

Shooting itself in the foot

Corrupt NRA hurts both sides of gun argument



One experience in particular stands out in my tangled consciousness. I was lying on my belly with an M-60 machine gun in my grasp. The streak of the tracers was hurling down range, impacting on an old armored vehicle. The testosterone was flowing through me like a spring flood.

One of my instructors, a sergeant, later remarked to me that he had imagined the greatest death a man could achieve; to go out in a firefight with a barrage of lead and a shower of brass casings. It sounded wonderful to me at the time, but I've learned two things since: 1) there is no such thing as a great, or even a good, death, 2) guns are not objects worthy of my love.

America, the land of the gun owner

Think of all of the homes you've visited. Half of them had guns stowed away somewhere. One in four businesses you've patronized have had owners packing heat. American society has long been obsessed with firearms. This country was born through the use of privately-owned weapons. Our culture is permeated with guns to this day. Thousands of images of guns are pumped into American homes each day. What is the last action movie you saw that didn't show a firearm-related homicide?

This may never change, but last Friday, Smith & Wesson took a step that has the potential to limit the effects of guns on our society. The gun manufacturer declared an agreement with the Clinton administration that put self-imposed sanctions into place.

In two months, all Smith & Wesson handguns will come with external locks. Within a year all hand-

guns will be designed so a child under six cannot "readily operate" them. Other parts of the agreement cleared the way for a second serial number and a national ballistics database.

In return for its civic responsibility, Smith & Wesson promised they would receive protection from lawsuits in the future, and several local governments would drop suits now pending. These controls are a necessary first step toward a safer America.

NRA, the most pathetic organization in America

The University of Nebraska recently held a campus election, you may not have

noticed, in which 14.4% of the student body voted. We look at that figure and think, "How pathetic." But consider the NRA, who, according to Jack Anderson (author of "Inside the NRA"), less than four percent of NRA members cared enough to send in their ballots to elect their president in 1995.

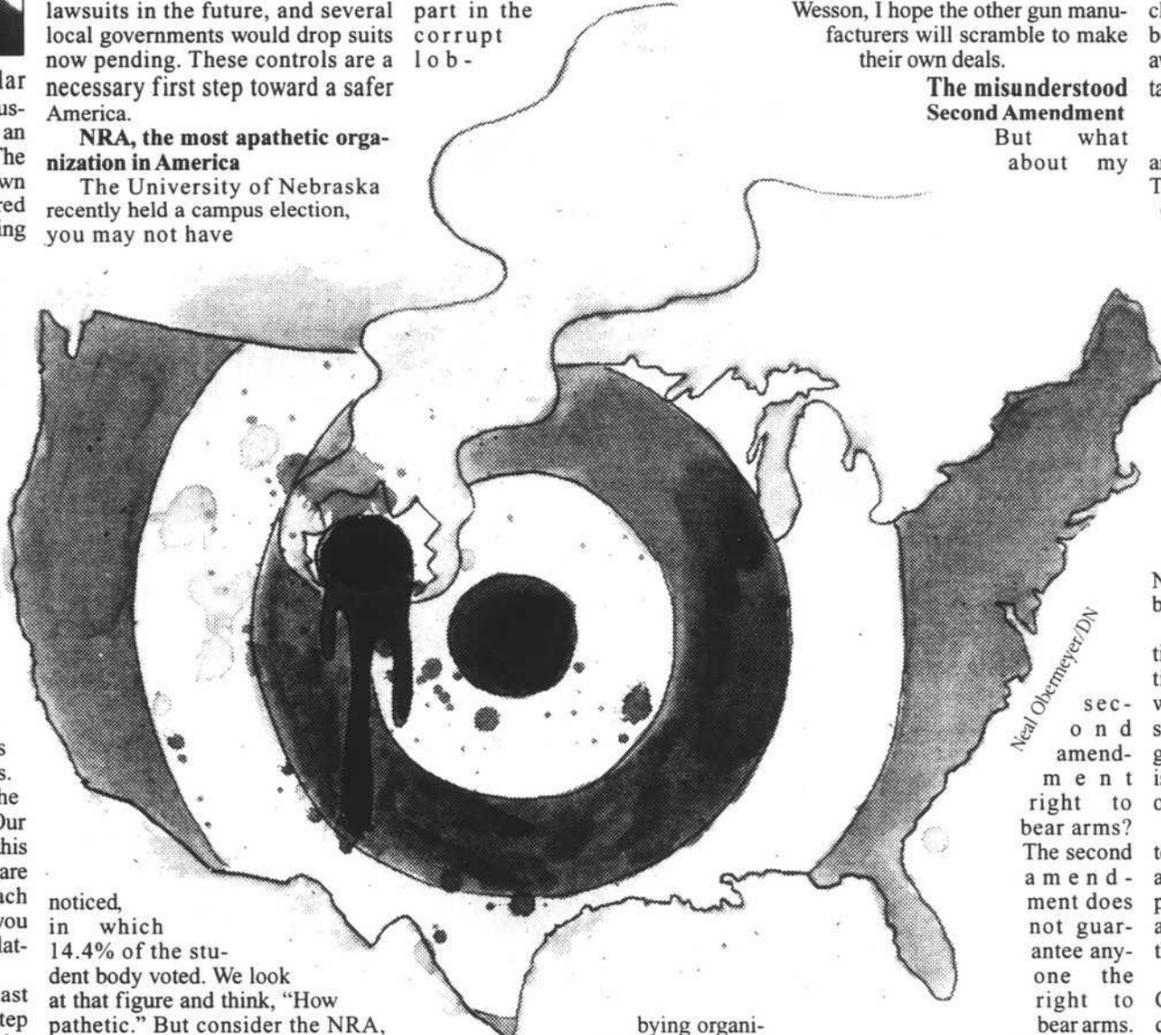
This is why the NRA leadership has an open mike to say whatever they want and bribe whomever they choose. Most of the membership does not even keep up with what is going on in the political end of the organization. They just want to get their magazine and go about their daily lives. Most NRA members I know are reasonable people who enjoy hunting or sport shooting and would have no part in the corrupt lobby-

ernment. But I don't think any reasonable person can tell me they need an AK-47 or a handgun. And if we want to allow these things to exist, they should be regulated to the full extent of the law, no matter what the NRA leadership says.

With the defection of Smith & Wesson, I hope the other gun manufacturers will scramble to make their own deals.

The misunderstood Second Amendment

But what about my



Neal Obermeyer/DN

second amendment right to bear arms? The second amendment does not guarantee anyone the right to bear arms. The second amendment proclaims: "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." A well-regulated militia, not sportsmen, hunters or any crackpot

who wants to buy one. The U.S. Third Circuit Court of Appeals in *U.S. v. Tot* found that "weapon bearing was never treated as anything like an absolute right." Deadly weapons have been regulated by societies since their invention, and ours is no different.

We try to keep guns away from children and felons, and it's time we began to keep the truly deadly guns away from everyone except the military.

Technology is the real issue

The essence of the gun control argument isn't about rights or crime. These are important issues, but the essence of the gun control debate is acceptable levels of danger. Some objects are just too dangerous to give to the average human being. This was not true in the days when our constitution was written. Back then, most dangerous weapons in the hands of the average man were very unlikely to kill someone.

The guns were slow-loading and inaccurate. Technology is what makes guns so dangerous today. The constitution refers to arms, not guns. So why doesn't the NRA lobby Congress for the right to bear nuclear weapons?

This would fulfill the constitutional framers' idea of a strong militia. This is preposterous not because we don't have the right to protect ourselves, but because they are too dangerous. The question becomes: When is an object so dangerous it must be outlawed?

I want hunters and target shooters to keep their rights to engage in these activities and none of the limits and precautions suggested by the Clinton administration would infringe upon that.

The NRA leadership can hire Charlton Heston, or the Pope for all I care, to do their TV ads. This will not change the fact most Americans can see that gun rights and safety are not incompatible. So, until we can all put on our little munchkin outfits and sing "The NRA is dead, the wicked NRA, the wicked NRA," I'll accept any positive steps gun manufacturers are willing to take.

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The Bible tells me so

Religion adopts secular values to stay alive



"Both sides read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes his aid against the other..." —Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address on the Civil War (1865)

A century ago, religion appeared to be on its last legs, an archaic remnant of a superstitious past.

Darwin's proof of evolution had stormed on to the stage, Hume and others had shown that the philosophical arguments for God's existence were fallacious and Freud argued that belief in God was an infantile delusion.

Marx hoped to wean society from the "opiate of the people," and Nietzsche declared "God is Dead."

But God didn't die. Instead, religious belief remains as strong as ever. Even in today's "secular" world of "moral degradation," 98% of Americans say they believe in God. (Stark, 1994)

Part of the reason religious belief remains so strong is because most people have a need to feel that some divine presence is watching out for them. But while belief in God remains constant, the social effects of this belief have changed dramatically in the past century.

A little over a century ago, many cities and states had laws forbidding people from working or shopping on Sundays in order to observe the Sabbath.

These "Blue Laws" had ample Biblical support (Exodus 20:8-10, Nehemiah 10:31) and were tied to severe punishments. In colonial times, for example, violators could be fined, whipped or sentenced to spend time in the stocks. Repeat violators could be executed.

As commerce became more important, enforcement became lax. This raised the ire of many of the era's religious leaders.

One reverend in 1890 said "We see this desecration of the Sabbath increasing every year, giving up a little here and giving up a little there...I want to say to the working man, if you give up the Sabbath, you give up the best friend you've got..." (Hill & Cheadle, 1996)

Now of course, these laws are largely forgotten and present-day religious leaders don't seem to mind. In the late 1800s, religious lead-

ers were also appalled at the "loose morals" and increasing "godlessness" of the nation. Today we blame this on movies and the Internet; back then, it was blamed on alcohol.

Citing scripture (Proverbs 20:1, Isaiah 28:7), the Women's Christian Temperance Union formed the "Anti-Saloon League of America." Over 60,000 churches joined the movement. Thirteen years after it went into effect, Prohibition ended due to difficult enforcement and the Depression.

Today, advocates of Prohibition and the supporting scriptures are routinely ignored.

Of course, the Bible was used to justify much more heinous practices than just banning liquor or work on Sundays. For most of its history, Christianity was united in supporting racism and slavery.

They had ample Biblical support (Leviticus 25:44-46, Exodus 21:20-21) and some used it to resist the abolition movement of the 19th century.

A typical example was said by a Baptist minister in 1856: "...Jesus Christ recognized [slavery] as one that was lawful among men...Jesus Christ has not abolished slavery by a prohibitory command; and...he has introduced no new moral principle which can work its destruction..." (Hill & Cheadle, 1996)

As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The greatest blasphemy of the whole ugly process was that the white man ended up making God his partner in the exploitation of the Negro."

Christianity slowly adopted the secular values of ending slavery and segregation and allowing people to choose when to work and when to drink.

Another example of a change in Christianity is the extreme changes in attitude by mainstream religious organizations toward once adamantly opposed practices like divorce (Mark 10:6-9) and contraception (Genesis 38:7-10).

Being divorced is no longer a stigma in politics, and fundamentalists cannot be found blocking access to a pharmacy that dispenses birth control pills. Yet at one time divorcing and using birth control were seen as severe violations of God's Word.

These dramatic shifts in view demonstrate how malleable the Bible really is. As Shakespeare said, "Even the devil can cite scripture for his purpose."

Anyone who reads the Bible, literally or not, brings his or her own biases, prejudices and expectations into the act. They all highlight some passages and ignore others, while explaining away contradictory passages to their favor.

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This practice is dangerous; racism, the subjugation of women and hatred and discrimination toward homosexuals have all been justified at one time by quoting scripture.

Last week the Pope apologized for, among other things, the brutal slayings of thousands of heretics at the hands of the Crusaders. The Crusaders' battle-cry? "God wills it!"

In the end, the Bible is just an empty tomb full of empty words. It's time to close the book, open your eyes and think for yourself.

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