

Gun Idolatry in Current American Culture

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"We are devoted to creating an America free from gun violence, where all Americans are safe at home, at school, at work, and in our communities. As the Brady Campaign, we work to enact and enforce sensible gun laws, regulations, and public policies through grassroots activism, electing public officials who support gun laws, and increasing public awareness of gun violence." Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, Mission statement

Is the real American motto of the current American generation *"In Guns We Trust"*? This could surely be the impression one gets from the unfolding of recent events.

There exists currently in the United States an unhealthy obsession with guns, —a form of idolatry of the gun as a useful tool to settle differences between individuals. Increasingly, it seems, when someone feels slighted in any way, the reaction is often to rely on the gun to settle things. Instances of appalling gun-related incidents seem to multiply and to be occurring on a daily basis in the current American cultural climate.

A disgruntled [employee](#) is let go; the upset person goes home, takes a gun and comes back to the work site to set the score straight, killing many people in a shooting rampage. A deranged [political extremist](#) campaigns against a candidate who is nevertheless elected; the disappointed individual takes his easily available gun and shoots at the politician and kills half a dozen other people. A devout [religious fanatic](#) feels that somehow his religion and its adepts are not well considered; he takes his gun and he assassinates at random everybody around. [Frustrated students](#) fail at school or are ostracized somewhat by classmates; they go home, take their parents' gun and kill teachers and scores of fellow students.

Even some disturbed [ten-year olds](#) now resort to the gun and turn it against their mother or father when they have been scolded, the gun being conveniently stashed in their room. It's a far cry from the commandment "Honor Thy Mother and Father"!

There would appear to be a firearms-related homicide crisis in the United States, but the idea that guns are required in the daily life of individuals is so well entrenched and propagated that a state of collective denial persists. Two hundred years ago, the vast majority of people lived on farms. Understandably, guns were then a necessity for hunting and for protection in a still wild and relatively lawless environment. Nowadays, the vast majority of people live in large urban areas where no hunting is allowed. What is then the need for large and small firearms, if not to shoot other people?

There is, of course, the persistent myth that Americans have the "right" to amass large quantity of firearms and to use them. Here again this seems to be a relic of bygone times

when the young American republic was threatened by its former British masters and could lose its recently acquired independence through a British invasion. At that time, there was a perceived need to constitute rapidly a militia to defend the homeland, and armed farmers could provide such an instant army. That is the logical interpretation that can be given to the [second amendment of the U.S Constitution of 1789](#) that says: *"A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."*

The most logical implication here is that some convenient precautions can be taken to defend the state with "well regulated" armed militias, at a time when the U.S. federal government was perceived to be weak and incapable of mounting a federal military response to an outside invasion or to a domestic armed uprising, and that it should not prevent the states from raising militias to maintain order. Such was the constitutional climate at the time. —This provision in the U.S. Constitution was hardly designed to be an open license for each and every individual to arm oneself, to use such arms at will, and to constitute a "non-regulated" one-man militia if he chooses to do so.

Such a wide and extravagant interpretation in a modern urban environment would seem to be a sure recipe for social and political [anarchy](#). Moreover, nowadays, the U.S. federal government is in full control of a powerful U.S. military organization and has no need whatsoever of private militias to defend the territory. Also, today, the [state national guards](#) have *de facto* taken the place that quickly enrolled private militias could have occupied in the past. There is no need today for readily available private armed militias to defend the territory.

Nevertheless, some [American judges](#) have ruled, and some [American politicians](#) have agreed, that the centuries-old right to form "well regulated" militias and to carry arms to defend the homeland really means that anybody, in the current modern environment, has an absolute individual right to own dangerous firearms of the nature and quantity he chooses, including sophisticated assault weapons, and to use them, and that no elected government can interfere.

The most recent case on this issue has been the ruling on [Parker v District of Columbia](#), in which the District of Columbia Circuit court of appeals ruled on March 9, 2007 that a D.C. ban on handgun ownership without a license violated individual rights under the U. S. Second Amendment. —And that's where things stand today... and the killing continues.

How many tragedies will be needed before mentalities change?

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The book "The Code for Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles", by Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay, prefaced by Dr. Paul Kurtz, has just been released by Prometheus Books.

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