

They were not the usual suspects. Accomplished intellectuals, recognized as the finest among a deservedly-elite corps of scholars, they shared among them an American Pulitzer Prize, a Medal for Distinguished Public Service, a vast array of well-respected articles and books paving the way in their respective fields – and, perhaps most importantly, the air of academic and personal integrity. That is, until they were caught.

The late popular historian Stephen Ambrose: guilty of plagiarism. Pulitzer Prize Winning Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin: guilty of lifting material from her sources. Professor Michael Bellesiles, author of *Arming America*: guilty of inventing data to support his argument that gun-control legislation is effective. And the most recent defendant in the court of academia, Professor John Lott, author of the book *More Guns, Less Crime*: still awaiting his less-than-promising verdict.

This recent trend of intellectual dishonesty comes at a huge cost to academia, and in turn, to politics. The scholarly research conducted at universities and think-tanks often fuels the compelling arguments on all sides of the political issues of the day. Gun-control is one of these issues, and the integrity of one key component of the gun-control debate has been jeopardized by the two preeminent scholars on the polar ends of the debate. Professors Bellesiles and Lott are the two seemingly corrupt exceptions in a world of honest and repetitious research and exploration, but the consequences of their respective acts of academic dishonesty are grave.

Lott's book offers a statistical foundation to the seemingly logical premise that more law-abiding armed citizens means less crime. In essence, because the criminal element of society would presumably disobey gun-control legislation, such laws merely disarm those who would intend to use guns for otherwise legal purposes. The book's release in the late nineties offered empirical support to the already-heated defense of the right to keep and bear arms. The issue of contention regarding the integrity of Lott's research is a study Lott allegedly conducted, a study which is, in effect, insignificant in the grand scheme of his greater research. However, if the allegations suggesting that Lott fabricated and/or altered data in this specific analysis prove true, it naturally calls to question the whole of Lott's research.

This is unfortunate, because the recent controversy has also insinuated that this flawed research is necessary to denounce the very notion of gun-prohibition. And this is simply not the case. While future thorough and honest numerical studies on the effect of restrictive gun legislation will undoubtedly provide proof that such legislation causes more harm than good, the focus of the gun debate should not be founded solely on the efficacy of gun-control. The vast array of legal and theoretical arguments must also be considered.

The Constitution explicitly states: *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.* Perhaps more importantly, though, even preeminent constitutional law scholars, including liberal Professor Lawrence Tribe and liberal Professor Alan Dershowitz, recognize that, legally speaking, the right to keep and bear arms extends not only to militias and/or states, but also to individuals. It is a fact that every signatory to the Constitution favored giving each American the right to keep and bear arms. Thomas Jefferson, for example, wrote that it is the citizens' "right and duty to be at all times armed."

That said, the constitutional legality of restrictive gun legislation is suspect at best. Additionally, the very rights to defend self, other and property are ingrained in the roots of the American legal cannon; more specifically, they are protected by the right to keep and bear arms. For this express purpose, that of defense of life and property, law-abiding individuals should be secure in their right to keep and bear arms in their homes and on their persons, a notion antithetical to the very practice of gun-control.

Furthermore, the second amendment provides a protection against tyranny. While this argument is all-too-often brushed off immediately, the theoretical premise still stands. It is with near certainty that the American populace is not in danger of its government becoming tyrannical. But one need not be a conspiracy theorist to recognize that a potentially armed populace makes it all the more impossible. Historically, Hitler, Stalin, Castro, Mao, and Milosevic all instituted various forms of gun-control to further their objectives.

The gun debate should not be oversimplified to whether or not gun-control *works*. Like many issues of the day, gun-legislation boils down to the bounds of governmental power and authority. The government should vigorously combat crime and the police should aim to protect individuals from criminals. Gun-control, though, simply does not accomplish this goal; it adversely strips from individuals the right and ability to protect themselves from armed assailants. Denying the right to self-defense is inconsistent with the values of a truly just society.

Any consideration of the consequences of gun-control legislation requires further research, because Lott and Bellesiles, from the two polar ends, have each jeopardized the integrity of this aspect of the gun debate.

This being the case, Lott's and Bellesiles's research should be repeated. After all, the cornerstone of the scientific method is repetition. *Scholars* on both sides of the issue should aim to discover, through analytical research, the actual impact of gun-control legislation.

It seems that only then will the American public recognize the flaws of gun-control legislation. But until the debate begins to encompass the constitutional and theoretical aspects of the issue, the argument in question will continue to be strictly academic.