

*Armed Citizens. The Road from Ancient Rome to the Second Amendment*

Noah Shusterman. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020. Pp. 281. £35.50

Very much to the point, this is an account for the general reader designed to contextualise the Second Amendment in terms of the history of republican and, more particularly, of anti-authoritarian attitudes toward the value, both practical and ideological, of an armed citizenry, well at least of white males. There is a start with Rome, a rapid switch to Machiavelli's ideas, a presentation of absolutist France as the path not chosen, and then we are in mid-seventeenth century England moving toward ideas of liberty and the rise of militia thought in particular contexts, notably Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia. The account is lively and worth reading, but I would want to place more of an emphasis on federalism as a key aspect of the more recent European legacy, and notably so with the Swiss Cantons, the Dutch Republic, and the quasi-republic of Poland, especially the Dutch Republic.

The Second Amendment then sits as part of the federal contract that was a central aspect of the American constitution. It appears illogical by modern standards, and, however justified by the civil war of 1775-83, notably so after that of 1861-5, but the historical nature of the constitution is a key element, and arguably the state, however defined, even in the defeated South, has never had sufficient authority and power to pursue another course. Lots here to consider in this incomplete but accessible, clear and well-written book. It can be readily supplemented by some of the literature on the subject, although it is fair to note that this has often been highly contentious. Thus, the legal historian Patrick Charles, in his *Armed in America: A History of Gun Rights from Colonial Militias to Concealed Carry* (2018) takes issue with Joyce Lee Malcolm's prominent account with its emphasis on limited early regulation. Issues of legality are of course pertinent to an historicised constitution, but there is also the inherently contentious character of a politicised constitution, and gun rights understandably falls into both contexts. Given the likely 'opening up' of the nature of personal firearms with development in guided stand-off weaponry and drones, it is likely that the contentiousness will then be applied to new contexts. Plenty of work for the lawyers, while historians might find it helpful to focus primarily on the recent decades of this issue.

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