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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Angela Frye Keaton entitled, "Unholstered and Unquestioned: The Rise of Post-World War II American Gun Cultures." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.

Janis Appier, Major Professor

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UNHOLSTERED AND UNQUESTIONED: THE RISE OF POST-WORLD WAR II AMERICAN GUN CULTURES

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Angela Frye Keaton
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DEDICATION

For Kevin

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the historical roots of America's contemporary fascination with firearms. America's gun cultures reached new heights in the era after World War II due to a renewed focus on the family and national heritage and a growing preoccupation with defending traditional gender roles. In addition, the research reveals that America does not have a monolithic gun culture. Instead, multiple subcultures that flourished in the Cold War era, including one stemming from childhood play, one among recreational gunners and sport hunters, and one that flourished as a result of civil and military defense efforts. The dissertation begins in 1945 with the return of the veterans and concludes with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. This era is a critical moment in the development of the nation's gun cultures because it is the last period in which guns receive relatively no criticism and enjoy minimal state or federal regulation. The tragic death of President John F. Kennedy, however, becomes a catalyst for the rise of anti-gun campaigns and signals the end of the last "golden age" for guns. Historians have only studied firearms in relation to the Second Amendment and violence. Unfortunately, studying guns only in the context of the Constitution and aggression has shed little light on America's various gun cultures. Moreover, the story of firearms is not entirely one of violence, particularly in the era immediately following World War II. Looking at firearm cultures only through this lens distorts America's relationship with guns and this project seeks to evaluate American gun cultures with a new perspective.

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INTRODUCTION: "THERE'S GLAMOUR IN GUNS"

In 1947, gun enthusiast Stuart Ludlum proclaimed, "There's glamour in guns . . . there's something interest-provoking, attention-getting about a gun. Scenes of exciting adventure riffle through the imagination at the mere mention of certain guns: dueling pistols . . . forty-five . . . thirty-thirty . . . automatic . . . Winchester . . . Springfield. . . . What pageantry and glamorous romance they cue on-stage in the theater of the mind." [1] Ludlum's declaration echoed the sentiments of many Americans in the post-World War II era. Widely regarded as devices for defense, symbols of a mythic frontier past, and instruments capable of instilling manliness, firearms held a place of reverence in the American popular consciousness. Furthermore, using firearms for various activities as a response to the exigencies of the Cold War era consecrated the gun as an inherent and fundamental part of the American experience.

But why have historians ignored such an important and fascinating aspect of American history, especially given ongoing debates about firearms? The scant amount of historical scholarship on guns focuses only on the history of certain manufacturers, such as Colt and Winchester, or describes the guns' aesthetics, components, and how they were made, rather than their social and cultural implications. [2] Daniel J. Boorstin argued in the late 1950s that the nation's gun culture was rooted in its colonial heritage.

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[1] Stuart D. Ludlum, *Great Shooting Stories*, illus. Ted Placek (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1947), xi.

[2] Examples of these sources include George R. Watrous, *The History of Winchester Firearms, 1866-1966,* eds. Thomas E. Hall and Pete Kuhlhoff (New Haven: Winchester Western Press, 1966) and James Edsall Serven, *Colt Cartridge Pistols: A Detailed Study of Colt Hand Arms, From 1868 Converted Caplocks Through Automatics* (Santa Ana: J. E. Serven, 1952). In addition, Phil Patton, a leading writer about design and technology, briefly mentions the role of the gun in shaping America. He cites the Colt revolver as an important early firearm, asserting that Samuel Colt sold more than a gun; he also sold the confidence and equality with which the gun imbued the user. However Patton, like so many other scholars discussing guns, fails to elaborate on a culture of firearms.

According to Boorstin, Americans acquired firearms based on need – for self-defense and food – and thus almost everyone had them. [3] A generation after Boorstin, Richard Slotkin asserted that frontiersmen forged through the American wilderness with guns because the frontier circumstance demanded firearms possession. The frontier experience led frontiersmen to believe that regeneration came through violence, and as a result, Slotkin asserts, Americans have always been killers. [4] Although they wrote fifteen years apart, Boorstin and Slotkin both represented how guns were usually given a place of significance in the nation's history and culture. Both studies are lacking, however. Boorstin's celebration of the gun sprang from his conception of a mythic past, while Slotkin's conception of firearms placed them solely in the context of violence.

Although scholars often accepted without refutation these arguments for the primacy of guns throughout the American experience, the notion that guns figured as a chief part of early American history has been called into question. Michael A. Bellesîles has argued that previous studies suffered from presentism. He asserts that because guns have been such an essential part of America's identity for the past few decades, historians made them prominent in the past, too. [5] Bellesîles's work seemed to offer a compelling argument that a gun culture did develop, only not as early as Boorstin has claimed. Bellesîles argues that a gun culture did not develop in full force until after the Civil War.

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[3] Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Random House, 1958), 353. See also Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[4] Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973). See also, Eric Mottram, "The Persuasive Lips": Men and Guns in America, The West," *Journal of American Studies* (October 1976): 53-84.

[5] Michael A. Bellesîles, "The Origins of Gun Culture in the United States, 1760-1865," *Journal of American History* (September 1996): 426. See also Bellesîles's recent book, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

Recently however, Bellesîles's attempt to trace the origins of America's national gun culture in *Arming America* has been discredited while creating a much-publicized debate on gun scholarship in general. Bellesîles erred not only in failing to report his sources accurately, but also in failing to explain fully America's early relationship with firearms. Specifically, he based the existence of a gun culture almost exclusively on firearms ownership. Americans owned various items in common in the period he addresses. However, the possession of certain articles does not necessarily mean that a culture develops in relation to those items. For example, many early, white settlers in America probably owned axes, vital tools for the construction of shelter and for obtaining firewood. A culture of axes did not develop, though. Any serious assessment of gun culture in America must consider evidence pointing to gun culture extending beyond mere ownership. No scholars have investigated this issue, however.

Bellesîles's oversight should not suggest that America lacked a gun culture. Colin Calloway's scholarship about Native Americans' early encounters with Europeans reveals that perhaps the first gun culture in America developed among them. Trading with Europeans not only contributed to Indians' ownership of firearms, but the weapons also altered hunting practices and intensified violence. In some cases, the use of firearms even indirectly modified spiritual beliefs as guns became instrumental in depleting animal populations and thus altered Indians' relationship with the environment. [6]

Yet, conceptions about the primacy of the gun in American history do seem inflated. During the Revolutionary era, Americans gained a reputation as sharp-shooting

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[6] Colin G. Calloway, *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

riflemen, despite the documented poor performance of the militia. The mythical status of the American rifleman continued to grow after the War of 1812. However, Americans' ownership and use of firearms seems to have only taken off after the post-Civil War era with the conquest of the frontier and the efforts of the Winchester Company in promoting their firearms as the products that "won" the west. Likewise, increased industrialization in the wake of the Civil War made firearms, especially pistols, available to more Americans than ever before while manufacturers marketed them by appealing to the perceptions that urbanization led to increased crime. Still, while famous figures, such as Buffalo Bill Cody, certainly glamorized firearms, the evidence for a thriving gun culture late in the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century remains sparse. For instance, the National Rifle Association, founded in 1871, had trouble for many years finding someone to serve as president of the fledgling organization and membership in the quasi-military group remained low. Given this evidence, it is hard to argue for the proliferation of an intense, national attachment to guns until well into the twentieth century. However, the role of the NRA in the establishment of national firearms cultures cannot be underrated. The organization provided a formal, well-established organization ready to welcome and coordinate the growing number of Americans interested in firearms during the post-World War II period.

In fact, the study of firearms cultures in American history demands an evaluation of the postwar era because it is a period in which interest in and use of firearms significantly intensified in America. Millions of World War II servicemen had become familiar with firearms during their service training and combat experience. Returning to

the states, they sought out firearms for recreational purposes. According to gun policy scholar Gregg Lee Carter, nine million demobilized veterans brought their new interest in firearms home and "tens of thousands of ex-GIs joined the NRA." [7]

At the same time, spurred on by wartime demands for large quantities of weapons, manufacturers seeking to maintain high production levels increased their efforts to market their wares. As a matter of fact, a reported one-quarter of the National Rifle Association's revenue came from gun advertisers in the postwar era. [8] Cutting-edge advances in firearms technology also enticed consumers already interested in guns to consume even more of them. As a result, a type of symbiosis between consumers and producers resulted that fanned the flames of steadily growing firearm cultures.

The general pattern of gun use also altered in the postwar era. Prior to WWII, many firearms owners and users lived in rural areas. Motivated by the need to hunt for food or, for the "pot," men used hunting as a means to add food to the family larder. During the post-1945 era, the need to hunt for food declined and hunting became more of a leisure pursuit among suburban males who had more leisure time to fill. [9] Hunting also became more democratized as it grew in popularity among the middle classes as a respectable hobby. Hunting did not become a sport exclusively for the middle classes,

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[7] Gregg Lee Carter, *The Gun Control Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 69.

[8] Stanley Meisler, "Get Your Gun from the Army," *Nation* (8 June 1964), 569.

[9] In fact, many corporations began to use hunting as a way to entertain and court clients and potential customers. Continental Motor Corporation routinely brought clients to its Lost Island hunting club in Stuttgart, Arkansas for several days of duck hunting. *Business Week* described the hunts as "an almost sure-fire way off mellowing a bunch of hard-boiled executives to the point where they're willing to listen to the company's best sales talks on its products." See "Continental Takes Its Customers Duck Hunting," *Business Week* (9 January 1954), 60. Other companies operating hunting camps included Lion Oil, Olin Industries, Mansanto Chemical, Brown Company (a New England paper manufacturer), Maxon (a Detroit advertising firm), and the Aluminum Company of America. Hunting offered executives and clients an escape from the constraints of 'the gray flannel suit' while improving business relations.

however. Other social classes continued to hunt and a hierarchy emerged in which race and class corresponded to the size of the prey. [10] In the South, for instance, blacks primarily hunted small animals such as squirrels, while working-class males pursued deer and those of better economic means and social standing hunted quail and pheasants, prey that demanded large areas of carefully maintained land.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the postwar era in relation to firearms is the relative absence of an anti-gun movement. Public outcries against hunting, shooting for recreation, or children's play with firearms rarely materialized. Congress and state governments remained silent on the issue of firearms control and violence. The federal government protected its program of subsidizing the distribution of firearms and ammunition to citizens in an effort to promote civilian marksmanship. Even more striking, the public rarely equated gun ownership and use with violence. Instead, gun use was viewed as a type of recreation that could offer a healthy outlet for the energies of youth, a wholesome family hobby, or an innocuous play activity, each of which could teach participating boys to be men and good American citizens. Moreover, in the postwar era, Americans encountered firearms in everyday life in multiple ways unrelated to violence. Unfortunately, most scholars have only studied firearms in the context of violence or Hollywood productions, which ironically usually only show the gun in relation to bloodshed. This study uncovers how Americans viewed and promoted

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[10] For more on hunting see Stuart A. Marks, *Southern Hunting in Black and White: Nature, History, and Ritual in a Carolina Community* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Lisa M. Fine, "Rights of Men, Rites of Passage: Hunting and Masculinity at Reo Motors of Lansing, Michigan, 1945 – 1975," *Journal of Social History* 33 (2000): 805-23. See also Steven Hahn, "Hunting, Fishing, and Foraging: Common Rights and Class Relations in the Postbellum South," *Radical History Review* 26 (1982): 36-64 and Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

firearms outside of these two perspectives and reveals that there is more to America's gun cultures than the all-too familiar brutal scenarios depicted on film.

The remaining scholarly literature on guns addresses the Second Amendment, constitutional theory, and the pro- and anti-gun movements that have developed since the mid-1960s. Legal scholars have discussed only the constitutional aspects of gun regulation and ownership, ignoring the cultural aspects of America's long relationship with firearms. Similarly, assessments of gun movements rarely speculate about the reasons for Americans' love for or distaste of guns. [11] One exception is a study by Charles DeBenedetti that discusses how history textbooks have portrayed guns as the benefactors of freedom and made them symbols of patriotism. [12] DeBenedetti reveals how textbooks have consistently taught generations of young Americans that the gun is an instrumental part of American history. However, his assessment does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the various firearms cultures in general. In fact, no scholars have argued about the existence of various gun cultures; instead, they erroneously lump all gun owners and users into one monolithic group.

Although the overwhelming majority of gun studies focus on early America, the Second Amendment, or the gun control battles of recent decades, the post-World War II period is one of the most significant in the history of American gun cultures because of the multiple ways that different groups encountered firearms. Increasing numbers of

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[11] See Gregg Lee Carter, *The Gun Control Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997). See also Lee Kennett and James La Verne Anderson, *The Gun in America: The Origins of a National Dilemma* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), which provides a history of firearms in America, but does not address how a culture of firearms developed.

[12] Charles DeBenedetti, "American Historians and Armaments: The View from Twentieth-Century Textbooks," *Diplomatic History* 6 (4) (1982): 323-337.

Americans used firearms, whether for play, recreation, or marksmanship training. Heightening the interest in the use of guns, literature about them also entered mainstream middle-brow culture in the postwar era. For instance, parents, doctors, hunters, outdoor writers, childcare experts, social scientists, military officials, and community organizations frequently published articles and stories in books and magazines, such as *Field and Stream* and *Life*, championing the sporting use of guns as an antidote to many of the perceived woes of the atomic age. Readers of the accounts encountered a never-ending barrage of explanations, persuasions, and lectures about the importance of guns to American history, their relationship to masculinity, and their necessity for national survival. Americans even encountered the same themes in school textbooks and on television. No matter where they turned, Americans rarely confronted firearms in a negative light.

Firearms also emerged as a socially acceptable way for Americans, particularly men, to assuage the anxieties of the atomic age. Various scholars have argued that the Cold War era was marked by pervasive anxieties and fears. [13] Specifically, the climate of the Cold War created a dynamic stage on which Americans, particularly males, could use guns to act out their uncertainties about maintaining proper gender roles and their fears about preserving a sense of "Americanness." [14] Some historians have pointed to a crisis

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[13] See Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), Allan M. Winkler, *Life under a Cloud: American Anxiety about the Atom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Steven J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). Each of these works address the various anxieties generated and exacerbated by the atomic age.

[14] For additional recent scholarship on anxiety and the Cold War see *Rethinking Cold War Culture,* eds., Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), particularly chapters three and seven and Peter Filene's essay, "Cold War Doesn't Say It All," 156-74. Filene

of masculinity in the early nuclear age. According to John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, the increasing visibility of "gay men and lesbians suggested the potential fragility of heterosexual familial norms," thus adding to the anxieties about gender and families in general. Similarly, K. A. Cuordileone deftly uncovers an "excessive preoccupation with – and anxiety about – masculinity in early Cold War American politics." [15] Underscoring the belief that the atomic age had negatively influenced men, one contemporary social commentator proclaimed, "Men of the nuclear age have at their fingertips weapons far more powerful than men of previous eras could even imagine. Yet we experience an unnatural inactivity that would have driven the cowboy mad. It is an age . . . of 'virile weapons and impotent men.'" [16] The use of firearms served as an important antidote to this particular anxiety because gun use allowed men to reconnect with their heritage and pretend, at least for a while, that they were again powerful men of action, like gun-wielders Theodore Roosevelt or the cowboy.

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concludes that the Cold War suffused the psyches of Americans whether they realized it or not. He contends that the Cold War indeed negatively affected citizens, but it occurred subconsciously.

[15] See John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 294. See also, K. A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960," *Journal of American History* 87 (September 2000): 515-45. Cuordileone examines American political culture, which "put a new premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft and feminine and, as such, a real or potential threat to the security of the nation." For analyses of how notions of masculinity changed during the twentieth century, see Charles Bergman, who asserts that men in the twentieth century have had their manhood challenged in middle-class American culture as the standard of maleness changes. See Charles Bergman, *Orion's Legacy: A Cultural History of Man as Hunter* (New York: Dutton, 1996), 6, and Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979). Dubbert notes that the notion of the "corporation" further eroded independence, because it stressed conformity, but traditional masculinity demanded individualism. For more on changing conceptions of masculinity in the twentieth century see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[16] Mark Gerzon, *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Faces of American Manhood* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), 78.

Americans' participation in various gun activities as a means to assuage their anxieties caused particular firearms subcultures to flourish in the Cold War era, including one that stemmed from children's play, one based on recreational shooting and hunting, and one rooted in civil and military preparedness efforts. First, a culture of childhood gunplay dramatically intensified because parents became so preoccupied with maintaining traditional gender roles and soothing their fears of homosexuality. Motivated by these concerns, they came to consider children's toy gun play an appropriate way to protect them from the threat within of becoming "sissies" and the threat without of communism. [17] In seeking to instill proper gender identity and an appreciation of America into their children during a time of national uncertainty, American adults intensified a gun culture rooted in childhood play while producing a new generation of Americans who would also revere the gun. Although historians have studied childhood and parenting during the postwar era, they have largely neglected to develop any in-depth cultural analysis of the role toy firearms played in the coming of age of the millions of baby boomers. [18]

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[17] Jessica Weiss has uncovered that anxiety about the role of the father particularly intensified during the 1950s. Both Weiss and Stephanie Coontz point to the anxiety surrounding parenting efforts during the postwar era, while Coontz reveals that the family of the 1950s was not that of the idealized image. Instead, she argues that the family was plagued with various problems like abuse and incest. This study shows that indeed, families of the postwar era also suffered from other anxieties, such as a fear about the gender identity of their children. Likewise, both Coontz and Weiss note that families of the period often sought the advice of childcare experts because of their fears about childrearing. This study reveals that in seeking the advice of these professionals, parents unwittingly contributed to a youth gun culture. See Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) and Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

[18] For instance, see Elliot West, *Growing Up in Twentieth Century America: A History and Reference Guide* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 195-96. William Tuttle also discusses the fear children experienced regarding the possibility of a nuclear attack and how it haunted many of those coming of age in the postwar era well into adulthood. This monograph provides a good context for studying children in the era. See William M. Tuttle, Jr. *"Daddy's Gone to War:" The Second World War in the Lives of*

Meanwhile, an emphasis on the need for recreational activities with guns also grew. A number of Americans considered gun hobbies a means to deter juvenile delinquency which increased the attachment to firearms among those who sought wholesome recreation for youths. Fearing the challenges posed to the family by changing gender roles and the red menace, many Americans also viewed recreational gun use as a means to bolster the father-son relationship. Equally important, recreational gun use offered young males rites of passage which would cement their gender identity as men.

A recreational gun culture rooted in sport hunting also expanded. Law-abiding citizens who enjoyed gun ownership for leisure, hunters owned guns because they associated firearms with American heroes, such as Daniel Boone, and because hunting offered them the opportunity to assert and to cultivate manliness. Historians have almost neglected altogether hunting as a topic and they have especially ignored this aspect of it. Perhaps the best source on hunting, Daniel Justin Herman's *Hunting and the American Imagination* historicizes the pursuit, explaining how an economic activity evolved into a recreational one. He provides an excellent discussion of how Americans' conceptions of hunting changed over time, beginning with the colonial era and continuing through the early twentieth century. Unfortunately, he does not address how a firearms culture evolved out of the experience of hunting, although he persuasively links notions of

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America's Children (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Although an excellent analysis of Cold War toys, Helen Schwartz begins her analysis after the hey-day of the toy gun. See Helen Schwartz, "When Barbie Dated G.I. Joe: Analyzing the Toys of the Early Cold War Era," *Material History Review* 45 (1997): 38-50. Peter Stearns's discussion relates primarily to juvenile delinquency and the threats posed to youths by forms of popular culture like comic books, rather than incorporating a discussion of how parents' fears contributed to toy gun play. See *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Childrearing in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). Nonetheless, he does marshal considerable evidence that convincingly demonstrates that numerous anxieties plagued parents of the era.

patriarchy with hunting throughout American history. [19] However, an evaluation of the popularization of recreational gun use by families, outdoor writers, gun enthusiasts, and local, state, and federal agencies reveals how hobbies with guns intensified another strain of American gun culture.

Finally, although living in an atomic age, some Americans after World War II became convinced that their firearms would still be important tools for defending themselves and their families when the communists invaded. Several historians have noted the efforts to build bomb shelters and have discussed civil defense measures, such as Elaine Tyler May, Paul Boyer, and Guy Oakes, but each ignores the role that preparedness efforts played in intensifying Americans' attachment to firearms. [20] However, gun enthusiasts did soothe their fears about the possibility of atomic warfare by preparing themselves, their children, and their military forces with increased training in

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[19] Daniel Justin Herman, *Hunting and the American Imagination* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001). Similarly, Lisa Fine's assessment of hunters working in the auto industry is an excellent appraisal of the importance of hunting and its relation to class in a local setting. While the study is a good evaluation of the relationship between men and hunting, its limited scope does not shed light on the importance of hunting as a national activity that contributed to a firearms culture. See Lisa M. Fine, "Rights of Men, Rites of Passage: Hunting and Masculinity at Reo Motors of Lansing, Michigan, 1945 – 1975," *Journal of Social History* 33 (2000): 805-823. Social scientists have also discussed how hunting is related to contemporary gender identities and the utility of hunting for providing males with contemporary rite of passage. For instance, Ray Raphael and Charles Bergman both have studied the relationships between hunting, gender, and rites of passage. However, studies such as this do not place their findings into a historical context in regard to understanding how these issues operated in the Cold War era, nor do they evaluate how these relationships contributed to firearms cultures. See Ray Raphael, *The Men From the Boys: Rites of Passage in Male America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) and Bergman, *Orion's Legacy*.

[20] For more on the civil defense and general culture of anxiety that the effort produced during the atomic age, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, and Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Although they ignore the relationship between civil defense efforts and firearms cultures, these authors do indicate the presence of various anxieties produced by the Cold War. Each also reveals that civil defense efforts received a good deal of Americans' attention in the postwar era. It is important to note, though, that Oakes argues that Americans' believed that survival depended on their ability to recapture the values of their pioneer forbears and that maintaining this national heritage would be instrumental in protecting the American way of life.

marksmanship. Even if the Russians did not invade the United States, many reasoned that young men would still benefit from the training in the event of potential confrontations abroad. The federal government agreed, encouraging civilian rifle practice and recognizing the need for civilian marksmanship training as practical preparation for future wars. After contracting an independent source to study civilian firearms training, Congress actually decided to continue granting appropriations for an official civilian marksmanship program which distributed discounted arms and ammunition to the public through the National Rifle Association. Thus, as many Americans readied for invasion, another strain of American gun culture intensified based on martial preparedness with the support of the federal government.

Ultimately, the interest in firearms in all of these venues converged to intensify several strains of American gun culture. The uncertain context of the Cold War and the anxieties it engendered, coupled with the notion that guns would be an appropriate antidote to the anxieties of the age, made for a potent cultural force that would significantly intensify Americans' attachment to guns. In the climate of the Cold War, these trends, each complementary to at least one other, combined to form a type of synergism that met the contemporary needs of Americans while serving to foster their intense attachment to the gun.

This era, beginning with the return of the WWII veterans and concluding with the death of President John F. Kennedy, is a critical moment in the development of the nation's gun cultures, because it is the last period in which guns received relatively no criticism and enjoyed minimal state or federal regulation. But the assassination of

President Kennedy became a catalyst for the rise of anti-gun campaigns and signaled the end of the last "golden age" for guns in the United States. The event also motivated Congress to debate seriously, for the first time since the 1930s, the possibility of legislating firearms regulations. The acceleration of U. S. involvement in Vietnam, the eruption of riots in Los Angeles, and the emergence of right-wing militia groups also changed public discourse about guns. Many Americans came to reconsider them as instruments of crime, brutality, imperialism, and death, rather than patriotic entertainments. The negative attitudes forced gun devotees to alter their defense of firearms from one based on heritage and tradition to one rooted in the concept of legal rights. Finally, gun cultures also lost some of their inviolability in the early to mid-1960s, when some citizens began to reassess the violent, disturbing aspects of American history that implicated guns in general. Their reassessment eroded a significant part of the very culture that had fostered the intensification of firearms cultures.

Studying guns in their halcyon days reveals that postwar America, and indeed contemporary America, does not have the monolithic gun culture that earlier historians and contemporary legal scholars posit. In addition, it is evident that firearms in America, whether wielded by children or adults, alarmed almost no one in the postwar era, because most gun owners were nonviolent, law-abiding citizens. In fact, only two subcultures can be characterized as violent – criminals who primarily used handguns to commit crime and right-wing militia groups. Both composed only a small proportion of the population. It is not surprising, then, that many baby boomers coming of age in this era, even if as adults they would not own or use guns, had little resistance to the gun ownership of

others because firearm possession was not associated with criminal violence. Regrettably, these issues have been overlooked because most studies of guns investigate only constitutional issues or violence and hence have shed little light on America's assorted gun cultures. Moreover, the story of firearms is not entirely one of violence, particularly in the era immediately following World War II. Looking at firearm cultures only through this lens distorts America's historical relationship with guns and ignores their rich history in their last golden age – the era of unholstered and unquestioned firearms.

CHAPTER 1: BACKYARD DESPERADOES

In February 1950, an article appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* poking mild fun at children's mania for the American West. It asserted that "today's youth considers himself practically nude if he is sent out into the streets in anything less than a pair of floppy sheepskins strapped over his roll-bottomed denims, a colored bandanna knotted loosely about the throat of his piped sateen or gabardine shirt, and a wide-brimmed hat settled dashingly about his ears." Yet the craze went beyond the desire for clothing items related to the Old West. The commentary also declared that "no 8-year old believes himself capable of crossing an apartment-house sidewalk without the aid of spurs, and he would think it risky to leave his porch without a pair of matched horse pistols slung from a tooled-leather cartridge belt studded with brilliants." [21]

The cowboy and his gun reigned supreme in the imaginations and play of American children in the early postwar era. In fact, for many adults, the cowboy and other frontier figures served as comforting reminders of a mythic American past in an era fraught with uncertainties. Popular culture promoted the mythological version of the frontier that stood in stark contrast to the anxiety-ridden culture of the Cold War, which drew on, found support in, and perpetuated the myth of the Old West. More importantly, the culture of the Cold War helped to create a new meaning for the toy guns wielded by youngsters engaging in western play. Specifically, it invested the form of amusement with special meaning while simultaneously affecting parenting styles. Parents' attitudes toward their pistol-packin' boys reveal the various layers of their own anxieties

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[21] John Sharnik, "It's Go Western for Young Men," *New York Times Magazine* (24 September 1950), 16.

concerning the masculinity of their sons. The discourse about toy guns occurring in popular sources readily available to the general American public also exposes the uneasiness pervading the American popular consciousness regarding gender roles, and it sheds light on the roots of America's gun cultures. Ultimately, the anxious climate of the Cold War, punctuated by the threat of instantaneous nuclear annihilation, challenges to traditional gender roles, and the standoff between communism and democracy created an environment in which a youth gun culture could flourish among white male youths.

In the early atomic age, children's play had an important role in reclaiming American values in the face of the communist menace. Forms of play drew comments from numerous professionals. From the Parent and Child section of the *New York Times Magazine*, Dorothy Barclay wrote that "play means a great deal more . . . to most of the specialists who work with children. To them it represents the child's way of learning, a vital process by which he grows up." In play, she noted, "Youngsters experiment with life and their own reactions to it; relieve some of their fears and tensions; re-create the world as they know it or shape a new and happier one where they can be the head men, where they can boss or be babied, threatened or comforted." Children's amusements are significant, Barclay argued, because they are a learning process that facilitates development of social skills. If play is fundamental to development, then objects used in play are of primary importance. Therefore, "parents can start thinking of toys not as bright ornaments for a youngster's room but as materials for . . . expression." [22] Moreover, play provides the means through which children interpret the world, as well as the method they employ to reflect their experiences. If imitation guns are acceptable toys

[22] Dorothy Barclay, "Playing is Learning," *New York Times Magazine* (19 March 1950).

and violent play is sanctioned, then children might very well come to understand that violence is acceptable and even a mundane part of everyday existence in America. Furthermore, play with toy guns shapes children's notions about power and the gun as an instrument of force and authority. Because of the exigencies of the Cold War, parents and professionals invested toy guns with new meanings. Parents happily encouraged their young boys to play with symbols of empowerment as a way to relieve some of their own feelings of helplessness in an era of nuclear uncertainties. [23] In the sources most readily available to Americans, the discourse about guns became entangled with the pressures of the Cold War and to a certain extent, divorced from crime and delinquency.[24]

Born in Morristown, New Jersey on 18 July 1941, Jonathan Holden vividly remembered his gun-slinging youth. He admitted, "For me, as a boy, certainly the most beautiful sound in the world, more beautiful than Mozart or Bach, was the sound of an explosion – the report of a firecracker or a rifle shot." He also recalled playing with his friends "and the other neighborhood kids the open-ended game that we called 'Guns,' or by some kind of word, some verbal expletive like BANG." [25] Holden described this gunplay in vivid detail, and although he recorded his recollections decades later, it is

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[23] See Peter Filene's essay "Cold War Doesn't Say It All," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture,* Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds. (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001): 156-74. Filene concludes that the Cold War suffused the psyches of Americans whether they realized it or not. He contends that the Cold War indeed affected citizens, but it occurred subconsciously.

[24] The cowboy craze of the postwar era swept away American youth in an abundance of western gear. In fact, the fad became such a part of the historical landscape that the National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, Virginia, has devoted an entire display case to the youth cowboy phenomenon. The exhibit is a re-creation of a bedroom complete with a lasso-motif bed covering, an array of vintage toy long guns, pistol and holster sets, western apparel, a coonskin cap, and western-themed wallpaper. Entitled "1950s Child's Room" and one of the largest displays in the museum, the room is meant to illustrate the museum's central theme, "Firearms, Freedom and the American Experience." The museum is part of the National Rifle Association's headquarters. The more than 2,000 other guns contained in the museum accompany the toy gun collection in the room.

[25] Jonathan Holden, *Guns and Boyhood in America: A Memoir of Growing Up in the 1950s* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 2, 15.

significant that he remembers gunplay as one of the defining features of his childhood. In this sense, he is representative of a vast number of young American boys coming of age in the early postwar years. Writer Tom Engelhardt has also asserted that "children of the 1950s would later remember with genuine fondness these sunny moments of play out of sight of grownups. . . . Men, and sometimes women, even those who identified themselves as antiwar during the Vietnam years, often recall the war play, war scenarios, and war toys of their childhood with a special fondness." [26] For children coming of age in the long shadow cast by World War II and the looming threat of nuclear conflict, play with toy weapons became pervasive.

However, war games did not prove as popular as the western motif across American backyards. The prevailing theme of play during the early postwar era centered on the western frontier and the cowboy. The role and significance of toy guns in American culture are best displayed in this era, where their use as cultural symbols reached new heights of popularity. The urge for toy guns among American youth manifested itself in a 'cowboy craze' and the hankering for holsters and pistols soared to staggering proportions. One commentator noted, "In the last couple of years the American child has come to think of himself as a clear-eyed, straight-talking, fast-shooting hombre, armed to the milk teeth and tall in the saddle." American boys held "dogged admiration for the era of the open range and its heroes, the cowboys. For the great majority of Americans between the ages of about four and fourteen the Old West, as seen through the sights of a repeating cap pistol, has a good deal more reality than any

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[26] Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 9.

part of the current scene." Parents and experts struggled to make sense of the craze. A Harvard historian and father commented that "the Western tradition has always been a potent force in American social and intellectual patterns. The West was the last field of heroic adventure in this country's history – it's one of the few phases of our history that has lent itself to romanticizing."

Television primarily contributed to the embellishing, and like the Harvard historian, it conveniently ignored the plight of the Native Americans and overlooked the sometimes less-than-heroic deeds of cowboys and other frontier icons. Experts also believed the cowboy play to be harmless because children focused their admiration "on such righteous models as the television variety of cowboy." Many people considered the youthful cowpokes the "fortunate heirs of a long-buried individualistic tradition." [27] Little of the popular discourse of the early atomic age regarding toy guns reveals concerns about violent play or the use of guns in society in general to perpetrate criminal acts. Instead, many of the commentators spoke of the imitation cowpokes with humor, creating a light-hearted atmosphere around this particular manifestation of American gun culture.

Aside from developing patriotism and providing psychological benefits, some adults believed that toy guns could have a tremendous practical value. In an era marked by international political instability, toy guns provided early marksmanship training. Instead of worrying about their sons' enthusiasm for violent gunplay, the cover of a March 1950 *Saturday Evening Post* revealed the attitude of many Americans toward toy

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[27] Sharnik, "It's Go Western," 16. See also, Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992) for more on the role of the western in television and movies in American culture.

guns. (See Figure 1) Posed in various stages of dying, a group of white American boys arrayed as cowboys, pistols in hand, is depicted on the cover. Today such a scene on the cover of a national magazine would elicit more than a few raised eyebrows. In 1950, however, the editor's comments on the scene read:

> After Amos Sewell had seen many such gun battles between the Wild West frontiersmen of his Connecticut town, the idea soaked in that to have a Post cover he need merely yell, "Come here, men!" to the neighborhood kids, and start painting. It's typically American, this hair-raising scene; and timelessly so – these kids' fathers, and their fathers knew also how to handle their toy six-guns. In view of America's current foreign policy – that peace depends on all of us being rugged and ready – we hope that some copies of this Post will, as usual, filter through the Iron Ban into Russia. It is pleasant to think that the comrades may be slightly startled by this portrayal of little capitalists frolicking amiably with one another. [28]

The image of so many capitalists-in-training was not the only thing that should have alarmed the Russians. The editor hoped the scene would convince potential communist readers that American males started their gun training early so that by the time they entered the armed forces, American men would already have an intimate familiarity with firearms. Likewise, many proponents of firearms, such as the National Rifle Association, regularly argued that all American males should receive firearms training as youths in order to prepare for future wars and civil defense. [29]

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[28] *Saturday Evening Post* (11 March 1950), 3.

[29] See Bill Shadel, "What Price Riflemen?" *American Rifleman* (March 1951), 31-32. In this article, Shadel argues that despite new atomic technology, a man and his rifle are still the most important resource of the armed services. He also urges NRA members to teach America's youth how to shoot in order to prepare them for future military service and possible civil defense. In addition, other writers warned Americans that the Russians, young and old, male and female, could already outshoot Americans. In light of this circumstance, Americans must prepare. See Garrett Underhill, "Citizens in Arms," *American Rifleman* 95 (June 1947), 7-10, 33-35. The article features photos of Soviet children studying tanks in front of rifles. Underhill worked as a long-time staff member of *Life* and during World War II he served three years with the War Department General Staff.

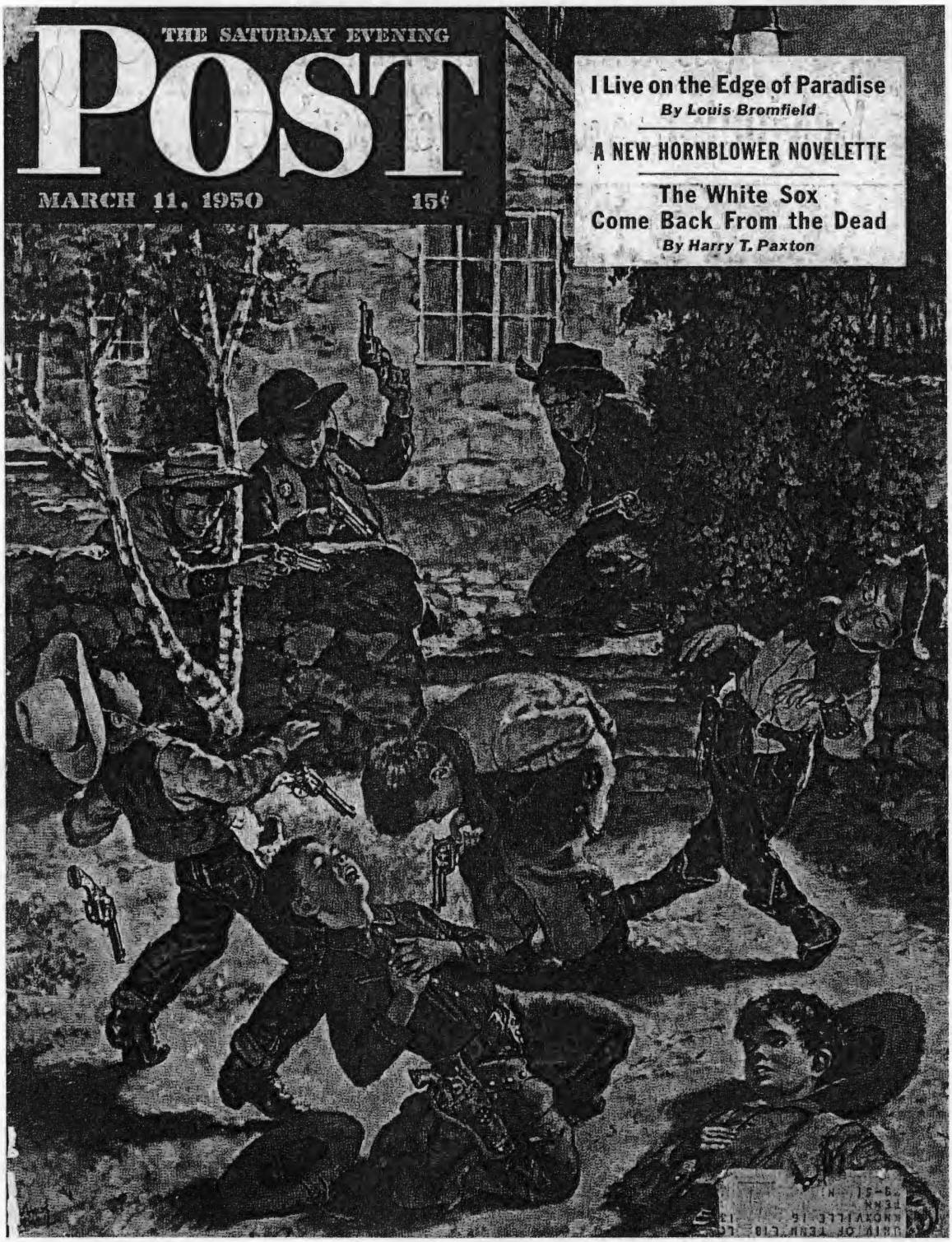

Figure 1. Boys at Play.

Source: *Saturday Evening Post* (11 March 1950), cover.

Parents did not seem particularly concerned about the violent nature of boys' play activities. In this context, adults readily accepted gun-wielding figures such as Gene Autry, who had a "Cowboy Code" of ethics he espoused to children. The code instructed:

1. The Cowboy must never shoot first, hit a smaller man, or take unfair advantage.
2. He must never go back on his word, or a trust confided in him.
3. He must always tell the truth.
4. He must be gentle with children, the elderly, and animals.
5. He must not advocate or possess racially or religiously intolerant ideas.
6. He must help people in distress.
7. He must be a good worker.
8. He must keep himself clean in thought, speech, action, and personal habits.
9. He must respect women, parents, and his nation's laws.
10. The Cowboy is a patriot. [30]

Already a hero to children, parents, too, approved of this clean-cut cowboy and his principles. At first glance, the code seems harmless enough. However, Autry does sanction violence as long as the other person shoots first. He perpetuates what numerous history texts, various types of popular culture, and even a generation of historians taught millions of Americans. Together, they created a vision of the American past where justice, progress, and prosperity came from the barrel of a gun. White Americans, in the traditional, heroic narrative, only attacked when provoked and usually remained above reproach. [31] Television and movies in the postwar era portrayed this scene repeatedly. The gun became an integral part of the standard narrative re-enacted by American youth

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[30] Museum of the American West website, http://autry-museum.org/museum/gene_autry.php accessed on 19 March 2004.

[31] See Charles DeBenedetti, "American Historians and Armaments: The View from Twentieth-Century Textbooks," *Diplomatic History* 1982 6(4): 323-337. DeBenedetti reveals how textbooks have consistently taught generations of young Americans that the gun is an instrumental part of American history.

and an indispensable part of American history. Pistol-totin' tots who eagerly consumed the antics of Gene Autry and his contemporaries also consumed this vision of America history. Ironically, part of the code instructed young cowboys to be racially tolerant, which must have been an especially provocative directive for some white Americans in this era. [32]

The cowboy craze thrilled toy manufacturers because it cultivated the longing to consume western paraphernalia among young children who successfully entreated parents to purchase these toys. American children's enthusiasm "to become 'pistol totin' cowboys and cowgirls" had by 1951 built up a multi-million dollar industry with more than 160,000,000 pistol and holster sets sold since 1944. [33] As early as 1950, the fastest growing segment of the toy industry proved to be "that ancient standby, the cowboy holster and pistol belt." Notably, that ancient standby harkened back to the frontier image. Stanley Breslow, the President of the Carnell Manufacturing Company, told the *New Yorker* in 1950:

> Last year there were enough holster sets manufactured to supply every male child in the United States three times over. I don't know where they all go. I have a plant in Brooklyn employing two hundred and fifty people, and we produce from nine to fourteen thousand sets a day. And we still can't meet the demand . . . sales are mostly to kids from three to twelve years old, and they know exactly what

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[32] The notion of the cowboy as a quintessential American hero was not new to the postwar era. Since the days of the nineteenth century the appropriation and romanticization of the cowboy in various media forms had catapulted the figure to iconic status. However, the cowboy took on new meaning during the Cold War. At times, the cowboy becomes a generic frontier figure, a clean-cut hero, or a dark, complex figure. In addition, it should be noted that "Red-hating" did not originate in the postwar era. Before World War II many Americans hated Bolsheviks and "Reds." Nevertheless, fear of the communists intensified after WWII as the Cold War altered the international political and military landscape. The cowboy now rode across this landscape as a representative of manliness, democracy, individualism, and capitalism. On anti-communism before World War I, see M. J. Heale, American Anticommunism: *Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press , 1990) and Richard Gid Powers, *Not without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New York: Free Press, 1970).

[33] "Young Fry's Cowboy Urge Builds Thriving Industry," *New York Times* (2 March 1951).

> they want . . . the fact is the kids don't even play cowboys and Indians any more; they play cowboys and cowboys. [34]

The willingness of parents to spend huge sums on the pistols and holsters amazed Breslow. He described the lavish designs of the products and remarked, "All this for a kid's toy! I ask myself, 'Why?'" Indeed, "why?" is the fundamental question. Why did children demand such toys and why did parents give in, even when the cost increased? The explanation comes from several sources. Part of the answer Breslow articulated unwittingly. Lamenting that the kids "wouldn't look at FBI sets, policemen sets, or anything military," he indicated the significance of choosing cowboy paraphernalia. [35] The cowboy symbolized American frontier tradition and the country itself, not the police force and the FBI, nor the military represented this tradition to Americans. The popularity of expensive cowboy gear also suggests that parents would willingly pay for something celebrating what they considered part of their heritage as Americans. These parental attitudes would explain why pirate toys did not sell even though manufacturers produced them. Parents wanted their children to have wholesome, even nationalistic, toys as opposed to those associated with swashbuckling villains.

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[34] *New Yorker* (11 March 1950), 22. Although manufacturers made toy guns sets for girls, girls' toy guns usually differed from those designed for boys. Girls' sets typically featured more decorative flourishes while boys' toy firearms looked surprisingly realistic. One manufacturer explained, "Let's face it, a little girl's future problems are men, and she should be taught to face and fight them." Girls only needed to learn how to deal with boys. Dressed as Dale Evans or Annie Oakley, a girl would be a wife or just another accessory for her male counterpart. In addition, more clothing than guns accompanied girls' western toys, such as the "Dale Evans" paper doll. Instead of using toy guns and western gear to cross gender boundaries, manufacturers usually made the toys to facilitate the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. See Helen S. Schwartz, "When Barbie Dated G.I. Joe: Analyzing the Toys of the Early Cold War Era," *Material History Review* 45 (Spring 1997): 48.

[35] *New Yorker* (11 March 1950), 22. Note that this article appears on the same day the *Saturday Evening Post* releases its issue featuring eight boys playing cowboys with their toy guns.

The cowboy mania became so popular that adults working with young boys altered their approach to the youngsters. In a January edition of the *Saturday Evening Post*, cartoonist Dave Hirsch drew a cartoon poking fun at the pervasiveness of the cowboy rage. (See Figure 2) The cartoon struck a cord with reader R. E. Hamilton, who wrote a letter to the editor in regard to the cartoon. Hamilton insisted, "Dave Hirsch's cartoon . . . is not at all farfetched. According to a recent issue of *Dental Survey*, there are two periodontists in Los Angeles who practice while wearing cowboy outfits. Their reception room is set up in Western style to appeal to children, with a corral in the corner where parents are 'roped in.'" [36] Again, the popular discourse about toy firearms focused on guns as respectable entertainments, not dangerous weapons to be regulated or banned. Separated from negative connotations, adults created a strain of gun culture in which firearms became a commodification of American heritage for a generation of young boys and even some girls.

Manufacturers did produce and sell other play items. Toys available to the massive onslaught of baby-boomers included facsimiles of atomic subs, missiles, and ICBMs. Yet these toys proved too realistic for children and did not lend themselves to much romanticizing. [37] Accordingly, these play items did not sell nearly as well as the cowboy gear because children did not demand them and parents did not purchase them. More successful than the military-oriented toys, a line of merchandise based on just one western character sold record amounts of merchandise. Historian of childhood Elliot West notes, "In 1950, the sale of Hopalong Cassidy gear reached sales of $40 million."

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[36] Capt. R. E. Hamilton, "Dentistry in California," *Saturday Evening Post* (13 February 1960), 4.
[37] Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture*, 81.

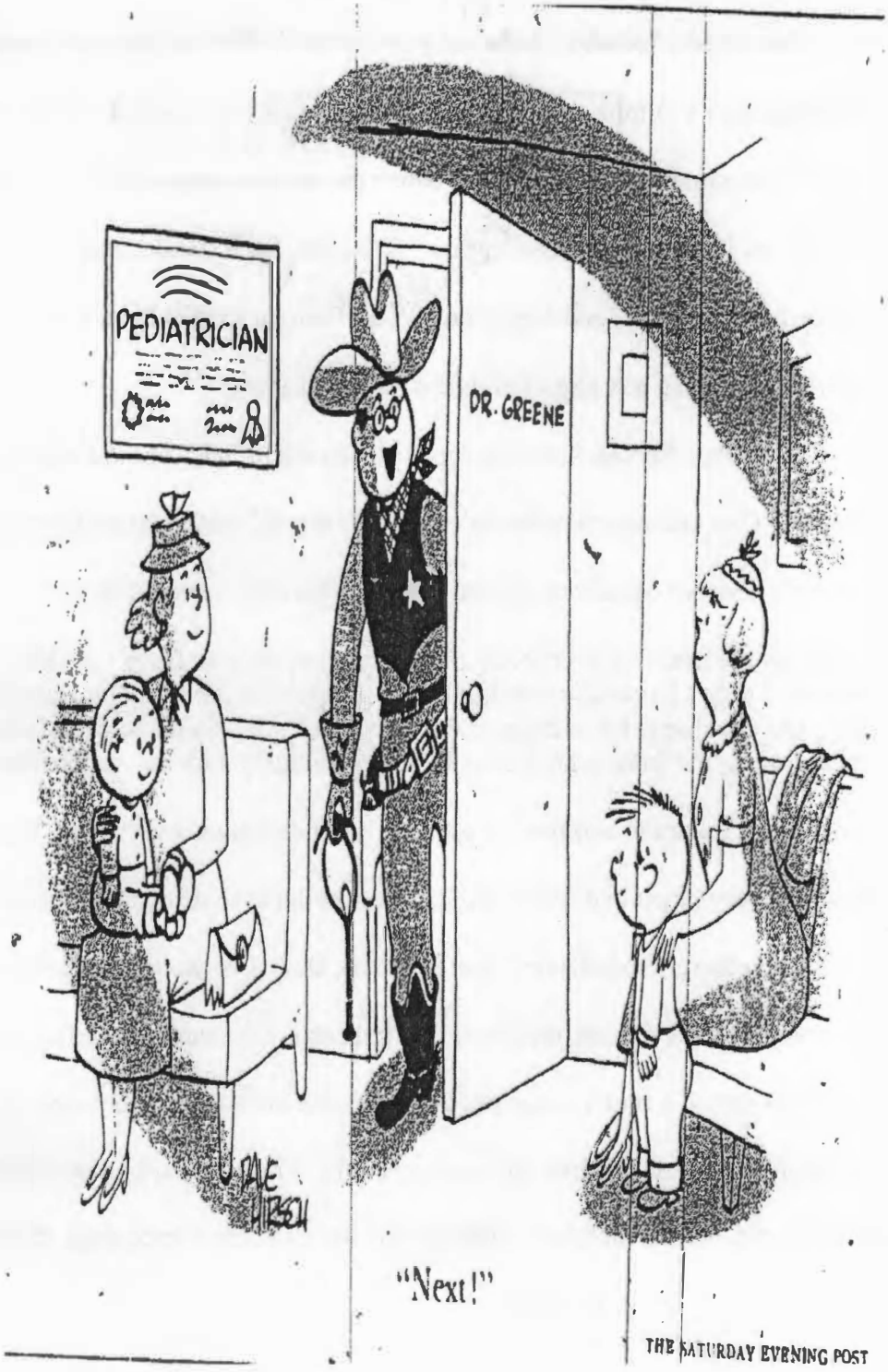

Figure 2. The Call of the West.

Source: Capt. R. E. Hamilton, "Dentistry in California," *Saturday Evening Post* (13 February 1960), 4.

At the end of the decade, "cowboy duds and guns based on various Saturday morning stars were bringing in $75 million a year; their total sales for the last half of the 1950s, $283 million, were more than $100 million above the annual value of all toys, games, and sporting goods produced twenty years earlier." He adds, for instance, that "at the height of the popularity of 'The Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp,' a special toy edition of Wyatt's pistol was selling at a clip of eighteen thousand a day." [38]

In 1955 another frontier hero emerged in a show entitled, "The Adventures of Davy Crockett." Crockett merchandise sales quickly moved past $100 million within the first few months. Steven Spielberg, a third-grader at the time, remembered:

> Suddenly the next day everybody in my class but me was Davy Crockett. And because I didn't have my coonskin cap or my powder horn, or Old Betsy, my rifle, and the chaps, I was deemed the Mexican leader, Santa Anna, and they chased me home from school until I got my parents to buy me a coonskin cap. [39]

Spielberg's failure to acquire the proper toys, including his very own "Old Betsy," rendered him an easy target and it also led the other children to designate him as un-American. As Spielberg's recollection demonstrates, Davy Crockett merchandise became so popular that it became a multi-million dollar industry. Ultimately, "the Davy Crockett craze was only a part of a much larger phenomenon, the increasing orientation of American business toward children and young people. This was partly a continuing trend . . . but after World War II, merchants and manufacturers really turned their attention to younger customers." [40] West explains:

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[38] Elliot West, *Growing Up in Twentieth Century America: A History and Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 195-96.

[39] Ibid., 196. During this era the Sons of the Pioneers recorded, "Old Betsy," a very popular song mythologizing Crockett's gun. The album was produced as part of RCA's Children's Bluebird Records.

[40] Ibid., 197.

> Specialists calculated the 'juvenile market' at $33 billion a year at the peak of the baby boom about 1960. For a businessman looking to cash in, the most obvious part of the national store was the toy department. Throughout the 1950s, each year's toy sales surpassed those of the year before. By the late 1950s, Americans were spending $1.25 billion annually on children's playthings, fifteen times the amount they had paid out in 1940. [41]

Interestingly, America's frontier and gun cultures blended to become an integral part of the growing consumer culture targeting younger audiences. Now, guns were part of American heritage and a part of an intensifying consumer culture that ironically was fast becoming another marker of what it meant to be an American. Whereas before owning a gun denoted Americanness, now the ability to purchase a firearm in a free market economy also signified one's allegiance to America and capitalism. In an era demanding explicit displays of patriotism, purchasing a quintessentially American item, such as a gun, offered parents the opportunity to show their patriotic pride while instilling it and an appreciation for consumerism in their children. Accordingly, an advertisement in 1952 for Kellogg's Sugar Corn Pops promoted the cereal to children by associating the "rip snortin' cereal" with "Wild Bill Hickok Show" actors Andy Devine and Guy Madison, the latter wielding his pistol on the box. (See Figure 3) In addition, each package of the "rootin'-tootin' snack" featured cutouts of famous six-shooters. The Kellogg Company even purchased full-scale replicas of antique guns to use as promotions for later cereal marketing campaigns. [42] The promise of a paper pistol and a sweet snack enticed children all the way from the supermarket checkout to the breakfast table to their backyards.

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[41] Ibid.

[42] "From Toys to Hobbies: Way to Men's Hearts," *Business Week* (28 January 1956), 61.



Figure 3. Kellogg's Cereal Gun Promotion.

Source: Author's collection, Kellogg cereal advertisement, 1952.

Parents worried about more than raising patriotic children infused with a consumer ethic. Another hazard, just as dangerous as communism, allegedly threatened American youth. Adults worried that reticent children, particularly boys, could never withstand the communist threat. Thus, the climate of the Cold War promoted parent's encouragement of hostile outpourings. Failure to release aggression during childhood could have disastrous results. For instance, Dr. Norbert Bromberg, delivering an address to the American Psychoanalytic Association, reported that after studying various patients, he found that many had turned to communism in an effort to vent hostilities created in childhood. He concluded that "because the patients could not take out the feelings of anger and hostility . . . they turned to this totalitarian ideal . . . totalitarian political ideologies provide an almost tailor-made impersonal arena onto which a person can vent his conflicting feelings." [43] Experts believed they had found the link between pent-up aggression and communism. Likewise, Edward Strecker, psychiatric consultant to the Surgeon General of the Army and Navy and adviser to the Secretary of War during World War II, spoke adamantly about the need for boys to develop "savagery." "When I first began to practice psychiatry," he admitted, "my young male friends who were at this developmental phase usually wanted to go West to kill Indians." [44] Bromberg and

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[43] Emma Harrison, "Clue to Reds Seen in Parent Hatred," New *York Times* (6 December 1958). Dr. Bromberg's evaluation would have no doubt disturbed many Americans. Yet upon further consideration it is interesting that he would have had so many "communist" patients. His comments, however, do reveal that he is deeply concerned, and convinced, that communists lurked everywhere and that communism could be a latent condition in otherwise healthy individuals. Many mental health professionals also believed homosexuality to be a condition lying dormant in men.

[44] Edward A. Strecker, *Their Mothers' Sons* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1951), 59-60, 201, 202. The perception of disintegrating masculinity had become glaringly apparent during World War II. For instance, Eugene Meyer, Chairman of the National Committee on Mental Hygiene, wrote, "On April 27, 1945, Dr. Edward A. Strecker delivered a lecture before several hundred medical students and physicians at the Bellevue Hospital in New York City. Alluding to Strecker's presentation, entitled

Strecker represent the large chorus of mental health professionals and childcare experts noting the links between passivity and communism. [45]

Experts' promotion of aggression by children proved a means to several ends. Cowboy play became an acceptable way to release hostility. A professor argued, "The five-year-old who is Hopalong Cassidy down to the last department store-advertised detail is not developing a cowboy complex when he tries to rope every visiting friend of the family with his lasso." He described the manner of play as healthy because it fell "under the heading of letting off steam." [46] If youngsters expressed hostility with an American cultural symbol while mimicking a national icon, then acting as pistol-wielding cowboys became the perfect means to release aggression, inculcate an appreciation and adoration of American frontier heritage, and contain the communist threat in America's backyards. In addition, the sight of armed youngsters frolicking in suburban backyards dressed as miniature American heroes provided some degree of reassurance to parents.

For many Americans, every age has been an age fraught with "anxiety." Puritans' anxieties concerning a loss of religiosity eventually led to impassioned jeremiads. Later

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"Psychiatry Speaks to Democracy," Meyer noted that Dr. Strecker's background gives him the right to speak. . . . screening men at induction centers and in the service, he has seen the case histories of many thousands of 'psychoneurotics.' To him the cold hard facts that 1,825,000 men were rejected for military service because of psychiatric disorders, that almost another 600,000 had been discharged from the Army alone for neuropsychiatric reasons or their equivalent, and that fully 500,000 more attempted to evade the draft were alarming statistics. See Strecker, *Their Mother's Sons*, 5-6, 7.

[45] Although it is beyond the scope of this investigation, it is interesting to note that at least a portion of these toy gun totin' baby boomers grew into advocates of peace movements and nonviolent civil disobedience. Either they released their aggression as youths, or their parents merely projected that need onto them during the early Cold War years. See also, K. A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960," *Journal of American History* 87 (September 2000): 515-545. Cuordileone uncovers an "excessive preoccupation with – and anxiety about – masculinity in early Cold War American politics." The author also examines American political culture, which "put a new premium on hard masculine toughness and rendered anything less than that soft and feminine and, as such, a real or potential threat to the security of the nation." Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety," 516.

[46] Fritz Redl, "Give Your Child a Chance to Let Off Steam," *Parent's Magazine* (December 1952), 122.

Theodore Roosevelt, fearing that an entire nation would become soft after the close of the frontier, spent considerable energy exhorting men to live the "strenuous life." The era immediately after World War II proved no different. [47] Children's anxieties eventually manifested themselves in their choice of playtime activities. Cowboy play reflected Americans' nuclear fears. According to Anna Hammond, Director of the Winfield Day Nursery, children's "apprehensions about 'the bomb' are beginning to appear among some nursery school youngsters and cowboy play is beginning to blend in confused fashion with games about war and soldiers." [48] Youngsters' choice of recreation exemplifies that they tried to use the act of play to work out their anxieties concerning the nuclear threat. Moreover, young boys' fusing of cowboy play with war games illustrates that they realized the two could be blended because they had similarities. Both kinds of play had high levels of violence, and children perceived cowboys and soldiers as the appropriate figures to look to for help in calming their uneasiness. In addition, these types of play indicated that children believed the best way to respond to the nuclear hazard could be found the in violent means exemplified by armed cowboys and soldiers.

Many Americans also felt anxious about challenges to traditional gender roles. Specifically, many worried that homosexuality was steadily on the rise. Abram Kardiner,

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[47] It is not surprising that Americans looked to figures such as Edward Strecker in the anxiety-ridden postwar era. In times of stress people often turn to those they perceive to be "experts" because these individuals are knowledgeable authority figures offering solutions to complex problems and they provide insight into otherwise inexplicable behavior. In the postwar era, Americans turned to experts for guidance in unprecedented numbers. Fueled by this quest, psychology enjoyed a dramatic increase in popularity. For instance, between 1940 and 1970, membership in the American Psychological Association increased more than 1,100 percent from 2,739 to 30,839. Likewise, the American Psychiatric Association enjoyed a 760 increase in its membership from 2,423 in 1940 to 18,407 by 1970. See Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Cultures in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1-3.

[48] "Nursery Schools See Bomb Apprehension," *New York Times* (18 January 1951).

a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Columbia University pointed to a massive growth in the numbers of homosexuals in America. Perhaps even more disturbing for Americans, according to Kardiner, was that homosexuality merely presented itself as an indicator of a much larger problem, "a flight from masculinity, or some aspect of masculinity. It is a symptom; it is not the disease." Where should the blame be placed? Mental health experts had weighed the case regarding the proposed decline of masculinity and the verdict was in – mothers everywhere were found guilty. Professionals used the popular phrase "Momism" to explain the unhealthy "attachment to a strong, dominant mother." "Momism" resulted in a man developing a problem in which "his image of himself is that of a little boy, and a little boy cannot do a man's job." [49] Boys growing up during the Cold War simply had to be prepared to do a "man's job," however, because communists could be lurking everywhere, ready to attack.

Author Philip Wylie, although an inflammatory writer, echoed the sentiments of contemporary experts' views of mothers' effect on their sons. Wylie warned America of the dangers of "Momism." He declared that we are in a nightmare where there are few real independent men left, and "mom sits on its decaying throne . . . [she] will soon, most likely, wrap civilization in mom's final, tender garment: a shroud." [50] Mom, then, appeared as a dangerous usurper whose ascendancy signaled the end of the world.

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[49] Abram Kardiner, "The Flight from Masculinity," in *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society,* Hendrik M Ruitenbeek, ed., (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1963), 18, 22, 28. For more on the family during the Cold War era, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988). May describes the turn toward the home for security as "the domestic version of containment" and contends that the home would be the instrument to mitigate the dangerous forces of the age. The findings in the Kinsey report about the prevalence of homosexuality also created alarm among many Americans.

[50] Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1955), 196.

Although vitriolic in his assertions that Satan motivated mothers among other outrageous claims, Wylie's underlying theme of mothers' ability to emasculate their sons resonated with many professionals, both male and female, during the 1950s. Fathers and mothers did not want their boys to be "sissies in an era demanding manly resolve to deal with the nuclear threat." [51] One way to encourage boys to be masculine included advocating play with toy guns. It seemed logical on several levels. A popular symbol of American heritage, toy guns represented the authority associated with men. Guns, even as playthings, also empowered boys and parents believed that toy firearms could make them assertive, aggressive, and secure – valuable attributes in a climate of nuclear and gender uncertainty for adults and children.

The prospect of boys developing into sissies increasingly worried many Americans, particularly returning veterans. A study conducted by the Committee on Child Development of the Division of Anthropology and Psychology of the National Research Council and published by Stanford University in 1954 confirmed Bartemeier's assertion. The research revealed that upon a father's return home from military service, the fathers often responded with criticism of their sons' behavior. "The youngster was 'spoiled' they said. The boys were sissies." [52] Twice as many war-separated as nonseparated fathers complained about the gender-appropriateness of their war-born

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[51] Dr. O Spurgeon English, M. D. and Constance J. Foster, Professor of Psychiatry, Temple University Medical School, asserted the role of mothers in childrearing seemed not only to be too dominating; it could also be destructive for boys because it retarded the internalization of masculine attributes. The father's influence could counteract that of the mother who, experts claimed, could not raise peaceful self-controlled children because of her overwhelming devotion and tenderness would emasculate them. See *Parent's Magazine* 26 (October 1951), 44, 153.

[52] Dorothy Barclay, "The Big Moment When Dad Returns," *New York Times Magazine* (31 January 1954), 41.

child's behavior." [53] In order to combat the sissy tendencies that appalled them in their boys, fathers naturally supported them playing with guns. No strangers to violence and weapons, toy guns would prove to be an appropriate way to instill masculinity in their sons. Moreover, imbued with a keen sense of patriotism, these father-veterans deemed acceptable their children's worship of an American patriot in his own right, the cowboy. [54]

Experts also recommended the father as the perfect figure to help boys release their violent behavior because without aggression, boys "would have no more backbone than a banana." [55] The implication clearly equated a non-aggressive boy with a spineless one and any display of weakness resulted in the boy stepping perilously close to the edge of "sissiness" and perhaps even homosexuality. During the early postwar era, parents and professionals alike worried about being on the edge of nuclear war, and they also fretted about their children crossing the boundaries of what they considered proper gender roles. The cowboy icon and toy guns were the best weapons at a father's disposal to deter effeminacy and masculinize their sons. [56]

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[53] Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 162. This information comes from a series of studies done after the war at Stanford University and published in *Father Relations of War-Born Children: The Effect of Postwar Adjustment of Fathers on the Behavior and Personality of First Children Born While the Fathers Were at War,* Lois Meek Stolz, ed., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), 62-63, 165-66.

[54] Many men also promoted hunting with real guns as a means to develop manliness, character, sportsmanship, and citizenship in their sons.

[55] Samuel Grafton, "I Found Courage over the A-Bomb," *Parent's Magazine* (October 1951), 44. Commenting on a visit to America, an English anthropologist commented that Americans' obsessed about whether boys were becoming sissies; it was "the overriding fear of every American parent." See Andre Fontaine, "Are We Staking Our Future on a Crop of Sissies?" *Better Homes and Gardens* December (1950), 156.

[56] The overwhelming majority of concern about homosexual tendencies among children focused on boys. For instance, Clara Thompson, a mental health professional who worked at Phipps Clinic at Johns Hopkins Hospital, taught psychiatry and psychoanalysis at Johns Hopkins, the New York Medical College, the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, and the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, and

Gun-toting television heroes ambling through the dusty streets of Hollywood sets both exemplified and helped resolve some of the gender anxiety. David Cort, one-time editor of *Time-Life* and a frequent contributor to *The Nation*, noted:

> At every nightfall, twenty to thirty million American homes rock with the sound of sudden gunfire, preceded by an ominous uproar and followed by deadly silence. . . . The gunmen are merely TV actors acting as if, in their scriptwriters' conception, they were living west of the Mississippi in a brief period following the year 1870. The Western art form brings us to still another popular opinion about guns: that they represent virility.

The performers seemed to be acting out the pervasive gender uncertainties among Americans who tuned in to their programs. Cort continued, "It is evidently heady stuff for an actor to be allowed to call another actor's bluff of virility, whip out the six-gun and blast away with the blanks. Bang! Bang! Bluff called." In westerns, Americans could vicariously call the bluff of the "bad guy" threatening them - the communists. [57]

A man's need to prove his manliness and aggressively assert himself continued even after the camera stopped rolling. Cort wrote, "One TV gunfighter, Hugh O'Brian (*Wyatt Earp*), recently announced that he is the fastest gun in Hollywood. Well, on re-examination, it seemed that several obscure stunt-men are faster. O'Brian re-defined his brag by saying that he was still the fastest gun among Hollywood stars of TV Western series." O'Brian's on-screen cowboy persona led him to lay claim to a manliness evoked

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authored *Psychoanalysis, Evolution, and Development*, points to social attitudes toward girls and aggressive behavior. Thompson argues, "The different cultural attitudes toward the sissy and the tomboy again show society's greater tolerance for the female homosexual type. When a boy is called a sissy, he feels stigmatized, and the group considers that it has belittled him. No such disapproval goes with a girl's being called a tomboy. In fact, she often feels considerable pride in the fact. Probably these names get their value from childhood ideas that courage and daring are desirable traits in both sexes. So the sissy is a coward, a mamma's boy, and the tomboy is a brave girl who can hold her own with a boy her size." See Clara Thompson, "Changing Concepts of Homosexuality in Psychoanalysis," in *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society* Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek, ed., (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1963), 40, 46. Thus the little Annie Oakley's of the era elicited little concern.

[57] David Cort, "Arms and the Man," *The Nation* (23 May 1950), 476.

by the image of the six-gun cowboy, even though he did not even perform his own gun stunts, thus indicating the cowboy's power to instill masculinity in those who imitated him. O'Brian's remarks, however, ignited a real showdown. *The Nation* reported, "A star that has actually been shot at, Audie Murhpy, thereupon challenged O'Brian to a duel with live ammunition." Audie Murphy effectively called O'Brian's bluff. Apparently realizing that he was Wyatt Earp only on screen, O'Brian publicly announced that "all he had ever meant in the first place was that he was the fastest gun merely in the sense of getting the gun out of the holster quick. He had not, he said, ever meant to imply that he knew what to do with the gun after he had gotten it out of the holster." Despite the ugly turn that the O'Brian and Murphy feud had taken, other actors joined in the fray. "No sooner had this colossal gunfight died down than Steve McQueen (*Wanted: Dead or Alive*) made himself wanted by deposing that he is the only real he-man on TV among a crowd of sissies." [58] Heady with playing ultra-masculine American heroes, O'Brian and McQueen believed they had come to possess the assured manliness of the characters they portrayed to millions of American viewers, including countless American boys. If grown men, such as O'Brian, could feel so empowered by faking a gun-slinging idol who did not even do his own gun feats, no doubt boys wielding their toy firearms could also take on the mantle of exaggerated manliness, much to the delight of their anxious parents.

Other facets of Cold War culture also contributed to the promotion of guns as toys. Faced with what many feared to be an emerging communist threat in the United States, parents worried about developing the proper respect for democracy in their children. In a November 1954 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens*, an article reminded

[58] Ibid., 476-77.

mothers, the primary readers of the publication, of their responsibility to create a democratic home. Entitled, "Democracy Begins at Home," it proclaimed, "We want our children to cherish their heritage of democracy. We want the schools to teach it, the churches to preach it, the government to practice it. But the foundations of democracy are laid in the home, and we parents are the chief builders." [59] Gun use, even if it occurred as a child's amusement, allowed youngsters to assert constitutional privileges and also served as a lesson in promoting democratic principles to counter communism. In addition, children's affection for the cowboy reassured parents that, in a precarious world, their children could benefit from the imitation of a familiar American character by brandishing an instrument of destruction, albeit an innocuous facsimile, in the backyard. Many parents also believed the impersonation of the armed icon instilled traditional American values into their youth. In an environment of apprehension and vulnerability, adults viewed firearms, whether brandished by adults or children, as ideological as well as practical deterrents to communism.

Jonathan Holden, who came of age in the early postwar era, remembered being unable to play with real firearms because of his parents' refusal to allow such gunplay. Holden particularly recalled the connection between his secret childhood gunplay, American heritage, and democracy. He shared that he and his friends:

> had to go to almost fantastic trouble to steal little voyeuristic peeks into those flash/bang mysteries that, on the radio and in comic books and movies, were so ubiquitous that shooting seemed part of the American landscape itself. It was the Colt .45 six-shooter, after all, that had 'won' the West, had secured for us our ongoing daydream of boyhood paradise – that ideal 'territory,' the frontier, for which Huck Finn had once lit out. We sensed, all of us, that if one were born

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[59] Joan Morrison, "Democracy Begins at Home," *Better Homes and Gardens* (November 1954), 176.

> American and male, then mastery of such sounds, together with ownership and control of the machinery to make them, was our birthright.

He continued, "I and the other boys on Pleasantville Road prepared regularly, systematically almost, to lay claim to this birthright. We prepared for it after school as well as on weekends and, of course, all summer, every afternoon." [60] Holden's recollection underscores the connections between gun use, Americanness, and manliness for males, even small ones, in the early postwar era. Guns, even toy ones, infused him and his playmates with a sense of masculine identity based on firearms use and national heritage.

The toy that won the West and the hearts of a million children received harsh criticism from only a few professionals. Dr. Vera Emanuel, M. D. commented that as a European, she reacted to American children's handling of toy guns with strange fascination accompanied by dismay. Emanuel admitted that to her "the impact of your crime reports and the sight of chubby children handling firearms, albeit toy ones, with assurance is so terrific that I feel I must . . . express my very great concern." She sent her reactions to *Parent's Magazine*, which published her letter under the title "Are We Making Gunmen of Our Children?" Emanuel noted that American parents seemed to think of the gunplay as harmless games conducted all in fun. However, such games alarmed her because multitudes of boys pumped their "enemy full of imaginary lead! A little body lies stretched out on the sidewalk, gun on breast. Its very realism makes one shudder." [61] In the proper setting,

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[60] Holden, *Guns and Boyhood*, 15-16.

[61] Vera Emanuel, "Are We Making Gunmen of Our Kids?" *Parent's Magazine* (May 1952), 48-50. Dr. Emanuel resided in the United States and served as an instructor in pediatrics at Bellevue Medical Center in

such as military training, Emanuel believed guns to be acceptable, but in a culture that celebrated gun violence outside the context of national defense, the possibilities could be dangerous.

Most Americans disagreed with her assumptions. In fact, it seems that *Parent's Magazine* only published the letter in order to bolster the position that guns posed no harm to children, because immediately following Emanuel's note a rebuttal appeared from an American doctor. Psychiatrist Sidney Green, M. D., responded that as a parent he, too, would be concerned about any credible threats presented to children by toy guns, but to him the toys presented no such harm. Green argued that taking play guns away from children would not prevent them from becoming delinquent any more than building more prisons would deter crime. He reasoned that the "emotionally healthy child who plays at killing with guns today is pretty sure to grow into a considerate adult . . . who can control his temper when everything goes wrong." [62] Dr. Green reaffirmed the widespread American conviction that toy guns made appropriate and safe playthings while teaching children to vent their frustrations properly .

Dr. Emanuel continued to plead with American parents to outlaw "this crazy play" and replace it with more wholesome games, proposing that parents go a step further and explain to their children why gunplay must cease. She refrained from articulating exactly what the parents would say in such an explanation. Parents taking her advice would have to tell their youngsters that playing "cowboys" constituted an inappropriate form of amusement because it involved too much violence. The child's play that

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New York. Although most American parents dismissed her remarks, she is representative of European attitudes toward the American gun culture.

[62] Ibid, 50.

Emanuel termed "rehearsals for murder, robbery, and violence" could better be described as reenactments of American history. [63] Yet the contradiction is just one of the ironies of the 1950s. American parents purchased cowboy gear in attempts to please their little cowpokes while alleviating their own anxieties, but if they examined the very frontier heritage the apparel celebrated, they would have found the frontier experience to be less than glorious. Meanwhile, the nation fell victim to the same hypocrisy by promoting itself as the principal symbol of democracy to the world while infringing on civil liberties at home through McCarthyism and in the suppression of the civil rights movement. While McCarthyism infringed on other civil liberties, for now at least, guns of all manners enjoyed their protection under the Second Amendment.

Near the end of the 1950s, some parents slowly began to reconsider toy guns as the implications of them became apparent. By 1958, articles appeared indicating that some Americans began to see something sinister about the excessive gunplay by children in their formative years. Although most childcare experts, whether male or female, agreed that toys had a positive influence on youngsters, other groups recognized the negative implications of playing with specific ones. For instance, the Amalgamated Meat Cutter's Union called for toy pistols to be banned in 1958 because "they said the child who 'bangs-bangs' at his playmate is likely to grow up to be a real 'pistol-packer.'" [64]

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[63] Ibid.

[64] "Toy Pistol Ban Urged," *New York Times* (March 31, 1958). Likewise, a Chicago citizen purchased a full page in a local television publication in order to run an advertisement calling for the end of media violence. Headlined, "Gruesome Killings in Our Living Rooms Must Be Stopped," the ad complained, "We have a growing son. His little life is in the formative stage. Each day brings new thrills and experiences. He *does* what he sees and hears. We can keep him away from public theaters, that have resorted to gruesome killings to attract blood-thirsty crowds (as in the old Roman gladiator days) but we cannot keep our son out of our own living room. These stabbings, shootings, hangings, and killings must be kept out of our homes. . . . This full page ad of appeal is being paid for by one man, but one man is

Already fears about children having unlimited access to and unrestrained play with toys evoking violence had emerged and would gain momentum as the decade drew to a close. By this time, American toy makers alone produced approximately twenty million toy guns a year, and despite their nascent fears, parents still bought between eighty and ninety percent of all toy guns sold. Most mainstream psychologists stressed that the guns remained suitable for play and they continued to believe that a toy gun provided the best means for children to vent hostility. In many ways, guns still functioned as cultural symbols of American heritage. Child psychologists began calling them 'equalizers,' except now they did not make cowboys on the range equal; instead, they psychologically elevated children to the same level as adults who told them what to do. They argued that the toy gun also served as "the medium of a child's social activity and play . . . [and] is essential to developing his ability to abide by the rules of a group and get along with others. Thus the gun is a useful tool for aligning a child with his peers." Guns had a special therapeutic role for shy children as well. Experts maintained that "with shy, retiring youngsters, gunplay may be encouraged to accustom them to stand up for their rights." [65] In spite of the changing attitudes toward toy guns, the playthings still served cultural and psychological needs. Children could be taught that the toy weapons endowed them with certain equalizing powers, and that the toys could also be used to protect and acquire rights. As gunplay swept American youth, the nation's faith in its

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helpless in this undertaking. I need your help. Write your U.S. congressman and send me a copy. Let's get the ball rolling to try and stop our children form murdering each other." *Television Forecast* (28 May 1949), 2. Although stirring, the writer's comments are directed at violence in general rather than guns specifically. Outcries such as this remained rare until the mid- to late 1960s.

[65] Gerald Walker, "Should Small Fry Carry Small Arms?" *New York Times Magazine* (29 June 1958), 14-15.

heritage had unconsciously been relegated to the backyard in the form of western amusement for children. Some parents, seemingly bewildered by the repercussions of the toy gun craze, probably marveled at the implications of what once seemed harmless playthings used in wholesome, backyard play.

Although toy soldiers and related military weapons have always been somewhat popular playthings for boys, the cowboy gear and pistols heralded a new stage for playthings because they happened to be "individualized" toys of violence. Most experts, like child analyst Dr. Sidney L. Green, reassured parents that "it is perfectly natural for young boys to be fascinated by guns . . . they represent an extension of power and strength." [66] But toys related to war and the military involved violence conducted collectively, such as in battalions or regiments, while cowboys and boys imitating them acted out their aggression singularly with the occasional assistance of a sidekick. The individualization of play signaled a change in American culture. A new form of violence would gain acceptance because of the influence of the cowboy in which society deemed aggression outside the military or law enforcement as acceptable. By endorsing the violence committed by children emulating the cowboy and other frontier heroes, parents and professionals unwittingly supported violence perpetrated by individuals acting independently of proper legal authorities. In the early 1960s, several changes occurred, however, which led many Americans to question sanctioning this type of violence.

One cultural shift that changed American parenting attitudes in general occurred with the decline of the "expert." Most white, middle-class Americans have long looked to some type of expert for various forms of guidance. But with the advent of the

[66] "Child's Guns Spark Battle in the Home," *New York Times* (7 June 1958).

turbulent 1960s, the advice dispensed by psychologists and psychiatrists came under attack. According to Ellen Herman, the multiple domestic and international crises of the 1960s "provoked a thorough reassessment of the assumptions about knowledge and power, expertise and government, that had animated earlier decades. The [Vietnam] war's managers, after all, were 'the best and the brightest,' men whose excellent educations had typically included liberal doses of up-to-date social science." [67] Some parents, then, lost faith in the childcare experts or at least viewed their advice with suspicion. Furthermore, experts' close alliance with the federal government made them suspect as more and more people questioned the motives of the political leadership of the 1960s.

Fatherhood historian Robert Griswold also notes that many parents were among those who rejected, or at least began to question, the advice of the childcare experts, explaining:

> The role of the father in the American family also began to change in the early 1960s. Although fathers were expected to help out occasionally in the American household in the period immediately after the war, they were rarely admonished for not bearing half of the household burden. Dad was only expected to pitch in once in a while and to be more attentive to his children, especially boys. During the early postwar era, "Family togetherness and paternal engagement was not a feminist ideology. It did not challenge the assumption that men's primary responsibility was breadwinning while mothers' was child rearing; it simply enlarged the significance of fatherhood while leaving intact the patriarchal assumptions underlying a gender-based division of labor." [68]

Beginning in the 1960s, "changes in the structure of the household economy coupled with the rise of feminism" politicized fatherhood. [69]

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[67] Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology,* 10.
[68] Griswold, *Fatherhood in America,* 186-87.
[69] Ibid., 242.

The actual cowboy toys, including the six-shooters and cap pistols, also declined in popularity during the early 1960s. In 1964 Mattel released a new toy – G.I. (Government Issue) Joe - that indicated brewing cultural change. As a toy, G.I. Joe dislodged the cowboy gear of the previous decade, but more significantly, the cultural atmosphere that had facilitated the rise of the cowboy after World War II dissipated. The western toys celebrating the mythic past were displaced by G. I. Joe, who "miniaturized the Cold War present." [70] The heroic narrative of the frontier did not blow away like a tumbleweed on a deserted, western Main Street, but it did take several serious blows as the showdown between democracy and communism heated up.

The Vietnam War also delivered another serious blow to the culture that had sustained a love of firearms. According to Engelhardt, Vietnam:

> mysteriously robbed Americans of their inheritance. On screen and off, they were transformed from victors into, at best, victims; from heroes into, at worst, killers; their leader, a self-proclaimed madman; their soldiers, torturers; their democratic public, a mob of rioters and burners; their army, in a state of near collapse; their legislative bodies, impotent. They had become the world's most extraordinary (because least expected) losers. [71]

If various attacks on the triumphant narrative of America left it staggering before, the story now could no longer sustain its wounds and collapsed.

The legacy of childhood gunplay is varied. Certainly the six-gun craze boosted toy manufacturers' revenues to unprecedented heights following World War II. The boom in consumption encompassed children as well as adults as an entire generation of baby-boomers learned about consumerism, even if unaware of the lesson, through the barrel of a toy gun. Television, where the cowboys and other American frontier heroes

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[70] Schwartz, "When Barbie Dated G.I. Joe," 47.
[71] Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture,* 254.

could be found every day, captured and shaped the imaginations of millions of youth. Television shows familiarized children with a heroic version of American history while commercials stimulated and refined their consumer ethic at younger and younger ages. Debates have raged for decades about whether the pre-pubescent gun slinging produced a violent generation. It seems that most of the youth wielding toy firearms did not grow up to be hardened criminals. However, many Americans of this generation did develop the attitude that guns are an integral part of American history and that America's success and the character of her people depended on firearms of various sorts. Most importantly, those who had spent many happy childhood days as cowpokes and other gun-carrying characters probably grew up to believe that guns are rather harmless. [72] Accordingly, they oppose harsh gun regulations. Far from being gun-toters in their adulthood, these law-abiding citizens nonetheless may still view firearms as a natural part of the American, and childhood, landscape.

Social critics evaluating America's gun cultures often try to discover why the United States has such an entrenched attachment to firearms. Considering the toy gun craze following World War II and the Cold War climate in which the youth gun culture flourished, the real question is not why America has such pervasive gun cultures, but why isn't the attachment to guns even more entrenched than it already is?

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[72] In a recent study of public opinion regarding gun ownership and regulation, several scholars have found that, based on data from major polling organizations, a minority of Americans since 1959 have opposed any regulation of firearms. See John T. Young and others, "The Polls – Trends: Guns," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 60 (Winter 1996), 634-49.

CHAPTER 2: GOOD, CLEAN FUN WITH GUNS

Guns in postwar America took on another positive attribute and became further separated from violence and misuse in the American popular consciousness as recreational shooting became a popular pastime for Americans of all ages, especially young males. Recreation advocates nationwide promoted target, clay, and competition shooting as wholesome family fun. One commentator proclaimed, "There's no finer family entertainment than a friendly shooting match. What better place for your children to learn how to shoot . . . than in your own home, under your own supervision? . . . And as for juvenile delinquency – you'll find mighty little of that in homes where parents take time to shoot with kids." [73] An article in *Better Homes and Gardens* also recommended sporting hunting as a wholesome family activity stating: "Each season, more and more women and sons and daughters are joining the hunting fold. It's good autumn *family* recreation." [74] By presenting firearms as tools that could foster the development of healthy attitudes and responsibility, the culture of sporting gun recreation separated firearms use from potential negative aspects. Ultimately, Americans turned to the sporting use of guns as a means to alleviate postwar fears of family disintegration evidenced by the purported rise of juvenile delinquency, to bolster father-son relationships, and especially to pass on male gender identity through rites of passage involving firearms ownership and use. In their pursuit of these activities as a means to assuage their anxieties, they intensified an American gun culture rooted in recreation.

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[73] Earl B. Holdren, "Shooting Fun for Everyone," in *Gun Digest,* ed. John T. Amber (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1958), 176.

[74] Henry E. Bradshaw, "Hunting Can Be a Family Affair," *Better Homes and Gardens* (October 1952), 261, emphasis in original.

Furthermore, the promotion of shooting as an ideal family recreation cast the use of firearms as good clean fun for the whole family.

The role of recreation in general gained new importance during the postwar years as more working Americans than ever before enjoyed additional leisure time. Holding on to the notion that idle time encouraged mischief, Americans took up a wide assortment of hobbies and leisure pursuits, from collecting stamps to camping. The significance of these activities extended beyond just filling time, however. For instance, in an address given to the 41st National Recreation Congress, Arthur S. Fleming, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, emphasized the importance of recreational activities for America. According to Fleming, appropriate types of leisure could prevent juvenile delinquency and improve education. He announced that "juvenile delinquency is the result of our failure to provide adequate and equal opportunities for education, including recreation." [75] Furthermore, according to one publication, "'No *family* is really safe or happy without hobbies.'" The authors, Penny and David Hellyer, noted that hobbies could prevent the "trend toward family disintegration," which multitudes of Americans feared. [76] The availability of more leisure time coupled with

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[75] Arthur S. Fleming, "Recreation to Keep America Strong," *Recreation* (November 1959), 371. Likewise, Walter L. Stone, Professor of Sociology of Hanover College, wrote in his pamphlet, *The Field of Recreation*, "Democracy will be secure ... if its people are happy and well adjusted." See "Recreation Can Help Make Democracy Secure," *American City* (November 1950), 94.

[76] The Hellyers reported that their own family had "found real family insurance in hobbies, insurance which helps to hold us together." They also suggested, "The important thing to remember is to straddle a family hobby as soon as possible and then ride it hard toward family happiness and security." See Penny and David Hellyer, "Keep Those Home Fires Burning . . . With Hobbies," *American Home* (December 1948), 51-52.

fears about the stability of the American family, made family-centered recreational activities especially attractive to postwar Americans. [77]

In particular, shooting as a recreational hobby gained in popularity during the era, reinforcing positive attitudes toward firearms. The National Rifle Association, for example, reported in 1952 "that two hundred fifty thousand adults are currently engaged in rifle and pistol shooting as members of the national organization." Many other organizations and individuals joined the National Rifle Association in promoting gun sports as wholesome fun. [78] Little informal opposition, and even less organized protest, surfaced in response to the popularity of recreational gun use in the early postwar years, and the image of sport hunting as a healthy family hobby grew in the American popular consciousness. For instance, *Recreation* magazine reported that part of the heightened interest in shooting lay in "the natural fascination of all for firearms. Properly guided, this fascination can be made a social and national asset, rather than a menace to society."

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[77] According to John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, the increasing visibility of "gay men and lesbians suggested the potential fragility of heterosexual familial norms" thus adding to the anxieties about gender and families in general. See John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 294.

[78] Schools joined community organizations in the promotion of shooting and hunting education, which further legitimated firearms use. Shooting and hunting education proved popular among teachers who participated in training workshops featuring instruction from Daisy BB Gun representatives, the NRA, and local law enforcement officials. Moreover, one program, officially entitled the Outdoor Education Project, received sponsorship from the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, a department of the National Education Association. Other contributors included the Associated Fishing Tackle Manufacturers, the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers Institute, and education agencies such as the American Association of School Administrators and the Association of Elementary School Principals. The Outdoor Education Project reported training 3,500 participants, and workshops were held from 1955-1958 in four geographical regions and twenty-nine states. *Gun Digest* reported, "Educators have initiated a program in the regular school curriculum to teach hunting and shooting skills under classroom conditions. This program is in addition to ROTC units, rifle clubs, and rod and gun clubs found in many schools." Educators supported the programs, deeming the use of firearms as a "worthy use of leisure time." See Dick Miller, "National Educators Sanction Shooting-Hunting Instruction in Schools," in *Gun Digest,* ed. John T. Amber (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1960), 181-82.

[79] Although families participated in shooting as a recreational pastime, the hobby particularly grew in popularity among male youths. Hoping to provide boys with a wholesome activity which would keep them out of trouble, parents encouraged involvement in shooting as a means to safeguard the family juvenile delinquency.

Evidence suggests that youth shooting programs became enormously popular across the nation. Clubs appeared all over the country, such as the "Long Rifles" at Loring Air Force Base, Maine, which boasted a membership of about fifty boys. Members wore shirts bearing "sleeve emblems depicting a B-52 crossed with a rifle and bearing the legend 'Long Rifles – Loring AFB, Maine.'" [80] Other clubs could be found anywhere from Canterbury, New Hampshire, Mount Clemens, Michigan, Brunswick, Maine, Utica, New York, Snowy Mountains, Montana, Atchison, Kansas, Fayetteville, North Carolina, and places in between. In Emporia, Kansas the local recreation commission held father-son shoots sponsored by the National Rifle Association in order "to encourage closer father-son relationships." [81] The insistence on firearms recreation as

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[79] Ruth Jacquemine, *Recreation* (November 1952), 365.

[80] "Sure-Fire Safety in Riflery," *Recreation* (September 1957), 256.

[81] Ibid., 257-58. The benefits of shooting extended beyond forging closer family ties. Some hunting programs encouraged familiarity with firearms because "now military leaders are accepting hunting as a good 'training sport.'" See Frank C. Hibben, "Hunting Goes to College," *Field and Stream* (September 1955), 52. Likewise, other groups promoted the use of guns for hunting and trained young boys to that end. The Abraham and Strauss department store in Hempstead, Long Island organized one national shooting and hunting club for youths, the Teen Hunters' Club. "Abraham and Strauss considered the event one of the finest public service programs in the history of the firm, and repeated the event in 1960 at Hempstead and at Babylon, New York. Teen Hunters' Clubs snowballed in 1960, and among other sponsors were J. L. Hudson Company in Detroit, Joseph Horne Company in Pittsburgh, and WSBT-TV in South Bend, Ind." The actual program events consisted of an "instructional session of shooting and hunting education, followed by a live-fire program for evaluation purposes." See Dick Miller, "Teen Hunters' Club," in *Gun Digest*, ed. John T. Amber (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1962), 217. In addition, in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, the Recreation Department offered rifle instruction courses to local high-school youth on Saturdays. The agency reported, "Since their inception, over twenty-five hundred boys and girls have attended and the enrollment for 1951 is well over the two hundred mark." The Recreation Department also proudly announced that the local police chief reported that boys who had taken the rifle class had never

a wholesome activity cast guns as just another object for amusement, like a basketball or wood burning kit, and detracted from their potential illegal and lethal misuse. By promoting recreational shooting as good, clean fun, guns came to be largely separated from the negative connotations that would later be associated with firearms. In addition, in an era searching for means to bolster the family unit, Americans welcomed recreation, such as firearms use, which offered ample opportunities for family togetherness and youth character development.

Many advertisements and youth publications also contributed to the growth of rifle clubs. For instance, one article asked boys, "Too small for football? Can't hit the side of a cow with a ball bat? Haven't the wind for basketball? Why not try riflery?" Shooting, the youth magazine proposed, could instill those lacking in physical prowess the chance to exhibit their skill and masculinity in a different sporting area. The article continued, "Age or size doesn't count in riflery. *Anybody* can shoot. And don't let anyone tell you 'guns are dangerous.' So are banana peels, bath tubs and baseball bats." [82] If the article alone did not effectively arouse the interest of boys, then the advertisement beside the piece further enticed them. Entitled "Bob and Bill Qualify as Sharpshooters," the cartoon showed how Bob and Bill became certified sharpshooters and gained the approval of their male coach. [83] (See Figure 4) Sponsored by Remington, the ad featured a coupon that boys could mail in to receive information about how to start a rifle club. Used as a tactic to cultivate future customers and safeguard sport shooting,

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been caught violating any of the local firearm ordinances or been involved in a gun accident. See A. J. Schara, "Rifle Instruction," *Recreation* (October 1951), 251.

[82] "Going, Going, Gun!" *Senior Scholastic* (24 September 1945), 35.

[83] "Bob and Bill Qualify as Sharpshooters," *Senior Scholastic* (24 September 1945), 35.



Figure 4. Remington Company Shooting Promotion.

Source: *Senior Scholastic* (24 September 1945), 35.

the advertisement and the article persuaded boys not already involved in a rifle club to establish their own. The advertisement also reveals that businesses and schools sanctioned shooting as an acceptable activity for young males. Furthermore, such ads in well-respected publications further convinced scores of Americans about the legitimacy of shooting as a healthy, appropriate youth activity, and they contributed to the growing recreational culture of firearms.

Rifle clubs flourished in part because many Americans wanted to provide youths with a healthy outlet for their energies. Rather than believing that knowing how to use guns may increase instances of juvenile delinquency, some Americans considered shooting a healthy hobby which could prevent juvenile misbehavior. For instance one observer noted, "While speaking of youngsters, it may be pertinent to mention that outdoor sports, such as recreational shooting, can be an effective preventive for juvenile delinquency. Judge William G. Long, of Seattle's Juvenile Court, who heard 45,000 cases over a twenty-year period, says that not one of the boys or girls that came before him had a wholesome outdoor hobby." [84] An outdoor writer reported one mother's similar thoughts on the relationship between delinquency and recreation: "'I've got two boys growing up, who just love to shoot. . . . They both can hardly wait until they get old enough to go deer hunting. . . . I've thought a lot about it – mainly the danger in getting them started so young. But with all this juvenile delinquency going on, I know there's a

[84] Pete Kuhloff, *Kuhloff on Guns* (New York: Winchester Press, 1970), 87. Herb Parsons, a famous shooter, also believed that "there could be no more healthy ambition. What better proof of this than the fact that only 2 per cent of all those in our institutions – from 16 to 50 – ever owned a hunting license [?]" See "Kids Want to Shoot – Give 'Em A Hand!" in *Gun Digest*, ed. John T. Amber (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1963), 141. Hunting was such a wholesome activity and had the power to prevent juvenile delinquency to such an extent that, according to Parsons and his statistics, hunters rarely ever faced conviction for criminal offenses.

lot worse things they could be doing than being out hunting with their Dad.'" [85] Many Americans agreed with her. Some went even further to argue that firearms posed no harm and that children should become familiar with them. Accordingly, one gun expert, "Today [guns] are used to build healthy minds and bodies; to develop self-discipline, initiative, and team spirit; [they can also] help prepare our young men to defend our American ideals, should the need arise, as did their forefathers. Hunting and shooting are wholesome forms of recreation which may be enjoyed for a lifetime." [86] By presenting guns as tools that could foster healthy attitudes, discipline, and responsibility, the culture of gun recreation separated firearms use from potential negative aspects. Because of the large number of clubs across America, the evidence suggests that few people feared that they could be training a generation of bank robbers, or worse. Prior to the early 1960s, Americans had little incentive to question their attachment to firearms in the absence of a crime wave and the sporting gun culture deepened across America.

In some instances, citizens implemented gun training for youth as a specific response to juvenile delinquency. A Kent, Ohio police officer, Nick Stefan, also a former Marine, decided to give boys a supervised opportunity to use their guns in order to reduce youth gun mischief. He established a local gun club for youths, age eleven to seventeen, with financial help from the Rotary Club. "The point of the Kent story," *Rotarian* reported, "is that the rifle club has won its first goal: Not once since it was formed has

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[85] Clyde Ormond, *Hunting Our Medium Size Game* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Press, 1958), 219.

[86] Louis F. Lucas, "A Man and His Gun," in *Gun Digest,* ed. John T. Amber (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1961), no page number, inside front cover. Louis F. Lucas' article about the role of guns in American history proved so popular in the NRA's official magazine, *American Rifleman,* that *Gun Digest* editor John T. Amber reprinted it. The original article appeared in 1959. Also, *Nation's Business* writer John Carlyle penned an article in October 1947 headlined, "The Rifle is America's Heritage," which proclaimed, "Marksmanship is our tradition. Here in America hunting and shooting are established customs." See *Nation's Business* (October 1947), 47.

there been an incident of illegal shooting involving a club member!" [87] The reported success of recreational gun use for youths resonated with Americans in the wake of a Senate Investigating Committee's report that most kids in trouble with authorities lacked hobbies to occupy their free time. [88] Thus, Americans welcomed shooting as an appropriate youth hobby that could deter delinquency. Youth shooting presented itself as an antidote to the postwar perceptions that disaster awaited American families, in part because of rampant juvenile delinquency. [89]

Americans considered sport shooting as more than an activity that would deter juvenile delinquency, however. Perhaps one of the most important benefits of passing on a culture of guns to American youth, especially in an era riddled with gender anxiety, lay

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[87] John Lewis Stange, "These Kids Shoot Straight, Go Straight," *Rotarian* (July 1949), 51.

[88] J. M. Lewis, "Juvenile Delinquency," *Recreation* (January 1956), 7-8. Lewis's letter to the editor urged readers to initiate or continue to support recreation programs for the benefit of American communities at large.

[89] Firearms training, according to NRA training literature, also developed good citizenship. The guide's "objective is to prevent gun accidents and teach skills and knowledge that will build wholesome leisure-time shooting activities. The shooting education program meets the needs of the functional type education that we are endeavoring to give boys and girls in order to prepare them for life and good citizenship." See Jack F. George, *Instructors Guide: Shooting and Firearms Education* (Washington, D. C., 1956), iii, National Firearms Museum Library, Fairfax, Virginia, Section 46 "Training." George acted as Director of Physical Education for the New Hampshire Department of Education and Recreation. The guide also received support from the NRA and argued that schools offered the best venue for proper gun education. The course of instruction recommended by the guide included learning the parts of the gun and safety exercises. For instance, one scenario for safety training asked students to imagine that "you are hunting alone and you come to a fence you wish to cross. With this .22 rifle, show [the instructor] how you would: a. go over or through the fence, [or] b. go under the fence." With safety instruction, youths could learn how to handle firearms responsibly, thus removing any danger posed to them or others. As long as youngsters learned firearms safety, few Americans criticized shooting as a recreational activity. Aware that accidents could hurt children as well as threaten their own existence, yet unwilling to disparage or attempt to terminate the sport, many other organizations also turned their attention to making recreational shooting safe. For instance, Stanley A. Mate, speaking on behalf of the Center for Safety Education advised parents, "There are millions of homes where the small fry have their 'cowboy' sidearms strapped on for a part of every day. . . . It is with 'Cowboy Joe' that firearm safety instruction should begin. Certainly a responsibility of the parent who keeps a gun in the home is to teach the child the difference between the toy and the real gun." See "The ABC's of Gun Safety," (New York: The Center for Safety Education, 1961), 36-37, National Rifle Association Safety Series (Washington, D. C., 1959),1, National Firearms Museum Library, Fairfax, Virginia, section 46 "Training." Rather than urging parents to disarm their little cowpokes, Mate, like the majority of his contemporaries, instead insisted that parents teach their future riflemen safety measures for handling firearms.

in the wish to teach boys how to become men through establishing close bonds between fathers and sons while at the same time strengthening families. In general, fathers already found themselves the target of criticism about their inadequacies as parents. And while mothers still received the bulk of the blame for poor parenting from mental health experts and social critics, the fear persisted that the lack of involvement on the behalf of fathers would breed a generation of delinquents, and worse yet in the perception of many Americans, effeminate boys who would not be able to stem the rising tide of communism. For instance, much of the literature on men during postwar era focused on 'father absence' as a key impetus for various social problems. [90] Accordingly, males found recreational shooting a fitting antidote to the gender anxieties of the early postwar era because it offered fathers and sons the opportunity to share quality time together while shooting and hunting for sport. In the midst of the father-son efforts to connect, the emphasis on a gun culture rooted in family recreation intensified Americans' reverence for firearms. [91]

Many fathers considered recreational shooting, and especially hunting, an ideal activity that could forge closer relationships between themselves and their sons. As one commentator explained, "The boys with hunting dads are twice blessed for, wandering the woods and fields together, they not only become good gunners, they also become

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[90] Ruth E. Hartley, "Sex Role Pressures in the Socialization of the Male Child," *Psychological Reports* 5 (1959): 458.

[91] On a related matter, Peter Stearns argues that at times men "managed to use recreation to compensate for some of the blows industrial society had administered to manhood in other respects. Thus in male leisure we see huge traces of a hunting society, beginning with an effort to give bodies an energetic outlet work denies them, but also the work patterns of agricultural society. We see efforts to use leisure to rebuild generational ties now excluded from work itself." Stearns argues that leisure in an important outlet for expressing gender, and accordingly, hunting is an activity perfectly suited for men wanting to forge a masculine identity. See *Be A Man!: Males in Modern Society* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1990), 192, 193, 196.

good pals. Your gunning partner is invariably one of your favorite friends; when he's also your dad, the combination can't be beat. And the good times you have together will always remain in both your memories as some of life's richest highlights." [92] Thus guns made more than good hobbies; they also brought fathers and sons closer and helped to allay fears about the declining role of the American father in sons' lives. As Colonel A. M. Libasci noted that "the finest" benefit of hunting with your son was probably the "spirit of pal-ship [that] will result, tying you to your boy even closer than ever." In addition, he urged that fathers should start training boys in the use of guns as soon as possible, even at the ages of "five or six." [93] Given this popular viewpoint, it is no wonder that Americans rarely questioned the use of firearms for recreation, even among very young boys. The emphasis on parent-child relationships, which shooting sports fostered, could be a key way to establish and sustain the family unit, which Americans feared would crumble because of juvenile delinquency.

Some fathers looked to hunting as an opportunity to mend broken father-son relationships. For instance, Charles C. Niehus shared with *Better Homes and Gardens* readers how his hunting experience with one of his own sons helped him to get to know the youth better and put their relationship on more solid ground. He explained how he decided to take his son Barry, with whom he "frequently clashed," on a hunting trip in an effort to develop a closer bond with him. Niehus admitted, "There was just no getting around it, my first-born son [Barry] and I had been growing apart. He was just going into his teens, a period of years ahead which promised to be difficult for all of us, and the

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[92] Edward C. Janes, *A Boy and His Gun* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1951), 11.
[93] Col. A. M. Libasci, "Teach Them Young," *American Rifleman* (January 1953), 4.

trend our father-son relationship was taking was not good." [94] Niehuis explained that by the third night of the trip, "Barry and I had already begun to spend some time talking before going to sleep – the kind of talks that had been all too rare between us at home." [95] The trip also cured Barry of habits annoying to his father, including "biting his fingernails," and he made other positive behavioral improvements, such as acceptance of a schoolteacher he had disliked. [96] Upon returning home, the father "decided that it was the best investment we'd ever made. The fact that Barry had accepted some of my viewpoints was pleasing, but most satisfying of all was the realization that for the first time I had taken the time to really know him – and he was a pretty fine boy." [97] The faith in the restorative powers of hunting and recreational gun use left little room for anti-firearms sentiment among families. At a time when postwar pressures seemed to assail the family unit from all angles, Americans welcomed hunting and shooting as occasions for family bonding, particularly between fathers and sons.

The sporting use of guns provided wholesome recreation for families, especially boys with idle hours on their hands, while at the same time presenting young males with rites of passage afforded by the ownership and use of guns. Although ancient rites of passage seemed to have no place in an atomic age, scholars have documented that many males still longed for some type of experience to indicate their maturation from boy to man. [98] Likewise, the gender anxieties of the Cold War era practically demanded some

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[94] Charles C. Niehuis, "I Got To Know My Boy in the Great Out-of-Doors," *Better Homes and Gardens* (June 1950), 17.

[95] Ibid., 174.

[96] Ibid., 257.

[97] Ibid., 258.

[98] Determining and achieving rites of passage remained an important step toward manhood in postwar America as it had for men and boys for centuries. However, according to Mark Gerzon, none of the

type of event marking the moment that boys had officially become men. Firearms ownership and use filled that demand. The acquisition of a boy's first BB gun, and later his first "real" firearm, served as major rites of passage which brought him one step closer to manhood. Finally, once he had obtained a "real" firearm, a boy could prove his masculinity through an important rite of passage offered by hunting – the first kill. Ultimately, recreational gun use afforded boys with various opportunities for various rites of passage, including the acquisition of a BB gun, the attainment of their first real firearm, and finally, participation in formal rituals associated with their first successful hunt.

The youth culture of firearms in postwar America extended beyond the playrooms and backyards full of cap pistols and miniature holster sets used for childhood recreation. Figuring as an important rite of passage and holding an intermediate place between "real" firearms and toy guns, BB guns remained popular amusements and a transitional step toward the use of authentic firearms for many boys. Gun devotees often noted that a clear difference existed between BB and "real" firearms. BB guns, while capable of harm, could not inflict life-threatening injuries. However, "real" firearms were

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available "rites of passage" seemed fitting in the postwar era – sports, car races, and drinking, while adequate, actually seemed more like 'rites of impasse.'" See *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing faces of American Manhood* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1992), 173-74. This search for an 'authentic' rite of passage partially explains the increased popularity of hunting in the early postwar era. Likewise, Ray Raphael has noted that for modern man, "Even if traditional initiations no longer appear to be objectively necessary, the psychological function they once served is still very real. The psychic needs of contemporary males have not always been able to keep pace with sex-role liberation and a computerized economy and nuclear warfare, all of which contribute to the apparent obsolescence traditional initiations. There is an obvious gap between our social forms and our internalized, old-fashioned images of manhood." Thus, despite all the advancements of the atomic age, "Consciously or unconsciously, [males] attempt to simulate some semblance of a rite of passage." Furthermore, because the construct of masculinity and manhood is abstract, men, according to Raphael, had to look for rites of passage to help them define these gender concepts. See Ray Raphael, *The Men from the Boys: Rites of Passage in Male America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), xii, 23, 192.

characterized so because they had lethal capability. For instance, shooting expert Herb Parsons argued that boys should be trained using something innocuous, like a BB gun, because eventually the youth "would be allowed to shoot a real gun," such as "a single shot 22 rifle." [99] The progression from the BB gun to a real firearm seemed logical, "From pellet guns, the next step – a couple of years later – is to a .22 rifle and small-gauge shotgun." [100] As an intermediate step between toy pistols and real guns, BB guns also represented a developmental phase between child and mature adult. The BB gun was also widely recognized as a fitting device for training boys in the handling and care of authentic firearms. Henry and Vera Bradshaw, for example, explained to parents that training in the handling of guns "may begin at an early age, usually with a cork gun around the house, shooting at toy targets." They continued, "From cork guns, the natural graduation at about age 8 is to pellet or BB guns." [101] BB gun use also allowed boys to practice before they used genuine firearms for hunting. "After the boy has pretty well mastered the 'feel' of a pellet gun in the basement and safety rules have become automatic," they advised, "Dad can take him along on actual hunts." [102] Conscious that adults used BB guns as training devices, the Daisy BB gun company assisted parents through its Training Services program, which worked with community agencies such as the U. S. Junior Chamber of Commerce and police departments to train youngsters in proper gun handling using Daisy products. By 1963, the company reported that "well

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[99] Herb Parsons, "Kids Want to Shoot – Give 'Em a Hand!" in *Gun Digest,* ed. John T. Amber (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1963), 141.

[100] Henry and Vera Bradshaw, "How to Teach Your Youngster to Hunt," *Better Homes and Gardens* (November 1956), 254.

[101] Ibid., 246.

[102] Ibid.

over 4 million young people, from the fifth grade to college age, have learned to shoot and handle a gun through the program." [103] Notably, parents' bestowal of a BB gun to a child also reinforced the notion that guns could be wholesome objects providing hours of fun and hands-on training in trustworthiness rather than instruments of small-scale mayhem.

Deemed part and parcel of a normal American upbringing, the postwar demand for BB guns soared. For instance, the Daisy Manufacturing Company, premier producer of BB guns beloved by millions of American boys, produced 1.5 million each year accompanied by 35 million BBs. The company also produced well over 100 other items, including a line of carbon dioxide guns, cap gun and holster sets, and various other types of arms. As writer Joe David Brown observed, Daisy enjoyed the position as "one of a handful of companies to attain the status of an American institution." [104]

Daisy's popularity can also be explained by the company's efforts to meet children's particular demands, including the postwar craze for all things western. For instance, Daisy created the Spittin' Image line, patterning one of best-selling rifles after the 1894-model carbine and the Colt's Frontier Peacemaker replica. [105] The Daisy 1894 appeared as the first BB gun made to the exact scale of the original firearm. In fact, the Daisy Company replicated the original so accurately that even gun enthusiasts could not tell the two apart just by looking at them. [106] Boys now had the opportunity to have a gun

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[103] Joe David Brown, "The Rifle Called Daisy," *Sports Illustrated* (29 April 1963), 64.

[104] Ibid., 59.

[105] "Daisy Spittin' Image," *Field and Stream* (November 1961), 40.

[106] The author also stated, "Of particular interest to young shooters, as well as to adults who enjoy shooting and informal target practice with a low-velocity gun, is the Daisy "Spittin' Image" series of B-B rifles. These are realistic reproductions of popular cartridge rifles. For instance, the Model 1894 Daisy 'Spittin' Image' B-B gun, while in one of my gun racks, has often been mistaken for the Winchester Model

just like their frontier heroes and a gun that looked as real as their dad's. [107] By wielding their facsimiles, boys engaged in a rite of passage that afforded entrance into the initial stages of manhood. In addition, the realistic replicas familiarized the youngsters with the mythic version of the nation's history, populated with sharp-shooting gunslingers. BB guns taught them what it meant to own a firearm and be a man while at the same time acquainting them with what it meant to be an American. [108] Given the lack of resistance to BB guns, it is also apparent that parents and society in general sanctioned the items as good, clean fun that could serve multiple, complementary purposes.

Although most boys cherished their BB guns, as they grew older many yearned for ownership of real firearms as a male rite of passage. As one mother and father explained, "Sometime in his early teens your boy will start wanting his first real gun.

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94 Carbine. The giveaway, of course, is when the B-B gun is picked up, it weighs a little over three pounds, as compared to six and a-half pounds, as compared to six and a-half pounds for the Winchester .30-30." See Kuhloff, *Kuhloff on Guns*, 84.

[107] Daisy also produced other BB guns that mimicked real firearms. For instance, the author explained, "The second in the Daisy 'Spittin' Image' series is the Model 572 Slide Action Repeater. It looks similar to the well known Remington "Field-master" .22 pump action. This Daisy has a capacity of forty-five shots and the tubular magazine under the barrel is loaded through a port in the conventional manner. The cocking load is divided, half on the forward motion of the sliding forearm and half with the return stroke." See Kuhloff, *Kuhloff on Guns*, 84.

[108] Daisy's business expansion took an interesting turn in 1964. Partnering with the State of Punjab, India, the company began construction of an air rifle and BB factory in order to "produce BB-guns for use in a government-sponsored program to train school children in weapon handling." India's interest in the manufacture of BB guns for youth training resulted from "the continued threat of Communist China on the northern frontier, according to Prem N. Sahni, Secretary for Heavy Industry in Punjab." Taking a page from the Americans' book, India wanted to provide firearms training for their youngsters in preparation for communist threats. Sahni explained that in previous confrontations with the Chinese, "it was discovered that few [Indians] had ever handled a rifle before," unlike their American counterparts. Realizing a need for early firearms instruction, "The Indian government sent a delegation to the U. S. to study civilian marksmanship training, and the group eventually wound up at Daisy." See "Not Just Kid Stuff," *Business Week* (25 January 1964), 88-90. Americans had earned an international reputation as gun enthusiasts, making them the model for other nations wishing to stage armed resistance to communist threats at their own borders. Indian officials, impressed with the firearms proficiency of American citizens and hoping to improve their own defenses, decided to model their efforts after an obviously successful way of life which produced generation after generation of able marksmen. Although Americans produced these gunmen as a result of multiple, sometimes complementary, forces, the image of the American rifleman that had informed generations of Americans also made an impression on other nations searching for models of national defense.

This is just as natural as his desire for a toy pistol or cowboy and Indian games." [109] Similarly, firearms devotees and hunters affectionately remembered their first guns. *American Rifleman*, for instance, featured a story entitled "The First Rifle," in which author frank Triem fondly remembered his first gun. [110] Identifying the first time he shot it as "the Moment," Triem recalled, "My personal idea of heaven consists of simple things. Above all else, I'd like to swing that mutilated Springfield to my shoulder just once again." [111] Triem's story also elicited numerous letters of approval to the editor. Lewis H. Detz, writing from Seattle, Washington, said, "I just read Frank Triem's article, 'The First Rifle.' That was one of the best I've ever seen in the *Rifleman*. I know how the kid felt and I know a lot of other fellows know also. An article like that makes you think for awhile and realize how valuable our right is to keep and bear arms." [112] Another happy reader from Phoenix, Arizona responded, "I just read with great pleasure and a hearty laugh the story of 'The First Rifle.' Having gone through a similar experience, I know just about how he felt. Let's have more stories like it." [113]

The letters represented an enthusiastic response revealing the nostalgia and romance associated with obtaining one's first gun, because it designated a real coming-of-age experience. Moreover, these men wistfully remembered their first guns because the firearms represented a tangible event demarcating their achievement of manhood.

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[109] Henry and Vera Bradshaw, "Teach Your Son to Hunt – Safely!" *Better Homes and Gardens* (September 1959), 32B. Some observers went as far as proposing that boys who did not want guns, if such a thing could happen, should be considered abnormal. The shooting editor of *Field and Stream*, for example, warned readers that "any boy who doesn't get the bug to own a real shooting gun, an honest-to-gosh rifle or shotgun, has had something left out of his makeup." See Warren Page, "Arms and the Boy," *Field and Stream* (December 1957), 84.

[110] Frank Triem, "The First Rifle," *American Rifleman* (February 1950), 23.

[111] Ibid., 24-25.

[112] Lewis H. Detz, *American Rifleman* (April 1950), 6.

[113] William H. Emery, *American Rifleman* (April 1950), 6.

Having a concrete reminder of their own rite of passage into manhood could have been a powerful force that soothed men's anxieties.

Most adults shared the recognition that a boy's first gun was as an important marker of manhood. Shooting hobbyist Henry M. Stebbins echoed this sentiment asserting, "All his life a boy will remember the day that brought his first rifle . . . [He] will love that rifle and a half-century afterwards be able to recite its details from memory." [114] At the same time, for a father, presenting a son with his first firearm fulfilled his responsibility as a good parent and as a good citizen. Many fathers shared the belief that "It's a privilege to start a rifleman – for his own good, for ours, and for our country's." [115] Ultimately, the first gun acted as a tangible means to achieve the abstract state of manhood for young males and their fathers, allaying contemporary fears about inculcating and assuming proper gender roles.

In addition to acquiring their first firearms, young males had other rites of passage available to them through hunting. [116] Because the postwar era abounded with fears of boys becoming sissies, Americans invested hunting with new meanings. Many males considered that using firearms to hunt and kill game in the company of other men provided the perfect rite of passage which would masculinize young males. An advertisement for the National Shooting Sports Foundation, Inc., for example, echoed the same sentiments. Showing a father and son preparing for a duck-hunting trip, the ad

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[114] Henry M. Stebbins, "Junior's 22," *Gun Digest* (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1958), 68.

[115] Ibid., 73.

[116] For instance, one hunting pamphlet for youths, picturing a boy and father on the cover read, "The sport of hunting is an ancient and honorable activity. . . . It is a wholesome recreation . . . physically stimulating and full of thrills and excitement. The fun in hunting comes as much from enjoyment of nature and the satisfaction of handling guns skillfully as it does from getting a full bag." See *National Rifle Association Hunter Safety Handbook*, National Rifle Association Safety Series (Washington, D. C., 1959),1, National Firearms Museum Library, Fairfax, Virginia, section 47.

shows their excitement. The text of the ad convinced fathers about the importance of taking their sons hunting because in doing so they could be as the father in the picture, encouraging and witnessing "the making of a man." [117] (See Figure 5) The Browning Arms Company accordingly pitched its guns to consumers by appealing to fathers' desire to make their boys into mature men. For instance, one Browning ad entitled "A Gun Can Be a Symbol," featured a letter written to a son from a father which read, "A gun can be a symbol. It is my way of showing you still another way to grow better. Thus gun can teach you that you gain in pleasure, as well as by labor. . . . This gun may offer the thrill of accomplishment . . . in the field . . . [and] in life." [118] (See Figure 6) The ad clearly indicates that young men achieved the qualities of manhood through hunting with firearms. Many males probably experienced relief that they had discovered this concrete way to establish manhood, instead of having to wrestle with such an abstract concept through other vague devices. [119]

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[117] "A Man in the Making," *Gun World* 3 (July 1963), 67.

[118] "A Gun Can Be a Symbol," *Guns* (November 1955), 3.

[119] Sport hunting as a rite of passage also served as a means of initiating males into a world of male acceptance, belonging, and bonding. For instance, sociologist Frank Young argues, "Initiation ceremonies are viewed as mechanisms for maintaining the consensus of the males. If the boys did not undergo initiation or if some were allowed to avoid it, the male definition of the situation might be distorted or weakened. It is for this reason that initiation is required of all boys in a community. The ceremony insures conformity by involving the candidate in an intense co-operation with men in the symbolic process." See Frank W. Young, "The Function of Male Initiation Ceremonies," *American Journal of Sociology* 67 (January 1962): 382, quoted in Ray Raphael, *The Men from the Boys: Rites of Passage in Male America*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 11. Rites of passage offer boys official entrance into the world of men while also acquainting them with the standards of manly conduct set by their respective communities. These rites also provide young males with a tangible means of expressing something intangible like abstract ideals of manhood. Raphael explains, "Unless a youth can find an alternate means of repudiating the weakness and dependency of childhood, he condemns himself to an indefinite state of insecurity . . . without the aid of a formalized rite of passage, it is harder for a youth to be sure that he has actually changed from one state to another." Postwar American society did not lend itself to perpetuating more primitive and ritualistic rites of passage, such as mutilation, however concrete those actions may have been. However, as Raphael argues, just because "modern society may eliminate the dramatizations of the passage from boyhood to manhood . . . it does not necessarily eliminate the felt need of the individual to undergo that transition." See Raphael, *The Men From the Boys*, 15, 18.



Figure 5. Ad Showing How to Make a Boy a Man with a Gun.

Source: *Gun World* 3 (July 1963), 67.



Figure 6. The Symbolism of Firearms.

Source: *Guns* (November 1955), 3.

Scholars have documented that postwar males, already besieged by various attacks on their masculinity, experienced a need for tangible rites of passage that would facilitate the transition through the phases of boyhood to manhood. Killing an animal through their skillful use of a firearm filled the bill. The weapon itself, closely associated with manliness in America, imbued the user with a sense of mastery over nature through technology and manly self-control. Hunter Fred Etchen explained, "There is something about owning a gun and really knowing how to shoot it that does something for a boy. It gives him a self-confidence that almost nothing else will give. It eases amazingly that often difficult transition from boyhood into manhood. In a word, if you want to make a real man of your boy, give him his own gun." [120] If men looked for a way to make their boys into men, then gun use, already a socially sanctioned sport in postwar America, proved an appropriate means to do it. [121]

In many communities, young men who did not hunt set themselves apart from the community of males and were viewed as out of the ordinary because they did not seek entrance into manhood through the rite of sporting gun use. For instance, some communities believed in the importance of hunting to the extent that schools indirectly sanctioned the event. Accordingly, at Troy High School in Troy, Montana, teachers used

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[120] Fred Etchen, *Commonsense Shotgun Shooting with Fred Etchen* (Huntington, West Virginia: Standard Publications, 1946), 8.

[121] Young males themselves also recognized the power of the hunt to invest them with manliness. For instance, in a letter written to the editor of *Field and Stream* about a coming of age story in a previous issue, sixteen year old John D. Jacobs wrote, "I was raised in the South. The men with whom I was in daily contact were the type mentioned by [the author], down-to-earth, hard in their methods of teaching. These men permitted me to hunt with them because I acted like a man when with them. . . . I'm grateful for my contacts with them. They taught me some common sense . . . and any young man who is fortunate enough to have this education is not likely to become a delinquent." See "Liberal Education," *Field and Stream* (October 1955), 4. Even as a young male, Jacobs recognized the power of the hunt to instill manliness. In the postwar era of atomic weaponry and other technological advances that rendered raw, male strength less significant, few activities still existed that would allow young males to have a concrete activity demarcating their official transition to manhood.

cooking classes to instruct female pupils in the art of carving and cooking venison during hunting season. In a *Life* magazine photo essay, photographs depicted the young women examining a diagram of a deer in order to learn how to butcher it while other photos showed high school boys preparing for a hunt. Notably, one snapshot showed the "Only boy in class at Troy High, Larry Perry, who did not go hunting, [and] is center of attention." [122] Because he is the only male in a sea of females, left so because his male classmates have left to hunt, Perry had set himself apart from his male contemporaries. Already distinguished because he is the lone male in the classroom, *Life* further singled out the young man in their layout as something of an anomaly in a town so focused on hunting that many businesses shut down for the season. The piece implies that because the young male chose to abstain from hunting, he has more in common with the girls, his only classmates.

Finally, a young male's first successful hunting outing, defined as the slaying of his first animal, served as one of the most important male rites of passage. According to some observers, boys rehearsed the act of the first kill for years. "A healthy, red-blooded American boy with an active imagination shoots his first buffalo in play about the time he turns five," one publication proclaimed. [123] The imaginary killing served as more than just child's play because the preparation continued through early adolescence, in which stage "the normal American boy becomes twelve or thirteen, [and] he seeks a real gun with which he can hunt real game." [124] Evidence shows that many young males did revel in their first kill. Hunter and outdoor writer Frank N. Dufresne, Jr., recalled that upon his

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[122] "Wholesale Stalking in Hunt-Happy West," *Life* (24 November 1958), 129.
[123] "A Boy's First Pheasant Hunt," *American Rifleman* (November 1953), 17.
[124] Ibid.

first kill, "I couldn't wait to get back to Juneau [Alaska] to show off my first deer to the neighborhood gang." Dufresne knew that the deer would be a tangible symbol of his achievement of manhood. He also could not wait to return home because he would "be bragging to [his] schoolmates" about a feat which would garner him the admiration and respect of his peers. [125] One publication correspondingly counseled parents, "A boy will want to talk for a while about his first kill." [126] The article also suggested that the need to replay the event should not concern parents. Probably because in reliving the event, the boy merely reaffirmed his entry into the world of manhood to himself and others.

In addition, young males realized the significance of their first kill and the importance of sharing it with other males as a way of publicizing their manhood. For instance, one young male, relishing the details his first kill, stated, "All I knew then was that I was the richest boy in the world as I sat there in the crushed ferns and stroked the silky hide of my first buck deer, patting his horns and smelling how sweet he smelt and admiring how pretty he looked." The young hunter also gleefully anticipated the reaction of his male hunting companions. "What a wonderful thing it was," he declared, "when you were a kid, to have four huge, grown men – everything is bigger when you are a boy – come roaring up out of the woods to see you sitting by your first big triumph." [127] He then described the sequence of events once his companions located him and his trophy. He explained how the men "blooded" him: his head covered in the "blood, guts . . . and partly digested deer fodder [covered me] from my head to my belt." One of the men conducting the ceremony announced that the novice hunter was now "a grown man. You

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[125] Frank N. Dufresne, Jr., "First Deer," *Field and Stream* (October 1958), 141.
[126] Bradshaw, "How to Teach Your Youngster to Hunt," 267.
[127] Robert C. Ruark, "The Old Man and the Boy," *Field and Stream* (December 1953), 17.

have been blooded, boy, and any time you miss a deer from now on we cut off your shirt tail." [128] Properly initiated into the circle of manhood by means of the ritual, the tenderfoot learned that he also had to maintain his proficiency in killing animals, for fear that another ritual, one of humiliation, would follow and thus call his gender status into question. [129]

As alluded to in the preceding account, the kill of one's first animal involved certain rituals that further demonstrated the importance of the kill. Slaying an animal for the first time became an especially important rite of passage which had its own particular ritual act. [130] Chapman J. Milling described the coming of age custom, known as "blooding." Detailing what happened when a male killed his first deer, he explained the procedure:

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[128] Ibid.

[129] Popular outdoor recreational publications often featured stories about a boy's first kill which depicted the event as a rite of passage. Cleverly entitled, "Billy Earns His First Buck," *Field and Stream* published a photo essay about the first deer killed by Billy Forrest. One of the photographs shows a beaming Billy holding the antler of a large buck with one hand while clutching his rifle in the other. The caption read, "Billy's radiant grin is the kind that comes only once in a lifetime – after a man has shot his first buck." Although Billy looks as if he is a very young boy, the writer deems him a "man" because he has killed his first deer. Indeed, in another caption accompanying a photo of Billy proudly shaking the hand of the ranch owner where he killed his buck, the text proclaimed, "Now a man among men, young Billy Forrest gets the congratulations of his host, Frank Haegen, ranch owner. The smear on Billy's face is blood from his deer; he has been initiated by the other hunters." See W. W. Findley, "Billy Earns His First Buck," *Field and Stream* (October 1960), 49.

[130] Women, too, hunted in the postwar era, though in significantly smaller numbers than men. Still the experience of women hunters differed from that of male hunters in terms of rites of passage because, "If a woman, say, decides to prove her worth by going to war or climbing a mountain, she does so more from a choice than from necessity. She is not affirming the traditional values of her sex; she is not demonstrating, to herself or others, that she can live up to archaic norms which have historically shaped the female experience. . . . A man who goes to war or climbs a mountain, on the other hand, is not only proving his individual worth – he is simultaneously displaying his gender. He is meeting an obligation (some might call it a burden) which in some sense is imposed upon him by sheer virtue of his being male. The intensity (and perhaps even the sheer desperation) of the experience is essentially masculine, colored as it is by the overpowering weight of social expectation." See Raphael, *The Men From the Boys*, xvi. For more on the notion of the burdens of masculinity see Jack Sawyer, "On Male Liberation," *Liberation* 15 (1970): 32, Myron Brenton, *The American Male*, (New York: Coward-McGann, 1966), 13, and Herb Goldberg, *The Hazards of Being Male* (New York: Nash Publishing, 1976), 17.

> It is during the butchering operation that a picturesque old custom is practiced. If the deer has been killed by someone who has never previously had such good fortune, he must be 'bloodied.' This is generally done when he least suspects it, or when he thinks it has been forgotten. Often the person privileged to perform this rite is the young fellow who has received his own initiation most recently, perhaps on the previous drive. It can be done, however, by any club member or driver – even any frequent guest of the club – who has ever killed a deer. The man elected to carry out the ceremony steps over where the deer is being butchered and secures a double handful of blood out of the chest cavity, where it is usually plentiful. He then slips up behind the neophyte and plasters it all over his face and forehead. If the neophyte becomes suspicious and tries to run, he is simply held firm by two or three stout men while the blood is being applied. It often becomes quite a game between the young fellow and the rest of the hunters present. It is perfectly cricket for him to run or to try to evade this ceremony, but he must always take it good-naturedly when finally caught." [131]

Notably, any male could perform the "blooding" as long as he is indeed a "man," proven thus by his previous success at taking an animal with a firearm. Formal membership in the club or the acquaintanceship of the men did not qualify males for participation in the ritual, instead the act of killing an animal joined them together. The men used a concrete marker, in this case the blood of the slain animal, as a means to demonstrate the abstract idea of what it meant to be a man and as a means to showcase the initiate's arrival at manhood. The initiate also had to enjoy the ritual as an indication of his delight at being offered entrance into the circle of men. Milling remarked, "Generally [blooding] is considered an honor by the recipient and he would feel neglected and unpopular were it omitted." [132] The inductee did not shy away from this practice; rather, he welcomed it as a means of initiation into manhood and the group. Of course, the rite of passage extended beyond the blooding ceremony. In addition to the

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[131] Chapman J. Milling, *Buckshot and Hounds* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1967), 83-84.
[132] Ibid., 84.

ritual described above, some clubs would place the scrotum of the kill around the neck of the initiate, who would then have to wear it until he returned home.[133]

The rituals did not always celebrate the success of a hunter, however. For the unlucky marksman, fellow hunters performed a different act. In order to publicly display a hunter's ineptitude at marksmanship the fruitless hunter's shirt tail would be chopped off. "There is sound reason behind this custom," Milling explained, "since it discourages anyone from risking a wild shot. ... Here, as in the bloodying ceremony, there is room for good natured horseplay . . .." [134] Horseplay or not, the message was clear. Successes and failures would be showcased among the men to mark who had and had not achieved manhood.

The ceremonies went further than just demarcating the men from the boys, however; a hierarchy of age also governed the group wherein the eldest male held the ultimate jurisdiction. Milling admitted, "In all of these traditional ceremonies . . . the Old Man of the Club should have the final word. . . . I like to think that this arrangement has been handed down from prehistoric times when group hunting was literally a way of life – that when a number of Stone Age Man's dependence on the wise leader, to whom all should gladly yield allegiance." [135] As evidenced by their deference to the eldest male in implementing their rituals, hunters believed in the significance of hunting as a necessary, primeval male ceremony. Shaken by the gender insecurities of the era, men found comfort in the rites of passage afforded by gun ownership and use and the reassurance that firearms activities offered as tangible indicators of manhood.

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[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 84-85.
[135] Ibid., 85.

Just as several events converged in the early postwar era to facilitate the intensification of an American gun culture based on recreational gun use, events of the early 1960s would converge to alter dramatically this culture of firearms. Indicative of the changed attitudes, Representative John V. Lindsay proclaimed, "Parents must be shown how dangerous it is for children to possess guns; youngsters must be made acutely aware of the risks." [136] Interestingly, the Congressman's remarks appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, which only a few years earlier had helped to create a light-hearted atmosphere of fun and male camaraderie in its annual photo essays depicting scenes of American hunting across the nation.

Public attitudes toward fathers' efforts to instruct boys in the practice of hunting and shooting also soured. Richard Starnes, a father and adamant defender of guns grumbled, "Make the mistake, as I have, of idly mentioning that you are teaching your kids to shoot, and the holy Joes will darkly suggest that maybe you are not a fit parent." [137] The attacks on the use of firearms by young boys stood a far cry away from the state and community sponsored shooting activities of the early postwar era. Now, primarily staunch gun advocates, like sportsmen and the NRA, defended allowing children to shoot firearms or enjoy the outdoors with a rifle tossed across their young shoulders. Meanwhile, more and more observers questioned whether shooting should even remain a privilege, much less a right.

Adding to the general disparagement of guns, magazines' negative characterization of firearms stood a far cry from the days of the light-hearted photo

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[136] John V. Lindsay, "Too Many People Have Guns," *Saturday Evening Post* (1 February 1964), 14.
[137] Richard Starnes, "The Anti-Gun Extremists Are at It Again," *Field and Stream* (April 1964), 14.

essays depicting activities with guns as good, clean fun. Once hailed as the instrument of democracy both past and present, sources now lamented, "In thousands of communities rifles, shotguns and pistols are openly and enticingly displayed in hardware, sporting goods and even dime stores – and are as easy to come by as fishing rods." [138] Similarly, a *Reader's Digest* headline warned Americans about "Where Johnny Gets His Gun," informing them, "It comes by mail . . . unscrupulous operators . . . put deadly weapons in the hands of boys." The article also alerted parents, "Comic books and the more sensational magazines are packed with advertisements that would make any sane adult shudder. 'How'd you like to be the most accurate and fastest gun alive?' challenges one ad." [139] Only a few years earlier, *Senior Scholastic* ran ads by the Remington gun company which asked boys almost the same thing, but there is no evidence of parental or public outcry regarding those advertisements. [140] The *Reader's Digest* article also alleged that an FBI survey of juvenile delinquency revealed that while the proportion of juveniles had only increased by 25 percent between 1955 and 1960, the percentage of juveniles arrested for firearms possession had raised by 46 percent. [141] Gone were the days of praising the gun as a deterrent to juvenile delinquency. By the early 1960s, children and guns no longer evoked visions of carefree days of harmless fun with guns.

The period when young boys could wander field and forest with firearms, unrestricted and more importantly unquestioned, was coming to an end. As the sun set

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[138] "The Run on Guns: A Lethal National Problem," *Life* (27 August 1965), 59.

[139] Jack Anderson, "Where Johnny Gets His Gun," *Reader's Digest* (July 1963), 138-39.

[140] Note the "Bob and Bill Qualify as Sharpshooters" cartoon that appeared previously that depicted the harmless fun of shooting.

[141] Anderson, "Where Johnny Gets His Gun," 140. The topic of this article was also discussed on the Reader's Digest radio and television show, "All America Wants to Know."

on the "golden age" of firearms, the hobby that American boys had enjoyed and that American men had shared with them for generations without opposition drew the ire of more Americans than ever before. However, before the attacks on the recreational culture of youth firearms use called into question the role of firearms in America in general, another strain of gun culture flourished among adult males.

CHAPTER 3: HUNTING FOR IDENTITY

Hunter and writer Arthur Hawthorne Carhart's description of one of his own hunting experiences represents idealized notions about American hunting in the postwar era. In a book published in 1946, he confided to readers, "You forget how cold it was up on the ridge, how the new boots you wore pinched a little at the heel, how you wondered at the time why in Sheol you came all the way out here every year just to get half frozen, spavined, full of aches, blessed with blisters. You wonder at the moment; but around the table, over the cups of coffee, you know." [142] What exactly does he "know?" He is referring to the ideas he shares with most other contemporary American hunters that a hunter's masculinity is tested by his ability to weather harsh conditions in order to kill an animal with a firearm. In addition, even though very few hunters after 1945 were 'pot hunters,' meaning hunters who killed game to provide meat for their families' survival, Carhart nonetheless demonstrates that if necessary, he can bring home the bacon. Yet representations of masculinity are not all that is important in his statement. Carhart believes that he is carrying on a tradition that reinforces his identity as an American. Carhart understood, and conveyed to his readers, that identity as an American male could be cultivated and expressed by successfully wielding a firearm to kill an animal. He continued, "It's something American that calls you back. The free America, where it is a birthright to bear arms, where you have the privilege of the sovereign to hunt without let or hindrance, except for the rules of the game and the laws of the land that you and your

[142] Arthur Hawthorne Carhart, *Hunting North American Deer* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 227.

brothers have set up to guide human conduct." [143] Many of the aspects of hunting are mentioned or alluded to in Carhart's comments: the appeal to the American past and national tradition, the exhibition of rugged masculinity, and the special relationship that a hunter shares with his gun, the instrument that made the demonstration and cultivation of his manliness possible. An American gun culture rooted in hunting is apparent in all of these intertwined and interdependent aspects of hunting. Furthermore, in an era of intense gender scrutiny for men, including perceived affronts to masculinity posed by homosexuality and domesticity hunting afforded many men a means to alleviate fears regarding their own gender and national identity. Accordingly, the anxiety produced by the Cold War intensified the need to display both national and male identity while at the same time significantly intensifying an American gun culture based on sport hunting with firearms.

Understanding the significance of sport hunting in postwar America demands an appraisal of the literature men read about the sport. Heightening the interest in sport hunting, literature on the leisure pursuit entered mainstream middle-brow culture in the postwar era. For instance, outdoor writers and well-known hunters frequently published articles and stories in books and magazines, such as *Field and Stream* and *Life*, championing the sporting use of guns as an antidote to all of the woes of the modern male. Readers of the accounts encountered a never-ending barrage of explanations, persuasions, and lectures about the importance of guns to American history and their relationship to masculinity. Making these accounts even more powerful, the writers themselves hunted and acted as gun proponents with whom readers could easily identify.

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[143] Ibid.

[144] For example, Warren Page, outdoor writer, gun enthusiast, and outdoor icon, explained to readers, "Hunting has been part of the human heritage since that early day when an apelike creature konked his dinner with the thighbone of an antelope. . . . I don't think men will ever quit wanting to hunt." [145] Hunters had an abundance of help at their disposal when forming their own opinions about the importance of hunting and the role of firearms in America. Outdoor magazines provided men interested in outdoor hobbies and guns with lively stories of field, forest, shooting adventures, and perhaps most noteworthy, heaps of commentaries promoting firearms and the need to develop manliness. At the same time, they linked both issues to America's mythic frontier past. [146] Despite the varying titles and the numerous volumes, most of the magazines and

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[144] Perhaps as important, social science theories of the postwar era focused on hunting as a key human activity, investing the hobby with new significance. For instance, in the wake of the atrocities of World War II, increasing numbers of intellectuals turned their attention to hunting as a subject of scholarly study in an attempt to identify what made humans aggressive. Anthropologists and other scholars considered hunting a key human activity in regard to the history of human evolution with men as the masters of it. In addition, anthropologists and archaeologists considered hunting an ordinary, necessary part of human evolution; thus they legitimated aggressive male behavior as normal and inherent. Most anthropologists discarded such theories in later decades. Nonetheless, the idea of "man the hunter" persisted because it has served contemporary needs. As argued by Charles Bergman, modern men, cramped by suits and offices, often look to a place and time where they could be "natural" men: unrestricted, wild, in charge, and dominant. Despite recent scholars' rejection of the theory that prehistoric men became 'civilized' through hunting and that men were powerful, violent killers (now some have determined prehistoric humans were actually the prey), the new view has not taken hold in popular perception because it does not meet contemporary needs for male views of themselves. Hunting has even pervaded language, as we go to work to earn a 'buck,' we 'hunt' for bargains, or we attend 'stag' parties. So even if men do not actually hunt animals, as Bergman explains, many are often hunters in how they think and imagine themselves. See Charles Bergman, *Orion's Legacy: A Cultural History of Man as Hunter* (New York: Dutton, 1996), 8-9, 10, 43, 47, 51.

[145] Warren Page, *One Man's Wilderness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973), xv. Page also served as the Shooting Department editor for *Field and Stream* for many years.

[146] A list of publications devoted primarily to firearms is very lengthy – *The American Rifleman, The Field, Field and Stream, Field and Tide, Fur-Fish-Game, The Gun Report, Guns & Ammo, Guns, Gunsport, Guns and Game, Guns and Hunting, Guns Review, Gun World, The Handgunner, International Shooting Sport, Muzzle Blasts, Ordnance, Outdoor Life, Precision Shooting, The Rifleman, Rod and Gun, Shooting Times, The Shotgun News, Skeetshooting Review, Sporting Goods Dealer, Sports Afield, Sports Illustrated,* and *Trap and Field.* Even the *New York Times* featured an outdoor article that commonly focused on hunting and shooting. Likewise, Warren Page's *One Man's Wilderness* was published 17 times between 1952 and 1970. Similarly, writing about the outdoors became so common that Edwin J. Becker, a

outdoor monographs explored many of the same themes. Outdoor magazines' and books' constant references to hunting and gun use as an American tradition throughout its hallowed history helped American gun culture grow dramatically in the postwar era, because many men defined hunting, as a quintessentially "American" activity, and therefore an antidote to the looming communist threat.

While early white settlers and Native Americans hunted to provide food, clothing, and shelter, or to obtain fur for trade, many postwar American men viewed hunting as a means to connect with their historic past and forge a national identity at a time when communism seemed to threaten the very way of American life they sought to celebrate. Looking backward, hunters and gun enthusiasts found solace in a history full of legendary, revered figures consisting of gunslingers, frontiersmen, soldiers, and even presidents. History books, television, and movies showcased the gun and men who wielded it as the architects of America, as well as and the evangelists and protectors of its values. [147] Furthermore, postwar men had not forgotten the most important tool of their hunting ancestors – the gun. For instance, the Executive Director of the National Rifle Association, Louis F. Lucas, articulated what many Americans already believed when he

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contributor to *The Writer,* commented on the increasing popularity of the genre, noting that articles on the outdoors and hunting occupied increasing space in general magazines. He explained, "It is not at all unusual to pick up a copy of *Esquire*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, or others of the top-flight slicks, and find outdoor pieces authored by comparatively unknown writers." Becker devised his own list of thirteen periodicals that routinely ran outdoor stories, including *Reader's Digest*, *Town and Country*, *National Geographic*, and *Natural History Magazine*. In addition he listed sixteen magazines strictly of the outdoor variety, including those with limited readership, such as *Alaska Sportsman.* See Edwin J.Becker, "Outdoor Writing Comes of Age," *The Writer* (June 1945), 173, 174, 176-177. Outdoor enthusiasts certainly had their pick of publications when seeking advice or entertainment.

[147] Outdoor writers, too, rarely divorced the importance of hunting and its role in the American past from the gun. "As you trace each step toward the rifle of today," Carhart explained, "you will gather appreciation of the tradition back of the gun you own. For there is a fine American heritage back of every rifle you take into the field – the heritage of the American rifleman." See Carhart, *Hunting North American Deer,* 126.

wrote in 1959, "One of the prize possessions of manhood since our forefathers first settled America always has been the gun." [148] Similarly, outdoor writers encouraged men to consider hunting and gun use as their birthright as Americans. After all, some of America's most prominent heroes, from the sharp-shooting riflemen of the American Revolution to Davy Crockett, gained fame by wielding a gun. [149] Hunters searched for ways to relive and reconnect with this heritage. For instance, one hunter asserted, "It's [hunting] inbred. It's a heritage. The hunter still has kinship with Daniel Boone . . . Americans, in their own way . . . can keep right on being Daniel Boones." [150] American hunters wanted to connect with hunter-hero Boone as a means to claim, even vicariously, to what they thought the armed icon represented – independence, individualism, and

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[148] Louis F. Lucas, "A Man and His Gun," *The American Rifleman* (1959), reprinted in *Gun Digest* ed. John T. Amber (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1961), inside front cover. Most hunters agreed with the version of American history that Lucas described: "Colonial farmers with their muskets had helped win the Revolutionary War. On the frontier, a gun was usually the pioneer family's only protection against wild animals and prowling savages. It was necessary and accepted that young and old alike be intimately acquainted with firearms and use them as tools of everyday life." In addition, numerous textbooks used in American classrooms featured narratives and visual images depicting the gun as an integral part of the American experience. See Charles DeBenedetti, "American Historians and Armaments: The View from the Twentieth-Century Textbooks," *Diplomatic History* 6 (4) (1982): 323-337.

[149] The hunter, as Herman demonstrates, has been an important part of the nation's past, whether appropriated as a national symbol of the Revolution, Jacksonian democracy, or imperialism. Despite the continual change of who hunted and perceptions of them, the hunter, in whatever guise, had come to represent a certain type of masculine and national identity over the course of American history. Yet the hunters' identity depended greatly on his most important implement ignored by Herman – the gun. Although he acknowledges that hunting symbolized and perpetuated patriarchy in the American ethos, he neglects to investigate how firearms have played an important role in maintaining American ideas about masculinity. See Daniel Justin Herman, *Hunting and the American Imagination* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), xii.

[150] Robert E. Pinkerton, "Hunting Comes Naturally," *Nation's Business* (December 1952), 52. Notably, one outdoor hero, due largely to his own efforts to forge such an identity, has served as the patron saint of hunters and gun enthusiasts for generations. Theodore Roosevelt, often pictured as a young man clad in buckskins with a rifle across his lap, is often hailed as the dean of the American outdoors. For instance, one editorial in *Gun Digest* celebrated Roosevelt as the man who "was more of a hunter-rifleman than any other President of the United States, who said more and did more to advance shooting and marksmanship as a National need." See *Gun Digest,* ed. John T. Amber (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1959), inside front cover.

ruggedness, all attributes that postwar men feared they were losing in the face of an international communist threat.

In addition to legendary frontiersmen, outdoor writers reminded readers that American folk stories provided them with armed heroes. Carhart explained, "You'll recall that Paul Bunyan stepped to the door of his shack in the north woods, pointed Old Bess, his trusty gun, east, west, north, south, pulled the trigger in any direction – and bingo, he got enough wild meat to feed the lumber camp." [151] Part and parcel of American history and folklore, the sporting use of guns offered postwar men a direct link with what they perceived to be an integral part of American history and identity. [152]

Jack O'Connor emerged as perhaps the twentieth century's most famous hunter, admired outdoor writer, and revered gun expert. Describing himself as one of the "nuttier gun nuts," he wrote a great deal about the role of hunting and guns in American history. [153] In his encyclopedic work on rifles he explained:

> The British emigrants to North America found themselves in a wilderness teeming with big game and with savage Indians. Those who pushed into the wilderness had to have rifles to exist. With them they hunted wild turkey, whitetail deer, black bear, and elk; and with them they defended themselves and their homes against the Indians. The American frontiersmen had, of necessity, to be a crack shot and a good hunter. Because the rifle was as much a tool of survival as his ax and his plow he treated it almost like a living thing and gave it fanciful names such as Old Betsy, Old Meat In The Pot, or Old Reliable. . . . [with a gun he could] kill game for the larder, and protect himself from the Indians. [154]

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[151] Carhart, *Hunting North American Deer*, 14.

[152] Louis S. Warren also notes the tendency of Americans to revere hunters. For example, American folklore involves hunters like Boone and Crockett. See *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 7. See also Bergman, *Orion's Legacy* for the importance of myths and folklore. He defines "myth" as not just a lie, but a story that gives a culture its truths and argues that a myth "coalesce important features of a people's historical and personal experience." Myths are also a way for people to make sense of their experience – historical and contemporary. See Bergman, *Orion's Legacy*, 19.

[153] Jack O'Connor, *The Big Game Rifle* (New York: Knopf, 1952), 57.

[154] Ibid., 19-20.

Whether or not his version of American history rings true, O'Connor perceived that the past had unfolded in this way, and he impressed upon his readers that guns helped tame a wilderness and establish a nation. [155] For postwar hunters wielding firearms, the promotion of the gun as an American symbol invested the user with a patriotic character, an especially sought after trait as America confronted an unsettling communist peril. [156]

Hunters and outdoor writers were also quick to promote the democratic nature of hunting in America. In the United States, authorities did not restrict hunting according to class, whereas as in Europe, only the upper classes enjoyed access to land and the privilege to hunt. Carhart heavily emphasized the difference, arguing, "In the olden days,

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[155] O'Connor's portrayal of the West probably found few critics, mostly because the scenes he described played out in the living rooms of Americans with televisions on a nightly basis. He insisted, "The era of the latter part of the nineteenth century was a romantic one from the standpoint of the hunter-rifleman. It saw British big-game hunters going all over the world. It saw the buffalo exterminated in the western United States. . . . This period is one which is strongly entrenched into American folklore. It was the day of the old black-powder Frontier Model Colt revolvers, the big, powerful single-shot Sharps buffalo rifles, Winchester Model 1873 lever-action rifles for the .44/40 cartridge. It was the time of Wild Bill Hickock and Billy the Kid, the time when a handful of American trappers and cowboys could stand off a horde of Indians at Adobe Walls, and it was also the time when General Custer and his command were wiped out on the Little Bighorn by the Sioux. Many are the marvelous tales that are told of the shooting in those days and many of them have grown with the telling." See O'Connor, *The Big Game Rifle*, 25. O'Connor helped the folklore of the gun grow with his detailed and vivid romanticizations of the gun's integral role in the development of the nation.

[156] O'Connor, however popular, was only one writer in a chorus of men extolling the rifle as the cornerstone of America. For instance, gun expert C. E. Hagie asserted, "Of no other country in the world can it be said that its very existence rests on the rifle as a foundation – that its independence sprang from proficiency with the rifle, and that the rifle was basically responsible for its expansion and development; and in no other country than the United States is practically every male citizen familiar with the rifle as a part of his civilian activities." He also disclosed his attitude regarding conservation and hunting. "But for the rifle," he announced, "the buffalo would still be dominating the plains and the grizzly bear and the timber wolf terrorizing the mountains." Hagie seemed undisturbed by what had happened to the buffalo, which were almost slaughtered into extinction by men killing them primarily for their hides and sport. His lack of remorse merely reflects the ordinary attitude among hunters of his era. Hunters gave little thought to preservation, instead most efforts aimed to conserve animals through wildlife management and conservation. Hunters primarily wanted to protect game animals for future hunting exploits. See C. E. Hagie, *The American Rifle for Hunting and Target Shooting* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944), v. Echoing the sentiments of O'Connor, Hagie painted a version of American history in which the gun rescued white Americans from savages, economic and political dependence, and a primitive way of life. Readers of the Hagie and O'Connor volumes, and indeed the many other books like them, confronted the association between guns and the formation, and implicitly the survival, of America.

hunting the stag, or any hunting for that matter, was the exclusive right of royalty. The blue-bloods owned all game, and only they enjoyed the sport of the chase. The 'sovereign' held that right exclusively. All others were poachers." [157] So although the sport of hunting is not exclusive to the United States, Carhart and many other hunters characterized hunting in the United States as uniquely democratic. In addition, Carhart disapproves of restrictions on hunting, implying that such constraints would be undemocratic. As if equal access to game regardless of class was not democratic and "American" enough, Carhart added, "There is a curious bit of legal fact to add here. So long as game is at large, title rests in all citizens of the state. But the moment you creel a trout or bag a buck, it becomes private property." [158] Thus, hunting and state management of game allowed men to act as armed capitalists because the state facilitated the competition for and acquisition of resources to be deemed private property upon procurement. Carhart informed his readers and fellow hunters, "I wanted you to see your stake in the deer herds of North America, your property rights in them and in the public hunting grounds where, if we guard our rights, you and I may continue to hunt. You and the other stockholders, through your game and fish officials, may hope and plan for future hunting; you must guard that future so this American tradition may persist, not only for you and me, but for others to come." [159] In an era when many citizens took every opportunity to celebrate the benefits of democracy and denounce communism, hunting

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[157] Carhart, *Hunting North American Deer*, 4.

[158] Ibid., 5.

[159] Ibid., 12. The business language and the rhetoric of private property are timely considering the pervasive postwar tendency to sing the praises of America's free enterprise system as opposed to communism. As Louis S. Warren notes, by the early twentieth century, Americans considered wildlife and other natural resources part of an abstract American public. American hunters demanded free, open, access to lands based on how they defined citizenship. See Warren, *Hunter's Game*, 11.

became the all-American sport representing both equality of experience and the continuation of an important American male tradition. Because popular sources linked firearms use for hunting so closely with American history and tradition, gun use became a sure marker of what it meant to be an American. Moreover, many hunters turned to the sport as a tangible means to display their abstract sense of patriotism. Perpetuating the heritage of sporting gun use, postwar men carried on an American tradition that had sustained the nation in other perilous times similar to that of the Cold War. Accordingly, a gun culture based on sport hunting grew significantly, increasing the attachment to firearms.

While a potent force in Cold War America, the glorification of a mythic, American heritage did not figure as the only episode intensifying men's attachment to firearms and hunting. Generally, gun culture also deepened during the postwar era because of pervasive fears about gender roles and the threat of homosexuality. Political rhetoric echoed the same fears and encouraged Americans to equate homosexuality with communism, thus complicating concerns about sexual identity even further. [160] Moreover, the perception that homosexuality was steadily increasing and the alleged encroachment of domesticity also generated anxiety among American men, prompting many to turn to the outdoors for self-expression as a means to quell their uneasiness about challenges to traditional gender norms.

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[160] For more on the connection made by politicians between communists and homosexuals, see K. A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in Masculinity, 1949-1960," *Journal of American History* 87 (September 2000): 515-545, especially Senator Joseph McCarthy's comments.

Additionally, hunting is particularly important in this era because it is an activity with clearly defined winners and losers, unlike the Cold War, which was characterized by ambiguity, including the difficulty of distinguishing enemies from allies. Americans may have had trouble determining the rules of international politics and military strategy in the atomic age, but men embarking on hunting adventures had a clear sense of the rules of engagement as they loaded their rifles and headed to the forests. Perhaps most importantly, however, the meanings and experience of hunting after World War II intensified America's already established love affair with the gun as men searched for ways to affirm their manliness in the face of a masculine identity crisis. [161] American men were inundated with profuse amounts of outdoor and mainstream literature that offered hunting and recreational gun use as a possible antidote to homosexuality and the fear of becoming 'soft' in an increasingly domestic world.

In the postwar era, emerging social forces seemed to challenge conventional notions of masculinity. For instance, the infamous Kinsey study reported a high incidence of homosexuality among American males. Kinsey asserted that although many

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[161] Although historically American men had experienced other crises of masculinity, in the postwar era these specific conditions again precipitated a masculine identity crisis. Scholar Gail Bederman argues that during the Progressive Era men experienced a crisis of manhood, rather than a crisis of masculinity because no such notion of "masculinity" had really cohered for men of that time. Further, she also asserts that no crisis, per se, happened at all. Instead, men merely wrestled with the ongoing process of forging a gender identity. Whether termed a crisis of fashioning a masculine identity or a process of working out a concept of manhood, men certainly suffered gender insecurity in both the Progressive and post-World War II eras as modes of work, notions of sexuality, and roles of females forced then to reevaluate male gender identity. Bederman is correct that in the twentieth century a dominant mode of masculinity did exist. It is clear, however, that in the postwar era men feared they would deviate from the dominant discourse, thus leading to a crisis of masculinity. See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

men did not act on their homosexual potential, they still harbored the "predilection." [162] Likewise, social scientists and mental health experts began to evaluate the state of masculinity in America and found it to be lacking, as evidenced by the title of Abram Kardiner's study, "The Flight from Masculinity," which appeared in Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek's compilation of essays on homosexuality, *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society.* [163]

Indeed, in a social context in which fears about gender identity pervaded culture and society, gun use for recreation proved the perfect leisure pursuit, because outdoor writers promoted it among hunters as an activity intimately connected to the development of manliness. [164] Outdoor writers and hunters helped create a world in the popular consciousness where the forest and field became the proving ground for manliness and an

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[162] Clyde W. Franklin, *The Changing Definition of Masculinity* (New York: Plenum Press, 1984), 8. See also Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948).

[163] Abram Kardiner, "The Flight from Masculinity," in *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society*, ed. Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1963), 17-39. "Homosexuality appears to be increasing in contemporary society," announced Dr. Hendrik Ruitenbeek in the preface of *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society*. Among mental health professionals of the postwar era, the basic assumption of the period shifted from considering homosexuality a biological disorder resulting from early development to characterizing it as a problem resulting from the social environment, including the pressures of modern life and the family. Ruitenbeek, as the editor of this volume, hoped to lead others to view homosexuality for what it was – "a sociological phenomenon." See Ruitenbeek, *The Problem of Homosexuality,* xiv. The majority of experts believed that Ruitenbeek was right. Furthermore, almost all experts, regardless of what they cited as the "cause" of homosexuality, agreed that it should be characterized as an abnormal, or deviant, state.

[164] Yet, where did the masculine identity crisis originate? Schlesinger blamed women's aggression stating, "On the most superficial level, the roles of male and female are increasingly merged in the American household. The American man is found as never before as a substitute for wife and mother – changing diapers, washing dishes, cooking meals, and performing a whole series of what once were considered female duties." See Arthur Schlesinger, "The Crisis of American Masculinity," in *The Politics of Hope* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1963), 237-38. In addition, one writer commented, "Our younger generation [of men] already shows signs of being fagged out and of having lost . . . the 'hunting instinct.'" This same author also declared, "Scientists who study human behavior fear that the American male is now dominated by the American female. These scientists worry that in the years since the end of World War II, he had changed radically and dangerously; that he is no longer the masculine, strong-minded man who pioneered the continent and built America's greatness." See J. Robert Moskin, "Why Do Women Dominate Him? in *The Decline of the American Male*, eds. *Look* (New York: Random House, 1958), 3, 11.

antidote to homosexuality. For instance, when relating how he tracked and killed his game by following the prey for several days, one hunter reported, "You've become a real hunter when you've walked down your first game. And you know you're a man, because it's a job for men only." [165] Similarly, the title of Harold H. Martin's column, "Sissies Never Hunt Bears," clearly shows that only the manliest of men hunted. He noted that when an acquaintance killed a bear, he experienced a "strange wild exultation" and "the first time it happened, he thinks, marked a turning point in his life." [166] For the bear hunter, obtaining this trophy became a marker of manliness and concrete proof that he was no "sissy."

The remains of the animal taken in hunting also served as a tangible reminder of a male's manliness. In his analysis of hunting, scholar Charles Bergman argues that the hunting trophy "is the way male dominance is given corporeal substance" among men, and when placed in the home the preserved animal carcass also conveys a distinct message to all who enter. Specifically, it communicates that the hunter has outwitted what he perceives as a formidable opponent. He has conquered nature and he has also mastered the masculine skills, usually proficiency with a gun, which hunting requires. Moreover, the refurbished remains demonstrate that the hunter is the provider. He is capable of securing food for his family, which the female then prepares. [167] In sum,

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[165] V. B. Bostick, "For Men Only," *Field and Stream* 60 (March 1956), 119.

[166] Harold H. Martin, "Sissies Never Hunt Bears," *Saturday Evening Post* (29 January 1949), 20.

[167] Bergman, *Orion's Legacy*, 227-29. Stuart A. Marks also questions, "What is it that motivates men to hunt, especially since it no longer constitutes an essential economic activity? . . . Within white households, game frequently has important gender significance in marking the dependency of family members upon masculine abilities." He continues, "I interpret this image of a deer head mounted within the house as a tangible assertion of masculine dominion within the woman's sphere of influence." See Stuart A. Marks, *Southern Hunting in Black and White: Nature, History, and Ritual in a Carolina Community* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 72, 81.

trophies such as deer antlers and preserved animals reveals that he is master of nature and king of his castle. Hunter Warren Page explained that "when you come right down to it, no trophy means much unless it is sauced by a fair mixture of blood, sweat, and tears." [168] The trophy and the skills and the guns required to obtain it, all create a masculine image. [169]

Likewise, if a hunter bagged game, he often enjoyed the adoration of his family as well as the rest of his community. Children looked up to him as a seasoned adventurer, women considered him a breadwinner in a new light, and other men admired his prowess with a gun. The November 1956 issue of *Field and Stream* pictured the scene on its cover. The illustration shows two men returning from a successful hunting trip, having killed a wild cat as well as a large buck. An admiring bunch, including women, children, and men, including the postman, watches as the trophies are unloaded amid the excitement. [170] (See Figure 7) The scene is described:

> Rain and snow and sleet may not deter your faithful mailman from the completion of his rounds, but when a mountain lion *and* a 5-point buck come home in station-wagon style even Uncle Sam's man in gray has to stop for a long, wistful look. (He has a hunt coming up too.) The cat, looking as disdainful in death as it did in life, is stirring delighted terror in the hearts of a little dog and a little girl, but only brave daydreams in the small boys. As for the adults – well, artist John Clymer, who has witnessed many a triumphant homecoming, has caught 'em in a climatic moment of shock, delight, and pride. [171]

The hunters are the objects of much admiration for their manly exploits while the jubilation validates their exploits and their masculinity.

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[168] Page *One Man's Wilderness*, 7.
[169] Bergman, *Orion's Legacy*, 228-29. According to Bergman, the trophy and the gun are both phallic.
[170] John Clymer, *Field and Stream* (November 1956), cover.
[171] "On the Cover," *Field and Stream* (November 1956), 4.



Figure 7. The Hunter Returns a Hero.

Source: John Clymer, *Field and Stream* (November 1956), cover.

Hunting offered men a means to instill, display, and reaffirm manliness in a climate fearful of rampant homosexuality. Furthermore, the sport offered a specific image of masculinity wherein the male participant was considered an adventurous, powerful, cunning, and virile heterosexual. Hunting scholar Stuart A. Marks has specifically characterized the man who hunts for male deer, for instance, as "the epitome of a masculine mystique. He is cool and collected in the trying and risky moments of performance. He uses his mind instead of his emotions. . . . He is active and assertive in the appropriate context and shows control in any situation likely to compromise him." [172] The deer hunter represents the type of masculinity considered necessary to withstand the tenuous circumstances of the Cold War. He is a man of action but few words, always in control, and confident in his abilities. In short, he is rugged and stoic rather than "soft," emotive, and effeminate.

Men also feared becoming soft as a result of encroaching domesticity. In the postwar years, as more and more women entered the workforce, many men perceived a rising tide of female influence at their expense. For instance, in 1958, *Look* magazine published a collection of essays entitled *The Decline of the American Male* that discussed the challenges to American men's gender identity. In one essay William Atwood complained, "Today's breadwinner must be a part-time nursemaid, kitchen helper, handyman and mechanic." [173] He continued, "The danger, of course, is that we will become too soft, too complacent and too home-oriented to meet the challenge of other

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[172] Marks, *Southern Hunting in Black and White,* 161.

[173] William Attwood, "Why Does He Work So Hard?" in *The Decline of the American Male*, eds. *Look*, (New York: Random House, 1958), 58.

dynamic nations like China and the Soviet Union." [174] In an era demanding manly resolve, a man could not afford to be perceived as a "softie" who yielded to domestic chores typically reserved for women. After all, if he was weak in the home, he may also be too weak to stand up to communists lurking in the shadows.

Various sources also explained to readers that the transformations in the structure of the family and changes to the traditional male role threatened masculinity. Many popular publications, even those in the mainstream not primarily concerned with outdoor leisure, promoted hunting as an appropriate antidote to domesticity. In 1960, for instance, the *Saturday Evening Post* revealed how hunting provided an escape for men:

> Deer hunting is mostly an excuse. It's an excuse to get away from jutting-jawed bosses, mean-dispositioned customers, international crises; from shaving, neckties, the 8:10, desks, memos, boredom. And – even though you love them dearly – the women and the family. You get away into a world of pipe-smoking, poker playing, wood smoke, wet wool and sweaty males. . . . For a few days you're not a little person any longer. You're a he-man among men. In the woods with that rifle in hand you're three sizes bigger than Paul Bunyan. [175]

Hunting offered a remedy for all types of anxiety generated by the Cold War. Most notably, hunters could reassert their manliness "with that rifle in hand" as a "he-man," thus proving his triumph over the "little woman." Hunting not only allowed them to cast

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[174] Attwood, "Why Does He Work So Hard?," 64. As the Cold War intensified, Americans not only worried about being able to defend the nation from communism, they also feared that they could not sustain the basic unit of society, the family, because of overbearing mothers and effeminate fathers. Arthur Schlesinger questioned, "What has happened to the American male? For a long time, he seemed utterly confident in his manhood, sure of his masculine role in society, easy and definite in his sense of sexual identity. The frontiersmen of James Fennimore Cooper, for example, never had any concern about masculinity; they were men, and it did not occur to them to think twice about it. Even well into the 20th century, the heroes of Dreiser, of Fitzgerald, of Hemingway remain men. But one begins to detect a new theme emerging in some of these authors, especially in Hemingway: the theme of the male hero increasingly preoccupied with proving his virility to himself. And by mid-century, the male role had plainly lost its rugged clarity of outline. Today men are more and more conscious of maleness not as a fact but as a problem. The ways by which American men affirm their masculinity are uncertain and obscure. There are multiplying signs, indeed, that something has gone badly wrong with the American male's conception of himself." See Schlesinger, "The Crisis of American Masculinity," 237.

[175] Murray Hoyt, "Beware the Untamed Deer Hunter," *Saturday Evening Post* (3 December 1960), 27.

off the responsibilities and constraints of everyday life, the use of the gun provided males with an opportunity to protect their masculinity from the threat of domesticity. [176] Men concerned about exhibiting their own masculinity could find comfort in gun use as a means to elevate the holder's status to a man among men, and just as importantly, as a means to stand out as a man in a crowd of what they perceived as authoritative women. [177]

Persuaded by the accounts of other hunters who shared their experiences in print, hunters believed that sport hunting could combat domesticity in various other ways. For instance, many men often endured hardships ranging from poor weather to physical exhaustion just for the privilege of proclaiming themselves hardened hunters. Hunter and contributor to *Field and Stream* Clare Conley, speaking of hunting chukars, a type of bird found in rocky, mountainous areas, asserted, "As far as I'm concerned there should be only two kinds of chukar hunting – hard and damn hard." The physical exertion required for a successful hunt only made the sport sweeter. He added, "It took muscle power and old fashioned shirt-wetting sweat to get the chukars." [178] Hunters like Conley understood that much of society would reward their suffering with validation of their masculinity.

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[176] Because of the perceived menace of domesticity, a number of men realized they would have to seek outlets for masculine expression. For instance, J. Robert Moskin wrote, "It is certain that, as women grow even more numerous and more dominant, we will have to invent new meanings and myths for maleness in America." See J. Robert Moskin, "Why Do Women Dominate Him?" in *The Decline of the American Male*, eds. *Look* (New York: Random House, 1958), 24. See also Lisa M. Fine, "Rights of Men, Rites of Passage: Hunting and Masculinity at Reo Motors of Lansing, Michigan, 1945-1975," *Journal of Social History* 33.4 (2000): 805-823. Fine offers evidence that Michigan hunters employed in the auto industry viewed hunting as an antidote to domesticity and work.

[177] Despite the stereotypes of the prim housewife vacuuming away her suburban days in heels and pearls, many women in the postwar era did become active in the labor force and various social movements while others defied the stereotypes by engaging in behavior that earned them "bad girl" reputations. All of these occurrences confirmed to postwar men that women were indeed overstepping proper boundaries. For more on women in the postwar era, see *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

[178] Clare Conley, "The Harder the Better," *Field and Stream* (October 1963), 34.

Furthermore, the prospect of using a gun to kill their prey excited hunters just as much as the prospect of enduring harsh physical conditions. John Carlyle, contributor to *Nation's Business,* declared, "To shoot at something with a rifle they [hunters] will cheerfully undergo the most incredible toil. They will crawl into sleeping bags wearing their pants and use their soggy boots as pillows. They will rise at ungodly hours and labor up peaks and over trails blocked by windfalls. They will eat sourdough bread and like it." [179] Voluntarily undergoing such harsh circumstances established oneself as a man and suffering hardship just for the pleasure of using firearms demonstrated manhood.

The inclination of men to prefer rigorous leisure pursuits certainly fits within the general context of the postwar era. Many Americans, especially social critics such as David Riesman, feared that widespread and unprecedented affluence would spoil Americans and render them complacent. In the case of men, "relaxing in the featherbed of plenty" would erode their birthright as rugged frontiersman. According to Riesman, in this context "any leisure that looks easy is suspect." [180] Enduring freezing weather, wet clothing, exhausting hikes, and unsavory rations made hunting sound like anything less than a good time. But if men harbored fears about the future of masculinity in America, and perhaps their own manliness, heading to the woods with rifle in hand reassured them of their masculine prowess. [181] Moreover, men also found comfort in carrying on what

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[179] John Carlyle, "The Rifle is America's Heritage," *Nation's Business* (October 1947), 47.

[180] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, abridged ed. with 1969 preface (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 295.

[181] Interestingly, when asked about hunting, one of Bergman's interviewees responded, "It's the politics of hunt and cunt." Bergman added, "The phallic rifle hanging above the female hearth" represents hunting's inextricable connection with notions of gender. See Bergman, *Orion's Legacy*, 229.

they perceived as a true American pastime – hunting with their trusty firearms, themselves emblems of Americanness and manliness.

Hunters found pleasure in their outdoor exploits because they derived personal satisfaction in the rigorous demands it made on their physical bodies and because those demands reinforced their gender identity as rugged men. Outdoor writers, hunters, and social critics shared the notion that the actual act of hunting reinvigorated men, suggesting that men only really lived when they killed. In addition, they believed that hunting could restore the fortitude that modern life allegedly drained from men. For instance, Page continued that hunting:

> always involves some conflict of man against nature, whether you consider nature the steepness of the sheep mountain, the bitterness of a subfreezing duck blind, or the highly developed cunning of an old buck deer. I know from long personal experience the agonizing lung-bursting competition of one runner against another; but I honestly doubt that there is a great difference between that, in severity of strain, and the effort of a determined hunter, perhaps a mite soft from the exigencies of modern life, to make that last ridge beyond which, he hopes, his ram may be in range. . . . It brings out the best, really, in both man and game. [182]

Weathering harsh conditions provided an opportunity to cultivate and exhibit manliness while also offering the opportunity for men to prove their prowess, for hunting and sexual activity, by hardening themselves for outdoor adventures. In fact, Charles Elliot admitted that he dedicated himself to a regimen intended to "harden" him up before hitting the woods. He explained, "I always go into a period of training for at least two months before I take off on a big game hunt. By properly preparing myself for the adventure, I can always be sure of enjoying it from the very beginning – rather than suffering for the first week or two while I adjust myself to the rigors of riding, climbing, and living by a

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[182] Page, *One Man's Wilderness*, 231-232.

standard altogether different from the one to which I am accustomed." [183] His regimen prepares him for the trip and it reveals that he can indeed achieve a state of hardness. The comments also suggest that he, and many other hunters, equated the physical prowess required by hunting and sporting gun use with sexual prowess. A hardened man was prepared for any outdoor adventure and was prepared to meet any challenge posed to his masculinity, whether it is a challenge posed by sexual intercourse or communism.

Hunting offered men excitement, pleasure, and manly reinvigoration and many American men viewed the sporting use of guns as an appropriate outlet for their discontents and fears about homosexuality and domesticity. In short, in a tumultuous era of dramatic social and political change, men derived pleasure through what the sporting use of guns afforded, namely a concrete activity that reaffirmed the abstract concept of gender identity. In the process, many men came to associate manliness and confidence with firearms themselves. This association explains why hunters fought vehemently against gun regulation because in curbing gun use, legislators also restricted men's access to adventure and self-identity. Ultimately, gun culture grew in the postwar era because men looked to the recreational use of guns as a means for masculine expression and the cultivation of manliness.

Many of the men who hunted, whether conscious of it or not, pursued hunting as a means to display their own masculinity. Thus, it is noteworthy that the pastime considered by many citizens as "typically American" required participants to be extremely familiar with firearms. Most hunters appeared to have a personal relationship with their particular firearms, and guns usually merited special attention separate from all

[183] Charles Elliot, *Gone Huntin'* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Company, 1954), 261.

other gear in publications about outdoor activities. An aura of romance developed around guns, with hunters characterizing their firearms as objects of affection. Some hunters explained the relationship between a man and his gun as one between that of a male and female wherein the male loved, yet controlled, his partner, the gun. Notably, men often discussed their firearms using romantic language and even sexualized the firearm and their relationship with it. For instance, Chapman J. Milling explains that a man's collection of guns "is not only pleasing to own and to fondle with pride; it is also very highly practical." [184] Whether or not he meant practical for multiple types of hunting or for defense is uncertain but he does reveal that any man should feel pride in owning multiple firearms. However, Milling also encouraged gun owners to find satisfaction in having a very tactile experience with their firearms and urged them to derive pleasure from fondling them. Milling's suggestion to gun owners to "fondle" their guns seems to be more of a recognition of the relationship gun owners already enjoyed with their firearms. Still, it is interesting that in an era in which so many Americans experienced anxiety about sexual identity that a man writing about the pride of ownership of guns would encourage or even mention the act of fondling what many considered a phallic symbol, or at least a symbol of manliness. Regardless, it is clear that gun owners shared a special, pleasurable relationship with their hunting firearms that at times can be considered sexual. [185]

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[184] Chapman J. Milling, *Buckshot and Hounds* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1967), 65.

[185] Sexual language was also utilized in discussing other anxieties of the Cold War era, such as concern for national security. As one commentator noted, "In our decade [1950s] of inertia, we squandered, for example, a commanding weapons lead until our own officials now frankly concede that by the early '60's the Soviet Union, a nation supposedly far behind our own in economic and technological sophistication, will have a superiority in the *thrust* of its missiles and in the *penetration* of outer space." See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "The New Mood of Politics," in *The Politics of Hope* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Other hunters made more explicit comments about the amorous relationship between firearms and masculinity. For instance, Robert Ruark, a widely-known hunter, respected outdoor writer, and one of the associate editors of *Field and Stream*, described how a quail hunt became the proving ground for masculinity because of how a man did, or did not, handle his gun. He described a hunter whose "heart is pounding a rumba-beat. He is carrying a shotgun, generally with a 26- to 28-inch barrel. The gauge of the gun is an index to the ability of the man to prove his manhood at that moment. If it is a 12-gauge, he is so-so at his business. If it is a 16, he is pretty good. If it's a 20-gauge he is excellent, and if it's a .410 he is bragging." [186] The larger the gauge, the better shot, and the more skilled the man he will prove himself. He added, "At the very moment he feels like a bull-fighter awaiting a *toro bravo*, a big-game hunter preparing to meet an African buffalo's charge, a soldier verging on a desperate destruction of a machine-gun emplacement. . . . his reputation is at stake." [187] Even hunting the small birds became a test of masculinity equal to that of bullfighting or warfare. As the dogs retrieve the birds, "he lights a cigarette, and for a moment he is Belmonte, the bull-fighter. He is Dwight Eisenhower. He is Clark Gable. . . . He is David, standing over the prostrate form of Goliath. He is one hell of a big guy – to himself, if he is alone – to the others, if he is

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Company, 1963), 86, emphasis added. Schlesinger's comments indicate the general anxiety of many Americans in regard to Soviet advancements. In addition, his choice of words reveals a profound fear regarding a loss of masculinity because Soviet superiority in technology would allow the Russians to "thrust" and "penetrate" more ably than Americans, thus denoting the technological and sexual prowess of the Soviets at the expense of the Americans.

[186] Robert C. Ruark, "The Brave Quail," in *Field and Stream Treasury,* eds., Hugh Grey and Ross McCluskey (New York: Holt, 1955), 330. The original version of this story appeared in *Field and Stream* (December 1951) as "The Brave Quail," 18-21, 110-11.

[187] Ibid., 330.

accompanied." [188] If the hunter is successful, then he will share a sense of masculinity comparable only to the manliest of men. [189]

Tellingly, the unsuccessful hunter became the target of humiliation. For instance, *Life*, which frequently featured light-hearted photo essays of hunting in their fall issues, included a photo poking fun of the Wyoming governor who failed to kill anything on his hunting trip. Entitled, "Governor's 'Disgrace,'" the caption read, "Daisy St. Clair, wife of a Shoshone chief, dresses Wyoming Governor Jack R. Gage as a squaw for 'humiliation' dance – he hunted nine hours, never fired a shot." [190] In the photograph, the ceremony seems all in good fun. However, despite the humorous appearance of the governor dressed as a woman, the message is clear – men who do not "bring home the bacon" are destined to cook it, because their failure to obtain game successfully with their firearm de-masculinizes them. [191]

Notably, the bulk of sources regarding hunting and firearms use only involved white men. A rare exception is a story from the December 1951 issue of *Field and Stream* accompanied by an illustration depicting white hunters being served by a black man. [192] Apparently, the privilege of hunting quail was reserved for white males while black males existed only as domestics who would serve men, much like women were expected to do. In fact, the overwhelming majority of stories, photographs, and

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[188] Ibid.

[189] Ruark spoke at great length about other exemplars of masculinity. According to him, "Mr. Bernard M. Baruch, the millionaire elder statesman, is fond of saying that there are two things a man cannot abide being kidded about: his prowess with the ladies and his ability to shoot quail." Ruark made sure to mention that other paragons of masculinity hunted quail, such as General Omar Bradley. See Ruark, *Field and Stream Treasury*, 332. Men had only to look at the current government administration to find contemporary paragons of manliness who enjoyed the leisure use of firearms.

[190] "Blam! The Season Opens," *Life* (20 October 1961), 48-49.

[191] "Governor's Disgrace," *Life* (20 October 1961), 49.

[192] *Field and Stream* (December 1951), 21.

advertisements in outdoor publications featured only white males, even though African Americans hunted, fished, and used guns. Nevertheless, the image of sport hunting and gun use remained predominately male, white, and middle class. According to representations in popular sources, only white men engaged in hunting, and only they could enjoy the gender expression and security offered by the sport. [193]

Outdoor writers were not the only ones aware of the powerful and erotic connection between men and firearms. The Pennsylvania Department of Commerce used the idea of a special relationship between "a man and his gun" to attract hunters to their state. [194] (See Figure 8) In addition, companies used firearms in their advertising campaigns hoping to appeal to potential male customers. For instance, a 1956 ad for Viyella shirts shows a well-groomed, aloof-appearing man holding a gun. While the text of the ad emphasizes the quality of the garment, the photo pictures a man seemingly ready to take the fields for a day of hunting. Ultimately, the ad uses the firearm as an object which can appeal to men, making them feel manly if they purchase the shirt. [195] (See Figure 9) In fact, the appeal of the gun is the key to marketing the shirt, because it is doubtful that many hunters would take to the woods in such fashionable attire.

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[193] Over the course of the 1950s and especially the early 1960s, national publications did finally present armed black men in their pages. However, the photos did not show black men hunting; instead, publications pictured young black men primarily armed with pistols. The stories and photographs also cast these men as violent gun wielders, masking a long history of non-violent gun use by black males for hunting. Thus, many Americans' initial impressions of blacks with guns resulted from such depictions connecting the use of firearms by blacks with violence and illicit activity. For a more thorough analysis of this issue, see the concluding chapter. On a related note, according to Louis S. Warren, hunting became considered a white prerogative in parts of Pennsylvania, because immigrants could not pay high fees to obtain hunting licenses. Warren demonstrates how regulations inadvertently codified hunting as a whites-only sport. See Warren, *Hunter's Game*, 11.

[194] "A Man and His Gun," *Field and Stream* (September 1952), 19.

[195] *Field and Stream* (November 1956), 41.



Figure 8. Pennsylvania Hunting Promotion.

Source: *Field and Stream* (September 1952), 19.

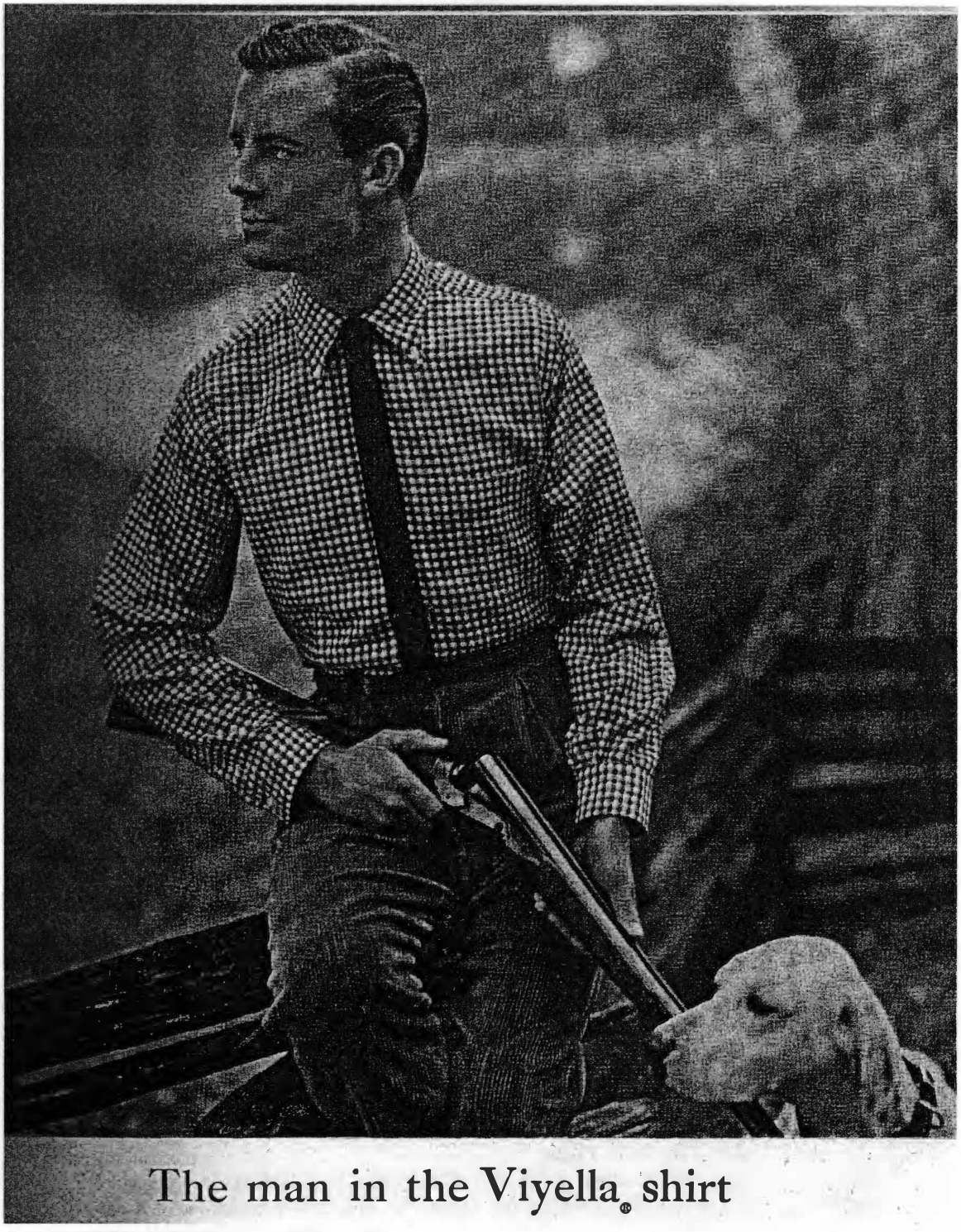

Figure 9. Sportswear Promotion.

Source: *Field and Stream* (November 1956), 41.

At a time when many Americans felt powerless in the face of a looming communist threat and felt helpless to defend themselves in the event of a nuclear attack, hunting provided men a means to exert control and feel powerful. As Charles Bergman argues, hunting is not just an exhibition of power, but the creation of it. [196] Men, armed with powerful weapons, considered themselves the most powerful being in the forests and fields where they roamed searching for game and hunting for identity. The hunter could feel quite safe anywhere, as long as he had his gun. O'Connor explained, "The hunter who stalks the grizzly above timberline in some great open basin, who has an adequately powerful rifle, who can shoot, and who keeps his cool, is in about as much danger as he is in his living room sitting before the fireplace reading a book." He elaborated, "The combination of a powerful rifle and a well-placed shot made the grizzly about as dangerous as a chipmunk." [197] Armed with a gun and other manly characteristics such as self-control, the hunter became all-powerful. A gun and the proper skill in using it reduced even the most formidable foe to a mere mouse-like creature. Perhaps O'Connor's readers also believed that armed and properly trained, the man with a gun could triumph over any rival, including communists and anything else which threatened manliness. [198] Overall, firearms invested these men with a sense of physical, masculine,

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[196] Bergman, *Orion's Legacy*, 17.

[197] O'Connor, *The Big Game Rifle*, 9-10.

[198] Other commentators worried about the decline of the typical "ruggedness" of American males. Arthur Schlesinger, for example, lamented the loss of the prototypical American trait – "rugged individualism" – and argued that the loss of this characteristic contributed to the decline of American greatness. He insisted, "The bureaucratization of American life, the decline of the working class, the growth of the white collar class, the rise of suburbia – all of this has meant the increasing homogeneity of American society. Though we continue to speak of ourselves as rugged individualists, our actual life has grown more and more collective and anonymous." See Schlesinger, "The Decline of Greatness," in *Politics of Hope,* 26. Any recreation which encouraged rugged individualism would provide an acceptable and welcome form of recreation. Hunting, at least as outdoor writers and hunters promoted it, fit the bill.

and sexual prowess. The sporting use of guns invested them with confidence about their ability to react to various threats as a result of their excessive manliness.

Despite all the talk of rugged masculinity and the glorification of nights spent sleeping in freezing weather in hopes of bagging an animal, hunters could become quite sentimental about their firearms. The gun remained, after all, an integral part of the hunting experience. The sexualization of guns and males' emotional attachment to them reveals another reason why this strain of gun culture became so entrenched. Analyzing the sporting use of firearms reveals males' intense attachment to them, as evidenced by the sexualization and romanticization of them also sheds light on the intensity of this gun culture.

At times, various writers characterized the relationship between a man and his gun as a marriage because some men preferred to think of their guns as loyal companions. For instance, Archibald Rutledge explained, "It just is not natural for a man to shoot well with a strange gun. And one reason is that under these circumstances most men may have a nervous feeling that they are stepping out on the Little Woman who has been faithful to them so long." [199] The use of a marriage metaphor indicates an emotional attachment to firearms. Men would care for and remain faithful to them as one would expect a spouse to behave in a healthy, loving marriage. But why use the marriage metaphor? Why not the metaphor of a loyal friend? Perhaps the metaphor demonstrates how gun use helped men to consider themselves manly by objectifying the gun as a

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After all, American men would need the rugged character of their mythic national ancestors to meet the communist threat.

[199] Archibald H. Rutledge, *Those Were the Days*, (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1955), 401-02. Interestingly, Rutledge concluded, "My advice is to get the very best all-purpose gun you can; then mate with it for life." The gun, like a wife, was to be a life-long companion.

woman. The male figured as the dominant figure and the primary provider. The gun in this case becomes the female, subject to the husband's will and faithful in return for care and affection. Business journalist John Carlyle similarly feminized guns, stating that riflemen's weapons were "as delicately made as watches and are beautiful as girls at a fountain." [200] In these descriptions read by countless numbers of men, the gun became a feminine object of beauty, emotional attachment, and male control.

This attitude is also reflected in the artwork of the leading outdoor magazines. For instance, in October 1958 *Field and Stream* ran a cartoon showing a duck hunter's attachment to his firearm. [201] (See Figure 10) Although poking fun at the man-gun relationship and the hunter's enthusiasm for the sport, the illustration nonetheless chose to make fun of a genuine attitude of hunters. It also evokes the notion that a hunter "weds" his gun because as the cartoon shows, he has gone to bed with it. [202]

Havilah Babcock, known in hunting circles as the "the nation's leading expert on quail shooting" and contributor to outdoor magazines such as *Field and Stream,* authored a story about his own relationship with his favorite firearm. In the story "Fallen Lady," he described his love affair with a particular firearm, a Parker double, recounting his desperate longing to shoot it. Reminiscing about the gun he began the story recalling, "I once called her Fallen Lady. Not inappropriately, either, for it should have been apparent

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[200] Carlyle, "The Rifle is America's Heritage," 48.

[201] *Field and Stream* (October 1958), 60.

[202] Other gun enthusiasts insisted on the importance of knowing one's firearms in order to become a successful hunter in addition to encouraging readers to develop a loving, faithful commitment to their guns, just as they would with their spouses. For instance, Archibald Rutledge explained, "Before he can come really to count on his gun, a man has to be married to it; the ceremony of acquiring it is not enough. He has to live with it. And usually, as in marriage itself, after a few unhappy experiences and disillusions, the two may settle down to many long years of success and happiness." See Rutledge, *Those Were the Days,* 399.

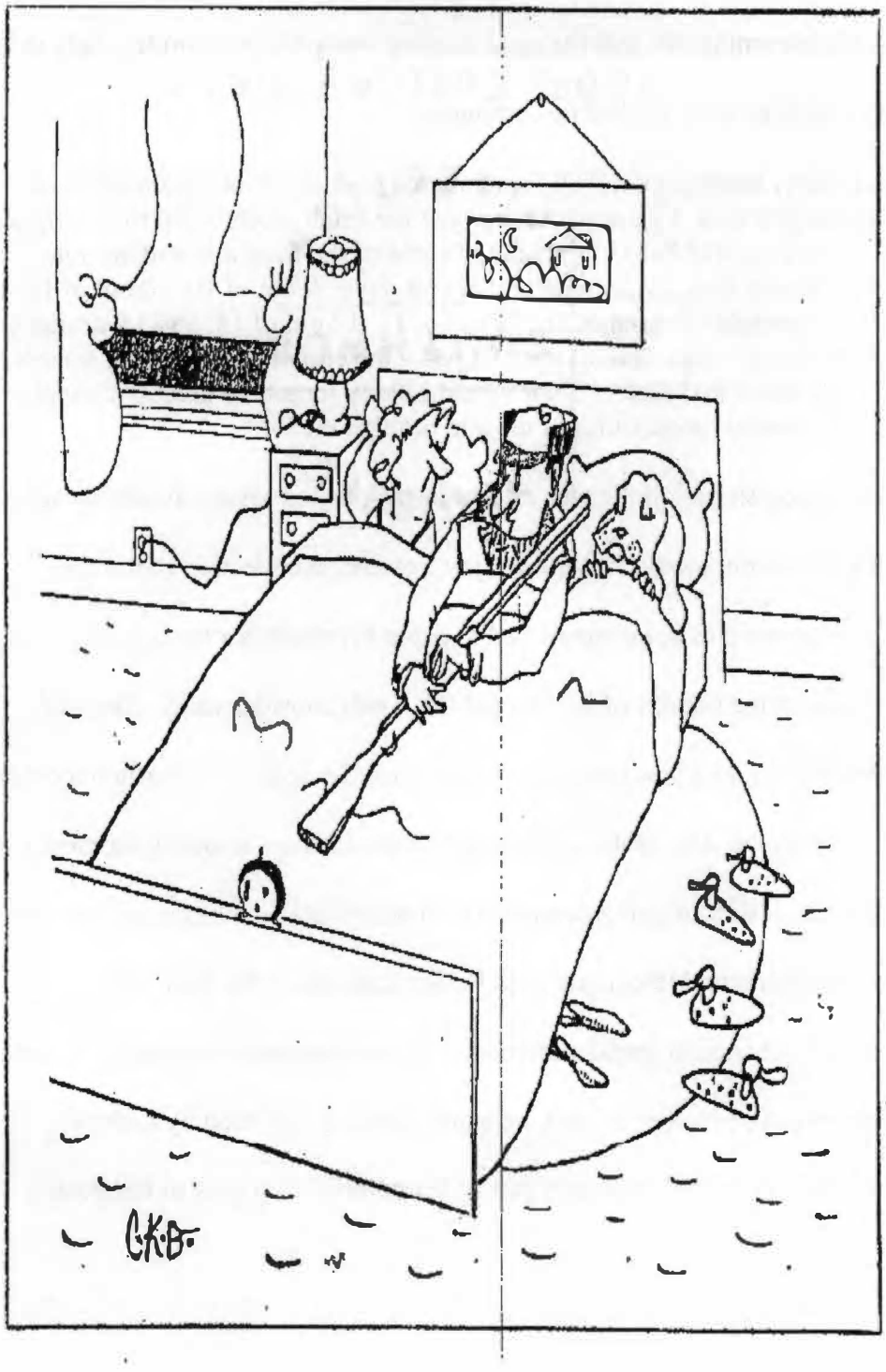

Figure 10. Poking Fun at Man and Gun.

Source: *Field and Stream* (October 1958), 60.

to any kindly and discerning eye that the aged fowling piece had been quite a lady in her day." [203] Becoming ever more wistful he continued:

> I smiled sadly, fingering the well-remembered gash in her once comely stock. Turning the gun over, I glanced curiously at the small placard tied to the trigger guard. In a script still bold it proclaimed some of the feats that had brought renown to Fallen Lady in younger and braver days: 9 out of 10; 10 out of 12; 12 out of 14; 9 straights; 14 out of 16; 12 out of 13; 12 out of 14; and 15 straights. I also remembered – how could I ever forget! – the circumstances under which Fallen Lady and I first met. . . . Nor would I likely forget the great but temporary elation the eventual acquisition of the gun brought me." [204]

Babcock's recollection shares all the elements of a star-crossed lover's reminiscence of a love affair – fond remembrances, wistfulness, joy, passion, recollection of the first meeting. Attaching a card to it, he committed to paper his praise for the gun explaining, "There is a notation at the bottom of the placard that I still consider valid: 'Beyond peradventure the finest gun a bird hunter ever put to his shoulder.'" [205] Furthermore upon his discovery of her in the attic, Babcock decided he would share a special moment with the "Lady" admitting, "Before going downstairs I'd settle back in a limpsy old Boston rocker and have a sentimental tête-à-tête with Fallen Lady about the good old days." [206] Babcock relished the chance to spend a moment with his cherished companion in spite of her worn and shoddy appearance. In fact, he barely seemed disturbed by Lady's appearance; her disfigurement becomes a part of her colorful character in Babcock's judgment.

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[203] Babcock, *Jaybirds Go to Hell on Friday and Other Stories* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), 30. Note that this book was printed eight times between 1958 and 1965.
[204] Ibid., 30-31.
[205] Ibid., 31.
[206] Ibid.

He then recounts how he came to meet Fallen Lady. Fearing embarrassment because he had lapsed into a shooting slump, Babcock reluctantly agreed to tag along as a spectator on a quail hunting trip, sans gun, when he spotted a large covey of quail. At the sight of the birds, he instantly "wish[ed] I had brought a gun along. Then out of the woods came a figure with a bunch of rabbits dangling from his belt and what seemed like a gun over his shoulder. Immediately I began to scheme. If I were to borrow that gun, take a crack at the just-lit covey, and miss, nobody would be the wiser." [207] His immediate desire for the gun underscores two interrelated aspects of hunting and gun culture. First, proficiency with a gun, or in this case the lack of it, would be directly related to his masculinity. Second, the desire to obtain a gun eventually overcomes his fear of being exposed as a poor shot. He instantly begins to "scheme" about how to get his hands on a firearm. He must have it, despite the fact that the owner, Unc Spiller, responds to his action with a warning that the firearm is not appropriate, or in Spiller's words, "If you lookin' for a bird gun you done come to a goat house for wool. Dis here rabbit gun." [208] Despite this caution from the owner, Babcock insisted on shooting the gun anyway. Describing what happened next, he declared, "I had no recollection of putting the gun up or of pulling the trigger. It seemed to have shot itself. That feeling, I have since decided, is the touchstone of perfect gun fit." [209] It seemed to be love at first shot. In short, Babcock was thunderstruck. He immediately informed Spiller that he would offer a very generous price for the opportunity to rent the gun. Later in the day when a companion pokes fun at his acquisition, Babcock warned, "'You are speaking of

[207] Ibid., 34.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.

someone near and dear.'" [210] Throughout the story, the gun is personified. Specifically, the author gives the gun female attributes as he continues sharing his memory of his beloved female companion with his many readers.

Babcock yearned for the gun to such a degree that his desperation drives him to rent it over a period of time because the owner consistently refused to sell it. Babcock's infatuation is so intense that he admitting driving "thirty miles out of my way to rent Unc Spiller's gun, and another thirty when I returned it that night." The more he shoots it, however, the more obsessed he becomes and he confessed, "Three times during the week following I sneaked by Unc Spiller's and rented his gun. And this kept up week after week . . . the countless side trips to Unc Spiller's was running me ragged." [211] Despite repeated attempts to purchase the Lady, Spiller flatly refused realizing he could easily earn more money renting it to his love-struck customer. He teased Babcock, "'Yessir, I sho' got myself a fat possum!'" Babcock, rendered irrational by his obsession, had already paid Spiller an exorbitant rental fee and agreed that "he did indeed have himself a fat possum." [212]

Babcock did not waste much time pondering the hilarity or economics of his situation. Instead, he allowed his fixation to fuel his creativity. "It occurred to me," Babcock declared, "that if I couldn't persuade Unc Spiller to part with his gun I could do the next best thing: have my gun remade into a facsimile of his. In every particular my gun would be identical to his, and two guns exactly alike must certainly shoot alike. Why

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[210] Ibid., 35.
[211] Ibid., 37.
[212] Ibid.

hadn't I thought of this before?" [213] Perhaps he had not thought of it before because he was smitten and like a person in love blind to common sense. Unfortunately for Babcock, the experiment flopped. He discovered that he "couldn't hit the ground with [the reproduction] at four feet" despite the hefty sum he invested in commissioning a gunsmith to craft a facsimile. Not to be deterred, he resolved to spend the next eight months pleading, cajoling, and bargaining with the owner before another hunting season began. Finally he confessed to being "at my wit's end in jockeying with Unc Spiller." [214]

Alas, the clouds broke for Babcock and Unc Spiller, preparing to marry and in need of money, agreed to sell Babcock the gun. "Back at home," Babcock gleefully proclaimed, "still shaken, I hurried to my room and locked the door against interruption. . . . I would gloat over my beauty alone. I'd doll her up in just a bit." [215] In a cruel twist of fate, the makeover revealed a ghastly secret. He lamented, "The sickening truth was irrefutable: the barrels of my precious gun were visibly, unmistakably, and irreparably Damascus." In other words, the old barrels could be lethal to the shooter if used with modern smokeless powder. The combination of a Damascus barrel and modern powder often led to an explosion of the gun and serious injury to the hapless shooter. [216] Stunned, Babcock is nonetheless reluctant to let her go, asserting that he would use her anyway. [217] Finally, fear of losing his fingers, or worse, leads him to retire the Lady. Years later he wistfully recalled, "Since that time I have often thought of Fallen Lady and of our brief but fruitful romance. I came out of that experience with a conviction I have since

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[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid., 38.
[216] Ibid., 38-39.
[217] Ibid., 39.

verified again and again: the feeling a gunner has toward his gun is part of the gun." [218] Although it may not have been a mutual connection considering the inanimate state of the Lady, Babcock certainly believed that a relationship existed between him and his favorite firearm. Furthermore, an emotional bond formed the basis of that connection. Babcock's story also reveals that hunters invested their firearms with human-like qualities, most notably female, and showered on them a real affection that added to the gun's intrinsic value. Certainly other objects, ranging from computers to toasters, are of great use to humans, but these devices rarely seem to inspire such intimate feelings related in short stories about guns, particularly stories written by and for men. In fact, few other objects in American history have generated such emotion or inspired humans to develop a culture around them, as is the case with firearms.

The language Babcock employs in the story also reveals the nature of his feelings for "Fallen Lady." Despite her "fall" from a former state of glory, the gun remains a "lady" and an object of great value to both Babcock and Spiller. Endowing her with a formal title, Babcock refuses to see the gun as she is now – old, worn out, irreparable, and capable of great harm if fired. Instead, he sees her through the veil of admiration that masks her faults. Indeed, the term "fallen lady" usually invokes an image of at worst a prostitute, or at best a lady who has experienced hardships that have brought her to a disreputable state. Yet in this case, Babcock insists that his firearm is nothing less than a lady. But why does he refer to the gun as a female? Does she need protection? Or does her fragile state require the care of a man? Is it that he truly considers their relationship as one of love between a male and a female? The story does read like a love affair. It is

[218] Ibid.

an episode of love at first sight, with one lover going to great lengths to be with his object of affection. The author also overcomes many obstacles in order to spend time with his love. Finally, even after the gun proves unfit for use, Babcock refuses to toss her away. One wonders if wives reading the story experienced a twinge of jealousy regarding this special relationship between a man and his gun, wishing they could be the "Lady" of such desire. Overall, Babcock's account reveals the depth of affection men felt for their firearms. The evidence also shows that men usually characterized their firearms as female. In short, in the man-woman relationship the gun owner figured as the man who cared for the gun and considered it a possession. Ultimately, the male is in control and the gun, as a female, acted as an object to reinforce the male's masculine identity. Firearms, then, became more than objects for sport. They also became objects of desire which could invest the owner with manliness.

The gun in America figured as an important symbol in the early postwar era for several reasons. Outdoor writers and their hunting audiences considered firearms important because of what they afforded – a connection to a heroic heritage, an antidote to challenges to traditional male gender roles, and the opportunity to demonstrate manliness. The discourse regarding firearms and hunting changed, however, over the course of the postwar era. By the early 1960s, hunters became more defensive about hunting as a sport and particularly their firearms. Warren Page, for instance, devoted an entire chapter of his book on hunting to a discussion of "the strange psychology of the gun haters, *New York Times* variety." [219] By the mid-1960s, a new rhetoric formed

[219] Page, *One Man's Wilderness*, x. This comment is surprising given that the *New York Times* regularly featured articles devoted to outdoor sports, including hunting game with firearms.

regarding the hunter and gun control. Hunters castigated the growing body of dissenters, explaining:

> This is the hate-firearms, hate-hunting group. Originally, most supporters of firearms *control* meant just that. . . . Few leaders in such areas today are, however, concerned with mere control. They are confessedly and admittedly striving for the abolishment of firearms, for the disarmament of every American who does not wear a uniform of military or police sort. [220]

The declaration echoed the fears and resentments of gun owners across the nation and represented the growing hostility of hunters toward efforts to restrict or control hunting and firearm ownership. [221]

Antagonism to hunting in regard to the fate of the game animals also grew in the early 1960s. In Page's opinion, and in the minds of other hunters, the anti-hunting sentiment had its roots in forms of media other than the *New York Times.* Page warned:

> More subtle, but probably more influential in the long run, has been the erosion of understanding of wild things and their ways as a result of the Disney nature-fakery approach, the 'Bambi' idealization of animals as anthropomorphic, possessed of human capacities and attitudes. Quite possibly one of the greatest sins ever committed upon young minds, in terms of their understanding of life, these films and their TV counterparts . . . will have a very profound and very bad effect on the directions of conservation in today's generation and the next." [222]

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[220] Ibid., 252.

[221] Gun enthusiast Richard Starnes also complained, "I am sick and tired of being slyly equated with suicidal maniacs, psychotics, neo-Fascists, and the wantonly irresponsible. I am worn out with defending myself against innuendo and distortions that would do credit to some of Dr. Goebbels' hand-honed lies." See "You Might Call It CBS Distorts," *Field and Stream* (September 1964), 20. His comment reveals the perception of gun owners that their opposition sought to lump all gun enthusiasts together in one villainous lot, although many gun control proponents only called for moderate firearms legislation. In addition, Starnes' comments may also be aimed at his fellow gun owners and readers in order to convince them that they were under attack by forces which did not try to understand them and who instead only sought to stereotype them as part of their scheme to disarm them. At any rate, comments such as Starnes could rarely be found prior to 1963, in part because hardly any legislative bodies made any real efforts to restrict ownership or use of firearms.

[222] Page, *One Man's Wilderness*, 253. The story of Bambi was originally written by Austrian Felix Salten in 1923 and entitled *Bambi, A Life in the Woods.* Notably, Whittaker Chambers translated the book into English while working for a communist newspaper. Disney's interpretation of *Bambi* was re-released in theaters in 1947, 1957, 1966, 1975, 1982, and 1988 and in 1989 it was released on video. A DVD was released in February 2006.

Ever since its release on 13 August 1942, many hunters had blamed Disney's big screen interpretation of *Bambi* for souring public attitudes toward hunting.

As the attacks on hunting grew, so did hunters' hatred of Disney's movie and hunting opponents' appropriation of its main character as an anti-hunting symbol. [223] Durward L. Allen, in response to the Bambi issue, encouraged hunters to hold themselves above reproach and "then we can simply ignore the hysterics of those who regard any killing of game as a sin against Bambi." [224] Uncle Walt's productions that humanized animals were not the only culprits turning public attitudes against hunting and the use of firearms for sport. Allen also warned readers of "increasing signs that a substantial body of public opinion regards . . . the sportsman as a blood-letting psychotic." [225] Whether the entire American public harbored such severe opinions or not, it became apparent to wildlife officials that opinions were indeed changing. For example, Indiana's Fish and Game Director Woodrow W. Fleming noted a growing opposition to all types of hunting in his state in 1963. In fact, the opposition in Indiana happen to become strong enough to stop a mourning dove hunting season. [226] Unfortunately for hunters and gun enthusiasts, opposition to hunting and anti-firearms sentiment usually went hand in hand.

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[223] Disney also made other nature "documentaries" that sentimentalized wild animals. These productions added to the idea of animals possessing human-like qualities that made them seem tame. The sentimental, idealized attitudes toward animals that these films fostered received more and more criticism from hunters.

[224] Durward L. Allen, "The Growing Antagonism to Hunting," *Field and Stream* (September 1963), 16.

[225] Ibid., 12.

[226] Ibid., 12. According to Page, "The true relationship, or lack of it, between normal firearms usage and crime, between the hunter's gun and conservation, indeed most questions of constitutional justice or even the simple facts of wildlife management – all these attract far less attention in today's media, especially in television, than do emotional outcries damning the hunter and his tools." See Page, *One Man's Wilderness*, 253.

With unrest at home and abroad receiving more attention during the 1960s, the discussion about firearms and violence affected hunting as a leisure activity. [227] Sport hunting continued as a popular diversion for many men despite the increasing attacks on the firearms they used to pursue their prey. However, another firearms culture proliferated in the postwar era among gun enthusiasts that would help to sustain part of firearms' positive reputation in America. As long as the specter of communism cast a long, red shadow over the nation, guns would still hold an important place in American society and culture, if not for leisure pursuits, then as an integral part of national defense.

[227] The assassination of President Kennedy turned the nation's attention to the easy accessibility of firearms domestically and to a larger extent, both the tragic killing and the escalation of the war in Vietnam also led many Americans to reassess the use of guns in general. For instance, at the end of the Vietnam war, the figures for the sale of hunting licenses across the nation fell steadily while anti-gun campaigns increased as episodes of gun violence, from juvenile delinquency to the Los Angeles riots, gained more attention from the media. More evidence of a general decline of interest in hunting can be found in what happened to the William Temple Hornady National Collection of Heads and Horns. Despite the large exhibit of game animals and the center's capacity to house 60,000 visitors, during the Vietnam era, the popularity of the exhibit waned. The exhibit subsequently closed in the mid-1970s. See William Bridges, *Gathering of Animals: An Unconventional History of the New York Zoological Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 307-08, in Daniel Justin Herman, *Hunting and the American Imagination* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 272. The hunting firearm sub-culture would not disappear, however. As more Americans argued for gun control, hunters turned to the National Rifle Association for support in protecting their firearms. The NRA responded by shifting emphasis to an outright campaign for the constitutional protection of firearms, rather than primarily focusing on conservation, education, and marksmanship training.

CHAPTER 4: THE RUSSIANS ARE COMING!

Showcasing the vital role that the rifleman played in the Korean War, a photo essay ran in the March 1951 issue of *American Rifleman* portraying American soldiers in various postures with their rifles. The scenes portrayed Marines with rifles and other soldiers leaning, rifle in position, on a wall in Suwan, Korea. According to the author, the Korean conflict had clearly demonstrated that, despite recent technological advances in nuclear weaponry, rifle still held a place of pride and usefulness in America's defense. [228] Indeed, in the early Cold War era many Americans recognized that atomic weapons alone would serve as a poor defense against a communist attack at home or abroad. In an effort to prepare themselves for attack, some Americans turned to a readily accessible means of defense with which they already had some familiarity – firearms.

Motivated by their anxieties of a potential communist confrontation, postwar Americans intensified a strain of gun culture based on martial preparedness. Specifically, popular sporting literature written by gun enthusiasts alleviated fears about the state of civilian marksmanship by promoting Americans' history of shooting feats. These sources also reveal that gun devotees, particularly the National Rifle Association, helped to spread anxiety that the Army would discard the rifle in the atomic age while also contributing to fears that when (not if) the Russians invaded, Americans may not be ready for them because American shooting prowess seemed to wane while the Russians reportedly improved their gun skills. Finally, anxieties about communist attack encouraged the federal government to recognize and encourage the need firearms as practical preparation for future wars thus ensuring the protection of firearms for civilian

[228] Bill Shadel, "What Price Riflemen?" *American Rifleman* (March 1951), 31.

marksmanship training for generations. Overall, efforts to promote and defend the use of firearms for civil defense among gun enthusiasts and the government helped to intensify the reverence for firearms in America.

Anxiety about a possible Russian attack plagued many Americans, but outdoor writers and gun enthusiasts allayed that fear by celebrating Americans' heritage as riflemen. [229] Sport writers could easily marshal a good deal of evidence to support their claim in regard to the WWII fighting man. For instance, W. H. Depperman reported, "In 1943, out of 148,346 marines who took recruit training, including officer candidates, 121,372 qualified with the rifle: 12,795 as expert riflemen, 40,696 as sharpshooters, and 67,881 as marksmen." [230] The figures exhibit the prowess of the American military man with his gun during WWII. Depperman, his comments appearing in a volume devoted to celebrating this history of shooting know-how in America, also noted that numerous soldiers gained individual recognition for their extraordinary shooting feats, such as Corporal James E. Meskill of Brantwood, Wisconsin who killed three German soldiers with three shots at a range of 900 yards in Italy. Even more astounding was the story of

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[229] Although females hunted and used firearms in other venues, use of the term "rifleman" was ubiquitous. Writers rarely ever referred to gunners as anything other than male, revealing an obvious gender bias in their assumption that only males used guns. Celebrating the shooting tradition of America, Stuart Ludlum asserted, "With the mere mention of the words 'Winning the West,' images of blazing six-guns race through your memory with the speed of motion-picture film, which continues to retell Western stories on screens everywhere, at very profitable figures. All of these miles of flicker fiction are based on fact, for it took much marksmanship to make the wide-open spaces of the West safe for divorcees in station wagons." See, *Great Shooting Stories*, illus. Ted Placek (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1947), xii. Correspondingly, Pete Kuhloff wrote, "Sharpshooting, as such, has an interesting and colorful past. It has shaped our country's history from Bunker Hill to the Bulge," adding, "As history proves, the trained rifleman has contributed greatly to the development of our country." He elaborated, "Up until well after the Civil War, the arms of Americans in many parts of the country were tools of everyday living, tools for defense and for securing food." See Pete Kuhloff, *Kuhloff on Guns* (New York: Winchester Press, 1970), 61, 63.

[230] W. H. Depperman, "Marksmanship in World War II," in Stuart D. Ludlum, *Great Shooting Stories*, illus. Ted Placek (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1947), 298.

John J. Zajac who, at over 400 yards, killed six Japanese with five shots, one bullet hitting two men. [231] Military officials, such as Lieutenant Colonel James C. Mott and Lieutenant Colonel James I. King, asserted that such shooting exploits "gave the Germans something to worry about." [232] Army officials also announced, proudly, that "'captured Germans . . . can't figure out how a rifleman of an American parachute infantry regiment could face a burst of forty or fifty rounds from a German machine pistol and then coolly dispose of his enemy with one well-aimed shot.'" [233] Anxious readers probably experienced some relief in knowing that their shooting exploits had been so good that they baffled their former enemies.

Writers also persuaded Americans that the benefits of firearms training would extend beyond the recent war effort. As Stuart Ludlum argued, "The ability to shoot was acquired at great price by millions of our men in the armed forces. That knowledge, brought back to this country, will represent a national treasure. If America remains truly a nation of peacetime riflemen, this skill might well discourage any nation from precipitating another war." [234] A nation of riflemen seasoned by battle could act as a deterrent to another war. More than likely, these reminders of a long history of heroic, skilled shooting resonated with Americans anxious about the prospect of an impending

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[231] Ibid., 294-95.

[232] Ibid., 296-297. The National Rifle Association could take some of the credit for preparing America's fighting forces. Reportedly, "From the time of the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 up to April 1942, the National Rifle Association achieved a minor miracle in marksmanship training. With little popular support, but with the wholehearted blessing of the armed services, 952 rifle clubs instructed 140,000 civilians in the use of firearms. From June 1942 to December 1944 the National Rifle Association was credited with furnishing 67,900 basically qualified small-arms marksmen to the armed services – the equivalent of more than four American Army divisions." See Depperman, "Marksmanship in World War II," 298-99.

[233] Ibid., 297.

[234] Stuart D. Ludlum, *Great Shooting Stories*, illus. Ted Placek (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1947, 299.

foreign war or attack on domestic soil. However, the atomic age also raised new, unsettling concerns. What if the next war did not require firearms at all?

The consequences of atomic innovation raised several disconcerting questions among gun enthusiasts as well as mental health experts. How could soldiers continue to be the epitome of rugged manliness if atomic technology only required them to push buttons? Would the military tactics of the previous war, which brought such a great victory to the Allies, now become obsolete? Would wars of the future be fought by men on the ground or would they merely be waged by men in a control room? Some mental health experts, such as Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek, already worried about the decline of masculinity caused by technological innovation. Ruitenbeek lamented:

> The typical 'manly' or masculine vocations are rapidly disappearing, at least from the list of honorable activities. As occupations, blacksmith and hunter have disappeared; farmer, miner, lumberjack, and fishermen now work as much with machines as with male brawn. Even the professional soldier, insofar as he holds a position of command, sits behind a desk or perhaps a computer. The day of the military leader on horseback is over. The most masculine figure of modern warfare drops bombs on women and children or, at best, on airplane carriers." [235]

Troubled by the implications of atomic technology, gun devotees may have feared that if bomb usurped the place of the soldier and his rifle, that part of their national identity, founded on the armed frontier hero, would crumble. They may have also worried that all firearms would lose legitimacy in civilian life if the rifle became obsolete or insignificant in the armed forces. Even Americans who were not gun enthusiasts feared that the consequences could be disastrous when the Russians came and found Americans

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[235] Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek, "Men Alone: The Male Homosexual and the Disintegrated Family," in *The Problem of Homosexuality in Modern Society*, ed. Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1963), 86.

untrained, and worse, unarmed, because the rifle had lost its prominence for national defense in the hands of soldiers and civilians. [236]

Gun proponents insisted that the gun would continue to hold a significant place for civil and military defense despite the advent of "push-button" warfare. Ludlum contended, "Whether he uses archery or atomic bombs, the course of history is decided by the warrior who can stay out of range of his enemy while pasting him. So, in addition to the inherent interest in marksmanship in military history, there are implications in the subject that are the keys to the future of the world." [237] Ludlum proposed that firearms training would be essential for safeguarding the nation and for maintaining world stability. Gun enthusiasts, already convinced of the importance of firearms for recreation, now likely applauded their continued significance for civilian and military defense in the atomic age.

The Army joined sporting publications in reassuring Americans that firearms were still necessary for the fighting man. Lloyd Norman, *American Rifleman* contributor, interviewed high-ranking Army officials in order to put his own fears, and those of readers, to rest about the future usefulness of firearms. In an interview with Norman, Army Chief of Staff General J. Lawton Collins assured NRA members, "'You have to

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[236] Despite the worries about the place of the military rifleman, army officials assured Americans that his role remained intact in the armed forces. Major General John H. Church divulged in an interview that the rifleman persisted as the "heart and soul of the infantry team, and in fact, of the combined ground arms team." All of the other elements "have but one mission – to support and assist the rifleman to move forward and seize and hold his assigned objective." The rifle itself also played a vital role in other military scenarios. Church explained, "'Remember, too, that in the fluid type of warfare being fought today there is no fixed front line. . . . Infiltrating attacks in the rear areas require that cooks, supply and administrative personnel, and command post personnel take precautions for their own security, and they are frequently forced to fight as riflemen for their own defense. Infantrymen who make up the gun crews for mortars and machine guns and recoilless rifles defend themselves and their gun positions as riflemen if an attacking enemy reaches them.'" See Lloyd Norman, "The Rifleman in the Atomic Age," *American Rifleman* (March 1952), 15.

[237] Ludlum, *Great Shooting Stories*, xii-xiii.

have riflemen as an integral part of the armed forces. You can't stop an enemy by air alone. You can't replace the rifleman by atomic weapons.'" [238] Major General John H. Church, in a separate interview, reminded Norman that the rifleman functioned as part of a team of composed of "mutually supporting elements with tanks, machine guns, mortars, recoilless rifles, as well as supply, signal, engineer, ordnance, medical, and other units." [239]

Despite assurances about the role of firearms for civil defense, questions still lingered about the role of marksmanship training for civilians. After his interviews with Collins and Church, Norman assured readers, "In this atomic age, it is evident that the Army will need its riflemen, and perhaps because this is the atomic age the nation will need its civilian rifleman more than ever." [240] In his opinion, defense in the atomic age required both military and civilian riflemen. Moreover, Norman shared with readers that General Collins had admitted that the Army welcomed seasoned marksmen and that youths who had been trained in civilian rifle clubs to shoot accurately could easily be utilized as shooting coaches in the Army. According to Norman, Collins also "said he favored continuance of the civilian marksmanship program, and that the Army, to a

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[238] Collins elaborated that one key role of the rifleman was to take ground from the enemy and then use his weapon to hold it, citing the Korean War as an example. He even noted that when visiting the Korean frontlines in July 1950, the commander of the 24th Infantry Division, Major General William F. Dean requested that he needed more riflemen than anything else. Dean, only about a week later, vanished and "recently turned up as a prisoner of the Chinese communists." A fate that he perhaps could have avoided had he had more of those riflemen he wanted. Ironically, Dean's replacement, Major General John H. Church, also favored rifles as weapons despite the advances in atomic weaponry. See Lloyd Norman, "The Rifleman in the Atomic Age," *American Rifleman* (March 1952), 14.

[239] Norman, "The Rifleman in the Atomic Age,"14-15.

[240] Ibid., 42.

limited extent, help finance this program. He conceded that early training in rifle marksmanship would help youths preparing for the Army." [241]

If Americans needed more evidence of the key role the rifleman still played, then they needed only to look to the Korean War. The title of a photo spread in one magazine read, "Atomic bombs notwithstanding, it's a rifleman's war in Korea." [242] The accompanying article sought to answer the question, "In the face of atomic bombs and super weapons, where does the individual rifleman fit into the picture?" [243] Bill Shadel, the author and well-respected journalist, reassured gun enthusiasts, and other Americans interested in civil defense, to "make no mistake about it. All of the talk about push-button warfare – generally popular concept of atomic warfare and super weapons – all of this to the contrary, *the rifleman is more important than ever.* Korea has proved that case once again . . . and there will likely be many more Koreas before there is an all-out atomic war." [244] Shadel insisted that fellow gun proponents should:

> consider yourself the representative of what might still be called militia . . . not necessarily the man standing by with a trusty rifle, awaiting the call to arms . . . but the apostle, however, of the old spirit of a militia. Call it individual preparedness. *This is the preparedness which must now be encouraged among the boys who are about to be drafted.* There's a crying need for just such preparedness. And there's a broad background for it in our own fraternity. Rifle marksmanship is needed to instill that essential confidence of the young soldier in his weapons . . . that's needed today in Korea." [245]

Americans who were concerned about the possible obsolescence of rifles need not have worried. Shadel convinced citizens that the defense of America still demanded rifles and

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[241] Ibid.

[242] *American Rifleman* (March 1951), 30.

[243] Bill Shadel, "What Price Riflemen?" *American Rifleman* (March 1951), 31.

[244] Ibid. The former war correspondent had once served as editor of *American Rifleman.* At the time he wrote this article, he worked as CBS Washington reporter covering military affairs and served as president of the Radio Correspondents of America.

[245] Ibid., 32, emphasis in original.

trained riflemen to use them. In sum, the American rifle remained an integral part of the arsenal of democracy.

Even if looking at past shooting feats and current conflicts reassured many Americans that the rifle would continue to enjoy a place of honor and usefulness in the armed forces, worries persisted among gun devotees that fewer citizens than ever before knew how to use a gun with any degree of proficiency. Rifle enthusiast C. E. Hagie lamented in 1944, "The younger generation of Americans, having come into the world during our country's preoccupation in its new industrial age, have had less first-hand contact with the rifle than any previous generation of Americans." [246] In an article about the need for increased civilian marksmanship training, author Merritt A. Edson pointed to a report of about the dangers of shooting incompetence. Edson repeated "the story which appeared in the October 26th edition of the *Boston Post* which told of the death of a boy sent into combat in Korea without ever having once shot a rifle in practice." [247] Whether their assumptions were rooted in reality or not, some Americans feared that the assertions about the lack of gun training could be true, thus spurring efforts to become better prepared than ever to defend themselves against communists.

The NRA led the movement toward civilian defense through firearms use. For example, it sponsored multiple shooting activities, including programs for youths. [248] In

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[246] C. E. Hagie, *The American Rifle for Hunting and Target Shooting* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944), vi.

[247] Merritt A. Edson, "Civilian Marksmanship – and You!" *American Rifleman* (December 1951), 12.

[248] Allegedly, these youth shooting programs were successful, in that of the youths involved, "not one of these youngsters has suffered a firearms accident and to the best of our knowledge and belief none of them has ever been responsible for a firearms accident or has ever been involved with the police through the improper use of a gun. Many of those who participated in the program ten to twenty years ago are now, of course, parents raising their own families and teaching their children the principles of safe firearms handling." See "Safety with a Gun," *Parents Magazine* (March 1948), 128.

"An Open Letter to the Membership," Edson stated, "Today's NRA seeks to educate the youth of the nation in marksmanship; to encourage shooting particularly among civilians, as a sport and for the purpose of qualifying as finished marksmen those individuals who may be called upon in time of war; and to create a public sentiment for the encouragement of rifle practice for these purposes." [249] Interestingly, some Americans enthusiastically applauded the NRA's broad mission. For instance, Rev. John L. Cross, from Rolla, North Dakota, wrote a letter to the NRA's publication, *American Rifleman*, that declared, "It may interest you that I used one of your editorials on patriotism as the basis for one of my sermons on that theme. Keep up the good work. It is plain that the National Rifle Association would be a real stumbling block in the path of the communists in this country." [250] It seems that the NRA was viewed by some Americans as an important contributor to morale as well as civil defense training. Accordingly, another citizen wrote, "Right now Uncle Sam is concerned that the young men of this country learn how to shoot straight. One of the most effective jobs of teaching them is being done by the National Rifle Association, a civilian organization functioning under congressional sanction . . . and dedicated to the proposition that America should live up to its reputation as a nation of riflemen." [251] Many Americans came to consider the NRA's mission to link firearms training with national destiny an important effort in meeting the communist threat.

Meanwhile, some writers joined the NRA in urging urged readers to consider the value of owning guns and the importance of being able to use them to sustain liberty and

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[249] Merritt A. Edson, "An Open Letter to the Membership," *American Rifleman* (September 1951), 12.
[250] "Stumbling Block," *American Rifleman* (January 1950), 6.
[251] Depperman, "Marksmanship in World War II," 298.

democracy. For instance, Hagie urged readers to "continue to be proficient in the use of the rifle against the day when it may again preserve democracy from the encroachment of every threat to our traditional liberties." [252] Anxious about the possibility of having to fight communism abroad, or even worse at home, Hagie's comments probably resonated with some Americans. Even more interesting, however, is Hagie's proposal that there is only one way to defend American values. Rather than trying diplomatic tactics such as seeking a solution through negotiation, he instead points to the rifle as the key to maintaining the American way of life. Ultimately, survival would come through the barrel of a gun – an observation both chilling and provocative in an era of international uncertainty and heightened interest in firearms.

The promotion of firearms was a chorus commonly repeated among gun enthusiasts, but some mainstream publications also suggested that firearms in the hands of common citizens would be as important in the event of an attack as the presence of troops. In a *Nation* article in 1959, David Cort warned Americans, "In an atomic war, intelligently conducted to conquer something worth having afterward, small units of enemy troops would appear suddenly in key areas of the United States. An American citizenry with guns at the right time at the right place would then be useful." After all, he questioned, if the attack destroyed civilization to the point that order would have to be re-established in the aftermath, then "why not let the honest heads-of-family have guns?" As responsible citizens, a gun would invest them with the means and the authority to put

[252] Hagie, *The American Rifle*, vii.

the pieces of society back together by force. Ultimately, in Cort's opinion, personal firearm ownership would be of great assistance in the wake of an atomic attack. [253]

While Cort noted the utility of civilian firearm ownership as a solution to one scenario of events, gun enthusiasts promoted firearms as the only thing that would protect home and hearth in the event of a nuclear strike. Convinced that "a crazed fury of unstable persons" would run rampant after a nuclear attack, one writer convinced readers that "a gun could let you go on living." In his version of events, a nuclear attack would eradicate the police force and all other authorities responsible for maintaining order. A gun would therefore be essential for protecting survivors' food and water supply from the predations of other survivors. The author encouraged rural dwellers to obtain shotguns for the procurement of game. However, he encouraged city folks to acquire a handgun "as a highly portable defense weapon" in order to fight off the masses of other urban dwellers who would compete for scarce resources. After reviewing several types of firearms in order to determine which made the best survival weapons, the author ultimately concluded that for fool-proof defense every family actually needed many types of guns, "thus preparing themselves for almost any eventuality." Of course, the gun alone would not be effective without sufficient skills to use it, and so the writer also encouraged families to practice "praying very night you won't ever have to put your ability to the ultimate test. But if you do, aim and squeeze – and keep on squeezing." [254]

As the preceding evidence illustrates, all the Cold-War era talk about the need for the preservation of the nation in the face of a communist invasion evaporated in some

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[253] David Cort, "Arms and the Man," *The Nation* (23 May 1959), 475-76.
[254] Bob Bell, "Survival Gun!" *Gun Digest* (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1964), 33, 37.

discussions; it was replaced by warnings about Americans' need to protect their families first with total disregard for their neighbors or their communities. The article also reveals the desperation of some Americans to prepare themselves for nuclear attack through the use of firearms. It is important to note that while scores of popular publications offered civil defense lectures and suggestions, most mainstream discussions about the matter did not mention gun acquisition as a priority. However, sporting publications, such as *Gun Digest* and the NRA's *American Rifleman*, are littered with calls for firearms preparedness. These sources hardly mentioned bomb shelters, food preservation, or safety drills. Instead, gun enthusiasts promoted firearms as the best, and only, response to an assault. Thus, gun devotees' anxieties about atomic aggression ensured that marksmanship and guns, whether in the military or at home, would not become obsolete. This desire for personal protection and preparedness intensified a strain of American gun culture.

Advertising, too, used the threat of atomic attack as a marketing tool. An advertisement in 1955 for Ithaca firearms pictured its newest Model 37 Featherlight Repeater in the foreground of a bomb explosion. [255] (See Figure 11) Specifically, the ad characterized the gun as a "bombshell" that would shake up the gun industry because of its cutting-edge innovations, including new technology that allowed the front sight to

[255] "Ithaca Bombshells for '55," *Field and Stream* (October 1955), 94.



Figure 11. Ithaca Firearms Promotion.

Source: *Field and Stream* (October 1955), 94.

glow, perhaps through the use of a radioactive element. [256] The image of the explosion evokes two important messages to anxious consumers. First, it presents the image of an atomic bomb exploding, complete with a mushroom cloud. In this case, the gun figured as an essential defense tool in the unfortunate event of an atomic attack. Second, the image also cast the gun as having "bombshell" potential itself, a quality that advertisers hoped would attract customers because it seemed to offer them a tangible, accessible means for self-defense unlike nuclear weapons, which seemed mysterious and proved unattainable. According to the advertisement's suggestion, customers purchasing the Ithaca could have their own version of a "bombshell."

No matter how consumers viewed the ad, the image of the gun connected firearms with living in an atomic world. Particularly appealing to those looking for a "survival gun," the ad also boasted that the new sighting mechanism would work under any conditions, including "dawn, dusk, overcast, rain, fog, dark woods, snow, moonlight, etc." In the uncertain world of nuclear warfare, such a versatile firearm that "improves any man's shooting" would be an attractive device in case of a communist assault. [257] Firearms offered personal, readily accessible, and according to the ad, affordable protection and security for postwar Americans. The role that guns played in scenarios of

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[256] The addition of the front glowing sight most likely involved the use of tritium, H3, a radioactive element used for making things glow in the dark, such as the hands of a watch. If so, then this advancement was truly an atomic-age innovation. These Ithaca guns were also among the first in the industry to feature a bottom-ejection system, meaning that the case of the bullet would drop from the bottom of the firearm, instead of being ejected from the side. This technologically advanced attribute proved very practical because the gun could easily be utilized by both right- and left-hand shooters. In the case of left-handed shooters, when firing a side-ejection gun made for right-handed users, the bullet casing would follow a trajectory across the shooter's face. (Most guns were made for right-handed gunners.) While this aspect usually proved harmless, it was nonetheless distracting and bothersome.

[257] "Ithaca Bombshells," 94.

self-preservation only added to Americans' affection for them and helped to augment firearms cultures.

Preparedness was not just for adults. As in other elements of this gun culture, Americans sought to pass their faith in the necessity of firearms to the next generation. In order to begin preparing for communist aggression, many Americans sought to teach young boys how to shoot early in life. To begin, Americans considered shooting a skill boys needed to learn in preparation for military service. One colonel articulated this notion, stating, "Being practical and cold-blooded about it, your son should be taught to shoot a rifle in preparation for duty in the Armed Services. World conditions almost make it a certainty that every able-bodied young man will serve a hitch in the Armed Forces." [258] In addition, many fathers believed that shooting preparation was a father's duty. When responding to a query about why to give a boy a gun for Christmas, one father replied:

> It is my conclusion that a father has a moral obligation to teach his children to use firearms . . . . But there is another reason your answer . . . should be yes . . . maybe the biggest of all. I travel a lot, as you know, and usually it isn't to the places the travel agents are pushing. In the last year I've been in trouble spots in the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Europe. Everything I see convinces me there is a good chance America will have to fight more wars, large and small, if it wants to stay free. [259]

He insists that if his sons were involved, he wants them "'to have every possible edge going for them. I want them to be wise and skillful in the ways of guns. . . . God send it never comes to that, but if it does I want my sons to be better prepared than some mass-

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[258] Col. A. M. Libasci, "Teach Them Young," *American Rifleman* (January 1953), 4.
[259] Richard Starnes, "A Gun for Christmas?" *Field and Stream* (December 1961), 142.

oriented product of collectivist society on the other side.'" [260] Future generations of American, according to this father, simply had to be prepared to meet the communist threat across the world as well as at home. Young Americans also learned that the proper response to the threat posed by "mass-oriented" societies was armed confrontation. Furthermore, in teaching the next generation that the "collectivist" threat must be countered with guns, adults fostered an attachment among youth for firearms related to the preservation of the American way of life. Ultimately, adult gun aficionados in Cold-War America taught youth that firearms were tools for having fun, achieving manhood, and protecting America. Depending on firearms for homeland defense, the attachment to firearms intensified across the generations.

Gun advocates also emphasized the need for organized efforts to prepare future generations for civilian defense. One gun promoter asserted that:

> if, as provided by the National Security Service and Training Act, every one of our sons must become a part of the armed forces for a definite period of his life; if, as now seems probable, the next world war will involve our entire society, require greater masses of manpower than ever before, and bring the fighting to our home-land; and if, as the records of World War II indicate, only two percent of our male population are familiar with weapons and have had training in marksmanship; isn't it time to make a real effort to create that 'nation of marksmen' which made the United States possible and which we must again become if we are to survive? This is primarily a civilian task – a task for the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice and for the National Rifle Association of America. [261]

Echoing the opinions of his fellow gun enthusiasts, the author made a convincing case for the need to train America's youth to shoot. After all, according to him, the very survival of the nation depended on the youth of today knowing how to shoot tomorrow.

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[260] Ibid.

[261] Merritt A. Edson, "Civilian Marksmanship – and You!" *American Rifleman* (December 1951), 12.

The desire for more firearms training was also fueled by various reports encouraging Americans that they should be concerned by the alleged civil defense training and shooting proficiency of the Russians. For instance, the Rand Corporation sponsored a study of civil defense programs in the Soviet Union and released their findings in 1962. The report revealed that the Russians were well-versed in civil defense. Specifically, regional Soviet civilian defense agencies announced that up to eighty percent of their population had received civil defense instruction, including firearms training. [262] If, as evidence suggested, Russians could match the Yanks then all American males, and perhaps even females, certainly needed more training with firearms. [263]

Sporting publications added to the anxieties, charging that Russian civilians could outshoot Americans. At the same, assertions that the Russians were skilled rifleman further stimulated anxieties about the postwar attempts to maintain "Americanness" in a nation that already claimed the image of the riflemen entirely for itself. The anxieties were far from irrational, though, because gun devotees did have access to information about the firearms training provided by the Soviet government to Russian civilians. Journalist Garrett Underhill, for instance, wrote about the Soviet preparedness program two years after the end of World War II. He reported that "Russian authorities offer

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[262] Leon Gouré, *Civil Defense in the Soviet Union* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), 7, 55.

[263] Some Americans considered the Olympic Games a litmus test for evaluating the shooting prowess of the Russians. One writer worried that "this nation of riflemen, one and all descended from Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone" would perhaps lose to the Russians and the Swedes. See John Maynard, "Outshoot the Russians," *Gun Digest,* ed. John T. Amber (Chicago: The Gun Digest Company, 1961), 4. Other observers agonized over the alleged poor state of American shooting skill. One writer grumbled, "The sad fact is that in the past thirty years of international competition we haven't been able to shoot our way out of a paper bag." See Warren Page, "Can We Outshoot the Russians?" *Field and Stream* (June 1960), 59.

every inducement for individuals to become gun owners and to perfect their sporting and military marksmanship." [264] Americans, who had long flaunted themselves as the only heirs of a national shooting tradition, most likely found Underhill's report disconcerting.

Underhill also reported that the Russians had their own organization, the *Osoaviakhim*, comparable to the United States' organization for civilian marksmanship training, the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice. The *Osoaviakhim*, however, made aggressive efforts to train Russian civilians in firearms usage, including training masses of women and men across the country in shooting techniques. The organization even offered courses on sniper shooting. [265] Underhill's article also featured photographs of Russian children, and even Russian women, shooting rifles and pistols. Underhill sent a clear message: Americans needed to improve their firearms training, because their Russian civilian counterparts certainly made every effort to hone their shooting skills. Ominously Underhill warned, "The American people at large have no more chance of resisting invasion . . . than have the French." [266] Underhill's report probably resonated with many Americans seeking ways to triumph over the Soviets in the atomic age.

The stand taken by the Army to improve marksmanship was to establish in 1955 the Advanced Marksmanship Unit, AMU. Disappointed that foreign nations triumphed in international shooting matches at the expense of the Americans, officials designed the

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[264] Garrett Underhill, "Citizens in Arms," *American Rifleman* (June 1947), 7.

[265] Ibid., 9-10. Underhill attributed the Russians' successful repulse of the Germans at Moscow and Stalingrad to the efforts of the *Osoaviakhim*-trained civilians. The *Osoaviakhim* had used "war games," for example, staged around Moscow as a training event. Over 100,000 *Osoaviakhim* members participated in one of these exercises and "some eight months later, they were to repulse a very real enemy."

[266] Ibid., 35.

military effort to remedy the situation. Based in Fort Benning, Georgia, the unit of 160 officers and men agreed "that International or Olympic shooting is a part of the cold war as important in its way as rocketing to the moon." [267] The attention to improving marksmanship continued into the next decade with official government support for competition shooting teams. For instance, in 1962 Congress paid for forty-two American men and their support team, comprised of gunsmiths, coaches, and officials, to "head off the Russians" at an international competition in Cairo. According to sports reporter John Lovesey, it was unfortunate that in spite of "America's hallowed tradition of Billy the Kid, Annie Oakley, Bill Cody and Sergeant York, the U. S. rifle team could finish no better than second."

The loss of the International Shooting Union world championship only increased fears that Americans were not prepared to meet the Russians on the shooting range or the battlefield. [268] Among gunners, especially men who hunted, the news of the loss probably stirred even more anxiety about maintaining an identity based on a heritage of heroic shooting feats. Moreover, through supporting competitive marksmanship, the federal government sent citizens a message about the importance of firearms' training. Ultimately, the government's sanction of shooting only intensified national attachment to firearms because they seemed necessary and legitimate for defense.

American citizens did not shoulder the burden alone when it came to worrying about the looming threat of potential communist attacks. The federal government, too, considered how best to prepare for future confrontations with the communists at home

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[267] Page, "Can We Outshoot the Russians?," 85.
[268] John Lovesey, "Cairo Hears a Big Red Bang," *Sports Illustrated* (29 October 1962), 58.

and abroad. Since 1903, the government had supported a firearms training initiative managed by the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice (NBPRP) and administered by the Director of Civilian Marksmanship (DCM). [269] The shooting programs, ranging from rifle clubs to shooting competitions, originally intended to promote firearms proficiency among civilians. However, in the mid-1960s, Congress reevaluated the continuation of the NBPRP for several reasons. Hoping to reduce budgetary costs, the government considered abolishing the program but first decided to determine its efficacy. In addition, because Congress found itself the target of mounting pressure to pass gun control measures in the wake of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, it may have sought to legitimate the financial support it granted to the NBPRP. Thus, in 1965 Congress commissioned the Little Company to determine what, if any, good had been served by the civilian marksmanship program.

The investigation uncovered some striking data about gun use in America. In the section entitled, "Benefits to the Military from the Civilian Marksmanship Program," the report concluded that military inductees familiar with firearms before military service "achieved significantly higher scores . . . than trainees who did not belong to a gun club." Specifically, the report found that compared to their non-gun owning peers, men who were familiar with firearms before their induction "are more apt to enlist, are more apt to prefer a combat outfit, are more apt to choose outfits where they are more likely to use their rifle . . . [and] are more confident of their ability to use their rifle effectively in

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[269] Congress created the NBPRP in 1903 at the insistence of the NRA and charged the NBPRP with the promotion of rifle practice and competition among civilians for military purposes. The NBPRP consisted primarily of representatives from the armed forces with some representation from the NRA. In addition, in order to promote rifle practice among civilians the Board made surplus arms and ammunition available to the public at a discount through the NRA.

combat." [270] The findings also revealed that men with pre-induction firearms experience viewed their military service more positively than those without such experience. Overall, men with shooting experience before entering the armed forces proved valuable to the military. Additionally, because the civilian marksmanship program encouraged pre-service gun training, the Little report argued that the initiative had "significant value" and recommended that it be extended and amplified. [271] Specifically, the report urged that efforts should be made to extend civilian marksmanship training to American youth. [272] The civilian marksmanship training program had certainly proven its worthiness in familiarizing Americans with firearms.

Notably, the Little report even mentioned, "It appears that only a very small number of Negroes or other nonwhites have applied for membership in DCM-affiliated clubs, especially in the South." [273] It is unclear if the investigating committee of the Little company was naïve about the reasons for low participation among southern blacks in gun clubs or if the organization merely chose merely to report the raw data on American shooting, even the seemingly obvious details. Nevertheless, the comments reveal the whiteness of American gun culture with respect to preparedness and civil defense. Some rural, southern blacks hunted with firearms in the postwar era, especially for small game, but this activity apparently existed in a separate realm from gun clubs and training for civil defense.

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[270] *The Arthur D. Little Report: A Study of the Activities and Missions of the NBPRP,* reprinted in James B. Whisker, *The Citizen Soldier and U. S. Military Policy* (Great Barrington, Mass.: North River Press, 1979), 58.

[271] Ibid., 64.

[272] Ibid,, 82, 88.

[273] Ibid,, 84.

Notably, though, blacks did discuss whether to arm themselves in response to potential threats, although the discussion concerned self, not civil, defense in the midst of the turmoil of the Civil Rights movement. Advocates of passive resistance condemned the use of firearms. Widely recognized as the leader of this group, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., asserted, "There is more power in socially organized masses on the march than there is in guns in the hands of a few desperate men." [274] Other blacks, led by Robert F. Williams, however, viewed armed resistance as the best response to direct assaults. [275] Williams, a black civil rights activist, gained notoriety when blacks in Monroe, North Carolina heeded his call to engage in armed self-defense. He explained how, in 1957, the black community of Monroe had "shot up an armed motorcade of the Ku Klux Klan, including two police cars, which had come to attack the home of Dr. Albert E. Perry, vice-president of the Monroe chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People." [276] The episode convinced Williams "how easily and quickly state and local police control disperse lawless mobs when the Negro is ready to defend himself with arms." [277] Debate about the use of firearms divided Civil Rights activists, and led some whites to begin "cataloging as 'good' Negroes and 'bad' Negroes those who,

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[274] "The Social Organization of Non-Violence," in Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with* Guns, ed. Marc Schleifer (New York: Marzani and Munsell, Inc., 1962), 14.

[275] Williams did "not advocate violence for its own sake, or for the sake of reprisals against whites." But, he did assert that if "there is a breakdown of the law, the individual citizen has a right to protect his person, his family, his home and his property." Williams eventually fled to Cuba as a political exile. See *Negroes with Guns*, 40.

[276] Williams also noted that the event resulted in the NAACP's re-affirmation of the right of self-defense. The event in North Carolina was considered to be a test case for the effectiveness of armed self-defense by blacks, especially in the South, as a response to harassment of individuals involved in the Civil Rights movement. See *Negroes with Guns*, 39.

[277] Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, 41.

respectively, follow King or Robert Williams." [278] It is not surprising, then, that fear of being labeled "bad," and worse, fear of reprisal would prevent black participation in civilian marksmanship gun clubs.

After the Little Company issued its findings, the government ceased talks about abolishing the program. In fact, the program still exists. On one hand, it is not surprising that the federal government continued funding the initiative, especially during the Cold War. On the other hand, it is startling that Congress would continue to arm citizens with subsidized guns and provide them discount ammunition after the death of President Kennedy created more anti-gun sentiment. Perhaps this decision points to the pervasiveness of gun cultures in general and the desire to protect firearms, even in Congress. After all, Kennedy was purportedly an NRA member and President Lyndon Johnson frequently deer hunted with members of Congress like Estes Kefauver. Most importantly, though, the decision to continue to support the program made the federal government an accomplice in the intensification of American gun cultures.

Ultimately, efforts made by civilians and the government to defend the ownership and use of guns on the basis of civilian and military preparedness elevated the role of firearms in general and increased Americans' psychological attachment to them. Many Americans viewed firearms as an important safeguard against the communist threat and considered ownership of them an American prerogative. Just as the dominant narrative of American history convinced generations of Americans that guns figured as an essential

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[278] Truman Nelson, "The Resistant Spirit," in Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with* Guns, ed. Marc Schleifer (New York: Marzani and Munsell, Inc., 1962), 19.

factor in establishing the nation, the proponents of preparedness linked America's future to firearms and men's ability to wield them in the event of a nuclear attack.

Calls for civilian preparedness met with little to no resistance until the early to mid-1960s. After the assassination of President Kennedy, arguments about the need to extend firearms training met with efforts to regulate the civilian acquisition of firearms.[279] Simultaneously, arguments in favor of preparedness became more impassioned than ever before and advised Americans of the dangers of disarming civilians. For instance, Richard Starnes declared:

> As it happens, I saw at first hand just how helpless a disarmed population can be. That was in South Vietnam, where the biggest advantage held by the Vietcong (Communist) guerrillas was the sure knowledge that not one village in a thousand would have the weapons and the training to defend itself. Time after time I heard bone-weary American officers explain how Vietcong cadres had escaped carefully planned traps simply because the peasant soldier of South Vietnam is the world's worst marksman.[280]

Vietnam, the author cautioned, should stand as a stark warning to Americans that disarming the population would allow other nations – communist of course –to overrun America just as the communists had tried to overcome South Vietnam.

More admonitions followed. Speaking of proposed legislation in the U. S. House of Representatives, bill number 5608, would impose restrictions on the ownership and

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[279] For examples of the calls to regulate firearms, see "Too Many People Have Guns," *Saturday Evening Post* (1 February 1964), 12-14, and Durward L. Allen, "The Growing Antagonism to Hunting," *Field and Stream* (September 1963), 16. Although this article is about opposition to hunting, it also contains arguments against firearms in general. In addition, in 1964 CBS broadcast a primetime documentary entitled, "Murder and the Right to Bear Arms," as part of its CBS Reports feature. In his work, *The Gun Control Movement*, Gregg Lee Carter argues that the modern antigun movement began in 1974, with the establishment in 1974 of the National Council to Control Handguns, later renamed Handgun Control Incorporated. Although this group may have been the first formal organization to oppose handguns, anti-gun sentiment, as revealed by the above-mentioned media attention, actually began to emerge in the early 1960s. See Gregg Lee Carter, *The Gun Control Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 72.

[280] Richard Starnes, "The Plot to Disarm Washington," *Field and Stream* (September 1963), 23.

possession of firearms, Starnes announced that the "anti-gun nuts" would "return, again and again, and if sportsmen and citizen-soldiers ever let down their guard, the next generation of American boys will grow up helpless to ward off the sort of guerilla wars that are now the vogue." [281] Impassioned pleas like that of Starnes probably resonated with some Americans as increasing numbers of young men shipped out to fight a guerrilla-style war in southeast Asia.

Despite the urgent warnings about the need for the continuation of civilian marksmanship training in light of contemporary foreign affairs, some Americans began to reevaluate the marksmanship program as gun violence began to make the headlines regularly. Not surprisingly, in the wake of these reports a debate ensued over the continuation of the training program. [282] The Army vociferously defended the program in the face of the sharp criticism. For example, in his testimony before a House subcommittee, Colonel John K. Lee, Jr., insisted, "'The man with the gun, the citizen properly trained in the use of firearms, has been the foundation of our military strength throughout the history of our nation.'" Writer Stanley Meisler ridiculed Colonel Lee's comments, noting:

> The Army, using these lofty – though, in a nuclear age, questionable – sentiments, has done its best to glorify the role of the gun in American society. In doing so, it has joined hands with the main force in the gun lobby that has prevented Congress so far from passing any meaningful legislation to restrict the ownership and use of guns. The heart of this lobby, the Army's partner, is the National Rifle

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[281] Ibid.

[282] By the end of 1964 government reports indicated that the Army "was instructing 384,950 civilians in marksmanship," with half of the trainees under the age of eighteen, at a reported cost of $620,000 to the federal government. According to Rep. Harry B. Gonzalez (D-Texas), the federal government had also distributed more than 60 million rounds of ammunition at a cost of $1,627,422 to gun clubs during the 1963 fiscal year. See Stanley Meisler, "Get Your Gun from the Army," *Nation* (8 June 1964), 568.

> Association, a nonprofit, private organization of more than 600,000 American gun buffs. [283]

Meisler's dissatisfaction with the role of the government in distributing firearms and in maintaining esteem for them is obvious. Rather than celebrating the role of the gun in protecting America, Meisler expressed frustration about the Army's appropriation of the mythic conception of the gun in American culture and society. [284]

Meisler's was especially incensed by the activities of the NRA. He disparaged its lobbying activities, complaining that the NRA's Executive Vice President, Franklin L. Orth, "is continually testifying about gun legislation and cornering Congressmen to urge them to withdraw or tone down their anti-gun bills." Meisler also grumbled that the NRA's *American Rifleman* created an ideal advertising opportunity for the sporting gun industry, "a business that shipped, when last studied in detail by the Department of Commerce, more than $50 million worth of guns a year to American civilians." To Meisler's chagrin, the advertisements in the magazine encouraged Americans to buy excessive amounts of guns, and even worse, the ads increased opposition to firearms regulations. As evidence, he pointed to a Redfield Gun Sight Company ad that ran in the *American Rifleman* with the heading, "Let's Aim for Good Gun Legislation." [285] Meisler noted, too, that because allegedly twenty-five percent of its income came from

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[283] Meisler, "Get Your Gun from the Army," 568. In addition, Meisler stated, "Pentagon records show that the Army sold 268,893 .30-caliber Model 1903A3 rifles to members of the NRA from 1960 to mid-1963. Last March, the Army also offered 150,000 M1 .30-calber carbine rifles to members of the NRA and found a customer for each one. During the past year, the Army also made 30,000 .45-caliber pistols available to NRA members. In addition to all these guns, which were priced at cut-rates, the Army sold at regular prices 1,344 M1 Match rifles and 309 M1 Standard rifles (for conversion to Match), to selected NRA marksmen. In short, the Army has put almost half a million used guns in the hands of civilians during the last five years." See Meisler, "Get Your Gun," 568.

[284] Ibid., 569.

[285] Ibid.

advertisements, the NRA had a vested interest in the sale of guns, making the organization eager to safeguard the right to own them. Likewise, a *Newsweek* article in 1963 argued that many gun ads were just downright unscrupulous, citing for instance an ad for a particular rifle which read, "The Führer himself ordered these machine rifles. . . . Only because they appeared so late in the war did they not completely annihilate the invading Allied forces." The *Newsweek* commentary also announced that a spokesman for the company selling the rifles stated that their advertising tactic was meant to be "'tongue-in cheek. We think they're kind of cute.'" [286] These articles, published in the wake of the assassination tragedy, stood in sharp contrast to the literature of the gun enthusiasts, especially those who had applauded the NRA.

Ultimately, efforts by gun enthusiasts and the federal government to defend guns and protect the ownership of them based on civilian and military preparedness elevated the role of firearms in general and increased Americans' psychological attachment to them. Because they figured as a vital part of civil defense, survival, and even national identity, guns also helped to allay anxieties about the threat of a potential communist invasion. Citizens' anxieties were quieted, too, because they could rest assured that they had the familiar weapons of their forefathers to protect their homes and families at a time when the military seemingly relied on enigmatic atomic weapons for national defense. Even after some Americans began to question the unregulated ownership of firearms, all the arguments about the need for them made it seem unlikely that citizens' rights to use them would be infringed. Nevertheless, events of the early to mid-1960s would stimulate opposition that threatened to undermine the place of the gun in American society and

[286] "Right to Bear Arms," *Newsweek* (9 December 1963), 70.

culture comparable to the way that the anxieties of the Cold War era had stimulated affection for it.

CHAPTER 5: THE END OF THE GOLDEN AGE

Americans encountered firearms in a variety of ways in the post-World War II era, from the playrooms full of pistols and school- and government sponsored rifle clubs, to hunting and civil defense activities. Americans' enthusiastic response to firearms in all of these venues dramatically intensified firearms culture. The use of firearms to alleviate Cold War concerns about gender, American identity, and national security created a place of reverence for the gun in America while at the same time severing it almost completely from negative associations. Indeed, with little to no resistance to firearms in the early postwar years, the period can be considered as the last "golden age" of guns in America. The golden age ended abruptly, however, with a few gunshots on a Dallas street in 1963. Upon the tragic assassination of President Kennedy, firearms lost some of their sanctity, and within months Congress found itself embroiled in a battle to impose strict regulations on them. Simultaneously, as the Cold War heated up in Vietnam, as riots erupted in Los Angeles, and as Americans learned more about the emergence of right-wing militia groups, public discourses about guns shifted from characterizations of them as patriotic entertainments to visions of them being instruments of crime, violence, imperialism, and death. The negative attitudes forced gun proponents to alter their rhetoric defending firearms and changed the course of organizations, particularly the National Rifle Association. Finally, gun cultures lost some of their inviolability in the early 1960s because many Americans began to reassess their society and history, thus altering the very culture that had fostered the intensification of firearms cultures in the early postwar era.

The murder of President Kennedy left a nation reeling with grief and incited a growing distaste and even a fear for firearms. The attack on guns and the change in public opinion toward them, according to Richard Starnes, "is exactly what happened after the murder of President Kennedy. Hysteria held sway, and rare was the state house or city council that wasn't deluged with hastily written gun bills. Newspapers, few of which seemed to know any better, shamelessly joined the hue and cry." [287] Although biased in his perception of firearms, Starnes, for all his acerbic language, accurately depicted the public reaction to firearms after the assassination. The tragic and untimely slaying of the President provoked enough anti-gun sentiment on its own, but accounts of how Lee Harvey Oswald had obtained the firearm aroused even more rancor. Media sources retraced the steps taken by Oswald to purchase the gun. For instance, *Life* writer Keith Wheeler wrote a story investigating Oswald's mail-order rifle. The "cursed gun" was actually an Italian army surplus item from World War II. After being acquired by an American company and sold to a Chicago sporting goods store, the gun was purchased by Oswald through the mail. [288] Many Americans were stunned that he had acquired the gun so easily, and that an endless array of firearms could be purchased without difficulty by practically anyone, even children. In fact, about three weeks after the murder, *New*

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[287] Richard Starnes, "The Anti-Gun Extremists Are At It Again," *Field and Stream* (April 1964), 14.

[288] The Italian government decided to sell over half a million surplus arms in 1960 to an American company, Adam Consolidated Industries, Inc. The guns ranged in price from $3.60 to as low as $1.12. The purchaser had the guns refurbished and the gun in question, C2766 left Italy 28 September 1960, was placed on a ship, and was unloaded about two weeks later in New York harbor. On 21 February 1963, the gun, along with nine others, was shipped to Klein's Sporting Goods in Chicago. Klein placed a full-page ad for the firearms in *The American Rifleman* in February 1963 and on 13 March 1963, a money order for $21.45 arrived at Klein's, which then shipped the gun to Oswald in Dallas, Texas. The sale of the gun did not break any laws, although Oswald did use the name A. Hidell on the money order and shipping address. Interestingly, the magazine also reported that on April 10 in Dallas Oswald had shot at Major General Edwin A. Walker, U. S. Army, Resigned, "through a window in the general's home. Oswald missed." See Keith Wheeler, "'Cursed Gun' – The Track of C2766," *Life* (27 August 1965), 62-64.

Republic featured a cartoon depicting the potentially sinister results of children's easy access to guns via mail order. [289] (See Figure 12) The cartoon stands in stark contrast to the 1950 cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* that merrily illustrated the fun of childhood gun play. The *New Republic* drawing grimly reveals that although firearms continued to enjoy protection under the Second Amendment, the golden age had ended.

To the chagrin of gun enthusiasts, media sources helped to cultivate the growing revulsion against firearms. For instance, outdoor enthusiast and gun proponent Warren Page bemoaned:

> This slant on firearms and the sporting usage of them has been loudly echoed by the big-city press, albeit less so by the smaller and more independent papers of the country. It has been preached repeatedly by the major television networks with the notable exception of one, although again the small-town or small-city TV station usually has local programs offering a different, even healthier, point of view. One of the major networks, ironically enough the one television colossus which had easiest access to basic expertise on the relationships of arms and men, for a time made a career of antigun editorializing. [290]

Such vociferous warnings about anti-gun proponents rarely appeared prior to President Kennedy's death. In the aftermath of the assassination tragedy, hunters and gun enthusiasts met with more and more attacks from the media and budding public sentiment against guns. Likewise, his comments also reveal the new media attention regarding the dangers posed by firearms.

The Kennedy assassination also infused new vigor into efforts to regulate mail order guns. For instance, in 1961, Senator Thomas J. Dodd (D-Connecticut) had already started work on a bill to restrict the importation of cheaply made – and therefore dangerous – pistols known as "Saturday Night Specials." Fearing the hazards of these

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[289] Joey cartoon, *New Republic* (14 December 1963), 7.
[290] Warren Page, *One Man's Wilderness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973), 252-53.



Figure 12. Cartoon Depicting Concern about Firearms after the Assassination of President Kennedy.

Source: *New Republic* (14 December 1963), 7.

poorly made guns and what they could do in the wrong hands, the NRA initially worked with Dodd to draft the bill. Despite Dodd's efforts, the Senator held only three days of hearings with fourteen witnesses from January through May 1963. Nonetheless, Dodd introduced his bill, S. 1975, on 2 August 1963. The measure merely targeted crooked mail-order gun businesses and appeared rather, thanks in part to the NRA's assistance in drafting the measure.

Largely ignored, the bill uneventfully awaited a hearing, and probable death in committee, until the assassination garnered the proposal instant attention from Congress and the public. [291] In the wake of the tragedy, Dodd expanded the bill to include all firearms and the NRA's cooperativeness evaporated. Congressional response to the proposed legislation remained lukewarm at best despite the national calamity. Senator Carl Hayden, for example, stridently opposed the bill. At a Senate Commerce Committee public hearing on the proposition, *New Republic* writer reported that Hayden, the "'rootinest, tootinest sheriff Arizona ever had,' . . . grabbed a pistol, and brandishing it over his head said, 'Who shall I shoot?' He took aim at Senator Strom Thurmond, who gayly [sic] ducked down behind the committee bench." Other officials, such as the governor of Arizona, joined Hayden in his opposition to the measure. In addition, *New Republic* reported that another witness "thought the bill was part of a Communist conspiracy." [292]

Contrary to the sentiments of these Senators and the witnesses, a Gallup poll indicated that seventy percent of Americans favored licensing of firearms. Moreover,

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[291] Lee Kennett and James La Verne Anderson, *The Gun in America: The Origins of a National Dilemma* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 228-31.

[292] James Ridgeway, "Fun with Guns in the United States Senate," *New Republic* (22 February 1964), 6.

Senator Dodd marshaled powerful evidence to encourage passage of the bill. For example, he cited the story of two Brooklyn girls, one of whom was shot by the other as they reenacted the rites of arms they had watched on television as part of the slain President's funeral ceremony. This story reinforced Dodd's call for strengthening firearms controls. [293] Support for the Dodd bill also emerged from other sources. One article lamented, "At the present time, a Lee Harvey Oswald, a sixth-grader, or a convicted criminal can buy a gun by simply filling out a newspaper coupon and sending his money to a mail order house." [294] Although efforts to legislate firearms initially centered on efforts to alter the manner of firearms sales, attitudes toward firearms in general had by and large spoiled. Ultimately, the debate over the bill and firearms regulation in general became so rancorous that those caught up in the dispute almost immediately polarized into anti- and pro-gun factions, many of which persist today in one form or another. [295]

The explosion of violence in the summer of 1965 in the Watts district of Los Angeles added to the negative attitudes about firearms by correlating the advent of gun violence with African Americans. In addition, some whites, fearing racial unrest, turned to guns for security. When the Los Angeles riots accelerated, many area residents, both black and white, rushed to arm themselves. For instance, *Life*'s coverage of the event

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[293] Nonetheless, pro-gun forces stood their ground against gun regulations. One witness in the hearing, Ben Avery of the Arizona Rifle and Pistol Club asked, "'Have we forgotten Pearl Harbor? Have we forgotten that American chaplain who stood on a pitching destroyer's deck and shouted, 'Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition' as he braved the withering fire of Japanese Zeros? I don't think President Kennedy would want us to forget, and start down the path that disarmed the British people, merely because one enemy bullet finally found him. What a ridiculous monument to his memory!'" See James Ridgeway, "Fun with Guns in the United States Senate," *New Republic* (22 February 1964), 7.

[294] "Gun Battle," *Commonweal* (28 May 1965), 309.

[295] For more on the various clubs and organizations that supported and condemned firearms see Kennett and Anderson, *The Gun in America*, 237.

noted that as the riots gained momentum, "Negroes, in their rage, and the whites, in their terror, dramatized a fact which poses an incendiary problem for the entire nation: the implements of violence – and death – are readily available to nearly anyone, as became so tragically clear at the time President Kennedy was killed." [296] However, this account cast blacks as the aggressors while whites posed as victims who only armed themselves as a desperate reaction to the violence perpetrated by others, a familiar refrain in American history that as a result probably resonated with many white readers. The writer continued to grumble about the easy availability of guns, noting, "When racial tensions high, [the easy access to guns] becomes appalling." As long as guns remained on the rifle ranges and in the playrooms in the hands of whites, they received little notice. However, once blacks obtained firearms, the public outcry became thunderous. Weapons had topped the list of the most common item looted during the riots, which lent legitimacy to some of the handwringing over the Watts' violence. However, little to no public protest erupted at other points in American history when whites used guns to eliminate indigenous populations or when whites used firearms to compel the obedience of slaves or Native Americans.

Rather than re-evaluating violence in general in American society and culture, the riots motivated many white Americans to associate gun use with blacks and ignorant bigots. For instance, in an article in *Life* entitled, "You Can Arm Yourself in the Five-and-Dime," one photo caption read, "Bigot Appeal. Gun shop in Fern Park, Fla., capitalizes on fanatic anti-Negro feeling. A clerk explained the 'nigger back guarantee' for this N. R. Davis 12-gauge shotgun: 'Shoot a nigger with it, bring it back and we'll

[296] "The Run on Guns: A Lethal National Problem," *Life* (27 August 1965), 59.

give you your money back – and we'll let you keep the gun, too.'" [297] Similarly, a photo appeared in *Life* that showed the confiscated weapons from the Watts riot. Underneath the phrase read, "The U. S. Gun Problem." [298] Gone were the days of visualizing gun owners primarily as law-abiding white citizens just seeking a wholesome form of leisure. In the wake of the assassination and the Watts riots, popular sources cast gun owners as either ignorant white racists or angry blacks and convinced Americans that the nation now had a "gun problem," rather than a healthy relationship with firearms that afforded patriotic recreation and self-protection from communists.

Echoing growing concerns about racial tensions that sometimes erupted into violence, journalist Stanley Meisler noted that the NRA and the Army rarely bothered to check closely who received the hordes of guns and ammunition distributed through the civilian marksmanship program. Meisler commented, "In May, New York policemen, worried about Malcolm X's call for Negroes to arm, raided the homes of two officers of a Harlem rifle club and seized 12,000 rounds of ammunition – or 11,600 rounds more than the law allows to be stored. The men had received a third of the ammunition from the Army through the Office of Civilian Marksmanship." [299] However, it is important to note that this particular rifle club had been associated with the NRA without incident since 1959 and members of the club were not Black Nationalists. It seems that the police investigation was instigated more by fears that a black rifle club was preparing for an

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[297] Another caption read, "Ominous Display. Behind the eerie face of a gas mask, the Army Trade Mart in Tampa, Fla. displays wares: pistols, rifles, hand grenades and – its barrel visible at left – a British bazooka. 'It's fully operative,' says the store owner. 'You could blow up a tank with it.' He has sold three." See "You Can Arm Yourself in the Five-and-Dime," *Life* (27 August 1965), 60.

[298] "Deadly Souvenirs of the Insurrection," *Life* (27 August 1965), 34-35.

[299] Stanley Meisler, "Get Your Gun from the Army," *Nation* (8 June 1964), 569.

attack of whites rather than being motivated by concerns about private citizens exceeding the limits posed on possession of ammunition.

Some white Americans also sought out firearms, hoping to maintain racial status quo and fearing potential confrontations with blacks as the Civil Rights movement gained ground. For instance, Byron De La Beckwith, assassin of civil rights leader Medgar Evers, allegedly spent a good portion of his jail sentence writing to the NRA. He proclaimed in one correspondence, "For the next 15 years we here in Mississippi are going to have to do a lot of shooting to protect our wives and children from bad niggers." [300] Apprehension spread that firearms, once primarily considered recreational devices, would end up in the "wrong hands." [301]

Whites' fears about unrestricted gun ownership extended beyond racial concerns. After 1963, Americans became more aware of the presence of militia groups, which received negative attention from the media, further fanning fears about gun violence. For instance, Rep. Harry B. Gonzalez (D-Texas) asserted that the "Minutemen, the fanatical, right-wing, guerrilla-type anti-Communist organization, was 'in part supported, subsidized and encouraged by the federal government' through the civilian marksmanship program." Just as damning to the program, Gonzalez noted, was a recent newsletter of the Paul Revere Associated Yeoman (Pray) that urged members to join the NRA and the Minutemen and to stock up on firearms and ammunition. [302] The

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[300] Meisler, "Get Your Gun," 571. Beckwith died in prison in 2001 while his appealing his case. With the appeal pending, his case was vacated.

[301] In December 1963 *Newsweek* reported, "During the racial unrest in Birmingham last summer, Federal investigators discovered that 180 shipments of mail-order guns were delivered to the Birmingham Railway Express Office." See "Right to Bear Arms," *Newsweek* (9 December 1963), 70-71.

[302] The newsletter also urged readers to "'Remember, the Communists cannot subdue an armed citizenry.'" See Meisler, "Get Your Gun," 569. The Minutemen organization, founded in the early 1960s

Minutemen's efforts to arm themselves gained such notoriety that in California, Attorney General Stanley Mosk sought assistance from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Explaining that the Minutemen established units within the California National Guard and recruited members from extreme Young Republican groups, Mosk shared with McNamara, "'These extremists concern us because we fear that if such unstable characters continue to play with guns and bombs, they may eventually disrupt the peace and security of our communities. It is disturbing to consider that the U. S. Army may aid such violence through its distribution of free ammunition.'" [303] Despite the Minutemen's staunch anti-Communist stance, officials had started to draw the line between citizens' gun play and stockpiling of ammunition. Not even anti-Communist rhetoric would protect groups such as the Minutemen from criticism of their firearms and ammunition hording. Anti-communist sentiment may have indeed waned in the wake of the decline of McCarthyism, but patience with firearms definitely wore thin, curbing Americans' tolerance of the gun despite the desperate, impassioned pleas to defend America from potential threats.

As many Americans' distaste for firearms grew, pro-gun forces merely increased their membership in an already established organization for the defense of firearms

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by Robert Bolivar DePugh, characterized themselves as patriots preparing to defend America against a growing internal communist threat. They formed units and armed themselves, stockpiling firearms and ammunition, in preparation for such a confrontation. Some commentators allege that the Minutemen were the predecessors of the modern militia movement.

[303] Meisler, "Get Your Gun," 570. In addition, *New Republic* reported that in May 1964 that Treasury agents arrested a former Minutemen leader, Richard Lauchli in Clinton, Illinois, where the agents found in his possession "100 submachine guns, five 50-caliber machine guns, a flame thrower, a 75-mm recoilless cannon, several 25-pund aerial bombs, mortars with shells, automatic pistols, and rifles and a large quantity of ammunition." The author continues to bemoan that tax-payers ultimately foot the bill for the arms and ammunition distributed by the Office of Civilian Marksmanship, a cost the publication reported to be $1.6 million. See James Ridgeway, "Don't Wait, Buy a Gun Now!" *New Republic* (6 June 1964), 10.

rights, the NRA. Despite growing antagonism to firearms and increasing visibility of gun crimes, the NRA steadfastly defended the right of citizens to bear arms. For instance, Franklin L. Orth, Executive Vice President of the organization, testified before a Congressional committee, "'I submit that with Castro's Communist Cuba as a stepping stone and abase of operations into the United States furnishing a haven for untold thousands of Communists, that every American, young and old, male and female, should be able to shoot.'" [304] In addition to their arguments about the need for firearms for national defense, the NRA also changed its emphasis. In response to the new attitudes toward firearms altered its course, the organization shifted its emphasis from conservation, education, and marksmanship training to legislative action as represented by their changing logo. In 1958 the NRA's main entrance was emblazoned with the phrase "Firearms Safety Education, Marksmanship Training, Shooting for Recreation." After the growing attacks on firearms use and ownership, the organization changed the motto to read, "The Right of the People to Keep and Bear Arms, Shall Not Be Infringed." [305] The amended slogan also represented how NRA supporters and gun enthusiasts changed the rhetoric employed to defend firearms.

In response to the attacks on firearms and proposed legislation to regulate the sale of them, popular literature about recreational gun use altered its tone and language as well, following the lead of the NRA. Instead of advocating gun use as wholesome,

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[304] Meisler, "Get Your Gun," 570. In addition to arguing that guns were needed for national defense, according to Daniel Justin Herman, "In the twentieth century, the conservationist cause has been distorted by the National Rifle Association, which has substituted gun for game as a symbol of American identity." See Daniel Justin Herman, *Hunting and the American Imagination* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 243.

[305] Gregg Lee Carter, *The Gun Control Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 69.

patriotic, and practical fun, gun enthusiasts' remarks became strident defenses of firearms based on arguments about the rights guaranteed to citizens by the Second Amendment. Likewise, rather than primarily promoting recreational gun use as a harmless diversion, writers instead defended it as a birthright and offered legalistic arguments for preserving it. For instance, when questioned about the possibility of legislating firearms restrictions, one NRA member asked, "'Are we ready to deny to ourselves and to our children their American heritage – the right of personal protection and the pleasure of shooting and hunting for recreation?'" [306] *Field and Stream* also issued a formal statement meant to represent "those of all the readers . . . [and] the great mass of some 50 million hunters, shooters, and sportsmen of these United States." In the spirit of the new defenses made for gunning, the statement proclaimed:

> We believe that the Second Amendment to the Constitution, guaranteeing the right of the people to keep and bear arms, is no more outdated than any other guarantee set forth in the Bill of Rights or in the Constitution itself. Although the Second Amendment was written nearly 200 years ago, the right of each citizen to own guns is still the strongest deterrent to criminal entry of our homes or to the subversive overthrow of our Government." The statement also decried legislation "requiring the registration of personal or sporting arms" arguing that such measures "constitute a calculated first step toward eventually depriving honest citizens of gun ownership." [307]

Gun enthusiasts, many of whom were likely members of the NRA, lost interest in moderate efforts to control the sale of firearms. They now professed to believe that any efforts to regulate guns would result in complete eradication of private gun ownership.

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[306] "Be Strong, Carry a Gun," *New Republic* (14 December 1963), 7.

[307] "For a Strong America," *Field and Stream* (April 1964), 10-11. Others argued that guns posed no more danger than other objects used in everyday life. One writer argued, "There is, of course, no compound, artifact, machine, or device that cannot be dangerous, and even fatal, if used unwisely." The author offered the following examples for his position asserting, "In England not long ago a young woman danced the twist all night and dropped dead. In Western Germany a cowboy singer was electrocuted by his guitar." Richard Starnes, "The Anti-Gun Extremists Are at It Again," *Field and Stream* (April 1964), 14. Nonetheless, he pointed out, no public outcry emerged calling for a ban on guitars or dancing.

Warren Page certainly believed that politicians sought to take away citizens' firearms. In his opinion, a "proposed proscription of the hand-sized firearm is only a first step, to be extended to the long shoulder-fired arm which is the sportsman's mainstay. Rep. Mikva of Illinois, in offering his handgun-seizure bills, brags on that same intention. More ranters and ravers have crawled out of the woodwork." [308] In addition, rather than defending firearms as an integral part of American heritage, the emphasis of arguments for guns now rested primarily on appeals to the constitutionality of gun ownership. Although gun proponents would continue to cite the importance of firearms to the nation's history, the main emphasis of the appeals had shifted and the legalistic rhetoric would mark the gun debate to the present day.

While specific events, such as the assassination of a president, the televised spectacle of race riots, and the emergence of militia groups set in motion a growing distaste for firearms in America, the atmosphere that had sustained and nourished gun cultures began to change in the early to mid-1960s as well, eroding the very foundation of the multiple firearms traditions. For instance, Americans began to reevaluate their "heroic" past in light of civil rights movements and the war in Vietnam. In addition, conceding some of the nation's imperfections and recognizing its not-so-heroic past led Americans to reevaluate their frontier heritage and its most infamous device – the gun. Growing instances of violence vividly splashed across television screens also soured many Americans on gun violence in general, if not abroad in Vietnam then at least domestically. Finally, the era of McCarthy and the ensuing demands for elaborate, or at

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[308] Page, *One Man's Wilderness*, 252.

least perceptible, displays of patriotism and allegiance to all things American faded. In part, the Vietnam War caused many Americans to lose faith in their government as they questioned the management of the war by the supposed "best and the brightest." The reevaluation that caused many Americans to question their gun-toting heritage, the violent events that rocked a nation and robbed it of some of its naivety, and the changing cultural landscape effectively ended the golden age of unquestioned, unholstered gun use and thrust the nation into a firearms control debate that continues to divide the nation. However, if cultural changes created the forces that led to America's complicated relationship with the gun, then perhaps there is hope that in the future attitudes about firearms may once again shift, facilitating a rational, non-polemical resolution to the current firearms dilemma. Understanding the reasons that caused America's multiple gun cultures to intensify in the post-World War II era will be a useful and indispensable starting point for an informed, fruitful dialogue.

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