

**WEIGHED IN AN EVEN BALANCE**



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*Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may  
know mine integrity.*

*Job 31: 6*



## Contents

One

**Context** 1

Two

**Probate Records** 5

Three

**Specific Challenges: Accurate** 13

Four

**Specific Challenges:  
Perceived Errors** 19

Five

**Specific Challenges:  
Matters of Interpretation** 47

Conclusion 57

Notes 61





## Chapter One

### Context

In the sixteenth century, Oxford University had a statute that any of its students or professors “who did not follow Aristotle faithfully were liable to a fine of five shillings for every point of divergence.”

—Graham Midgley<sup>1</sup>

In September 2000, a book appeared challenging the popular perception that Americans have always been a heavily armed people. *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* questioned a series of assumptions about Americans’ relationship with guns by examining a wide array of evidence across three centuries. The book came under sustained assault nearly a year before its appearance. Along the way a number of accusations were made against the book’s scholarship and its author. Most of these accusations focus on the three paragraphs and one table dealing with probate records, though other charges emerged, primarily on the web. As the author of *Arming America*, I would rather not engage in the highly political and personal tone of these attacks which often say more about the critic than about the content of the book. As the goal of this tract is the furtherance of scholarship, I prefer to simply answer each of the charges of falsification in turn. For that reason, each accusation is quoted without attribution, so as to avoid further personalizing this debate.

Not all critiques are equal. I hope that it is evident that many accusations made against *Arming America* have no relation to the text but are rather based on what some people assume or imagine the book says. A great many attacks appear to have been motivated by political agendas. Unfortunately, the polemical static obscured a number of legitimate criticisms, and I did not respond adequately to each and every allegation. This document is an effort to respond to every specific criticism of the book. Many criticisms of this book have either correctly identified errors or offered an alternative reading of the source. I welcome the former, which has led to the publication of an improved second edition. While there were errors in the first edition, none of them was made intentionally or with any design to mislead the reader. The latter form of critique, alternative interpretations, are important and helpful, forming the essence of scholarly debate. Hopefully these critiques will inspire further research, for, as *Arming America* attempted to make clear, America’s gun heritage is a sur-

prisingly underexplored aspect of our history. As stated in the introduction to the book, I have only scratched the surface of the documentary record, and the vast amounts of material, such as military records, demand further exploration. There is certainly room for disagreement about the significance of the evidence provided by *Arming America*, but my goal in writing it was to present a rigorous and accurate historical account and a reasonable, though controversial, interpretation of the historical record.

Not for a moment do I mean to suggest that *Arming America* is free of error; it is likely that no work of scholarship is free from error. The individual scholar thus has a responsibility to correct any mistakes in his or her work, as I have consistently endeavored to do. In his biography, *Truman*, David McCullough quotes a memo from General Thomas Handy of George Marshall's staff as stating that the military expected 500,000 to one million casualties in the invasion of Japan.<sup>2</sup> As it turned out, the memo was actually written by former President Herbert Hoover and General Handy's covering memo dismisses the prediction as ridiculous. The Army's highest casualty figure for the invasion was 67,000. Though McCullough acknowledged the error, it has never been corrected in *Truman*, which is still available in bookstores. The failure to correct that mistake in print has had major consequences, as it is often quoted to justify America's decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan and was repeatedly cited in the debate over the cancelled Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian.<sup>3</sup> Even the finest scholars, and I place McCullough in that camp, make mistakes. However, acknowledging an error is not enough, it must be corrected. From the first appearance of *Arming America*, I have done my best to correct any errors, as I do here and in the revised edition of the book.

Above all else, I hope that anyone attempting to evaluate *Arming America* will actually read the book. This may seem a self-evident request, and any author would like to have people read his or her book, but I believe that much of the criticism of *Arming America* is based on misinformation spread on the web.

*Arming America* was the product of ten years of research in scores of archives.<sup>4</sup> It examines the development of America's gun culture from the first European settlements through 1877. The book's thesis is that the gun culture which is now so widely taken for granted in the United States has not always been a "given" of life in America, but developed during the mid-nineteenth century. An increase in the production of firearms under federal supervision in the 1850s set the groundwork for the slaughter of the Civil War. That war generated a massive increase in the demand for guns, while training millions of American men in the use of firearms. This is not a simple story, and *Arming America* is a rather complex book. I aimed to explore a broad diversity of experience over three centuries and to avoid sweeping generalizations about what Americans believed as a collective, giving attention to regional, class, racial, and gender differences.

Starting with the earliest use of firearms in Europe, paying particular attention to political and cultural trends in England, *Arming America* tracks firearms to North America. I attempt to show the gun's range of uses and limitations in the daily life of colonial America, as well as the effort of colonial governments to acquire and preserve sufficient firearms for their defense. The fourth chapter, which several critics have suggested contains the most original contribution of the book, argues that the Eastern Woodlands Indians constituted America's first gun culture. Moving from the attitudes of North America's natives to wilderness war-

fare, I follow the lead of many fine military historians in matching the myth and reality of the militia in the eighteenth century. The American Revolution serves as the practical test of these historical arguments, as the militia displayed occasional moments of astounding heroism and a steady pattern of avoidance. I do maintain that the militia's hesitance to do battle was perfectly rational, given the shortage of firearms and the general ignorance of their proper use. It is certainly the case that the military and political leaders of the patriot cause worked constantly to acquire sufficient firearms for their struggle with England. Since there were no gun manufactories in North America, they had no choice but to turn to Europe, finding willing suppliers in France and the Netherlands.

Chapter 7 is the pivot of the book. In this and the two following chapters, I endeavor to show how the new federal government sought constantly to encourage arms production, promote the better organization and arming of the militia, and develop a way of training a large number of men in the use of firearms while avoiding an expensive standing army. These efforts failed miserably, as the War of 1812 amply demonstrated. Meanwhile, state governments walked a fine line between the perceived need to supply arms to reliable citizens for internal defense and the desire to prevent those arms from falling into the hands of feared classes—Indians, blacks, the poor, and political radicals. I focus on a number of domestic political disputes in order to uncover the use of firearms and the level of violence. The creation of a hunting subculture in the late 1820s and the erratic progress of uniformed militia companies point to a growing yet still limited interest in firearms. The book's last chapter focuses on the significant improvements in firearms technology and production in the 1850s and 1860s, as well as the traumatic and decisive experience of the Civil War, to discover the origins of America's gun culture. I like the way Carl Bogus has put it, that *Arming America* "explores the development of an American gun culture by following the hardware." The book does attempt to focus on the guns, to find "how many there were, who made them, who had them, where they were kept, and how they were used."<sup>5</sup>

This work offered a reading of America's fascination with firearms that was clearly at variance with received tradition. This contrary thesis was presented in the spirit of exploration, with the hope that other historians would be interested enough to pursue the subject as well and engage with the findings of this author. Historians, like all scholars, formulate hypotheses to explain some aspect of the past, and then test them against what we can know or think we know. If these tests stand, then the hypothesis may also stand, for a time (for no historical theory lasts for very long). But the failure of the facts to fit every aspect of a thesis is no cause for despair, for we have learned something even from such a disagreement between interpretation and evidence. More significantly, historians have always disagreed on what specific facts mean and how they should be read. The historical profession thrives on such disagreements. What may prove deadly to scholarship is the assumption, in the absence of any other evidence, that any error or sloppiness in the recording of these facts is part of some effort to mislead the reader. Such an approach may ultimately have a chilling effect on scholarship, especially on those scholars who dare to step outside the normative and approved paths of inquiry.

What follows is an effort to respond to every specific accusation against *Arming America* that has been brought to my attention. *Arming America* contains 1407 footnotes covering 126

#### 4 **Michael Bellesiles**

single-spaced pages, nearly every one of which has been checked for error by hostile critics. There is little doubt that with the publication of the revised edition of *Arming America* new charges against the book will appear, including, in all probability, the repetition of charges confronted in this pamphlet. Hopefully fair-minded people will verify these charges by looking for themselves at the source documents and at what *Arming America* actually says.

## Chapter Two

### Probate Records

But the whole point of this exercise [attacking the probate records] is to discredit Bellesiles' book without expressly dealing with the arguments.

—Robert Spitzer<sup>1</sup>

The most significant and oft-repeated criticism of *Arming America* concerns the probate materials. Many critics maintain that “the entire argument of the book is based on one thousand probate records.” This statement is incorrect. It is true that I had initially been fascinated with probate records as a source, and for years I would stop at every county courthouse I was near and ask if they had any probate inventories from the antebellum period. These materials open a window on the dynamic nature of the early American economy and the structure of the household economy. However, as I presented my findings at historical conferences over the 1990s, I was persuaded that probate records are deeply flawed as a source. Academic conferences are supposed to accomplish precisely this task, helping scholars clarify their ideas and discover what is strongest and weakest in their evidence. Many historians pointed out that a great deal depended on the dedication of the executors. Theirs was a complex job, that of listing and giving a monetary valuation to every single item in the possession of the deceased at the time of death. Many of them must have been tempted to take shortcuts. Additionally, except for when goods are auctioned, there is no indication as to how the executors arrived at their valuation of goods inventoried. There are also many problems with the documents themselves, not the least of which is deciphering them. Some executors possessed a beautiful flowing script, others had the most awful and barely legible handwriting; prior to the 1820s all spelled erratically. But the primary problem with probate records is their built-in class bias. Generally only property holders were inventoried; far too often the poorest were buried without any concern for the distribution of their few goods.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the many conversations I had with scholars over the years about probate records I decided to make little use of them in *Arming America*. Nonetheless, they remain significant sources, providing some indication of how many guns were in private hands in America and in what condition those guns were kept. As a consequence, this material appears

in four paragraphs and a sentence (pp. 74, 109–110, 266–67, and 386). I tried in the book to indicate, as briefly as possible, the limitations of probate records, which are biased by class, race, gender, local standards, and the personalities of the executors. It is very clear that I erred in not devoting far more space to a full consideration of a source that would arouse the interest of readers. The ensuing controversy has led to a number of valuable insights into the use of probate materials, which will hopefully be of some benefit to future scholars. I have posted on my web page an essay I wrote some years back on the uses of probate materials. Further materials and a name-by-name listing of the probate records examined may be found on that site.<sup>3</sup> The following are the primary accusations concerning the probate materials.

## 1 The Flood

The problems with my probate notes began on April 2, 2000. On that day the pipes in Emory University's Bowden Hall (where the history department is located) burst and flooded the building, doing serious damage to nearly every office and an estimated million dollars in damage to the building.<sup>4</sup> The ceiling of my office (222 Bowden Hall) collapsed and the resulting flood turned a dozen of the legal pads on which I had taken notes into unreadable pulp (these were not all my notes, but those with statistics which I planned to enter onto my computer in the fall when I returned from Europe). Professor James V. Melton, who was the only person in the building at the time, characterized the ensuing rush of waters, which lasted several hours, as "like being on the Titanic." Professor Mark Ravina described the wreckage of papers on his desk as "a sodden mix of waterlogged pulp and ceiling tiles," and stated that these documents had been rendered "undecipherable and unreadable."

Despite the fact that these events were well known and well described, many critics charged that no flood had occurred.<sup>5</sup> More commonly, I was criticized for persisting in the use of pencil and legal pads in the last decade of the twentieth century. Many people charged that no serious scholar uses anything but computer programs for note taking, while others found it difficult to believe that I kept my notes in my office. It is true that I stuck to the anachronism of pencil and paper until I purchased a laptop computer in 2001. As the History Department's undergraduate director for seven years, I was in my office five days a week in order to be available for students and did nearly all my work there. It is further correct that I had just assumed that my notes were safe in Bowden Hall. I had no way of knowing that when the flood came that the ceiling would collapse right on to that chair, the ceiling tiles turning into a white mud on top of my notes.

So ruined were these notes that it was not initially clear which materials had been lost, especially as I was in Europe teaching and conducting research over the summer. But upon my return I determined that my notes on these probate records had been destroyed and posted a message to that effect on several historical e-mail lists in September 2000. I do not know that there is any connection between my posting that information and the sudden attacks on me for not having my notes for the probate records, but it was almost eerie the way that several hostile web sites shifted their ground from denying the validity of probate records as a source to insisting on their centrality to *Arming America* and my obvious (and admitted) failings as a scholar for not having put my data on a computer.

I have tried on my web site to open a scholarly conversation about probate records. Going over this material in a new way, I have undertaken an extended project to not simply replicate my probate findings but to expand the evidential base. Several scholars criticized my use of the sample set method in *Arming America*. I had counted the presence of guns in the probate records for one and two year periods from forty different counties, an approach I now see to be fraught with possible biases. Inspired by Cornelia Dayton's work,<sup>6</sup> I am now researching and posting on the web ten to thirty year periods from specific counties, reproducing every firearm and book listed in every probate file in those years. Books are included because I am interested in the subject of literacy and reading habits in early America, and it is also a topic that has garnered attention from many scholars over the past decade, making such a database of some wider use. Additionally, these lists serve as a useful indicator of how different probate collections work, providing an indication of the thoroughness of the executor and aid in understanding the idiosyncratic nature of these inventories. Probate records are very complicated and difficult to read in their original condition; the handwriting is often abysmal, spelling erratic and confusing, the paper often smudged with age or burned, and the entirety subject to the patience and dedication of the executors. I have invited other scholars interested in the subject to contribute materials for posting on this site. There is no effort here to prove any argument with this site, but rather to provide information that may be of value to historians. Additionally, I no longer think it is the number of guns that matters so much, as the recorded quality of the guns, an issue worthy of further discussion.

It is perfectly reasonable for scholars to be concerned over the destruction of these notes, which is precisely why I informed the various e-mail lists of the accident. They are also correct to wonder why no one else has replicated my findings. But then, to my knowledge, no one else has looked specifically for firearms. For instance, Gloria Main conflated all possible weapons and accoutrements into a category "arms, armor."<sup>7</sup> Even that is more than all but a few unpublished theses have done. Sometimes the lack of interest in firearms is rather striking. Margaret B. Schiffer in her study of 10,788 probate inventories from Chester County, Pennsylvania, has lists of colors used in cloth but does not mention a single gun.<sup>8</sup> It is regrettable that the money and energy committed to investigating me could not have been devoted to aiding me in replicating the lost material. Hopefully this debate will inspire many scholars to look more closely at these valuable, though limited, documents.

## 2 The Location of Probate Materials

Somehow the story spread that I claimed to have done all or most of my research at the National Archives center in East Point, Georgia. I did not research original probate records at the National Archives center in East Point, Georgia. Neither my book nor my web site (posted in September 2000) gives that location for the probate materials, most of which are in county courthouses, as most American historians know. Nor did I ever tell anyone at any conference or in any interview at any time that the probate records are located at the National Archives, for they are not. Rather, at every opportunity I denied that I had read original probate materials at this archive. Nor does my essay on probate sources mention the National Archives. Microfilms of probate materials, which are not always complete, may be borrowed

and purchased from a number of sources. I did acquire the microfilm for a few counties and used the National Archive's microfilm readers to read some probate records that I brought with me. I do not believe that use violates any federal regulation or known standard of scholarship. I used these readers for the simple reason that I thought they were easier to read from than those in Emory's library, and also to break up the tedious task of going through hundreds of pages of microfilm material having nothing to do with probate in the National Archives' collection.

### 3 The San Francisco Records

My web site did, I fear, contain an error. As a consequence of the destruction of my probate notes, I had to reconstruct the location of the forty different probate districts I examined from memory, which may have been a mistake. It may have been better to have waited to list the locations of these probate records until I had a chance to revisit each archive. Nonetheless, each of those citations has been verified by my critics and apparently all but one is correct. That one is for the sources I labeled San Francisco. I have posted photocopies from three of these files on my web site and they are clearly headed "San Francisco County Probate," though there is evidence that they are in fact Contra Costa County records, which is across the bay from San Francisco. It does not affect the statistics I gathered whether these dozen probate records are from Contra Costa or San Francisco County, and no one has disputed that fact. My memory was that I read these dozen probate files one morning in 1994 in a courthouse storeroom. Since they are currently located in the Contra Costa Historical Society, some people assumed that I had not read the documents in question. But a thorough investigation revealed that in 1994 these documents were in fact stored in the county courthouse, as I correctly recalled. The probate inventories have a wonderful phrase before the appraisers' signatures, which acknowledged their fallibility and may serve as a useful guide when using probate materials: "Errors excepted."

### 4 The Vermont Records

A data set for the Vermont probate records is circulating on the web that purports to disprove the data set listed on my web site (hereafter the former will be referred to as the alternative database). Most people are unaware that often more than one source exists for a county's probate records. There were probate districts as well as county courts, probate docket books as well as files, and also auction records, which provide the most accurate measurement of the value of goods. It is also important to emphasize the distinction between probate inventories and probate files. The inventories are generally lists of goods thought to belong to the deceased, while the files, especially in the northern states, often contain a great deal more information. Wills, lists of debts and credits, actual notes of hand, comments by the administrators of the estate, challenges to the division of the estate, subpoenas and testimony, letters, and all sorts of scraps of papers appear in files.<sup>9</sup> It is necessary to examine the entire probate file in order to gain an accurate portrait of any estate; hence the need to actually visit the archives in order to read these files.



Wherever possible, I used the original files and auction records. For instance, take the first example offered from the alternative Vermont probate records, that of Elnathan Hubbel. My data set lists Hubbel owning a gun valued at £2, 8s, and another at £1. My source was the files in the Bennington Courthouse basement, where I worked for two months. The alternative database relies on the District Probate Court Book, also known as the Probate Record Books or the Minute Books. Note the difference: one gun at 48 shillings (which equals £2, 8s, as I recorded) and the other gun at 18 shillings, two shillings less than my record reported. The difference may be explained by the inclusion of auction records in the original files, so that a gun evaluated at 18s sold for £1. But the perceived error here is that I overvalued a firearm, which would be what social scientists call “an error against interest.” The more important point to note, as was recorded by Emory University’s committee of inquiry, is that one database does not disprove another database, and that these two collections are based not only on different records, but occasionally on different counties.

There may be names in the Minute Books that do not correspond to files, which may explain why there are so many names in the alternative database that do not appear in my database. One aspect of the difficulty of using these records is revealed by the fact that many names are misspelled. For instance, Captain Stephen Fray in the alternative database should be Captain Stephen Fay, a prominent figure in early Vermont. The misreading of a name is indicative of how easy it is to make a mistake in using these handwritten, decaying documents. However, I would not accuse anyone who has made such an error of deliberate fraud. I have also noticed a disagreement in dates for many of these files, some by as many as seven years. I have worked on the assumption that we are not talking about two different people, even if the dates are that far apart, for the settlement of estates often took many years, even decades. It is possible that inventories listed in the Minute Books as 1789 or 1790 may have appeared later in the files so that I missed them. A further explanation of this discrepancy is that I looked at several files that did not contain inventories, and so did not include them on my list. It may be that the Minute Books contain inventories for these people. At the very least it seems that neither of these two data sets is inclusive of all the files.

Based on the alternative database, the following people have guns that I did not find in their probate files:

Bennington: John Armstrong, John Hodgkinson, David Barber, Luther Lawrence, Reverend Jedediah Dewey, Samuel Hunt, and William Hendricks;  
 Hartford: Oliver Farnsworth and Joseph Smalley;  
 Manchester: John Sherman, William Searle, and Elijah Galusha (or Golusha);  
 Marlboro: Charles Phelps.

I have no record of a probate file for any of the following people who are listed in the alternative database as having guns:

Bennington: Amos Fairchild, Levi Morgan, Benjamin Fray [probably Fay], Jonathan Moon, and Abner Drinkwater;

Hartford: Enoch Bontwell, Elkanock Stuart, John Northam, Nathan Gall, Alexander Miller, Phillip Smith, Perez Woods, Thomas Pitkin, Charles William Jr., Joseph Bates, and Billa Gray;  
 Manchester: Benjamin Rose, John Grimmel, Lemuel Buck, Alaph Leaven, and Jonathan Hay;  
 Marlboro: William Sears, Thomas Sergent, Francis Whitmore, and Richard Weatherbee;  
 Rutland: Ezra Mead, Eleazer Davis, and not a single one of the fifteen names in book 2;  
 Windsor: not one of the nine names in the two Windsor books.

The following people listed on the alternative database as not having guns do not appear in my database:

Bennington: John Fray [perhaps John Fay, who does appear on my list], Ichabod Sparrow Paine [my list has Ichabod S. Paine Jr.], John Robbins, Stephen Scorial, Jeremiah Willoughby [my list includes his father, who died in 1771], Capt. John Scott, Luther Stibbons, William Carde, Josiah Perry, Jonathan Cunningham, Thomas Haynes, Dan Howlett, Abner Chaffee, Spencer Niles, Bethiah Kinsman, and Asa Alger;  
 Manchester: Samuel Pitman, John B. Wirmage, Nathan Weller, Benjamin Barney, Eliakim Weller, Ara Rose, Ira Hawley, Caleb Newcomb, Capt. David Bates, Gideon Barber, Capt. Elisha Wales, Richard Sackett, Amaziah Avents, William Wiley, Capt. Jekiel Hawley, and Alexander McLowry;  
 Rutland: Joshua Woodard, Jedediah [sic] Mise, Thamer Horcford, Garth Beal, James Francies, Samuel McGee, Stephen Nicols, William Roberts, Thomas McConnel, John Cobham, Marshall Newton, Odel Squires, George Robins, Robert Gastilow, Noah Wait, Daniel Sherber, and Samuel Ladd;  
 Marlboro: Perez Stockwell, Jonathan Hutchins, Jonathan Herrington, Capt. John Kathan, Ephraim Weatherbee, Charles Evans, John Butler, Sarah Stockwell, Lucy Willard, and Benjamin Ray;  
 Hartford: Abel Curtis, Daniel Pike, Joshua Slaton, Jonathan King, Joab Hoifing, Benjamin Swinton, Nathan Roberts, Asa Jones, William Hunter, John Searles, Robert Gates, Isaac Williams, and Calvin Parkhurst;  
 Windsor: Moses Gile, Joseph Stack, Samuel Rowley, Jonathan Tarbell, Matthew Patrick, William Philips, Joseph M. Neal, Samuel Litch, William Jones, Peter Leavons, Sariah Green, Lucy Bates, and Bisbee Thomson.

The alternative database includes eighteen people from Orange County, Vermont, a county that I did not include in my database. There is one instance where I assume that this data set is citing the same estate twice, John Smith of Bennington. Otherwise there is a second John Smith whom I do not have on my list. I know that several of the people listed in this database as not having inventories have them in the probate files. Thus the alternative database states that John Nichols of Rutland County has “no items listed,” while my notes indicate that he had “a gun £1, 3 bayonets 4s6,” as well as “a spelling book 2s.” Here again we have a

good indication of how different sources on the same person can contain different information.

There are 64 names on the alternative database that are listed as owning guns that I do not record as having guns; however, 51 (88.5 percent) of these 64 names do not appear on my database at all. Additionally, as indicated above, there are 85 names of people who do not own firearms who do not appear on my list. If we add these 136 names to the 312 on my web site, the total number of probated estates would increase to 448. Adding the 64 additional estates with firearms to the 45 in my database increases the total to 109, or 24.3 percent. Let me note that I get a different total from the alternative database, as in the eighteenth century a “firelock” generally meant the lock mechanism to a firearm and is not in and of itself a gun. However, that is a minor point of disagreement.

The alternative database states that the Gloucester County records do not exist. They do exist and are in the County Clerk’s Office in Chelsea, Vermont (in the old vault when I looked at them in 1984). Gloucester County was initially part of New York, a subject discussed in my book, *Revolutionary Outlaws*.



## Chapter Three

### Specific Challenges: Accurate

When you work in the archives, you're far from home, you're bored, you're in a hurry, you're scribbling like crazy. You're bound to make mistakes. I don't believe any scholar in the western world has impeccable footnotes. Archival research is a special case of the general messiness of life.

—Lawrence Stone<sup>1</sup>

Is error fraud? So much of this debate over *Arming America* comes down to the notion that if an error can be found in my calculations or quotations then there is solid evidence of fraud. Is that the case? Every statistician knows that there is a “margin of error” built into all calculations. Even the Census Bureau has operated with such an admission of probable error. If the 1990 census reports that there were 7,322,564 people in New York City, does that mean that this is the exact population of New York at some point in the year 1990? If it is found that the correct figure is 7,322,546, does that indicate fraud? Personally, I think not.

Many scholars argue that all evidence, including statistical evidence, should be subject to suspicion and scrutiny. It is often very difficult to determine what constitutes accuracy in any subject dependent on human action. For example, several of the critics of *Arming America* have referred to the “meticulous” index of the *Early Records of the Town of Providence* and my failure to use it properly (though it's unclear what constitutes proper use in the critic's eyes). I doubt that any historian would judge any index as meticulous, but this one contains a number of spelling errors, omissions of names and documents, and often unusual and inconsistent subject headings. If a document with so many errors is adjudged “meticulous,” then is not a work of history with even fewer errors even more meticulous? At the very least, if we are to persist in this kind of a conversation about scholarship, we should agree upon what is an allowable margin of error and what is the line between meticulous and fraudulent. There are errors in *Arming America*. These mistakes have been corrected in the revised edition. It is my firm belief that authors should be given the opportunity to correct their errors.

#### 1 The Militia Act of 1792

There is an error in the first hardback edition of *Arming America* concerning the Militia Act of 1792. On page 230 the following paragraph appears:

The problems inherent in any effort to arm the militia or even the U.S. Army were amply demonstrated in 1792. Congress, trying to keep the militia alive and to meet its constitutional mandate to regulate the militia, passed “An Act More effectually to provide for the National Defence.” This Act declared that “every free able bodied white male citizen of the respective States” between the ages of eighteen and forty-five should be enrolled in the militia and must appear “when called out to exercise.” Further, “every citizen so enrolled, shall . . . be constantly provided with a good musket or firelock, a sufficient bayonet and belt, two spare flints,” and other accouterments. Congress took upon itself the responsibility of providing those guns, and specified that within five years all muskets “shall be of bores sufficient for balls of the eighteenth part of a pound.” All arms and ammunition intended for militia use remained exempt from attachment in any civil suit. To keep track of its arms, each company was to make regular returns of arms and ammunition to each state’s adjutant general, who in turn reported directly to the president. To begin this process, Congress ordered the purchase of seven thousand muskets. Over the next two years the government was able to purchase only 480 “rifle guns.”

The 1792 Militia Act actually reads: “That every citizen so enrolled and notified, shall within six months thereafter, provide himself with a good musket or firelock, a sufficient bayonet and belt, two spare flints, and a knapsack. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

The original quotation is in fact correct, but it is not from the 1792 Militia Act, but from the revised 1803 Militia Act, which would be the operative legislation for the militia until the Dick Act in 1906. The accompanying footnote (p. 521n85) cites *Militia Laws: Comprising the Acts of Congress, with the Rules and Articles of War* (Frankfort, KY, 1815), 8–13.<sup>3</sup> In editing my 1200-page manuscript to a more manageable length, I compressed two paragraphs into one, failing to keep the transition between Congress’ initial wording and its amendment of that wording eleven years later. When Ian Binnington of the University of Illinois pointed out this mistake to me, I immediately verified the error and sent a message to several historical e-mail lists and corrected this error in the paperback, published by Vintage in September 2001.

However, many critics did not accept the admission and correction of this error as sufficient. Curiously those who charged that I was “deliberating falsifying the evidence” failed to observe that on the next page I quote Secretary of War Henry Knox as stating that under the 1792 Militia Act the “militia are requested to arm and equip themselves.” Nor do they mention that on page 262 I write, “In theory every member of the militia supplied his own gun, as the Militia Act of 1792 required.” It is also worth noting that the error weakened my point in that I aim to describe in this chapter how those in positions of authority learned from experience that the militia could not supply their own guns. The passage of the 1803 act indicates that Congress had come to appreciate that they could not expect the militia to show up with guns.

It is important to recall that debates over the organization of the militia began in 1790 and occupied Congress through the next thirty years. To fully understand not just this act but the issues that concerned the political leadership of the new republic, one must read all of these debates. Obviously historians often summarize a large body of information, as I attempted to do in chapter 7 of *Arming America*. My notes direct the interested reader to many

other interpretations of these controversies, though my favorite is Richard Kohn's *Eagle and Sword*.<sup>4</sup>

As Ian Binnington has helpfully observed in a widely posted email, there is even more to this story of the Congressional discovery that individuals were not in a position to arm themselves that I left out of *Arming America*.

The Debates and Proceedings in Congress (3rd Congress) has a letter to the House from Secretary of War Henry Knox (dated Dec 10, 1794) in reference to "An Act More effectually to provide for the National Defence" (1792) that states: "The militia are requested to arm and equip themselves at their own expense, but there is no penalty to enforce the injunction of the law" (p. 1397). His point seems to be that whatever the penalties enacted to induce militiamen to arm themselves there was an insufficient supply of arms in the United States. He notes that less than 1 in 4 of the prospective militiamen was properly armed, and that to solve the problem the US should establish "manufactories in each state" (p. 1399).

Presumably in response to Knox's concerns, U.S. Statutes I: 576 records "An Act providing Arms for the Militia throughout the United States," July 6, 1798, that says: "That there shall be provided, at the charge and expense of the government of the United States, thirty thousand stand of arms . . . for the purpose of being sold to the governments of the respective States, or the militia thereof. . . ." Finally, the 1803 amendment ("An Act in addition to an Act entitled 'An Act More effectually to provide for the National Defence,'" U.S. Statutes II: 207, passed March 2, 1803) states: "That every citizen duly enrolled in the militia, shall be constantly provided with arms, accoutrements, and ammunition. . . ."

It seems to me that this makes [Bellesiles'] point very clearly, that Congress initially wished to pass the cost of procuring firearms onto the militiamen and very quickly found that to be impractical, and then devoted their attentions to providing the arms themselves.

## 2 Charles Cotesworth Pinckney

"[Bellesiles] cannot even get the name of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney right!"

I had left the first "n" out of Charles Pinckney's name on page 230 of the hardcover edition. Since I spelled the name correctly everywhere else in the book including the index, most people would just note a typo. There are similar escalations of typographical errors into failures of scholarship. For instance, several people pointed out that Fayetteville is misspelled as Fayetteville on page 419 of the hardcover edition.

## 3 Providence Women

"[Bellesiles] says that there were no inventories for women in Providence."

I did not quite put it that way, but I did err in implying that these inventories were solely for men. This paragraph reads:

The Providence records provide an indication of the nature of gun ownership in Colonial America. These 181 probate inventories from 1680 to 1730 are for property-owning adults, the top quarter of Providence society. Eighty-eight inventories mention some form of gun, from pistols to “a peice of a Gun Barrill.” More than half of these guns are either evaluated as old or given such low valuation as to indicate poor quality. More than three-fourths of the inventories containing guns fall into the last twenty years of this fifty year period, after the distribution of firearms by the English government to the New England militia in Queen Anne’s War. Several inventories explicitly list “one of ye Queens armes,” which officially belonged to the government. Fifty men owned one gun of some kind, twenty-one owned two, twelve held three, three owned four guns, and two owned five guns. Nearly all of those man holding multiple guns were either militia officers or sea captains (a pair of pistols being popular with this latter group). If one could imagine these men as a militia company, half would be unarmed and a third armed with guns that were broken or too old for service. And yet they would have been one of the best-armed forces of their time.

The penultimate sentence implies that all 181 inventories were for men, which is not the case. This paragraph has been rewritten as follows:

Two examples from New England evidence the nature of gun ownership in Colonial America. Of the 181 inventories from Providence, Rhode Island, for the years 1680 to 1730, ninety-one mention some form of gun, from pistols to “a peice of a Gun Barrill,” more than three-fourths of these in the last twenty years, after the distribution of firearms by the British government to the militia in Queen Anne’s War. These guns ran in value from two shillings to £3, 10s, with a mean evaluation of £1. Among the most meticulous probate records from the seventeenth century are those of Essex County, Massachusetts. Essex had 75 percent more probate files, 316, in the eight years from 1673 through 1680, than did Providence in fifty years. Counting guns in these files is complicated by the use of the word “arms,” which could mean anything from armor to pikes. Including the nineteen inventories that reference “arms” without specifying type, there are 107 inventories (33.8 percent) listing firearms (88 or 27.8 percent excluding those that just state “arms”). By way of comparison, 79 inventories (25 percent) mention swords. These guns range in value from 3s to £2, with a mean of 18s (just 2s more than the mean evaluation of swords). At a time when the colony is paying up to £8 for a new musket and a used gun lock sells for 8s, a gun evaluated at less than 10s, as are a quarter of these guns, almost certainly borders on useless. What use was a gun given the same value as a chamber pot (generally rated at between 2s and 12s)? If one could imagine these men of Essex as a militia company, two-thirds would be unarmed, while at least a quarter of those with guns would be carrying weapons unfit for service. This portrait would match most descriptions of the Colonial militia.

#### 4 Table Two

A very gracious critic kindly pointed out a pair of errors in table 2 of *Arming America*. When computing the category of “Other” for the 1810 firearms returns (the second column on table 2), I twice included figures from the “Espontoons” (pikes) column, raising the total of “other” firearms to 49,105, whereas the correct amount was 48,258. A more significant error occurs with the 1820 and 1830 returns (the third and fourth columns of table 2), where I com-



pletely missed a column containing “Horsemen’s pistols.” The correct number for the “Others” entry should therefore be 20,204 and 24,986, respectively. These corrections have been made to table 2.

Let me take this opportunity to repeat what is often stated in *Arming America*, that these, like all other sources, are suspect and subject to all sorts of qualifications. No statistics from the nineteenth century (as perhaps from the twenty-first) are definitive. Nonetheless, I stand by my calculations, as corrected. Different calculations of these figures can be found on the web, with widely different totals. My addition has been checked numerous times and can be verified by any reader by examining my cited sources: *American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, Class V: Military Affairs*, 7 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1832-61) 1: 162, 169-72, 258-62; 2: 319-23, 361-64; 4: 683-91. Fortunately, this task is made much easier as these volumes are now online at the Library of Congress website, <http://memory.loc.gov>. Table 2 is reproduced below to facilitate the comparison.

	1803	1810	1820	1830
militia members	524,086	677,681	837,498	1,128,594
muskets	183,070	203,517	315,459	251,019
rifles	39,648	55,811	84,816	108,036
other	13,113	48,258	20,204	24,986
total arms	235,831	307,586	400,275	384,041

## 5 Minor Errors

Additional errors I have found, posted, and corrected in the revised edition of *Arming America*:

“Colonial Benjamin Church” should, of course, read “Colonel Benjamin Church” (p. 43);

“Despite their increased use of flintlocks in the late eighteenth century. . . .” should be “the late seventeenth century” (p. 117);

“The only incidence of gunfire in long decade leading up to rebellion came in Boston in 1770,” is inaccurate and vague. It has been replaced with “The most serious of the few incidences of gunfire in the decade leading up to rebellion came in Boston in 1770” (p. 177);

“In European armies, ten flints per soldier was a normal supply; prior to 1782, a Continental regiment usually did not have one flint per man; by the end of the war, most had three flints per soldier, enough for one hundred shots under perfect conditions.” My figure of just over thirty shots per flint was based on modern flints. Eighteenth century military manuals indicate that twenty shots was the norm. The “one hundred” has therefore been changed to read “sixty” (p. 199);

“continued the legal British tradition of controlling . . .” should read “continued the British legal tradition of controlling . . .” (p. 214);

The word “to” in Claiborne’s letter should read “be” (p. 250);

“Another time they used an ax to cut down the tree when the beer would not come down on his own.” Well, maybe there was beer in the tree as well, but I meant bear (p. 314);

“Philadelphia’s fall election riot that year was the deadliest prior to the 1850s . . .” should read “prior to the 1840s” (p. 358);  
“Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention 2: 207–09*,” should read “3: 207–09” (p. 516n19);  
I misspelled “Mt. Rainier.” (p. 584).

My apologies for these errors. I trust that none can be construed as deliberate or part of an effort to misrepresent the past.

## Chapter Four

### Specific Challenges: Perceived Errors

This method [of distorting the work of others] has been used in all times and places. Men have always tried, and still try, to ridicule the doctrine and the person of their adversaries: to achieve this they invent thousands of stories.

—Pierre Bayle, 1697<sup>1</sup>

#### 1 Benedict Arnold

“Bellesiles makes up a story in which Benedict Arnold discovered upon hearing the news of Lexington and Concord that his men were unarmed.”

That is not quite what I said and I do not feel that I made up the story. On page 181 of *Arming America* the following paragraph appears:

When news of Lexington reached New Haven, Benedict Arnold inspected his troops and found them largely unarmed. He threatened to break into the town arsenal in order to arm his men, but the town’s selectmen relented and opened the doors to his militia, with Arnold supervising the distribution of Brown Besses. Of Connecticut’s twenty-six thousand militia, four thousand (15 percent) responded to the Lexington alarm. Most observers considered this an impressive display of enthusiasm. Half these men served less than a week.

The endnote (p. 505n32) cites the following texts:

Harold E. Selesky, *War and Society in Colonial Connecticut* (New Haven, CT, 1990), 228–29;

J. Hammond Trumbull, et al., eds., *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, 15 vols. (Hartford, CT, 1850–90) 14: 499;

*Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society*, 31 vols. (Hartford, CT, 1860–1967), 20: 220–21;

*Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 88 vols. (Boston, MA, 1794–1992), 5th ser., 9: 493.

Perhaps I have gotten some detail of the events wrong, or worded it in a displeasing fashion, but if I made up this story it is difficult to understand why it appears in all previous Arnold biographies, including those written before I was born.<sup>2</sup> Every life of Arnold contains this encounter in greater and lesser detail. I have quoted below only from the most recent and,

in my opinion, definitive biography of Arnold by James Kirby Martin. I also offer his footnotes to these four paragraphs.<sup>3</sup>

Early the next morning, Arnold and the Footguards mustered on the New Haven Green. Hundreds of cheering folk turned out as well. One and all bowed their heads when the Reverend Jonathan Edwards Jr. prayed for God's special blessings in guiding and protecting these citizen-soldiers as they embarked on the great crusade to preserve human liberty. Then the assemblage applauded as Captain Arnold, impeccably attired in a bright new blue uniform, reviewed his troops. The Footguards were no ragtag throng; they, too, wore handsome new uniforms. Unfortunately, many lacked weapons, powder, and musket balls, which deprecated their martial bearing. (19)

New Haven's old-guard leaders had called an emergency town meeting the previous day and secured a vote not to offer military succor to Massachusetts until the reasons of the fighting at Lexington and Concord became clearer. If Arnold wanted his troops to have the accoutrements of war, he would have to challenge the authority of the town fathers and gain access to the local powder magazine. Once he finished reviewing the Footguards, he barked out orders for his column to march to a nearby tavern where New Haven's selectmen and the local committee of safety were then meeting. All true local patriots were welcome to follow along, thereby adding the weight of their numbers to the looming confrontation.

Details vary regarding what happened next. Arnold apparently aligned the Footguards in front of the tavern before sending one of his lieutenants inside to parley. In turn, the local leaders asked David Wooster to go outside and explain to Arnold, his fellow Mason, that the Footguards were not to have access to the magazine; nor did they have authorization to traipse off to Massachusetts. A bemused Arnold reputedly retorted, "None but Almighty God shall prevent my marching." He then gave the selectmen five minutes to produce the keys, or he would order the Footguards to force their way into the magazine and appropriate whatever weaponry and supplies they needed. (20)

In the face of such a well-orchestrated form of patriotic extortion, the town leaders relented. Once equipped with quantities of arms and ammunition, the Footguards formed ranks again; and with their civilian well-wishers shouting a flurry of huzzahs, they were soon on their way to Cambridge, Massachusetts. . . . (21)

Martin's footnotes to these paragraphs:

19. Despite modern-day stereotypes, colonists, especially in the older seaboard settlements, rarely had muskets hanging over their fireplaces. Most were unprepared to defend hearth and home. Hence, small arms and powder and ball were in very short supply at the outset of the war, at least until France started to provide covert aid after mid-1776. Although BA's soldiers promised to furnish their own weapons, the only readily available supply of arms was stored at New Haven's central powder magazine, where militiamen went to receive weaponry in case of some military emergency. Thus BA and his Footguards had to gain access to the storehouse if they wanted an amply [sic] supply of arms.

20. Atwater, *History of New Haven*, 42, credits BA with these words but offers no source. BA's words may have been apocryphal, but his forceful confrontation with New Haven's old guard leaders was not.

21. Buel, *Dear Liberty*, 36-38, states that 3,716 Connecticut volunteers marched for Cambridge, Mass., within a week of hearing about Lexington and Concord. Some 46 of 72 Connecticut towns sent troops to Massachusetts in the first days of the contest. Gipson, *Jared Ingersoll*, 338n., estimated that about one thousand New Havenites took up arms on behalf of the rebel cause at some point during the war.

Even critics who have access to this information repeat the accusation of falsification. Thus, I have been charged with lumping “together guns and ammunition in his discussion of Benedict Arnold’s march on the powderhouse in 1776.” The Province of Connecticut stored arms remaining in their charge at the end of the Seven Years’ War in the armory. Oddly, the very charge that this alleged error indicates fraud is marked by error, as the American Revolution started in 1775, not 1776. In the absence of any contrary evidence indicating the inaccuracy of the standard reading of these events, I have retained the original wording of this passage in *Arming America*.

## 2 ZOG

“[Bellesiles] is a paid agent of ZOG.”

It is instructive to discover that one is a paid agent of something one has never heard of. ZOG is the “Zionist Occupational [sic] Government.” I am not now, nor have I ever been, to my knowledge, an agent of ZOG.

## 3 Funding

“Bellesiles is funded by anti-gun groups.”

I am not now, nor have I ever been funded by an “anti-gun” group. The research for *Arming America* was supported by the American Antiquarian Society, the Huntington Library, the American Philosophical Association, the Stanford Humanities Center, and Emory University. I do not believe that any of these constitutes an “anti-gun group.”

## 4 Gun-Hating

“A Gun-Hating Historian.”

The headline above has appeared in several journals and on several web sites. This is an odd description that I do not understand and is made without the slightest hint of evidence. If anything, I would think that anyone who reads *Arming America* could not help but notice that I am fascinated with firearms.

## 5 Political Agenda

“Masquerading as a historical investigation, this book is really about promoting statist public policies that reveal the class hatred felt by many intellectuals for a broad section of the American people.”

Many commentaries of the book accuse me of a left-wing political agenda; or, as one email message began, “You are a tool of the liberals (or state socialists, as they really are) seeking to steal my guns.” *Arming America* does not offer any policy recommendations, nor does it promote any political agenda, which in the eyes of some is also a flaw. To my knowledge, I have only twice written on current gun control issues, both times to note the danger of further gun regulation because of historic patterns of selective enforcement.

## 6 George Washington on the Militia

“Bellesiles has misquoted Washington. Bellesiles leads the reader to believe that Washington was complaining that this was the general state of the militia.”

On page 159 of *Arming America* I quote George Washington’s letter to Governor Dinwiddie as follows:

Colonel Washington reported on the militia to Governor Dinwiddie: “Many of them [are] unarmed, and all without ammunition or provision.” In one company of more than seventy men, he reported, only twenty-five had any sort of firearms. Washington found such militia “incapacitated to defend themselves, much less to annoy the enemy.”

The source provided in footnote 63 on page 500 is John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, 2: 78–79, and reads as follows:

I think myself under the necessity of informing your Honor, of the odd behaviour of the few Militia that were marched hither from Fairfax, Culpeper, and Prince William counties. Many of them unarmed, and all without ammunition or provision. Those of Culpeper heaved particularly ill: Out of the hundred that were draughted, seventy-odd arrived here; of which only twenty-five were tolerably armed.

I proposed to the unarm’d, that as they came from home (at least with a shew) of serving their country; and as they were, from the want of arms, incapacitated to defend themselves, much less to annoy the enemy, or afford any protection to the inhabitants; they they shou’d (during their short stay here) assist in forwarding the public works; for which I offered them 6d. per day extraordinary. But they were deaf to this and every other proposition which had any tendency to the interest of the Service.<sup>4</sup>

It is unclear to me how I have misconstrued Washington’s meaning, though an alternative reading may be available. Had Washington never said another negative word about the militia, then lifting this single passage would have been unfair. However, this quotation is not the sole instance of Washington’s negative judgment of the militia. Many other statements by Washington critical of the militia appear in *Arming America*, with more cited in various footnotes,<sup>5</sup> and many more could have been added.<sup>6</sup> For instance, *Arming America* contains a lengthy extract from Washington’s 1780 “circular to the states,” in which he bluntly dismissed the militia ideal as “chimerical.”<sup>7</sup> That this judgment was not simply rhetoric being employed for a temporary political purpose should be evident from Washington’s actions as president, in which he consistently worked to build a professional army and a select militia. All of this

information appears in *Arming America* with supportive citations and references to the work of other historians.

## 7 Tocqueville

(A) “Bellesiles completely ignores Tocqueville, who said, ‘There is not a farmer but passes some of his time hunting and owns a good gun.’”

(B) “Bellesiles omits dozens of other travellers who write of widespread ownership of firearms, among them Alexis de Tocqueville. The famed French observer describes a typical ‘peasant’s cabin’ in Kentucky or Tennessee as containing ‘a fairly clean bed, some chairs, a good gun.’”

It is true that *Arming America* does not contain either of these quotations. Tocqueville does not discuss the centrality of either guns or violence in America anywhere in the two volumes of *Democracy in America*. But then neither of these two quotations is from that book; they are taken instead from Tocqueville’s notebook.<sup>8</sup> The first quote (A), dated December 15, 1831, is not Tocqueville speaking, but a farmer with whom Tocqueville is talking. It is also notable that the exact context of the farmer’s statement is a discussion of slavery: “There is no small-holder in Tennessee so poor,” this farmer told Tocqueville, “but he has one black or two.” This assertion, a form of the popular pro-slavery argument that slave-ownership was widespread among whites and offered poor whites a path to upward mobility, should lead one to question the credibility of the other generalizations made by this farmer. The second quotation (B) is from the same time but in a different notebook, into which Tocqueville transcribed summaries of notes from his conversations. Oddly, quote (B) left off the next clause in the original: “often some books and almost always a newspaper.” It is also notable that Tocqueville is referring to a specific “peasant’s cabin,” which he draws in the margin of his notebook. That this passage (B) is based on his conversation with the farmer quoted first (A) is evident by the succeeding observation in (B), “Almost all the farmers we saw, even the poorest, had some slaves.”<sup>9</sup>

Tocqueville himself did not share the view of this quoted farmer. His notebooks do contain references to guns, and even to good shots, but the latter tend to be Indians, as is the case during his trip to Saginaw. He is delighted to be at the edge of Western civilization and as an avid hunter is very impressed with the skill of a group of frontiersmen, who seem to know their weapons fairly well, though their guns are generally of an inferior quality. But these stereotypical frontiersmen are Quebecois voyagers. In contrast, Tocqueville expresses a degree of contempt for the Americans, who he describes as entirely concerned with cutting down trees, clearing the land, and planting crops, deficient in either romance or heroism.<sup>10</sup> The Americans, Tocqueville thought, lacked a military spirit, which was not necessarily a bad thing. After viewing the Albany militia in July 1831, he wrote, “It’s the national guard of the country, but of a country where the military spirit is absolutely unknown. You may judge what kind of *pigeons* these honest citizens made; their martial appearance was really comic to see.”<sup>11</sup>

More important is the degree to which Tocqueville's brief conversation with a Tennessee farmer may have determined his mature judgment. No such commentary appears in Tocqueville's published work. On page 348 of *Arming America* I do quote the one passage from *Democracy in America* I know of that addresses firearms. In discussing the danger of "democratic armies," Tocqueville writes that "Democratic nations are naturally prone to peace from their interests and their propensities, they are constantly drawn to war and revolutions by their armies."<sup>12</sup>

Can anyone who reads *Democracy in America* really believe that its author perceived the United States as a heavily armed and violent society? Anyone who takes the time to read all of Tocqueville's writings on his travels in North America will come away with a very different perspective. Mobility, hard work, individualism, and equality mixed with conformity and greed, these are the prime characteristics of the people he observes in the early 1830s. And, as *Arming America* argues, the same can be found in most, though certainly not all, travel accounts from the years prior to the Civil War.

There is one further aspect to this criticism that I did not quote this precise line in Tocqueville's notebooks. There are no doubt thousands of possible quotations that I did not use. Historians have no choice but to be selective. History is not a chronicle of everything that happened; it is not a textual version of Italo Calvino's land of master geographers who create a map with a one-to-one ratio that is then laid atop their country, smothering everything.<sup>13</sup> Such an approach to history would smother the past as well, making it dull and unreadable. The historian must choose what he or she believes to be most significant and construct a meaningful narrative from that material.

## 8 John Lawson

"He gets Lawson completely wrong. Lawson sees guns everywhere."  
Another web-based criticism states that I failed to quote Lawson, who held that everyone "shared in the misfortunes, and rejoiced at the advance and Rifle of their brethren."

The latter statement is correct, in that I did not quote that sentence, which actually reads: "shared in the misfortunes, and rejoiced at the advance and Rise of their brethren."<sup>14</sup> One can see how someone would misread this old fashioned s as an f and then imagine the l.

The text in question is John Lawson's 1709 book, *A New Voyage to Carolina*. I quote Lawson four times, each time correctly and, I trust, true to the context. But the reader should make an independent judgment, as all historical documents are open to interpretation. The passages from *Arming America* are below, followed by the original passages cited in the footnotes (keeping in mind that sometimes s looks like f in this edition).

*Arming America:*

When John Lawson came to the Carolinas in 1701 to explore and hunt, one of his first observations was that "the meanest Planter" in America could enjoy hunting. Even "A poor Labourer, that is Master of his Gun" might hunt under the law. Yet Lawson also noticed that these settlers all worked hard on their land and devoted little or no time to hunting, leaving that pleasure to the Indians. When Lawson went exploring with two



settlers, he discovered that his was the only gun: “We had but one Gun amongst us [with] one Load of Ammunition.” “Relying wholly on Providence,” the three men, like so many others in early America, traveled among and with many different Indians for the next few weeks without mishap. Lawson concluded that journey by noting that the local Indians were mostly friendly and “hunt and fowl for us at seasonable rates.” He thought no place “so free from Blood-shed, as Carolina,” though he warned his readers that they would have to bring their own arms and ammunition with them to America. (p. 104)

### *A New Voyage to Carolina:*

A Quest after Game, being as freely and peremptorily enjoy'd by the meanest Planter, as he that is the highest in Dignity, or wealthiest in the Province. Deer, and other Game that are naturally wild, being not immur'd or preserv'd within Boundaries, to satisfy the Appetite of the Rich alone. A poor Labourer, that is Master of his Gun, &c. hath as good a Claim to have continu'd Courses of Delicacies crouded upon his Table, as he that is Mastter of a greater Purse.

My self and two more were left behind, by Reason the Canoe would not carry us all; we had but one Gun amongst us, one Load of Ammunition, and no Provision. Had our Men in the Canoe miscarry'd, we must (in all Probability) there have perish'd.

Relying wholly on Providence, we march'd on, now and then paying our Respects to the new-married Man.

And as for what may be hop'd for, towards a happy Life and Being, by such as design to remove thither, I shall add this; That with prudent Management, I can affirm by Experience, not by Hear-say, That any Person, with a small Beginning, may live very comfortably, and not only provide for the Necessaries of Life, but likewise for those that are to success him; Provisions being very plentiful, and of good Variety, to accommodate genteel House-keeping; and the neighbouring *Indians* are friendly, and in many Cases serviceable to us, in making us Wares to catch Fish in, for a small matter, which proves of great Advantage to large Families, because these Engines take great Quantities of many Sorts of Fish, that are very good and nourishing; Some of them hunt and fowl for us at reasonable Rates, the Country being as plentifully provided with all Sorts of Game, as any Part of *America*; the poorest Sort of Planters often get them to plant for them, by hiring them for that Season, or for so much Work, which commonly comes very reasonable. Moreover, it is remarkable, That no Place on the Continent of *America*, has seated an *English Colony* so free from Blood-shed, as *Carolina*; but all the others have been more damag'd and disturb'd by the *Indians*, than they have; which is worthy Notice, when we consider how oddly it was first planted with Inhabitants.

As for the Commodities, which are necessary to carry over to this Plantation, for Use and Merchandize, and are, therefore, requisite for those to have along with them, that intend to transport themselves thither; they are Guns, Powder and Shot, Flints, Linnens of all sorts, but chiefly ordinary Blues. . . . (p. 12–13, 15, 42, 86, 88, repectively, original emphases).

### *Arming America:*

So common had guns become among the Indians in the Carolinas by the early eighteenth century that John Lawson found it notable that the Wateree were “very poor in English Effects,” having few guns and still relying mostly on bows. Lawson thought an

Indian who used a gun regularly could not miss more than one shot in twenty. Yet on one hunting trip Lawson and his Indian companions sighted “plenty of turkies, but perch’d upon such lofty Oaks, that our Guns would not kill them, tho’ we shot very often, and our Guns were very good.” A few days later a wolf came right into their camp. “One of our Company fir’d a Gun at the Beast; but, I believe, there was a Mistake in the loading of it, for it did him no Harm. The Wolf stay’d till he had almost loaded again,” when Lawson’s spaniel chased the animal off. (p. 126–27)

*A New Voyage to Carolina:*

Our *Indian* having this Day kill’d good Store of Provision with his Gun, he always shot with a single Ball, missing but two Shoots in above forty. . . .

This Nation is much more populous than the *Congrees*, and their Neighbours, yet understand not one anothers Speech, They are very poor in *English* Effects, several of them having no Guns, making Use of Bows and Arrows, being a lazy idle People, a Quality incident to most *Indians*, but none to that Degree as these, as I ever met withal.

At Night, we lay by a swift Current, where we saw plenty of Turkies, but perch’d upon such lofty Oaks, that our Guns would not kill them, tho’ we shot very often, and our Guns were very good. Some of our Company shot several times, at one Turkey, before he would fly away, the Pieces being loaded with large Goose-shot.

After we had supp’d, and all lay down to sleep, there came a Wolf close to the Fire-side, where we lay. My Spaniel soon discover’d him, at which, one of our Company fir’d a Gun at the Beast; but, I believe, there was a Mistake in the loading of it, for it did him no Harm. The Wolf stay’d till he had almost loaded again, but the Bitch making a great Noise, at last left us and went aside. We had no sooner laid down, but he approach’d us again, yet was more shy, so that we could not get a Shot at him. (27, 32, 45, 50, respectively, original emphases)

*Arming America:*

One of the signs “that the Quera, or good Spirit, has been very kind to the English Men,” some Indians told John Lawson, is that Quera taught “them to make Guns, and Ammunition, besides a great many other Necessaries, that are helpful to Man, all which, they say, will be deliver’d to them, when that good Spirit sees fit.” (p. 136)

*A New Voyage to Carolina:*

They all believe, that this World is round, and that there are two Spirits, the one good, the other bad; The good one they reckon to be the Author and Maker of all every thing, and say, that it is he, that gives them the Fruits of the Earth, and has taught them to hunt, fish, and be wise enough to overpower the Beasts of the Wilderness, and all other Creatures, that they may be assistant, and beneficial to Man; to which they add, that the *Quera*, or good Spirit, has been very kind to the *English Men*, to teach them to make Guns, and Ammunition, besides a great many other Necessaries, that are helpful to Man, all which, they say, will be deliver’d to them, when that good Spirit sees fit. (p. 211, original empases)

*Arming America:*

John Lawson noted this method of repair in 1701 in South Carolina. He wrote that Indians would shoot “about 100 Loads of Ammunition, before they bring the Gun to shoot according to their Mind.” This seems unlikely, as one hundred loads with bullets would not only take the whole day, requiring constant cleaning, and dangerously over-heat the gun often, but would also be extremely expensive. Lawson noted that they stocked guns well, though their only tools were knives, a point made also by James Adair, a merchant with the Chickasaw. (p. 492n67)

*A New Voyage to Carolina:*

they being curious Artists in managing a Gun, to make it carry either Ball, or Shot, true. When they have bought a Piece, and find it to shoot any Ways crooked, they take the Barrel out of the Stock, cutting a Notch in a Tree, wherein they set it streight, sometimes shooting away above 100 Loads of Ammunition, before they bring the Gun to shoot according to their Mind. (27, 172, respectively)

**9 Gun-Free America**

*Arming America* argues that antebellum America was “a basically gun-free society.”

This statement is not correct. As the original introduction states, “This book does not argue that guns did not exist in early America, nor that violence did not occur.” *Arming America* is an exploration of the question “of cultural primacy: What lies at the core of national identity?” Its conclusion is that while in “the modern United States, guns are determinative; for early America, they served an often limited function.”<sup>15</sup> Anyone who reads just the chapter titles should conclude that the book does not argue that America was “basically gun-free.” Nonetheless, this assertion is one of the most widely made misunderstandings of *Arming America*, made repeatedly in reviews (often by the same authors publishing multiple reviews). Similarly, one critic says in two of his reviews of *Arming America* that the book argues that “our forebearers” “didn’t own guns, didn’t know how to use them and didn’t hunt.” No such statement appears in *Arming America*.

Another common misreading of the book is that it argues that “America’s gun culture is a recent development.” In fact, *Arming America* puts forth the thesis that guns became more central to American culture in the years 1840 to 1870, which is not terribly recent.

**10 Pistoles**

“He covered up evidence of hundreds of pistoles in the Virginia colonial records.”

*A pistole* was a Spanish coin.

## 11 Maryland Inventory of Arms

“The Maryland inventory of arms taken in 1768 on p 180 is completely wrong. Belleiles [sic] says that there are only 200 muskets (note the suspiciously round number) when there are actually 889.”

The inventory of arms lists the following:<sup>16</sup>

200 muskets;  
86 carbines;  
35 pistols in usable condition;  
442 muskets “very rusty” with broken or no locks;  
104 carbines “mostly without locks, and not worth repairing”;  
57 “old muskets, and carbines”;  
9 pistols with broken locks;  
212 swords;  
50 sword blades;  
47 pikes.

In *Arming America* I compressed the swords and sword blades into 262 swords and did not include the pikes. The critic quoted above added all the muskets and carbines regardless of condition for his total while taking only the first number from my list. It is worth noting that when a critic of *Arming America* made this charge in the draft of his article, the journal’s fact-checker came up with a third total. When I asked her to check again, her total was the same as mine and the original accusation was dropped. It is not always as easy to reach calculations from old texts as modern readers may believe. In this case, my calculations were correct, those of the critic incorrect. But I hold that a miscalculation is not an indication of the intent to mislead.

## 12 Harold Selesky

“[He] misquotes and misinterprets Harold Selesky’s book on the Connecticut militia.”

This charge is quite common, though it is made without reference to a page number in either of our books. I am a great fan of Selesky’s *War and Society*,<sup>17</sup> thinking it one of the finest works of eighteenth-century military history, and quote from it in *Arming America* on eight occasions. I have reproduced each of those instances below followed by the original in Selesky’s book. As I trust is evident, all the quotations are exactly correct. However I did discover one error in the footnotes; the citation for the first quotation on page 168 appears in the footnote to the following paragraph, which quotes from the same pages.

*Arming America*:

Despite living “in a wilderness radically different from their homeland,” as military historian Harold Selesky has written, “the colonists clung to the military training which reminded them they were Englishmen.” Thus they tended to practice formal field movements and the “pushing of pikes,” when they practiced at all. For “militiamen were inept,” prone to hurt one another in their practices and not cultivating “the marks-

manship and woodcraft which would have made them a match” for their Indian opponents. (p. 115–16)

*War and Society:*

June 1663, the New Haven Company divided in half to practice forcing back a tightly packed opponent by “pushing of pikes.” Moreover, the militiamen were inept: one man inadvertently “cast his pike . . . into the other part” of the company and “struck one on the face that had it been an armed pike [steel-tipped] it might have been hazardous to the man’s life.” Despite having lived for thirty years in a wilderness radically different from their homeland, the colonists clung to the military training which reminded them they were Englishmen. Although the Law Code of 1650 required each town to provide enough gunpowder for target practice on training days, the colonists did not cultivate the marksmanship and woodcraft which would have made them a match for the Dutch and the Indians. (p. 14)

*Arming America:*

As the military historian Harold Selesky wrote, the settlers “had neither the training nor the skill to meet the Indians as military equals.” (p. 133)

*War and Society:*

While geographical isolation made local control of military affairs a necessity, the settlers did not organize their colony along military lines. A handful were professional soldiers, and a few more may have learned to use firearms at the annual militia muster in England, but they had neither the training nor the skill to meet the Indians as military equals. (p. 3)

*Arming America:*

Thus the Pequot War, won by Mason’s ruthless destruction of Mystic Village and aided by Indian allies who guided him through Pequot territory, lulled the New Englanders into thinking that they could easily meet any future Indian threat. While the whites slept, the Indians “mated firearms with their superior knowledge of the land to create a new style of hit-and-run fighting that emphasized speed, stealth, and surprise.” (p. 134)

*War and Society:*

The Pequot war shaped New England’s attitudes about military force for decades to come. By winning so decisively and so quickly, the settlers lost the incentive to learn the military skills needed to defeat future Indian threats. The obliteration of the Pequots removed any pressing need to think about how to fight a mobile enemy, and left Connecticut dependent on its Indian allies. Mason had exploited an extraordinary situation without solving the tactical problems that had baffled Massachusetts. Over the next forty years the Indians gradually mated firearms with their superior knowledge of the land to create a new style of hit-and-run fighting that emphasized speed, stealth, and surprise. When some tribes rose up against English domination in 1675, the settlers found they still could not match the military skills of the Indians. (p. 10)

*Arming America:*

By 1711 Connecticut had essentially abandoned its militia system for a “military system [that] began to look more like Britain’s, which had long since learned to use bounty money to induce poor men to perform dangerous military service.” Military service simply did not appeal to the vast majority of Americans. By 1740 every Connecticut recruit received wages, food, clothing, and a gun, as well as a share of any booty, as the colony was “openly and happily paying poor men to go to war.” (p. 140)

*War and Society:*

Still, the militia ideal of universal service was no longer the central paradigm in the way the colony organized its resources for war. Connecticut’s military system began to look more like Britain’s, which had long since learned to use bounty money to induce poor men to perform dangerous military service, than like that of a frontier colony in which leaders could compel men to join together in common self-defense. In the next twenty-five years, the idea of basing military service on economic self-interest became the dominant theme in the way Connecticut organized its resources for imperial war.

... What contemporaries overlooked was the extent to which the Assembly shifted from using financial incentives as a way of ameliorating compulsory service, as it had done in 1709–11, to openly and happily paying poor men to go to war. (p. 66, 82, respectively)

*Arming America:*

As Harold Selesky has summarized, “The soldiers lost heavily in a morning ambush, demonstrating once again their lack of skill at Indian-style war, but in the afternoon they repulsed every French attack from behind the breastwork around their main camp.” (p. 157)

*War and Society:*

Connecticut did not produce good soldiers. They were brave, and within the limits of their training, effective if too much was not expected of them on the few occasions when they actually went into battle. But they were not adept at war in the wilderness because the colony did not have an active frontier to nurture the skills needed for scouting and skirmishing. The most important colonial victory of the war, the defeat of the French at Lake George on 8 September 1755, showed the strengths and weaknesses of a New England army. The soldiers lost heavily in a morning ambush, demonstrating once again their lack of skill at Indian-style war, but in the afternoon they repulsed every French attack from behind the breastwork around their main camp. (p. 185)

*Arming America:*

As Harold Selesky has written, “the leaders rejected any attempt to use the militia ideal of universal service as a model for the expeditionary regiments long before they received the imperial subsidies that allowed them to come close to creating a colonial version of a professional army by 1762.” (p. 160)

*War and Society:*

The Assembly's most important decision was to apply the methods that had worked so well in King George's War to raise troops by financial incentive; the leaders rejected any attempt to use the militia ideal of universal service as a model for the expeditionary regiments long before they received the imperial subsidies that allowed them to come close to creating a colonial version of a professional army by 1762. The regiments became a source of employment for men who viewed military service as a way to get ahead financially—just the sort of men the Assembly wanted to attract—and had a continuity in personnel unlike any previous Connecticut military force. But they were still not a standing force like the British regular army. The regiments were raised each year for one campaign at a time—eight times in eight years—and retained many of the characteristics of the militia, including rudimentary training, poor discipline, and officers chosen primarily for their popularity with the soldiers. (p. 144)

*Arming America:*

One of the most astute students of the Colonial militia, Harold Selesky, has summarized its nature perfectly: "Many militiamen fancied themselves as soldiers because they could play on the parade ground without the slightest danger of actually being called to fight." (p. 168)

*War and Society:*

The Stamp Act crisis saw the introduction of purposeful violence into the political process. The inclination to use force was in part a product of an inflated military self-esteem stemming from the war which had just ended in unprecedented victory. Many militiamen fancied themselves as soldiers because they could play on the parade ground without the slightest danger of actually being called to fight. (p. 224)

*Arming America:*

For instance, in 1762, "while the real soldiers were joining the expeditionary regiments, militiamen in both North Haven and Stratford held a 'mock Indian fight' at their annual musters in May." It seemed irrelevant to these men that "no militiamen had been asked to fight Indians for forty years," and the two musters descended into tragic farce in no time, with one soldier killed in North Haven, and another shot in the leg at Stratford, thus emphasizing "the average militiaman's lack of military skill and experience." (p. 168)

*War and Society:*

In 1762, while the real soldiers were joining the expeditionary regiments, militiamen in both North Haven and Stratford held a "mock Indian fight" at their annual musters in May. These exercises had an air of unreality—no militiamen had been asked to fight Indians for forty years—but that did not stop both musters from ending in tragedy. When a man was accidentally killed at North Haven and another was shot in the leg at Stratford, it only emphasized the average militiaman's lack of military skill and experience. (p. 224–25)

### 13 The NRA

“Bellesiles’ essential argument is that there were almost no guns in the U.S. until the 1850s, partly because they were expensive, and partly because there was a near-universal hatred of guns. A gun culture only developed because the NRA used government subsidies to create one after the Civil War.”

I do not believe that any part of the above summary is correct. The NRA is mentioned only on the penultimate page of the book (p. 443) in noting that it was founded by two Union veterans, William Church and George Wingate, who were disturbed that the vast majority of the recruits they had trained during the Civil War had never held a gun in their lives.

### 14 An Exact Number of Guns

“There were [x number of] guns in America.” Or, “there were enough guns for [x percent] of the population.”<sup>18</sup>

Nowhere does *Arming America* pretend to know how many guns there were at any given time in the United States or what percentage of the population bore arms, or any other statistical certainty. Rather, I provided what information I could find, offering it in hopes of approaching some understanding of the place of firearms in early America. For instance, in looking at the 1810 militia returns I write:

In 1810 Secretary of War William Eustis, in what was probably the most thorough and exact of all the studies, found that almost nothing had changed: 46 percent of the militia bore arms; the total number of guns recorded was sufficient for 4.3 percent of the American population, or 20.9 percent of the white adult males. (p. 263)

There are those who have read that sentence and then written that I argue that just 4.3 percent of the American people owned guns. While that assertion may be true, it is not what I say nor is there any way that we can know; in fact, in the sentence previous to the one quoted above I refer to these returns as “certainly incomplete.” Some writers have gone further and insisted that I contradict myself since I offer many different sources that suggest different levels of gun ownership. As one critic wrote, “which is it, 14.7 percent or 4.3 percent or 7 percent or what?” There are no claims for definitiveness in this book.

### 15 Vermont Supreme Court

“He cites as his source the Vermont Supreme Court records, but that court did not open until December 1778 and its minutes from September 1782 to August 1791 have been missing since the early twentieth century.”

To be precise, I cite the Vermont Superior Court records (there is a slight difference). There are ten volumes of its files in the Rutland County Superior Courthouse (including cases from several years before the first sitting of the court). I worked with these volumes in the early 1980s. Volume 1 of this series vanished sometime after 1985, and was a topic of conversation at the Society of Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR) conference at His-



toric Sturbridge in 1989. I had the good fortune to find the Windham County Court records, thought to have disappeared in the early twentieth century, in the abandoned jail in Newfane, Vermont. As I learned from Oscar Knowles, who had been a teenager at the time, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) had moved these documents to the jailhouse in the 1930s. These files contained many Superior Court cases, for the Vermont court, like most others in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, worked a circuit of the state. The jailhouse also contained the original library of the Vermont Superior Court and many other legal records. Shortly thereafter, State Archivist Gregory Sanford and the Windham County assistant judges raised the money to catalogue and store these records at the Newfane Historical Society, protecting a highly significant collection of source documents.

It is also worth noting that this quoted criticism is made in objecting to footnote 145 on page 558 as incomplete. Yet the text's statement, that there were "five reported murders" in Vermont prior to 1790, is not questioned. I cited only the records where these murder cases are heard and the work of Professor Randolph Roth. I could have cited additional Vermont court records that did not contain murder cases, but did not think that was necessary. I also could have cited the Vermont newspapers from these years, in which I read widely. In the revised edition of *Arming America* I have altered this footnote to include all the court records.

## 16 Travel Accounts

Many critics write that *Arming America* ignores travel accounts that observe the common use of firearms. A favorite quote is from an anonymous "Diary of a Scot," from 1822: "Not only in general do they make the musket their amusement throughout the states . . . [but] in every house it may be found ready loaded for action."

This document is quoted in *Arming America*. It should be noted that I hoped with this book to get beyond the comparison of favorite quotations into a more thorough examination of popular attitudes; to arrive, in short, at the norm rather than the purely anecdotal. A further reading of this diary is instructive. Its anonymous author discovered no support for what he had initially believed to be true about America. When he observed a Connecticut militia muster, he was appalled. "Their implements of war, long brass clasped german firelocks, rusty fowling pieces, fusees, and musketoons . . . would have equipped the much famed troops of Falstaff. . . . They marched along, some supporting [arms] others presenting weapons on the ground. They never designed to be all one way or going the same road. Some straggling behind a dozen of yards apart, were locked in each others arms, and on tiptoe were acting the fool, or dandy. Another party bustling along, were humorously kicking the breeches of those before them with their knees. . . . The Captains raved and they laughed, and ended the whole in good humor."<sup>19</sup> Each text requires a full reading, a single sentence does not stand on its own.

Some critiques list travel accounts examined in *Arming America*, stating that they all contain references to high levels of gun ownership. Yet a closer examination of these texts often shows otherwise. To take just one example, the Scots merchant John Melish came to the United States in 1806, stayed far longer than Tocqueville, and ended up writing two massive

volumes about his *Travels in the United States*. As Stephen Watts has written, Melish “marveled at the dynamic, bustling republic.”<sup>20</sup> The slave states lacked the vigor and concern for the public good Melish found north of the Ohio, but the vices that caught Melish’s attention were “*gaming* and *drinking*.”<sup>21</sup> His one experience of violence in his five years in the United States came outside Savannah at the very start of his travels, where two slaves had been executed for killing their overseer, “one was hanged, and the other was burnt to death.” Melish was “horror-struck” when he saw the remains of the latter slave, but continued his travels.<sup>22</sup> South Carolina was notable for its horrid food; “unsightly coffee, brown bread, some bacon and butter, which looked like ‘train oil thickened with salt.’ I had just put the cup to my lips, when I heard a violent retching in the adjoining room.” He could not leave “this wretched place” fast enough.<sup>23</sup> The free states were more to Melish’s liking. When he visited the frontier beyond the Appalachians he discovered commerce and prosperous farms. The west was vibrant with activity and hard work. Pittsburgh, already home to schools, newspapers, and a library, was alive with “the sound of the hammer and anvil.”<sup>24</sup> Even the smaller western towns resounded with commerce and labor and boasted good schools. When Melish explicitly compared America to Europe, he found the former peaceful, “a happy retreat from the turbulent scenes of Europe.”<sup>25</sup> As with Tocqueville, those who bother to read all of Melish’s two published volumes will come away with the sense that these travelers did not visit a society more violent and more heavily armed than their own. No such commentary appears in these hundreds of pages.

## 17 Early Gun Laws

“Completely ignored are laws requiring gun ownership.”

These laws are discussed in *Arming America*, as is the dissatisfaction of various governments with the result. See for instance, pages 75–80 and 229–39. It is worth noting that those who make this charge seem to work on the assumption that a law must become reality; if the state orders the purchase of a gun, the people respond by buying one. That may have been the case, but evidence is required in support of this position.

## 18 Daniel Morgan

“Bellesiles omits the crucial contribution of Daniel Morgan’s riflemen to the Continental cause.”<sup>26</sup>

Daniel Morgan is in the index and discussed in *Arming America* on pages 195–203. As I write in these pages, “Morgan’s men performed brilliantly at the two Saratoga battles and demonstrated the value of the rifle’s greater accuracy.”<sup>27</sup>

## 19 Revolutionary Outlaws

“Bellesiles’ book draws conclusions ignoring or recanting much of his earlier work, *Revolutionary Outlaws*. . . . This is not surprising given that he is now director of the Center for the Study of Violence at Emory University.”

Several people contend that *Arming America* completely ignores Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys while contradicting my earlier book, *Revolutionary Outlaws*.<sup>28</sup> Ethan Allen does appear in the index of *Arming America* and is discussed on pages 104–105 and 184–85. The exact nature of any contradiction between the two books has never been specified, nor do I have the slightest idea what my having been director of the Center for the Study of Violence, an interdisciplinary undergraduate program, has to do with *Arming America*.

## 20 Gun Knowledge

“[H]is knowledge of guns is limited (making a handgun a long gun sort of thing).”

Though I have been brought in by museums as a consultant on early firearms, I will acknowledge immediately that I am an historian first. It is difficult to measure levels of expertise, but I know of no instance in which I confused a handgun and a “long gun.” Those who know modern firearms often assume that I must be wrong based on the way things are now. Thus many black powder enthusiasts have responded angrily that I have it all wrong about muskets, that they are not as unreliable and inaccurate as presented in *Arming America*. The present tense is vital. When I have actually spoken in person to people knowledgeable about early firearms, they readily admit that their guns have been refitted, that they use modern powder which is far more reliable than eighteenth-century powder, that they regularly maintain their weapons, that they practice often, and that they do not fire under battle conditions. These are significant differences.

## 21 Thomas Jefferson

“Bellesiles ignores Thomas Jefferson, who wrote of ‘every soldier in our Army ha[ving] been intimate with his gun from infancy.’ . . . Between Prof. Bellesiles and Thomas Jefferson, who is a better guide to Jefferson’s contemporaries’ attitudes and practices about guns?”

I do not ignore Thomas Jefferson or this particular quotation. On page 182 of *Arming America*, I wrote:

Thomas Jefferson voiced what later became the standard view when he ascribed the victory [at Breed’s or Bunker Hill] “to our superiority in taking aim when we fire; every soldier in our army having been intimate with his gun from infancy.” He proclaimed that a “want of discipline” was irrelevant beside “native courage and a cordial tho’ governable animation in the cause.” Those who actually knew something of warfare were not so certain.<sup>29</sup>

My point was that those who had combat experience, which Jefferson did not, had a different perspective. Jefferson tended to see things through ideologically tinted glasses, the world as it should be. Later in *Arming America* I examine his actions as President, when experience forced him to be a bit more practical. I found it notable that seven of his eight annual

addresses to Congress called for a thorough reform of the militia and that he promoted the most significant exercise of central authority to that date in attempting to arm the militia with the 1808 Militia Act. Of course these issues are all open to interpretation and one need not accept either me or Jefferson as the better guide to the past.

## 22 Peter Lydick

“Among the incredibly inaccurate claims of this book, is his condemning the famous gunsmith Peter Lydick.”

This criticism contains three inaccuracies: the gunsmith’s name, his fame, and my opinion of him. The correct name is Peter Lydig, who was not terribly famous, and I do not condemn him. Rather, I am quoting Maryland’s inspector of firearms, Reaz Beall, who wrote that Lydig was “culpable” of fraud in offering the state such poorly made guns.

Interestingly, this criticism appears to have been based on an earlier web critique which faulted me from getting Lydig’s name wrong: “Bellesiles on p. 186 refers to the failure of guns at proof made by Peter Lydig, Baltimore’s leading gunsmith. His source for that claim found, not Peter Lydig’s guns failing proof, but Peter Lydick’s guns failing.” The author of this email labels the correct spelling of Lydig’s name just one “of Bellesiles’s incredibly inaccurate claims.” The confusion comes from the document in Browne, et al., eds., *Archives of Maryland*, which recorded Lydig as “Lydick.” While it is appropriate to retain the misspelling of a name when a document is being quoted, it is fairly standard to use the correct spelling on all other occasions in order to avoid confusion.

## 23 The Second Amendment

“Bellesiles further asserts . . . that . . . the Second Amendment was written for the sole purpose of supporting these useless bodies of men [the militia], and not with any thought of protecting private ownership of firearms.”

I cannot find any such statements in *Arming America*. The Second Amendment is discussed on pages 217–18.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, several commentators charged that *Arming America*, in the words of one, “called for the repeal of the Second Amendment.” It is likely that these commentators did not read the book they were attacking, for nowhere in *Arming America* is there any policy recommendation of any kind on any subject.

## 24 William C. C. Claiborne

“[He] regularly misquotes Louisiana Governor William C. C. Claiborne’s letters.”

Governor Claiborne is quoted in several places. The excerpts from *Arming America* are below; followed by the text from Claiborne’s letters.<sup>31</sup> There is an error in one of the quotations, which has been corrected. Where I wrote, “must to armed and disciplined,” it should read, “must be armed and disciplined.” Also, Jefferson appointed Claiborne the first governor

of Orleans Territory in 1803, rather than 1812. Again, the interested reader may compare the text with the source.

*Arming America:*

W. C. C. Claiborne served as governor of the Mississippi Territory between 1801 and 1803, and Jefferson appointed him the first governor of Orleans Territory in 1812. His letters from these posts evidence well his frustration with what he called the most “unpleasant & difficult undertaking” of organizing the militia. He complained to Secretary of State Madison in the beginning of 1802 that his efforts “to organize the Militia” of Mississippi had met “many obstacles . . . the greatest of which are the want of arms and the means of obtaining a supply.” (p. 249)<sup>32</sup>

Claiborne to James Madison, 23 January 1802:

I am making exertions to organize the Militia of this District;—but many obstacles present, the greatest of which are the want of arms and the means of obtaining a supply. (*Official Letter Books* 1: 39)

Claiborne to James Madison, 3 March 1802:

The organization of the Militia at presents [present?] occupies much of my attention;—I find it an unpleasant & difficult undertaking—But I hope, I shall at least be (partially) successful. (*Official Letter Books* 1: 54)

*Arming America:*

Claiborne faced roughly the same difficulties in Louisiana. The militia system there “is greatly defective.” [4: 92] Men were not showing up or not obeying orders; the best-disciplined group was the free black regiment; one battalion, the Blues, simply dissolved itself so as to not bother with musters; and “the muskets of several Company’s . . . have been reported to be as totally unfit for use, and I am solicited to furnish arms, which would enable them to render service if the occasion should require.” [4: 32] He suggested to the local army commander that they exchange defective, privately owned muskets for good army guns. The army agreed to supply three hundred muskets; yet within two years Claiborne was again complaining to the legislature that the militia “must to armed and disciplined.” [4: 297] Two years after that, in 1811, he again “renew[ed] my entreaties for a more energetic Militia System.” [5: 124] (p. 250)<sup>33</sup>

Claiborne to Col. Freeman, 25 October 1806:

The muskets of several Company’s of the Battalion of Orleans Volunteers have been reported to be as totally unfit for use, and I am solicited to furnish arms, which would enable them to render service if the occasion should require; the officers also commanding the 1st, 2d, and 4th Regiments of Militia Infantry, (and which Regiments have made a voluntary tender of their Services), have solicited me, to supply them with arms; my own opinion is that the state of society here, and the aspect of affairs are such, as to render it advisable to arm not only the Volunteers, but the regular city Militia; Under this impression, therefore I shall propose to you, to receive the arms of the volunteers, which

are unfit for use, and to deliver (from the public stores) on the receipt of several Captains, a like number of good muskets; I shall solicit also for the use of the City Militia nine hundred public Muskets, to be delivered to the several Colonels. (*Official Letter Books* 4: 32)

Claiborne to the Assembly, 13 January 1807:

For myself I have supposed, that you would be enclined [sic] to a short Session, and shall therefore press for consideration, such subjects only, as cannot well be postponed. Among these, the revision of the Militia Law is the most important. The present system is greatly defective; the most unvaried exertions on the part of the officers to entroduce [sic] discipline will be of no avail, unless disobedience of orders, and improper conduct on parade be punished with severity; unless Company musters are more frequent, and the fines for non attendance such, as to be sensibly felt by those Citizens, who unmindful of the injunction of the Law, can only be brought thro' fear of a pecuniary forfeiture to the discharge of duty. (*Official Letter Books* 4: 92)

Claiborne to the Assembly, 14 January 1809:

The State of the Militia imposes it upon me as a duty, again to call your attention to that subject, and to entreat you, not to close the present session, until some energetic Law, in relation to this service is enacted. The defects in the present system are know [sic] to every officer, and are proven by the little progress which has been made in the introduction of order & discipline. A regard to our dearest rights enjoin, that we should engraft the character of a soldier on that of the Citizen. The young men of this Territory are not degenerated; they are brave, hardy and enterprising; they have inherited the virtues & possess the spirit of their fathers. But to give this spirit energy; to make it subservient to the defense of the country, they must be armed and disciplined. (*Official Letter Books* 4: 297)

Claiborne to the Assembly, 29 January 1811:

I could not avail myself of an occasion as favorable as the present, to renew my entreaties for a more energetic Militia System. (*Official Letter Books* 5: 124)

#### *Arming America:*

Thus Governor Claiborne of Louisiana wrote the Senate that any diminishment of the government forces stationed there endangered "the safety of the state," for the "militia are not & cannot for some time be made efficient [as] the Want of Arms & munitions of War, are sources of great embarrassment." He begged them to loan the state at least thirty-four hundred muskets and four hundred sabers. Or, as he put it to the local army commander, "the militia of Louisiana, is for the present in a state of Great Derangement." (p. 256)

Claiborne to Louisiana Senators, 10 June 1813:

But it is my duty to state to you, & to urge you, Gentlemen to represent to the Government, that the regular Force in this quarter cannot be deminished [sic] without endangering the safety of the state.—The militia are not & cannot for some time be made

efficient the Want of Arms & munitions of War, are sources of great embarrassment, and I renew to you my entreaties to effect if possible from the Government, the loan of three thousand four hundred muskets & four hundred sabres.

(*Official Letter Books* 6: 220–21)

Claiborne to General Flournoy, 17 June 1813:

I am very sensible of the dangers to which this state is exposed from within & without, and the expediency of taking in time *precautionary measures*! Among *these* the holding in readiness for active service, a strong Detachment of militia, is Certainly of primary importance,—and orders to that effect shal [sic] be issued.—It is however with Concern, I inform you, that the militia of Louisiana, is for the present in a state of Great Derangement. (*Official Letter Books* 6: 226, emphases in original)

*Arming America:*

Governor Claiborne of Louisiana complained to Secretary of War Monroe of this “scarcity of arms” among the arriving militia, who added nothing to the city’s defense. While the New Orleans volunteer militia was well armed, “The militia in the Interior of the State are almost wholly destitute of arms.” (p. 259)

Claiborne to James Monroe, 25 October 1814:

The militia in the Interior of the State are almost wholly destitute of arms, they are very pressing in their demands on me, and it is with regret that I find myself without the means of arming them.—Fifteen hundred stand of muskets have been furnished the State by the General Government, a thousand of which are in the hands of the detached militia, and the remaining five hundred are reserve for the use of such corps as are expected to volunteer their services.—I have convoked the Legislature for the tenth of next month, and one object of the Call is to invite them to make provisions for the purchase of arms; but should this be done, I fear they cannot be had in this City.—could the General Government loan to Louisiana [sic] two or three hundred Sabres, and of as many of horseman’s Pistols, it would indeed be a great accommodation, and add more to our security, for on the event of insurrection among our slaves, Cavalry are the troops which can act with greatest advantage. (*Official Letter Books* 6: 290)

Claiborne to James Monroe, 4 January 1815:

We have to lament for the moment a scarcity of arms, but are hourly in expectation of an Ample Supply which the General is informed has left Pittsburg some time since.

(*Official Letter Books* 6: 330)

*Arming America:*

Nonetheless, Claiborne insisted that they needed sabers for their cavalry, which “is best adapted to the Climate of Louisiana.” These guns took a long time to arrive, finally all reaching New Orleans after the war was over. Until then, Claiborne complained about his “unarmed, & undisciplined Militia.” (p. 526n178)

Claiborne to John Armstrong, 22 July 1813:

I am honored with the receipt of your letter of the 22 June, informing me “That two thousand Stand of Arms, will be deposited with the deputy quarter Master General at Pittsburg . . .” This supply of Arms will be a great acquisition to Louisiana, & I have only to regret the delay in their transportation to New Orleans.—This State would be much accomodated [sic] if you would supply her also with 150 Sabres;—The service of Cavalry is best adapted to the Climate of Louisiana, and in many parts of this State (in the Western prairies for example) are the only troops that could act with advantage. (*Official Letter Books* 6: 243)<sup>34</sup>

Claiborne to Thomas Flournoy, 17 September 1813:

Were my means equal to my wishes, you would find a prompt & firm supporter, but with an unarmed, & undisciplined Militia, I can only offer you partial aid.—You must have heard of the opposition in New Orleans, to my orders for holding in readiness for service a detachment of Militia. (*Official Letter Books* 6: 269)

## 25 Media Images

“*Arming America* is another familiar example of history being rewritten to make the past conform to the media’s prevailing opinion of the present.”

This is a baffling formulation, as I am not certain what in *Arming America* matched “the media’s prevailing opinion of the present.” Since, to my knowledge, the media has consistently reinforced the perception that Americans have always been fascinated with firearms, *Arming America* would seem to be at variance with the media. But specific examples have not been offered.

## 26 The Burning of Washington

“[His] long quotation from Colonel Minor’s description of the fall of Washington does not appear in his cited source.”

Colonel George Minor’s testimony appears on page 255 of *Arming America* and matches the cited source in the first volume of *American State Papers: Military Affairs*. There is a slight error in the quotation, as a comma has been omitted following the word “ammunition” and before “&c.” Otherwise the quotations are correct. I reproduce most of Minor’s statement to demonstrate that his experience matches the larger point made in this chapter that the militia was both ill equipped and ill organized (note, for instance, Colonel Carbery returning to his home for the evening before the battle).

In October 1814 Colonel George Minor testified before Richard M. Johnson’s House committee that was investigating the fall of Washington, D.C. Minor, in command of Virginia’s 60th Regiment, arrived at Washington with six hundred infantry and one hundred cavalry. He found his troops grievously short of arms, reporting personally to President Madison “as to the want of arms, ammunition &c.” Madison sent him to General Armstrong, who told him that “arms, &c. could not be had that night, and directed me to report myself next morning to Colonel Carbery, who would furnish me with



arms, &c.; which gentleman, from early next morning, I diligently sought for, until a late hour in the forenoon, without being able to find him, and then went in search of General [William] Winder." He found Winder and was told to wait. As a consequence, this regiment, described by General Winder as "wholly unarmed," never saw battle.

Colonel George Minor's statement appears in *American State Papers: Military Affairs* and reads as follows:

In answer to the several interrogatories made by Colonel R. M. Johnson, chairman of the inquiry into the causes of the destruction of the public buildings in the city of Washington, as hereunto annexed, state as follows, viz:

On Friday, the 19th of August last, was informed (not officially) of the collecting of the enemy's forces in our waters, namely the Potomac and Patuxent. Immediately issues orders for the regiment under my command to assemble at Wren's tavern on the Tuesday following. . . . And on Monday evening, the 22d, received a verbal message from the President, by Mr. John Graham, to hasten on the troops which had been ordered from my regiment, which will more fully appear by said Graham's letter to General Winder, to which I beg leave to refer the committee; and, after informing Mr. Graham the purport of the orders I had received, we both concluded it would be proper for him to return to Washington, and have the orders, first alluded to, countermanded, so as to justify me in marching with my whole force to the city; which consisted, as well as I can recollect, of six hundred infantry and about one hundred cavalry; and the said Graham returned to Wren's tavern on Tuesday evening, the 23d, with General Winder's orders, written on the same letter to which I have referred the committee. On the receipt of which, I took up my line of march immediately, and arrived at the capitol between sunset and dark, and immediately made my way to the President and reported my arrival, when he referred me to General Armstrong, to whom I repaired, and informed him as to the strength of the troops, as well as to the want of arms, ammunition, &c. which made it as late as early candle light, when I was informed by that gentleman the arms, &c. could not be had that night, and directed me to report myself next morning to Colonel Carbery, who would furnish me with arms, &c.; which gentleman, from early next morning, I diligently sought for, until a late hour in the forenoon, without being able to find him, and then went in search of General Winder, whom I found near the Eastern Branch; when he gave an order to the armorer for the munitions wanting, with orders to return to the capitol, there to await further orders.

On my arrival at the armory, found that department in the care of a very young man, who dealt out the stores cautiously, which went greatly to consume time; as, for instance, when flints were once counted by my officers, who showed every disposition to expedite the furnishing the men, the young man had to count them over again, before they could be obtained, and at which place I met with Colonel Carbery, who introduced himself to me, and apologized for not being found when I was in search of him, stating that he had left town the evening before, and had gone to his country. After getting the men equipped, I ordered them on to the capitol, and waited myself to sign the receipts for the munitions furnished; and, on my arrival, was informed by Major Hunter, who commanded in my absence, orders had been given to march to Bladensburg, when we took up our march for that place, and met the retreating army on this side the turnpike gate, and was ordered by one of General Winder's aids to form the line of battle on a height near that place, and was soon after ordered by the General in person to throw back my regiment from that position, into sections, and to wait until the retreating army had passed, and cover their retreat; and immediately after sent his aid to direct me to countermarch immediately, and come on to the capitol.

After returning there, halted the troops, to wait further orders, until General Winder directed me to march them on, without telling me where; of course I marched with the other troops until I came to the six buildings, where I took the left hand road, leading to the foundry, and there occupied the nearest height to that place, and sent the adjutant to find where the General had made his rallying point, and was informed at Tenlytown, where I marched that evening, and found the troops moving off to encamp at some convenient place on the river road, where I followed on until I saw two barns, where I made to, and rested for the night. Next morning sought for General Winder; met him on the road leading from Tenlytown, to where my troops lay, when he ordered me to Montgomery Court House, and from thence to Baltimore. Given under my hand, city of Washington, 30th of October, 1814. George Minor, Colonel Commandant 60th Regiment Virginia Militia. (1: 568–69)

## 27 James Fenimore Cooper

“Bellesiles should have begun his research by reading the fiction of James Fenimore Cooper, in which the ability to shoot accurately is highly admired, and gun ownership on the frontier . . . was a natural thing.”

While it is interesting advice that an historian should begin her or his research with fiction, I did discuss the work of Cooper on pages 303, 322, and 344–47. I do not know of any passage in Cooper holding that gun ownership was common or “a natural thing” on the frontier.

## 28 The Militia

“Bellesiles is rewriting history, ignoring the well known fact that tens of thousands of American farmers rushed forth with their arms to defeat the British in the American Revolution.”

This comment addresses a popular image of the American Revolution that historians generally refer to as “the militia myth.” In this mythology, yeoman farmers stepped from their plows, grabbed their trusty muskets from above the mantel, and went forth to do battle against the British for eight years. As Charles Patrick Neimeyer has written, no myth has proven more difficult to combat. “Contrary to popular lore and some modern commentators, the well-to-do and ‘yeoman farmers’ seemed to prefer staying home rather than rushing to the front lines.”<sup>35</sup> Military historians have devoted a great deal of energy to demolishing this myth over the past fifty years,<sup>36</sup> and yet their efforts have failed to affect popular perceptions.<sup>37</sup>

Those who foster the militia myth must do so in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Nearly every officer who served during the Revolution, including militia commanders, spoke of the failings of the militia, while the biggest problem facing the Continental Army was a lack of volunteers. In January 1776, Washington imagined an army of 75,000. His was not an unreasonable projection, as conservative estimates put the colonies’ white male population aged sixteen to fifty in 1775 at 350,000. Washington hoped for just one-fifth of those. Even had just one-twelfth of these white men served every year, Washington would

have had a force of 30,000 for every campaign. Instead the Army's peak came in July 1776, when he could call on 19,000 troops. For most of the war he was lucky to have six or seven thousand combat-ready forces.

Alexander Graydon's recruitment efforts are fairly typical in this regard. He searched desperately for volunteers, using many of the same methods made notorious by recruiters for the British army, including getting the "volunteers" drunk. In 1776 he wrote of a group who "drank freely of our liquor," but had apparently agreed beforehand to keep one another from enlisting. Graydon gained one short-term recruit by striking him "with the utmost force between the eyes." The best he could do in another place was "to recruit, a fellow . . . who would do to stop a bullet as well as a better man." This recruit "was a truly worthless dog," but the town was "much indebted to us for taking him away." Graydon wrote of the "error of those who seem to conceive the year 1776 to have been a season of almost universal patriotic enthusiasm."<sup>38</sup> That error persists.

This lack of general public support extended even to supplying the Continental Army with the essentials for both combat and survival. As Wayne Carp titled his excellent book on the subject, the public seemed content "To Starve the Army at Pleasure."<sup>39</sup> Throughout the war, the army suffered while the general populace prospered. Even the famous near famine of Valley Forge occurred after a successful harvest in the middle states; but farmers preferred to sell their crops to the British who could pay with hard currency, rather than the poverty-stricken American forces who paid with paper.

Washington offered an excellent assessment of the situation in a letter to John Hancock dated September 24, 1776, on "the eve of another dissolution of our Army." Given their poor treatment, Washington told the President of Congress, it was not surprising that his soldiers would not re-enlist. Nor could they expect any assistance from the militia. "To place any dependence upon militia is assuredly resting upon a broken staff; men just dragged from the tender scenes of domestic life; unaccustomed to the din of arms; totally unacquainted with every kind of military skill, which being followed by a want of confidence in themselves, when opposed to troops regularly trained, disciplined, and appointed; superior in knowledge, and superior in arms, makes them timid and ready to fly from their own shadows." The only option was to offer greater inducements and better support in return for longer terms of military service. That the British had not already defeated the Americans was due solely to their failure to take "proper advantage" of the situation.<sup>40</sup>

## 29 The First Gun Count

"In Bellesiles's first supposed gun count in the new world, he uses this source to show that settlers in Massachusetts Bay were only 10 percent armed, when it actually shows the plan to arm every man."

The count for the Massachusetts Bay Company is not the "first gun count" in *Arming America*. There are numbers given for French and Spanish expeditions on pages 40 and 47, for Quebec on page 49, Jamestown in 1609 on pages 52–53, and 1611 on page 55, and Smythe's Hundred in 1618 on page 56.

The passage in question appears on page 63 and reads as follows:

But even the Saints needed gunpowder. Through most of the seventeenth century the New England settlers were desperate for firearms and powder. As in the Chesapeake Bay, the exception was in the first wave of settlement, when so many settlers died that there were enough guns for use by the survivors. In 1630 the Massachusetts Bay Company reported in their possession: “80 bastard musketts, with snaphances, 4 Foote in the barrill without rests; 6 long Fowlinge peeces . . . 6 foote longe; 4 longe Fowlinge peeces . . . 5 1/2 foote longe; 10 Full musketts, 4 Foote barrill, with matchlocks and rests,” one hundred swords and “5 peeces of ordnance, long sence bowght and payd For.”

This accusation of error lifts a single quotation out of context, in this case from both *Arming America* and the original document. First it should be noted that the context of the quotation in *Arming America* is that the settlers had “enough guns.” The cited document, which is published in Nathaniel Shurtleff’s five volume compilation on the Massachusetts Bay Company,<sup>41</sup> refers to plans for the voyage of the settlers in 1630. They had not yet left England and were in the process of planning their journey. The first volume of Shurtleff’s collection, as he says in his introduction, covers the preparations for the journey. This list dated 1628 could not represent what is in Boston on that date as they have not yet left. Rather, what we see in these pages are company plans. We can trace the progress of the buying of arms for the settlement at Boston in this volume, as well as the Company’s intention that all firearms were to be “equally devided amongst the severall plantations” to be kept in “readynes as a towne stocke.”<sup>42</sup> They succeeded in acquiring everything on their list on page 26, making it correct, I contend, to state that this was the total armory for that first settlement in 1630.

Mine is not an eccentric reading of these documents. The highly respected arms expert, Harold L. Peterson, makes the same sense of this evidence in his well known *Arms and Armor in Colonial America, 1526-1783* [(New York, 1956), 44.] Peterson provides the same list I do in *Arming America*, introducing it as follows: “With the coming of the settlers to Massachusetts Bay in 1630, however, the transition began in earnest. The common arms supply of the Massachusetts Bay Company contained . . .” He has an almost identical passage in his more thorough study, “The Military Equipment of the Plymouth and Bay Colonies, 1620–1690,” [*The New England Quarterly* 20 (1947): 204.] M. L. Brown offers a similar reading of these sources in *Firearms in Colonial America: The Impact on History and Technology, 1492–1792* [(Washington, D.C., 1980), 85–87.]

### 30 An English Bookseller

“[Dunton] was not a ‘Massachusetts Soldier,’ but rather an English bookseller. . . . Bellesiles offers Dunton’s letter as evidence of a shortage of guns, American unfamiliarity with guns, and a preference for pikes. . . . *Arming America* mistakenly shifts the date of this date to five years closer to King Philip’s War, and Bellesiles uses the source to support his contention that there were gun shortages during the war.”

John Dunton was a former English bookseller and a soldier in service to the colony of Massachusetts. Many other men serving in New England were born in England. Since this paragraph is about the province of Massachusetts turning to the greater use of firearms, I did not see why it was necessary to give biographical information about the person being quoted,

especially as my sole reason for quoting Dunton was to show the continued use of pikes. The charge that Dunton's quotation is intended to show "a preference for pikes" is untrue. Rather, the point is made that pikes were no longer favored, but used out of necessity.

The note to this paragraph in *Arming America* (pp. 487–88n23) has six sources. While all the quotations are correct, the date of 1681 is inaccurate; it should indeed read 1686. This was a typographical or transcription error, the year 1686 appearing as 1681, and it has been corrected in the second edition of the book. I cannot see, however, how the altered date changes the meaning of the paragraph. A motive is ascribed, that of shifting the date to support the "contention that there were gun shortages during the war." Yet the very next sentence after the Dunton quotation, which is not quoted by the author of this criticism, states that England "supplied several hundred muskets." That closing sentence reinforces the topic sentence of this paragraph, also not quoted in the criticism: "It was in King Philip's War that the musket became the weapon of choice for American militia."

Mine is not an unusual reading of the documents in question. One of the finest military historians of early America, Don Higginbotham, used exactly the same document in almost precisely the same fashion: "Young John Dunton was not alone in conceding that he 'knew not how to shoot off a musket' and that his fellow militiamen 'knew it well enough by my awkward handling' of one."<sup>43</sup> Jack S. Radabaugh also read this source in the same way in his study of the Massachusetts militia.<sup>44</sup>



## Chapter Five

# Specific Challenges: Matters of Interpretation

Historians' practices of citation and quotation have rarely lived up to their precepts; footnotes have never supported, and can never support, every statement of fact in a given work.

—Anthony Grafton<sup>1</sup>

It is of course fair to disagree with any scholar's interpretation of a cited source or with the entire thesis of any book. For instance what I see as a limited and insufficient supply of firearms can be interpreted as a great many by another reader. Whenever we deal with numbers there is a core question of presentation. Do we say “only 20 percent,” or “as much as 20 percent”? Likewise, raising contrary evidence, as I attempt to do in my book, is a legitimate aspect of all scholarship. All good scholars hope that their research will inspire an informed discussion and learned disagreement. I trust that the following issues can be treated as part of a fair and honest exchange of opinion.

### **1 Incorrect Number of Homicides in Colonial Virginia**

“[T]en white murder suspects were sentenced to death by the Virginia General Court—a fraction of all murder suspects in Virginia in those years, most of whom fled prosecution or were discharged after hearings before coroners' inquests, justices of the peace, or county courts.”

This critique asserts that the original source, Arthur P. Scott, *Criminal Law in Colonial Virginia*, is misrepresented in the following passage from *Arming America*:

A study of eighteen years of Virginia's seventeenth-century court records discovered twenty-three murder trials resulting in eleven homicide and four manslaughter convictions, or less than one murder a year. In the four years of 1736 to 1739, there were ten murders in Virginia, a notable increase to two and a half murders per year. (p. 82)

The accuracy of the first figure on the seventeenth century, the accuracy of Scott's study and my use of it are not questioned. Rather it is charged that I failed to reference those cases in which “the murder suspects” fled or were discharged. It is conceivable that those discharged were innocent, that a murder had not been committed, or any of a number of other possibilities.

More significantly, no source has been provided for the large numbers of cases not brought to trial, nor does Scott make any reference to such avoidances of the legal procedures. Scott does write that in the years after 1736, “Perhaps the examining courts, which by now were in operation, were allowing fewer doubtful cases to reach the capital.” He adds that “Only 1 manslaughter case appears” in these years.<sup>2</sup>

Historians must rely on the available evidence. I know of no source to validate the assertion that many murders were not brought to trial, though there may be such, and Scott’s views on the Colonial Virginia criminal courts are supported by the more recent study of Peter C. Hoffer and William B. Scott. This more thorough examination of the Richmond County Courts, including material discovered since Scott’s 1930 work, found a total of eighteen homicide cases in the years 1714 to 1749 inclusive. That total is 4.3 percent of all criminal cases heard, for an average of one murder every other year, a much lower incidence of murder than discovered by Arthur Scott. Professor Hoffer notes that “some defendants, rather than risk trial and conviction in the General Court, pleaded guilty.” The one reference to flight to avoid conviction observes that the man’s son was then charged with being an accessory, the court having no patience for those who sought to avoid justice. “Anglo-American jurists generally took a harsh view of crime, and Richmond County judges were no exception.” Nine of these suspected murderers (“that many” or “only” may be applied) “were in any way judged culpable and either punished or held for trial.”<sup>3</sup> Like Arthur Scott, I took a conviction as evidence of murder. However, it may be correct that the clause in my sentence should be changed to read either “twelve murder trials” or “ten murder convictions.” But either way, the meaning of the passage remains unchanged.

The critic quoted above is incorrect, however, in writing that “Scott examined the surviving issues of the *Virginia Gazette* from September 10, 1736, to February 1, 1740.” Scott wrote that he examined surviving court records, “memorandum in the British Record Office,” and the *Virginia Gazette* for the years between 1736 and 1774, finding capital cases in the years “1736–39, 1766–69, and 1771–74.”<sup>4</sup>

Every historian to my knowledge who has worked on homicide among the European settlers in colonial America has been struck with the low number of cases. That may be because there were few murders, or because few homicides were finding their way into the courts. Many homicide cases heard would strike modern jurists as highly suspect. Elaine Forman Crane’s fascinating recent study of “the only fully recorded case of matricide in colonial America” is particularly interesting in this regard.<sup>5</sup> There was absolutely no evidence that the victim, Rebecca Cornell, had in fact been murdered and the initial inquest ruled her death a tragic accident. But spectral evidence, a vague statement by Cornell’s ghost to her brother and the fact that her corpse bled in the presence of her son Thomas, led to the conviction and execution of Thomas Cornell for murder. Any scholar counting homicides would have to include the Cornell case as a homicide, but it remains problematic.

## 2 Homicide in Colonial Plymouth

Whereas Bellesiles found “not a single case of homicide” in the first forty-six years of Plymouth Colony’s courts, there were in fact “11 cases of murder and [the court] investigated 4 additional deaths that may have been murders.”



This charge of error refers to the last half of a sentence in *Arming America* (pp.81–82) in which I reference the court records for Plymouth Plantation during the forty-six years from 1636 to 1681, inclusive. As part of a general point that “Whites rarely assaulted other whites in the colonies,” I found “not a single homicide” in the Plymouth court records in those years. The statement in *Arming America* is based upon and cites only volume 7 of Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth*, which contains the court records for Plymouth Colony.<sup>6</sup> I certainly erred in not looking in the other volumes of this series. However, I read these records very differently from the critic quoted above and disagree with the assertion that there were at least eleven homicides between 1636 and 1681.

To repeat, the statement in *Arming America* drawing upon these records is in the context of an examination of the commonalty of white-on-white violence. The first case in volume one concerns the 1638 murder of “Penowyanquis, an Indian.”<sup>7</sup> The second is the 1648 conviction of Alice Bishop for slitting the throat of her four-year-old daughter.<sup>8</sup> That case is followed by a hearing, not a trial, of Walter Baker, “suspected” of murder but cleared with no charges brought.<sup>9</sup> Three of the documents in the third volume are inquests into deaths: one of a man who froze to death while hunting with no suspicion of foul play, another of an indentured servant who was forced to work outside in severe cold while ill,<sup>10</sup> and the third to a man who was pushed and died shortly thereafter.<sup>11</sup> Only the latter suggests homicide, though the presentment does not carry that charge and the defendant was found not guilty. The fourth case in this volume is a probate hearing on the proper disposition of the estate of Ephraim Hickes who “died a violent death,” which in the seventeenth century could mean fits or falling down. Through an oversight, the court’s order “that the said estate should be improved for the comfort and support of Mistris Margarett Hickes, the mother of the said Ephraim” had not been recorded. It is difficult to discern the homicide here.<sup>12</sup>

One of the documents in volume five is an inquest into a death with no reference to murder.<sup>13</sup> There is also a coroner’s inquest resulting in the discovery of “noe wound nor bruise that might hasten his [James Browne’s] death.”<sup>14</sup> The other is definitely a homicide: the trial and execution of three Indians for killing John Sassamon, whose body had been found under the ice of a pond in February 1675. Many people, including the deputy governor of Rhode Island, denied that Sassamon had been murdered, holding that he had fallen through the ice. The trial—which included supernatural evidence—and executions precipitated King Philip’s War.<sup>15</sup> Not only is this not a white-on-white crime, it was perceived as an act of war by Metacom and the Wampanoags, and so I treated it in *Arming America*. Since the Indians were not inhabitants of Plymouth Colony, the court’s jurisdiction is suspect.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, one may put forth a different interpretation and treat this as a homicide rather than judicial murder. The remaining citations refer to a ten-year-old boy falling to his death “through the flore of the saw mill,”<sup>17</sup> and deaths during the war, with the defendants referred to as prisoners of war.<sup>18</sup>

The citations in the sixth<sup>19</sup> and seventh<sup>20</sup> volumes fall outside the period of my study, while volume eight is a list of births and marriages, 1666 to 1671, with no reference to homicide.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, the sole reference to a gun in any of these cases comes in 1684, with the indictment of “Robert Trayes, negro,” for the accidental shooting of Daniel Standlake. Stand-

lake died of a wound in his leg, leading the jury to the verdict of “death by misadventure.” Traves was not charged with any crime, but given a stern lecture.<sup>22</sup>

The definition of murder is stretched rather thin in including cases of accidental death, probate hearings, and birth records. Likewise, in the absence of further evidence it is second-guessing the jury to find declarations of innocence indications of homicides. Nonetheless, it is correct that there were two legally proven murders in the period covered with which I was unfamiliar: the murder of Penowyanquis in 1638 and the young child killed by her mother in 1648, though only the latter is a white-on-white homicide. I regret having failed to examine volume three of this series, and the sentence in question has been corrected to read: “Only one murder is mentioned in the records of New Haven colony, while in forty-six years, 1636 through 1681, Plymouth colony’s courts returned one white on white homicide conviction, an infanticide.”

### 3 Homicides in Colonial North Carolina

“[Bellesiles] states that there were 43 criminal actions for murder in North Carolina, 1663–1740, but his source, Donna Spindel, notes that her data is incomplete, because of long, irregular gaps in the colony’s court records, and because ‘dramatic dips’ occurred in the number of criminal prosecutions during periods of ‘political turmoil.’”

This critique does not flaw the cited statement from *Arming America*, which reads:

There were 559 criminal actions in North Carolina between 1663 and 1740, 43 of which (7.7 percent) were murders, an average of one homicide every two years. (p. 82)

Rather, it is here maintained that the flaws in the sources negate the statement.

Every historian understands that we are limited by our sources. Any statement based on a source document or upon the research of others carries with it the implicit qualification “insofar as we are able to know given the limitations of the sources cited.” Even though it is a given of historical research, I note in several places in *Arming America* that all data is problematic. I assumed that most readers would grow weary of the reiteration of this obvious point; certainly scholars work on the understanding that it is not necessary to offer a close examination of every source used.

One may argue, however, that the average reader is unaware of these limitations and needs to be reminded regularly. A few critics, including the one quoted above, have maintained that it is preferable to stop and consider precisely the flaws and limitations of every piece of evidence employed. To take this single paragraph on page 82 of *Arming America* that considers white-on-white violence, the following sources were used to arrive at the nine pieces of discreet information:

J. M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660–1800* (Princeton, NJ, 1986);

Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639–1789* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995);

Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750–1900* (London, 1996);

- Charles J. Hoadly, ed., *Records of the Colony and Plantation of New-Haven, from 1638 to 1649* (Hartford, CT, 1857);  
 Hugh F. Rankin, *Criminal Trial Proceedings in the General Court of Colonial Virginia* (Williamsburg, VA, 1965);  
 D. Rumbelow, *I Spy Blue: The Police and Crime in the City of London from Elizabeth I to Victoria* (London, 1971);  
 Arthur P. Scott, *Criminal Law in Colonial Virginia* (Chicago, 1930);  
 J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550–1750* (London, 1984);  
 Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, 10 vols. (Boston, 1855–1861);  
 Donna J. Spindel and Stuart W. Thomas, Jr., “Crime and Society in North Carolina, 1663–1740,” in Eric H. Monkkonen, ed., *Crime and Justice in American History: The Colonies and Early Republic*, 2 vols. (Westport, CT., 1991) 2: 699–720.

In addition, my footnotes to this paragraph refer to contrary interpretations by Joyce Lee Malcolm [*To Keep and Bear Arms: The Origins of an Anglo-American Right* (Cambridge, MA, 1994)] and Carl Bridenbaugh [*Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625–1742* (New York, 1955)].

To provide a proper evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each of these sources would have required, I calculate, an additional eight to ten paragraphs. Is it necessary to recapitulate the precise aspects of a source when the author being cited has already done so? Such an approach to scholarship would have the advantage of absolute clarity while walking the reader carefully through the material. It is unlikely that such a technique could possibly work in any book seeking to make use of more than a few sources. Perhaps a disclaimer should appear on the bottom of each page, “Warning: all historical data suffer from some limitations.”

Incidentally, the critic quoted above is incorrect in writing that I cite Spindel, *Crime and Society in North Carolina*.<sup>23</sup> Rather, the footnote in *Arming America* cites the article Spindel wrote with Stuart W. Thomas, Jr., “Crime and Society in North Carolina, 1663–1740.” I should have cited Spindel, *Crime and Society*, for that is where she discusses the limitations of her records. As Professor Spindel writes, “This material represents virtually the only documentary evidence from the colony’s early history.”<sup>24</sup> There is no such thing as a perfect source. Every form of evidence reflects some process of subjective selection or accidental survival. Archives sadly do not contain everything from the past, and even they occasionally lose documents through fires, floods, and other forms of mishap. And, as is well known, documents now much admired by scholars, such as the letters of workers, women, and members of minority groups, were once thought to be so much ephemera. Nonetheless, historians do the best they can within the limitations imposed by the nature of the evidence. In the absence of alternatives, historians can draw upon these flawed sources or remain silent.

#### 4 According to the Sources Cited

“[H]is numbers often directly contradict one another.”

This complaint, along with one that I use the “wrong” numbers or “incorrect” interpretations of events, appears often in the critiques of *Arming America*. Several critics charge an

attempt to mislead the reader if not commit fraud by citing many different statistics that do not always agree—for instance both the censuses of 1850 and 1860 (pp.384–85) and the Secretary of the Treasury’s surveys of manufacturers in 1833 and 1858 (pp.386–86). These surveys did come up with different statistics; but then they were conducted by different methods in different years. Generally critics have demanded to know which figures are correct, not conceding that it is possible that I am not attempting to state categorically that any of them are completely accurate. In fact I state the contrary on several occasions, writing that all these numbers should be taken as tentative. Nonetheless, the numbers are those reported in the cited sources.

## 5 Failure to Appreciate Anecdotal Evidence

“Bellesiles must be wrong, as my parents, who lived in Montana, owned several guns, and all of our neighbors owned guns.”

Many critics complain about the failure of *Arming America* to match the writer’s personal experiences. The anecdotal is generally a family story or heirloom that falls well outside the period covered in this book. Thus the criticism above is no doubt correct; but *Arming America* ends in 1877. Another critic wrote, “I am sitting on the front porch of the plantation house that has been in my family since the 1740s.” This writer then insists that *everything* in *Arming America* must be false since he still owns an old gun that one of his ancestors used in the Civil War. He concludes, “Need I add that my family estate is on the National Registry of Historic Houses.” No, no need at all. My research indicates that his was exactly the sort of family that was most likely to own a gun, in fact, many guns: rich slave-owners. One writer in a business paper denied the research in *Arming America* because every character in the computer game “Oregon Trail” can access a gun. Anecdotal evidence like this is difficult to interpret, though very valuable for those scholars attempting to get at the construction of images of the past.

## 6 Attitude toward “the South”

“[H]e hates Southerners, making the Southern militia into a lynch mob and Southern men into vicious killers.”

Several commentators find *Arming America* biased against an entire region of the United States. The review above, as well as several others, paraphrase a sentence on page 356 of *Arming America*: “This was the southern white male’s preferred mode of violence, beating an unarmed opponent.” This sentence is within the context of Preston Brooks’ caning of Senator Charles Sumner in 1856. The next sentence after the quote reads, “After all, it was how they treated their slaves.” It is possible to read this and other passages as demonstrating an unfavorable attitude toward Southern white male slave-owners, but it is also important to note that those slaves were Southerners as well.

There is room for an interesting historical discussion here, which *Arming America* does attempt to address. How do we measure and evaluate violence in the antebellum South? There are those, including many of my critics, who emphasize violence among Southern men, with special attention to the duel, while downplaying violence against slaves. *Arming America*

suggests the opposite, that prior to the 1850s whites rarely attacked other whites physically (and almost never with firearms), especially when compared with white violence against African Americans. The insistence of many modern white Southerners that there is something glorious in the militaristic spirit and manly violence of Southern whites as demonstrated in dueling and the “Lost Cause,” while insisting that violence against slaves is grossly exaggerated, poses an intriguing issue worthy of analysis.<sup>25</sup> I may be wrong about the level of white-on-white violence, but much more research is required before we can be certain. I do not think I am incorrect regarding the high levels of violence against slaves and cite a number of recent studies to support that reading of the past.

## 7 The Duke of Cumberland

“He says, for example, that the Duke of Cumberland’s imperial ambitions drew Britain’s American colonies into the Seven Years’ War. . . . [J]ust the opposite was true.”

Nowhere do I write that “Cumberland’s imperial ambitions drew Britain’s American colonies into the Seven Years’ War.” The summary statement on page 143 of *Arming America* says:

This great and bloody victory also elevated “Butcher” Cumberland to a position of great authority within the British government; and he used his authority to encourage a more militaristic imperial expansion that would produce the Seven Years’ War and lead to his own downfall.

I believe that the literature on the period upholds the perspective that Cumberland attained great power within the government after Culloden and promoted militarist policies that brought on the Seven Years’ War and ultimately led to his own political demise.

Curiously, the critic quoted above cites Fred Anderson’s *Crucible of War* to support the contention that “just the opposite was true.” *Arming America* draws upon Anderson’s outstanding book, among others, in constructing the historic context of chapter 5. Anderson finds that Cumberland selected Braddock for command in North America and set the aggressive policy he was to pursue, while the duke of Newcastle blamed the duke of Cumberland for the disasters that ensued. Cumberland, as Anderson writes, was “notable for favoring military action over diplomacy.” By the age of twenty-six, Cumberland “was already captain-general of the British army and the most powerful military figure in Britain. By 1754 he had grown to truly formidable dimensions in both girth and political influence.” “Allowing him too great an influence in formulating a response to the French victory on the Ohio [Ft. Duquesne], Newcastle knew, might be the greatest threat of all to peace.”<sup>26</sup> Yet that is exactly what happened, for Newcastle could not halt Cumberland’s rise. It was Cumberland who bore responsibility for the plans that would bring on the war with France. Braddock, who “had been the duke of Cumberland’s choice to assume the supreme command in North America,” “considered himself bound to proceed according to the instructions he received from Cumberland’s hand.” Anderson adds, “American military initiatives . . . originated with Cumberland.”<sup>27</sup> Cumberland’s father, King George II, also blamed Cumberland for bringing on the war.<sup>28</sup> In

brief, contemporaries seem to agree with my formation, as does Professor Anderson. But again, alternative interpretations are legitimate and welcome.

## 8 “Defeating” the Indians in the 1760s

Bellesiles argues “that the British had less trouble conquering Canada than defeating the Indians of South Carolina and the Old Northwest, . . . the opposite was true.”

I am not sure how the opposite could be true, when the British did *not* defeat the Indians of South Carolina and the Old Northwest. Rather, the point of this section of chapter 5 is that the British declared themselves victorious without having defeated the Indians. Instead they signed treaties acknowledging Indian rights to their lands and established the Proclamation Line to keep white settlers out of Indian territories so as to avoid further wars. The Indians did suffer grievously, especially from the burning of their towns and fields by British troops, but they held out until the British recognized their rights. The critic quoted above also turns to Fred Anderson for validation, yet no where does Professor Anderson write that the British defeated the Cherokee or broke Pontiac’s Rebellion. Here is Anderson’s summary:

Even if the rebel [Indian] leaders had not been able to awaken and restore their French father, they could scarcely have failed to note that at the end of the war the British repealed every policy to which the Indians had objected. With the treaties of peace, diplomatic gift-giving resumed; limitations on the trade in powder, shot, and arms ended; the trade in alcohol opened once again. The Indians had forcibly instructed the newcomers in what residence in the *pays d’en haut* required of them.<sup>29</sup>

## 9 Cowpens

“Bellesiles appears to show a strong bias against the militia concept in his description of the Revolutionary War battle of Cowpens.”

This author does not question my sources, but rather insists that I disagree with some web sites. As Professor Joan Gunderson responded to this particular statement:

Historians do differ on the degree of orderliness in the militia’s retirement from the field at Cowpens, but that is typical of historical interpretation. We don’t all read the same evidence in the same way.

Professor Richard Bernstein added what should be obvious to any student of history:

People can read historical evidence differently and draw different conclusions from that evidence.<sup>30</sup>

Repeatedly, critics of *Arming America* find it difficult to accept that people can disagree on how to interpret a specific historic event or body of evidence. And yet, without such a willingness to disagree, history would quickly become dormant, as lifeless as any tyranny’s official story.

## 10 The Anti-Federalists

“The anti-federalists wanted every man to bear arms.”

I could not disagree more. I think that there is very persuasive evidence, some of which I supply in the pages of *Arming America*, that the anti-federalists did indeed join in granting state governments authority to limit membership in the militia. They also supported the disarming of radicals when they saw social order threatened, and I provide some examples. This position is, I believe, supported by a number of scholars, such as Jack Rakove, Saul Cornell, and Don Higginbotham.<sup>31</sup> I think it is entirely incorrect that the anti-federalists wanted “Every Man Armed.” I know of no evidence to that effect, and given the fear of slave rebellion and Indian “uprisings” among many of the anti-federalists, I am puzzled by such an assertion. Nonetheless, I think it an error to treat the anti-federalists—or the federalists for that matter—as a single voice; there was no consensus. But most importantly in this context, this is a disagreement not an error, and I maintain that there is a fundamental difference between the two.

## 11 Union Guns

“It is not true that ‘the number and quality of Union firearms determined the outcome of the [Civil] War’<sup>32</sup> . . . most historians would insist on a more comprehensive explanation.”

I agree entirely. *Arming America* does not argue that the greater productive capacity of the North alone explains the outcome, but rather proposes that we should pay more attention to “the number and quality of Union firearms” in our examinations of the war. This single sentence is part of a larger and perhaps new perspective on the Civil War. But rather than dismissing new ideas out of hand as just plain wrong, is it not better to engage with the particulars and test them against the historic record?

## 12. Axes

“He misquotes Frederick Gerstaecker, who did not say that axes were good weapons.”

The quotation is correct, but my paraphrase is not. The passage on page 313 reads:

Gerstaecker felt their [the frontier settlers’] most notable skills were those related to farming. He noted that they were very “expert” at the use of axes, “which they begin to wield as soon as their arms are strong enough to use them,” adding that axes make very good weapons.

Gerstaecker did not literally “add” that axes were good weapons, the correct choice of words should have been, and will be, “finding.” Gerstaecker discovered the utility of axes during his hunts in America, the very next paragraph in *Arming America* gives one such example (citing Gerstaecker pp. 266–67). Gerstaecker also used an axe to dispatch a wolf. This criticism implies but does not state that my portrayal of an axe as a useful weapon is inaccurate.

*Arming America* cites a leading gun expert on the utility of the axe as a weapon, and I recommend the book to those interested in this issue: Carl P. Russell, *Firearms, Traps, & Tools of the Mountain Men* (New York, 1967), 232–311.

### 13 Ole Rynning

“Another misquote comes with Ole Rynning’s account, which stated that guns should be brought west for self-defense, a point [Bellesiles’] ignores.”

I believe that my use of this quotation is correct, especially as Ole Rynning does not state, as the criticism implies, that a gun was in any way necessary for self-protection, nor does he provide any examples to that effect. Rynning does, however, talk elsewhere about the usefulness of having European goods for exchange which is the point of this paragraph.<sup>33</sup> However, I grant that the clause in question, “partly for personal use,” should be inserted for greater clarity, and that change has been made in the second edition of *Arming America*.

My larger argument in this section is that most travelers never witnessed the tales of violence they heard. Rynning makes no reference to violence, and found the American “easier to get along with than the Norwegian, more accommodating, more obliging, more reliable in all things. . . . Since it is so easy to support oneself honorably, thieving and burglary are almost unknown,” though he does make an exception for “the infamous *slave traffic*.”<sup>34</sup> Rynning, like so many travelers, found violence focused on the slaves, and even predicted civil war over the issue. Also like many other travelers, Rynning was struck with the emphasis Americans who lived outside the South placed on education: “he spares nothing in the instruction and education of his children.”<sup>35</sup> He even adds that there is nothing to fear from the Indians; “these people are very good-natured, and never begin hostilities when they are not affronted.”<sup>36</sup> Like so many other visitors, Rynning thought America was all about work and prosperity.



## Conclusion

“Yet I admit that here, as is so often the case, there is always reason to still be in doubt.”

—Leopold von Ranke<sup>1</sup>

Most historians insist that evidence may be compelling without being certain. It seems that I failed to make apparent the complexity and tentativeness of my historical inquiry. *Arming America* came across to some people as making claims for a definitiveness that would be alien to any work of history, especially one that acknowledges that it is a preliminary exploration of a new field. Albert Camus saw the essence of human frustration in the contradiction between the desire for certainty and the irrational nature of the world.<sup>2</sup> There are those who rest their very identity on the notion of a certain, unchanging past. The vision that society is unalterable is not just incorrect, it is dangerously undemocratic, and as such should be of concern to every modern historian.

Leon Goldstein sees history consisting of a superstructure, “that part of the historical enterprise which is visible to non-historian consumers of what historians produce,” and an infrastructure, “that range of intellectual activities whereby the historical past is constituted in historical research.”<sup>3</sup> History is often perceived as little more than a chronicle, the plain recording of a sequence of facts, each total and complete unto itself. Such a perspective fosters the notion that historians devote themselves solely to acquiring facts and reporting them. In the case of *Arming America*, the manuscript came in at over one thousand pages, requiring the elimination of great amounts of material, entire careful accounts and considerations of the details of firearm technology and numerous other issues. As a result, many criticisms focus on exactly what has been cut, as though a failure to devote thirty pages to the distinctive styles of musketry in the eighteenth century negates the entire work. Obviously there is much more to be said on this subject and no book can hope to say it all—every writer on every subject must make hard decisions on what to include and what to cut. But that fact does not mean that every book written is an artifice for failing to cover every detail of a subject.

Perhaps we should make a better effort at sharing with a wider public the workings and advantages of historical analysis. Those new to historical writing often assume that each footnote leads the reader to a repetition of the wording that is in the chronicle. Yet footnotes generally refer to the precise evidence being discussed; much of that discussion is often based on an appreciation for what lies in the total context of the archives, the provenance of the document under consideration, the biographical details of the author or authors of that document,

and, hopefully, an informed analysis of its larger meaning. Or as Ranke said, footnotes are not enough, we must ask the right questions.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the criticisms of *Arming America* seem to focus on the American Revolutionary period. Very little has been said about the seventeenth or nineteenth centuries, roughly three-fourths of the book. For instance, I know of only one criticism of my handling of the War of 1812, none of the Mexican War and Civil War. There are whole areas of inquiry that have not been subject to criticism, though I know from the various e-mail lists that nearly every footnote in *Arming America* has been checked for accuracy. Almost nothing has been said about my portrayal of the attitudes of the political leadership, or the technological development of firearms, or government efforts to promote gun production and use, or the collapse of the militia in the nineteenth century, or the growth and nature of the hunting subculture and the revival of the militia in the mid-nineteenth century. Nor do I know of any criticisms of my examination of law and politics in the colonial period or the nineteenth century, or of the nature of crowd actions at any time. It is intriguing that most of the accusations against this book are concerned with probate records and the period immediately preceding the articulation of the Second Amendment.

*Arming America* rests on many pillars. It was my intention to offer as many different approaches to the subject as possible, to provide the reader with several different ways of approaching the book's argument. Perhaps I erred in making it too complex in this regard, and some critics have suggested that it would have been far better had I abbreviated much of the first half of the book and focused just on the last fifty years of the story.<sup>5</sup> My reasoning was that this book approached what I felt to be a previously undeveloped area of history and that it was therefore my responsibility to open up the subject for further research as much as possible. There are errors in *Arming America*, as in every book. Every effort has been made to correct flaws in this book, and a great deal of time has been devoted to discovering that many charges of error are incorrect. The honest scholar realizes the probability of mistake and remains open to further correction and suggestion. Ultimately history is not a science, but the product of fallible humans (and even some physicists hold that science is not a science, but also the product of subjective human actions and understandings). If we insist that all mistakes and errors of judgment are indicators of fraud, we would very soon cease publishing.

My former colleague Deborah Lipstadt not only wrote on the ability of dedicated ideologues to manipulate popular misperceptions about history, but also had a closer encounter with that attitude than she appreciated. Her book *Denying the Holocaust* is an important study of the ability of Holocaust deniers to weave a sequence of lies, half truths, careful misquoting, and subtle language into a denial of one of the most carefully documented acts of evil in history. For the Holocaust deniers, disagreements among scholars over the precise number of Jews killed serves as evidence that historians are making it all up. Negative evidence is key to the deniers' case, as they label the Holocaust "impossible," requiring organizational skills beyond German capacities, and it was "impossible" to air out the chambers between poisonings. When David Irving sued Deborah Lipstadt for libel (because she would not sue him), it became necessary to prove that the Holocaust was possible and had occurred.<sup>6</sup> Dozens of historians were put to work recreating years of scholarship to prove that the Nazis did what they say they did. Along the way the press often got it wrong, framing Irving's lawsuit as "the

Holocaust Trial,” proclaiming that the validity of the Holocaust was on trial. It was not; Irving’s lies were on trial. The case record makes that clear. Many reporters actually reversed the case, seeing Irving as the defendant.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most intriguing aspects of this whole affair was the need for historians to demonstrate that when they disagree it is not because the event did not exist. It was necessary to show that history is not “just the facts,” and that those facts are well known. Similarly, just because the findings of one scholar disagree with those of another does not mean that either is “wrong,” it just indicates that they looked at different sets of information and that now the task is to figure out the meaning of the comparison. Because two historians read the same source document differently does not indicate that either is attempting to falsify the records; it means that they are doing their job and attempting to decipher the “foreign land” of the past. Read any ten books on the American Revolution and you will find ten distinctive views of that event. If that were not the case, then Mercy Otis Warren would have had the last word on the subject and there would be far fewer books.

In Isaiah Berlin’s recently published notebooks the following passage occurs and seems a fitting conclusion to this discussion:

Few things have done more harm than the belief on the part of individuals or groups. . . . that he or she or they are in sole possession of the truth: Especially about how to live, what to be & do—& that those who differ from them are not merely mistaken, but wicked or mad: & need restraining or suppressing. It is a terrible and dangerous arrogance to believe that you alone are right: have a magical eye which sees the truth: & that others cannot be right if they disagree.<sup>8</sup>



## Notes

### Chapter 1: Context

1 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1911 edition, s.v. Giordano Bruno, [www.1911encyclopedia.org](http://www.1911encyclopedia.org) (accessed September 24, 2003).

2 David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 400–401.

3 Philip Nobile, ed., *Judgment at the Smithsonian* (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1995), xxiv–xxvi.

4 Adams County Courthouse, West Union, Ohio; American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts; Arlington Library, Arlington, Vermont; Baldwin County Courthouse, Milledgeville, Georgia; Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; Bennington County Court House, Vermont; Bennington Historical Museum, Vermont; Bodleian Library, Oxford; Boydton Courthouse, Virginia; British Museum Library, London; California History Center, Martinez; Caroliniana Collection, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Charlotte Courthouse, Virginia; Chatham County Courthouse, Savannah, Georgia; Chicago Historical Society; Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia; Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford; Connecticut State Library, Hartford; Contra Costa County Courthouse, Martinez, California; Delaware Public Archives, Dover; Special Collections, Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta; Essex County Court, Salem, Massachusetts; Georgia State Archive, Atlanta; Gloucester County Clerk's Office, Chelsea, Vermont; Greene County Records Center and Archives, Xenia, Ohio; Halifax Courthouse, Virginia; Hampshire County Court, Northampton, Massachusetts; Historic Deerfield, Massachusetts; Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh; Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka; Keene Public Library, New Hampshire; Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles Superior Court; Luzerne County Court, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; Manchester Town Clerk's Office, Vermont; Maine Historical Society, Portland; Maine State Archives, Augusta; Maryland State Archives, Annapolis; Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Massachusetts State Library, Boston; National Archives, Washington, D.C.; National Archives, East Point, Georgia; National Guard Armory, Natick, Massachusetts; New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston; New Jersey State Archives, Trenton; New-York Historical Society, New York City; New York Public Library, New York City; North Carolina Division of Archives and History, Raleigh; Northampton County Court, Easton, Pennsylvania; Ohio Historical Society, Columbus; Old Jail, Newfane, Vermont; Olin Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; Philadelphia County Court; Plymouth County Court, Massachusetts; Public Record Office, Kew, England; Rutland County Courthouse, Vermont; San Francisco County Courthouse; South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia; Suffolk County Registry of Probate, County Court, Boston; University of Virginia, Charlottesville; University of Washington, Seattle; USMA Library, West Point, New York; Vermont State Archives, Montpelier; Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier; Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; Virginia State Library, Richmond; Washington County Court, Pennsylvania; Westmoreland County Court, Greensburg, Pennsylvania; Windham County Clerk's office, Brattleboro, Vermont; Windsor County Clerk's Office, Woodstock, Vermont; Worcester County Court, Massachusetts; Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut; Yonge Library, Gainesville, Florida.

5 Carl T. Bogus, "Shootout," *Texas Law Review* 79 (2001): 1642.

### Chapter 2: Probate Records

1 Robert Spitzer, letter to the editor of the *Wall Street Journal*.

2 On the utility of probate records, see Mark Overton, "Computer Analysis of an Inconsistent Data Source: The Case of Probate Inventories," *Journal of Historical Geography* 3 (1977): 317–26; Carole Shamas, "Constructing a Wealth Distribution from Probate Records," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 9 (1978): 297–307; Alice Hanson Jones, "Estimating Wealth of the Living from a Probate Sample," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 13 (1982): 272–300; Peter Benes, ed., *Early American Probate Inventories*, The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife: Annual Proceedings, 1987 (Boston, 1989); Holly V. Izard, "Random or Systematic? An Evaluation of the Probate Process," *Winterthur Portfolio* 32 (1997): 147–67.

## Notes for pages 6–23

3 www.bellesiles.com.

4 *Emory Report* (May 8, 2000) Volume 52, No. 32.

5 Two of the historical societies I have visited have also suffered from serious flooding caused by plumbing errors: the Chicago Historical Society in 1986 and the Maine Historical Society in 2001. I have also heard that the Milwaukee Historical Society suffered a flood a few years back.

6 Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639–1789* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995).

7 Gloria L. Main, *Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland, 1650–1720* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 245.

8 Margaret B. Schiffer, *Chester County, Pennsylvania Inventories, 1684–1850* (Exton, PA: Schiffer Pub., 1934).

9 A critic on a radio show, citing the published work of Alice Hanson Jones, accused me of “lying” when I stated that many probate files, particularly in the North, included additional documents. But as Alice Hanson Jones wrote, “A number of other probate documents of tangential interest to an estimation of wealth are sometimes encountered, especially in the New England and Pennsylvania county courthouses, where all papers for one estate are gathered in one file.” Alice Hanson Jones, *Wealth of a Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 7.

### Chapter 3: Specific Challenges: Accurate

1 Quoted in Jon Weiner, *Professors, Politics, and Pop* (London: Verso, 1991), 64.

2 *U.S. Statutes* 1: 271–72.

3 See also *Debates and Proceedings in the Congress* 3: 1392–95; *U.S. Statutes* 2: 207, passed March 2, 1803.

4 Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Beginnings of the Military Establishment in America* (New York: Free Press, 1975).

### Chapter 4: Perceived Errors

1 Quoted, Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (London: Faber, 1997), 195.

2 See Isaac N. Arnold, *The Life of Benedict Arnold: His Patriotism and His Treason* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg & Co., 1880), 35–36.

3 James Kirby Martin, *Benedict Arnold: Revolutionary Hero* (New York: New York University Press, 1997) 62–63, 453.

4 Washington to Robert Dinwiddie, 27 June 1757, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799*, 39 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931–1944) 2: 78–79.

5 Including in the footnote accompanying Washington’s letter to Governor Dinwiddie, quoted above, which refers the reader to a lengthy “Memorandums Concerning the Militia,” *ibid.*, 1: 344–53. Washington’s condemnation of the militia was not as strong as that of General James Wolfe, who called them “the dirtiest most contemptible cowardly dogs that you can conceive. There is no dependence on them in action. They fall down dead in their own dirt and desert by battalions, officers and all.” Wolfe to Lord George Sackville, August 7, 1758, Beckles Wilson, ed., *The Life and Letters of James Wolfe* (London: W. Heinemann, 1909), 392.

6 For instance, to take a single volume from his letters, see *ibid.* 20: 67, 13, 2930, 49–50, 204–208, 260, 457–59, 495–96.

7 Washington, “Circular to the states,” 18 October 1780, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 20: 209.

8 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 101, 266. For some reason the first passage is often cited in critical responses to *Arm-ing America* as being on page 95.

9 It is also worth noting that, as the editor writes, the original of notebooks E and F (this is E) are lost, while “the transcriptions of these texts are occasionally faulty as Tocqueville’s handwriting presented, particularly in his American travel diaries, considerable difficulties.” Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, 234n.

10 *Ibid.*, 241–80.

11 George Wilson Pierson, *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), 180n.

12 Alexis C. H. C. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve and Francis Bowen, ed. Phillips Bradley (2 vols.; New York: Knopf, 1963) 2: 267.

13 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).

14 John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina: Containing the Exact Description of that Country* (London: John Lawson, 1709), 13.

15 Michael A. Bellesiles, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 14.

16 William H. Browne, et al., eds., *Archives of Maryland*, 72 vols ( Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1883–1972) 61: 363–64.

17 Harold E. Selesky, *War and Society in Colonial Connecticut* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

18 These are both paraphrases of a very common statement about *Arming America* made by both critics and admirers of the book. The numbers offered vary widely.

19 “Diary of a Scot,” *Collections of the New-York Historical Society* (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1809) 1: 147–50, 339–41.

20 Steven Watts, *War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790–1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 2.

21 John Melish, *Travels in the United States of America, in the years 1806 & 1807, and 1809, 1810, & 1811*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: published for the author, 1812) 2: 150. Emphasis in original.

22 *Ibid.*, 1: 31.

23 *Ibid.*, 1: 267.

24 *Ibid.*, 2: 60.

25 *Ibid.*, 1: 148.

26 Since some polemicists have denied that anyone has ever made this accusation, it is worth noting that it appeared often in the early months of the attacks on *Arming America* in letters to the editor, call in radio shows, several web-sites, and the February 2001 *Playboy*, as well as repeatedly in email and hostile phone messages.

27 Bellesiles, *Arming America*, 202–203.

28 Michael Bellesiles, *Revolutionary Outlaws: Ethan Allen and the Struggle for Independence on the Early American Frontier* (University Press of Virginia, 1993).

29 Jefferson to Giovanni Fabbroni, 8 June 1778, Julian P. Boyd, et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 27 vols. to date (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950–1997) 2: 195, 198n.

30 Jack N. Rakove criticized the book for not devoting more space to the Second Amendment. Rakove, “Words, Deeds, and Guns: *Arming America* and the Second Amendment,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (2002): 205–210; as did Carl Bogus, “Shootout.” I agree with their criticism.

31 Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Official Letter Books of W. C. C. Claiborne, 1801–1816*, 6 vols. (Jackson, MS: State department of archives and history, 1917).

32 The endnote also cites *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 1: 162.

33 The endnote adds, “see also Rowland, ed., *Official Letter Books of Claiborne* 4: 73, 111, 302, 5: 189, 194–95, 216, 259–60, 6: 165–67, 174–75, 225–26.”

34 One critic charged that *Arming America* misquoted this passage, and that it should read instead “Cavalry are the Troops best fitted to the Climate of Louisiana.” This error is understandable as on the very next page is a letter from Claiborne to James Brown dated the same date (22 July 1813) that is nearly identical to the letter I quote. “By a communication from the Secretary at War of the same date as your, I am advised that two thousand stand of Arms will be deposited with the Deputy Quarter Master General at Pittsburg, subject to my order. These Arms will be a great acquisition to the State, & I regret that their transportation hither from the approaching low State of the Waters will necessarily be attended with so much delay.—I wish sincerely you could prevail upon the Secretary at War, to supply the State, with 150 Sabres;—Cavalry are the Troops best fitted to the Climate of Louisiana; and in many parts of the State, could act with the greatest advantage.” *Official Letter Books* 6: 244. Nonetheless, my citation and quotation are both accurate.

35 Charles Patrick Neimeyer, *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), xiii.

36 See for example Don Higginbotham, “The American Militia: A Traditional Institution with Revolutionary Responsibilities,” in Higginbotham, ed., *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 83–103; Higginbotham, *War and Society in Revolutionary America*:

*The Wider Dimensions of Conflict* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Lawrence Delbert Cress, *Citizens in Arms: The Army and the Militia in American Society to the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

37 David H. Fischer offers a useful insight to the working of this mythology in his historiography essay at the end of *Paul Revere's Ride* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 327–44.

38 Alexander Graydon, *Memoirs of His Own Time* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1846), 133–36.

39 E. Wayne Carp, “To Starve the Army at Pleasure”: *Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

40 Hezekiah Niles, ed., *Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America* (Philadelphia: W. O. Niles, 1876), 464–66.

41 Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 5 vols. (Boston: W. White, 1853–1861) 1: 25–26.

42 *Ibid.*, 1: 125. This quotation appears in *Arming America*, 470n84.

43 Don Higginbotham, “The Military Institutions of Colonial America: The Rhetoric and the Reality,” in *War and Society in Revolutionary America*, 25.

44 Jack S. Radebaugh, “The Militia of Colonial Massachusetts,” *Military Affairs* 43 (1954): 1–18.

#### Chapter 5: Matters of Interpretation

1 Grafton, *The Footnote*, 233.

2 Arthur P. Scott, *Criminal Law in Colonial Virginia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 319.

3 Peter C. Hoffer and William B. Scott, eds., *Criminal Proceedings in Colonial Virginia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984), xli, lxviii, lxix.

4 Scott, *Criminal Law in Colonial Virginia*, 314.

5 Elaine Forman Crane, *Killed Strangely: The Death of Rebecca Cornell* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 4.

6 Unfortunately, there are two versions of the same records: Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, 10 vols. (Boston: W. White, 1855–1861); and Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, and David Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth in New England*, 12 vols. (Boston: W. White, 1855–1861). The title pages of these two editions are identical, except for some of the individual volume titles. Yet the two sets are arranged and indexed differently, with the twelve-volume set containing more information. Since William White, Printer to the Commonwealth, published both sets, the only way to distinguish the two editions is by the number of volumes. The citations that follow are all from the twelve volume edition.

7 Shurtleff, and Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth* 1: 96–97. Four white men were convicted and hanged for killing Penowyanquis.

8 *Ibid.*, 2: 132–34.

9 *Ibid.*, 2: 170–71.

10 *Ibid.*, 3: 70–73, 143. The first is a 1654 inquest that reports on the death of Henery Draiton, who “died, for ought wee could discern, through the violence of the season.” The next concerns an inquest into the death of John Walker, an indentured servant forced to work while ill in severe cold, for which Robert Latham was found “guilty of manslaughter by chaunc medley.” Chance medley was defined by Thomas Blount in *A Law Dictionary* (London, 1670), no page numbers, as “the casual slaughter of a Man, not altogether without the fault of the slayer, . . . when the Killers ignorance or negligence is joyned with the Chance.” In short, this was a partly accidental death that could have been avoided.

11 *Ibid.*, 3: 205. A charge against John Hawes for contributing to the death of Joseph Rogers “by giving him a most deadly fall.” Homicide was not suggested and Rogers was subsequently found “not guilty” of any crime.

12 *Ibid.*, 3: 202–203, 217–18.

13 *Ibid.*, 5: 264–45 concerns an 1678 investigation into the death of James Pequin.

14 *Ibid.*, 5: 141.

15 *Ibid.*, 5: 159, 167–68.



16 Bellesiles, *Arming America*, 116–21; Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 21–47.

17 *Ibid.*, 5: 209. There is no hint of foul play.

18 Shurtleff and Pulsifer, eds., *Records of the Colony of New Plymouth*, 5: 204–206. Four Indians were convicted for killing Sarah Clarke. One, John Num, admits to killing other whites, and is “accordingly immediately executed,” as was Keweenam. The other trial reaches the conclusion that one of the three Indians under investigation is innocent, and the rest “are very suspicious.” The jury orders that all three “be sent out of the country speedily,” which is justified as they are prisoners “taken in warr.” *Ibid.*, 5: 224.

19 *Ibid.*, 6: 82, 113, 141–42. The first document is a 1682 trial of Indian James for contributing to the death of William Crocker by kicking him in the stomach. He was found not guilty. This trial was neither a homicide nor within the period I examined. It is followed by a 1683 investigation into a child born dead, also outside the period under consideration. The court dismissed the case, though the mother, Betty, was found guilty of fornication. This may be the same Betty found guilty of killing her husband “by misadventure” in 1685 when she admitted to “throwing a stone att a bottle of liquore and missing the bottle, shee hitt the said Indian, her husband, on the side of his head, whereof hee died.” *Ibid.*, 6: 153–54. Again, this is beyond the period examined in *Arming America*.

20 *Ibid.*, 7: 305–307. This is a murder charge, but comes in 1690, nine years after the end of the period examined.

21 *Ibid.*, 8: 57.

22 *Ibid.*, 6: 141–42.

23 Donna J. Spindel, *Crime and Society in North Carolina, 1663–1776* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

24 *Ibid.*, x.

25 The only book I know that attempts to treat this topic is Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

26 Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 67–69.

27 *Ibid.*, 86, 90, 125.

28 *Ibid.*, 212.

29 *Ibid.*, 633–34.

30 Quotations from the h-oieach e-mail list, April 2002.

31 Jack N. Rakove, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution* (New York: Knopf, 1997); Saul Cornell, “Commonplace or Anachronism: The Standard Model, the Second Amendment, and the Problem of History in Contemporary Constitutional Theory,” *Constitutional Commentary* 16 (1999): 221–46; Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788–1828* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Don Higginbotham, “The Federalized Militia Debate: A Neglected Aspect of Second Amendment Scholarship,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 55 (1998): 39–58; and “The Second Amendment in Historical Context,” *Constitutional Commentary* 16 (1999): 263–68.

32 Quoting *Arming America*, 427.

33 Ole Rynning, *Ole Rynning's True Account of America*, translated and edited by Theodore C. Blegen (Minneapolis, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1926; orig., 1838), 91–92.

34 *Ibid.*, 87–88.

35 *Ibid.*, 89.

36 *Ibid.*, 91.

## Conclusion

1 “Doch becheide ich mich, dass hier, wie oft in ähnlichen Fällen, immer noch gewisse Zweifel möglich bleiben.” Leopold von Ranke, *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Munich: Paul Joachimsen, 1925–26) 3: 442n. My thanks to my Augsburg colleague Johannes Burkhardt for showing me this passage.

2 I believe I got this notion from Oliver Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

3 Leon Goldstein, *Historical Knowing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 140–43.

4 See Grafton, *The Footnote*, 34–61.

5 Gerard DeGroot wrote, “we don’t really need quite so many examples to prove each point.” “Up in Arms for 225 Years,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 7, 2000, 19. Dan Baum thought that “for the lay

**Notes for pages 58–END**

reader, a hundred pages of myth-debunking probably would have accomplished the same purpose as three times that many.” “Targeting America’s Gun Culture,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 3, 2000.

6 See Robert Jan van Pelt, *The Case for Auschwitz: Evidence from the Irving Trial* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002).

7 Richard J. Evans, *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

8 Isaiah Berlin, “Notes on Prejudice,” *The New York Review*, October 18, 2001, 12. See also Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).