

ent than real. And Bergman is to be commended for fighting against those at CBS who wanted to spike the interview lest it invite a lawsuit from Brown and Williamson and sour the network's pending sale to Westinghouse. The film's moral posturing over Bergman's battle, however, is at best a sidebar pretending to be the central issue.

Until we kick the habit of moral outrage, we'll never be able to think clearly enough about tobacco to address its dangers effectively. We'll just throw more money at it, hoping it will go away. Has our dreadful experience in trying to regulate and ban other drugs not taught us anything? To introduce the law and its main-chance minions into these matters is to invite waste, crime, corruption, and untold misery, not to mention the insufferable moralizing of media celebrities and Hollywood filmmakers.

And now a closing word about a film that exerts no serious strain on our will to believe: *Pokemon: The First Movie*. (The subtitle is a voluntary warning label.) The production is a colorful, stylized Japanese cartoon of ineffable cross-cultural dynamics—which is to say I have no idea what it's about. Can anyone tell me why all the human characters look Western? Is there an Asian version of these cartoons? Well, I won't press these questions. Liam, my ten-year-old son, was completely charmed by these pocket monsters, which is, I learned, what "Pokemon" means. That was good enough for me, especially at matinee prices.

George McCartney teaches English at St. John's University.

GUNS

The Founders' Reading of Ancient History

by David B. Kopel

Why is the Second Amendment under such constant attack? One important reason is the depressing historical ignorance of most Americans, partic-

ularly of classical history.

But suppose that modern students were required to read Tacitus, Plutarch, Livy, and other classical historians. The Founders of the American Republic all knew the sad story of the Roman Republic. What the Founders had learned were lessons that illustrate the importance of a virtuous armed populace as an essential check on the inevitable deprivations of a central government and its standing army.

Carl Richard's excellent *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* is the first book to examine exactly what the Founders learned from ancient history. Let's look at some of the lessons which illuminate the Second Amendment.

While those who support gun prohibition declare that the Second Amendment is obsolete, the Founders understood that events of many years past could provide useful guidance for the present. John Adams wrote that whenever he read Thucydides and Tacitus, "I seem to be only reading the History of my own Times and my own Life."

The Founders did not believe that tyranny should be resisted only passively. Dennis Henigan, lead attorney for anti-gun activist Sarah Brady, claims that anyone who believes that an illegitimate government can be resisted by force under the Second Amendment is an "insurrectionist." But the Founders carefully distinguished between legitimate resistance to tyranny and illegitimate insurrection against lawful authority.

For example, after the imposition of the Stamp Act in 1765, John Adams praised "the same great spirit which once gave Caesar so warm a reception" and "which first seated the great grandfather" of King George III on the throne of England. Caesar's assassin Brutus was venerated, as was the much earlier Lucius Brutus, who led the overthrow of Rome's Tarquin monarchy in 510 B.C. Likewise, Thomas Jefferson lamented that so many good Romans chose suicide rather than life under an emperor, when "the better remedy" would be "a poignard [a small dagger] in the breast of the tyrant."

Caesar's use of the standing army to subdue Rome was used by Antifederalists to show that an army drawn from the best, most faithful, and most honorable parts of society could still be used to enslave their country. And even Americans who felt at least a small standing army to be necessary were aware of the dangers.

As James Madison wrote in *Federalist 41*, "the liberties of Rome proved the final victim to her military triumphs."

Those concerned about standing armies frequently pointed to the many coups perpetrated by imperial Rome's standing forces. During the final months of Watergate, many citizens worried that President Nixon would mobilize the 82nd Airborne Division in order to retain power, echoing the fear of the imperial presidency articulated by George Mason: "When he is arraigned for treason, he has the command of the army and navy, and may surround the Senate with thirty thousand troops. It brings to recollection the remarkable trial of Milo at Rome."

Mason was referring to the famous trial of T. Annus Milo in 52 B.C. Milo and Clodius were rival demagogues in the decaying Roman Republic. When Milo and his gang ran into Clodius and his gang on the Appian Way, Clodius ended up dead. Milo was put on trial, with the great orator Cicero serving as his defense attorney. Cicero wrote a brilliant argument in Milo's defense, but, after Milo's enemy Pompey surrounded the courtroom with troops, was intimidated into not delivering it as written.

Although Milo was deprived of the benefits of Cicero's eloquence, history was not. The text of the speech survived, and students in colonial America were expected to read Cicero in the original Latin:

There exists a law, not written down anywhere, but inborn in our hearts; a law which comes to us not by training or custom or reading but by derivation and absorption and adoption from nature itself; a law which has come to us not from theory but from practice, not by instruction but by natural intuition. I refer to the law which lays it down that, if our lives are endangered by plots or violence or armed robbers or enemies, any and every method of protecting ourselves is morally right. When weapons reduce them to silence, the laws no longer expect one to wait their pronouncements. For people who decide to wait for these will have to wait for justice, too—and meanwhile they must suffer injustice first. Indeed, even the wisdom of a law itself, by sort of tacit implication, permits self-defense, because it is not actually forbidden to kill; what it does,

instead, is to forbid the bearing of a weapon with the intention to kill.

Thus, natural law and common sense make it “morally right” to use deadly force to defend against a deadly attack. James Wilson quoted the above words of Cicero, in full, in a lecture series he gave to the law students at the College of Philadelphia in 1790. The lectures were attended by President Washington, Vice President Adams, Secretary of State Jefferson, and other leaders.

Today, more than half of all Americans live in states where an adult with a clean record can obtain a permit to carry a firearm for lawful protection. Handgun Control, Inc., opposes these laws, claiming that they will lead to murder. But Cicero points out the logical distinction in Roman law: Carrying a weapon for lawful defense was perfectly lawful; carrying with malign intent was a crime.

Later in that speech, Cicero declared, “Civilized people . . . learn that they have to defend their own bodies and persons and lives from violence of any and every kind by all the means within their power.”

This lesson, unfortunately, is lost on too many modern Americans, who live in what attorney Jeffrey Snyder, in an essay in the *Public Interest*, terms “A Nation of Cowards.” The Founders greatly feared the corruption of the citizenry fostered by Rome’s ever-expanding government. The Roman free-bread program produced a vast body of citizens too lazy to work. Similarly, modern American police chiefs who warn citizens not to use force to protect themselves from force “have created a population of millions of people without the courage or character to protect themselves or their families from deadly assault.”

Livy wrote a 142-volume history of Rome; 35 of the volumes have survived and were available to the American Founders. Livy tells us that, under the Roman King Servius Tullius (578-535 B.C.) in the days before the Republic was established, “the right to bear arms had belonged solely to the patricians.” But then “plebians were given a place in the army, which was to be re-classified according to every man’s property, i.e., his ability to provide himself a more or less complete equipment for the field . . .” Thus, all citizens “capable of bearing arms were required to provide” their own weapons.

But when Rome moved away from this

militia system toward a mercenary standing army, the character of the citizenry began to decay. As Edward Gibbon, in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, explains:

In the purer ages of the commonwealth, the use of arms was reserved for those ranks of citizens who had a country to love, a property to defend, and some share in enacting those laws which it was their interest, as well as duty to maintain. But in proportion as the public freedom was lost in extent of conquest, war was gradually improved into an art, and degraded into a trade.

As the Roman standing army secured the vast empire against barbarian incursions, the people of the empire lost their capacity for self-government. “They received laws and governors from the will of their sovereign, and trusted for their defense to a mercenary army,” Gibbon explained. The once-great Romans became, morally speaking, “a race of pigmies,” and an easy target for the German tribes whose conquest of decrepit Rome finally “restored a manly spirit of freedom.”

What lesson was drawn by Gibbon? “A martial nobility and stubborn commons, possessed of arms, tenacious of property, and collected into constitutional assemblies, form the only balance capable of preserving a free constitution against the enterprises of an aspiring prince.”

In an oration in 1772 in memory of the Boston Massacre, Joseph Warren recalled Roman history: “It was this noble attachment to a free constitution which raised ancient Rome from the smallest beginnings to the bright summit of happiness and glory to which she arrived; it was the loss of this which plunged her from that summit into the black gulph of infamy and slavery.”

As Carl Richard summarizes:

The founders’ immersion in ancient history had a profound effect upon their style of thought. They developed from the classics a suspicious cast of mind. They learned from the Greeks and Romans to fear conspiracies against that liberty. Steeped in a literature whose perpetual theme was the steady encroachment of tyranny on liberty,

the founders became virtually obsessed with spotting its approach, so they might avoid the fate of their classical heroes. . . . Whatever his faults, George III was hardly Caligula or Nero; however illegitimate, the moderate British taxes were hardly equivalent to the mass executions of the emperors. But since the founders believed that the central lesson of the classics was that every illegitimate power, however small, ended in slavery, they were determined to resist such power.

The Second Amendment helps to preserve a “noble attachment to a free constitution” by teaching the people that resistance to tyranny is not “insurrection,” but the command of the Constitution. Thus the ownership of firearms by modern Americans is important not just for practical reasons but for moral ones. A homeowner who never has to use his gun for self-defense still possesses something that his unarmed next-door neighbor does not: He has made the decision that he will take responsibility for defending his family. That decision has powerful moral consequences, as does the disarmed neighbor’s decision to rely upon the government for his family’s safety.

The character-building aspect of defensive firearms ownership is one reason why tyrants—as well as other people who believe in the supremacy of the state—are so determined to disarm as many citizens as possible. Firearms ownership not only interferes with government domination of society; it creates a population which is independent and self-reliant.

Weapons bans have deadly practical consequences. Yet the moral consequences are even worse, as our Founding Fathers learned from their study of the sad fate of the Romans.

David B. Kopel is the research director of the Independence Institute (www.i2i.org).

M O V I N G ?

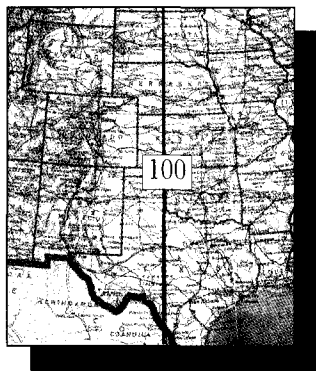
Send change of address and the mailing label from your latest issue to:

CHRONICLES Subscription Dept.
P.O. Box 800
Mount Morris, IL 61054

The Hundredth Meridian

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

Friends at a Distance



Second only to prostitution, writing is the loneliest profession. Because a writer's work is wherever he happens to be, he has no real need to be anywhere; because writing is neither a team sport nor a cooperative enterprise, and because the laborious act of composition is notoriously prone to distraction, the writer normally performs his daily stint of four, five, or six hours in a state of isolation as total as he can manage. Art, Aquinas said, is a fruit of the practical intellect—like prayer, to which art is kin. Every artist, whether he knows it or not, is in some degree a religious—a monk or a nun—and his work, his cloister from which, mentally at least, he is rarely absent. Also like the religious, if he is lucky he has friends outside encouraging him—whether by prayer or some more direct and tangible means such as fan mail, including small reeking packages and boxes plastered with PERISHABLE labels.

Though Hemingway complained that any writer incautious enough to mention booze and wine in his work finds himself instantly labeled an alcoholic, my own experiments in this regard have paid off handsomely in a harvest of sin and gluttony. It was about three years ago that the first of a series of packages arrived by U.S. mail from Clyde, Kansas. Enclosed were three or four bunches of fresh garlic, painstakingly packed and artistically tied off with woolly ribbon, and a letter from one Ed Detrixhe: a Midwestern farmer with a law degree from Vanderbilt and a shared taste for garlic and pasta, in addition to red wine, bourbon, and the writings of Edward Abbey. A thank-you letter provoked an answering one from Clyde; more garlic; and, at Christmastime, a bottle of red wine produced from Mr. Detrixhe's own vineyard. The first time I phoned Ed I pronounced the name "DEH-trix-ee," followed by a giggle of self-aware ignorance. Writers, of course, are to be read, not seen or heard, but Ed Detrixhe is a patient man; also he had a glass of brandy and a cigar with him in his den. (I was drinking red wine or a dry Martini, I forget which. The Martini would account for the giggle.) Politely,

he explained that the name is "DEE-tree"—a Belgian one, though Ed is Swedish on his mother's side—then switched directly to the latest Washington atrocity, whether Janet Reno's refusal to investigate Asian campaign contributions or the 99 lives of President William Jefferson Clinton I also can't remember. (It's Tom Sheeley in Flagstaff, a classical guitarist who sent me a recording he made of Manuel Ponce's music when I moved to New Mexico two years ago, who impersonates Maddy Albright when you answer the telephone.) We wound up the conversation an hour and several refills later, after a discussion ranging from firearms loads to the writings of Nebraska author Mari Sandoz, by sticking rhetorical pins into Sarah and Jim Brady, and a couple of days later another fragrant box was delivered to my house in Las Cruces by a postman with watery eyes, holding his nose.

In the spring Ed invited me to pay him and the family a visit at the farm. By consulting a Rand McNally road map, I estimated the distance between Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Clyde, Kansas—on the banks of the Republican River ten miles east of Concordia—at 700 to 800 miles. As I was obviously failing to establish a significantly other (or otherly significant) relationship with the Land of Enchantment, I proposed to Ed that we postpone our meeting until I could get back home to Wyoming, within a shorter striking distance of northeastern Kansas—a negligible five to six hundred miles from Laramie, I guessed, or an ordinary day's journey horseback in the American West. The actual distance, from my front door to Ed's, was 542 miles: an easy nine-hour drive on I-80 from the lower end of Third Avenue in downtown Laramie to

York, Nebraska, then south a hundred miles on 81 across the Kansas-Nebraska border. The Pony Express could probably have made it in six.

Pioneers following the Platte River west had to contend with hostile Indians, rampaging buffalo herds, rattlesnakes, prairie fires, sandstorms, blizzards, lawless lawmen, and acute alcohol deprivation. Today, motorized travelers crossing the state of Nebraska between Omaha and Pine Bluffs, Wyoming, anticipate merely tedium. The mileage signs do become discouraging—Lincoln 455, Kearney 120, North Platte 148, Ogallala 198—the shortest of these distances being a far piece in less expansive regions of the country. But to say the landscape doesn't "change" over 458 miles is like claiming the Atlantic Ocean between New York City and Southampton, England, is a dull uniformity. On this Indian summer day in late October, driving from dawn until early evening beneath the parabolic arc of the south-traveling sun, anyone who cared to look could have observed a wonderful progression of light, shadow, and texture in the Lodgepole River valley running to meet the South Platte west of Ogallala, and in the valley of the Platte on course across southern Nebraska to join the Missouri near Omaha. As the sky changed from morning yellow through noontime cobalt to the fierce ultraviolet of afternoon, the fall haze gathered in the river bottom where the braided river gleamed between golden cottonwood islands scattering leaves like weightless coins into the slow backwaters and cutoff meanders of the Platte. The Sandhills crowding down from the north went from gold to pink as the widening valley pressed them back, while south of the river the pine bluffs darkened with shadow. From the bottom of this watery geological crease the vast prairie around was hidden, its presence suggested only by the unbroken sky spreading in all directions toward an invisible horizon, but there were harvesting fields to see beneath wheeling flocks of starlings, and comfortable redbrick and clapboard towns shaded by mature cottonwoods and overshadowed by the towering grain elevators. At York, 40