AMERICA 250

Semiquincentennial. There's a mouthful, and it represents a lot of history. Two hundred and fifty years of the United States of America to celebrate July 4, 2026. There is much divisiveness in our country today, and everyone finds something to complain about without really appreciating what we have. We have problems, but we are still the best country in the world. We have issues, but we are working on them. It's a work in progress, and the progress we have made is almost unimaginable.

Two and a half centuries are not much in the course of human history, but the time span covers ten generations. People today can't really know the reality of life 250 years ago, and couldn't relate to it anyway. Living conditions were primitive as immigrants tried to scratch a toehold in a hostile wilderness and still pay taxes to the King of England.

How America got to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the "Keep and Bear Arms" Second Amendment is quite a story, and it bears retelling because it is important, and we have forgot most of it. So here are the Cliff Notes.

In 1774 the thirteen original English colonies in America convened the First Continental Congress to develop a unified response to Britain's "Intolerable Acts", which included the blockade of Boston Harbor, dissolved colonial self-government, and forced colonists to house British troops in their homes. These actions were punishment for Massachusetts' Boston Tea Party, which dumped ship loads of tea in the bay in protest of taxation without representation. This convention responded by forming the Continental Association, and formalizing a petition to the King asserting their autonomy from England, condemning taxation without representation, and setting a trade ban on England.

THE WAR IS ON

King George III ignored the petition and decided that more force was necessary to keep the colonies in line. Several regiments of "Redcoats" (regular frontline infantry) were sent to reinforce the troops already in the Boston area. This resulted in losing battles with colonial militia (the Minute Men) at Lexington and Concord in April of 1775. About two months later the militia inflicted about 1000 casualties on the British at the battle of Bunker Hill, but were forced to retreat having run out of ammunition.

In May of 1775 the Second Continental Congress was convened and in June they created the Continental Army and made George Washington the Commander in Chief. Still desiring peace, they sent the Olive Branch Petition to the King in July of 1775. King George III issued the Proclamation of Rebellion and declared war in August 1775. To crush the uprising, the King dispatched over 20,000 additional British soldiers and a massive naval fleet, including

approximately 18,000 German mercenaries (Hessians) to reinforce his American garrisons. The British force in America peaked at over 50,000 total.

The Continental Army never exceeded some 48,000 at any one time and depended on state militias during critical campaigns. The militias never exceeded some 45,000 at any one time. Both the army and the militias were chronically underfunded, and lacked equipment, food and clothing suitable for winter campaigns. George Washington commanded about 17 major battles with the British, and is generally credited with winning six, losing seven and the rest draws or retreats. Because his army was small and very poorly equipped, he often had to execute tactical retreats to keep his army alive, but he persisted.

In 1776 the Second Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence which made the thirteen colonies independent from England. The efforts of Congress to establish a government resulted in the Articles of Confederation approved in 1777 and ratified in 1781

England at this time was a worldwide power competing with other countries like France and Spain in colonizing areas around the world. England also was the undisputed naval power. One would think that such a force would have little difficulty controlling these thirteen American colonies with such meager resources. The reality was that England was stretched thin defending its territories worldwide.

America was 3,000 miles away across the Atlantic Ocean and the colonies covered about 1,300 miles of rugged coastline, up to some 300 miles deep to the Appalachian Mountains. The rugged terrain and the colonial militia's employment of guerrilla warfare limited the effectiveness of rigid European battle tactics.

Perhaps the biggest factor in our success in the Revolutionary War was securing France as an ally. Desiring to weaken its English rival, France began secretly supplying funds and military supplies in 1776. A formal Treaty of Alliance was signed with France in 1778. France contributed over 12,000 troops and 22,000 naval personnel to our cause. England was stymied. The Parliament finally decided the colonies cost more than they were worth at the time. In 1783 the Treaty of Paris was signed, and England formally recognized the United States as an independent and sovereign nation.

WE WON THE WAR, NOW WHAT?

Now Congress could have called it good right there and kept doing business as usual, but they had already found that the Articles of Confederation were too weak and ineffectual. It did not really meet the expectations of the Declaration of Independence which set the stage for developing a new way to order and regulate the affairs of men. In a most radical departure from the historical status quo, the Declaration stated that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty

and the pursuit of Happiness." The document also stated that to protect these rights, a government must be created that derives its just powers from the consent of the people.

The problem was that we were on the edge of a new evolution (and revolution) in the affairs of men, and there were no good models. We did not know how to do it, because it had never been done before.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FREEDOM

To put this problem in perspective, we need to understand the history of civilization. Since the dawn of history, with few exceptions, men and women had no rights, and were not equal or free, and had no say in their government.

Humans evolved to favor brains over brawn, which meant we had to come together to organize and cooperate in the struggle for survival. The earliest human organizations were tribal bands or chiefdoms that were dictated by the strongest hunter or warrior. As agriculture blossomed and populations grew, power became consolidated in monarchies and empires headed by rulers, kings, and emperors. Most men and women were not free or equal, but rather slaves or subjects of the ruling class.

Around 759 B.C. city-states began to organize in ancient Greece, and they experimented with early forms of democracy that included free citizens, but the definition of citizen was narrow. Citizenship was limited to free, native-born adult males who completed military training. Women, children, foreigners and slaves had no rights. Citizenship was lost when the city-states fought among themselves and degenerated into oligarchy (rule of the few). Finally, the city-states were conquered by Macedonia in 338 B.C.

Rome reigned for some 2,200 years, arising about the same time as the Greek city-states from a small Iron Age village. They established a Senate and had citizens, but still a King. After a succession of seven kings, the Roman Kingdom was overthrown.

This gave rise to the Roman Republic in 509 B.C. Instead of another King, they established a constitutional republic with a complex set of checks and balances. Rome was famous for large numbers of "free citizens", but that did not equate to equal rights for all. Major categories that changed over time were patricians (wealthy aristocrats) and plebeians (commoners), freedmen (slaves granted freedom), and provincials (conquered subjects). Free-born Roman women were citizens, and they held property and inheritance rights, but could not vote or hold public office. And then there were the slaves.

Rome's economy was based on conquest and slavery for wealth, resources and manpower. For about 500 years the huge armies of the Roman Republic marched into Europe and Western Asia

creating a massive empire until they were fatally overextended. At the end of the Republic, Roman Italy had maybe ten million citizens, and three million slaves. This constitutional republic, originally created to run a small city-state, became unable to finance or control its armies or its many citizens. Wealth inequality, private armies and political corruption gave rise to a series of civil wars. Julius Caesar marched into Rome with his army and appointed himself as dictator for life. Thus ended the first constitutional republic and the Roman Empire began about 27 BC.

The autocratic rule of the Roman Empire (27 BC- 476 AD) ended individual political freedom. While the Edict of Caracalla in 212 AD granted citizenship to almost all free men in the empire, slavery was still a pillar of the economy.

The fall of the Roman Empire gave rise to a long period of feudalism known as the Middle Ages (500-1500). Power became fragmented and numerous small countries emerged as monarchies. Kings granted land to nobles in exchange for military service and loyalty. With the land came peasants, or serfs, who accounted for some 90 percent of the population.

Serfs were one step up from slaves. Serfs were not property and could not be bought and sold, but serfs were forced to provide unpaid agricultural labor to the lord of the land in exchange for protection, shelter and the right to farm a small plot of land for their own families.

In spite of several major wars during the Middle Ages (500-1500), such as the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) between England and France, the Wars of Scottish Independence (1296-1357) between England and Scotland, and the Crusades (1096-1291) religious wars between Christianity and the Muslims, there was a global growth in trade, independent towns, and coin-based economies. A wealthy merchant class arose. The rise of monetary economies allowed serfs to buy their freedom. Societies were slowly transitioning toward capitalism, replacing the bondage of serfdom with wage labor.

But with the rise of trade from east to west came a global pandemic. The Black Death (1346-1353) arose in Central Asia and then traveled overland and by sea into China, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Africa and Europe. This plague killed perhaps 200 million people world-wide, and an estimated one-third of the population of Europe. If it could be said that there was an upside to such a scourge, it would be that it created a massive labor shortage that gave surviving serfs more bargaining power and freedom.

The Middle Ages (500-1500) also saw a slow evolution of thinking about the rights of humans based on natural law, a belief that moral principles are inherent in human nature, discernible through reason, and above man-made laws. The signing of the Magna Carta (1215) by King John of England was a major step forward as it established the rule of law, showing that no man

is above the law, even a King. It also promised limits on taxation, due process (fair trials), and freedom from unfair prison sentences.

The Renaissance (1300-1527) ushered out the Middle Ages with a cultural and intellectual rebirth relating to art, science and humanism, which focused on individual human potential, values, and rights. This period was powered by a growth in wealth due to increased global trade, the rediscovery of ancient Grecco-Roman texts and the spread of literature facilitated by the invention of the printing press.

The Age of Enlightenment (1688-1789) grew out of the Renaissance and began to foster more human-centered thinking. The scientific revolution was beginning to show that human reason could discover universal truths about the natural world instead on relying on superstition. The Protestant Reformation challenged the authority of the Catholic Church and encouraged people to read, think for themselves and question traditional religion.

A key starting point of this new age was the Glorious Revolution and the English Bill of Rights of 1689. The revolution ousted King James II and the English Bill of Rights gave the new rulers a strict rulebook that limited the powers of the King, ceded some powers to Parliament, and protected basic human freedoms, such as the freedom of speech and the right to keep and bear arms. This shifted England from a rigid monarchy to the first constitutional monarchy where the King is a symbolic position, and the real power resides with a Parliament representative of the people.

This period also birthed a major ideological shift in the proper relationship between government and the people. Philosophers like Locke, Hobbes, Rousseau and Montesquieu championed the concept of the "social contract". Their idea was that government should derive its legitimacy from the consent of the governed, based on natural rights (life, liberty and property), separation of powers and constitutionalism. Sound familiar?

So our founders, who were largely educated men of the period, had these ideas about individual freedom and rights, and a government driven by the people already planted in their collective minds. However, there were no good models. What they had in mind had never been done. England's constitutional monarchy was close, but it still had a king and a House of Lords. The founders liked a constitution, and they wanted a democracy (direct individual citizen involvement in all aspects of government and majority rule), but the growing population was already too large for that.

SO HOW DO YOU MAKE SUCH A GOVERNMENT?

Our Declaration of Independence stated that in order to secure and protect these rights, a government must be created that derives its just powers from the consent of the people, and

that whenever the government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right and the duty of the people to alter or abolish it.

Delegates from the thirteen states agreed that the government based on the first Articles of Confederation was too weak and ineffectual. They took a new cut at defining and describing their desired new government in the first Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia which resulted in the United States Constitution, signed in 1787 and ratified in 1789. The result was a constitutional republic ruled by elected representatives.

Further deliberation by the First Congress resulted in the Bill of Rights in 1789, ratified in 1791. These first ten amendments to the Constitution were intended to limit government powers and provide more specific protection for individual liberties. The First Amendment protected the freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances. The Second Amendment specified that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. Of the twenty-seven total amendments to the Constitution to date, they are all dependent to a large degree on the First and Second Amendments. Citizens without a voice, without firearms cannot oppose tyranny, invaders, or even protect themselves.

SO WHAT ABOUT THE SECOND AMENDMENT?

Now the people who would take our guns away believe that the Second Amendment does not apply to an individual right to keep and bear arms because the Second Amendment begins with the statement: "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state…" The anti-gunners argue that the "militia" is the National Guard.

This is partially true. US Code (10 USC 246) defines "militia" as consisting of two parts: the organized militia (National Guard) and the unorganized militia. US Code (10 USC 311) states that the (unorganized) militia of the United States consists of all able-bodied males aged 17 to 45.

So why a militia? The founding fathers were fearful of having a large standing army, as history taught them that armies were often used by governments to oppress their own people. It was thought to limit the size of the standing army until needed to fight foreign enemies. In the case of sudden invasions of our soil or other emergencies, the government would rely on the (unorganized) militia comprised of ordinary civilians who supplied their own weapons and gear.

The unorganized militia has never been called up by Congress, but did play a short, but critical role in the American Revolution. The Minute Men were a colonial militia comprised of ordinary citizens who had to provide their own uniforms, muskets, tomahawks and ammunition. They represented about twenty-five percent of the colonial fighting forces, and played a crucial role

in the first successful military engagements with the British army that began the Revolutionary War in April 1775, with the Battles of Lexington and Concord.

It became quickly apparent that militia forces alone could not defeat the British army on their own. Their organizational purpose was quick community defense, not extended military operations. They lacked a unified command structure and training for sustained engagements. They also lacked standardized weapons and bayonets, and a reluctance to leave their home territories. Limited numbers left the militias a weak force to oppose the British Army. Of necessity to conduct the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress formed the Army in 1775.

When the Constitution was finalized in 1789 the federal government was given authority to raise a peacetime standing army. In the 250 years since, our own civil war, and a large number of wars small and large, world wars, cold wars and regional conflicts have resulted in our nation's military forces becoming enormously larger and technologically more powerful. The militias, however, are still on the books.

AND WHAT A MILITIA!

While Japanese Admiral Yamamoto's famous WWII quotes about the United States being the "sleeping giant" he feared to awaken, and that they didn't invade the USA mainland because there would be "a gun behind every blade of grass" have never been verified by historians, there appears to be truth behind the assertion. It is estimated that the United States has the highest number of civilian-owned firearms in the world, perhaps over 400 million guns for some 342 million people.

It should appear obvious from the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights that our founding fathers believed that citizens had not only the right, but also the responsibility and duty to protect themselves, their families, their community, their state and their country.

In 2008 the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in the Heller decision that the Second Amendment protects an **individual** right to keep and bear arms for traditionally lawful purposes. In spite of this affirmation of the Second Amendment by the Supreme Court, efforts at all levels from federal to state to local continue to infringe on our right to keep and bear arms.

SO WHY ALL THE FUSS OVER GUNS?

Why? The primary argument for gun control is public safety. The belief is that the common availability of firearms increases the incidence of violent crime and homicides, increases

suicides, increases mass shootings, increases child abuse and domestic violence, and increases just about everything bad.

In 2024 there were some 3.07 million deaths in the USA in total. About 99 percent of these deaths were disease or health related. Accidents, suicides, homicides and legal interventions (death by police) amount to less than one percent of the annual deaths. Of the 3.07 million deaths in 2024 some .015%, or 44,447 were gun related deaths. Sounds horrible, right? The population in America totaled 341,814,420. If you do the math, the number of gun related deaths comprises significantly less than one percent of the population (.0013%).

These 44,447 gun-related deaths are further categorized as deaths by suicide (62%, or about 27,557), deaths by police in the line of duty (2%, or about 889), deaths by homicide (35%, or about 15,556), and deaths by accidental discharge (1%, or about 445). If you set aside deaths by suicide and deaths by police in the line of duty, you are left with only some 16,000 annual deaths by intentional homicide or accidental discharge. And of these, the majority occur in a handful of major metropolitan areas like Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Washington D.C., all of which have the strictest gun control laws in effect.

While all deaths are regrettable, it seems that the focus on this very small number of gun-related deaths compared to the total of all deaths annually is severely disproportionate. Considering that this country is estimated to have some 400 million guns in the hands of 342 million people, the number of gun-related deaths seems infinitesimally small.

SO AGAIN, WHY ALL THE FUSS?

It seems to me that there are two major reasons for gun control laws and regulations and the disregard of the Second Amendment. Both reasons may be operative at the same time.

First, there are many well intentioned people who suffer from what I call “wishful thinking”. These people have an irrational belief that the elimination of guns from society would eliminate evil and violence. They wish that it were true and work toward that end in spite of all the real world evidence that it would never work. Even if you could magically make every gun in the world suddenly vanish, you would still have people killing each other with sticks and stones.

These are the same people who argue that they don’t need guns because they have the police to protect them. And then they advocate defunding the police. The reality is that the police don’t protect you personally, but rather clean up after a crime has been committed and try to catch the bad guys.

The second reason takes you to the dark side. Gun control is about people control. Since the start of civilization people with power and wealth have attempted to control and use people, to

make them work for them, or fight for them. There are still many countries around the world that are communist or totalitarian and which control their populations with force of arms.

There are many conspiracy theories about who is really controlling the United States, or who want to control the United States. The Deep State theory hypothesizes that there is secret network of high-level military officials and industrial leaders (military industrial complex), and intelligence agencies like the CIA and FBI that are covertly running things. Many believe that Secret Societies such as the Bilderbergers and the Illuminati are the operators. Others believe that Big Money, the corporate and financial elites, are the puppet masters. Still others believe that the aliens are the controllers.

Who knows who to trust or what to believe anymore. Sadly, I believe we can trust human nature, which is hedonistic in principle. Humans are hard wired to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Society uses a variety of laws, institutional organizations, moral frameworks and cultural norms to suppress or counter this hedonism, but there are always some who escape the conditioning. These people will lie, cheat, steal and murder to get their way on a singular basis, or rise to positions of high level control.

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were the founding fathers effort to break with the tradition of autocratic rule. The Second Amendment was their recognition that an armed population was the only true barrier to a corrupt government.

A CALL TO ARMS

It behooves us, individually and collectively to be more proactive in fighting efforts to disarm the public. Our ability to protect ourselves, our families, our country and our freedom with the most effective weapons will be lost. Get involved, be informed, communicate with local, state and federal legislators. Vote.

By

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