

Constitutional Ignorance and Dereliction

[Walter E. Williams](#)

The nation's demagogues and constitutionally ignorant are using the Charleston, South Carolina, AME church shooting to attack the Second Amendment's "right of the people to keep and bear Arms." A couple of years ago, President Barack Obama said, "I have a profound respect for the traditions of hunting that trace back in this country for generations." That's a vision shared by many Americans, namely that the Constitution's framers gave us the Second Amendment to protect our rights to go deer and duck hunting, do a bit of skeet shooting, and protect ourselves against criminals. That this vision is so widely held reflects the failure of gun rights advocates, such as the NRA and Gun Owners of America, to educate the American people. The following are some statements by the Founding Fathers. You tell me which one of them suggests that they gave us the Second Amendment for deer and duck hunting and protection against criminals.

Alexander Hamilton said, "The best we can hope for concerning the people at large is that they be properly armed," adding later, "If the representatives of the people betray their constituents, there is then no recourse left but in the exertion of that original right of self-defense which is paramount to all positive forms of government." What institution was Hamilton referring to when he said "the representatives of the people"?

Thomas Jefferson: "What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms." Who are the rulers Jefferson had in mind?

James Madison, the "Father of the Constitution," said, "(The Constitution preserves) the advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation ... (where) the governments are afraid to trust the people with arms."

George Mason, author of the Virginia Bill of Rights, which served as inspiration for the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights, said, "To disarm the people — that was the best and most effectual way to enslave them," later saying, "I ask, sir, what is the militia? It is the whole people, except for a few public officials."

Richard Henry Lee said, "To preserve liberty, it is essential that the whole body of the people always possess arms, and be taught alike, especially when young, how to use them."

Here's a much more recent statement from a liberal, bearing no kinship to today's liberals/progressives: The late Vice President Hubert H.

Humphrey said, "Certainly, one of the chief guarantees of freedom under any government, no matter how popular and respected, is the right of the citizen to keep and bear arms. ... The right of the citizen to bear arms is just one guarantee against arbitrary government, one more safeguard against the tyranny which now appears remote in America but which historically has proven to be always possible."

There are some historical anti-gun statements that might please America's gun grabbers. "Armas para que?" (Translated: "Guns, for what?") That's how Fidel Castro saw the right of citizens to possess guns. There's a more famous anti-gun statement: "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." That was Adolf Hitler.

At the heart of the original American ideal is the deep distrust and suspicion the founders of our nation had for Congress, distrust and suspicion not shared as much by today's Americans. Some of the founders' distrust is seen in our Constitution's language, such as Congress shall not abridge, infringe, deny, disparage, violate or deny. If the founders did not believe Congress would abuse our God-given rights, they would not have provided those protections.

Maybe there are Americans who would argue that we are moving toward greater liberty and less government control over our lives and no longer need to remain an armed citizenry. I'd like to see their evidence.

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