

Armed America: Firearms Ownership and Hunting in America

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DISARMING THE AMERICAN PAST

Professor of History Michael A. Bellesiles's *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* is a startling book that attempts to demolish many long-cherished beliefs about early America, violence, guns, and the effectiveness of the militia. *Arming America* received a flood of positive praise in book reviewsⁱ including reviews by some of America's most eminent historians and law professors.ⁱⁱ Only a very few reviewers suggested that *Arming America* might have been in error or overstated the case in its astonishing revision of the place of guns in American historyⁱⁱⁱ--and only one of those critical reviews was by a history professor.^{iv}

What are these long-held beliefs that Bellesiles regards as myth? He argues that the militia was, throughout American history, an ineffective force;^v that guns were very scarce in America before about 1840; there was effectively no civilian market for handguns before 1848;^{vi} and that few Americans hunted.^{vii}

The first question that the reader of this book might ask is, "So what?" Why does it matter if the militia was an effective alternative to a standing army? Why does it matter if guns were rare or if they were common? Why does it matter if early Americans hunted with guns, or obtained meat by trapping wild game and slaughtering livestock with knives and axes?

All of these questions play a significant, if indirect role in the modern debate about what sort of gun control laws should pass constitutional muster. Bellesiles argues that the population was not well-armed when the Bill of Rights was adopted, and that the Second Amendment's purpose was to have the population armed for the benefit of the government. It was not for individual self-defense, and not for the purpose of rebellion against a tyrannical government. Judges, when asked to decide what gun control laws should be found constitutional, might persuade themselves, based on *Arming America's* claims, that they are free to allow strict gun control laws without violating the Second Amendment. Bellesiles's intent on this can be deduced from the argument advanced in an *amicus curiae* brief that Bellesiles signed for the government's appeal of *USA v. Emerson* (N.D.Texas 1999).^{viii}

Ideas have consequences. If Bellesiles's claims are true, it could provoke a significant change in American jurisprudence, because the individual rights' perspective on the Second Amendment has enjoyed a dramatic renaissance in the last twenty years.

Arming America makes very strong claims. There is, as Bellesiles acknowledges, a nearly unanimous tradition among American historians for more than a century that guns and hunting were a fundamental part of our frontier tradition. Bellesiles must provide strong evidence to claim otherwise, in the face of such overwhelming agreement. From the near unanimous praise that *Arming America* has received from American historians, one might conclude that *Arming America* makes this case with impeccable logic and overwhelming evidence.

The first of Bellesiles's claims—that the militia was quite ineffective—is the least controversial. Many Americans have grown up with a vision of Minutemen, running out the door, Kentucky long rifle in hand to take on the "Redcoats." Historians have recognized for at least 40 years that for every success of the "citizen soldier" in defending home and nation, there were far more examples of militias turning tail in battle, or simply leaving for home because harvest time had come.

Bellesiles devotes enormous energy to demonstrating that the militias were almost never successful, and that only professional armies were an effective military force in America. He argues that the militia was unreliable, undisciplined, and usually more interested in socializing and drinking than in developing any useful military skills.^{ix} Bellesiles also argues that Americans were poor shots, because they had little experience with

guns;^x militia units did their best to avoid exhibitions of their marksmanship skills, because they were so embarrassingly inaccurate.

Bellesiles argues that the notion that armed citizens formed into militias would be a useful alternative to standing armies, or that they could usefully act as a restraint on governmental tyranny, was a romantic delusion of the Framers of our Constitution. While the militia concept did not work out as the Framers envisioned, neither were militias the unrelentingly incompetent and drunken mob that Bellesiles portrays. Bellesiles is correct that militias were never as well-trained as standing armies, and seldom very effective in fighting against regular troops. Similarly, there was really no realistic alternative to at least a small standing army, especially on the sparsely populated frontier.

Why does Bellesiles put such an emphasis on the failure of the militia? One of the reasons that the Second Amendment protected an individual right to keep and bear arms was the colonists' mistrust of professional soldiers.^{xi} There was a belief among many of the Framers that the best security for a free society was a military that was united with the citizenry. Patrick Henry, at the Virginia ratifying convention, argued that the new federal government represented too great a centralization of power in the hands of the new chief executive:

If your American chief be a man of ambition and abilities, how easy is it for him to render himself absolute! The army is in his hands, and if be a man of address, it will be attached to him, and it will be the subject of long meditation with him to seize the first auspicious moment to accomplish his design; and, sir, will the American spirit solely relieve you when this happens? [T]he President, in the field, at the head of his army, can prescribe the terms on which he shall reign master, so far that it will puzzle any American ever to get his neck from under the galling yoke.^{xii}

One of the defenders of the new Constitution, James Madison, also believed that the militia, composed of the entire body of citizens, represented an effective force for restraining tyrannical government:

Let a regular army, fully equal to the resources of the country be formed; and let it be entirely at the devotion of the [Federal] Government; still it would not be going too far to say, that the State Governments with the people on their side would be able to repel the danger. The highest number to which, according to the best computation, a standing army can be carried in any country, does not exceed one hundredth part of the whole number of souls; or one twenty-fifth part of the number able to bear arms. This proportion would not yield in the United States an army of more than twenty-five or thirty thousand men. *To these would be opposed a militia amounting to near half a million of citizens with arms in their hands*, officered by men chosen from among themselves, fighting for their common liberties, and united and conducted by governments possessing their affections and confidence. It may well be doubted whether a militia thus circumstanced could ever be conquered by such a proportion of regular troops.^{xiii} [Emphasis added]

If, as Madison and Henry believed, the militia represented an effective military force, then the “armed citizens restrain tyranny” argument has considerable strength. Whatever the merits of restrictive gun control today might be for crime control, it would be foolish to discard the protections of the Second Amendment without developing some other method of keeping tyranny in check. Auschwitz, the Khmer Rouge, and the Gulag Archipelago, all provide sobering reminders of what happens when governments operate without checks on their power, and professional armies are responsible only to their officers.

The ineffectiveness of the militia is really a sideshow in *Arming America*, and not even particularly new. The truly novel part is Bellesiles's claim that guns were scarce in America until nearly the Civil War. Why were guns scarce? Because not only were guns expensive, but also because, “the majority of American men did not care about guns. They were indifferent to owning guns, and they had no apparent interest in learning how to use them.”^{xiv}

Bellesiles asserts that this lack of both interest and knowledge was because of the fundamentally peaceful nature of early America^{xv} and that hunting was very rare until the mid-1830s, when a small number of wealthy Americans chose to imitate their upper class British counterparts.^{xvi} Indeed, Bellesiles claims that by the

1830s, a pacifist movement, fiercely hostile to gun ownership, to a military, and to hunting of any form, was becoming a major influence on American society.^{xvii}

Bellesiles first presented these ideas in a *Journal of American History* article in 1996.^{xviii} Bellesiles's claim that guns had been rare in America until the Mexican War is intriguing, and was initially an attractive explanation for why eight slave states took the lead in the development of concealed weapon regulation in the period 1813-1840. It might explain why so many of these laws regulating the carrying of deadly weapons (including handguns) appeared at a time that Bellesiles claims America was changing from a peaceful, gentle, almost unarmed nation, into a land of violent gun owning hunters.

Bellesiles is incorrect. The traditional view of early America as a place where guns and hunting—and at least in some regions, violence—were common, was repeatedly articulated in travel accounts, memoirs, and diaries. Bellesiles's choice of sources has been atypical and in his zeal to confirm a new and unique hypothesis, he has simply misread his sources, apparently in the pursuit of a dramatic new discovery. Unfortunately, novelty is, at times, of more value in the academic community than accuracy. Who wants confirmation of what is already conventional wisdom? The iconoclast—the revisionist—is always more interesting!

The phrase “revisionist history” carries a negative connotation to many who are not historians. To historians, however, “revisionist” simply means an historian who proposes a dramatic change of our understanding of the past. There is a grand tradition of scholarly revisionist history, and it is part of the process by which our imperfect knowledge of the past improves. Revisionism is simply the process by which historians advance radically different theories to explain why past events happened. Why did the American Revolution happen? Why did the Puritans settle New England, leaving the relative security of England for a howling wilderness? These are questions for which the explanations accepted a century ago have been supplanted by new theories that better fit established facts, or new facts obtained through research of either primary sources, or increasingly, archeological evidence.

If *Arming America* were in the grand tradition of scholarly revisionist history, this article would also be in the grand tradition of responses to revisionist history. Such responses sometimes expose a fatal flaw. More commonly, responses to revisionist history may raise important questions about the new theory, but not completely demolish it. Over time, parts of the revisionist theory—appropriately tempered by criticism and perspective—may become part of the conventional perception of history.

Such responses to revisionist history often include an analysis of the revisionist historian's logical reasoning errors, other possible explanations of the evidence the revisionist has cited, and an examination of evidence that the revisionist has not considered. In some respects, this article is that traditional sort of refutation. Some of *Arming America*'s ambiguous sources will be closely read, and it will be seen that Bellesiles has read those sources as evidence that supports his claims, while other legitimate readings could argue against those claims. Evidence that Bellesiles did not examine will also be brought to bear against his claims.

Unfortunately, *Arming America* is *not* in the grand tradition of scholarly revisionist history in one very disturbing and crucial respect, and consequently this article is also untraditional. The most damning evidence against *Arming America* comes from *Arming America*'s own sources—many of which directly contradict Bellesiles's claims about what those sources say. *Arming America* contains altered quotes, altered dates, quotes out of context, and unambiguous sources that have been grossly and inexplicably misrepresented.

These factual errors do not concern minor points, nor are there just a handful of such gross misreadings. When reviewing Bellesiles's sources, it was rare to find that his representation of a source was correct. It was common to find that the cited source directly contradicted Bellesiles's claim. In some cases, the cited sources were utterly irrelevant to Bellesiles's claim.

The historical profession works on an assumption of integrity—that when an historian makes a factual claim, and cites a source, that he has actually looked up the cited source and that the fact cited appears in that source. *Arming America* fails on this count: repeatedly, bluntly, and unambiguously.

EVALUATING GUN SCARCITY

The most incredible of Bellesiles's claims is that guns were scarce in America, almost everywhere, until the 1840s, when modern manufacturing methods finally made guns cheap enough and modern

marketing techniques effective enough for them to become common. Before asking the question: “How many?” we first need to ask, “How do we know how many?” How does one measure the number of guns present in different periods of American history? Bellesiles’s claim is based on a combination on probate records, official reports, and letters.^{xix}

Attempting to deduce anything about gun prevalence from probate records has some problems. How representative are probate records of what average Americans owned? Were probated estates unusual in terms of wealth, literacy, or urbanization? Bellesiles has not made publicly available much of the data from which he drew these conclusions. (*The yellow notepads on which he recorded much of his data were destroyed in a flood at about the time that scholars first asked for copies.*)

At least *some* of the data sets from which Bellesiles draws his conclusions, however, are publicly available. Professor James Lindgren of Northwestern University School of Law and Justin Lee Heather, a law student at Northwestern, have examined some of these data sets and Bellesiles’s claims do not stand up to independent review:

One run of probate records that Bellesiles cites is a published set of about 186 decedents’ estates in colonial Providence in 1679-1729. Even though he finds high gun ownership in Providence in this period (48%), he undercounts the percentage of estates listing guns substantially—according to our careful count, 63% of white male estates with itemized personal property inventories had guns.

Bellesiles also claims that most of the guns in the (approximately) 90 Providence inventories listing guns “are evaluated as old and of poor quality.” In fact, only about 9% of the guns are so listed. Bellesiles claims that he included only white males in his 186 Providence estates when he apparently included 17 women. He claims that all 186 estates had both wills and inventories when less than half did.^{xx}

Lindgren and Heather also examined other data sets of probate records and property inventories, and demonstrate that Bellesiles’s claims about the completeness of probate records lead to some inescapable conclusions, one of which is that seventy percent of estates probated in 1774 had not even one penny in cash (a most unlikely possibility), and that twenty-three percent of colonial Americans owned no clothing of any kind (an even more unlikely possibility).^{xxi}

The Providence probate records, for which Bellesiles makes especially striking claims about the relative scarcity of guns, when reviewed by Lindgren and Heather, are especially striking for how common guns are:

Thus if axe and knife ownership was near universal in Providence, then gun ownership was probably near universal as well, since guns are as commonly listed as axes (65%) and more commonly listed than knives of all kinds, including table knives (36%). If one compares gun ownership (63%) with the ownership of swords, cutlasses, bayonets, and other edge weapons (30%), the difference is particularly striking. Indeed, the odds of finding a gun in a colonial Providence inventory are 4.1 times as high as the odds of finding a sword or other edge weapon.

Guns were as commonly listed in Providence estates (63%) as all lighting items combined (60%): candles, tallow, candlesticks, oil, lamps, and lanterns. Gun ownership is as common as book ownership (62%) and much more common than the ownership of Bibles (32%).^{xxii}

My own limited examination of estate inventories more closely match Lindgren and Heather’s results than Bellesiles’s. The first volume of *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* contains a small number of both wills and estate inventories covering 1639 to 1663. The wills are of no value for determining what items were commonly owned; some are detailed as to who will receive particular goods while others list only a few specific items to be left to particular heirs.

The thirty-five estate inventories are more useful, although even these have their problems with many household goods being lumped together under the category of “tools.” These estate inventories provide a minimum count of guns actually owned at the time of death.

One problem with the estate inventories is that they represent a disproportionately older population--those who were less likely to be subject to militia duty and less likely to use guns for hunting because of

physical infirmity and declining eyesight. Another problem is that there are wills recorded that lack estate inventories, such as those of Connecticut colonists William Froste and George Willis,^{xxiii} suggesting that not all deaths resulted in an estate inventory, raising questions about how typical such property distributions were.

We also find some reminders that guns were not just a male accessory, and so Bellesiles's focus on the estates of men may be misleading. Thomas Scott's estate inventory was divided into two sections: one listing goods "delivered to the Wydow Scott for her use," and another listing "Goods of Tho: Scots sett aparte for his 3 daughters." Mrs. Scott received a fowling piece, a matchlock musket, a sword, and a pair of bandalers (used for carrying ammunition). The three daughters received a snaphance flintlock and "1 cok mach musket," apparently a matchlock.^{xxiv}

Nathaniel Foote's estate inventory lists £5 of ammunition—but no guns. Thomas Hooker's estate inventory lists £4 of ammunition—but no guns. Both estates were quite extensive^{xxv} and one can assume that because guns were of fairly low value that they were not listed. Another possibility is that the ammunition was left over from a time when Foote or Hooker owned a gun, and the gun had been sold or given away, but the ammunition remained. For purposes of this analysis, we assume that estate inventories that list ammunition but no arms had no guns present at the time of the inventory.

John Porter's estate inventory lumps together "five silver spoons; and in pewter and brass, and iron, and armes, and ammunition, hempe and flax and other implements about the roome and in the sellar" valued at £35:14:0.^{xxvi} Were these "armes" guns? The inclusion of "ammunition" suggests yes, and so we assume at least one gun was included among "armes." The same assumption can be made for Abraham Elsen's estate inventory that includes "his arms and munion" valued at £1:15:0, and John Elsen's "his arms and ammunition" valued at £2.^{xxvii}

Estate inventories list valuations of goods, but often guns are lumped together with swords and other military gear: "a musket, a sword, bandaleres & a rest" valued at £1:5:0.^{xxviii} This makes it difficult to determine the actual appraised value of the guns; we can only produce maximum values for these guns, perhaps far in excess of their actual value. The numbers are interesting and paint a very different picture from Bellesiles's account of scarce and expensive guns. Of the thirty-five estates examined, 66% explicitly list guns, or list "armes and ammunition."

The maximum number of guns in an estate inventory is six, for James Olmstead: "3 musketts, one fowleing peece, 2 pistolls."^{xxix} The average number of guns in estates that list guns or "armes and ammunition" was 1.78. The average value of the guns was £1:2:0. If guns were actually scarce, one would expect their value to be high, not low.

Along with probate records, however, most of Bellesiles's argument for gun scarcity is derived from official records and readily available documents. Before examining how Bellesiles has misread those materials, it is worth asking how one would recognize gun scarcity in primary sources.

It is perhaps wise to start out by understanding what contemporary sources can and cannot tell us about a period. The truly mundane objects and concerns of life may receive no mention at all. Objects that are unusual may be mentioned precisely because they are uncommon. When examining sources from early America, it is important to recognize that the *manner* in which writers mention firearms may tell us as much about their scarcity as the mention itself.

For example, a resident of modern New York City who encountered a deer in Central Park would describe the experience very differently than would a resident of Cougar, Washington meeting a deer in downtown Cougar. The New Yorker would almost certainly comment on the presence of a deer with great amazement, perhaps writing a letter to the newspaper, leaving it for future historians to cite as evidence. The resident of Cougar, Washington, would find a deer so unremarkable that there would almost certainly be no written record. Yet we all recognize in which city today it is more likely that one might encounter a deer.

Another problem with the use of what are necessarily impressionistic sources is the human tendency to overgeneralize. If you were to ask most members of the academic community how many Americans own guns today, they would probably severely underestimate the actual percentage based upon their own circle of acquaintances. The results might be somewhat different the other direction if you asked people at a local shooting range.

If we find writers in early America identifying hunting and firearms as "common" or "widespread," it might be argued that they have overgeneralized from their experiences. For that reason we might reject one

writer's observations. We might reject the accuracy of such an observation if the writer came from a nation where both firearms and hunting were less common than in America. The novelty of seeing firearms might cause a foreigner to overgeneralize from a small number of personal experiences. We cannot, however, reject large numbers of independent observations from writers both American and foreign, from different regions of pre-1840 America that reach similar conclusions without assuming some sort of shared delirium.

It is also important to distinguish those accounts that describe what *should* be from what *is*. Bellesiles's 1996 *Journal of American History* paper quotes from an 1843 children's book that condemns guns themselves as evidence that the public was "completely uninterested in firearms."^{xxx} Lesson 42 in McGuffey's 1836 *Eclectic First Reader*, another children's book of the same era, heartily condemns rum and whiskey,^{xxxi} but no one who has read *The Alcoholic Republic*^{xxxii} would consider McGuffey's condemnation to be evidence about the scarcity of alcohol in antebellum America. Those who wrote children's literature often intended to discourage behaviors that were *too* common among the adult population or that were inappropriate for children.

Bellesiles relies heavily on official records to make his claims. These records include government contracts with arms makers, militia returns, and other primarily military data. If, as Bellesiles claims, there was little hunting or civilian interest in guns in early America, then information associated with the military use of guns might be an effective method of identifying patterns and levels of gun ownership and use. But if Bellesiles is incorrect, and guns were commonly used for sporting purposes, then records associated with military uses of guns will tend to understate the number of guns in America and distort the relationship that Americans had with guns.

One difficulty with evaluating primary sources is that they were not written with the goal of assisting the historian and are often ambiguous. How an historian interprets a particular text can reflect the assumptions that he brings to it. As an example, Samuel Wilson's account of Carolina, published in 1682, devoted a paragraph to discussing the available game:

The Woods abound with Hares, Squirrels, Racoons, Possums, Conyes and Deere, which last are so plenty that an Indian hunter hath kill'd nine fatt Deere in a day all shott by himself, and all the considerable Planters have an Indian hunter which they hire for less than twenty shillings a year, and one hunter will very well find a Family of thirty people with as much Venison and Foul, as they can well eat.^{xxxiii}

One could interpret this passage as indicating by omission that whites did not hunt in Carolina but purchased wild game from Indians. An equally legitimate reading would argue that "all the considerable Planters" hire Indians to hunt their wild game, but this passage, by itself, tells us nothing about whether poorer whites hunted wild game. The discussion of the abundance of wild game could also be legitimately interpreted as an indication that wild game was available for the taking, since Wilson's account encouraged immigration to the New World because of its bounty.

Another problem with evaluating primary source evidence is the question of what is meant by "arms." A dictionary definition of "arms" includes not just firearms, but also swords, pikes, clubs, and other weapons. Bellesiles makes the claim that historians have traditionally interpreted "arms" in primary sources to mean "firearms." Because guns were scarce in early America, Bellesiles argues that this interpretation is incorrect. It is certainly true that there are many primary sources that mention only "arms" without specifying "firearms." But we will see examples of how Bellesiles assumes the non-specific "arms" to mean that there were no guns present—even when his sources are explicit on other pages that "arms" included guns.

Some accounts that use the term "arms" almost certainly mean "firearms" because the events described make no sense otherwise. "The People of this place and countrey... rose up in Arms.... The Fort being Surrounded with above Fifteen hundred men was Surrendered..."^{xxxiv} Why would a fort surrounded by people armed with swords and pikes surrender? Only if those "arms" included guns would the narrative make any sense.

In other cases, the characteristics of the "arms" clearly identify that "arms" means firearms and nothing else. When Connecticut in April 1775 directed purchasing "three thousand stands of arms... as soon as may be..." they also specified characteristics of these "arms" to be purchased: "the length of the barrel three feet

ten inches, the diameter of the bore from inside to inside three-quarters of an inch....”^{xxxv} When Connecticut’s government said “arms” in such a context, they meant “firearms.”

One must examine the totality of evidence when studying what are necessarily incomplete documents. In particular, a recurring issue when examining Bellesiles’s claims of gun scarcity is to see what the people who lived in that time said and did. Did they take steps that indicated that they believed that guns were widely available? Or did they operate as though guns were relatively uncommon? Eyewitnesses should be trusted more than the interpretations of later writers unless there is some clear evidence that the eyewitnesses are untrustworthy or wrong.

In some cases, travel accounts refer to guns or hunting but make no statement about whether these were common or unusual. But if multiple travel accounts for a particular period and region make reference to guns or hunting, and none of them indicate that either is unusual, it seems a bit hard to believe that many travelers just happened upon something that was rare, and failed to make mention that this was an unusual item or event.

It is certainly true that an historian today has the advantage of hindsight and the ability to marshal a variety of pieces of evidence in a way that those living in 1700, or 1800, did not. But Professor Bellesiles’s evidence does not stand up to careful analysis. Indeed, much of his evidence turns out to be false—not misinterpreted, not atypical of other evidence, but misquoted or misread. When Bellesiles’s evidence simply evaporates under the most cursory examination, his argument collapses. *All* of Bellesiles’s claims are severely wanting, in a few cases because of logical errors. But in most cases, because Bellesiles’s claims are based on misquotations and misreadings of his sources.

Why Bellesiles’s book is so remarkably full of errors—and overwhelmingly biased—is an interesting and disturbing question, but one that only Bellesiles will be able to answer.

GUN POSSESSION & GUN VIOLENCE IN COLONIAL AMERICA

Bellesiles emphasizes that the English colonies in America had few firearms and that the few guns that they had were beyond the ability of the vast majority of the colonists to use competently. Bellesiles portrays the Plymouth Colony as remarkably poorly armed: “[Myles Standish’s] was one of only four snaphances held by the settlers, though there were also some battered old matchlocks.”^{xxxvi} How many guns did the Pilgrims have that first year? You might assume, from Bellesiles’s description, that there were only four useful guns, and a few other, out of date weapons. (The snaphance was a new technology; but matchlocks were still considered an appropriate weapon, and were in use at Jamestown as well.^{xxxvii})

Reading the sources that Bellesiles cites tells perhaps not a different story, but one that can be read with a rather different conclusion about gun scarcity and competence. When a party of twenty went ashore at Cape Cod on November 11, 1620, every man carried a firearm.^{xxxviii} Since there were only forty-one adult men who signed the Mayflower Compact,^{xxxix} at least half of the men at Plymouth had a gun.

Bellesiles describes the first defensive use of guns by Plymouth Colony this way: “Arrows flew and the Pilgrims fired their four snaphances while the rest of the force lit their matches with a brand from the fire. They then let off a volley from these muskets and the Indians fled. No one was hurt, though the Nauset learned that the Europeans could make very loud noises.”^{xl} The phrase, “very loud noises,” is clearly intended to portray the Europeans as incompetent with guns.

Yet reading William Bradford’s account of the battle that Bellesiles cites indicates no firearms incompetence. The fight was fierce, unexpected and showed poor planning. (As Bellesiles acknowledges muskets were not accurate.) While most of the attacking Indians retreated, one stood behind a tree, “within half a musket shot of us,” and fired arrows repeatedly at the Pilgrims.

Contrary to Bellesiles’s description of the Indians being frightened off by the noise, Standish’s last shot, after taking “full aim at him,” “made the barke or splinters of the tree fly about his ears, after which he gave an extraordinary shriek, and away they wente all of them.”^{xli} The lack of fatalities among the Indians was not because of poor accuracy, but good use of cover by Standish’s intended target. It also appears that Standish and company may have sought to scare the Indians away more than kill them:

We followed them about a quarter of a mile; but we left six to keep our shallop; for we were careful of our business. Then we shouted all together, two several times; and shot off a couple of muskets, and so returned. This we did that they might see that were not afraid of them, nor discouraged.^{xliii}

Bellesiles devotes considerable energy to telling us how incompetent with a gun even Myles Standish, the professional soldier of Plymouth Colony was; how incompetent the first settlers were in using guns for self-defense; and how short of firearms both Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colony were.^{xliiii}

This is contradicted by the accounts of visitors. Emmanuel Altham, visiting in 1623, described the arrival of the Indian chief Massasoit at Governor Bradford's wedding. Massasoit arrived with "four other kings and about six score men with their bows and arrows—where, when they came to our town, we saluted them with the shooting off of many muskets and training our men."^{xliiv} Issack de Rasieres, a Dutchman visiting Plymouth about 1628 described a militia muster: "They assemble by beat of drum, each with his musket or firelock, in front of the captain's door...." Since de Rasieres indicated that Plymouth had about fifty families, it stands to reason that there were at least fifty muskets or firelocks present.^{xliv}

Bellesiles neglects to mention that in 1630, only ten years after his arrival at Plymouth, John Billington was convicted of murdering a newcomer named John Newcomen by shooting him with a blunderbuss—and Bellesiles cites material from the same source that reports this murder.^{xlvi} According to Bellesiles, "in forty-six years Plymouth Colony's courts heard five cases of assault, and not a single homicide."^{xlvii} In a community that averaged only a few hundred souls, even one murder in ten years is quite dramatic, yet Bellesiles seems unaware of Newcomen's murder.

There are incidents that suggest that guns and violent deaths caused by them were not quite as rare in Plymouth Colony as Bellesiles implies. A dispute over beaver trapping rights on the Kennebec River in 1634 led to the shooting death of Moses Talbot by a Captain Hocking, and in turn the shooting death of Hocking by Talbot's partner.^{xlviii} Another incident at Plymouth—found when I picked a page at random in a book about Plymouth Colony—described how:

On 1 July 1684 Robert Traves of Scituate, described as a 'negro,' was indicted for firing a gun at the door of Richard Standlake, thereby wounding and shattering the leg of Daniel Standlake, which occasioned his death. The jury found the death of Daniel Standlake by 'misadventure,' and the defendant, now called 'negro, John Traves,' was cleared with admonition and fine of £5.^{xlix}

One would think if the goal were to give a full and accurate picture of gun availability and use in America, Bellesiles would include these three troubling incidents. Of course, such incidents might raise some questions about how scarce guns really were in Plymouth Colony and its environs. It would also raise some questions about Bellesiles's claim about the England from which the Pilgrims came: "Most personal violence in early modern England occurred not on lonely highways but at public festivals, often between competing teams of Morris dancers and such other representatives of communal pride."¹

This claim hardly needs refutation. There is no shortage of scholarly study of the problems of personal violence in early modern England, especially along the border counties between England and Scotland. This culture of violence transplanted from Britain played a major part in creating a similar culture of violence in the backcountry parts of the United States.¹

Thomas Morton's description of the erection of the Maypole at Merrymount (a trading post established on Massachusetts Bay in the 1620s) tells us that, "And upon Mayday they brought the Maypole to the place appointed, with drumes, gunnes, pistols, and other fitting instruments, for that purpose...."¹ⁱⁱ Both guns and pistols were present at Merrymount, and more importantly, Morton found no need to explain the presence of long guns and pistols there.

What Morton needed to explain—and chose not to—was his trade with the Indians. When Miles Standish led an expedition to arrest Morton and close down his scandalous establishment, the Pilgrim's primary motivation was not suppressing licentious living by Morton and friends, but suppressing Morton's arming of the Indians. When the Pilgrims arrived in 1620, the Indians had no guns. John Pory's 1623 account reported that those Indians unfriendly to the Pilgrims had been "furnished (in exchange of skins) by some

unworthy people of our nation with pieces, shot, [and] powder....”^{lviii} By 1627, the Indians of Massachusetts Bay were believed to have at least sixty guns, largely supplied by Morton. Morton bartered guns for furs with the Indians, violating royal proclamation against supplying firearms, powder, or shot to the Indians.^{lv}

Concerning the scarcity of guns in Massachusetts Bay, Bellesiles writes:

In 1630 the Massachusetts Bay Company reported in their possession: “80 bastard musketts, with snaphances, 4 Foote in the barrill without rests, 6 long Fowlinge peeces...6 foote longe; 4 longe Fowlinge peeces... 5-1/2 foote longe; 10 Full musketts, 4 Foote barrill, with matchlocks and rests,” one hundred swords, and “5 peeces of ordnance, long sence bowght and payd For.” There were thus exactly one hundred firearms for use among seven towns with a population of about one thousand.^{lv}

The source cited for this claim is “Shurtleff, ed., *Records of Massachusetts Bay* 1:25-26.” But what is actually at that location is *not* a list of weapons in Massachusetts Bay colony. It is not even a list of guns owned by the company. It is a list of “Necessaries conseaued [conceived?] meete for o[u]r intended voiadge for New England to bee prepared forthwith”: a list of arms to be brought over by the company, only some of which were already owned.

There is nothing in the cited pages that indicates that this is a list of *all* the guns in the colony, or that it includes privately owned guns, as Bellesiles implies when he says “one hundred firearms” for a population “of about one thousand.” Even the year that Bellesiles gives is wrong. The dates on the document Bellesiles cites are February 26 and March 2 1628/9 (Old Style). The year 1630 does not appear. (If Bellesiles had given the correct year, most historians would have wondered how the Massachusetts Bay Company could have done an inventory of guns in the colony *before* the colony even existed.) The only part of Bellesiles’ claim that is correct is the list of weapons.^{lvi}

This same list of weapons appears in Harold L. Peterson’s *Arms and Armor of Colonial America*, several pages after a section that Bellesiles cites—but Peterson has the date listed as 1626, which is also wrong. Peterson, however, correctly identifies the meaning of this list: “As the Massachusetts Bay colonists prepared for their voyage, they made a list of the public arms they intended to take with them.”^{lvii}

Shooting was apparently a common enough pastime in 1638 Massachusetts that when an Emanuell Downing had “brought over, at his great charges, all things fitting for takeing wild foule by way of [decoy],” the General Court felt it necessary to order “that it shall not bee lawfull for any person to shoote in any gun within halfe a mile of the pond where such [decoy] shalbee placed....”^{lviii}

Examination of records of the Springfield, Massachusetts, court from 1639 through 1702 provides a number of examples of guns present, and in every case, treated as an ordinary item. There is trial of a woman in 1640 accused of selling her late husband’s gun to an Indian. Her defense was that she did not sell it, but lent it to the Indian, “for it lay [spoiling] in her [cellar],” and she expected to reclaim it shortly. The judge warned her that she should get it home again speedily, “for no commonwealth would allow of such a misdeme[a]nor.”^{lix}

A few months later, there is a civil suit between two men, “for a gunn that he bought of him and paid 22s. 6d.” but had not been delivered.^{lx} There is a criminal case in 1650 involving Thomas Miller, convicted of striking an Indian “with the butt end of his gunn.”^{lxi} Two Indians are fined for drunkenness in 1662, and not having the money for the fine, one of them, “Left a gun with the County Treasurer till they make payment.”^{lxii}

In 1680, Isack Gleson complains that Isack Morgan beat his servant and “took away his Gun and knife.”^{lxiii} There are at least two other cases involving prosecutions for theft of guns, one involving a runaway slave who “stole a Gun in the next Town viz Southfeild” in 1681,^{lxiv} and another theft in 1699, in which the stolen gun was found in Daniel Nash’s shop for repair.^{lxv} Another theft in 1697 involving lead and powder would suggest that the victim owned a gun.^{lxvi} (A civil suit involving “Rifles” in 1661/2 may be a misreading of the manuscript, since rifles were quite rare this early in New England.)^{lxvii}

Even though this court did not normally handle probate,^{lxviii} there are at least three estate inventories contained in its records. One in 1641/2 lists “peeces powder and shott” valued at £3:1:0. Another in 1654/5 lists “a Muskett Sword bandaliers” valued at £1:2:0. The third estate inventory lists no guns.^{lxix} It seems a bit strange, if Bellesiles is correct that guns “were to remain the property of the government”^{lxx} that they would be appraised and inventoried like any other item of personal property.

Accounts of early Virginia routinely mention guns. Augustine Herrman, a Dutch diplomat en route from New Netherlands to Maryland in 1659, described large numbers of guns in use and unremarkable by their presence. “Nothing occurred on the way except hearing a shot fired to the north of us, which the Indians doubted not was by an Englishman. Whereupon we fired three shots, to see if we should be answered, but heard nothing.”

Two days later, having stopped at a Swedish settlement, Herrman was in a dispute as to the ownership of a boat. “Abraham with one Marcus, a Finn, came to our side in a canoe, and would not let us pass... and this Marcus drew a pocket-pistol and threatened to fire if we would not stop. They had, besides, two snaphances... On leaving the river, we heard heavy volley firing on Colonel Utie’s island... which we presumed must have proceeded from fifty or sixty men; it was mingled with music. This lasted until night....”^{lxxi}

One early account of Bacon’s Rebellion describes an incident that led to war between Bacon’s men and the Indians. In a dispute about a murderer sought among the Indians, “the King [chief] pleaded Ignorance and Slipt loos[e], whom Brent shot Dead with his Pistoll. Th’ Indians Shot Two or Three Guns out of the Cabin, th’ English shot into it....”^{lxxii} There is no surprise expressed that the Indians were shooting back, or that they had two or three guns in one cabin. Similarly, a battle between Bacon’s force and the Pamunkey Indians involving gunfire from the Indians is treated as unsurprising.^{lxxiii}

While a description of frontier Virginians during Bacon’s Rebellion “taking their Arms into the Fields... no Man Stirrd out of Door unarm’d”^{lxxiv} could be interpreted to refer to swords or pikes, it is a strained reading. The Indians had guns as the legislature had complained in March 1658/9, “the Indians being furnished with as much of both guns and ammunition as they are able to purchase....”^{lxxv} It seems unlikely that if the settlers were afraid, that they would be working in their fields without guns.

Similarly, a contemporary description of Bacon’s first organizing of men to follow him against the Indians describes them as “about 300 men together in armes....”^{lxxvi} When Bacon later marched into the capital to demand a commission from the governor, he confronted a force of “1000 men well arm’d and resolute...” Other references refer to guns in the hands of both Bacon’s men and the governor’s force.^{lxxvii} Statutes of the time also made repeated references to impressing guns and assumed that guns were available for impressment.^{lxxviii}

Other accounts of seventeenth century rebellions also mentioned guns with no indication that they were at all unusual. A description of a 1677 insurrection in North Carolina described how a Captain Gilliam with thirty to forty men, “with armes of the [said] Gilliam, and headed by one Valentine Bird and Edward Wells... with force and arms *vid.* Swords, guns, and pistols, violently rush into the house....” The author also described threats he had received from others of “hanging, pistolling, or poisoning....”^{lxxix}

Many other accounts and statutes suggest, by their sheer numbers, that guns must have been pretty commonly owned items. A statute adopted at the Massachusetts 1713-14 legislative session complained, “Whereas by the indiscreet firing of guns laden with shott and ball within the town and harbour of Boston, the lives and limbs of many persons have been lost, and others have been in great danger, as well as other damage has been sustained,” the firing of any “gun or pistol” in Boston (“the islands thereto belonging excepted”) was prohibited.^{lxxx}

In 1722, Governor William Keith of Pennsylvania offered to the Indians who would assist in capturing runaway slaves “one Good Gun and two Blankets for each Negro” whom they captured and returned to his master.^{lxxxi} This tells us nothing by itself, but does suggest that either there were few runaway slaves, or guns to be used as rewards were not in short supply.

William Black’s 1744 description of a practical joke played on some Maryland fisherman also suggests that guns were not scarce:

Towards the going down of the sun we saw a boat and canoe fishing inshore. We hailed them with, “Have you got any fish?” They returned with, “Have you got any rum?” We answered, “Yes, will you come on board and taste it?”

Then they untied and made directly for us, but were very much surprised with the manner of reception they met with. We had the [blunderbuss] ready loaded and aimed on the side while they

were to board us. Mr. Littlepage, who was to act the part of the lieutenant of a man of war, was furnished with four loaded pistols and the like number of swords.

With his laced hat and romantic countenance he made an appearance much like another Black-beard. Several more of our company were armed each with a drawn sword and cocked pistol. Several pistols, three fowling pieces loaded, and some drawn swords were lying in view on a table on the main deck.

In this manner were we equipped and stationed ready to receive the poor fishermen. When they came near enough to observe our postures, they immediately lay on their oars and paddles with no small concern to know what we were. In a little time the ebb tide drew them alongside, and Littlepage asked them in a sailor-like manner if they would come on board and serve his majesty. To this they made no reply, but kept gazing at us like so many thunderstruck persons. At last, with a discharge of our great gun and small arms, flourishing our swords round our heads, we asked them to come on board directly, else we would sink them....

A call was made to haul up the barge and man her. This being done, Littlepage and myself got in with each a pair of pistols and a sword and made directly after them. Upon this, they quickened if possible their strokes, pulling for life directly to the shore. Now and then one or other of them would look behind and then cry out, "Pull away! Pull away! or we are all taken."^{lxxxii}

Yale's 1745 regulations for students include the following:

If any Scholar Shall keep a Gun or Pistol, or Fire one in the College-Yard or College, or Shall Go a Gunning, Fishing or Sailing, or Shall Go more than Two Miles from College upon any Occasion whatsoever: or Shall be present at any Court, Election, Town-Meeting, Wedding, or Meeting of young People for Diversion or any Such-like Meeting which may Occasion Mispence of precious Time without Liberty first obtain'd from the President or his Tutor, in any of the cases abovesaid he Shall be fined not exceeding Two Shillings.^{lxxxiii}

If guns were scarce, why did Yale feel a need to pass such regulations? We know at least that Nathaniel Ames, a Harvard student, "went a gunning after Robins" one April day in 1758. It was worth noting in his diary, but so was the arrival of a relative from home with linen, attending a funeral, and going fishing.^{lxxxiv}

Analogies involving guns can also be an indication that guns were common enough that the writer expected others to understand such uses. Benjamin Franklin's letter of December 25, 1750 [Old Style], described "an Experiment in Electricity that I desire never to repeat." Franklin attempted to electrocute a turkey with his static electricity capacitors, and distracted by his audience, shocked himself into unconsciousness. "The Company present... Say that the flash was very great and the crack as loud as a Pistol..." Where the shock entered his finger, "I afterwards found it raised a round swelling where the fire enter'd as big as half a Pistol Bullet..."^{lxxxv}

Franklin, in 1753, while castigating the German immigrants to Pennsylvania for their lack of patriotism, observed Pennsylvania and the lower counties, "raised armed and Disciplined [near] 10,000 men..."^{lxxxvi} Yet Bellesiles tells us that at the start of the American Revolution, more than half of the guns in America were 20,000 Brown Besses sent over during the French & Indian War (1755-1763).^{lxxxvii} These figures allow for less than 20,000 guns prior to the French & Indian War. Yet Pennsylvania and the lower counties alone somehow managed to raise and arm 10,000 men more than 20 years earlier. One must conclude from this statement of fact that

Pennsylvania and Delaware had more than half of the guns in the entire American colonies.

There had been a lot of guns in the American colonies before the French & Indian War that had been broken, lost, or exported.

Franklin wasn't talking about guns when he said "armed," *or*

Bellesiles is wrong about the scarcity of guns in America before the Revolution.

Another example of Bellesiles's curious misreading of sources concerns the 1756 emergency call-up of the Virginia militia:

Colonel Washington reported on the militia to Governor Dinwiddie: "Many of them [are] unarmed, and *all* without ammunition or provision." In one company of more than seventy men, he reported, only twenty-five had any sort of firearms. Washington found such militia "incapacitated to defend themselves, much less to annoy the enemy."^{lxxxviii}

Bellesiles misquoted Washington. Bellesiles leads the reader to believe that Washington was complaining that this was the *general* state of the militia. Washington was clearly referring to only *some* militia units:

I think myself under the necessity of informing your Honor, of the odd behaviour of the few Militia that were marched hither from Fairfax, Culpeper, and Prince William counties. Many of them unarmed, and *all* without ammunition or provision. Those of Culpeper behaved particularly ill: Out of the hundred that were draughted, seventy-odd arrived here; of which only twenty-five were tolerably armed.

Washington considered the militia arriving inadequately armed to be "odd behaviour," and worth mentioning. This suggests that other militia units *were* adequately armed and brought ammunition. Washington sought to have the unarmed militiamen punished, which suggests that their behavior was exceptional, not typical.^{lxxxix} Yet Bellesiles portrays this unusual situation among a "few" of Washington's militia units as normal behavior for the militia that Washington commanded.

Governor Tryon's struggle against the Regulators of the backcountry of North Carolina in the decade before the Revolution provides a number of clues to the level of gun ownership in that colony, and in a way that might not have otherwise ended up in any official records, if not for the rebellion. There *are* occasional hints that gunpowder is scarce in North Carolina in 1769, with Governor Tryon complaining, "in case of war, I could not purchase here twenty barrels of powder...."^{xc} But more careful reading suggests that Governor Tryon's problems had more to do with a reluctance of the legislature to provide ammunition for the governor's troops. Governor Tryon made several requests to the legislature, asking them to pay for ammunition "for the protection of the Country," and found himself carefully rebuffed at first.^{xcii} When the legislature finally acceded to Tryon's request, the language used suggests that the gunpowder and musket balls were to be purchased locally: "the Governor be impowered to draw upon either of the public Treasurers for money to purchase the same."^{xciii}

Other evidence from a thorough reading of *Colonial Records of North Carolina* for 1769-1771 shows that guns appear in a number of contexts and they are not regarded as startling or unusual. One example is the depositions concerning murders committed by felons being pursued by the Sheriff of Dobbs County.^{xciiii} Another example is Governor Tryon's order of February 7, 1771, that prohibited "for a reasonable time from vending or disposing of any fire arms and ammunition least the same should come into the hands of the said people called Regulators or the Mob...." This order applied to "all Merchants, Traders and others... till further notice."^{xcv}

The Regulators were already armed with guns, and this was not considered remarkable. Colonel Spencer's letter to Governor Tryon of April 28, 1768 describes how the Regulators "came up to the Court House to the number of about forty armed with Clubs and some Fire Arms...."^{xcvi} As a general rule, the Regulators were careful to keep guns out of town when engaged in violent disruptions of the court system, and some contemporary accounts express some uncertainty as to whether their men out of town had guns or not. What is interesting and suggestive is that the Regulators outside of town having guns is expressed as a possibility, and not a startling one.^{xcvii} If guns were actually scarce in 1769 North Carolina the writers of these accounts were apparently not aware of it.

As the crisis with the Regulators came to a head, there are other indications that guns were commonly owned. An Anglican minister named Cupples described the difficulties in mustering the militia in Bute County for an expedition against the Regulators: "The Col. of this county was by his instructions only to raise Fifty men exclusive of officers, yet he told me, when he called a general muster that though there were

betwixt eight or nine hundred men under arms, there was not any would list... and proclaimed themselves for the Regulators....”^{xcvii}

Militiamen were certainly armed with their own guns. The only mention of unarmed militiamen is the levying of fines on May 8, 1771, against some militiamen that showed up “without Arms...”^{xcviii} Governor Tryon complains that “this service was undertaken without money in the Treasury to support it, no armory to furnish arms, nor magazines from whence we could be supplied with ammunition...”^{xcix} Orders to various militia colonels indicate that they were to purchase provisions, gunpowder, and lead for their soldiers, “and to defray the expence thereof I will give you a Draft on the Treasury.” “Ammunition to be provided by the men agreeable to Law and what is further wanting will be supplied from the Magazine in Newbern.”^c The only logical reading of such documents is that guns were commonly owned, and ammunition was available for purchase in North Carolina.

Bellesiles claims that at the start of the American Revolution in 1775, “Most of the guns in private and public hands [in America] came from the twenty thousand Brown Besses supplied by the British government during the Seven Years’ War.”^{ci} This means that there were *no more* than 40,000 guns in the American colonies in 1775. Yet in Bute County, North Carolina, alone there appear to have been at least eight hundred guns in private hands—or five percent of *all the guns* in the American colonies, if Bellesiles is correct.

Other evidence that there was a wide variety of guns in private hands can be found in the order from General Waddell, commanding Tryon’s forces, that twenty-four rounds of ammunition be supplied to each soldier, “Bullets, Lead or Swan Shot at the discretion of the Captain of each company.”^{cii} If the majority of guns in America were “Brown Besses,” of a standard caliber, then it made little sense to distribute such a variety of projectiles. Giving soldiers their choice of lead suggests that the militia commonly possessed guns of non-standard calibers.

Once Governor Tryon’s forces were mobilized, there were repeated accounts that demonstrated that the Regulators were well-armed with guns. Contemporary accounts are in agreement that about 4,000 men were part of the Regulator force that battled against Governor Tryon.^{ciii} Governor Tryon described how the offer of amnesty, provided “the rebels... surrender up their arms, take the oath of allegiance and oath of obligation to pay all taxes” had led 3,300 to surrender themselves. While these 3,300 had only surrendered 500 arms (presumably firearms, from the accounts of the battle), Tryon clearly knew that far more had failed to do so: “many of those that surrendered asserted that they were not in the battle, while others pretended to be in the battle without arms.”^{civ} At least twenty-five guns were taken from the rebels immediately after the battle.^{cv}

Morgan Edwards toured North Carolina the year following the battle. He described the results of the battle as 4,000 Regulators fighting 2,000 of Governor Tryon’s men, but that many shots hit no one: “lodging in the trees an incredible number of balls which the hunters have since picked out and killed more deer and turkies than they killed of their antagonists.”^{cvi} Perhaps as Bellesiles claims, Americans were poor shots, but since the weapons of the time were slow to reload single shot muskets and rifles, there must have been *many* Regulators firing guns.

Another contemporary account, from the Boston *Gazette* of July 1771, similarly implied that the Regulators were well-armed with guns. It described how, “the Almighty Ruler of Heaven and Earth could guide the Balls from the Rifles of the Regulators to fly over the Heads of our Troops in the Day of Battle, as they did by ten Thousands; which otherwise, as they were at least five Times the Number of our Troops, must have cut them off by Hundreds, and left the Field a dismal Scene of Blood and Carnage.”^{cvi} The *Gazette’s* account suggests that there was something rather miraculous about so many shots going astray. The Regulators might have been poor shots, but in the American context, this was regarded as miraculous, not the norm—and there were *many* guns being fired.

It would be foolish to claim to know how many of the Regulators were armed with guns. But as contemporary accounts make clear, the Regulators at that battle had, at a minimum, many hundreds of guns—or several percent of all the guns in the American colonies, according to Bellesiles.

Bellesiles’s account of the Regulators is also remarkable in another respect. He claims that, “White Americans had long demonstrated a capacity for violence against Indians and blacks, but, at least in the Colonial period, indicated a remarkable hesitance to kill one another.... Political and social conflicts among whites almost never involved violence—until 1768. In that year English colonists exchanged deadly gunfire with other colonists for the first time.”^{cvi}

This is a most amazing claim by Bellesiles since he previously writes about the Battle of Severn in 1655 Maryland. His version of that battle—in which Royalist colonists seize public arms from the provincial armory, and are defeated by “well-trained troops from a Commonwealth ship”—does not match the eyewitness accounts that Bellesiles cites.^{cix}

According to Bellesiles’s primary sources, 200 to 250 men “mustered in Arms,” on the Royalist side, and at least 120 on the Puritan side. The 120 on the Puritan side were not “well-trained troops from a Commonwealth ship,” but local Marylanders. The ship on the Puritan side, contrary to Bellesiles’s term “Commonwealth ship” was a merchant ship with cannon, not a naval vessel at all. Dozens were killed or wounded.

The Puritans claimed that they commandeered the ship, acting under Parliamentary authority. According to the Royalists, the ship’s captain was paid for his services. Neither side claimed that the ship, or those fighting on the Puritan side, were professional soldiers.^{cx}

The Royalists had plundered many homes for guns and ammunition, “taking all the Guns, Powder, Shot, and Provision, they could anywhere finde,” not “from the provincial armory” as Bellesiles claims. A Puritan account described how the Royalists had stripped the Country bare of men, “as also of Arms and Ammunition; the poor women urging this to them, ‘What should they do if the Indians come upon them?’, being thus strip’d of men and Arms to defend them....”^{cxii} A Royalist account does not dispute that they took “Arms from those of Patuxent,”^{cxiii} and does not imply that public guns were used.

None of the primary sources that Bellesiles cites for the claim that the Royalist used “public arms” seized from the “provincial armory”^{cxiiii} makes any reference to either; every reference to a gun seized by the Royalists is either silent as to its origin, or is explicit that the gun was seized from an individual’s home.^{cxiv} The only public items seized by the Royalists were records.^{cxv}

Bellesiles’s depiction of Leisler’s overthrow of the government of New York in 1689 is similarly at variance with primary sources. Bellesiles characterizes Leisler’s forces as armed with swords and clubs, based on one incident in which they drove four customs commissioners out of the customs collector’s office with swords, and the continuing use of the unspecific “arms” to refer to Leisler’s men being armed. In a like manner, Bellesiles’s description of Leisler’s men taking control of the fort, “They had hoped for a stockpile of English guns, but found instead... only fifteen useable cannon and one barrel of gunpowder” implies that Leisler’s men, before and after taking over the fort, had no guns.^{cxvi}

If the accounts of Leisler’s forces had only used the word “arms” it would be unclear if they were armed with guns. However, another account in Bellesiles’s source for this incident described how Leisler’s men fired into the city, “whereby several of his Majesties Subjects were killed and wounded as they passed in the street....”^{cxvii} Other accounts in that same source, seeking to justify Leisler’s actions, reduced the number killed by gunfire from Leisler’s men, but do not dispute that it happened.^{cxviii}

Yet another account in that same source described how men under Leisler’s command went to him “and threatened to shoot him if he did not head them.” Another section described how Leisler “sends severall Armed men, with no other warrant their Swords and Guns” to arrest a prominent merchant.^{cxix} To assert that “arms” did not include guns in these accounts of Leisler’s rebellion is disingenuous.

Bellesiles’s depiction of Colonial America as a place where whites were never violent to whites is hard to believe. The Battle of Severn was not the only example of political violence. The accounts of riot and murder in Charleston between Dissenters and Anglicans in 1701/2 are appalling. Daniel Defoe quoted a petition to the England-based proprietors of Carolina: “some of the said Rioters, whilst the Riot was at the Church, went one Night to the House of John Smith, a Butcher in Charles Town; and there being a Woman big with Child in the said House, they with Force open’d the door, threw her down, and otherwise mis-used her, that she brought forth a dead Child, with the Back and Skull broken.”^{cx}

Disputes over the borderline between Pennsylvania and Maryland turned into deadly gunfire in 1736. “[A]n armed Force of about three hundred Men was sent up by our Governor in a Hostile Manner....” Cressap, leading the Maryland forces, brought “a large Quantity of Arms and Ammunition.” By the time the dispute was over, at least one person had been killed by gunfire.^{cxxi} The documents expressed horror that lives were taken, but the presence of the guns was not worthy of special note.

Bellesiles implies that the scarcity of gun violence in Colonial America was because guns were scarce. Since it is apparent that guns were not especially rare—and pistols of various sorts appear commonly in travel

accounts—another explanation may be more appropriate. Misson de Valbourg in 1695 described the love of fighting in England. After observing that even among adults, minor disputes would turn into fights with large crowds gathered to egg on the participants: “They use neither sword nor stick against a man that is unarmed; and if any unfortunate stranger (for an Englishman would never take it into his head) should draw his sword upon one that had none, he’d have a hundred people upon him in a moment.”^{cxxii} There was a notion of fair or proportionate use of weapons.

A description of the riots in 1746 New Jersey quoted the rebels, “And that they were resolved [should] they be opposed by Fire Arms, to take up Fire Arms to defend theirselves.”^{cxxiii} It would appear that the rebels had guns, and were prepared to use them only if guns were used against them. This might explain the North Carolina Regulators limiting themselves to clubs in Colonel Spencer’s account.

Another indicator that suggests guns were commonly owned appears in Pennsylvania Governor Thomas’s efforts to persuade the Assembly to pass a militia law. Governor Thomas emphasized that there will be little expense to the public in establishing a militia. There would be no need to raise even “One Shilling upon the People... and but little to each private Man, and much less if they are already Provided with Arms...”^{cxxiv}

There are *numerous* accounts from the Colonial period whose mention of guns suggests that firearms were not considered unusual items. Seven ads for runaway indentured servants in one newspaper in 1737 and 1738 mention that the missing man had either stolen a gun, or had a gun with them.^{cxxv} A 1743 ad in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* advertised for the return of two runaway indentured servants. “They took with them two Guns, one long the other short...”^{cxxvi} A 1746 ad complains of a deserter from the “Northampton Muster in North-Carolina” who stole, among other articles, a “Pocket Pistol.”^{cxxvii}

Runaway slaves also seem to have had no problem finding guns, including pistols. As early as 1737, two slaves who ran off were reported as having “robb’d a House, and took a Pair of Pistols...”^{cxxviii} There are many other ads that list runaway slaves and indentured servants who managed to find and carry away guns and pistols.^{cxxix} A 1775 ad indicates that the runaway servants had carried away sizeable arsenals: “They had, and took with them, a country square-barrelled smooth bore gun rifle-stocked, one pistol, and other fire-arms.”^{cxxx} An ad reported in 1768 Cumberland County, Virginia, that a runaway slave had brought a horse and a rifle. The horse was appraised at £2:1:0; the rifle described as worth 12/6 (probably £0:12:6).^{cxxxi}

Many accounts make references to guns as though they were completely ordinary and unsurprising items. John Andrews’s 1773 description of the Boston Tea Party describes the “Indians” as, “Each was armed with a hatchet or axe or pair of pistols.”^{cxxxii}

On June 4, 1774, the people of Hanover, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania met “to express their sentiments on the present critical state of affairs...” Among their resolves, “That in the event of Great Britain attempting to force unjust laws upon us by the strength of arms, our cause we leave to heaven and our rifles.”^{cxxxiii}

The Committee of Observation for Lancaster County on May 1, 1775, shortly after the start of the war, made some interesting resolutions that, at a minimum, suggest that guns were believed to be available for purchase: “it be most heartily recommended to the inhabitants of the county of Lancaster, immediately to associate and provide themselves with arms and ammunition...”^{cxxxiv}

A loyalist account of mob violence just before the Revolution describes how, “At Worcester, a mob of about five thousand collected, prevented the court of Common Pleas from sitting, (about one thousand of them had fire-arms,)...”^{cxxxv} If we are to believe Bellesiles’s claim about the number of guns in America, then 2.5% of all the guns in America were present at this *one* event in Worcester.

A Failure of Critical Thinking By America's Historians

Arming America has the form of scholarship, but not the substance. There are accurately represented facts in the book but careful examination of the footnotes, and the manner in which the author misquotes, twists, and misrepresents sources, leads one to one of several possible conclusions.

One possibility is that the author is so intent on proving a particular theory for its current political value that he is unable to accurately read even the simplest documents. One might conclude that Bellesiles' desire to find a peaceful early America with almost no guns, few hunters, and almost no violence, has prevented him reading his sources accurately.

Arming America is not entirely false. There are individual statements of fact that are true though, sometimes, misleading. But the conclusions that Bellesiles draws—that Americans owned few guns before 1840, and that few hunted—are false. Not only are the conclusions of Bellesiles's *Arming America*'s in error but it is difficult to see how they could be based on unbiased scholarship with so many sources that do not match the author's claims for them.

How did *Arming America* receive such a sterling collection of reviews from some of America's most respected historians? First, the historical profession is based on trust and integrity. If a history professor at a prestigious university tells you a series of facts—even a very surprising series of facts—most historians assume that they are being told the truth.

The second reason that *Arming America* received such glowing reviews is that there is a lack of diversity among historians today. While history departments pride themselves on the diversity of their faculty in the areas of sex, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity, there is really no political diversity.

And finally, *Arming America* has a clear-cut public policy agenda. On the back cover, Stewart Udall proclaims, "Thinking people who deplore Americans' addiction to gun violence have been waiting a long time for this information."

The premise that *Arming America* is intended to promote—that the Second Amendment's guarantee of a right to keep and bear arms is an anachronism today—is very popular in academic circles these days. Unsurprisingly, nearly every historian who reviewed *Arming America* has felt no need to check the accuracy of Bellesiles's more controversial claims—and that is unfortunate.

There is something terribly wrong with *Arming America*. That it has received such glowing praise—and that attempts to raise the integrity problems with historians has led to such a vigorous defense of Bellesiles for perpetrating this mass of altered quotes and misrepresentations—suggests that there is something terribly wrong with the state of American historians as well.

i "Take Another Look At Gun Rights History," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 25, 2000, A22; Philip Seib, "'Arming' takes aim at America's gun 'mythology,'" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 24, 2000; Philip Seib, "Shooting holes in myth of gun-toting forebears," *Dallas Morning News*, October 8, 2000, 13C; Richard Slotkin, "The Fall Into Guns," *Atlantic Monthly*, November 2000, 114-18; Paul Rosenberg, "Historian explodes myth: Gun culture firing blanks," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, September 24, 2000.

ii A few examples: Edmund S. Morgan, "In Love with Guns," *New York Review of Books*, October 19, 2000; Gary Wills, "Spiking the Gun Myth," *New York Times*, September 10, 2000; Sanford Levinson, "A startling reassessment of gun ownership and gun culture," *History Book Club*, November 2000;

iii Vin Suprynowicz, "Will rewrite nation's history to suit new tenant," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, September 17, 2000.

iv John Whiteclay Chambers II, "Lock and Load," *Washington Post*, October 29, 2000, X2.

v Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 174, 212, 220-1, 301.

vi Bellesiles, 378.

vii Bellesiles, 304, 320-23.

viii Chris Mooney, "Showdown: Liberal Legal Scholars Are Supporting The Right to Bear Arms. But Will Historians Shoot Them Down?" *Lingua Franca*, 10:1 [February, 2000].

ix Bellesiles, 276-8.

x Bellesiles, 174.

xi A more detailed examination of the various threads underlying the Second Amendment can be found in Clayton E. Cramer, *For the Defense of Themselves and the State: The Original Intent and Judicial Interpretation of the Right to Keep and Bear Arms* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Press, 1994).

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- xii Jonathan Elliot, *The Debates of the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1888), 3:59-60.
- xiii James Madison, "Federalist 46", in Jacob E. Cooke, ed., *The Federalist* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 320-1.
- xiv Bellesiles, 295.
- xv Bellesiles, 314-15.
- xvi Bellesiles, 320-23.
- xvii Bellesiles, 300-1.
- xviii Michael Bellesiles, "The Origins of Gun Culture in the United States, 1760-1865," *Journal of American History*, 83:2 [September 1996] (hereinafter Bellesiles, *JAH*),
- xix Bellesiles, 109-110, 148-9, 262, 266-7.
- xx James Lindgren and Justin Lee Heather, "Counting Guns in Early America," unpublished paper presented at the Association of American Law Schools Annual Meeting, January 4, 2001, 4.
- xxi Lindgren and Heather, 10-11.
- xxii Lindgren and Heather, 24.
- xxiii J. Hammond Trumbull (vol. 1-3), Charles J. Hoadly (vol. 4-15), *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, Prior to the Union with New Haven Colony* (Hartford, Conn.: Brown & Parsons, 1850) (hereinafter *Public Records of Connecticut*), 1:465-6, 468-72.
- xxiv *Public Records of Connecticut*, 1:455-6.
- xxv *Public Records of Connecticut*, 1:461-3.
- xxvi *Public Records of Connecticut*, 1:476-7.
- xxvii *Public Records of Connecticut*, 1:479, 480.
- xxviii *Public Records of Connecticut*, 1:453.
- xxix *Public Records of Connecticut*, 1:448-9.
- xxx Bellesiles, *JAH*, 439.
- xxxi William H. McGuffey, *The Eclectic First Reader for Young Children* (Cincinnati: Truman & Smith, 1836; reprinted Milford, Mich.: Mott Media, 1982), 138-40.
- xxxii W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- xxxiii Samuel Wilson, *An Account of the Province of Carolina...* (London: G. Larkin, 1682), in Alexander S. Salley, Jr., ed., *Narratives of Early Carolina: 1650-1708* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911; reprinted New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959), 170. Other sources indicating that Indians sold game to the settlers: *A Relation of Maryland*, in Clayton Colman Hall, ed., *Narratives of Early Maryland: 1633-1684* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprinted New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959), 98.
- xxxiv "Letter of Captain George to Pepys" (1689), in Charles M. Andrews, ed., *Narratives of the Insurrections, 1675-1690* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915; reprinted New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959), 216. See also Governor Andros's description of "the greatest part of the people, whereof appeared in arms at Boston...." In "Andros's Report of his Administration," in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 232.
- xxxv *Public Records of Connecticut*, 14:419-20.
- xxxvi Bellesiles, 59.
- xxxvii M.L. Brown, *Firearms in Colonial America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980), 83-84.
- xxxviii [William Bradford], "A Relation, or Journal, of the Beginning and Proceedings of the English Plantation settled at Plymouth," in Edward Arber, ed., *The Story of the Pilgrim Fathers, 1606-1623 A.D.; as told by Themselves, their Friends, and their Enemies* (London: 1897), 432. Heath, 18-19, relates the same incident, but puts the number of men "well armed" at "fifteen or sixteen."
- xxxix Heath, 18 n. 6.
- xl Bellesiles, 60.
- xli William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Harvey Wish, ed. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), 66.
- xliv [Bradford], 433.
- xlvi Bellesiles, 60-61.
- xlv James, 29.
- xlv James, 75-77.
- xlvi George F. Willison, *Saints and Strangers*. (New York: Time-Life Books, 1981), 308. See Bellesiles, 470 n.82 for a citation to Willison's *Saints and Strangers*. Willison's book is apparently not universally regarded as scholarly history; see Eugene Aubrey Stratton, *Plymouth Colony: Its History & People, 1620-1691* (Salt Lake City: Ancestry Publishing, 1986), 1.
- xlvii Bellesiles, 82.

xlvi Willison, 320-21.

xlix Stratton, 188.

l Bellesiles, 36. Joyce Malcolm, "Concealed Weapons", *Reason*, January, 2001, 47-49, reports that the two sources cited by Bellesiles for this claim make no such statement.

li See George MacDonald Fraser, *The Steel Bonnets: The Story of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers* (London: HarperCollins, 1995) for a discussion of violence in the border counties of northern England and southern Scotland during this time. Also on the same subject, Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 21-23; James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 3-13, 147-148, 157-168; R. J. Dickson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America 1718-1775* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 84-85, 96-97; Carlton Jackson, *A Social History of the Scotch-Irish* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1993), 82-83, 112-113; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 621-632.

lii Thomas Morton, *A New English Canaan* (Amsterdam: Jacob Frederick Stam, 1637), 132, in Charles Francis Adams, Jr., ed., *New English Canaan of Thomas Morton* (Boston: The Prince Society, 1883; reprinted New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), 276-7. Also in Albert Bushnell Hart, ed., *American History Told by Contemporaries* (New York, 1898), 1:361-63.

liii Sydney V. James, Jr., *Three Visitors to Early Plymouth* (Bedford, Mass.: Applewood Books, 1997), 16. Emmanuel Altham at James, 32, gives a bit more detail that same year.

liv Adams, 21-28. Even after Morton's banishment to England, there was apparently a problem with Englishmen selling guns to the Indians. See Shurtleff, 1:196, for the May 17, 1637 ordinance prohibiting sale of guns, gunpowder, shot, lead, or shot molds, or repair of guns, for the Indians.

lv Bellesiles, 63.

lvi Shurtleff, 1:25-26.

lvii Peterson, 325.

lviii September 6, 1638, Shurtleff, 1:236.

lix Smith, 208.

lx Smith, 209.

lxi Smith, 223.

lxii Smith, 263.

lxiii Smith, 294.

lxiv Smith, 298.

lxv Smith, 362-3. This Daniel Nash appears to be the grandson of Thomas Nash, New Haven Colony's armorer.

lxvi Smith, 349.

lxvii Smith, 256.

lxviii Smith, 172-3.

lxix Smith, 212-3, 232, 241-2.

lxx Bellesiles, 73.

lxxi Augustine Herrman, "Journal of the Dutch Embassy to Maryland," in Hall, 314, 316.

lxxii "The Beginning, Progress, and Conclusion of Bacon's Rebellion, 1675-1676," in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 17.

lxxiii "A True Narrative of the Late Rebellion in Virginia, by the Royal Commissioners, 1677," in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 124-5.

lxxiv "The Beginning, Progress, and Conclusion of Bacon's Rebellion, 1675-1676," in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 20.

lxxv Hening, 1:525.

lxxvi "A True Narrative of the Late Rebellion in Virginia, by the Royal Commissioners, 1677," in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 111.

lxxvii *Ibid.*, 130-1.

lxxviii Hening, 2:434-5.

lxxix "Narratives of Thomas Miller, Sir Peter Colleton, and the Carolina Proprietors," in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 152, 156.

lxxx Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay... (Boston: Albert J. Wright, 1878), 3:305-6.

lxxxi *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th series, 1:412.

lxxxii William Black, "A Practical Joke" in Hart and Hill, 43-45.

lxxxiii Franklin B. Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* (New York: H. Holt & Co, 1896), 2:8.

lxxxiv Hart, 267-8.

lxxxv Benjamin Franklin, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Leonard W. Labaree, ed. (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1961), 4:82-83.

lxxxvi Franklin, 4:485. *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th series, 1:831, may be referring to this when Governor Thomas indicated in 1743 that all the Assembly need do is “prepare a Bill for obliging them to appear well Armed and Accoutred...” There is no indication that the Assembly needed to provide them with arms. The following year, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th series, 1:851, Governor Thomas complained that without a militia law to compel it, “the Inhabitants will not appear... for their Instruction in Military Discipline, nor provide themselves with Arms or Ammunition.” This suggests that the problem was “would not,” not “could not.”

lxxxvii Bellesiles, 183.

lxxxviii Bellesiles, 159.

lxxxix George Washington to Robert Dinwiddie, June 27, 1757, *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931-44) (hereinafter *Writings of George Washington*), 2:78-79.

xc Col.Rec.N.C., 8:30.

xcı Col.Rec.N.C., 8:114, 130-1, 285.

xcıı Col.Rec.N.C., 8:368, 436, 440.

xcııı Col.Rec.N.C., 8:200-1.

xcıv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:498.

xcv Col.Rec.N.C., 7:722.

xcvi Col.Rec.N.C., 8:243.

xcvıı Col.Rec.N.C., 8:552.

xcvııı May 8, 1771, *Col.Rec.N.C.*, 8:577.

xcıx August 1, 1771, *Col.Rec.N.C.*, 8:651.

c February 7, 1771, *Col.Rec.N.C.*, 8:687-9.

ci Bellesiles, 183.

cıı May 5, 1771, *Col.Rec.N.C.*, 8:601.

cııı *Col.Rec.N.C.*, 8:647, 655.

cıv August 1, 1771, *Col.Rec.N.C.*, 8:649. See also 8:608-11, 613, 615-16, 637, 642, 647, 693, for other evidence that the Regulators were armed with guns, and this was not regarded as unusual.

cıv *Col.Rec.N.C.*, 8:671.

cıvı *Col.Rec.N.C.*, 8:655.

cıvıı *Col.Rec.N.C.*, 8:615-6.

cıvııı Bellesiles, 175.

cıx Bellesiles, 84.

cıx Leonard Strong, *Babylon’s Fall in Maryland: a Fair Warning to Lord Baltimore...* (London: Leonard Strong, 1655), in Hall, 242; John Langford, *A Just and Cleere Refutation of a False and Scandalous Pamphlet Entitled Babylons Fall in Maryland...* (London: John Langford, 1655), in Hall, 266.

cıxı Strong, in Hall, 240-4 contains a Puritan account of the battle; Langford, in Hall, 260, provides a Cavalier version of events.

cıxıı Langford, in Hall, 261.

cıxııı Bellesiles, 84.

cıxıv *Virginia and Maryland, or The Lord Baltimore’s printed CASE...* (London: n.p. 1655), in Hall, 204; Strong, in Hall, 239-41.

cıxıv Strong, in Hall, 239. Land, 50-54, accepts the descriptions from the primary sources that no professional soldiers or naval vessels were involved, and contains no mention of use or seizure of public arms. It bears almost no resemblance to Bellesiles’s version of the Battle of Severn.

cıxıvı Bellesiles, 89.

cıxıvıı A Letter From a Gentleman of the City of New-York To Another.... (New York: William Bradford, 1698), in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 369.

cıxıvııı Loyalty Vindicated from the Reflections of a Virulent Pamphlet... (Boston: n.p., 1698), in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 391.

cıxı [Nicholas Bayard], A Modest and Impartial Narrative Of several Grievances and Great Oppressions... (London: n.p., 1690), in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 333.

- cxx Daniel Defoe, *Party-Tyranny, or an Occasional Bill in Miniature...* (London: n.p., 1705), in Salley, *Narratives of Early Carolina*, 244; John Ash, "The Present State of Affairs in Carolina," in Salley, *Narratives of Early Carolina*, 273-4.
- cxxi *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th series, 1:586-95.
- cxxii John Carey, ed., *Eyewitness to History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 192-3.
- cxxiii Hart, 2:83.
- cxxiv *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th series, 1:700.
- cxxv October 21 to October 28, 1737, [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Parks), in Thomas Costa, ed., *Virginia Runaways: Runaway Slave Advertisements from 18th-century Virginia Newspapers* (<http://www.wise.virginia.edu/history/runaways/>); January 13 to January 20, 1737/8, *Ibid.*; August 26 to September 2, 1737, *Ibid.*; August 26 to September 2, 1737, *Ibid.*; April 28 to May 5, 1738, *Ibid.*, ("Two Fowling-Pieces"); May 12 to May 19, 1738, *Ibid.*; March 2 to March 9, 1738/9, *Ibid.*
- cxxvi Hart, 2:300.
- cxxvii June 27 to July 3, 1746, [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Parks), in Costa.
- cxxviii April 15 to April 27, 1737, [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Parks), in Costa.
- cxxix May 24, 1751, [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Hunter), in Costa; July 18, 1751, *Ibid.*; August 8, 1751, *ibid.*; October 24, 1751, *Ibid.*; November 7, 1751, *Ibid.*; January 30, 1752, *Ibid.*; April 10, 1752, *Ibid.*; June 12, 1752, *Ibid.*; July 30, 1752, *Ibid.*; October 17, 1755, June 6, 1766, [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Co.), in Costa; May 28, 1767, [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon), in Costa; July 23, 1767, [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), in Costa ("Brass mounted Pistols"); December 22, 1768, *ibid.* (mentions that the gun is a rifle); May 4, 1769, *ibid.*; September 14, 1769, *ibid.*; October 31, 1771, *ibid.*, ("two muskets"); February 4, 1773, *ibid.*; November 24, 1774, *ibid.* ("old smooth Bore Gun"); June 16, 1775, [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), in Costa ("old smooth bore gun"); . June 30, 1775. Supplement, *Ibid.*, ("a brass mounted long smooth-bore gun, marked on the side-plate MM 1769, and on the barrel W. MORGAN, a shot-bag and powder-horn, a canister with 2 lbs. of powder"); August 16, 1776, Supplement, *Ibid.*, ("a smooth bore gun of the best sort, double breached, which had part of the stock broke off before, a shot bag and powder horn"); January 5, 1775, [Norfolk.] *Virginia Gazette or, Norfolk Intelligencer* (Duncan), in Costa;
- cxix April 21, 1775, [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), in Costa.
- cxix April 14, 1768 [Williamsburg.] *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), in Costa.
- cxixii John Andrews, "Another Account of the Tea Party," in Mabel and Hill, 166.
- cxixiii *Pennsylvania Archives*, 2nd series, 13:271.
- cxixiv *Pennsylvania Archives* 2nd series, 13:292.
- cxixv Hart, 459.

NOTES

- cxixv "Take Another Look At Gun Rights History," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 25, 2000, A22; Philip Seib, "'Arming' takes aim at America's gun 'mythology,'" Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel*, September 24, 2000; Philip Seib, "Shooting holes in myth of gun-toting forebears," *Dallas Morning News*, October 8, 2000, 13C; Richard Slotkin, "The Fall Into Guns," *Atlantic Monthly*, November 2000, 114-18; Paul Rosenberg, "Historian explodes myth: Gun culture firing blanks," Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, September 24, 2000.
- cxixv A few examples: Edmund S. Morgan, "In Love with Guns," *New York Review of Books*, October 19, 2000; Gary Wills, "Spiking the Gun Myth," *New York Times*, September 10, 2000; Sanford Levinson, "A startling reassessment of gun ownership and gun culture," History Book Club, November 2000;
- cxixv Vin Suprynowicz, "Will rewrite nation's history to suit new tenant," Las Vegas *Review-Journal*, September 17, 2000.
- cxixv John Whiteclay Chambers II, "Lock and Load," *Washington Post*, October 29, 2000, X2.
- cxixv Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 174, 212, 220-1, 301.
- cxixv Bellesiles, 378.
- cxixv Bellesiles, 304, 320-23.
- cxixv Chris Mooney, "Showdown: Liberal Legal Scholars Are Supporting The Right to Bear Arms. But Will Historians Shoot Them Down?" *Lingua Franca*, 10:1 [February, 2000].
- cxixv Bellesiles, 276-8.
- cxixv Bellesiles, 174.
- cxixv A more detailed examination of the various threads underlying the Second Amendment can be found in Clayton E. Cramer, *For the Defense of Themselves and the State: The Original Intent and Judicial Interpretation of the Right to Keep and Bear Arms* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Press, 1994).
- cxixv Jonathan Elliot, *The Debates of the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1888), 3:59-60.

cxxxv James Madison, "Federalist 46", in Jacob E. Cooke, ed., *The Federalist* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 320-1.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 295.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 314-15.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 320-23.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 300-1.

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cxxxv Bellesiles, 109-110, 148-9, 262, 266-7.

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cxxxv J. Hammond Trumbull (vol. 1-3), Charles J. Hoadly (vol. 4-15), *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, Prior to the Union with New Haven Colony* (Hartford, Conn.: Brown & Parsons, 1850) (hereinafter *Public Records of Connecticut*), 1:465-6, 468-72.

cxxxv Public Records of Connecticut, 1:455-6.

cxxxv Public Records of Connecticut, 1:461-3.

cxxxv Public Records of Connecticut, 1:476-7.

cxxxv Public Records of Connecticut, 1:479, 480.

cxxxv Public Records of Connecticut, 1:453.

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cxxxv Bellesiles, *JAH*, 439.

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cxxxv Samuel Wilson, *An Account of the Province of Carolina...* (London: G. Larkin, 1682), in Alexander S. Salley, Jr., ed., *Narratives of Early Carolina: 1650-1708* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911; reprinted New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959), 170. Other sources indicating that Indians sold game to the settlers: *A Relation of Maryland*, in Clayton Colman Hall, ed., *Narratives of Early Maryland: 1633-1684* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910; reprinted New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959), 98.

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cxxxv William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Harvey Wish, ed. (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), 66.

cxxxv [Bradford], 433.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 60-61.

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cxxxv Bellesiles, 82.

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cxxxv Stratton, 188.

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cxxxv Thomas Morton, *A New English Canaan* (Amsterdam: Jacob Frederick Stam, 1637), 132, in Charles Francis Adams, Jr., ed., *New English Canaan of Thomas Morton* (Boston: The Prince Society, 1883; reprinted New York: Burt Franklin, 1967), 276-7. Also in Albert Bushnell Hart, ed., *American History Told by Contemporaries* (New York, 1898), 1:361-63.

cxxxv Sydney V. James, Jr., *Three Visitors to Early Plymouth* (Bedford, Mass.: Applewood Books, 1997), 16. Emmanuel Altham at James, 32, gives a bit more detail that same year.

cxxxv Adams, 21-28. Even after Morton's banishment to England, there was apparently a problem with Englishmen selling guns to the Indians. See Shurtleff, 1:196, for the May 17, 1637 ordinance prohibiting sale of guns, gunpowder, shot, lead, or shot molds, or repair of guns, for the Indians.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 63.

cxxxv Shurtleff, 1:25-26.

cxxxv Peterson, 325.

cxxxv September 6, 1638, Shurtleff, 1:236.

cxxxv Smith, 208.

cxxxv Smith, 209.

cxxxv Smith, 223.

cxxxv Smith, 263.

cxxxv Smith, 294.

cxxxv Smith, 298.

cxxxv Smith, 362-3. This Daniel Nash appears to be the grandson of Thomas Nash, New Haven Colony's armorer.

cxxxv Smith, 349.

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cxxxv Hening, 1:525.

cxxxv "A True Narrative of the Late Rebellion in Virginia, by the Royal Commissioners, 1677," in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 111.

cxxxv *Ibid.*, 130-1.

cxxxv Hening, 2:434-5.

cxxxv "Narratives of Thomas Miller, Sir Peter Colleton, and the Carolina Proprietors," in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 152, 156.

cxxxv Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay... (Boston: Albert J. Wright, 1878), 3:305-6.

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cxxxv William Black, "A Practical Joke" in Hart and Hill, 43-45.

cxxxv Franklin B. Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* (New York: H. Holt & Co, 1896), 2:8.

cxxxv Hart, 267-8.

cxxxv Benjamin Franklin, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Leonard W. Labaree, ed. (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1961), 4:82-83.

cxxxv Franklin, 4:485. *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th series, 1:831, may be referring to this when Governor Thomas indicated in 1743 that all the Assembly need do is “prepare a Bill for obliging them to appear well Armed and Accoutred...” There is no indication that the Assembly needed to provide them with arms. The following year, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th series, 1:851, Governor Thomas complained that without a militia law to compel it, “the Inhabitants will not appear... for their Instruction in Military Discipline, nor provide themselves with Arms or Ammunition.” This suggests that the problem was “would not,” not “could not.”

cxxxv Bellesiles, 183.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 159.

cxxxv George Washington to Robert Dinwiddie, June 27, 1757, *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931-44) (hereinafter *Writings of George Washington*), 2:78-79.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:30.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:114, 130-1, 285.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:368, 436, 440.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:200-1.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:498.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 7:722.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:243.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:552.

cxxxv May 8, 1771, Col.Rec.N.C., 8:577.

cxxxv August 1, 1771, Col.Rec.N.C., 8:651.

cxxxv February 7, 1771, Col.Rec.N.C., 8:687-9.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 183.

cxxxv May 5, 1771, Col.Rec.N.C., 8:601.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:647, 655.

cxxxv August 1, 1771, Col.Rec.N.C., 8:649. See also 8:608-11, 613, 615-16, 637, 642, 647, 693, for other evidence that the Regulators were armed with guns, and this was not regarded as unusual.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:671.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:655.

cxxxv Col.Rec.N.C., 8:615-6.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 175.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 84.

cxxxv Leonard Strong, *Babylon’s Fall in Maryland: a Fair Warning to Lord Baltimore...* (London: Leonard Strong, 1655), in Hall, 242; John Langford, *A Just and Cleere Refutation of a False and Scandalous Pamphlet Entitled Babylons Fall in Maryland...* (London: John Langford, 1655), in Hall, 266.

cxxxv Strong, in Hall, 240-4 contains a Puritan account of the battle; Langford, in Hall, 260, provides a Cavalier version of events.

cxxxv Langford, in Hall, 261.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 84.

cxxxv *Virginia and Maryland, or The Lord Baltimore’s printed CASE...* (London: n.p. 1655), in Hall, 204; Strong, in Hall, 239-41.

cxxxv Strong, in Hall, 239. Land, 50-54, accepts the descriptions from the primary sources that no professional soldiers or naval vessels were involved, and contains no mention of use or seizure of public arms. It bears almost no resemblance to Bellesiles’s version of the Battle of Severn.

cxxxv Bellesiles, 89.

cxxxv A Letter From a Gentleman of the City of New-York To Another.... (New York: William Bradford, 1698), in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 369.

cxxxv *Loyalty Vindicated from the Reflections of a Virulent Pamphlet...* (Boston: n.p., 1698), in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 391.

cxxxv [Nicholas Bayard], *A Modest and Impartial Narrative Of several Grievances and Great Oppressions...* (London: n.p., 1690), in Andrews, *Narratives of the Insurrections*, 333.

cxxxv Daniel Defoe, *Party-Tyranny, or an Occasional Bill in Miniature...* (London: n.p., 1705), in Salley, *Narratives of Early Carolina*, 244; John Ash, “The Present State of Affairs in Carolina,” in Salley, *Narratives of Early Carolina*, 273-4.

cxxxv *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th series, 1:586-95.

cxxxv John Carey, ed., *Eyewitness to History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 192-3.

cxxxv Hart, 2:83.

cxxxv *Pennsylvania Archives*, 4th series, 1:700.

cxxxv October 21 to October 28, 1737, [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Parks), in Thomas Costa, ed., *Virginia Runaways: Runaway Slave Advertisements from 18th-century Virginia Newspapers* (<http://www.wise.virginia.edu/history/runaways/>); January 13 to January 20, 1737/8, *Ibid.*; August 26 to September 2, 1737, *Ibid.*; August 26 to September 2, 1737, *Ibid.*; April 28 to May 5, 1738, *Ibid.*, (“Two Fowling-Pieces”); May 12 to May 19, 1738, *Ibid.*; March 2 to March 9, 1738/9, *Ibid.*

cxxxv Hart, 2:300.

cxxxv June 27 to July 3, 1746, [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Parks), in Costa.

cxxxv April 15 to April 27, 1737, [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Parks), in Costa.

cxxxv May 24, 1751, [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Hunter), in Costa; July 18, 1751, *Ibid.*; August 8, 1751, *ibid.*; October 24, 1751, *Ibid.*; November 7, 1751, *Ibid.*; January 30, 1752, *Ibid.*; April 10, 1752, *Ibid.*; June 12, 1752, *Ibid.*; July 30, 1752, *Ibid.*; October 17, 1755, June 6, 1766, [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Co.), in Costa; May 28, 1767, [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon), in Costa; July 23, 1767, [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), in Costa (“Brass mounted Pistols”); December 22, 1768, *ibid.* (mentions that the gun is a rifle); May 4, 1769, *ibid.*; September 14, 1769, *ibid.*; October 31, 1771, *ibid.*, (“two muskets”); February 4, 1773, *ibid.*; November 24, 1774, *ibid.* (“old smooth Bore Gun”); June 16, 1775, [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), in Costa (“old smooth bore gun”); . June 30, 1775. Supplement, *Ibid.*, (“a brass mounted long smooth-bore gun, marked on the side-plate MM 1769, and on the barrel W. MORGAN, a shot-bag and powder-horn, a canister with 2 lbs. of powder”); August 16, 1776, Supplement, *Ibid.*, (“a smooth bore gun of the best sort, double breached, which had part of the stock broke off before, a shot bag and powder horn”); January 5, 1775, [Norfolk,] *Virginia Gazette or, Norfolk Intelligencer* (Duncan), in Costa;

cxxxv April 21, 1775, [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), in Costa.

cxxxv April 14, 1768 [Williamsburg,] *Virginia Gazette* (Rind), in Costa.

cxxxv John Andrews, “Another Account of the Tea Party,” in Mabel and Hill, 166.

cxxxv *Pennsylvania Archives*, 2nd series, 13:271.

cxxxv *Pennsylvania Archives* 2nd series, 13:292.

cxxxv Hart, 459.