



# American Thinker

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## What Is a Militia, Anyway?

By J.L. Woodruff

Among the signs carried by many of the half-educated demonstrators protesting the Bill of Rights in Washington, D.C. was one that read, "What part of 'well regulated' don't you understand?" The reference is to the famous introductory phrase of the 2nd Amendment, which says, "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." It is safe to say the protester waving the sign meant it as a rebuke to those who think the 2nd Amendment guarantees the right to own firearms.

As a simple declarative sentence, despite the unnecessary use of commas typical of 18th-century writing, the amendment is perfectly clear to anyone with even a rudimentary understanding of English. Yet in recent decades, it has become the source of lies, distortion, and obfuscation by assorted opponents of the Bill of Rights who claim that only members of a militia may own guns. They include federal judges, left-wing activists, the politicians they support, and assorted anti-gun nuts in academia and news organizations. They pay homage to Michael Bloomberg and his Billionaires' Crusade to Disarm the Peons by smearing the National Rifle Association's 5 million members as a bunch of murderers and congressional puppet masters and spread demonstrable nonsense about the Bill of Rights.

Most of them, unlike the mawkish teens pumping their fists like Weathermen at a Viet Cong rally, are real grown-ups in coats and ties, many with law degrees and lots of official-sounding titles that make them seem like authoritative folks who really know what they're talking about. But they don't.

The ACLU, for example, in its hallucinatory interpretation, claims that "the people" in the amendment refers not to persons, but to state governments and their power to establish militias. The left-wingers there do not explain how a description of state powers ended up in a list of things called the "Bill of Rights." Others, including former Supreme Court justice John Paul Stevens, implausibly insist that the amendment guarantees firearm ownership only to members of a militia.

That is one of the greatest public frauds in U.S. history. Fortunately, no one needs a law degree or even extensive knowledge of what America's Founders thought about militias to see through the fraud and to understand the 2nd Amendment. Knowing rudimentary English will do just fine.



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Imagine that the 2nd Amendment is about something other than firearms. Suppose the amendment said, "A well-educated

electorate being necessary for the functioning of a free republic, the right of the people to read and write books shall not be infringed."

Does that mean only registered voters may read books? Of course not. The right is guaranteed not to voters, but to people, from whom the electorate is drawn. Does this imaginary amendment mean that only trained librarians may read books? Does it mean that only college graduates may write books? Does it mean that the government gets to decide who may read books, and which books they may read? Of course not. Does it mean that one can read but not write books? Nope. Both are guaranteed activities.

Most important of all, notice that the right to read and write is not dependent on the well educated electorate. The reverse is true: the educated electorate depends on the right. The origin and reason for the right are not mentioned at all. It exists independent of the electorate. The introductory phrase, which does not limit the right, is simply the reason why the right "shall not be infringed."

Violations of the guarantee are not allowed. That could not be more explicit: the right "shall not be infringed." And what does "infringe" mean? It means to limit, curb, restrict, undermine, encroach, or diminish. That is clearly, obviously, and undeniably forbidden.

Anyone who says the right to read and write books is limited to registered voters is either lying or an idiot. Now take a look at the journalists, judges, politicians, and academics pushing the demonstrably false notion that the 2nd Amendment limits the right to gun ownership to militias. They, like CNN's Jeffrey Toobin – a magna cum laude graduate who claims on YouTube that the 2nd Amendment is "ungrammatical and mysterious" – are not idiots (at least not all of them). The people pushing the nonsense that firearms ownership depends on membership in a militia are smart, well educated people. They can read English very well. They know what the 2nd Amendment means. They have chosen to distort that meaning.



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