Defending the American Way: White-Masculine Gun Ownership and the Projection of Power

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Defending the American Way:
White-Masculine Gun Ownership and the Projection of Power

By
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Defending the American Way:
White-Masculine Gun Ownership and the Projection of Power

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# Table of Contents

Introduction ............................................. 1

1. Gun Ownership from the Militia to the New Deal......................... 12

2. Post-War Social Movements: Defying White-Masculinity................. 38

3. Political and Economic Unrest: America in Decline.................... 57

4. The NRA and Conservative Politics: Institutionalizing Gun Culture... 61

Conclusion ................................................................ 70

Bibliography ................................................. 77
Abstract

Though the nature of gun ownership has evolved throughout American history since the colonial era, white-masculinity has persistently underpinned gun ownership as a white-men prerogative, reinforcing the masculine values of provider, protector, and rugged individualism while mythologizing narratives of the citizen militia and western frontier. The nation’s current dominant gun culture emerged from the history of gun ownership that projected and enforced white-masculine power. Threatened by post-war social, political, and economic disruption in the form of activism, white-men conservatives took up arms in the post-war gun culture to reinforce their individual masculinity and construct a culture to defend white-masculinity’s social dominance. Institutionalized through the National Rifle Association, gun rights laws, and conservative politics, the post-war dominant gun culture rests at the center of contemporary America’s divisive discussion of gun ownership and violence.
Introduction

Gun ownership and violence remains a significant issue in American society, polarizing the public and enflaming sociopolitical tensions across the United States. In recent decades, public mass shootings have stunned the nation and garnered overwhelming media attention. According to data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, at least one hundred public mass shootings have been perpetrated in the United States over the past thirty-five years – and most shooters obtained their guns legally.¹ On February 14, 2018, the shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida created a national movement organized by student survivors of the massacre to demand new gun safety laws. America’s continuing public discussion of gun ownership centers on legal and political arguments that pin “gun rights” and “gun control” supporters against one another, ignoring the complex and nonbinary reality of gun ownership in the United States. Social anxiety caused by the divisive existence of gun culture and conservative reaction to post-war progressive social change translates into the current political debate over gun rights and gun control. As a result, gun rights and control is now a central partisan and barometer issue in United States politics. Pew Research Center reports that “Republican and Republican-leaning independents are about twice as likely as Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents to say owning a gun is essential to their freedom (91% vs. 43%). Republican non-owners are more likely than Democratic owners to view the right to own guns as essential to their freedom (61% vs.

¹ Mark Follman, Gavin Arosen, and Deanna Pan, “A Guide to Mass Shootings in America,” Mother Jones, May 18, 2018, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/07/mass-shootings-map/. Follman, Arosen, and Pan use a common criminological standard to define public mass shootings: a single attack that occurred in a public place in which at least four victims were killed. Since 2013, the FBI has used this standard with a lowered threshold of three victim fatalities; the count includes this data. It excludes conventional crimes, such as armed robbery and gang violence. Though shootings not included in this count are essential to the full understanding of gun violence in America, this definition best defines the events that drive public discourse on the issue of gun violence.
Nonetheless, scholarship has only recently analyzed the conservative culture of American
gun ownership that informs public discourse, and it must thoroughly investigate the social
structures that maintain the place of guns in society, namely: masculinity, racism, and
conservatism.

Society’s present discussion of gun violence provides evidence of this underlying gun
culture. As the primary organization promoting easy and expanded access to firearms, the National
Rifle Association serves, institutionalizes, and appeals to the dominant gun culture. It often cites
hunting and recreation as justified reasons to defend gun ownership, both historically men-
dominated activities. However, ownership for self-defense has come to define America’s post-
war gun culture, and during this era, gun ownership for self-defense has steadily increased. Pew
Research Center reports that “67 percent [of gun owners] cite protection as a major reason [for
ownership],” and 63 percent of gun owners cited “protection against people” to be a primary
reason for ownership in the 2015 National Firearms Survey. Consequently, the NRA’s political
positions, advertising, and public messaging idolize guns as necessary tools to protect freedom
threatened, not merely by criminals, but by liberals, the elite, and the powerful. The organization
presents its mission as a defense of constitutional Second Amendment rights. Executive Vice
President Wayne LaPierre demonstrated this mission and the NRA’s commitment to expanded gun
ownership in a press conference following the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting when he asserted

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4 Ibid., 5.
5 Ruth Igielnik and Anna Brown.
that “the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.” Following each new public mass shooting and in response to calls for new gun safety laws, this principal argument has become a frequent defense for expanded gun ownership and carry.

This foundational argument expressed by LaPierre demonstrates the gendered and individualistic ideals of the dominant gun culture. The argument itself genders the “good guy” within the masculine ideal of protector, romanticizing individual masculine violence by presenting it as the only reasonable response to criminal violence. Through reducing the complex social problem of gun violence to one bad man versus one good man, this argument defines the debate in individualistic terms and ignores the majority of gun violence research that indicates increased rates of gun ownership lead to increased rates of gun violence. The masculine protector ideal and gun culture’s individualism stand juxtaposed to traditional perceptions of feminine vulnerability and leftist trust in the collective (such as the state’s ability to protect). Through appeals to the masculine-American values of rugged individualism and self-reliance, the NRA incorporates a founding aspect of America’s dominant gun culture into its political messaging.

This post-war emphasis on self-protection and masculine individualism defines the contemporary dominant gun culture. As the gun culture grew and came to dominate public discussion of firearms, gun ownership for self-defense increased and has become the primary reason for gun ownership. White and middle-class men dominate the ranks of these gun owners across America. Generated by a perception of national decline and social disruption in the form

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9 Yamane, 5.
10 Ibid., 7.
of activism, gun-owning men lost faith in the state’s ability to protect them and their families.¹¹

On the international stage, the Cold War (1947–1991) and Vietnam War (1955–1975) threatened American power during the post-war gun culture’s development. Domestically, the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, Second Wave Feminism from the 1960s to 80s, and the Queer Rights movement of the 1970s to the present destabilized social power dynamics and challenged the power of traditional white-masculinity in America.¹² In the wake of public action, a racialized fear of crime increased among the public, primarily due to urban race riots in the 1960s and spiking violent crime in the 1970s.¹³ These social changes prompted opposition from conservative political forces: manifested as the War on Drugs targeting African Americans since the 1970s, organized opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s, and the unique demonization of Queer Americans during the AIDS crisis. Despite resistance, the advancements of post-war progressive social movements have been mostly maintained. These changing social dynamics challenged the power of white-men conservatives. In response to the perceived collapse of their values and social dominance, these white-men conservatives took up arms within the masculine role of protector, reinforcing their masculine power through an alleged need for self-defense.

Sociological fieldwork and interviews confirm the gendered and racialized foundation of the dominant gun culture. Such primary source research, documented in the works of Scott

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¹² This paper used the term *Queer* instead of other labels such as *LGBT*. Though *Queer* has been used as a homophobic and transphobic slur, the present-day community has reclaimed and mostly accepted its use to describe the community as a whole, but some debate remains especially between older and younger generations. *Queer* provides a more inclusive term for an incredibly diverse community while allowing individuals to choose their own more specific labels. For insight into this debate, see Marissa Higgins, “Is the Word "Queer" Offensive? Here's a Look at its History in the LGBTQ+ Community,” *Bustle*, February 4, 2016, https://www.bustle.com/articles/139727-is-the-word-queer-offensive-heres-a-look-at-its-history-in-the-lgbtq-community.

¹³ Carlson, 12.
Melzer\textsuperscript{14} and Angela Stroud,\textsuperscript{15} combine to clarify how individual desire to reinforce masculinity and traditional social order creates a perceived need for self-defense. Racialized fear of African American crime, immigrants, and racial others foster the urge for self-defense through personal gun ownership.

Patterns of gun ownership throughout eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century American history combined with the historical events of the post-war era to develop and underpin the nation’s current gun culture. During colonial, revolutionary, and early republic America, the militia necessitated and maintained widespread gun ownership among property-owning white men.\textsuperscript{16} These otherwise ordinary white-men citizens owned guns primarily for service in the state-owned and regulated militia. Privileged by their race, gender, and economic position, these men could exert state power.\textsuperscript{17} The purpose of gun ownership shifted in the nineteenth century as citizen ownership centered primarily on westward expansion,\textsuperscript{18} recreation, and hunting (fulfilling the ideal of masculine provider for one’s family).\textsuperscript{19} Through this history of American gun ownership, guns symbolize masculine power and ability to provide. The militia’s function as a masculine protector comprised of the male citizenry to protect the community’s vulnerable women and children moved to newly created police departments, state National Guards, and the professional military. By administering governance with guns through these organized and professional institutions, the

\textsuperscript{17} Jennifer Carlson and Kristin A. Goss, “Gendering the Second Amendment,” \textit{Law and Contemporary Problems} 80, no. 2 (2017): 104.
\textsuperscript{19} Yamane, 2-3.
state enforced its structure as a masculine institution of power. States, territories, and local communities passed gun control laws across the country, even in pioneer towns and settlements, exemplifying the state’s strengthened prerogative over common defense and its increasing control over individual gun ownership through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

Though white men in the nineteenth century forfeited their ability to exert state power through the militia, they retained their power as the principal public actors of society (in contrast to women as domestic actors) who directed state power. American pioneers expanded the nation westward across the continent throughout the century. Detailed by Matthew Flynn in Settle and Conquer: Militarism on the American Frontier, 1607-1890, the decision of American men on the frontier to migrate into Native American land and initiate violence against Native peoples compelled the state to intervene with military force to protect white Americans and kill Natives. Instead of predominately state-directed expansion, white-men civilians initiated westward expansion of the United States and performed the majority of violence against Native Americans, exemplifying white-men civilians’ continued ability to direct state power. Instead of the state dictating the actions of its citizens, the white-male citizenry continued to direct and control the state.

When faced with challenges to white-masculinity’s social dominance, white men used the state to maintain their power. Following Abolition and Reconstruction, freedmen threatened this social dominance. In response, the state enacted Black Codes, excused terrorism by white-supremacist lynch mobs and the Ku Klux Klan, and passed Jim Crow laws to maintain white-

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20 Carlson and Goss, 104.
21 Winkler, 165-67.
22 Flynn.
masculinity’s singular hold on state power while affirming racist cultural practice and belief into and through the twentieth century.

Increased urbanization and new immigration at the turn of the twentieth century transformed the place of guns in American society. The public and political establishment frequently blamed immigrants for increased urban violence, and states often barred non-citizen gun possession or discriminately enforced new gun control laws against immigrant populations. Firearms became increasingly associated with urban immigrant crime, and the demographics of immigration posed a new threat to the power of white-masculinity. The Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 restricted immigration and implemented racist national quotas in an attempt to maintain white European social dominance in the United States. Even as the state served to protect white-masculinity’s power through new gun laws and immigration restriction, gun regulation continued into the mid-twentieth century through the National Firearms Act of 1934, Federal Firearms Act of 1938, United States v. Miller in 1939, and new state and federal regulation.

White-masculinity maintained its social dominance throughout American history even as the relationship between white-men citizens, the state, and gun ownership fluctuated. However, the post-war era successfully challenged the position of white men as the directors of state power. White-masculinity faced renewed challenges to its social, political, and economic supremacy in the Civil Rights, Feminist, and Queer Rights movements. These progressive social movements

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24 Winkler, 206-07.
26 Winkler, 203.
27 Ibid., 204.
28 Ibid., 215-16
29 Ibid., 200.
looked to the state, especially the Federal Government, to guarantee the legal and constitutional rights of the oppressed. Unlike post-Reconstruction and other previous eras, the post-war American state began to ensure the rights of African, women, and Queer Americans, undermining the historical role of white men as the nation’s sole public actors. White-men conservatives, having lost faith in the state’s ability to protect their social dominance and influenced by perceptions of American decline (and thus the decline of the American state as a white-masculine institution), have increasingly lost trust in government.\textsuperscript{30} Plummetsing confidence in government, especially among conservatives, and a perceived inability of the state to protect from (often racialized fears of) crime, trigger the self-defensive gun ownership that is fundamental to today’s gun culture.\textsuperscript{31}

This new gun culture exerts its power through gun sales, the NRA, and political efforts to ensure white-masculine dominance. Since the 1970s, the NRA has fought to change public perception of gun ownership and institutionalize the dominant gun culture into law. A campaign to pass shall-issue carry gun laws at the state level found success across the country.\textsuperscript{32} Also championed by the NRA, Stand-Your-Ground laws expand the ability of private citizens (as opposed to official state agents) to initiate public violence in self-defense or the defense of others.\textsuperscript{33} These laws codify the masculine ideals of chivalrous violence, protector, and personal self-defense romanticized by today’s gun culture.\textsuperscript{34} Stand-Your-Ground laws repeal the duty to retreat when threatened in public spaces and attempt to re-institutionalize and affirm white-men civilians’ ability to exert state power by effectively extending state police powers to civilian gun owners.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{30} Carlson, 12-15.  
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 5.  
\textsuperscript{33} Kautzer, 179-80.  
\textsuperscript{34} Stroud, 226.  
\textsuperscript{35} Flynn; Carlson and Goss, 123.
The Conservative movement has thoroughly accepted the post-war gun culture since the 1970s and 80s. Though California Governor Ronald Reagan supported gun control legislation in response to the Black Panther Party in 1967, he strongly opposed gun restriction during his tenure as president from 1981-1989.\(^{36}\) To this day, gun safety laws and regulation remain strongly opposed by the Republican Party.\(^{37}\) In response to post-war social changes, the dominant gun culture has become fiercely individualistic and conservative as it seeks to reinforce white-masculine dominance.

The emphasis on self-defense and white-masculine dominance defines today’s gun culture. Though members of this culture cite self-defense as the purpose of gun ownership, rates of violent crime have now steadily declined for decades.\(^{38}\) Considering that economically secure white men have been the least threatened cohort of America’s population throughout its history and given the current era of declining violent crime, why has this new gun culture developed and thrived in contemporary America? Through the evaluation of historical evidence, political science, and sociological research, this paper demonstrates that America’s dominant gun culture emerged in the post-war era from social anxiety over the perceived erosion of traditional white-masculinity. White-men conservatives accuse the state of decline because it is now less able and less willing to maintain hegemonic masculinity and white supremacy in the face of the advancing social movements of the mid-to-late twentieth century. Now less able to direct state power and preserve the masculine ideals of protector, provider, and rugged individualism, private white-men conservatives in the dominant gun culture feel compelled to take up arms to reinforce their

\(^{36}\) Winkler, 224-45; Waldman, 93.


\(^{38}\) Kautzer, 184.
individual masculinity and sustain a culture of gun ownership that preserves white-masculinity’s social dominance.

Section one begins this paper with a historical overview of American gun culture and ownership while investigating connections between gun ownership and white-masculinity’s control of state power. Beginning with colonial, revolutionary, and early republic America, this section analyzes the militia as an institution of masculine protection and civic duty. Moving into the nineteenth century, the state’s increasing role in common defense through professional police and military forces changed the nature of gun ownership. Nonetheless, section one examines how white men sustained gun ownership as a masculine ideal while maintaining control of state power. Specifically, white-men civilians initiated and drove United States westward expansion, committed genocidal gun violence against Native Americans, and enacted continued oppression of African Americans following Abolition and Reconstruction. As immigrants threatened white-masculinity’s dominant societal position at the turn of the century, gun restriction and new immigration laws protected the power of white men.

Section two begins the discussion of post-war America by detailing how the Civil Rights, Feminist, and Queer Rights movements worked to deconstruct white-masculinity’s social, political, and economic dominance. Civil Rights expanded opportunities for African Americans in opposition to white supremacy and racial discrimination; the Feminist movement challenged sexist notions of male superiority and gender dynamics while opening opportunities for women in politics and the workforce, and the Queer Rights movement challenged traditional gender and sexual ideals while battling fierce opposition from conservatives and evangelicals. Each of these social movements initiated an interrogation of white-masculinity throughout American society.
Section three contextualizes the social anxiety created by post-war social movements that was critical to the dominant gun culture’s development. The Cold War and the social trauma of the Vietnam experience challenged the masculine power of the United States. Domestically, changing economic conditions destabilized working- and middle-class employment, epitomized by disappearing manufacturing jobs. Unstable men’s employment, combined with increasing rates of women in the workforce detailed in section two, endangered the traditional *breadwinner* model and compelled men to reaffirm their masculinity through gun ownership as protectors. These political, economic, and social changes created a perception of American decline and sparked general distrust in the state’s power that continues to define twenty-first-century gun culture. Given racialized fears of crime, challenges to white supremacy, the perceived dangers of the women’s movement, and the societal collapse threatened by Queer Americans, white-men conservatives turned to firearms as masculine symbols of power.

In section four, an evaluation of the NRA, its history, and conservative political goals details how the post-war gun culture seeks to institutionalize itself. Passage of shall-issue carry laws on the state level provide members of the dominant gun culture with the legal right to assert their white-masculinity through gun carrying both at home and in public. Stand-Your-Ground laws strive to re-ordain white men with the ability to command state power individually in public. Additionally, redefining the popular and legal understanding of the Second Amendment allowed the NRA to increase public support for expanded gun ownership and carry, eventually leading to the Supreme Court’s *District of Columbia v. Heller* decision in 2008. Lastly, section four synchronizes the previous sections by examining the current realities and experiences of the

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39 Carlson, 12-15.
contemporary gun culture. The decreased ability of white-masculinity to direct state power combined with challenges to the traditional social order to create social anxiety among white-men conservatives. Through the analysis of sociological fieldwork and interviews of present-day NRA members and concealed-carry gun owners, the themes of masculine protector, provider, and rugged individualism are further supported.

This paper closes by discussing the post-war gun culture in light of the current gun control, Black Lives Matter, Feminist, and Queer Rights movements. Ultimately, anxiety over decreasing white-masculine power produced and continues to sustain the dominant gun culture. This gun culture projects white-masculine power, defending the conservative social order they perceive as the traditional “American Way.” In the process, white-men conservatives reinforce their individual masculine identity within a model of gun ownership dating back to the citizen militia and western frontier. New gun control movements, progressive models of gun ownership, and recreational gun owners not committed to the NRA’s gun politics stand to challenge the white-masculine foundation of the dominant gun culture that polarizes and restricts America’s public discourse.

Section 1 – American Gun Ownership from the Militia to the New Deal

The Citizen Militia: Colonial, Revolutionary, and Early Republic America

America’s post-war dominant gun culture evolved from a long history of gun ownership stretching back to the earliest years of English colonialization. For generations, Americans have been raised and educated on historical narratives of colonial and revolutionary America, mythologizing and revering the use of firearms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, a “shot heard around the world” sparked the struggle for
American independence.\textsuperscript{40} Instigated on April 19, 1775 in Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts, the first battle of the Revolution epitomizes the civic republicanism and patriotic duty that America’s founding stories seek to instill. Ordinary white-men citizens, from Paul Revere to the minutemen that fought at Lexington and Concord, filled the ranks of America’s protectors in stark opposition to a professional military or police force such as the British redcoats. This citizen militia stood at the heart of widespread gun ownership, common defense, and community in colonial and revolutionary America. White-men citizens not only defended themselves and their families using firearms, but they organized to defend the community from external military threats and internal criminal threats, maintaining secure social order through service in the citizen militia.

The militia underpinned citizen gun ownership during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. Colonial and state legislatures required free able-bodied white-men citizens to own a firearm fit for military service, such as a musket or rifle, beginning in the first English-American settlements. With these firearms, the state mandated free white men from between sixteen to sixty years of age to serve in the militia.\textsuperscript{41} Though the state controlled the militia through legal mandate and regulation, the masculine duty to protect motivated white men into militia service as a fundamental responsibility of good citizenship.\textsuperscript{42} The state mandate and civic responsibility of firearm ownership created the widespread gun culture dominated by white men during this era. Periodic musters maintained the militia, necessary to preserve the state’s primary

\textsuperscript{40} Ralph Waldo Emerson, \textit{The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Poems}, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 158.

\textsuperscript{41} Waldman, 9. Differing colonial and state laws created conflicting militia regulations. Congress passed the Militia Act of 1792 to standardize militia service across the country and required all free able-bodied white men between eighteen and forty-five years of age to own a military-grade firearm and serve in their state’s militia. States maintained control and regulatory power over their respective militias.

\textsuperscript{42} Carlson and Goss, 110.
means of defense.\textsuperscript{43} These musters included rudimentary training, inspection of guns by public officials, and accounting of guns on public rolls\textsuperscript{44} – the latter of which is strikingly similar to the gun registry proposals fiercely opposed by the NRA today. As a result, militia-based gun ownership emphasized community protection, provided common defense and law enforcement through private white-men citizens, and required significant state regulation of private gun ownership.

Mainly due to militia service, guns were common among the private white-men population. From the late seventeenth through eighteenth century, an estimated forty to sixty percent of wealth holders owned a working firearm, with ownership most common among white, economically-secure, and southern men.\textsuperscript{45} Restricted to predominately property-owning white men, gun ownership was common but not universal.\textsuperscript{46} The state frequently used its authority to control and regulate gun ownership. Laws across the colonies and states required safe storage of gunpowder, New York City, Boston, and all cities in Pennsylvania forbade the firing of guns inside city limits, and Boston forbade loaded guns in homes.\textsuperscript{47} When necessary, states maintained the right to impress (temporarily confiscate) guns for military service, which ten of the thirteen states utilized to arm their militias during the Revolution.\textsuperscript{48} Even if individuals at the time viewed such laws as inconvenient, the militia-based context of gun ownership permitted the state’s unrestricted prerogative to legislate and regulate firearms. Such legislation confirmed and protected the role of white men as protectors and agents of state power. Though the militia is often discussed as

\textsuperscript{43} Waldman, 6.
\textsuperscript{44} Winkler, 113.
\textsuperscript{45} Melzer, 32.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Waldman, 32.
\textsuperscript{48} Winkler, 113.
representative of the community, state laws restricted militia service to white men, excluded women from service, barred African slaves from gun possession to prevent slave revolts, and frequently banned the sale of firearms to Native Americans.\textsuperscript{49} During the Revolution, states also disarmed loyalist sympathizers even when they posed no threat to American military success, further proving that anyone perceived as untrustworthy (including political opponents, women, non-whites, and ultimately a majority of the population) could be legally disarmed to maintain the social and political power of American white men.\textsuperscript{50} Not only did the militia exist to ensure public safety, but it enforced white-masculine social order and symbolized the union between America’s free white men and the state. Instead of reflecting the community, the militia encompassed the powerful of American society and enforced white-masculinity’s social dominance. The population of free white men directed and executed state power through militia service, using guns as a tool of state-sanctioned violence while bearing them as symbols of their social and political power.

In what Carlson and Kristin Goss term “Chivalrous Governance,” white men in colonial, revolutionary, and early republic America created, embodied, and developed the ideals of good citizenship and enforced state power through private gun ownership and widespread militia service.\textsuperscript{51} Gun ownership in this period blurred the lines between public and private as ordinary white-men citizens wielded state power and guaranteed public order. Since the militia fulfilled the public need as the state’s means of protection and law enforcement, it became the foundation of stable government, secure communities, and maintenance of white-masculinity’s social order.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{49} Winkler, 115-16; Melzer, 30. As noted by Melzer, though English colonies often banned the sale of firearms to Native Americans, Native peoples frequently obtained guns through trade with Great Britain’s rival colonial powers. 
\textsuperscript{50} Winkler, 116.
\textsuperscript{51} Carlson and Goss, 104.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 110.
Leadership within the militia became a frequent stepping stone to political leadership as it signaled one’s masculine and public virtue. In this sense, white men did not bear arms primarily through an individual need for self-protection but instead used guns to engage early America’s ideals of citizenship by expressing their masculine protection of the community, connection to state power, and dominating social, political, and economic position.

*The Nineteenth Century and Paternal Governance*

Following the Revolutionary War and at the turn of the nineteenth century, strict enforcement of compulsory militia service began to diminish. Though the militia continued to exist, the state professionalized common defense through law enforcement and the military in the nineteenth century. The newly founded Federal Government established West Point Military Academy in 1802 to support the development of a professional standing army. After the War of 1812, during which the citizen militia proved incapable of protecting the nation’s capital against the professional British army, Congress enlarged and significantly increased funding for the federal military. Beginning in the American South with Kentucky in 1813, states sought to suppress a masculine honor culture of duels, gunfights, and violence and banned concealed carry of firearms in public throughout the nineteenth century – a right central to the post-war gun culture of America today. In opposition to prevailing myths of the American frontier, similar gun control extended into frontier towns and settlements. America’s historical memory glorifies the masculine fantasy of an adventurous, lawless, and violent nineteenth-century frontier supported

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53 Carlson and Goss, 111.
54 Waldman, 66.
55 Carlson and Goss, 116.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Yamane, 5.
59 Winkler, 166-67.
by 1950s-style westerns, television, science fiction, and detective stories.\textsuperscript{60} However, western towns commonly banned gun carrying within municipal limits, required visitors to forfeit their guns temporarily to authorities, and allowed only law enforcement to carry firearms.\textsuperscript{61} These settlements restricted gun carry to hunting and bringing guns to repair or military muster.\textsuperscript{62} Gun violence on the frontier did not often occur within settlements but instead centered around civilian-led violence against Native Americans (further explained starting on page 18) and decreased once westward expansion had removed, displaced, or killed Natives.\textsuperscript{63} Violent crime was rare in western towns, and illegal gun carrying became the second most common reason for an arrest.\textsuperscript{64} Municipalities, western territories, states, and the Federal Government asserted increased control over law enforcement and public defense through newly established professional police forces and the military. As the separation between private white-men citizens and the state apparatus grew, the increasingly powerful American state asserted its position as a masculine institution of power through gun use, providing for and protecting the white population that it primarily served with newly created police and military institutions.

Termed “Paternal Governance” by Carlson and Goss, the state increased control over personal gun use and co-opted the masculine duty to protect the public from private white-men citizens serving in the militia. The authority to exert state power transferred from the general population of white-men citizens to a selective population of professional, state-employed, more powerful law enforcement and military service members also populated primarily by white men.\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
    \item Melzer, 33.
    \item Winkler, 165.
    \item Melzer, 34.
    \item Ibid., 33.
    \item Winkler., 171.
    \item Carlson and Goss, 116.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
In the mid-nineteenth century, police forces had been established across the country, especially in cities, and were modeled after military rank and physically signified by military-style uniforms.\textsuperscript{66} Whereas the militia-based context of gun ownership maintained no distinction between public and private gun ownership and therefore little distinction between private white men and the American state, the police and military of the nineteenth century separated themselves from the newly defined civilian population through their wielding of state power with firearms.\textsuperscript{67} Nevertheless, white-men citizens maintained their rights to gun ownership, union with the state, and exclusive ability to direct and control state power through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

\textit{Westward Expansion: Mythologized Gun Violence on the Frontier}

Westward expansion, culminating in the official close of the frontier in 1890, marks a critical example of how white men maintained their ability to direct state power through gun ownership. Detailed by Flynn in \textit{Settle and Conquer: Militarism on the American Frontier, 1607-1890}, civilians drove the nineteenth-century growth of the United States across the continent by initiating violence against Native Americans and impelling the United States government to respond retroactively.\textsuperscript{68} Though politicians spoke of establishing a “permanent Indian frontier,” American settlement consistently violated this ideal as it sought persistently to dominate and proliferate further into Native lands.\textsuperscript{69} Great Britain attempted to establish such a frontier with the

\textsuperscript{66} Carlson and Goss, 116.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Flynn, 6. Flynn describes the three hundred years long European conquest of America and expansion of the United States as the ultimate counterinsurgency success. The “Indian Way of War” projected power through continual low-intensity fighting with a limited demographic consequence that sought to counteract enemies and create a coexistence among rivals that the dominant power could exploit. American civilians and settlers largely initiated violence and sought the total defeat of, not coexistence with, indigenous peoples. Together, these realities allowed for immense civilian-led violence and murder of Native Americans, amounting to a “demographic imperialism” that resulted in United States domination across the continent.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 48.
Proclamation Line of 1763 and ordered its American colonial subjects to cease westward settlement, but instead, it merely generated anti-British sentiment among America’s white citizens that led to the Revolutionary War.⁷⁰ Late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans looked to settle west of the Appalachian Mountains and started a century-long march towards the Pacific.⁷¹ As formerly noted, popular American histories and culture continue to mythologize this frontier expansion and experience. However, these American legends consistently misrepresent and glorify frontier gun use in war and genocide.⁷² In pioneer stories of westward expansion, Americans have counted frontiersmen among the most praised and valued of these narratives.

Daniel Boone became one of the first renowned frontiersmen of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁷³ Born in Pennsylvania in 1734, Boone traveled throughout the Appalachian region and Old Northwest, traveling on lands from present-day Michigan to Florida.⁷⁴ His passion for frontier living required hunting for both sustenance and currency and necessitated skills that mimicked indigenous cultures to survive.⁷⁵ By most accounts, Boone did not actively seek out violence with Native tribes, though his exploration, settlement, and incursion into their lands stand to justify the violence against him. Shawnee chief Blackfish adopted him as a son, though Boone later defended his settlement of Boonesborough against a Shawnee siege.⁷⁶ Both his

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⁷⁰ Flynn, 72.
⁷¹ Ibid., 70.
⁷² Melzer, 34.
⁷³ Flynn, 75. This paper uses Flynn’s account of Boone since it recognizes his role in the violence against Native peoples on the frontier. However, Jon Mack Faragher is Boone’s chief biographer in *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York: Henry Holt, 1992), though Faragher neglects to account for Boone’s part in this violence fully. Flynn also suggests Meredith Mason Brown’s *Frontiersman: Daniel Boone and the Making of America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).
⁷⁴ Ibid.
⁷⁵ Ibid., 77.
⁷⁶ Ibid., 76.
sons died in violent confrontations with Natives, yet Boone survived all his encounters and travels, dying in 1820 at eighty-five years old.77

Boone and frontiersmen like him blazed the trail for American civilians to expand westward, increase settlements, and enact further violence against the Natives living there. His life on this frontier and documentation of the Wilderness Road and Cumberland Gap paved the way for over three hundred thousand Americans to settle in Kentucky.78 The states and Federal Government did not employ or order frontiersmen like Boone to travel westward but neither did the state seek to stop civilian westward expansion. In a tacit sanction of the violence produced by Boone and frontier settlers, Congress awarded Boone public land in the west, calling him “instrumental in opening the road to civilization.”79 American culture has revered Boone as a facilitator of the American Dream and lauded his life as a symbol of the American experience. Through the extreme self-reliance, bravery, strength, and rugged individualism with which Americans have credited him, Boone stands as a lived ideal of white-masculinity. In this American myth, not only did robust masculinity and gun ownership ensure Boone’s survival and success, but his masculine experience provided for the westward expansion of the United States, albeit at the expense of Native lives.

One of the most famous of America’s frontiersmen, David “Davy” Crockett also received widespread popularity in the nineteenth century that continues to the present day for his pivotal role in “opening the west.” A folk figure in American culture, songs such as the 1950s “Ballad of Davy Crockett” idolize the violence he committed against Native Americans. The sixth stanza

77 Flynn, 77.
78 Ibid., 75.
79 Ibid., 77.
proclaims that Crockett “Fought single-handed through the Injun War / Till the Creeks was whipped an’ peace was in store.” Despite such praise, Crockett and frontiersmen used firearms to kill Native peoples. After the Creeks attacked Fort Mims along the Alabama River in 1813, Crocket briefly volunteered for militia service during General Andrew Jackson’s campaign against the tribe. Though white-masculinity professes to provide and protect women and children, these masculine ideals failed to save the noncombatant Native women and children killed by Crockett and frontier settlers. He continued to travel within the western frontier before serving two consecutive terms as a Congressman from Tennessee starting in 1827. However, Crockett made most of his wealth from land speculation, and he moved to Texas after his reelection defeat, helping to encourage a wave of American immigration to the Mexican territory. He died in 1836 defending the Alamo in the Texas Revolution. Crockett’s life on the frontier supported westward expansion and gun violence against Natives, and his last stand in Texas paved the way for the Mexican-American War.

Mythologized frontiersmen like Boone and Crockett extended the boundaries of American society, and through their travels and popularity, encouraged civilian-led settlement of the frontier. White-men civilians, including Boone and Crockett, actively incurred into already-populated lands and committed gun violence against their indigenous inhabitants. This civilian-initiated violence occurred without the state’s direct order, though the state’s subservience to white men resulted in no significant opposition. As a result, the decision of white-men civilians to settle on the frontier

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80 Flynn, 79.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 80.
84 Ibid., 81.
85 Ibid., 82.
and commit violence against Native peoples directed the state to inflict additional violence against Natives, often in a purported attempt to prevent future violence. Spurred by President Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act of 1830, the United States government forced Native peoples in trans-Appalachia to migrate to lands west of the Mississippi River. In the most infamous case, the Army oversaw the removal of over sixteen thousand Cherokee peoples from Georgia in 1838, moving them along the Trail of Tears to territory in present-day Oklahoma. Over four thousand Cherokee died during the eight-hundred-mile exodus. Though the American state implemented the removal policy, the desire of American settlers for more land and their willingness to commit violence resulted in federal Indian removal. In their accounts, soldiers often justified removal because they believed Natives would have experienced more violence at the hands of settlers. Accordingly, President Jackson often claimed sympathy for the plight of Natives, licensing Americans to discussed removal as a passionate policy seeking to prevent further bloodshed. The trend of white-men civilian-led expansion initiating state-executed violence on behalf of the white-civilian population demonstrates that white-men civilians maintained the ability to direct state power in the nineteenth century.

These frontier settlers often amounted to paramilitary forces and professed American exceptionalism as they traveled across the continent. Beginning in the 1820s, mountain-men first opened the Rocky Mountains to Americans through the beaver fur trade. By the 1840s when the fur trade collapsed, mountain-men began to direct settlement parties and wagon trains through the

86 Flynn, 91.
87 Ibid., 99.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 95-96.
90 Ibid., 88.
territory, such as Jim Bridger who guided settlers through the Bridger Pass to Oregon and California.\textsuperscript{91} By 1858 following the Rouge River War against the Cayuse tribe, civilian gun violence and military attacks reduced the ten-thousand Natives that lived in Oregon to a population of two thousand.\textsuperscript{92} Though the army forced this Native population onto the Coast Reservation and sought to prevent civilian-American incursion into it, the Coast Reservation disappeared by 1875 due to increased civilian-American settlement.\textsuperscript{93}

When the Mexican Government began to attract Americans to Texas with land grants in 1821, white-men civilians led their families to the territory in substantial numbers.\textsuperscript{94} By 1835, Americans dominated the region and rebelled against the Mexican government for independence. The Texas Rangers, a civilian-populated paramilitary group associated with the state of Texas, slaughtered indigenous peoples, destroyed their homesteads, and sought the total extermination of Natives within Texas.\textsuperscript{95} Generally not paid, they shared in the spoils of their war, stealing farm goods, livestock, horses, and mules from Natives and Tejanos alike. The economic incentive for civilian-led violence cleared Texas of its Native population and significantly reduced its Tejano population by 1860.\textsuperscript{96} In response to Texan independence, the United States annexed Texas in 1845, leading to the Mexican-American War from 1846-1848 and further United States land acquisition.\textsuperscript{97} In line with Carlson and Goss’ Paternal Governance model, the Texas Rangers evolved into a state law enforcement agency after the Civil War.\textsuperscript{98} Today, the Texas Rangers

\textsuperscript{91} Flynn, 89.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 130.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 120.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 121-24.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 119.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 126.
operate as a state police agency in Texas and are celebrated with a Major League Baseball team of the same name.

Similar gun violence and Native extermination continued across the nineteenth-century American frontier. In the Arizona Territory, violence between the Apache and volunteer paramilitary groups allowed Americans to sell Apache scalps for up to one thousand pesos and decimated the Native population by the 1870s. The United States Army on the Great Plains directly involved itself in the conflicts with Native tribes, especially the Sioux, after the Civil War. Following decades of Native resistance, American white-men civilians in partnership with the United States military forced most Native peoples onto reservations and completed the frontier’s conquest by 1890. Through civilian gun ownership and economic incentive, American white-men civilians explored, settled, and dominated the American continent and committed genocidal gun violence against its Native populations. White-men civilian gun ownership was critical to this violence and westward expansion. Despite this, American historical memory recalls frontiersmen and settlers as independent, brave, virtuous white men seeking a better life and opposed by “Indian savages.” Without recognizing its coordinate attack on Native existence, America has mythologized frontier white-masculinity and misrepresented its culture of gun ownership as individual gunfights dispensing justice. Not employed or directed by the state, these civilians engaged their social dominance to profess an American exceptionalism of Manifest Destiny that justified violence, and they spent their economic power expanding the United States

99 Flynn, 134.
100 Ibid., 137.
101 Ibid., 178.
102 Melzer, 30.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid., 43.
to the Pacific. After initiating violence, white-men citizens exerted their political influence to defend their settlements, subdue their Native opponents, and avoid criminal consequence. Though no longer state agents under the Chivalrous Governance of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, white-men citizens continued to control and direct the American state in defense of white-masculinity through westward expansion and gun violence in the nineteenth century.

The Civil War and Reconstruction: Challenging White-Masculinity

Mostly separated from the frontier, Americans within the established United States practiced the culture of men-dominated civilian gun ownership under the Paternal Governance model. In the antebellum South, the state continued to use citizen militias to deter and quell African slave revolts, and new state laws solidified the prohibition of gun ownership by free black men. As a result, firearms were a white prerogative that symbolized the superior status and freedom of white men. The Supreme Court’s 1957 *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision confirmed the white power structure necessary to maintain white-masculinity. The case denied free African Americans citizenship, and Chief Justice Roger Taney said, “blacks were unfit to associate with the white race” and “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” If they were allowed citizenship, he continued, they would require the right “to keep and carry arms wherever they went,” thus confirming the white prerogative of gun ownership. Nonetheless, white-masculinity faced its next threat with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861.

105 Flynn, 166. The cost to travel onto and settle the frontier prevented poor Americans from making the journey. White and economically-secure men and their families dominated the ranks of western settlers throughout the nineteenth century.
106 Winkler, 132. Prior to the early-to-mid nineteenth century and when not already banned outright by state law, free African Americans in the South could only possess firearms at the discretion of local officials. In effect, this prevented most free black men from ever owning a firearm.
107 Melzer, 134-35.
108 Winkler, 133.
109 Ibid., 134.
Instead of an eighteenth-century citizen militia, the well-established United States military fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery. Over two hundred thousand African Americans served in the Union Army, and the United States allowed Union soldiers to take their military firearms home after the war, increasing gun ownership rates across the country. Abolitionists often encouraged black soldiers to take their military firearms home to defend their newly obtained freedom. Reconstruction era constitutional amendments included the Thirteenth Amendment that outlawed slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment that overturned Dred Scott and established birthright citizenship and equal protection, and the Fifteenth Amendment that allowed freedmen the right to vote. As a result of over two million northerners and one million southerners having served in the war, the American gun industry arose, and millions of Americans obtained military training in firearms. The Freedman’s Bureau and the Civil Rights Acts of 1866 both tried to guarantee Civil Rights for freed African Americans and entitled them with the same rights to gun ownership as white Americans. The federal military supported Radical Republican state governments that gained power across the South, and African Americans attained newfound political office and freedoms. In response, the white-masculinity still dominant throughout American society and former Confederate states sought to reassert social and political dominance.

Immediately after the war, southern states passed Black Codes that required black men to have a job and sign a labor contract that effectively re-enslaved freedmen while forbidding African Americans from sitting on a jury, voting, or owning a gun. Though Congress and Radical

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110 Waldman, 71.
111 Winkler, 135.
112 Ibid.
113 Waldman, 71.
114 Winkler, 140.
115 Ibid., 135.
Republican state governments reversed Black Codes and obtained the passage of Reconstruction era constitutional amendments, southern white men resorted to violence. Founded in 1865, the Ku Klux Klan emerged as the South’s most infamous white-supremacist terrorist organization and sought to disarm freedmen.\textsuperscript{116} Klansmen and other white-supremacist groups forcibly confiscated the guns of freedmen and terrorized and murdered African Americans across the South. During the Colfax Massacre of 1873, a white paramilitary group seeking to disarm freedmen killed approximately one hundred and fifty black men.\textsuperscript{117} In the 1876 Supreme Court case \textit{United States v. Cruikshank}, the Court found that the Fourteenth Amendment could only be applied to the Federal Government, not states or individuals, and therefore the Second Amendment rights of the black victims of Colfax were not violated during the massacre.\textsuperscript{118} After Reconstruction ended in 1876, southern states passed Jim Crow laws through the turn of the twentieth century and enforced racial segregation while sharecropping economically oppressed African Americans throughout the South. In the thirty years after the Civil War began, white-supremacist terrorism and paramilitary groups had lynched an estimated five thousand African Americans.\textsuperscript{119} Though the Civil War abolished slavery and threatened to subvert racial power dynamics, white-men citizens disarmed freedmen, committed racial terrorism with firearms, and forced African Americans into new social and economic systems to maintain white-masculinity’s dominance and control of gun ownership.

\textit{Industrialization, Recreation, and Evolving Masculinity}

During and after the Civil War, the United States economy industrialized and coined the term \textit{breadwinner} in the process. Though up to 90 percent of white men owned a farm or shop as

\textsuperscript{116} Winkler, 136.
\textsuperscript{117} Waldman, 76-77.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Winkler, 143.
late as the 1850, industrialization and urbanization pushed men into industrial labor jobs.\textsuperscript{120} In response to the insecurity of losing their self-employed status, the newly emerged Separate Spheres Doctrine secured men’s control of the public sphere (opposed to women in the domestic sphere) and celebrated the \textit{self-made man} ideal by linking masculinity to economic success.\textsuperscript{121} This new industrial masculinity further founded men’s identity in their ability to provide for their families financially. However, these masculine values were only available to white men. Because racism kept black men from earning a family wage, 50 percent of black women worked in the labor force in 1880, while only 15 percent of white women did the same.\textsuperscript{122} These values of masculine provider and individualism remain central to white-masculinity and white-men conservatives in today’s post-war gun culture.

During the post-Civil War period in 1871, William Church and George Wingate founded the National Rifle Association.\textsuperscript{123} Both northern veterans of the war, they recognized the poor marksmanship and firearms knowledge of urban soldiers in the Union army.\textsuperscript{124} Church and Wingate sought to rectify this inexperience through target shooting competitions and practices organized by the NRA and “promote and encourage rifle shooting on a scientific basis.”\textsuperscript{125} Reflecting the desire to benefit military effectiveness, they chose Civil War General Ambrose Burnside to serve as the NRA’s first president.\textsuperscript{126} In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt’s administration subsidized the NRA and began to fund its national shooting and marksmanship

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{120} Melzer, 31.
\item\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 32.
\item\textsuperscript{123} Winkler, 63.
\item\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 63-64. This is a quote by William Church stating his goal for the NRA.
\item\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 64.
\end{itemize}
competitions, permitting the organization to buy surplus military rifles to sell to its members.\textsuperscript{127} After World War I, the military sold 200,000 rifles exclusively to NRA members.\textsuperscript{128} Unlike the NRA’s current lobbying and political messaging that preaches distrust in government, the organization began by encouraging recreational shooting and firearms education, not divisive politics.

In line with the NRA’s founding, recreational gun ownership flourished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the nature of American gun ownership evolved.\textsuperscript{129} The convergence of several important events triggered this evolution. The Civil War increased white-men civilian gun ownership and birthed the modern gun industry;\textsuperscript{130} the genocidal gun violence of westward expansion mostly concluded with the frontier’s close,\textsuperscript{131} and Paternal Governance discontinued popular militia-based gun ownership,\textsuperscript{132} culminating in the Dick Act of 1903 that federally funded and regulated state National Guards in accordance with the federal military.\textsuperscript{133} As a result, rifle and target shooting organizations such as the NRA became common throughout the country, and receiving a rifle became a popular right-of-passage for young men that continues to the present day.\textsuperscript{134} Industrial gun production, the Civil War, and frontier mythologizing developed this late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century gun culture centered on masculine recreation.\textsuperscript{135}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{127} Melzer, 36. The Federal Government permanently stopped funding NRA national shooting competitions in 1958.
\bibitem{128} Winkler, 63.
\bibitem{129} Yamane, 2.
\bibitem{130} Winkler, 135; As discussed on pages 25-27, the Civil War also increased gun ownership by freedmen, but white-supremacist southerners and terrorist organizations largely disarmed them during and following Reconstruction.
\bibitem{131} Melzer, 33-34.
\bibitem{132} Carlson and Goss, 116.
\bibitem{133} Waldman, 78. The Dick Act was officially titled the Militia Act of 1903. Under this system, states still maintain control over their respective National Guards unless federalized by the president.
\bibitem{134} Yamane, 2; Melzer, 34.
\bibitem{135} Melzer, 34.
\end{thebibliography}
After 1890, the United States found itself without a frontier for the first time in its history. The frontier’s close threatened masculinity and the ability of men to live out and fantasize the glorified lives and values of frontiersmen like Boone and Crocket.\textsuperscript{136} Cities and urban life lacked the rugged lifestyles of the wilderness and threatened to make American men effeminate, a belief still commonly expressed by rural and conservative Americans and the post-war gun culture.\textsuperscript{137} Known for his embodiment of rugged masculinity with firearms through both personal recreation and his “Big Stick” foreign policy, President Theodore Roosevelt argued that “[the frontier] brings out manly virtues – mutuality, honor, self-respect – not the ‘emasculated milk-and-water moralities’ of the eastern elite.”\textsuperscript{138} Despite such rhetoric, President Roosevelt was a member of this “eastern elite” himself. Today, President Trump likewise appeals to conservative and rural masculine ideals even though he is a product of New York’s “eastern elite.” Similar to today’s dominant gun culture that uses self-defensive gun ownership to reinforce masculinity, white men owned guns at the turn of the twentieth century to reaffirm their masculinity through firearms recreation, target shooting, and marksmanship.

\textit{Immigration, Crime, and the New Deal}

As the United States faced continued industrial growth and increased immigration at the turn of the twentieth century, the challenges of urban society became a rising concern for the American public. In the mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the second major wave of immigration to the United States began. Composed mainly of Irish, eastern and southern European Catholics, and Jewish immigrants, the public feared these new arrivals could not

\textsuperscript{136} Melzer, 48.  
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{138} Melzer, 49; Theodore Roosevelt, \textit{An Autobiography} (New York: Scribner’s, 1913), 76.
assimilate or participate in democracy.\textsuperscript{139} Multiple organizations developed that expressed the public’s fear of immigrants. Founded in 1894, the Immigration Restriction League associated immigrants with the nation’s socio-economic problems, urban industrialization, poverty, crime, labor unrest, and violence.\textsuperscript{140} The organization sought to create its ideal society through demographic and racial engineering, supporting inhumane policies such as eugenics, sterilization of the disabled, and bans on interracial marriage.\textsuperscript{141} Similar anti-immigrant organizations gained traction across the country, such as the American Protective Association that sought government supervision of Catholic institutions and a decrease in immigration, and the expansion of the Ku Klux Klan as a white supremacist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and anti-Catholic organization.\textsuperscript{142} Anglo-Saxons and western-Europeans dominated prior immigration to the United States, but the demographics of new immigration distressed the public. America’s white social order challenged the racial status of new immigrants, depicting Irish, southern European, and eastern European immigrants as threats to the white Anglo-Saxon power structure.

While immigration debates gripped the nation and as noted previously, southern states passed Jim Crow laws to reassert white supremacy and white-masculinity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Southern whites (as well as many northerners) sought to resist expanded rights and opportunities for African Americans.\textsuperscript{143} Part of this process included erecting monuments to Confederate leaders in a coordinated attempt to rewrite the antebellum South and Civil War’s history, seeking to erase historical memory of the horrors of slavery, the terrors of

\textsuperscript{139} Tirman, 2.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Gerder, 39.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 37.
war, and the fundamental treason of the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{144} Confirmed by the Southern Poverty Law Center in a 2016 report, southern whites and northern sympathizers seeking to reinforce white supremacy erected the first wave of Confederate monuments from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1920s.\textsuperscript{145} This occurred amid the passage of Jim Crow laws and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan that oppressed and terrorized African Americans.\textsuperscript{146} Not until the Civil Rights movement did white supremacists erect a second wave of Confederate monuments in reaction to the prospect of black equal rights and liberation.\textsuperscript{147}

Throughout the previous eras of American history, populations that threatened white-masculinity’s power were disarmed through both legal and extrajudicial means. In the early 1900s, much of the public saw immigrants as a threat to the prevailing social order and blamed them for violence in increasingly crowded urban centers.\textsuperscript{148} In response, state governments began to regulate handgun ownership that was associated with urban crime and restrict non-citizen gun possession.\textsuperscript{149} In New York, the Sullivan Dangerous Weapons Act of 1911 banned non-citizen gun carrying in public, required a permit for handguns, mandated that firearm dealers record all gun sales, and forbade the sale or gift of guns to anyone under the age of sixteen.\textsuperscript{150} Though the law’s legislative sponsor, Timothy Sullivan, had a large immigrant constituency and purportedly drafted the law to combat juvenile delinquency,\textsuperscript{151} local law enforcement often refused to issue handgun

\textsuperscript{144} Brundage.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{148} Waldman, 78; Tirman, 2.
\textsuperscript{149} Winkler, 206-07.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 205.
\textsuperscript{151} Waldman, 79.
permits to immigrant citizens.\textsuperscript{152} States across the country passed similar gun control laws to restrict non-citizens and urban communities from possessing firearms in an attempt to restrict immigrant rights while combating crime.\textsuperscript{153} Firearm, legal, and nativist organizations supported these laws. NRA President Karl T. Frederick help to draft the model Uniform Firearms Act in 1920.\textsuperscript{154} Though the Uniform Firearms Act did not explicitly ban non-citizen ownership, it proposed newfound regulations on gun sales and ownership, including the licensing of gun sellers, concealed-carry permits, a two-day waiting period for handgun purchases, ban on gun sales to violent criminal convicts, and the requirement for only “suitable” people with a “proper reason” to be issued handgun permits.\textsuperscript{155} The United States Revolver Association, a marksmanship and shooting organization like the NRA, proposed the model Revolver Act in 1923 that banned non-citizen handgun possession, required concealed-carry permits, mandated that gun dealers provide sale records to police, and implemented a one-day waiting period for handguns.\textsuperscript{156} In the 1920s, nearly all states implemented some form of similar gun control, displaying the increased power of the state to regulate gun ownership.

Notwithstanding the fear of immigrant crime, public opposition to immigration increased as new ethnic groups immigrated to the United States and threatened the established white-masculine social order. Congress responded to the organized backlash to immigration by enacting

\textsuperscript{153} Winkler, 206.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 208
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 208-09.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 207; The Sullivan Act, Uniform Firearms Act, and Revolver Act were all \textit{may-issue} state laws that provided local law enforcement with the discretion to issue gun licenses and permits. The post-war NRA later initiated a national movement to repeal such laws, replacing them with \textit{shall-issue} legislation that removed law enforcement’s discretion to issue permits.
laws designed to maintain America’s racial and ethnic status quo. The joint House-Senate Dillingham Commission concluded in 1911 that southern and eastern European immigrants could threaten American culture and that their entry should be regulated.157 Under President Theodore Roosevelt, the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 established quotas with the Japanese government and reduced immigration from Japan by roughly one-third.158 The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 established the nation's first national origin quotas.159 Soon after, the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 made national origin quotas permanent and more restrictive. These quotas immensely favored immigration from northern and western European countries and mostly ended immigration from Asia.160 Congress did not eliminate these national quotas until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.161 While negative social stereotypes dominated the public’s view of immigrants, major immigration legislation of the early twentieth century filtered immigrants by race and nationality to maintain America’s white-masculine social order.

With the frontier closed, increasing urbanization, and a new wave of immigration populated by “undesirable” ethnic communities, white men in the early twentieth century developed new ways to reinforce their masculinity in the face of America’s transforming society. Growing urban communities sparked the fear of young boys’ feminization. Fathers in urban communities spent most of their time in industrial work, leaving the raising of sons to their wives and women grade school teachers.162 In 1910, the Boy Scouts of America was founded to prevent the feminization of young boys in urban areas while morning the frontier’s close.163 Organized

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157 Tirman, 2.
158 Gerder, 32.
159 Ibid., 41.
160 Ibid., 43.
161 Ibid., 50.
162 Melzer, 50.
163 Ibid., 51.
sports, fraternal orders, shooting clubs, and college fraternities exclusive to white men provided homosocial spaces for adult men to escape the feminizing influence of women. In response, immigrant communities sought to whiten themselves while the federal courts and American culture reformed the definition of white to include new European ethnic communities. The advent of World War I provided another space for white men to express and reinforce their masculinity while isolated from women and segregated from racial minorities.

Following World War I, the United States began national prohibition in 1920 under the Eighteenth Amendment that banned the production and sale of alcohol. Beginning in 1929, the Great Depression marked the worst economic crisis in the nation’s history, and in 1932, America elected Franklin D. Roosevelt as president. These events converged to affect gun ownership and regulation as the United States neared World War II. Prohibition created a nationwide black market for alcohol production and sales, spurring development of criminal gangs that fought to control the illegal alcohol market. Prohibition era gangsters utilized new World War I submachine gun technology and made the Thompson submachine gun, nicknamed the “Tommy Gun,” the signature weapon of organized crime. As automobile availability increased, state law enforcement could not effectively challenge highway robbers. Armed with firearms, these criminals used cars to cross state lines quickly, escaping arrest by state and local police. As a result of organized crime,

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164 Melzer, 51; Yamane, 2.
165 Melzer, 50.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 51.
168 Waldman, 81.
169 Winkler, 190.
170 Ibid., 194.
criminals often outgunned police, and violent confrontations between law enforcement and criminals increased.\footnote{Winkler, 193.} Upon entering office in 1933, President Roosevelt promised a New Deal for Americans that used federal power to confront organized crime and regulate firearms.\footnote{Waldman, 81.}

President Roosevelt revolutionized the United States government through the expansion of federal authority and programs during his tenure as president. His New Deal philosophy envisioned the federal government as a powerful tool to protect ordinary Americans.\footnote{Winkler, 196.} To combat the economic drain of organized crime, Roosevelt made gun control legislation critical to his economic recovery plan.\footnote{Ibid., 197.} In a 1934 speech, the president argued that his New Deal must “include our constant struggle to safeguard ourselves against the attacks of the lawless and criminal elements of our own population.”\footnote{Ibid.} The Roosevelt Administration used the Federal Government to regulate civilian gun ownership directly for the first time in United States history. The National Firearms Act of 1934 effectively outlawed machine guns, submachine guns (including the Tommy Gun), and short-barreled shotguns and rifles. It placed a hefty $200 tax on the manufacture, sale, and transfer of these weapons and required owners to register their firearms and submit fingerprints to law enforcement, a requirement that criminals refused to fulfill.\footnote{Winkler, 203; “CPI Inflation Calculator,” United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed April 23, 2018, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, $200 in June 1934 amounts to over $3,700 in March 2018.} As a result, law enforcement could easily arrest anyone found in possession of these firearms.\footnote{Winkler, 203.} Though the NRA opposed handgun restrictions in the law that the final draft did not include, it endorsed the final version of
the National Firearms Act. In 1938, the Federal Firearms Act further regulated firearms by requiring gun dealers to be licensed and maintain a record of all sales while barring felons from obtaining firearms. The NRA also supported this legislation. In 1935, the Roosevelt Administration founded the Federal Bureau of Investigation to enforce these new laws across state lines and throughout the country. In 1939, the Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of this federal gun control in United States v. Miller when it held that the National Firearms Act did not violate the Second Amendment because the weapons it regulated had no reasonable relationship to the well-regulated militia. This precedent held until District of Columbia v. Heller in 2008 when the Supreme Court established an individual right to a firearm under the Second Amendment for the first time in United States history.

By the start of World War II, American gun ownership had changed drastically from its inception under the citizen militia. The state increased its authority to regulate private gun ownership from the nineteenth century into the twentieth century, culminating in the Federal Government’s first gun control legislation in 1934. No longer tasked with enforcing state power through popular militia service, white-men civilians on the frontier used firearms to expand the United States westward at the expense of Native peoples. America has since glorified, mythologized, and misrepresented the frontier experience throughout its culture, coupling firearms with masculine ideals. When faced with threats to white-masculinity’s power – whether by Natives, African Americans, or immigrants – white men used guns to maintain their power and

178 Winkler, 211.
179 Ibid., 204.
180 Ibid., 211.
181 Ibid., 200.
182 Ibid., 215-16.
183 Further explained on pages 67-68, Heller established a limited individual right to a firearm in the home for self-defense unrelated to the militia.
direct state authority. Accordingly, though the state increased its authority over gun ownership, it
did not use this authority to impede the gun ownership of legally-upstanding white-men citizens
significantly. Economic insecurity of the Great Depression and the resulting New Deal programs
increased individual dependence on the federal government and created a potential for white men
to feel disempowered. However, the New Deal did not offer a revolutionary change to America’s
white-masculine social order. Instead, it offered a return to normalcy for white men attained
through new federal programs that did not considerably endanger the state’s subservience to white
men. As the United States triumphed in World War II and entered the post-war era, American
white-masculinity in the mid-to-late twentieth century faced its most significant challenge in post-
war social movements, political change, and economic turmoil. Informed by the white-masculine
history of American gun ownership, post-war social, political, and economic disruption in the form
of activism spurred white-men conservatives to develop America’s present-day dominant gun
culture.

Section 2 – Post-War Social Movements: Defying White-Masculinity

As a result of allied success in World War II, the United States emerged as the world’s
leading superpower, armed with a strong and growing economy, immense military strength, a
nuclear monopoly, and a capitalist democratic system it sought to champion across the globe.
Americans, especially white Americans, saw their nation’s wartime victory and dominant position
in the new international order as a confirmation of the country's exceptionalism, expressed by
media coverage and widespread sentiment that credited America’s young white men with winning
the war. As with prior wars in United States history, World War II created a space for Americans
to champion white-masculine values and for young men in the armed forces to assert their
masculinity as rugged protectors of the nation through military gun use. In the post-war era, the Civil Rights, Feminist, and Queer Rights movements directly challenged the continued hegemony of white-masculinity, threatening the values that have underpinned the dominant gun culture throughout American history.

The Civil Rights Movement

Reaching its height in the 1950s and 60s, the Civil Rights movement fought to secure equal rights and opportunities for African Americans, fighting racial segregation and systematic black oppression in the American South and throughout the United States. Its roots lie a century earlier in the fight for Abolition and post-Civil War attempts to confront black oppression. As previously examined, America’s white-masculine social order succeeded in preventing meaningful advancement for millions of freed African slaves and their children following the Civil War. Nonetheless, the struggle for black liberation continued into the twentieth century.

African American leaders including W.E.B. Du Bois laid the foundation for the post-war Civil Rights movement and established the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. As a national Civil Rights organization devoted to improving the lives of African Americans, the NAACP publicized racial injustices, organized against white supremacy, and used lawsuits to challenge state-sanctioned racial discrimination. During the early twentieth century, white America feared challenges to the hegemony of white-masculinity posed by urban immigrants, southern states passed Jim Crow laws to institutionalize white

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184 Melzer, 51.
186 Tirman, 2.
supremacy and resist black advancement,\(^{187}\) and southern white supremacists and northern sympathizers erected a wave of Confederate monuments amid a national resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan.\(^{188}\) Nevertheless, the NAACP continued its work into the post-World War II era, becoming a critical player in the fight for black Civil Rights a century after Abolition.

Sponsored by the NAACP and argued by Thurgood Marshall, the famous Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* found in 1954 that that racially segregated Jim Crow public schools violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.\(^{189}\) Because racial segregation was unconstitutional in public schools, Civil Rights activists now had strong precedent to challenge segregation in all aspects of public life.\(^{190}\) Though school integration took decades to implement and is still not fully accomplished, the *Brown* decision threatened Jim Crow laws, and the Civil Rights movement used its resulting momentum to advocate full legal rights and equal opportunity for African Americans.

The movement continued to fight for racial equality through the 1950s and 60s with unprecedented levels of social activism, protests, and demonstrations now seared into America’s historical memory. Through this social action, Civil Rights activists exposed the contradiction between America’s promise of rights, justice, and freedom and the nation’s practice of segregation, discrimination, and white supremacy.\(^{191}\) In December 1955, NAACP activist Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama and sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott.\(^{192}\) Nearly a year later, the NAACP succeeded in desegregating the city’s public bus

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\(^{187}\) Brundage.

\(^{188}\) Gunter and Kizzire, 11; Gerder, 39.


\(^{190}\) Ibid., 75.

\(^{191}\) Melzer, 58.

\(^{192}\) Carson, 3.
system, and the following year, boycott leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to organize and support future protests.\textsuperscript{193} The new possibility of Civil Rights endangered white dominance, and in response, southern states erected hundreds of Confederate monuments from the early 1950s through the 1960s in the second major wave of their construction.\textsuperscript{194} These Confederate monuments did not seek to reconcile the nation a century after the Civil War or benignly celebrate southern heritage. Instead, they stood as public symbols of the state’s adherence to white supremacy and dedication to continued black subjugation.\textsuperscript{195}

Though facing stiff opposition, the Civil Rights movement continued to gain momentum when on February 1, 1960, black college students entered a drugstore in Greensboro, North Carolina and staged a sit-in at the white-only segregated lunch counter. Activism swelled in response as thousands of black students across the South staged sit-ins during the winter and spring of 1960, incorporating a generation of young African Americans into the movement who established the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to oversee student protests.\textsuperscript{196} Decades later, Queer Rights activists used this form of activism as a model for their own “kiss-in” protests that challenged homophobia by queering straight spaces.\textsuperscript{197}

The following year, the 1961 Freedoms Rides in Alabama, Tennessee, and Mississippi sought to desegregate public bus terminals, resulting in the beating, arrest, and murder of black activists.\textsuperscript{198} The violent backlash to these non-violent demonstrations forced the Federal

\textsuperscript{193} Carson, 3.
\textsuperscript{194} Gunter and Jamie Kizzire, 11.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{196} Carson, 3.
\textsuperscript{198} Winkler, 231.
Government to intervene and protect the safety and constitutional rights of black activists.\textsuperscript{199} Historically controlled by white-men citizens, the state proved it could now be used to protect the rights of Americans oppressed by the white-masculine social order.

In April 1963, the Birmingham, Alabama police brutally attacked non-violent Civil Rights protestors,\textsuperscript{200} part of the history of state-sponsored racial violence that dates back to the early days of American slavery and seeks to uphold racist social order. Footage aired on national news networks, forcing the violent legacy of slavery and brutal reality of Jim Crow into the living rooms of northern white Americans primarily removed from most Civil Rights activism.\textsuperscript{201} Imprisoned by Birmingham police, Dr. King penned his renowned “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in which he defended the non-violent strategy of civil disobedience. Additionally, Dr. King warned against the growing split between Civil Rights workers and Black Nationalists such as Malcolm X who advocated for armed self-defense and black separatism that Dr. King feared could disintegrate into a “violent racial nightmare.”\textsuperscript{202} Both Civil Rights and Black Nationalism threatened white social dominance, and armed Black Nationalists threatened to undermine gun ownership as a white-men prerogative.

In June 1963, President John F. Kennedy forced the University of Alabama to desegregate and introduced the Civil Rights Act to Congress, signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964.\textsuperscript{203} In August, Dr. King led roughly 250,000 people in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. His “I Have a Dream” speech linked the fight for Civil Rights to the core American

\textsuperscript{199} Carson, 3.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
values of freedom, equality, and justice that have historically been reserved for white citizens. Dr. King called on America to ensure the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness proclaimed in the nation’s founding documents to all Americans.  

In 1964, the SNCC and Council of Federated Organizations launched a voter registration campaign known as the “Freedom Summer.” The campaign brought thousands of voting rights organizers and northern white volunteers to the South and fostered a culture of youth activism and taught strategies of sociopolitical demonstration to young Americans who later supported the emerging Feminist and Queer Rights movements.

By the mid-1960s, many African Americans became frustrated with the slow advancement of Civil Rights, including Huey Newton and Bobby Seale of Oakland, California. Inspired by Malcolm X and his message of black liberation “by any means necessary,” Newton and Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in 1966 to challenge police brutality. A former law student, Newton knew that California allowed any citizen to openly carry a loaded gun in public if not pointed at anyone in a threatening manner. With the law on their side, the Black Panthers patrolled black neighborhoods and followed Oakland police cars. When the police stopped a black person, the Panthers would get out, show their guns, and shout legal advice. Empowered against police harassment, the Panthers displayed firearms as a symbol of strength previously reserved for white-men citizens, undermining white-masculinity’s power.

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204 Carson, 3.
205 Winkler 231-32; Carson, 3.
207 Winkler, 231.
208 Ibid., 231-33.
209 Ibid., 235-36.
210 Ibid., 237.
Challenged by public displays of black men’s power, Republican state legislator Don Mulford introduced the Mulford Act in 1967 to disarm the Panthers, threatening to forbid the carry of loaded guns on public streets.\textsuperscript{211} In response, Seale and twenty-four other Panthers traveled to Sacramento on May 2, 1967 and legally carried loaded rifles and pistols into the state capitol building, walked through the halls, and entered the legislative chamber.\textsuperscript{212} In a prepared statement to a shocked crowd of reporters, Seale:

Call[ed] on the American people in general and the black people in particular to take careful note of the racist California legislature … aimed at keeping the black people disarmed and powerless at the very same time that racist police agencies throughout the country are intensifying the terror and repression of black people. Black people have begged, prayed, petitioned, demonstrated and everything else to get the racist power structure of America to right the wrongs which have historically been perpetuated against black people. All of these efforts have been answered by more repression, deceit, and hypocrisy. Time has come for black people to arm themselves against this terror before it is too late. The pending Mulford Act brings the hour of doom one step nearer.\textsuperscript{213}

Though Seale and the Panthers left the California state capitol with no shots fired, no arrests, and no injuries,\textsuperscript{214} the news media called this bold display of armed black power the “Sacramento Invasion,” and coverage of the event shocked, emboldened, and horrified Americans across the country.\textsuperscript{215} Hours later, California Governor Ronald Reagan declared his strong support for the Mulford Act and denounced the Panther’s demonstration. On July 28, 1967, Reagan signed the Mulford Act with an added provision that prohibited anyone but police from possessing a loaded firearm in the state capitol.\textsuperscript{216} Reagan later reversed his position on gun control and championed the gun rights of white-men conservatives as president from 1981-1989.\textsuperscript{217} The Mulford Act ended

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{211} Winkler, 239.
  \item \textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 241.
  \item \textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 240.
  \item \textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 243.
  \item \textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 244-45.
  \item \textsuperscript{217} Waldman, 93.
\end{itemize}
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the Panther’s police patrols and allowed the state to arrest Panthers who illegally continued to carry their firearms.\textsuperscript{218}

Though California quickly suppressed the group, the Black Panthers successfully challenged American white-masculinity by co-opting one of its central symbols of power: the firearm. The Panther’s membership peaked in the late 1960s with an estimated two thousand members spread across chapters in forty-eight states.\textsuperscript{219} Its radical displays of black power and support of socialist principles defied white-masculine power and individualism.\textsuperscript{220} FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover deployed the agency’s counterintelligence program against the Panthers, fostering violence and creating dissent and disruption within the group.\textsuperscript{221} The Black Panther Party eventually disintegrated in the mid-1970s.\textsuperscript{222}

The Civil Rights movement continued through the mid-to-late 1960s but struggled as national support declined and African American frustration with the movement expanded. Police attacked protestors during the Selma to Montgomery March of 1965, and on “Bloody Sunday” of March 7, 1965, tear-gassed, beat, and trampled activists.\textsuperscript{223} These continuing incidents of racial violence stunned millions of northern white Americans and led President Johnson to introduce the Voting Rights Act of 1965, helping to ensure voting rights for millions of African Americans.\textsuperscript{224} However, northern white citizens failed to support future Civil Rights protests in equally large numbers. Many black Americans grew frustrated with the promise of Civil Rights that had not

\textsuperscript{218} Winkler, 245.
\textsuperscript{220} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{221} Winkler, 246-47.
\textsuperscript{222} Duncan.
\textsuperscript{223} Anderson, 98-99.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 99.
significantly impacted most of their lives, exemplified in the founding of the Black Panther Party. An upsurge in urban racial violence, including the 1965 Watts Riots in Los Angeles, California, amplified white resentment towards the Civil Rights movement and sparked a backlash against Black Nationalism. After Dr. King was assassinated in 1968, the Civil Rights movement mostly dissolved by the end of the decade. Though black Americans still suffer from systematic social, political, and economic inequality, the movement’s success continues to define the present-day United States. The Civil Rights movement successfully implemented lasting achievements against white supremacy and provided a model of social activism employed by both the post-war Feminist and Queer Rights movements.

Second Wave Feminism

During World War II, American women entered the labor force in record numbers, especially in wartime defense industries, to offset the deployment of young men in the armed forces. At the height of the war, 36 percent of women between sixteen and sixty-five worked outside the home. Most employers and American men saw these women’s labor advances as merely temporary, and employers and returning servicemen pushed many women out of the workforce and into traditional domestic roles after the war. Nonetheless, women’s participation in the workforce recovered to wartime levels through the 1940s and 50s, with 35 percent of

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225 Winkler, 231.
226 Ibid., 240.
227 Carson, 4; Winkler, 240.
228 Dicker, 63.
229 Ibid, 64.
232 Ibid., 534.
American women in the labor force in 1960.\textsuperscript{233} Meanwhile, the Cold War fostered an oppressive social climate that reinforced traditional gender roles, and popular culture praised the traditional and rigidly gendered nuclear family as America’s primary source of stability under threat by communism and the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{234} Women’s increasing employment opportunities, mainly in the growing service sector, ran counter to the stringent Cold War gender roles of the 1940s and 50s, developing the conditions that simulated a second wave revival of feminist activism. Second Wave Feminism sought expanded opportunities and equal treatment for women by directly confronting the nineteenth-century Separate Spheres Doctrine that defined white-masculinity and gender expectations throughout the previous century.\textsuperscript{235} This post-war feminism interrogated commonly accepted gender constructions, undermining the ideals of American white-masculinity as women fought for equal rights in their personal, economic, and political lives.\textsuperscript{236}

Second Wave Feminism rejected the traditional division of labor that positioned men as breadwinners and public actors through individual competitiveness, strength, and dominance. Defined in opposition to men, women existed in the domestic sphere as cooperative and nurturing homemakers. Post-war feminists directly challenged white-masculinity’s strictly defined gender expectations. Published in 1963, Betty Friedan’s \textit{The Feminine Mystique} detailed the struggle of suburban homemakers oppressed by a cult of domesticity that prevented these women from living stimulating and meaningful lives.\textsuperscript{237} Though her book only considered the lives of white and

\textsuperscript{233} DuBois and Dumenil, 544.
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 534-35.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 534.
\textsuperscript{237} DuBois and Dumenil, 541.
economically-secure women homemakers, it became an immediate bestseller and inspired women to organize for equality.  

In 1966, Friedan founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) to fight for women’s rights on the national level. When NOW developed a “Bill of Rights for Women,” it found broad feminist support for six positions: (1) banning employment discrimination, (2) right to maternity leave, (3) government-funded child care centers, (4) tax deductions for child care expenses, (5) equal and unsegregated education, and (6) equal job-training opportunities for poor women. These goals fought to open masculine spaces to women, such as higher education and the workforce. Through the 1970s, NOW fought to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to outlaw sex discrimination and ensure the state could no longer institutionalize and support white-masculine dominance. The emerging New Right and Conservative movement of the 1970s and 80s organized in opposition to the ERA and Feminist movement to defend America’s traditional white-masculinity. Led by Jerry Farwell’s Moral Majority and Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum, organized conservative forces succeed in defeating the ERA, falling three states short of the thirty-eight needed for ratification. 

NOW became the primary organization that led liberal feminism and won newfound rights for women through legislation, the courts, and government action. Within Second Wave Feminism, radical feminists often denounced liberal feminism for engaging in patriarchal power

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239 Ibid.  
240 Ibid., 100.  
241 Dicker, 100.  
242 Ibid., 104.  
243 Ibid.  
244 Dicker, 71.
structures. Their fight targeted cultural and social constructs that limited and endangered women’s freedom, challenging the underlying ideals, definitions, and the existence of gender in American society. In general, feminists made violence against women central to their movement. The creation of rape crisis hotlines, battered women’s shelters, and women’s health centers in the 1970s reflected this concern, and the feminist anti-violence movement coined the terms sexual harassment and domestic violence necessary to understand the violence faced by women.

Analysis of gun ownership is necessary to understand and address the continued prevalence of domestic violence. Recent research has revealed the strong connection between domestic violence and gun ownership in America. Published in 2004, a survey of battered women in California found that firearms, especially handguns, were 20 percent more common in the homes of battered women than the general population. Of the battered women who reported a gun in their home at some point with their last intimate partner, 64.5% percent said their partner used the gun against them. Though 6.7 percent of those women reported they had used a gun in the home against their partner, each of these women reported their partner had used a gun against them as well. A separate national study of intimate partner homicide compared women murdered by an intimate partner to a control group of battered women and found that a gun in the home was a significant risk factor for domestic violence. Notably, there was no clear evidence of any protective effect for having a gun in the home even among women who lived apart from their

245 Dicker, 75.
246 Ibid., 98.
247 Burkett; Dicker, 58.
249 Ibid., 1414.
250 Ibid., 1415.
abuser. Empirical data continues to show that intimate partner violence is more lethal when guns are accessible, and in the United States, women die at higher rates from homicide (as well as suicide and accidental firearms-related deaths) in states that allow easier access to firearms. Ultimately, easy gun access increases the lethality of domestic violence, and evidence shows that gun ownership provides women with no significant protection from violence. In a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in 2013, NRA Executive Vice President LaPierre said, “the one thing a violent rapist deserves to face is a good woman with a gun,” yet empirical evidence defies the NRA argument that guns are “equalizers” between men and women.

Second Wave Feminism forced America to question its social constructions of gender and called attention to women’s issues, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, through activism and newly developed women’s studies programs in higher education. With legal and political victories, women gained access to new positions in the workforce, obtained antidiscrimination legal protections, and developed women’s sports programs through Title IX of the Higher Education Act of 1972. By entering politics and the workforce, feminists challenged the Separate Spheres Doctrine and men’s traditional position as breadwinners and financial providers for their families. The development of women’s athletics contested organized sports as a masculine space popularized for men at the turn of the twentieth century. Second Wave Feminism is often criticized for its primary focus on the issues of white women and its initial exclusion of Queer

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252 Hemenway, 123.
254 Ibid.
255 Burkett.
women. Beginning in the 1990s, Third Wave and contemporary feminism’s intersectional focus confronted these concerns and challenged the public to consider women and broader society in terms that are not exclusively white, continuing to undermine white-masculine social order.256

The Queer Rights Movement

Out of the 1960s culture of social activism, Queer Americans organized in the 1970s to combat systematic discrimination and anti-Queer violence while demanding equal rights and cultural acceptance. During World War II, the military placed soldiers in men-dominated spaces where gay and bisexual men enjoyed more opportunities to have gay relationships, many for the first time.257 Numerous lesbian and bisexual women entered the military especially to meet other Queer women because the military’s policy against employing married or pregnant women created a disproportioned number of lesbian service members.258 Because the war brought more young people into cities across America, young Queer Americans and veterans created visible communities in the nation’s urban centers following the war.259 Though war created a space for most straight white men to reinforce their white-masculinity and project it throughout American society, it also provided Queer Americans with newfound Queer spaces and interactions, creating “something of a nationwide coming out experience.”260

However, post-war America actively continued to undermine the ability of Queer Americans to live out and freely in society. By rejecting heteronormative norms, Queer people were accused of pervasive tendencies, and Americans came to view Queer citizens as communist

256 Dicker, 127-29.
258 Ibid., 27.
260 D’Emilio, 24.
threats to the nation. The state directed its enforcement of sodomy laws directly at Queer Americans, raiding Queer bars and social spaces. Across the country, these laws institutionalized homophobia, and states used them to justify the loss of child custody, bans on adoption, and firing of Queer employees. Starting in Kansas in 1969, nine states passed gay-only sodomy laws while other states enforced their sodomy laws solely against the Queer community. Confronted by injustice, police brutality, and cultural persecution, Queer Americans started their movement for equal rights and acceptance in this post-war era.

Begun on June 28, 1969, the Stonewall Riots in the Greenwich Village of New York are widely credited with sparking the organized Queer Rights movement. When police raided the Stonewall Inn to suppress New York’s Queer community by attacking one of the city’s few gay bars, outraged Queer residents responded with riots that resumed on following nights against state-sanctioned police harassment and violence. Today, the Queer community commemorates Stonewall with annual Pride celebrations throughout the month of June.

White-masculinity’s ideals and projections of power defined men and women’s societal roles in stark opposition. In doing so, men’s ability to provide for, protect, and ultimately exert control over women extended into intimate relationships. Therefore, by defying heteronormative expectations, gay men and women threaten white-masculinity’s binary and heterosexual gender dichotomy. Society portrayed gay men as weak and feminized, lesbians were stereotyped as

261 DuBois and Dumenil, 538.
263 Ibid.
264 Ibid.
265 Levy.
266 Ibid.
267 Ibid.
deceiving, ugly, and envious of men, and Queer people’s free existence threatened white-masculinity’s power over men’s gender expectations and women’s freedom.

The movement continued to organize in the 1970s and 80s to fight for equal rights and acceptance against oppressive cultural norms, sodomy laws, and discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations.\textsuperscript{268} Established in 1973, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force convinced the American Psychiatric Association to stop classifying “homosexuality” as a mental illness, challenged media portrayals of Queer people, and persuaded Rep. Bella Abzug (D-NY) to introduce the first Queer Civil Rights bill to Congress.\textsuperscript{269} Also founded in 1973,\textsuperscript{270} Lambda Legal sponsored landmark lawsuits, including Supreme Court cases \textit{Romer v. Evans} in 1996 that struck down a Colorado state constitutional amendment that forbade the passage of gay anti-discrimination laws and \textit{Lawrence v. Texas} in 2003 that ruled sodomy laws unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{271} In 1980, the Democratic Party wrote support for gay anti-discrimination laws into its national platform, signifying the entrance of Queer Rights into mainstream American politics.\textsuperscript{272}

Though many Queer Rights groups utilized assimilationist strategies and brought the community into the political mainstream, the movement also used liberationist activism outside the political process to challenge America’s social and cultural repression of Queer people, such as through the Gay Liberation Front.\textsuperscript{273} At the start of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, the disease

\textsuperscript{268} Levy.
\textsuperscript{270} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{272} Levy.
\textsuperscript{273} Rimmerman, 54-56.
devastatingly struck the gay community. Popular perceptions and media coverage dangerously and inaccurately portrayed HIV/AIDS as a gay men’s disease, and the Conservative movement and Reagan Administration ignored the epidemic, restricting funds for the research of HIV/AIDS treatment as part of their broader campaign against the free existence of Queer Americans. The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) utilized both liberationist and assimilationist strategies to demand improved healthcare for HIV/AIDS patients. ACT UP’s activism challenged conservative and Christian Right rhetoric that labeled Queer bodies, especially HIV positive gay men, as “disease plague carriers bearing the mark of god’s disfavor.” “Kiss-ins” inspired by the Civil Rights “sit-in” protests publicized Queer relationships that society sought to suppress. On December 10, 1989 in New York, ACT UP now-famously staged a “die-in” during mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral that brought Queer protestors and AIDS patients into the church and forced public recognition for the plight and oppression of Queer Americans, personalizing and giving faces to the victims of the AIDS crisis. Similar organizations such as Queer Nation continued these forms of public activism that fought for Queer people’s right to exist in public through queering straight spaces.

Continuing to the present day, the Queer Rights movement has achieved legal and cultural victories throughout the United States such as marriage equality, increased media representation, and passage of state-level anti-discrimination protections. The movement itself has also reformed and begun to confront its history of sexism and racism that has kept black and trans people from

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274 DeLuca, 17.
275 Ibid., 10.
276 Ibid., 17.
277 Ibid., 18
278 Ibid.
279 Ibid.
positions of power within the community. Through its challenges to gender norms and perceived threat to the traditional family ideal, the Queer Rights movement confronted white-masculinity’s social dominance and became a primary target for the emerging Conservative and Christian Right movements of the 1970s and 80s.

In recent years, the organized opposition to Queer Rights and threats of violence have caused some to turn to firearms as symbols of power. Gun clubs such as Trigger Warning and the Pink Pistols argue that guns can combat homophobia and transphobia. Trigger Warning formed in 2017 in Rochester, New York. Its members cited a year marked by political protests and the 2017 “Unite the Right” white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia as having increased their anxiety of armed and organized conservative extremists. A founding member of the group, Jake Allen told the Associated Press that “[Trigger Warning is] a way to assert our strength … Often, Queer people are thought of as being weak, as being defenseless, and I think in many ways this pushes back against that. And I want white supremacists and neo-Nazis to know that Queer people are taking steps necessary to protect themselves.”

Founded in 2000, the Pink Pistols are a similar Queer gun club that has created dozens of chapters across the country. Expressing anger over the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, an

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283 Ibid.
284 Ibid.
article in *Salon* by Jonathan Rauch called for gay communities to arm themselves against violence and inspired the founding of the Pink Pistols. Groups such as Trigger Warning and the Pink Pistols exemplify that guns can be used to symbolize and project both individual and group power, even without instigating violence. These Queer gun clubs lack the strongly developed ideology of the Black Panthers and Black Nationalists who took up arms to defend themselves and project their power against white supremacy. Nonetheless, they have created unique social spaces for gun use in support of progressive social principles, defying the binary rhetoric of conservative “gun nuts” versus progressive “gun grabbers.”

Through the mid-to-late twentieth century, post-war progressive social movements challenged the structures of racism, sexism, and homophobia within American society. In these movements, American white-masculinity faced its most dangerous threat. Previously under the sole direction of white-men citizens, the post-war state and especially the Federal Government used its power to advance the causes of Civil Rights, Feminism, and Queer Rights through legislation, the courts, and executive action. African, women, and Queer Americans began to enter public spaces and politics previously reserved for white men. As these movements interrogated the white-masculine social order, United States politics and economics contributed to the growing white-men perception of American decline.

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Section 3 – Political and Economic Unrest: America in Decline

The Cold War and Vietnam Experience

Following victory in World War II, the United States emerged as the world’s leading superpower, demonstrating the strength of American masculinity credited with winning the war. However, public anxiety increased over national security and the country’s threatened global position as the Cold War intensified.\textsuperscript{287} 1950s McCarthyism epitomized these fears as America felt penetrated by communists and Soviet sympathizers that Senator Joseph McCarthy equated to gay men and women for their pervasiveness and gender failure.\textsuperscript{288} In this context, Americans turned to the traditional family unit to provide the foundation for national stability.\textsuperscript{289} Both Queer people and feminists challenged the traditional social norms required to maintain the post-war era’s ideal family, and therefore, they threatened the American way of life and the country’s national security.\textsuperscript{290} The Cold War and nuclear arms race pitted America’s masculine strength, military power, and individualistic free-market capitalism against the Soviet Union’s strength, military power, and collectivist communist society, testing the ideals of American white-masculinity on the international stage.

Domestically, the 1950s and Cold War era created new forms of frontier mythologizing. Films and primetime television idealized nineteenth-century western frontier heroes armed with guns, helping to stimulate gun sales throughout the decade.\textsuperscript{291} Westerns and popularized tales of

\textsuperscript{287} DuBois and Dumenil, 535.  
\textsuperscript{288} Melzer, 137.  
\textsuperscript{289} DuBois and Dumenil, 535.  
\textsuperscript{290} Melzer, 148; Dicker, 61.  
\textsuperscript{291} Joan Burbick, \textit{Gun Show Nation: Gun Culture and American Democracy} (New York: The New Press, 2007), 71
the frontier told a story of American righteousness and morality without recognizing the history of frontier firearms as tools for civilian-led genocide.292

Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union carried into the Vietnam Conflict. In the 1950s, American intelligence and military advisors worked on the ground to defend capitalist South Vietnam and install Ngo Dinh Diem as the South’s leader.293 In 1961, the United States inserted thousands more military advisors to support the South, and in 1965, deployed active combat troops.294 At home, the conflict became increasingly controversial, and millions of Americans came to oppose military involvement during the 1960s and 70s. The military conflict increasingly looked unwinnable and lost broad public support in a direct challenge to the dominance of the United States, representing a failure of American masculinity.295 Whereas the previous generation of American men upheld that nation’s white-masculine strength in World War II, America’s young men fighting in Vietnam failed to protect the nation and demonstrate their individual masculinity in military conflict.296 Many men dodged the draft, refused to fight in the conflict’s inhumane conditions (as documented by the discovery of unfired weapons), and protested against the conflict at home.297 On March 29, 1973, the United States completed the withdrawal of its military forces. Fighting re-escalated within Vietnam over the following two years, and the remnants of the South Vietnamese government surrendered to the North Vietnamese on April 30, 1975.298

292 Burbick, 71; Melzer, 33.
294 Ibid., 1.
295 Melzer, 56.
296 Ibid.
297 Ibid.
298 Spector, 12.

- 58 -
While the Vietnam Conflict challenged America’s trust in its power and determination internationally, violative events of the 1960s struck at white-masculinity’s domestic strength. In 1963, the assassination of President Kennedy stunned the nation and created the threat of new federal gun control.\textsuperscript{299} The Watts Riots and race riots of 1965 horrified millions, and a second wave of riots in 1967 burned inner-city neighborhoods, homes, and stores in cities throughout the country such as Detroit, Chicago, Baltimore, and Atlanta.\textsuperscript{300} In response, white Americans increasingly developed racialized fears of black crime, and gun ownership provided a tool to protect from ‘‘dangerous blacks.’’\textsuperscript{301} After the assassinations of Dr. King and Senator Robert Kennedy in the spring of 1968, Congress passed the Gun Control Act of 1968 that established a federal licensing system for firearms dealers, banned the importation of military-style weapons, and prohibited specific classes of people from gun possession, including felons and fugitives.\textsuperscript{302} By the 1970s, the Cold War and Vietnam Conflict triggered public anxiety about America’s power and social fabric. Shaken by the deaths of a president, his brother, and the nation’s leading Civil Rights leader and confronted with images of violent race riots, many Americans came to perceive the United States as a nation in decline.

\textit{Economic Change: Undermining the Breadwinner}

As the post-war United States faced international conflict, domestic unrest, and social disruption in the form of progressive activism, economic change in the post-war decades threatened the ability of men to fulfill the role of financial provider for their families, undermining the breadwinner ideal central to white-masculinity. Combined with increasing globalization of the

\textsuperscript{299} Winkler, 83.
\textsuperscript{300} Burbick, 90.
\textsuperscript{301} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{302} Waldman, 83.
economy, deindustrialization resulted in millions of manufacturing workers being laid off and moved industrial jobs to other countries.\textsuperscript{303} Outsourcing of jobs resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of workers not only in manufacturing and industrial jobs but across the economy as the culture of unionization decreased; this included thousands of workers in manufacturing, healthcare, government, and education.\textsuperscript{304} The United States lost 32 to 36 million manufacturing jobs in the 1970s alone, devastating communities across the country, especially industrial cities and towns.\textsuperscript{305} Previously unionized industrial workers were forced into new, non-union, often temporary, vulnerable, and insecure jobs with dramatically decreased wages and little to no benefits mainly in the growing service sector.\textsuperscript{306} This change resulted in an economic shift from a men-dominated workforce and industrial economy to a service-based economy without reliable benefits like healthcare, retirement, and sick time.\textsuperscript{307} White-masculine society continued to hold men to a do-it-yourself rugged individualism and sole-breadwinner model, yet the changing modern economy made fulfilling this role difficult and near-impossible for many American men.\textsuperscript{308} Decreased job security, income, and benefits for millions of American men (and women) hurt the economic security of many families but also produced social consequences amplified by post-war social movements that redefined gender relations within the family as white men were unable to maintain their status as the sole breadwinner of their families.\textsuperscript{309}

Economic change undermined the core values of individual white-masculinity, including provider, breadwinner, and rugged individualism. Cold War anxieties, American failure in

\textsuperscript{303} Storch, 123.\textsuperscript{304} Ibid., 131.\textsuperscript{305} Ibid., 126.\textsuperscript{306} Ibid., 132.\textsuperscript{307} Carlson, 13.\textsuperscript{308} Melzer, 46.\textsuperscript{309} Carlson, 13.
Vietnam, political assassinations, civil unrest, and social activism all created a perfect storm of disruption that undermined the social, political, and economic power that white-masculinity had cultivated since the colonial era. Confronted by these challenges, the new Conservative movement of the 1970s and 80s sought to revive white-masculinity’s power. As the NRA radicalized at the same time, a population of white-men conservatives turned to the NRA and Conservative movement to protect their gun rights, their role as family protector, and the white-masculine order central to their worldview.

Section 4 – The NRA and Conservative Politics: Institutionalizing Gun Culture

The Conservative Movement

The Conservative movement, New Right, and organized Christian Right emerged as an organized political force in the 1970s and 80s to counter progressive social and political progress of the post-war era while responding to economic change and perceptions of American decline that threatened traditional white masculinity’s projection of power. This new Conservative movement appealed to rugged individualism, patriotism, and moral absolutism by countering the collective nature of post-war social movements and opposing the perceived attack on America’s national character.310

The post-war era brought social issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia into mainstream American politics that changed the party affiliations of millions of Americans, especially white-men conservatives.311 Southern Democrats shifted into the Republican Party in the 1960s and 70s as the Democratic Party allied with Civil Rights, assisted in feminist advancements, and expressed

310 Melzer, 48.
311 Ibid., 57.
support for Queer Rights in its 1980 national platform.\textsuperscript{312} In opposition, hardened social conservatives empowered by President Reagan used race-neutral framing in their public messaging that stressed personal responsibility and egalitarianism.\textsuperscript{313} Conservatives opposed “special rights” for women and minorities, challenged affirmative action for African Americans and woman as an attack on American meritocracy, and accused social progressives of “reserve discrimination.”\textsuperscript{314} By framing progressive social activism as an attack on freedom and individualism, the New Right argued that post-war social movements took resources, rights, and opportunities from hard-working white-men citizens and allocated them to “free-riders” and “welfare queens” that were unwilling to work hard for their success.\textsuperscript{315} The newly coined term “welfare queen” feminizes the perceived failure of poor Americans’ masculine individualism. Conservatives centered their new movement on traditional American “family values” – the same values that supported white-masculinity’s social dominance through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{316}

New Right and Christian Right leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Phyllis Schlafly led the opposition against Second Wave Feminism and Queer Rights. Schlafly’s campaign against the ERA argued the amendment would invalidate sodomy laws, outlaw single-sex bathrooms, legalize same-sex marriage, and force women to register for the draft.\textsuperscript{317} Falwell and other Christian Right leaders organized widespread resistance to Queer Rights among evangelicals and social conservatives, labeling Queer behavior as morally wrong and expecting government and societal institutions to enforce “responsible” white-masculine behavior.\textsuperscript{318} Evangelical conservatives

\textsuperscript{312} Burbick, 88; Levy.
\textsuperscript{313} Burbick, 88; Melzer, 165.
\textsuperscript{314} Melzer, 165.
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{316} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{317} Burkett.
\textsuperscript{318} Green, 122.
founded new organizations, coined as “pro-family” groups, to challenge organized feminist and Queer Rights organizations, including Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for America, and the Traditional Values Coalition.\textsuperscript{319} These groups distorted science, religion, and politics to support and emphasize conservative white-masculine gender roles,\textsuperscript{320} arguing that post-war social activism feminized men, weakened the family, and left America with no moral compass.\textsuperscript{321} Organized against Civil Rights, Feminism, and Queer Rights, the Conservative movement launched an orchestrated campaign to reaffirm white-masculine hegemony in America. Threatened by these progressive post-war movements, white-men conservatives armed themselves in a new post-war gun culture that continued the history of white-masculine gun ownership and projection of power.

\textit{The NRA’s Rebirth}

As white-men conservatives turned to firearms as a masculine symbol of power, they propelled the NRA into a new era of radicalized politics and gun culture. In the 1970s, the NRA’s Old Guard leadership attempted to maintain the organization’s primary focus on hunting, sport shooting, and marksmanship. In what became known as the 1976 Weekend Massacre, the NRA leadership fired eighty employees sympathetic to conservative gun rights hardliners.\textsuperscript{322} The following year, the NRA announced it would move its headquarters to Colorado Springs, Colorado, attempting to remove itself from the nation’s divisive political debates.\textsuperscript{323} However, the Old Guard underestimated the ability of white-men conservatives to reclaim firearms as a masculine symbol of power, hijacking the NRA to institutionalize and project white-masculinity

\textsuperscript{320} Melzer, 49.
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid. 55.
\textsuperscript{322} Melzer, 64; Waldman, 90.
\textsuperscript{323} Waldman, 90.
throughout American society. At the 1977 NRA national convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, conservative gun rights supporters under the leadership of Harlon Carter ousted the organization’s national leadership. The former director of the NRA’s lobbying arm, the Institute for Legislative Action, Carter became the organization’s new Executive Vice President and declared “no more Civil War in the NRA.” After the national convention, the new conservative national leadership issued a statement titled “What the NRA Is” in the subsequent issue of the NRA’s magazine, *American Rifleman*:

> The NRA, the first and foremost guardian of the traditional American right to ‘keep and bear arms,’ believes that every law-abiding citizen is entitled to the ownership and legal use of firearms, and that every reputable gun owner should be an NRA member.

Known as the “Revolt at Cincinnati,” conservative hardliners officially took control of the NRA, dedicating the organization to a new mission of conservative gun rights and white-masculine politics.

The new NRA quickly worked to institutionalize the emerging post-war dominant gun culture that uses firearms to project white-masculine power and reinforce traditional white-masculinity. In the late 1970s, the NRA’s new leadership began a campaign to loosen gun regulation and pass *shall-issue* carry laws. Unlike laws previously supported by the NRA, such as the proposed Uniform Firearms Act in 1920, any applicant for a gun carry permit who meets the minimum criteria set by the state (e.g., no criminal record, at least twenty-one years of age) must be issued a permit under *shall-issue* laws, removing the discretion of law enforcement to

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324 Waldman, 90; Melzer, 64.
325 Melzer, 89.
326 Waldman, 90-91.
327 Melzer, 64.
328 Carlson, 5.
issue permits under may-issue laws.\textsuperscript{329} Since the 1970s, more than three dozen states have loosened their gun laws, making it easier for residents to purchase guns and obtain open and concealed carry permits.\textsuperscript{330} The large majority of American gun owners and carriers are men, and shall-issue laws allow white-men conservatives to more easily purchase, carry, and bear arms to reinforce their individual role as rugged protectors of their families and communities, especially in light of their declining ability to fulfill the breadwinner model of masculinity.\textsuperscript{331}

More recently, the NRA has championed Stand-Your-Ground laws that re-ordain gun carriers (primarily men) with an increased ability to engage in state-sanctioned public violence to protect themselves or others with no duty to retreat in public spaces.\textsuperscript{332} The increased freedom to commit state-sanctioned public violence is reminiscent of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century militia. However, the citizen militia acted as law enforcement and maintained social order in defense of the community, not in individual self-defense. In 2005, Florida passed the nation’s first Stand-Your-Ground law with lobbying support from the NRA, and since then, roughly two dozen states have followed suit.\textsuperscript{333} These laws received widespread condemnation when George Zimmerman successfully used a Stand-Your-Ground defense after he shot and killed unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin in 2012, effectively using the law as a license to kill.\textsuperscript{334} Though the NRA and gun rights advocates have argued these laws merely support self-defense and prevent violence against women, post-war gun rights and Stand-Your-Ground laws neglect to protect

\textsuperscript{329} Carlson, 5.
\textsuperscript{330} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{331} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{332} Kautzer, 180.
\textsuperscript{333} Carlson, 6; Kautzer, 180.
women from the domestic violence that they most often face. Convinced that easy gun access is necessary to protect white-masculine power and reinforce individual masculinity, the NRA and post-war gun culture use the Second Amendment to defend white-men conservative gun carrying.

The Road to Heller

In the landmark District of Columbia v. Heller decision in 2008, the Supreme Court ruled for the first time that Americans have an individual right to a firearm under the Second Amendment. Through this decision, Americans now maintain the right to a firearm in their home for personal self-defense. Though limited, Heller’s individual right reversed the Court’s existing precedent. In the previous related case, United States v. Miller in 1939, the Court ruled that the shotgun restrictions in the National Firearms Act had no relation to the well-regulated militia and therefore did not violate the Second Amendment. Until 2008, federal circuit courts had overwhelmingly supported this collective right theory: that the right to bear arms under the Second Amendment only applied when related to militia service. Even though Court precedent and federal circuit courts had uniformly followed collective right theory since Miller in 1939, the Heller decision guaranteed an individual right in response to the individualism of America’s dominant gun culture.

Before 1959, all indexed law review articles on the Second Amendment concluded that the constitution did not provide an individual right to a firearm, and both the legal and historical consensus of the time supporting the collective right theory. However, in the late 1970s during

335 Carlson and Goss, 126.
337 Ibid.
338 Winkler, 24.
339 Ibid.
340 Winkler, 95; Waldman, 125.
the radicalization of the gun lobby, the NRA began funding academic research and scholars who argued in support of individual right theory.\textsuperscript{341} In a broad conservative strategy, the New Right actively challenged legal ideas used by post-war progressive social movements and sought to develop their own legal ideas in defense of white-masculinity.\textsuperscript{342} At the same time, the NRA’s Institute for Legislative Action continued its push for shall-issue open and concealed carry laws on the state level, arguing that the Second Amendment provides for unrestricted gun ownership in public spaces.\textsuperscript{343} As the political power of the NRA increased, so did its sway over public opinion. Though 60 percent of Americans supported a ban on handguns in 1959 according to Gallup, by 2012, only 24 percent supported a handgun ban, and in 2008, 73 percent believed the Second Amendment guaranteed the right to own guns outside of militia service.\textsuperscript{344} After the NRA strongly supported George W. Bush in the 2000 presidential election, the Bush Administration directed the Justice Department to support individual right theory for the first time in American history.\textsuperscript{345} Once \textit{Heller} reached the Supreme Court, newly manufactured legal arguments and shifting public opinion steered the Court towards its landmark decision.

\textit{Gun Culture in Contemporary America}

Throughout American history, guns have been used by white-men citizens to project white-masculine power, construct models of masculinity, and reinforce individual masculine identity. In contemporary America, white-men conservatives have experienced threats to their dominant social, political, and economic position. Post-war progressive social victories confronted white

\textsuperscript{341} Winkler, 97.  
\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{343} Carlson, 5.  
\textsuperscript{344} Waldman, 119.  
\textsuperscript{345} Ibid., 118.
supremacy, challenged the Separate Spheres Doctrine, and undermined traditional gender roles. Simultaneously, the Cold War increased public anxiety over America’s national security and international position, and the Vietnam Conflict confirmed that the masculine power and global position of the United States after World War II could successfully be subverted even by a small communist nation. At home, the American state showed increased willingness to protect the rights of oppressed Americans against the interests of white-masculinity while political assassinations, race riots, and violent crime caused white-men conservatives to lose trust in the state’s ability to protest themselves and their families, particularly from racialized fears of black crime.\footnote{Carlson, 12-13.} Combined with globalization and deindustrialization that undermine the ability of white men to fulfill the masculine role of breadwinner for their families,\footnote{Melzer, 46.} white-men conservatives feel compelled to take up arms to protect themselves and their communities while reinforcing their individual masculinity in what Carlson terms the \textit{citizen-protector} model of gun ownership.\footnote{Carlson, 6.}

Through analysis of gun culture’s history and interviews with NRA members during the organization’s national conventions, Melzer describes the contemporary dominant gun culture as its own social movement, fighting directly against liberals, the elite, and the powerful.\footnote{Melzer, 102-05.} These conservative gun owners fight to reassert white-masculinity as America’s unchallenged social order but remain frustrated by their inability to turn electoral victories since the 1980s into concrete cultural victories and a rollback of progressive legal rights.\footnote{Ibid., 60.} Gun ownership allows these Americans, primarily white-men conservatives, to signal their adherence to traditional white-
masculine social order and build a culture to project white-masculine power. The Trump Administration stands to demonstrate if conservative America can use its significant political power to challenge the dominant progressive culture in the United States successfully.

In her study of concealed-carry permit holders in Texas, Stroud’s research further confirms that white-men conservative gun ownership affirms the values of white-masculinity. For these men, gun ownership signified their fatherly and masculine duty to protect their family, yet they recognized their wives as more likely to be in a position to defend their children.\textsuperscript{351} By recognizing that their wives’ domestic status made them better positioned to defend their children but not expecting their wives to own or carry firearms, these men confirmed that gun ownership reinforces masculinity by signifying the willingness to protect one’s family, even though their masculine gun ownership provides no empirical defensive benefit. Additionally, of the twenty men interviewed, only one (who was of Hispanic descent) did not rely on racialized fears of crime to justify his gun ownership and concealed carry.\textsuperscript{352} Ultimately, these men said they required a firearm and concealed carry permit primarily to defend their families in self-defense, partly against the perceived potential of crime committed by racial minorities, and did not cite sport shooting and recreations as the primary reason for ownership.\textsuperscript{353} Nonetheless, even though these men admitted to being frequently away from their families, they reported that men should carry weapons because they are stronger yet conversely referred to guns as “equalizers” between men and women, and they did not depict their wives as potential equal defenders of the family.\textsuperscript{354}

\textsuperscript{351} Stroud, 226.  
\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., 233.  
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., 234.
masculinity both individually and throughout society instead of owning guns for their professed purpose of self-defense. Instead, white-men conservatives own guns primarily as a response to social challenges against white-masculinity. In this post-war dominant gun culture, white-men gun owners have armed themselves with a historical symbol of their power, constructing a culture designed to maintain and project white-masculine dominance into America’s future.

**Conclusion**

Today’s dominant gun culture uses the NRA to organize and institutionalize American white-masculinity. In recent years, this gun culture and its national lobby have successfully prevented the passage of federal and state gun safety laws, even after public mass shootings such as the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting. The current movement for gun safety laws led by student survivors of the Parkland, Florida school shooting continues to show unprecedented success against the NRA and dominant gun culture, maintaining public interest and significance months after the Parkland shooting on February 14, 2018. Parkland students through the March for Our Lives movement have also provided a new platform for black youth activists to discuss gun violence that affects the black community. This intersectional attribute of the March for Our Lives movement creates an opportunity for America to address the racialized and prejudiced nature of its gun violence epidemic in opposition to the discriminatory rhetoric of the dominant gun culture and NRA. Expanding the public conversation beyond mass shootings to include other forms of gun violence such as urban gun violence, police shootings of black Americans, domestic violence, and suicide is necessary to address the gun violence epidemic in the United States fully.

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355 Stroud, 234.
If provided with a Congress and White House that is willing to pass gun safety laws (most likely requiring a new Democratic Congress and Administration), the March for Our Lives movement could challenge the white-masculine foundation of American gun ownership through a comprehensive public discussion of gun use and passage of new gun control legislation. Already as a result of this movement, major corporations and businesses have cut ties with the NRA and divested from the gun industry, signaling a fundamental shift in the debate over gun ownership and control in America.357

Though the United States comprises less than 5 percent of the global population, it has an estimated 48 percent of the world’s civilian-owned guns.358 With a gun ownership rate of roughly one gun per person,359 any national discussion of firearms must recognize the reality of widespread gun ownership that is unlikely to change significantly in the coming years and decades. Throughout American history, the dominant gun culture has borne firearms as a symbol of white-masculine power, enforcing a social order that oppresses African, women, Queer, and immigrant Americans. Groups such as the Black Panthers, Trigger Warning, and Pink Pistols have used guns in a progressive manner, arming themselves against the white-masculine social order. In these groups and settings, firearms have also provided a social space for oppressed communities to gather. Future research should investigate how oppressed and minority communities bear arms in models of gun ownership that oppose white-masculinity. Additionally, it should also question how members of oppressed and minority communities have used guns in support of and within the

dominant white-masculine gun culture. For example, studying how conservative women exist within the dominant gun culture that continues to oppose feminist activism. Ultimately, the continued development of progressive models of gun ownership could challenge the dominant use of guns in American society as symbols of white-masculine power and confront the history of firearms as instruments of white-masculinity.

Additionally, not all white-men gun owners participate or fully participate in the culture of gun ownership that projects white-masculine power. Melzer defined three types of NRA members during his research: the Critical Mass, Reserves, and Peripherals. The Critical Mass is the most committed to white-masculine gun politics, the Reserves support NRA politics but are less financially and emotionally committed, and the Peripherals engage with the NRA for its sport shooting, hunting, and recreational aspects, not conservative white-masculine politics. Many Peripherals remain unsupportive of NRA politics, most gun owners support gun control policies such as universal background checks, and independent voters, men, and whites with no college degree have made up the largest surges in support for gun control policies since the Parkland school shooting. The white-masculine gun culture maintains its dominant position not because the majority of American gun owners fervently support it, but because it controls America’s public discourse on gun ownership and appeals to the broader population engaged in conservative politics. Progressive engagement with gun owners that do not support white-masculine politics (such as Peripherals interested in firearms recreation) and public recognition of the complex and

360 Melzer, 173-75.
361 Ibid.
363 Ibid.
diverse reality of American gun ownership promises to challenge white-masculinity’s dominance over mainstream gun ownership and culture.

Within the dominant gun culture, gun owners continue to bear firearms in opposition to the perceived threat of progressive social change. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has called public attention to gun violence and police shootings faced by African Americans and aims to reform law enforcement’s existence as an institution of white-masculine power, receiving intense opposition from conservatives in the process. Throughout the nation’s history, law enforcement has maintained white-masculine social order against African, women, and Queer Americans. In this regard, BLM professes an intersectional focus that includes the unique issues and violence faced by black women and Queer black people into the movement’s mission.364 BLM continues to challenge white supremacy as well as the sexist and anti-Queer discrimination of black Americans maintained by white-masculinity.

Following the success of the Second Wave Feminist movement, Third Wave Feminism also developed an intersectional focus that challenges racism, homophobia, and transphobia within feminism and broader society.365 In response to President Trump’s inauguration, the Women’s March in 2017 and 2018 organized millions of Americans in feminist activism.366 This emerging Fourth Wave of Feminism includes the #MeToo and Times Up movements that sparked a continuing global conversation about the sexual harassment and violence faced by women.367

365 Dicker, 127-29.
Though feminist activism remains necessary to challenge sexism, gender bias, and inequality, the ability of feminism to confront sexist structures throughout our society successfully has endangered the dominance of white-masculinity.

Since its organized emergence in the 1970s, the Queer Rights movement has achieved significant success and continues to challenge the white-masculine social order. According to Gallup, 72 percent of Americans in 2017 thought that gay and lesbian relationships should be legal as opposed to only 43 percent in 1977, and in 2017, 64 percent of Americans supported marriage equality as opposed to only 27 percent in 1996. In 2015, the Supreme Court in Obergefell v. Hodges ruled that states must allow same-sex couples to marry, establishing marriage equality across the United States. Due to increased cultural acceptance, more Queer Americans now feel comfortable coming out, and the percentage of Americans identifying as Queer has risen in recent years from 3.5 percent in 2012 to 4.1 percent in 2016. Additionally, politics, the media, and popular culture increasingly include, represent, and portray Queer people. Nonetheless, Queer Americans still face prejudice in their daily lives, lack anti-discrimination protections in many states, and Queer people (especially trans women of color) frequently face violent hate crimes and threats of violence. By interrogating the dominant models of gender and sexuality within America’s white-masculine and heteronormative society, the Queer Rights movement continues to threaten the social power of white-masculinity integral to the dominant gun culture.

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370 Anna Brown, “5 key findings about LGBT Americans,” Pew Research Center, June 13, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/13/5-key-findings-about-lgbt-americans/. The term LGBT used by Pew Research Center has been replaced with Queer in this paper.
Today’s dominant gun culture follows the same historical model of gun ownership that populated the citizen militia, devastated Native peoples during westward expansion, suppressed black liberation following the Civil War, discriminated against new immigrants, and preserved the values of white-masculinity during industrialization and after the frontier’s close. Now under a perceived threat from progressive social movements and deindustrialization, white-men conservatives arm themselves in the dominant gun culture to project the power of white-masculinity throughout American society. Individually, white-men conservatives reinforce their masculinity as protectors of their families through gun ownership and carry for self-defense, now the most common reason for gun ownership in the United States. The contemporary white-masculine gun culture continues to reinforce the values of protector, provider, and rugged individualism that remained central to white-masculinity throughout American history, including through models of masculinity popularized by legends of the revolutionary militia and western frontier. White-men conservatives have turned to firearms as a symbol of power against progressive social movements and economic disruption that threaten the traditional “American Way” by undermining the white-masculine social order. In continuation of the white-masculine model of gun ownership, today’s dominant gun culture seeks to restore and defend the supremacy of white-masculine power in American society.

Today, many Americans hope to resist and combat the dominant gun culture through the political movement for new gun safety laws. A majority of Americans, including most gun owners, support some form of gun control legislation. Considering that many NRA members are not

372 Stroud, 226-233; Ruth Igielnik and Anna Brown; Deborah Azrael et al.
373 Clark.
fully committed to the organization’s white-masculine politics, as noted by Melzer, the dominant gun culture’s ability to control America’s public discussion of gun ownership stands as a testament to the power and resolve of white-masculinity and conservative gun politics. Nonetheless, a majority of Americans and many gun owners are not engaged in or committed to the dominant gun culture. Groups such as the Black Panthers, Pink Pistols, and Trigger Warning demonstrate that progressive models of gun ownership can challenge gun use as a symbol of white-masculine power. Additionally, current gun control proposals do not threaten recreational gun ownership, and many models of recreational gun use do not require engagement with white-masculine politics; Trigger Warning exemplifies this through their focus on recreational target shooting. Aligned with the March for Our Lives and other gun control movements, Americans could challenge the NRA and dominant gun culture by engaging progressive and recreational models of gun use and combatting the white-masculinity that has underpinned America’s dominant gun culture throughout the nation’s history.

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374 Melzer, 173-75.
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