

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Michael A. Bellesiles. *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000. 601 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-375-40210-4.

Reviewed by Daniel Justin Herman (Department of History, Central Washington University)  
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## Gun Battles

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There's been a count, there's been a recount, and there will be recounts of recounts, no doubt, yet no clear winner has emerged. The final numbers, it seems, depend on which standards are used. In the meantime, liberals proclaim victory over the forces of darkness while conservatives rally to defend the Constitution. Historians offer resolutions, while protesters rail vehemently against "misquotes," "dishonesty," "bigotry," "stereotyping"! [1] So is this the introduction to yet another post-mortem on the Gore v. Bush presidential election? No, it is an all-too accurate description of Bellesiles v. NRA et al.

Michael Bellesiles's *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*, recipient of this year's Bancroft Prize, is one of the most polarizing works of history published in recent decades. If you ardently oppose gun control, you will likely find *Arming America* to be arrogant, misguided, and, where gun numbers are concerned, miscounted. If you ardently support gun control, you will likely approve of the probate and gun census counts and revel in *Arming America*'s potpourri of evidence showing how few Americans owned (or celebrated) guns prior to the Civil War. If you are an agnostic on gun control, as I am, you will likely find that *Arming America*, though at times oversimplified and too zealous, is difficult to dispute. *Arming America* is both mighty and flawed.

Here is the nucleus of Bellesiles's devilish argument: despite the occasional anecdote suggesting that every colonial and early national American male learned to

wield a gun almost as soon as he could crawl, there were relatively few guns in America prior to the Civil War. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, colonial officials bemoaned the dearth of firearms. This perpetual shortage of guns was caused by the relative scarcity of gunsmiths and the complete absence of gun manufactories in the colonies, which required colonists to import guns from Europe. Indeed, such gunsmiths as there were in America often did little more than repair guns.

The relative scarcity of guns in America, argues Bellesiles, existed until the antebellum and Civil War decades. Several gun censuses conducted by the federal government during the early national years indicated that less than half of American men who were enlisted in militias possessed firearms suitable for duty. Time and again, in virtually every part of the United States, militia members showed up for muster with neither guns nor knowledge of how to use guns. Even in the antebellum years, when per capita gun ownership began to rise as manufacturing processes became more efficient, Americans retained a longstanding indifference to guns and hunting. Only the transformative experience of the Civil War created a martial justification for gun ownership while at the same time stepping up gun production to unprecedented levels. With assistance from promotional campaigns by gun manufacturers, hunting clubs, and organizations like the National Rifle Association, the Civil War spawned a national gun culture.

Given Bellesiles's recitation of gun censuses, gun

manufacturers' reports, militia and army records, and probate records, *Arming America* seems practically, uh, bulletproof. But even a thesis wrapped in kevlar can have an Achilles heel, a heel that Bellesiles's enemies are aiming at with every weapon at their disposal. Indeed, a whole company of scholars has embarked on a campaign to crush the Bellesiles heresy.[2]

Among Bellesiles's able and reputable critics are Jim Lindgren and Justin Heather, who argue in an impressive Internet paper (complete with charts and graphs) that some of Bellesiles's probate figures are wrong. In reporting data from Providence, Rhode Island probate records for the years 1679-1729, for instance, Bellesiles somewhat understates the number of records that mention guns and grossly overstates the number of broken or antiquated guns in the records. Lindgren, Professor of Law and Director of the Demography and Diversity Project at Northwestern University School of Law, and Heather, Lindgren's student, find that 63 percent of estates listed in the Providence records included firearms (compared to Bellesiles's calculation of 48 percent [p.109]). Lindgren and Heather also fault Bellesiles's finding that just 14.7 percent of sample probate records from throughout America between 1765 and 1790 list guns. This low figure, argue Lindgren and Heather, is mathematically impossible, given that three of the four regions for which Bellesiles provides figures show higher gun ownership rates than the national average. The only region that shows a slightly lower rate than the national average is the frontier, which surely had fewer inhabitants than the other regions. Further, and most egregious in the eyes of Lindgren and Heather, Bellesiles neglects to specify sample sizes and cell counts for his regional and national figures (cited in Table One of *Arming America's* Appendix [p.445]).[3] These omissions, coupled with the loss of Bellesiles's research records in a flood, make it impossible to replicate his study.

How could Bellesiles be so wrong? Is he, as one of his enemy's claims, guilty of "intellectual dishonesty and bigotry against firearms owners"? [4] Bellesiles promises to answer his critics, at least in regard to probate records, on a website that he is building (<[\\$>\\$](http://www.emory.edu/HISTORY/BELLESILES/index.html)). He also rebuts the Lindgren/Heather report by claiming that it relies on sets of data that he did not use.[5] Perhaps, in the end, Bellesiles will win this skirmish, especially if he produces his flood-damaged citations for the probate records used in his study. Meanwhile, the problem with Lindgren/Heather is that it confutes Bellesiles's numbers by

using an even smaller sample of probate records (about one-eighth of the 11,170 used by Bellesiles). To imply, as some have done, that Lindgren and Heather have effectively refuted Bellesiles by looking at a small sample of probate records, or that the Lindgren/Heather figures show what percentage of Americans owned guns (rather how many probate inventories listed guns), is nonsense.[6]

Whether or not Bellesiles's figures prove to be accurate may not matter in the end, given that probate records cannot provide reliable estimates of how many Americans owned and used firearms. As Bellesiles admits, problems with probate records, like punchcard ballots, are numerous. Would every gun, or even most, have appeared in probate records, given that family members might have raided estates prior to inventories? Given that most men who died either with or without wills were well beyond their hunting primes, might these men have passed on guns to sons and grandsons prior to their deaths? And even if few white adult males of the colonial and antebellum eras owned guns, isn't it possible that several members of an extended family could have shared a gun? Or that those who lacked a gun might borrow one on occasion?

Moreover, as Jackson Lears wondered in a review of *Arming America* that appeared in *The New Republic*, even if probate records could show precisely what proportion of adult white males owned firearms, can we determine from this whether or not Americans participated in a "gun culture"? [7] If there were few guns, does that mean that guns were not valued? If there were many guns, does that mean that Americans attached great symbolic importance to them? What, indeed, is a "gun culture"? Bellesiles attempts to answer these questions with a barrage of anecdotes showing that, prior to the Civil War, Americans were poor shots, did not take care of, or care about, guns, and seldom hunted. These anecdotes, however, are the weakest links in the argument.

What, moreover, do we mean when we claim that "many" Americans owned guns, or that "few" owned guns? If 60 percent of adult, white American males owned guns, should we construe this to mean that "many" Americans owned guns, or should we be surprised that 40 percent did not own guns? Alternatively, if we find that 25 percent of the adult white male population owned guns, should we construe this to mean that "few" Americans owned guns? Even if just 25 percent of American adult white males owned guns in the eighteenth century, isn't it possible that Americans re-

ally were, as John M. Dederer maintained, the best-armed people in the world, given that European nations tended to restrict gun ownership to the elite? [8]

With so many awkward questions standing between *Arming America* and a viable thesis, one might assume that the critics have won the shooting match. Not so. As Bellesiles has claimed repeatedly, probate records represent but one source among many in *Arming America*. More convincing are the militia records and gun censuses undertaken by the federal government. Simply stated, there is overwhelming evidence that thousands of members of the militia from throughout the country—before, during, and after the Revolution—showed up for drills and even for wars without guns. Bellesiles is not the first to make this observation; he follows a train of military historians who have noted that Americans were not particularly militaristic prior to the Civil War. Many Americans evaded militia service, others showed up with walking canes and cornstalks rather than guns, and still others appeared for duty only so they could participate in the alcoholic fete that generally followed musters.

On this point Bellesiles adduces solid evidence: colonial and early national Americans—with notable exceptions in certain geographical areas and among certain segments of the population—were not nearly as well armed as we have been led to believe. It is true, of course, that the various gun counts underestimated (or even failed to count) the total number of firearms in private hands; gun censuses provide a minimum number of guns in America, not a maximum.[9] It is also true that the poor, young men who tended to show up for militia duty may have left the family gun at home, hoping that the government would award them a new one. Still, the evidence suggests that a significant part of the adult white male population of the colonies and later the United States—indeed, probably a majority of this population—did not own or know how to use a firearm.

If *Arming America* is so convincing, why has it generated so much bile? Partly because it threatens cherished ideas that Americans, particularly NRA members and libertarians, hold about their history and themselves as a people of the gun. In a sense, however, the book actually confirms the myth of Americans as an armed people. Bellesiles notes that as early as 1691, William Blathwayt, auditor general of the colonies, reported “there is no Custom more generally to be observed among the Young Virginians than that they all Learn to keep and use a gun with a Marvelous dexterity as soon as ever they have strength enough to lift it to their heads.” Robert Bev-

erley, a well-to-do Virginia planter, similarly reported in 1705 that “the People [of Virginia] are very Skilful in the use of Fire-arms, being all their Lives accustom’d to shoot in the Woods.” Then there is Benjamin Franklin, who, though not cited by Bellesiles, wrote in 1747 that Pennsylvania had “at least (exclusive of Quakers) 60,000 Fighting Men, acquainted with Fire-Arms, many of them Hunters and Marksmen, hardy and bold.”[10] Apparently English officers were convinced by such talk; during the French and Indian War, General James Abercromby, when told by the governor of New Jersey that no arms could be had in the colony for soldiers, responded that “it is known, almost to every one, that few, if any, of the People of the Continent are Without Arms” (p.162). Just a few years later, any number of America’s founders—especially Virginians—testified that America’s legions of sharpshooters would win the Revolution.

Such statements, says Bellesiles, were manifestations of a myth that began during the French and Indian War and continued during the Revolution (despite the fact that the statements of Blathwayt and Beverley appeared much earlier). Bellesiles rightly points out that the legions of hunters and marksmen never materialized in either the French and Indian War or the Revolution. There were, of course, expert marksmen who fought in the Revolution and who played significant roles in battle on occasion; but such sharpshooters (like the rifles they used) were not the deciding factor in the war. Nonetheless, “the Kentucky riflemen picking which eye of British officers to shoot out,” explains Bellesiles, speaking here of the popular conception of the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, “fulfilled some deep national yearning. An imagined American equality seemed to demand that every man could be the equal of the best-trained troops in the world—at least in popular songs and tall tales” (p. 259).

One suspects that there really were enough hunters and sharpshooters in America to make the myth credible; surely the American forests hosted a great many more buckskinned hunters than the parks and woods of English aristocrats and gentry. Yet Bellesiles is equally correct in contending that the myth did not match the reality; where did these throngs of hunters and sharpshooters disappear to in wartime? The real question, then, is why the myth existed at all. What “deep national yearning” exactly did the myth satisfy? That is where Bellesiles lets us down; his resistance to cultural analysis, i.e., his inattention to art, literature, and intellectual nuance, leaves *Arming America* with no clear explanation for why the myth came into being.

Bellesiles's failure in this regard has not stopped gun lovers and libertarians from attacking him on all fronts. From a casual Internet search for commentary on *Arming America*, one might think that Bellesiles is about to single-handedly deprive every right-thinking American of his or her firearm (a threat made more alarming by the dust jacket blurbs chosen by Knopf, several of which identify the book as pertinent to Second Amendment debates). For purposes of legal wrangles over gun control, however, it is hard to see what difference it makes whether our forebears were gun-rich or gun-poor. One wonders, too, how much difference it makes whether the colonial, state, and federal government held arms in government warehouses, or reserved the right to impress arms in wartime, or kept guns out of the hands of potential enemies of the state (including Indians, Catholics, Tories, and African-Americans) (pp. 65, 72, 79). So long as the myth of the gun-loving, tyranny-hating American animated the founders, it is hard to argue that they intended the Second Amendment only to provide guns for state-regulated militias, especially since individual colonists owned and kept firearms despite government regulations.

The perceived threat to the Second Amendment is not the only reason that *Arming America* has come under fire. The book has also met with hostility because, despite all the evidence it brings to bear, it is flawed. Time and again, the book suffers from the author's zealotry to prove his thesis, a problem that leads to exaggeration and misinterpreted evidence. Let me be clear: these mistakes do not discredit the thesis, as Bellesiles's critics claim (indeed, much of the criticism attains a level of hyperbole beyond anything in *Arming America*). But *Arming America* should be read with caution.

Because Bellesiles's critics have taken on the task of refutation with such ballyhoo, one hesitates to repeat their findings. A number of glitches, however, have escaped the critics' keen eyes. Consider Bellesiles's assertion that "hunting [with a gun] is and always has been a time-consuming and inefficient way of putting food on the table.... To head into the woods for two days in order to drag the carcass of a deer back to his family—assuming he was lucky enough to find one, not to mention kill it—would have struck any American of the Colonial period as supreme lunacy" (p. 103). There is a bit of truth in this statement and a lot of exaggeration. Colonists did obtain protein primarily from domesticated animals rather than from game. Yet many colonists killed deer, sometimes with guns and sometimes by other means. Two anecdotes suffice to demonstrate Bellesiles's exaggeration: In

his 1624 report on Virginia, John Smith commented that Jamestown settlers "do so traine up their servants and youth in shooting deere, and fowle, that the youths will kill them as well as their Masters." Similarly in 1700 John Lawson, surveyor general for the Lords Proprietors, explained in his diary that since deer and other game were not the property of the elite, "a poor laborer that is made master of his gun, & c., hath as good claim to have continued coarces of delicacies crowded upon his table, as he that is master of a great purse." [11] Obviously some colonists, though probably not a majority, thought that hunting deer with guns was quite practical.

Bellesiles also claims that in the early nineteenth century, "the public as a whole was ... disdainful of the man who felt the need to use a gun" (p. 297). This follows from anecdotes that belittle untrained and unruly militias. But being critical of militias is not the same as being "disdainful of the man who felt the need to use a gun." To be sure, educated Americans expressed disdain for gun-toting backwoodsmen who made hunting a way of life, but not for farmers who killed wolves, bears, panthers, and wildcats in order to prepare the land for "civilization." Nor did Americans express contempt for men who participated in shooting matches, which were common events in early national and Jacksonian America (even Henry Clay and Daniel Webster participated in such matches). [12] And if some Americans worried over "savage" whites who lived by hunting alone, others made Daniel Boone into a cultural hero in the early nineteenth century (Boone's name appears twice in Bellesiles's text, yet nowhere does Bellesiles discuss Boone as a gun-toting superhero of early national Americans).

In addition to exaggeration Bellesiles at times embraces half-truths. In antebellum children's literature, writes Bellesiles, "guns are never portrayed in a positive light.... Children were not presented playing with guns or involved in games of cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, mass murderers and serial killers" (p. 301). This statement may apply to literature intended for very young children (the same thing could be said about such literature today), but it leaves out some of the principle literary works intended for youths. Not to belabor a point, but who read the innumerable Jacksonian and antebellum biographies of Daniel Boone? Who read Cooper's Leatherstocking tales (the first of which appeared in 1823)? Who read the Davy Crockett almanacs of the 1830s, or Davy Crockett's "autobiography"? Who read Washington Irving's works on western travel and adventure? Who read the various military histories of the 1830s (and why were Americans endlessly fascinated

by Napoleon? )? Who read Charles Wilkins Webber's novels of the West, or Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods*? Who read Henry William Herbert's *The Complete Manual for Young Sportsmen ... Prepared for the Instruction and Use of the Youth of America*? It is hard to see how Bellesiles could have neglected so much Jacksonian and antebellum literature available to youths that praised guns and celebrated violence.

Bellesiles likewise tells us that "illustrations in newspapers, journals, and books" from the Jacksonian era seldom show guns, thus attesting to a widespread "lack of interest" in firearms. "This statement," he adds, "may appear impressionistic, but it rests on an examination of a large body of artwork." Once again, there is a measure of truth here. Most American illustrations then, as now, did not depict guns or hunters. Yet Bellesiles ignores the numerous illustrations in books about frontier heroes like Boone, Crockett, Kit Carson, Mike Fink, and others. Paintings from the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s by Thomas Doughty, William Allan, Thomas Cole, Charles Deas, William Ranney, George Caleb Bingham, and Arthur F. Tait likewise depicted proud men carrying guns, as did vignettes on antebellum banknotes. Throughout the 1850s, moreover (admittedly a little after the period at issue), Currier and Ives produced thousands of lithographs depicting hunting scenes and dead game.

The assertion that travelers in Jacksonian and antebellum America "somehow ... just did not see the guns that were supposedly all around them" is likewise exaggerated. What follows this statement are lengthy examinations of works by two travelers, Charles Augustus Murray and Friedrich Gerstaecker (hunters both) who saw plenty of guns around them. To be fair, Bellesiles reports having looked at eighty travel narratives before coming to the conclusion that few travelers saw, or at least reported seeing, guns (p. 304). Yet a brief survey of any number of bibliographies of early western travels and/or sporting literature would have revealed dozens of travel narratives that record guns and hunting on the frontier and occasionally in the vicinity of major cities. One thinks here of a line from Simon and Garfunkel, "still a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest."

Even the travel narratives that Bellesiles does mention are but half analyzed. Bellesiles reports that Charles Augustus Murray's "hunting stories, like most others published in the first half of the nineteenth century, are full of missed shots, absurd errors, ... dull hunts, and the failure to shoot anything." (p. 310; emphasis added).

Repeatedly, Bellesiles selects comic incidents and parody to prove that Americans were indifferent hunters who knew little about guns. To be sure, Jacksonian and antebellum travel writers, like those today, were eager to make readers chuckle. The occasional comic incident made for good reading and more book sales. But there were plenty of thrill-a-minute hunts and miraculous shots in such literature, all of which Bellesiles ignores in his haste to build a towering thesis. Perhaps had Bellesiles replaced Murray's book with Frances Parkman's *The California and Oregon Trail* (published in 1848), or any of dozens of other books, he would have arrived at different insights.

Or consider a couple of other distortions. Bellesiles trots out a passage from the *New England Farmer*, a monthly periodical, to show that the editor, and perhaps the readers, "questioned the value of hunting itself" (p. 323). Why? Because the editor objected to hunting songbirds for sport. One finds similar passages in *The American Farmer*, yet, in 1829, that journal's editor, John Skinner, launched the *American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine*, which made a fetish of sport hunting. The campaign to end the hunting of songbirds was prompted by the realization that such birds helped farmers by eating pests, not by an opposition to all forms of hunting. Indeed, the campaign against the hunting of small birds may indicate the growing popularity of hunting among boys. Henry David Thoreau recalled in *Walden* that, when he was a youth in rural Massachusetts, every boy "shouldered a fowling-piece between the ages of ten and fourteen." Bellesiles goes on to tell us that "by the 1840s most critics found hunting simply a waste of money," yet offers another inapposite piece of evidence, an article that mocked a staged buffalo hunt held in Hoboken, New Jersey in 1843 (p. 340). Sport hunters themselves mocked such events; even *Spirit of the Times*, the premier antebellum journal of field sports, expressed disdain for a staged buffalo hunt held in Boston in 1843 (perhaps organized by the same men who held the Hoboken hunt).[13]

There was indeed anti-hunting sentiment among the middle and upper classes of the northern and middle states in the colonial, early national, and Jacksonian eras, but Bellesiles offers little evidence to demonstrate that sentiment. Nor does he offer solid evidence to show that Americans, even the hunters among them, were ignorant of gun technology in the Jacksonian era. Because an American editor reprinted an English treatise instructing men in the selection of guns, then wondered, rhetorically, what improvements had been made in arms for hunting since the treatise's original appearance, Bellesiles deter-

mines that “not even the premier hunting magazine in America had a clear understanding of the technology of firearms, and certainly not of the newest developments.” Is a rhetorical question about the efficacy of new technology the same as not understanding firearms? In another sporting magazine published in 1830, a contributor noted that Americans were bringing “the science of shooting to its greatest perfection,” a statement that, though a brag, revealed great interest in new technologies. Indeed, by 1848 a member of the “Boon Club” of Harrodsburg, Kentucky, could write in the *Spirit of the Times* that New Yorkers had “brought rifle-shooting to greater perfection ... than it has attained to in any other part of the Union, or perhaps in the world,” and asked New York marksmen a series of technical questions on rifles and shooting.[14]

The occasional exaggerations and misinterpretations do not discredit the book but they do reveal an over-eager author. Bellesiles might respond that his book is more than what he terms dueling anecdotes. “The aggregate matters,” Bellesiles rightly says, meaning the aggregate of gun censuses, manufacturers’ reports, probate records, and finally, and perhaps least importantly, anecdotes (p. 14). But given the doubt that Bellesiles’s critics have cast on gun censuses and probate records, the anecdotes take on a greater importance. When properly scrutinized, masses of anecdotes, like masses of numbers, reveal truths.

Sometimes these truths are contradictory and messy, but probate records and gun censuses by themselves cannot tell us whether men prized guns or ignored them, or whether they used guns to defend liberty or to defend chickens, or whether they did all of the above. Nor can such records tell us whether men who lacked guns held them in high or low esteem. Consider the mixed message of William Cooper Howells, who, while growing up on the Ohio frontier, lacked a gun. “As father did not think he could afford to buy one,” wrote Howells, “or was not very deeply impressed with the importance of having one, I had to wait a long time for the consummation of a powerful desire.” Howells finally obtained his desideratum when an older neighbor who no longer used his gun, or perhaps had never used it, gave it to Howells.[15]

What does this anecdote tell us? It confirms Bellesiles in one way: Howells’s father thought that a gun was both expensive and useless; yet Howells himself experienced a “powerful desire” to own a gun. He finally received a “permanent loan” of the rifle from a neighbor who had no further need for it; this particular gun therefore never appeared in the neighbor’s probate record.

The gift of the gun, however, presents more questions. Did the giver award the gun to his young friend with fanfare and pride, or did he give away the gun because it no longer held any significance to him? Had the neighbor simply become too old to hunt, or had he become disenchanted with guns and hunting? With these questions come others: was there a stage in men’s lives when owning a gun was “powerful desire,” and another stage when owning a gun became a trivial matter? Howells’s anecdote asks such questions; other anecdotes might help answer them (though, to be sure, it would be helpful to distinguish the probate records of older men from younger men to determine who was most likely to own a gun).

Perhaps the true value of *Arming America* itself is not in counting guns but in generating questions. Bellesiles has issued a challenge to gun lovers, libertarians, and the NRA, and they have accepted. The result is sure to be positive: Americans of all political stripes will learn a great deal more about guns and about history as the debate continues. In the process, they will be forced to consider again old questions: what is good government? What is tyranny? What rights belong to individuals, and what rights belong to the collective?

While we are asking those questions, we might ask, too, whether crusaders for gun rights protect us from tyranny, or tyrannize over us. The spectacle of a scholar—whether right, wrong, or somewhere in between—being harassed for having published a book should surely cause us to worry. The threats against Bellesiles and his family only confirm what proponents of gun control already suspect: that over-fondness for guns, far from making one into a patriot, makes one into a bully. Indeed, a case can be made that guns have always made bullies. The idea that our forebears employed guns to protect their rights should be balanced with the observation that our forebears used those same guns to deny rights to others, namely Indians, slaves, and Mexicans.

As Daniel Shays might have recognized, the theory that a well-armed people will guard against government tyranny contains its own contradictions. Indeed, throughout American history, those who have used arms to battle a tyrannous government—Daniel Shays, the Whiskey rebels, the Confederates, the Weathermen, the Symbionese Liberation Army, or, most recently, Timothy McVeigh—were crushed by other armed men who came to the defense of that government. The problem with encouraging everyone to own guns to protect themselves from tyranny is that not all Americans define tyranny in the same way. Consider two recent in-

stances of perceived tyranny: the burning of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, and the disfranchisement of tens of thousands of Florida voters in the 2000 election. The former fired the imagination of a proponent of the Second Amendment; the latter fired the imagination of political actors who tend to favor gun control. What resulted? Tim McVeigh will go down in history as an American Guy Fawkes whereas Florida's poor and minority voters—never having dreamed of using guns and bombs in protest—will get electoral reform. Perhaps that is one of the lessons of *Arming America*.

## Notes:

[1]. OIEAHC Resolution on Harassment of Michael Bellesiles, May 7, 2001, archived at <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl> (see various H-Net discussion logs); quotations from "IS BELLESILES TRYING TO DECEIVE YOU?" flyer by Randy Herrst, Highlights of Jeff Chan's Archive, <http://rkba.org/highlights.html>, undated (accessed May 17, 2001).

[2]. Asked in a January 2001 interview whether other scholars were working on refuting Bellesiles, Joyce Lee Malcolm responded that "Michael Korda has an article planned that is coming out next month. There is a whole series of scholars who have been working on different aspects of the book who should be bringing things out shortly. I'm going to be writing for a law journal an article that will come out in May in the University of Texas Law Journal." See "Were the Colonists Gun-Haters? Geoff Metcalf Interviews Second Amendment Historian Joyce Malcolm," *WorldNetDaily*, January 7, 2001, archived at [http://wnd.com/news/printer-friendly.asp?~ARTICLE\\_ID=21237](http://wnd.com/news/printer-friendly.asp?~ARTICLE_ID=21237).

[3]. James Lindgren and Justin Lee Heather, "Counting Guns in Early America," <http://www.law.nwu.edu/faculty/fulltime/Lindgren/Lindgren.html>, May 16, 2001, 3-12.

[4]. "IS BELLESILES TRYING TO DECEIVE YOU?" Highlights of Jeff Chan's Archive, <http://rkba.org/highlights.html>.

[5]. Michael Bellesiles to HOIEAHC@h-net.msu.edu, email, January 9, 2001. Archived at <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl> (see the HOIEAHC discussion log).

[6]. Kimberley A. Strassel, "Arm-Twisting," *Wall Street Journal*, April 5, 2001; also available at <http://www.opinionjournal.com/columnists/>

[kstrassel/?~id=85000800](http://www.opinionjournal.com/columnists/kstrassel/?~id=85000800).

[7]. Jackson Lears, "The Shooting Game," *The New Republic*, January 22, 2001.

[8]. Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 12.

[9]. Bellesiles is almost certainly incorrect in asserting that in 1806 "a congressional committee estimated that there were 250,000 guns in America." See Bellesiles, *Arming America*, p.241, fn. 123. Clayton Cramer, perhaps the most ardent of Bellesiles's critics, points out that the 250,000 figure excluded some 120,000 operational firearms owned by the federal government as well as a significant number of privately owned firearms. See Clayton Cramer, *Armed America: Firearms Ownership & Manufacturing in Early America*, version 5.2, <http://www.GGNRA.org/cramer/ArmingAmericaLong.pdf> (accessed May 17, 2001), 125-27. It is also important to remember that, as Bellesiles and others show, gun ownership varied by geographical locale and by class. Generally, the richer one was, the more likely one was to own a gun. In addition, southern men were more likely to own guns than northern men. For evidence that a majority of adult white male Americans in at least one locale owned firearms, see Judith A. McGaw, "So Much Depends upon a Red Wheel Barrow': Agricultural Tool Ownership in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," in *Early American Technology: Making and Doing Things from the Colonial Era to 1850*, Ed. Judith A. McGaw (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1994), 332.

[10]. Benjamin Franklin, *Plain Truth: or, Serious Considerations On the Present State of the City of Philadelphia, and Province of Pennsylvania*, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Eds. Leonard W. Labaree and Whitfield J. Bell, Jr. (New Haven, 1961), III, 202.

[11]. John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England & the Summer Isles together with the True Travels, Adventures and Observations, and a Sea Grammar*, vol. 1 (Glasgow, 1907), 178. John Lawson, quoted in Stuart A. Marks, *Southern Hunting in Black and White: Nature, History, and Ritual in a Carolina Community* (Princeton, N.J., 1991), 29.

[12]. Stephen Anthony Aron, "How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of California at Berkeley, 1990), 280; Charles Lanman, *The Private Life of Daniel Webster* (New York, 1852), 78.

[13]. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (New York, 1962), 207-8; Acorn, "Buffalo Hunt Near Boston!" *Spirit of the Times*, 12, no. 12 (May 20, 1843): 1, cols. 2-3.

[14]. Sportsman, "Rejoinder to I.T.S.," *Cabinet of Natural History and American Rural Sport*, Ed. Gail Stewart (Barre, Mass., 1973), 1:116; Boon Club, "Rifle Shooting in Kentucky," *Spirit of the Times* 18, no. 7 (April 8, 1848): 79, col. 3.

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