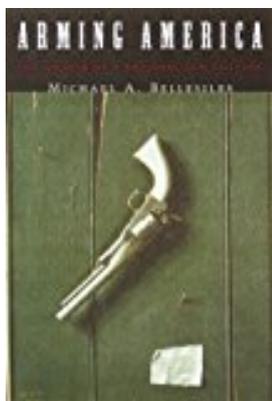


[PDF] Arming America: The Origins Of A National Gun Culture

Michael A. Bellesiles - pdf download free book



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Description:

While gun supporters use the nation's gun-toting history in defense of their way of life, and revolutionary enthusiasts replay skirmishes on historic battlefields, it now turns out that America has not always had a gun culture, and wide-scale gun ownership is much newer than we think. After a 10-year search for "a world that isn't there," professor and scholar Michael Bellesiles discovered that Americans not only rarely owned guns prior to the Civil War, they wouldn't even take them for

free from a government that *wanted* to arm its reluctant public. No sharpshooters, no gun in every home, no children learning to hunt beside their fathers. Bellesiles--whose research methods have generated a great deal of controversy and even a subsequent investigation by Emory University--searched legal, probate, military, and business records; fiction and personal letters; hunting magazines; and legislation in his quest for the legendary gun-wielding frontiersman, only to discover that he is a myth. There are other revelations: gun ownership and storage was strictly legislated in colonial days, and frivolous shooting of a musket was backed by the death penalty; men rarely died in duels because the guns were far too inaccurate (duels were about honor, not murder); pioneers didn't hunt (they trapped and farmed); frontier folk loved books, not guns; and the militia never won a war (it was too inept). In fact, prior to the Civil War, when mass production of higher quality guns became a reality, the republic's greatest problem was a dearth of guns, and a public that was too peaceable to care about civil defense. As Bellesiles writes, "Probably the major reason why the American Revolution lasted eight years, longer than any war in American history before Vietnam, was that when that brave patriot reached above the mantel, he pulled down a rusty, decaying, unusable musket (not a rifle), or found no gun there at all." Strangely, the eagle-eye frontiersman was created by East Coast fiction writers, while the idea of a gun as a household necessity was an advertising ploy of gun maker Samuel Colt (both just prior to the Civil War). The former group fabricated a historic and heroic past while Colt preyed on overblown fears of Indians and blacks.

Bellesiles, who is highly knowledgeable about weapons and military history, never comes out against guns. He is more interested in discovering the truth than in taking sides. Nevertheless, his work shatters some time-honored myths and icons--including the usual reading of the Second Amendment--and will be hard to refute. This fascinating, eye-opening account is sure to both inform and inflame the already highly charged debate about guns in America. --*Lesly Reed*

From Publishers Weekly Like most students of U.S. history, Bellesiles (Emory University) believed gun-related violence was inextricably woven into the American past from its earliest days. Then he started studying county probate records as part of a project about the early American frontier. To his surprise, he found that for the years 1765 to 1770, only 14 percent of probate inventories listed a gun. Further study convinced Bellesiles that American gun culture began only with the Civil War. Sickened by the carnage associated with guns today, Bellesiles, in his second book (following *Revolutionary Outlaws: Ethan Allen and the Struggle for Independence on the Early American Frontier*), is agenda driven. If U.S. society has, as he contends, been largely free of gun-related violence in the past, then it could be again. This agenda, however, does not taint Bellesiles's scholarship. Through examination of "[l]egal, probate, military and business records, travel accounts, personal letters" and other primary sources, he painstakingly documents the relative absence of guns before the Civil War and the rise of the gun culture in its wake, due to an increasingly urban populace now accustomed to shooting and newly industrialized gun manufacturers tooled up to mass-produce firearms. This combination of factors, he argues, led to the violence-prone American ethos, one that fetishizes guns. Bellesiles's approachable writing style makes easily digestible this revision of the historiographical record. "The question is one of cultural primacy," Bellesiles contends. "What lies at the core of national identity?" His answer is bound to inflame today's impassioned controversy over gun control.

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