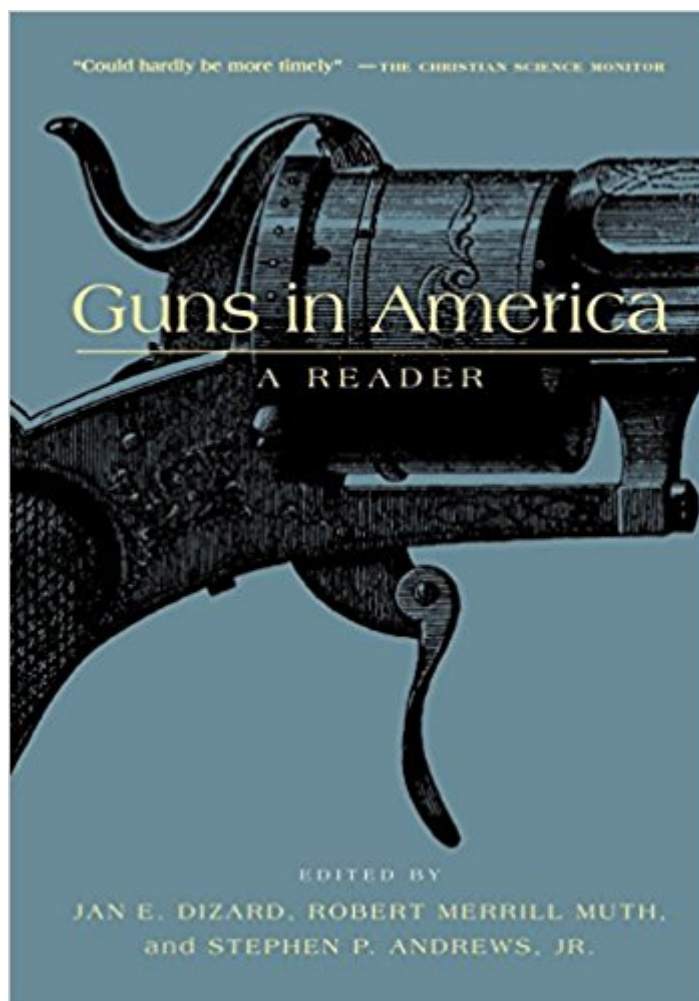


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# Guns In America: A Historical Reader



## Synopsis

Firearms have long been at the core of our national narratives. From the Puritans' embrace of guns to beat back the "devilish Indian" to our guilty delight in the extralegal exploits of Dirty Harry, Americans have relied on the gun to right wrongs, both real and imagined. The extent to which guns have been woven into our nation's mythology suggests that the current debate is only partly about guns themselves and equally about conflicting cultural values and competing national identities. Belying the gun debate are a host of related issues: contesting conceptions of community, the proper relationship between the individual and the state, and the locus of responsibility for maintaining order. *Guns in America* documents and analyzes the history of firearms in America, exploring various aspects of gun manufacture, ownership, and use—and more importantly, the cultural and political implications which this history reveals. Eschewing single-minded partisanship and emphasizing nuance and compromise, Jan E. Dizard and Robert Merrill Muth have assembled a diverse array of writings from all points on the ideological spectrum. The documents span the whole of American history, from Puritan sermons to contemporary NRA documents. The result is an indispensable panorama of the never-ending controversies over gun control, crime, hunting, and militias.

## Book Information

Paperback: 517 pages

Publisher: NYU Press; Paper edition edition (April 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0814718795

ISBN-13: 978-0814718797

Product Dimensions: 7 x 1.3 x 10 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,483,980 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #61 in [Books > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Conventional > Firearms](#) #444 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Arms Control](#) #2416 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Law Enforcement](#)

## Customer Reviews

A trio of academics with expertise ranging from American culture to public policy administration

have compiled this collection of scholarly and insightful essays tracing the position of firearms in our society. The uniqueness of the American Colonial and Revolutionary experience and the rugged nature of the American frontier combined to foster an attitude about guns and a prevalence of firearms unmatched by other Western industrialized nations. The problems posed by this historical legacy as it collides with our modern, more urban, and more civilized society are fully explored. Collectively, these essays point to a common conclusion: guns are here to stay. Even though the need for an armed citizenry has disappeared, the framers of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights worded the Second Amendment in a deliberately vague manner so as to allow for a happy medium that provides for a modicum of governmental control and regulation over firearms without infringing on the individual liberties that gun ownership was supposed to protect. These essays are carefully researched and documented and yet written in a clear and lucid manner that could benefit either a college or general audience. A Philip Y. Blue, New York State Supreme Court Criminal Branch Law Lib., New York Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"A lively and interesting overview of guns in American life; past, present, and future...Guns in America: A Reader will serve most promisingly as a long-awaited introduction to a complex and controversial issue."-Left History

As a policy analyst who continually struggles to get an accurate picture of controversial issues, I give this book high marks for covering three important criteria for good treatment of social subjects. First, they provide a historical review. How could we get perspective on contemporary controversies if we didn't know that police in Boston and New York City did not wear guns in 1905, that only a small proportion of households owned guns through much of U.S. history prior to the 1960s, and that gun sales increased threefold in the 1960s over the 1950s? In other words, there is nothing in the American character or traditions that consistently links them to guns. Next, a proper treatment must try for balance, and the authors are conscientious in providing pro and anti-gun positions in essays. Pros and cons are not enough because partisan arguments often leave out key background information. The authors seek to provide such background by a whole host of diverse articles, for example, motivations for gun ownership, statistics on gun crimes, manipulation of public opinion by advertising, regional patterns (i.e. western and rural vs urban guns), social science perspectives, etc. In short, there is an effort to build background information so that readers can test out their own theories and experience. Having said these positive things, I missed more than a limited list of readings at the end (no references for each essay). The authors let several essayists

summarize - so you really end up doing the work of synthesis yourself. However, the need for getting adequate and balanced information on touchy issues in the U.S. is so great that I concur with the Christian Science Monitor in rating the authors' effort highly.

I don't have a lot to say about this book, but since no other ordinary purchaser has reviewed it here, I thought it better to throw in a few comments than to leave you, the potential buyer, with no guidance whatsoever. First of all, this is a collection of over 40 essays by that many different authors. Some are clearly for more gun control, some are firmly against, and some writers focus instead on what the gun issue says about our culture, generally. Some of the works are very scholarly, like a shortened version of a master's thesis--chock full of historical detail and deep analysis. Some of these deep writings do not lend themselves to casual pleasure reading. Some essays go in the other direction, giving you plenty of passionate rhetoric but few factual details to support the writer's position. All in all, this collection of 43 essays by some of the biggest names in the gun control debate today is very useful for almost anyone. I would not say that it's a "must-have" for someone who has read several other books about gun control, because you've probably seen most of these ideas before. But for someone familiar with the gun control issue who does not already have a library full of books on the subject, this is one you should get. You will find yourself referring to it over and over again.

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