

Violence: The American Way of Life

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The United States of America was conceived and nurtured by violence.

Americans not only engage in violence, they are entertained by it.

Killing takes place in America at an average of 87 times each day. Going to war in Afghanistan is less dangerous than living in Chicago.

The Romans went to the Coliseum to watch people being killed. In major cities, Americans just look out their windows. Baseball, once America's national game, a benign, soporific sport, has been replaced by football which is so violent it destroys the brains of those who play it. Violent films, euphemized as action flicks, dominate our motion picture theatres and television sets. Our children play killing video games.

So do you really believe that gun control will miraculously make America into a tranquil nation? Do you really believe that outlawing products and practices will make Americans peace loving? A culture cannot be changed by laws, change requires a sustained effort over several generations. Are Americans up to the task?

Carry Amelia Moore Nation was born on November 25, 1846. She became a radical member of the temperance movement which opposed the consumption of alcohol. She described herself as "a bulldog running along at the feet of Jesus, barking at what He doesn't like," and claimed a divine ordination to promote temperance by destroying bars. She began her temperance work in Medicine Lodge, Kansas by starting a local branch of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and campaigning for the enforcement of Kansas' ban on the sales of liquor. She became infamous by vandalizing taverns. Often accompanied by hymn-singing women and musicians, she would march into a bar and sing and pray while smashing bar fixtures and stock with a hatchet. Between 1900 and 1910 she was arrested around 30 times for "hatchetations," as she called them. She died on June 9, 1911 and was buried in an unmarked grave in Belton, Missouri. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union later erected a stone inscribed "Faithful to the Cause of Prohibition, She Hath Done What She Could." Had she lived just eight years longer, she would have seen prohibition become the law of the land.

But, of course, it didn't last. Prohibition was repealed on December 5, 1933. It lasted a mere 14 years. It had absolutely no beneficial effects on society. In fact, it helped establish organized crime in America.

Yet Americans do not give up easily. In this anti-intellectual society where people are told

more scientists are needed, unscientific practices prevail. What is shown not to work is repeated over and over again. So in 1971, the Nixon administration declared war on drugs. Now, almost 50 years later, the walls of the trenches are beginning to collapse. This long effort at prohibition too has just not worked, and it too has had absolutely no beneficial effects on society. In fact, it has resulted in the deaths of thousands in America and abroad, has ruined countless lives of young people, and squandered vast amounts of money. Just as Prohibition did, it has fostered the creation of international criminal cartels. What people with a scientific bent would have abandoned as ineffective, Americans have put into practice with greater and greater vigor. One would think that someone would recognize the folly. But no, the crowd is again clamoring. Now it's about guns.

Don't misread this piece. I own no guns; I can think of no reason why people living in a civilized state should need guns. Guns have one purpose and one purpose alone—to kill! People in a civilized state should have no need or reason to do that. If guns are needed for self-protection, the state has failed in its primary function of insuring domestic tranquility. (Read your Constitution!) A nation that cannot provide even that has thoroughly failed. And the fact that there are those in America who insist on owning guns says more about them and the nation's failure than it says about guns.

But another attempt at prohibition is nothing but an emotional attempt to do something even if it is something that won't have any significant effect on the level of violence in America. Some have referred to gun control laws as "feel good" acts. Perhaps, but feel good acts are better than feel bad acts, and I know of no good reason to oppose gun control. What I object to is the Pollyanna belief that gun control will significantly reduce violence in American society. Guns are not the cause of this violence; the violent nature of American society is the cause of the American love affair with guns.

The United States of America was conceived and nurtured by violence. The Europeans who colonized America were neither tolerant or enlightened; they were the dregs of society, and they even despised each other. The totally impure Puritans of Massachusetts despised the Quakers of Pennsylvania and the Catholics of Maryland. In the Pequot War, English colonists commanded by John Mason, launched a night attack on a large Pequot village on the Mystic River and burned the inhabitants in their homes and killed all survivors. By conservative estimates, the population of the United States prior to European colonization was greater than 12 million. Four centuries later, the count has been reduced to 237,000. Four centuries of continuous violence against native Americans, and the violence persists.

Abraham Lincoln, enshrined as the great emancipator, freed the slaves by inciting a war that killed somewhere around 750,000 Americans. Emancipation came to the slaves by previously unheard of violence. In contrast and at about the same time in history, the autocratic Tsar Alexander II of Russia emancipated more than 23 million serfs without killing a single person. Oh, those horrid Russian Tsars!

After the Civil War, Americans pushed the frontiers of America all the way to the Pacific Ocean. They did it with the gun. The Winchester Model 1873 repeating rifle and Colt Peacemaker revolver of 1873 are colloquially known as "The Guns that Won the West" for their predominant roles in the hands of Western settlers. Americans shot their way from the Mississippi to the Pacific.

American foreign policy for decades has consisted primarily of military

misadventures—foreign policy through the barrel of a gun! Today, the gun has become the drone and the bullet, the hellfire missile. General Smedley Butler (1881-1940), one of only two Americans to win the Medal of Honor on two separate occasions, wrote:

“I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle-man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism. . . . I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.” Now, of course, we’re using the gun to make the Middle East and Southeast Asia “safe for democracy.”

But the attempt isn’t faring very well.

Violence pervades this culture. Americans not only engage in violence, they are entertained by it. Killing takes place in America more often than the Sun rises, currently at an average of 87 times each day. Going to war in Afghanistan is less dangerous than living in Chicago. The Romans went to the Coliseum to watch people being killed. In major cities, Americans just look out their windows. Baseball, once America’s national game, a benign, soporific sport, has been replaced by football which is so violent it destroys the brains of those who play it. Violent films, euphemized as action flicks, dominate our motion picture theatres and television sets. Our children play killing video games.

So do you really believe that gun control will miraculously make America into a tranquil nation? Do you really believe that outlawing products and practices will make Americans peace loving? A culture cannot be changed by laws; the only function of law is to justify vengeance. No law in all of recorded history has been enacted that eliminated the practices it was meant to reduce. The oldest profession has been outlawed since the dawn of recorded history. It still is carried on. The truth of the matter is that a society based on law is a lawless society.

American society is violent not because of guns but because of the attitudes of Americans. When Europeans first came to the Americas, they thought that they had discovered a new world. Instead they found a land already inhabited by people with their own ways of life. Christian intolerance required the use of violence. Just as the Romans took the parts of Europe they wanted, these Europeans took the Americas. Violence was in their souls. Current day Americans have inherited it.

Wayne LaPierre, a National Rifle Association spokesman, has said, “The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.” Someone should tell him that many consider him to be a bad guy with a gun.

So sure, enact legislation to control the proliferation of guns, but don’t get sanguine about it. Such legislation may help, but don’t count on it. Unless you can change the American character, our violent nature will endure until we exterminate ourselves. Live by the. . . . Oh, you know how that goes. Cultures are extremely difficult to change; changing them requires a sustained effort over several generations. I doubt that Americans are up to the task.

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who writes on social, political, and economic issues. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, he spent 20 years as a university professor and another 20 years working as a writer. He has published a textbook in formal logic commercially, in academic journals and a small number of commercial magazines, and has written a number of guest editorials for newspapers. His on-line pieces can be found on <http://www.jkozy.com/> and he can be emailed from that site's homepage.

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