, and later all white men, were expected to possess and bear arms to defend their commonwealths, both from external threats and from the internal ones posed by blacks and Indians. The statutes of many colonies specified that white men be armed at public expense. In most colonies, all white men between the ages of sixteen and sixty, usually with the exception of clergy and religious objectors, were considered part of the militia and required to be armed.”<sup>33</sup>

Gun control laws did exist, however, and from the earliest colonial days to the period after the Civil War, they were aimed directly at disarming blacks. As civil rights activist Niger Innis put it, “Long before gun control was touted as “common sense” measures, the concept was promoted as a means to keep ethnic populations in an unequal position while assuaging the fears of whites.”<sup>34</sup>

In the New World, the earliest gun control laws were enacted during the 1500s in what is now Mexico to maintain Spanish colonial rule. “Similarly, in the sixteenth century the colony of New Spain, terrified of black slave revolts, prohibited all blacks, free and slave, from carrying arms.”<sup>35</sup>

In the English and French colonies to the north, whites were just as afraid of slave rebellions as the Spanish were. Antebellum gun bans typically extended beyond slaves to free blacks, because whites feared freedmen would help enslaved blacks to rebel.

The earliest American gun control laws were enacted just a few decades after the first English colonies were founded. “In 1640, the very first gun control law ever enacted on these shores was passed in Virginia. It provided that blacks—even freemen—could not own guns.”<sup>36</sup>

In Louisiana, the French colonists tolerated no weapons possession among blacks at all. “Starting in 1751, the French Black Code required Louisiana colonists to stop any blacks, and if necessary, beat ‘any black carrying any potential weapon, such as a cane.’ If a black refused to stop on demand, and was on horseback, the colonist was authorized to ‘shoot to kill.’”<sup>37</sup>

Louisiana's rules eventually relaxed to the point that free blacks were permitted to participate in armed militias, until white fears of black rebellion were rekindled by the Haitian slave revolt in the 1790s, which devolved into a race war. "When the first U.S. official arrived in New Orleans in 1803 to take charge of this new American possession, the planters sought to have the existing free black militia disarmed, and otherwise exclude 'free blacks from positions in which they were required to bear arms,' including such non-military functions as slave-catching crews. The New Orleans city government also stopped whites from teaching fencing to free blacks, and then, when free blacks sought to teach fencing, similarly prohibited their efforts as well."<sup>38</sup>

Nat Turner's Rebellion, a Virginia slave uprising during which at least 57 whites were killed,<sup>39</sup> led to increased gun control throughout the slaveholding South. "While arms restrictions on *free* blacks predate it, these restrictions increased dramatically after Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831, a revolt that caused the South to become increasingly irrational in its fears."<sup>40</sup> "Virginia's response to Turner's Rebellion prohibited free blacks 'to keep or carry any firelock of any kind, any military weapon, or any powder or lead...' The existing laws under which free blacks were occasionally licensed to possess or carry arms were also repealed, making arms possession completely illegal for free blacks."<sup>41</sup>

In reaction to Turner's Rebellion, the Tennessee legislature executed an explicitly racist constitutional revision. "One example of the increasing fear of armed blacks is the 1834 change to the Tennessee Constitution, where Article XI, 26 of the 1796 Tennessee Constitution was revised from: 'That the freemen of this State have a right to keep and to bear arms for their common defence,' to: 'That the free white men of this State have a right to keep and to bear arms for their common defence.'<sup>42</sup>

In 1844, the North Carolina Supreme Court established an overt racial double standard in the law. The Court

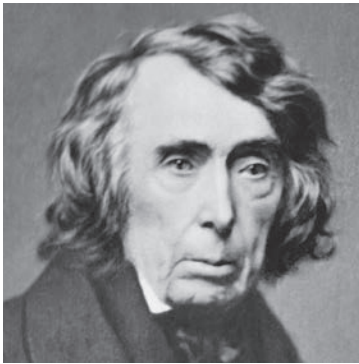


*Rev. Nathaniel Turner*

had acknowledged in *State vs. Huntly*, 1843, that the people had the right to be armed under the state constitution. In the *Nemson* case of 1844, however, the Court upheld a state law denying the right to bear arms to free blacks.<sup>43</sup> While the state constitution guaranteed an individual right to bear arms, the court justified its decision by asserting that free blacks were not citizens.<sup>44</sup>

The Georgia Supreme Court followed suit in 1848, creating a backhanded racial double standard of its own. In *Nunn v. State*, 1846, the Court found a law limiting the sale of concealable guns and bladed weapons to the citizenry unconstitutional. In *Cooper and Worsham v. Savannah* (1848), however, the Court found that blacks were not citizens, in part because they were not allowed to own weapons.<sup>45</sup> The Georgia court's reasoning resurfaced in the U.S. Supreme Court's deplorable 1857 *Dred Scott* decision:

“Chief Justice Roger Taney’s opinion insisted that blacks could not be citizens because, if they were, they’d ‘have all the protections of the Bill of Rights, including the right to full liberty of speech... to hold public meetings on political affairs, and to keep and carry arms wherever they went.’”<sup>46</sup>



*U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice  
Roger Taney*

After the Civil War, slave revolts ceased to be an area of concern, but controlling blacks did not. During the Reconstruction and Jim Crow periods, gun control laws continued to target black populations in an effort to maintain white supremacy. The element of class conflict also appeared, as ruling elites sought to keep firearms out of the hands of the poor—black and white alike.

Firearms became readily available in the post-Civil War years. According to William R. Tonso, “Small pistols selling for as little as 50 or 60 cents became available in the 1870s and ‘80s, and because they could be afforded by recently emancipated blacks and poor whites (with whom agrarian agitators of the

time were encouraging to ally for economic and political purposes), these guns constituted a significant threat to a Southern establishment interested in maintaining the traditional structure.”<sup>247</sup>

“Gunfight” author Adam Winkler noted that Southern white efforts to disarm blacks began soon after the end of the Civil War. The Ku Klux Klan was founded in 1866. “The KKK began as a gun-control organization. Before the Civil War, blacks were never allowed to own guns. During the Civil War, blacks kept guns for the first time—either they served in the Union army and they were allowed to keep their guns, or they buy guns on the open market where for the first time there’s hundreds of thousands of guns flooding the marketplace after the war ends. So they arm up because they know who they’re dealing with in the South. White racists do things like pass laws to disarm them, but that’s not really going to work. So they form these racist posses all over the South to go out at night in large groups to terrorize blacks and take those guns away. If blacks were disarmed, they couldn’t fight back.”<sup>248</sup>





Extrajudicial efforts at gun control were soon accompanied by judicial ones. In 1870, Tennessee banned the sale of all but the most expensive handgun, the Army and Navy model.<sup>49</sup> Arkansas banned the sale of cheap revolvers in 1881.<sup>50</sup> In 1893, Alabama placed heavy taxes on the sale of handguns, to make them too expensive for blacks and poor whites.<sup>51</sup> Texas imposed heavy taxes on handgun sales in 1907.<sup>52</sup>



*Remington 1858 Army and Navy model*

Other states forbade public ownership of handguns altogether. “In 1893 the Florida Legislature adopted a gun control law—that it revised in 1901 and 1906—that prohibited the carrying of handguns and repeating rifles, openly or concealed, with exceptions for peace officers and persons licensed by a county commissioner.”<sup>53</sup> In 1902, South Carolina banned handguns for all except “sheriffs and their special deputies—i.e., company goons and the KKK.”<sup>54</sup>

Were all of these laws really racist in intent? While the text of the laws might not be explicitly racist, selective enforcement made them racist in practice. As Kopel notes, “A 1941 opinion by Florida Supreme Court Justice Rivers Buford provided a frank explanation of why the carry ban was enacted and how it had actually been enforced:

“I know something of the history of this legislation. The original Act of 1893 was passed when there was a great influx of Negro laborers in this state drawn here for the purpose of working in turpentine and lumber camps. The same condition existed when the act was amended in 1901 and the act was passed for the purpose of disarming the Negro laborers and to thereby reduce the unlawful homicides that were prevalent in

turpentine and saw-mill camps and to give the white citizens in sparsely settled areas a better feeling of security. The statute was never intended to be applied to the white population and in practice has never been so applied. We have no statistics available, but it is a safe guess that more than 80 percent of the white men living in rural sections of Florida have violated this statute. It is also a safe guess to say that not more than 5 percent of the men in Florida who own pistols and repeating rifles have ever applied to the Board of County Commissioners for a permit to have the same in their possession and there has never been, within my knowledge, any effort to enforce the provisions of this statute as to white people, because it has been generally conceded to be in contravention of the Constitution and non-enforceable if contested.' (*Watson v. State*, concurring opinion).<sup>255</sup>

Gun control was not limited to the South. In New York, the 1911 Sullivan Law required would-be gun owners to obtain permits from the police first, and obtaining permits proved to be impossible for disfavored groups.

“This law made it possible for the police to screen applicants for permits to possess handguns, and while such a requirement may seem reasonable, it can and has been abused.

“Members of groups not in favor with the political establishment or the police are automatically suspect and can easily be denied permits. For instance, when the Sullivan Law was enacted, southern and eastern European immigrants were considered racially inferior and religiously and ideologically suspect. (Many were Catholics or Jews, and a disproportionate number were anarchists or socialists.) Professor L. Kennett, coauthor of the authoritative history *The Gun in America*, has noted that the measure was designed to ‘strike hardest at the foreign-born element,’ particularly Italians. Southern and eastern European immigrants found it almost impossible to obtain gun permits.”<sup>256</sup>

What about gun control legislation after the Jim Crow and Civil Rights eras? Is it also racist in intent? Many people think so.

The late General Laney, founder of the National Black Sportsmen’s Association and a conservative gun enthusiast, declared anathema all gun control: “Gun control is really race control. People who embrace gun control are really racists in nature. All gun laws have been enacted to control certain classes of people,



General Laney

mainly black people, but the same laws used to control blacks are being used to disarm white people as well.”<sup>57</sup>

Tonso also points out that liberal journalist Robert Sherrill

“...concluded in his book *The Saturday Night Special* that the object of the Gun Control Act of 1968 was black control rather than gun control. According to Sherrill, Congress was so panicked by the ghetto riots of 1967 and 1968 that it passed the act to ‘shut off weapons access to blacks, and since they (Congress) probably associated cheap guns with ghetto blacks and thought cheapness was peculiarly the characteristic of imported military surplus and the mail-order traffic, they decided to cut off these sources while leaving over-the-counter purchases open to the affluent.”<sup>58</sup>

Moving further left along the political spectrum, the radical Black Panthers also condemned gun control. “Panther Minister of Information, Eldridge Cleaver noted in 1968: ‘Some very interesting laws are being passed. They don’t name me; they don’t say, take the guns away from the niggers. They say that people will no longer be allowed to have (guns). They don’t pass these rules and these regulations specifically for black people, they have to pass them in a way that will take in everybody.”<sup>59</sup>

Even the term “Saturday Night Specials” has racist connotations, according to Tonso. “The cheap revolvers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were referred to as ‘Suicide Specials,’ the ‘Saturday Night Special’ label not becoming widespread until reformers and politicians took up the gun control cause during the 1960s. The source of this recent concern about cheap revolvers, as their new label suggests, has much in common with the concerns of the gun law initiators of the post-Civil War South. As B. Bruce-Briggs has written in *The Public Interest*, ‘It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the “Saturday Night Special” is emphasized because it is cheap and is being sold to a particular class of people. The name is sufficient evidence—the reference is to “niggertown Saturday night.”’<sup>60</sup>

In contrast to gun restrictions, the freedom to bear arms has repeatedly enabled black communities in America to defend themselves both before and after the Civil War. Private gun ownership proved instrumental in the defense of black communities in Northern cities during the 1800s. City militias suppressed white mobs attacking blacks in Providence (1831), New York (1834), Pittsburgh (1839), Boston (1843), and Philadelphia (1849).<sup>61</sup>

While blacks were typically excluded from official state militias, in several cities black communities raised their own militias. Black militias repelled white mob attacks on black neighborhoods in Philadelphia (1835) and Cincinnati (1841).<sup>62</sup>

In the South during Jim Crow, black militias formed in several Southern states, and groups of armed blacks occasionally came together to surround jails and protect accused men from being lynched. The famed black journalist Ida Wells-Barnett reported one such incident in Memphis in 1891, in which a hundred men considered to be in danger of lynching were protected by a black militia group for two or three nights. The night the militia went home, a white mob rushed the jail and lynched three men.<sup>63</sup>

Following a series of Ku Klux Klan beatings and murders of civil rights activists in the early 1960s, armed blacks began to escort activists and guard their homes. In 1964, the Deacons for Defense and Justice were formed in Jonesboro, Louisiana to protect black people from violence. In 1965, the Deacons grew to fifty to sixty chapters located throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, and one chapter boasted 900 members.<sup>64</sup>



*Dacons for Defense and Justice*

The practice of armed self-defense can provide a sense of human dignity and equality to a vulnerable person. Cottrol and Diamond quote Wells-Barnett explaining why she decided to buy a handgun:

“I had been warned repeatedly by my own people that something would happen if I did not cease harping on the lynching of three months before.... I had bought a pistol the first thing after [the lynching], because I expected some cowardly retaliation from the lynchers. I felt that one had better die fighting against injustice than to die like a dog or a rat in a trap.

I had already determined to sell my life as dearly as possible if attacked. I felt if I could take one lyncher with me, this would even up the score a little bit.”<sup>65</sup>

Gun control continues to harm racial minorities to this day, with both liberals and conservatives lamenting the disparate impact of gun control legislation on blacks. According to attorney Stephan Bijan Tahmassebi, “More recent, facially neutral, gun control laws have been enacted for the alleged purpose of controlling crime. Often, however, the actual purpose or the actual effect of such laws has been to discriminate or oppress certain groups.”<sup>66</sup>

Liberals tend to emphasize that gun control laws, though “facially neutral,” in fact are far more likely to be applied to blacks. Citing a U.S. Sentencing Commission report for 2013, *The Washington Post*’s Radley Balko writes, “Last year, 47.3 percent of those convicted for federal gun crimes were black—a racial disparity larger than any other class of federal crimes, including drug crimes.”<sup>67</sup> Balko also points out that blacks are more likely to run afoul of mandatory sentencing laws: “In a 2011 report on mandatory minimum sentencing for gun crimes, the U.S. Sentencing Commission found that blacks were far more likely to be charged and convicted of federal gun crimes that carry mandatory minimum sentences. They were also more likely to be hit with ‘enhancement’ penalties that added to their sentences.”<sup>68</sup>

Conservatives, for their part, argue that gun control laws infringe on the right of blacks, who live disproportionately in high crime areas, to defend themselves. Kelly Riddell of *The Washington Times* notes that whites living in relatively safe neighborhoods in Chicago are far more likely to be able to obtain concealed carry permits than blacks in the most crime-ridden neighborhoods. “If you live in 60624,” [a ZIP code in Chicago’s South Side] “you don’t expect your streets to be safe. In the last 30 days, that neighborhood has recorded more homicides, robberies, assaults, thefts, and narcotics charges combined than any other ZIP code in Cook County when measured on a per capita basis. Its population is 98 percent black and averages a median income just above the poverty line.... It also is one of the ZIP codes that registers the fewest active concealed carry firearms permits per capita in the county...”<sup>69</sup> Riddell continues, “Ditto for the crime-ridden neighborhoods of Englewood and West Englewood. Combined with West Garfield Park, out of their 114,933 total residents, only 193 concealed carry licenses have been issued—less than 0.17 percent of the population.”<sup>70</sup>

According to Tahmassebi, “Blacks are eight times more likely to be victims of homicide and two and one-half times more likely to be rape victims. For robbery, the black victimization rate is three times that for whites...”<sup>71</sup>

Tahmassebi argues, “The fundamental civil rights regarding the enjoyment of life, liberty and property, the right of self-defense, and the right to keep and bear arms, are merely empty promises if a legislature is allowed to restrict the means by which one can protect oneself and one’s family. This constitutional deprivation discriminates against the poor and minority citizen who is more exposed to the acts of criminal violence and who is less protected by the state.

“Reducing gun ownership among law-abiding citizens may significantly reduce the proven deterrent effect of widespread civilian gun ownership on criminals, particularly in regard to such crimes as residential burglaries and commercial robberies. Of course, this effect will be most widely felt among the poor and minority citizens who live in crime-ridden areas without adequate police protection.”<sup>72</sup>

A look at crime statistics confirms Tahmassebi’s contention that widespread civilian ownership of firearms has a deterrent effect on criminals. Washington, D.C., a majority black city formerly known as the murder capital of the U.S., has enjoyed plummeting crime rates following the Supreme Court’s 2008 *Heller* decision, which found that the Second Amendment establishes an individual right to keep and bear arms exclusive of participation in a militia. *Heller* ruled unconstitutional the District of Columbia’s extremely restrictive gun laws, which made it a felony to load a long gun in one’s home, effectively banning the use of guns for self-defense.

According to gun control expert Dr. John Lott, more than 72,000 adults owned long guns in D.C. when *Heller* was passed. Lott observes, “After the decision, almost a quarter of the adult population were suddenly able to legally use those guns for self-defense.”<sup>73</sup> Crime rates in the District dropped precipitously in the five years following the *Heller* decision. Crimes using guns dropped especially sharply. Robberies using guns dropped 11.3 percent; assaults using guns dropped 30.9 percent; and the homicide rate fell an astonishing 52.3 percent.<sup>74</sup>

Lott also notes that after the Supreme Court struck down Chicago’s handgun restrictions in 2010, “murder and gun crime rates didn’t rise after the bans were eliminated—they plummeted. They have fallen much more than the national crime rate.”<sup>75</sup>

Gun control has proven to be a useful tool for oppressing blacks politically and culturally in the United States, while at the same time rendering them vulnerable to criminals. Guns in the hands of law-abiding citizens, in contrast, have repeatedly protected ethnic minorities while also driving down crime rates in the most dangerous inner cities. The implication of these facts for black political leaders ought to be obvious.

# *Conclusion*

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If we learn anything from the history of gun control, it is that citizens should be on their guard whenever politicians attempt to impose restrictions on gun ownership. Gun control laws have turned hundreds of millions of people into easy marks for criminals, turned tens of millions into second-class citizens, and exposed tens of millions more to extermination. The ugly history of gun control demonstrates the wisdom of America's Founding Fathers in enshrining in the Bill of Rights the God-given right to self-defense.

As millions of victims can attest with their prematurely terminated lives, the concentration of power in the hands of a despot is the most dangerous threat faced by humanity. Man is a fallen creature capable of performing the most appalling acts of evil. He must be checked. The Founding Fathers understood this fact, so they devised a political system that divided the powers of government. Above all, the Founding Fathers guaranteed the right of self-defense, so that citizens could keep and bear arms to defend themselves should their government lapse into tyranny.

Americans have been negligent in defending their right to self-defense. They have allowed politicians in major cities to minimize and even eliminate the citizen's ability to protect himself, his family, and his property. Do the people living in the disarmed inner cities need to worry that our government, like the twentieth century totalitarians, will murder them? Probably not. They're too busy fending off heavily armed, home-grown predators who are emboldened when their victims are disarmed. But the Jewish citizens of the Weimar Republic also thought they had nothing to worry about.

# Endnotes

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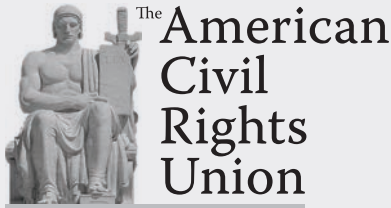
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