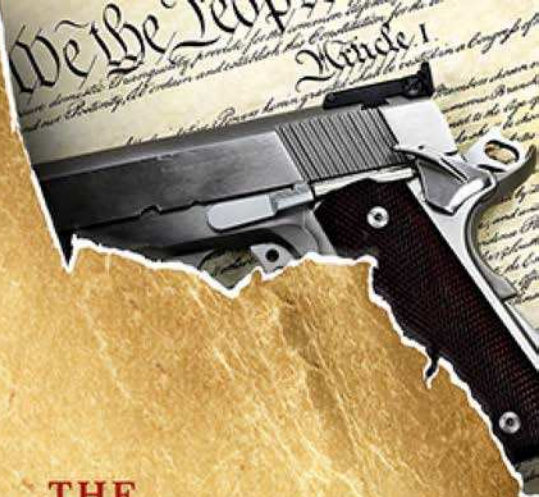


"34,000 REASONS  
TO READ THIS BOOK:  
That's the number of  
gun-related deaths  
annually in America."

—Norman Lear



THE  
HIDDEN HISTORY *of*  
GUNS  
*and the* SECOND  
AMENDMENT

*New York Times* Bestselling Author

THOM HARTMANN

## **Praise for *The Hidden History of Guns and the Second Amendment***

“If every American were to read this book and take its message to heart, the lies that are used to divide could lose their power. And we might just find the common ground that so frequently eludes us.”

—**John Nichols, National Affairs Correspondent, *The Nation***

“America, with 5 percent of the population, ended up with 50 percent of all the guns, worldwide, in civilian hands.”

—**Medea Benjamin, author and cofounder of CODEPINK**

“Thom is the professor America needs. If people knew what he knows, we’d have a vastly different country.”

—**Cenk Uygur, Host, *The Young Turks*, and CEO, TYT Network**

“Hartmann unravels the anemic underpinnings of the deafening claims by gun rights advocates for constitutional sanction while showing how gun rights ideology, born from slavery, is rooted in racial hatred and tribalism manipulated by economic demands of racketeering gun manufacturers and their corporate and political allies.”

—**Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.**

“When Thom Hartmann talks, I listen. This book about the history of guns in America is important, mind-opening, and profoundly helpful.”

—**Marianne Williamson**

“Thom tells us what we can do right now to move forward.”

—**Larry Cohen, Chair, *Our Revolution*; Past President, Communications Workers of America; and Founding Chair, Democracy Initiative**

“Thom Hartmann adroitly links the relationship of guns to slavery from Columbus through Reconstruction to racism in present-day America. This book should be required reading for every legislator.”

—**Earl Katz, political ethicist and Emmy-nominated documentary producer**

“A powerful stepping-stone to a new understanding about and approach to gun reform in the Wild West of nations.”

—**Mark Karlin, founder of BuzzFlash.com and former Chairman and President, Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence**

“This profoundly personal yet insightful historical work so wonderfully encapsulates the pulse of our time and the sea change the Parkland kids and others have made in our national, and deadly, struggle with guns in America.”

—**Stephanie Miller, national radio host**

“Political sloganeering aside, guns do in fact kill people. It’s a national plague directly traceable to a handful of corporate profiteers, gun lobby extremists, and gutless politicians. In this liberating book, Thom Hartmann exposes their scam and proposes a path to gun sanity.”

—**Jim Hightower, populist radio commentator, syndicated columnist, and editor of the monthly newsletter *The Hightower Lowdown***

“There is a widely accepted false choice that either we protect the lives of our schoolchildren or we protect our freedom to own guns, but we can’t do both. This book explains how we’ve come to think in such black-and-white terms and how the debate over guns has become so polarized as to seem intractable.”

—**John Robbins, bestselling author and cofounder and President, Food Revolution Network**

THE  
HIDDEN  
HISTORY  
OF GUNS *AND THE*  
SECOND AMENDMENT

THOM HARTMANN



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

# The Hidden History of Guns and the Second Amendment

Copyright © 2019 by Thom Hartmann

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921

Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

[www.bkconnection.com](http://www.bkconnection.com)

## Ordering information for print editions

*Quantity sales.* Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the "Special Sales Department" at the Berrett-Koehler address above.

*Individual sales.* Berrett-Koehler publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626; [www.bkconnection.com](http://www.bkconnection.com)

*Orders for college textbook/course adoption use.* Please contact Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626.

Distributed to the U.S. trade and internationally by Penguin Random House Publisher Services.

Berrett-Koehler and the BK logo are registered trademarks of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-5230-8599-6

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-8600-9

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-8601-6

Digital audio ISBN 978-1-5230-8603-0

2019-1

Book production: Linda Jupiter Productions; Editor: Elissa Rabellino; Cover design: Wes Youssi, M.80 Design; Text design: Morning Hullinger, The Color Mill; Proofread: Mary Kanable; Index: Paula C. Durbin-Westby

*To the memory of my friend  
Clark Stinson*

*This page intentionally left blank*

# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	vii
<b>PREFACE</b>	x
<b>INTRODUCTION: The Social Cost of Guns</b>	1
1. The Unholy Alliance of Racism, Genocide, and Guns	6
2. The Sanitized History of America	10
3. The Roots of American Gun Culture in the “Discovery” of America	15
4. From Columbus to Jamestown	18
5. From Genocide to Slavery	22
6. Early Hints toward the Second Amendment	26
7. Gun Culture’s Ebb and Flow	28
8. How Slavery Laid the Foundation of the Second Amendment	31
9. Gun Culture Enshrined: The Second Amendment	34
10. A Constitutional Rorschach Ploy: Limits on Slavery?	36
11. How Europe’s History of Mercenaries and Military Coups Shaped the Second Amendment	41
12. How Fears of Abolition Shaped the Second Amendment	47
13. The Myth of the Well-Armed Cowboy	52
14. The Gunshot That Ended Reconstruction	61
15. The Failure of Reconstruction and the Rise of the Klan	63



16.	Racists Turn Open Carry into the New White Hood	69
17.	Copwatching and Its Connection to Gun Control	76
18.	One Sunny August Day in Texas	82
19.	1966: A Turning Point in America's Gun Culture	89
20.	Guns, Militarism, and the War on Drugs	95
21.	<i>Heller</i> : Reinterpreting the Second Amendment	99
22.	Political Corruption Underwrites America's Gun-Control Nightmare	109
23.	Gun-Control Activists Are Confronting Only the Tip of the Iceberg	114
24.	Neoliberalism Drives Inequality; Inequality Drives Mass Murder	118
25.	Weapons of War on America's Streets	125
26.	Semiautomatic Weapons	127
27.	What America Learned from Cars—and How to Apply It to Guns	133
28.	Gun Manufacturing in the 21st Century: 3-D Printing	137
29.	Well-Regulated Smart Guns Are Here	140
30.	Addressing Racism to Reduce Gun Violence	144
31.	Learning from Other Nations	148
	<b>NOTES</b>	151
	<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	160
	<b>INDEX</b>	162
	<b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</b>	170

# FOREWORD

*By Mike Farrell*

Years ago, probably the late '70s, I went to a fund-raising event in Los Angeles to hear Rev. George Regas, one of the founders of the Interfaith Center to Reverse the Arms Race. I remember being struck by a unique part of his fund-raising pitch that day. He said that our society's priorities are upside down: human existence is being endangered by the makers of war, so in a rational society those working for peace should be funded by the government while the Pentagon has bake sales to raise its budget.

He said it better than that, but the idea stuck with me. And when I think about it, so many of the things we do in this country tell me he's right. The "official" policies are too often counterproductive in a society that claims to respect the dignity of each individual, in a state that claims to believe in equality and says it intends to "promote the general welfare." The general welfare means, roughly, taking care of the needs of the common citizen. And that's us, folks.

But take a look at poverty, climate change, health care, racial and gender equity, the proliferation of guns; name your issue. Whatever it is, we clearly seem to have gone pretty far off track in a lot of areas in a lot of ways and find ourselves wondering why we're stuck in opposition to one another.

When that happens, I've found it helpful to look for thoughtful, clear-eyed people who are capable of taking a

dispassionate look at a troubling issue or situation and parse it, take it apart logically, and in so doing provide a better understanding of not only the issue itself but its history, the factors or elements that have led us to a place that is so obviously deeply wrong but somehow seems too overwhelmingly complicated to ever get right.

Happily, there are such people in our world. They are leaders, but not necessarily part of formal leadership. Think of them as thought leaders. One of the best of them, I believe, is Thom Hartmann, the author of this book.

Like Rev. Regas, Thom recognizes that we have inverted our priorities and wants to do something about putting us back on our feet. Thom does it by first educating himself, and then reading more, debating, learning, studying, assessing, questioning, and challenging. Once his ideas are formed, he puts them out there by talking, speaking formally, broadcasting, studying more, challenging more, and writing. His books, more than 20 by now, cover a wide range of subject areas. But you've picked up this one because it deals with a very current, very deadly national dilemma: gun violence.

Typical of Thom, he doesn't simply leap into today's debate and make a well-thought-out argument on one side of a thorny question. Instead, in *The Hidden History of Guns and the Second Amendment*, he lays out a path of paving stones, asking you to look at the way in which firearms were introduced into our world, by whom, and for what. He walks you through a history replete with the ugliness of the worst kind of human behavior and allows you to see the processes by which

a culture within a culture can develop. He explores racial attitudes, the extremes of colonialism, the demands of exploration, national expansion, and the costs of the assumption of white supremacy.

Much of what he relates about the development of our country will make you wince. But all of it is presented without fear or favor in order to create an understanding of who we are and how we came to the place we find ourselves in today.

And then he offers insights and ideas about what might be done to ease the pain, to find a way to resolve the apparent dilemma posed by the tension between those wanting to live a completely free and independent life and those living happily and productively in a free society that imposes necessary constraints. He points us toward finding a way to resolve it all in a manner that allows those with differing philosophies to respect themselves and one another, while living comfortably together.

Enjoy the trip. I did.

*Mike Farrell, best known for playing Capt. B.J. Hunnicutt on M\*A\*S\*H, is the author of Just Call Me Mike: A Journey to Actor and Activist and Of Mule and Man.*

## PREFACE

*The characters I've played, especially Bret Maverick and Jim Rockford, almost never use a gun, and they always try to use their wits instead of their fists.*

—James Garner

There was a high deck of wispy clouds, with bits of bright blue sky cracking through, and it was bitterly cold, two days before Christmas 2008, in Lansing, Michigan. The wind cut right through you. A little less than a foot of crystal-white snow covered the ground, most of it accumulated over a few small storms during the past two weeks.

Two of my brothers, one of their kids, and one of mine all drove out to the small nearby town of Mason, where one of the area's larger shooting ranges was located. My brother Steve has collected guns for years and even built a small shooting range behind his rural house on the Grand River. When my wife, Louise, and I visit Michigan, we usually stay with Steve and his wife, and during the summers we target-shoot competitively on his backyard range. (Steve is not a hunter; he's mostly a vegetarian, in fact.)

Inside the shooting range, there were numerous paper targets for sale; they included black-outlined Muslim men in turbans, depictions of big men with nappy hair, and the usual round bull's-eyes.

The store attached to the range was huge—from the outside it looked like a one-story warehouse with a few windows

clustered around a bumped-out entrance with weather doors in the center of the long building. Inside, long rows of glass cases held many of the more than 2,000 guns they boasted of having in inventory.

Behind the glass cases were long stretches of shelves for ammunition, which I was pretty sure from previous visits were usually full. Today they were nearly empty.

I rented a .40 caliber semiautomatic pistol (wanting some practice with something that could kick) while my brothers and our kids were making their selections. The guy taking my money was tall and thin, his pale skin highlighted by wispy facial hair.

“I’ll take two boxes of 40s,” I said.

“No, you won’t,” he said. “One box per customer.”

“Why’s that?”

“We’re nearly out of ammunition,” he said, waving at the shelves as if it should have been obvious to me.

Wondering if there’d been a Christmas run on bullets (this was rural Michigan, after all), I said, “Why’s that?”

He snorted as if I were mentally defective. “You noticed that black guy<sup>1</sup> who just got elected?”

“Obama?”

“There’s another?” He squinted at me.

“What’s he got to do with your ammunition?”

“He’s going to take away our goddamn<sup>2</sup> guns and ban ammo. People are stocking up! Where the hell<sup>3</sup> have you been?”

“I didn’t know Obama wanted to take away my guns,” I said tentatively.

He snorted again and then pulled a cellphone from his back pocket, poked the screen, and scrolled down for a moment. “Look,” he said, holding the phone in front of me where I could read it. It was an email titled, in bold screaming type, “Obama is coming for your guns in January!”

“How do you know?” I said.

“Can’t you effing read?”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t make it true. There’s lots of crap on the internet.”

He shook his head. “It’s true, I seen it on Fox, too. And you can only buy one box.”

I sighed and handed him my driver’s license and credit card. You can’t challenge Fox News in this part of the country.

The great ammunition shortage of December 2008 was the first of two—the second, coincidentally, was in December 2012, right after President Obama was reelected. An explosion of hysterical emails and widespread coverage of Obama’s “coming gun extermination program” preceded both. Which is pretty ironic, given that the only gun effort Obama had undertaken was to allow them in national parks. Nonetheless, these were such large, nationwide events that there’s even a Wikipedia page about it all.<sup>4</sup>

Between the weapons manufacturers and right-wing pundits trying to whip up fear and increase donations and listenership, a black man in the White House was a huge boon for the death industry. Earlier in the year, as Barack Obama and Joe Biden were gaining on John McCain and Sarah Palin, Nancy Lanza got a divorce from her husband and, with her

son Adam (who was to become the Newtown, Connecticut, shooter), began collecting guns.<sup>5</sup>

It was a fateful year.

While the United States has a long and sordid history of violence against both indigenous people and enslaved people, it's largely in the past 40 years that we've seen an explosion in something virtually unknown in the rest of the world: school shootings.

Tracking that outburst of school-based violence, the past 40 years have also seen an actual *decrease* in all crime, violent crime, and gun-related violence. The three most likely factors causing this decrease are the aging of the baby boomer generation (people in their 20s and 30s are the most likely to engage in criminal activity); the legalization of abortion in 1973, leading to fewer unwanted children (unwanted children are more likely to grow up antisocial); and the removal of lead from gasoline in the 1970s (lead damages the brains of children in ways demonstrated to make them more likely to grow up violent).<sup>6</sup>

That said, with our nation awash in guns, the rate of gun violence on a per capita basis in the United States, at 120 killings per 100,000 people, is massively higher than in any other fully developed nation in the world.<sup>7</sup> In Japan, the odds of a person being killed by a gun are the same as those of being hit by lightning: one in 10 million. In England and Poland, it's one in a million; and in countries with widespread (although reasonable) levels of gun ownership, like Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, it's one in two million.



In the United States, there are 96 gun-based deaths a day, every day of the year.<sup>8</sup>

This book examines the sources of this proclivity for gun violence that's so deeply embedded in the American psyche. By learning and understanding our history, we can begin the process of recovering from it. Finally, you'll find clear, simple, and effective solutions (that work within the boundaries of the Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court) to our gun-violence crisis.

# The Social Cost of Guns

*In my lifetime, we have lost a President, a Civil Rights leader and  
a Presidential candidate—all to gun violence.*

—Marianne Williamson<sup>1</sup>

It was the late 1960s, and Clark Stinson had joined the army. It wasn't that he wanted to go fight in Vietnam; he hoped that by joining up, he could get a job that would allow him to avoid combat duty. And he'd probably get drafted if he didn't join, given his lottery number.

He came home to Lansing, Michigan, from boot camp on a brief leave extremely depressed. A year before, Clark had joined his best friend—they were inseparable through several years of middle school—spending a summer living in a teepee in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where they both studied religion and meditation practice deep inside the Cherokee National Forest.

When he looked up his friend, he noted that it was Christmastime, and the Vietnam War was still raging. He wanted out of the army but knew that pretty much every option available to him would lead either to exile or to jail. His friend listened attentively but couldn't offer anything other than sympathy.

Two days later, Clark made a decision. He visited a gun store near his home and bought a small pistol and a box of bullets. He went home, sat on his bed, and thought about his

future for an hour or so. Then he put the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

His wife, Colleen, called me in hysterics. I was Clark's best friend, the guy he'd confided his depression to, although he never told me that he was considering suicide. It was a shattering experience for all of us who knew and loved Clark.

Society lost an extraordinary human being. I lost my best friend, and Clark's mother lost her son. Colleen lost her husband.

Every year in America, the firearms industry sells about 16 million new weapons into the American civilian mainstream (generating more than enough profits to fund pro-gun groups and PR), while this nation suffers around 34,000 gun-related deaths.<sup>2</sup> Two-thirds of all American gun deaths are suicides, the result of the efficiency of guns at producing a quick and painless death (although they leave a gruesome mess for survivors), combined with continuous access in gun-owning households so that a momentary depressive impulse that could be backed away from via a second thought with an overdose or a slit wrist becomes, instead, nearly 100 percent fatal.

The role of impulse combined with availability becomes starkly visible when compared with the experiences of other countries. For example, when Australia put into place stringent gun-control measures and a nationwide gun-buyback program in 1996, the already-declining annual rate of *all* suicidal deaths, which had fallen by roughly 3 percent, fell dramatically to a more than 7 percent annual decline.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, the percentage of all homicides committed with guns—74.5 percent in 2016 in the United States<sup>4</sup>—also went down in Australia with the 45 percent drop in gun ownership that immediately followed the introduction of more stringent gun laws.<sup>5</sup> That drop was similar to the drop in suicides. The peer-reviewed journal *Injury Prevention* noted, “Australia’s 1996 gun law reforms were followed by more than a decade free of fatal mass shootings, and accelerated declines in firearm deaths, particularly suicides. Total homicide rates followed the same pattern.”<sup>6</sup>

The social cost of gun homicides and suicides in the United States—including lost productivity, the “value” of the lost lives, and expenses directly associated with gun deaths—is, according to peer-reviewed research performed by Timothy M. Smith of the University of Minnesota, around \$300 billion annually, more than the entire nation was spending on Medicaid in 2013 when the research was published.<sup>7</sup> That works out, essentially, to a \$2,380 annual tax on every American household.<sup>8</sup>

And that number doesn’t include the more than 80,000 firearms-related injuries reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) every year, each costing more than twice as much as other injury-related hospitalizations, because bullets cause such extensive damage to organs, bones, and tissue.<sup>9</sup>

It’s hard to know exactly how many children are killed or maimed by guns because in 1996, Rep. Jay Dickey, R-Ark., at the behest of the National Rifle Association (NRA) and weapons manufacturers, attached the Dickey Amendment to