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“HALF COCKED”: THE PERSISTENCE OF ANACHRONISM AND PRESENTISM IN THE ACADEMIC DEBATE OVER THE SECOND AMENDMENT

SAUL CORNELL*

James Lindgren’s recent forward to The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology’s 2015 symposium on “The Past and Future of Guns,” purports to be a neutral and scholarly account of the current state of the debate on the meaning of the Second Amendment. Lindgren’s introductory essay fails to achieve both of these goals. Rather than survey the pre-Heller scholarship in a comprehensive and even-handed manner, Lindgren provides a distorted and superficial account of the historical literature. He compounds this error by ignoring the vast post-Heller scholarly literature, failing to note that much of this recent body of scholarship has been deeply critical of Heller, and has generally vindicated the work of the historians he criticizes. Indeed, the evidence he himself offers in defense of his interpretation actually undercuts his claims about the meaning of the Second Amendment. Lindgren’s essay does not chart a path forward in this contentious debate, but proffers an incomplete and analytically flawed account of the Founding Era’s understanding of this important provision of the Constitution.

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THE FUTURE OF THE PAST: HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND THE SECOND AMENDMENT AFTER HELLER

Reading James Lindgren’s recent forward to The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology’s symposium on “The Past and Future of Guns,” one might be tempted to think that nothing new on the Second Amendment had been written in the aftermath of the Supreme Court’s decision in District of Columbia v. Heller. In fact, Heller has spawned a vast new scholarly literature. Not only does Lindgren not engage with the historical scholarship written prior to Heller, he fails to consider the post-Heller literature, rendering his account of the state of the debate over the Second Amendment’s historical meaning both incomplete and unsound. Moving forward in the contentious debate over firearms regulation does, as Lindgren asserts in his discussion of the policy issues, require more attention to evidence, but this sage counsel applies to history every bit as much as it applies to statistical analysis.

It is a bit surprising to see an article on the past and future of the gun debate that makes no mention at all of important recent work by scholars such as Duke University’s Joseph Blocher and Darrell Miller, Yale University’s Reva Siegel, or Harvard scholar Cass Sunstein, to name just a few of the new voices and senior figures in constitutional law that have entered this ideologically charged field after Heller. All of these scholars reject Lindgren’s interpretation of history and his reading of Heller. Some

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3 See infra notes 7–10.
4 See infra notes 7, 9, 11.
5 Lindgren, supra note 1, at 705, 711.
8 See infra pp. 207–08 (describing the civic rights interpretation of the Second
of the harshest criticism of the D.C. gun case and its abuse of history has come from conservative scholars and judges, including Richard Epstein, Charles Fried, Richard Posner, and J. Harvie Wilkinson, another fascinating aspect of the post-*Heller* jurisprudential landscape that Lindgren neglects.

In a brief response it would be impossible to survey the full richness of the new scholarly developments Lindgren overlooks. Nor does space permit a detailed exposé of all of the historical errors and analytical flaws in *Heller* and the outdated body of scholarship Lindgren cites in his essay. In the interest of moving the debate forward, some salient points are worth stressing.

There is substantial scholarly support for the argument that the “individual rights” view articulated in *Heller* and defended by Lindgren was largely an invented historical tradition. Gun rights advocates both within and outside of the legal academy worked assiduously to create this revisionist history of the Second Amendment and deployed it effectively.
in *Heller*. As Reva Siegel and Michael Waldman have each shown, the individual rights interpretation of the Second Amendment was a modern creation.\(^{14}\) For most of the last century the dominant interpretation of the Second Amendment was as a collective right, not an individual right. The eminent early twentieth century Harvard legal scholar Zechariah Chafee, Jr. captured the earlier scholarly consensus around this conception in an influential article written more than seventy years before *Heller*: “[u]nlike the neighboring amendments,” the Second Amendment, Chafee averred, “safeguards individual rights very little and relates mainly to our federal scheme of government.”\(^{15}\) Chafee’s article was hardly the only one to embrace such a view. Most legal scholars and courts accepted this collective rights view until a new wave of revisionist scholarship emerged in the 1990s.\(^{16}\)

Lindgren’s dismissive characterization of historians’ efforts to formulate a new paradigm for understanding the Second Amendment prior to *Heller* is cast in quasi-conspiratorial terms, as if it were part of some nefarious anti-gun agenda. Lindgren’s account of this historiography confuses two different groups of scholars and fails to understand the connections between Second Amendment scholarship and early American

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\(^{14}\) Michael Waldman, *The Second Amendment: A Biography* xiii, 87–140 (2014) (arguing that the prominence of the individual rights interpretation is the result of a “jurisprudential campaign” by gun-rights activitists that began in the 1970s); Siegel, *infra* note 7, at 239 (arguing that throughout most of the twentieth century, legal scholars interpreted the Second Amendment with a primary emphasis on the militia clause, but that “decades of gun rights mobilization transformed the ‘natural’ meaning of the Constitution’s text so that . . . a law-and-order Second Amendment simply appeared there as the founders’ Constitution”); see also Robert J. Spitzer, *Lost and Found: Researching the Second Amendment*, 76 Chi.-Kent L. Rev. 349, 371 (2000) (charting the rise of a new individualistic interpretation of the Second Amendment and discussing the role of gun rights advocates in advancing this view).


\(^{16}\) See Spitzer, *infra* note 14, at 384 (providing additional evidence that the Chafee view was the dominant paradigm for understanding the Second Amendment for much of the last century).
historiography. He argues that historians:

[W]ith essentially no original evidence to support their view—and some evidence directly contrary to it—the states’ rights academics came up with an entirely new view, which they termed the “civic rights” view. According to this view, the right to keep and bear arms was an individual right, but it could be exercised only with the permission of the state in a militia.

It is hard to credit the claim that there was no new evidence to support the view that the Second Amendment was a civic right. Indeed, Lindgren’s hyperbole is typical of much gun rights oriented scholarship, and it is precisely for this reason that Sanford Levinson has described such claims as antithetical “to serious intellectual debate.” The new historical paradigm that Lindgren mocks, variously described as a limited individual right, a militia-based right, or a civic right emerged almost simultaneously in the writings of scholars who were working independently from one another and employing different methodological tools, but who were all responding to debates and trends within early American legal historiography. The one commonality among all the scholars drawn to this paradigm was not their connection to contemporary gun politics or previous support for its theory of states’ rights, but their emphasis on the necessity of rooting Founding Era American law in the culture of the early modern Anglo-American Atlantic world.

17 Lindgren, supra note 1, at 707.
18 Id.
19 Levinson, supra note 9, at 327. Among the multitude of new sources consulted by scholars associated with the civic paradigm were H. Richard Uviller & William G. Merkel, The Militia and The Right to Arms, or, How the Second Amendment Fell Silent 150 (2002) (exploring the Latinate origins of the ablative absolute used in the Second Amendment); Saul Cornell, Commonplace or Anachronism: The Standard Model, the Second Amendment, and the Problem of History in Contemporary Constitutional Theory, 16 Const. Comment. 221, 227–35 (1999) (challenging the belief that Pennsylvanians sought a modern-style individual right at the time of the state’s drafting of its constitution by analyzing the Test Acts, a law that disarmed part of the population and the views of the Anti-Federalist Dissent of the Minority); David Thomas Konig, The Second Amendment: A Missing Transatlantic Context for the Historical Meaning of “the Right of the People to Keep and Bear Arms,” 22 Law & Hist. Rev. 119, 120 (2004) (exploring the conventions on preambles and the disarmament of the Scottish militias).
20 Lindgren, supra note 1, at 707.
21 Lindgren conflates two different groups of historians working on the Second Amendment in recent years: those associated with a collective rights model, and those who advanced a civic rights model. For a more nuanced and accurate discussion of the historiography, see William Merkel, A Cultural Turn: Reflections on Recent Historical and Legal Writing on the Second Amendment, 17 Stan. L. & Pol’y Rev. 667, 672 (2006) (arguing that historical scholarship opposing the individual rights view is best seen in terms of a republican school focusing on a civic right and a traditional states rights interpretation,
The claim that this new historical paradigm lacked any evidence from the Founding Era neglects the centrality of the militia and the related fear of standing armies to Anglo-American republican discourse in the period between the Glorious Revolution and the adoption of the amended Constitution. The pervasiveness of republican ideas in the legal and political discourses of the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century has been documented time and again by historians of early modern political thought. More than forty years of historiography on republicanism contradicts Lindgren’s suggestion that the new civic paradigm was somehow conjured out of thin air. Lindgren’s misunderstanding of the relevant historiography goes beyond his lack of appreciation for the centrality of republicanism to Anglo-American legal culture in this period—his analysis demonstrates a failure to grasp some of the most elementary principles of historical inquiry. Thus, he confidently asserts that:

The problem with [the civic rights model] was that, again, there was no contemporary evidence from the Framers’ era to support it, and, indeed, no one had ever heard of the civic rights view for the first two centuries of the Second Amendment’s existence. The first use of the term “civic right” to describe the Second Amendment in American law reviews appeared in a 2002 article by the historian Saul Cornell. It would be strange if most of the Framers held the civic rights view of the Second Amendment, but kept it a secret from everyone, including the other Framers.

It is hardly surprising that the Founding Generation did not use a term invented by modern scholars to describe the Second Amendment—how could they? Lindgren has fallen into an elementary historical fallacy. By conflating what modern historians have said about the past with what historical actors actually said in the past, Lindgren has confused a

sometimes described as a collective right).


25 Lindgren, supra note 1, at 708.

26 See supra note 21.
“semantical question about the name by which the object is called,” with
the historical object itself. In essence, he blurs the differences between
primary and secondary sources by conflating modern historical labels with
the historical beliefs they describe.27

From a strictly textualist interpretive modality, the assertion that there
is no evidence for a militia-based reading of the Amendment is easily
rebutted by reference to the Second Amendment’s text, especially its
preamble.28 Lindgren attempts to get around this particular textual
embarrassment by invoking the authority of libertarian legal scholar Eugene
Volokh’s controversial, and now largely discredited, claim about the role of
preambles in Founding Era constitutional texts.29 Unfortunately, Lindgren
ignores the scholarly critiques of Volokh’s work, some voiced before Heller
and others elaborated since the decision.30 Moreover, anyone familiar with
Founding Era sources would have little trouble finding evidence to
challenge Volokh’s anachronistic interpretation. A good place to start
might be the 1750 legal dictionary authored by Giles Jacob, a popular
Founding Era text among lawyers.31 Thomas Jefferson and John Adams
each owned a copy of Jacob’s law dictionary.32 Jacob defined the role of a

27 DAVID HACKETT FISCHER, HISTORIANS’ FALLACIES: TOWARD A LOGIC OF HISTORICAL
28 On textualism as a basic modality of constitutional interpretation, see PHILLIP BOBBIT,
02 (1998) (arguing that the preamble to the Second Amendment should not be interpreted as
establishing the sole purpose of the Amendment, but simply a purpose).
30 David Thomas Konig, The Second Amendment: A Missing Transatlantic Context for
the Historical Meaning of the Right of the People to Keep and Bear Arms, 22 LAW & HIST.
REV. 119, 154-55 (2004) (analyzing a number of Founding era constitutional and legal
treatises treating preambles as the key to establishing the meaning of a text); see generally
David Thomas Konig, Why the Second Amendment Has a Preamble: Original Public
Meaning and the Political Culture of Written Constitutions in Revolutionary America, 56
UCLA L. REV. 1295 (2009) (providing additional evidence that Volokh’s interpretation of
preambles was historically flawed). Taken together Konig’s two essays have effectively
discredited the Volokh thesis. Indeed, legal scholar Sanford Levinson, a leading proponent
of the individual rights view and critic of Heller describes Konig’s critique of the
Volokh/Scalia view of preambles as “devastating.” Levinson, supra note 9, at 321.
31 See generally GILES JACOB, A NEW LAW DICTIONARY (6th ed. 1750). See also Konig,
supra note 19, at 156 (describing the wide use of Jacob’s dictionary in the eighteenth
century).
32 For additional evidence of the influence of Jacob’s dictionary in early America, see
Gary L. McDowell, The Politics of Meaning: Law Dictionaries and the Liberal Tradition of
Interpretation, 44 AM. J. LEGAL HIST. 257, 261 (2000). Although McDowell demonstrates
the importance of legal dictionaries, his account of the Lockeian assumptions about language
in the Founding Era is deeply flawed. For a more sophisticated account of John Locke’s
views of language, see Hannah Dawson, Locke on Language in (Civil) Society, 26 HIST. POL.
preamble in a way that flatly contradicts Volokh’s claims: “[t]he Preamble of a Statute . . . which is the Beginning thereof, going before, is as it were a Key to the Knowledge of it, and to open the Intent of the Makers of the Act; it shall be deemed true, and therefore good Arguments may be drawn from the same.”33 This particular gloss on preambles, derived from Lord Coke, was echoed in New Jersey Justice of the Peace James Parker’s popular Founding Era legal guide.34 A 1788 advertisement for Parker’s guide described the book as essential reading for Americans interested in the law. “This book is highly esteemed and very necessary” not only for gentleman in their public capacity as Justices of the Peace, but for “every other person who would wish to be acquainted with the laws of the land we live in.”35 Volokh’s analysis of preambles ignores these types of sources and other relevant texts essential to recovering the Founding Era’s interpretive assumptions and rules of construction. Instead of reconstructing Founding Era practices, Volokh erroneously employs approaches to statutory construction drawn from treatises written a half century later. In short, Volokh reads history backwards, applying nineteenth century rules to understand eighteenth century texts. If one corrects his anachronistic methodology and applies the correct eighteenth century rules and

33 JACOB, supra note 32, under “statute.” Volokh does not consult Giles, and misconstrues other relevant Founding Era sources by applying the rules found in nineteenth century treatises, including JOEL PRENTISS BISHOP, COMMENTARIES ON THE WRITTEN LAWS AND THEIR INTERPRETATION § 48 (1882); FORTUNATUS DWARRIS, A GENERAL TREATISE ON STATUTES 688 (39th ed. 1835); THEODORE SEDGWICK, A TREATISE ON THE RULES WHICH GOVERN THE INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION OF STATUTORY AND CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 55 (1857); E. FITCH SMITH, COMMENTARIES ON STATUTE AND CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AND STATUTORY AND CONSTITUTIONAL CONSTRUCTION §§ 562, 567, 573 (1848). Justice Scalia emulated Volokh’s anachronistic practice of using texts written at least a half century after the Second Amendment to reconstruct its original meaning. See Eugene Volokh, The Commonplace Second Amendment, 73 N.Y.U. L. REV. 793, 808 n.51 (1998); District of Columbia v. Heller, 554 U.S. 570, 578 (2008).


35 PARKER, supra note 34, at vii. In the period between 1788 and 1791 Coke’s rules on preambles were included in half of the James Parker manuals published in America in this interval. For a good example of how Parker’s views of preambles influenced other popular legal writers in this period, see FRANCOIS XAVIER MARTIN, THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE OF THE PEACE 186 (1791). On the importance of justice of the peace manuals in shaping early American legal culture, see generally Larry M. Boyer, The Justice of the Peace in England and America from 1506 to 1776: A Bibliographic History, 34 Q.J. LIRB. OF CONGRESS 315 (1977); John A. Conley, Doing It by the Book: Justice of the Peace Manuals and English Law in Eighteenth-Century America, 6 J. LEGAL HIST. 257 (1985).
assumptions to the text, one of the central pillars of Justice Scalia’s
textualist argument in *Heller* collapses.\textsuperscript{36}

Additional evidence that the Volokh/Lindgren/Scalia approach to
preambles is historically flawed is provided by the very example Lindgren
offers to substantiate his interpretation. When read in context, Lindgren’s
own effort to buttress Volokh’s argument, drawn from the Virginia
Declaration of Rights’ provision on freedom of religion, actually
undermines Volokh’s claim about the function of preambles in the
Founding Era.\textsuperscript{37} The Virginia text asserts:

That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging
it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and
therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the
dictates of conscience.\textsuperscript{38}

Lindgren’s gloss on this text is ahistorical; rather than reconstruct
eighteenth-century patterns of reading as the baseline for interpreting this
text, he simply reads the text as any modern lawyer might.\textsuperscript{39} For Lindgren,
“reason” is synonymous with logic and rationalism. Although this might be
a plausible reading if the text were written today, such an interpretation is

\textsuperscript{36} Although Volokh did not consult Founding era justice of the peace manuals in his
work on preambles, in his later writing on the Second Amendment he does invoke their
authority as highly probative of Founding era legal meaning. See Eugene Volokh, *The First
importance of justice of the peace manuals as evidence of public meaning in the Founding
Era).

\textsuperscript{37} Lindgren, supra note 1, at 707.

\textsuperscript{38} George Mason, *THE VIRGINIA DECLARATION OF RIGHTS* (June 12, 1776).

\textsuperscript{39} Lindgren’s interpretive approach is under-theorized in his essay, but he appears to be
using a textualist modality, taking the reasonable modern reader as his baseline for
interpreting the Virginia Declaration of Rights, a profoundly ahistorical approach to reading
an eighteenth century text. Thus, his interpretation neither follows a genuinely originalist
approach nor an authentic historical one. Cf. Gary Lawson & Guy Seidman, *Originalism as
 a Legal Enterprise*, 23 CONST. COMMENT 47, 48 (2006) (arguing for the reasonable Founding
Era reader as the basis for constructing original meaning). On the historical alternative to
originalism, see generally Saul Cornell, *Originalism As Thin Description: An
Interdisciplinary Critique*, 84 FORDHAM L. REV. 1 (2015); Saul Cornell, *Meaning and
Understanding in the History of Constitutional Ideas: The Intellectual History Alternative to
Originalism*, 82 FORDHAM L. REV. 721 (2013); Jonathan Gienapp, *Historicism and Holism:
Failures of Originalist Translation*, 84 FORDHAM L. REV. 935 (2015); Jack N. Rakove, *Tone
deaf to the Past: More Qualms about Public Meaning Originalism*, 84 FORDHAM L. REV. 3
(2015). There are multiple candidates for the legal meaning of a text, and not all are
determined by history. See Richard H. Fallon, Jr., *The Meaning of Legal “Meaning” and Its
Implications for Theories of Legal Interpretation*, 82 U. CHI. L. REV. 1235 (2015) (surveying
a variety of different possible candidates for how to ascertain the relevant legal meaning of a
text, including reasonable meaning, linguistic meaning, contextual meaning, intentional
meaning, and interpreted meaning).
hard to reconcile with the linguistic and ideological context in which the text was written and read in 1776. Here is how Lindgren reads the text:

Because of the preamble to Virginia’s Bill of Rights, would it be reasonable to think that Virginia could decide to protect religions that are based on reason, but not religions based on tradition and memorized catechisms? Of course not. The preamble gives a rationale and a purpose to the right (in this case, the protection of religious liberty); it does not restrict it.40

The term “reason” in this context was synonymous with the free exercise of an individual’s mental faculties: it meant to argue or to debate.41 Lindgren is clearly not familiar with the Enlightenment background of the Founding Era and its relevance to the history of religious freedom.42 George Mason, the primary architect of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, and Thomas Jefferson, another champion of religious freedom, were both profoundly influenced by John Locke’s writings on toleration.43 Locke and those who drew inspiration from him used the term “reason” in a much broader sense than Lindgren’s ahistorical reading of the text suggests: “Every Man,” Locke wrote, “has Commission to admonish, exhort, convince another of Error; and by reasoning to draw him into Truth.”44 Admonishment and exhortation were not antithetical to reason in Locke’s view. Thomas Jefferson used reason in a similar sense when he proposed the following bill in 1779: “The holy author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do, but to extend it by its influence on reason alone.”45 The Founding Generation would have been categorically

40 Lindgren, supra note 1, at 707.
41 SAMUEL JOHNSON, A DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (10th ed. 1792).
42 There is a vast literature on the American Enlightenment. For a useful starting point, see Shane J. Ralston, American Enlightenment Thought, INTERNET ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY, http://www.iep.utm.edu/amer-enl/ (last visited Sept. 1, 2016) (summarizing the central beliefs of the American enlightenment, including its support for a Lockean view of religious toleration).
opposed to any coercion in matters of religion, so the fit between the preamble and the enacting clause was actually quite tight in Lindgren’s example. In short, his own evidence contradicts Volokh’s claims about the function of Founding Era preambles.

The textualist arguments in favor of the militia-based view of the Amendment are among the strongest evidence to support this interpretation, but one need not rest such an argument on textualist grounds alone. Consider the case of St. George Tucker. Lindgren makes the following claim about Tucker’s understanding of the Second Amendment: “If, as the civic rights camp believes, the Framers believed in the civic rights view of the Second Amendment, somebody should have told St. George Tucker, perhaps the leading American legal commentator of the day.” It is not clear who exactly Lindgren believes should have told St. George Tucker about modern historical debates over his writings. There are two basic evidentiary problems with his claims about Tucker. First, Lindgren simply ignores Tucker’s clear statement that the reason the Second Amendment was adopted by the First Congress was to buttress the federalism provisions of the Tenth Amendment, a point that Justice Stevens raised in his *Heller* Dissent. Tucker’s text offers another example of a Founding Era source supporting a conception of the right to bear arms that Lindgren claims is a modern invention.

The second flaw in Lindgren’s interpretation derives from his failure to engage in a genuinely holistic historical exercise of reconstructing Tucker’s vision of rights before zeroing in on his interpretation of the right

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46 Tucker was a leading Virginia jurist and prominent Jeffersonian who published an important annotated American edition of Blackstone’s *Commentaries*. For Tucker’s relevance to modern debates over the Second Amendment, see District of Columbia v. *Heller*, 554 U.S. 570, 594–95 (2008).

47 Lindgren, supra note 1, at 709.

48 *Heller*, 554 U.S. at 666 n.32. Lindgren’s interpretation of Tucker relies entirely on the work of a single unrepresentative historian Robert Churchill. Lindgren, supra note 1 at 708. Most historians have been critical of *Heller* and the scholarship it rested on; for a quick summary, see Justice Breyer’s Dissent in *McDonald v. City of Chicago*, 561 U.S. 742, 914 (2010) (Breyer, J., dissenting) (describing the growing historical consensus that *Heller* was wrong). For a discussion of Justice Stevens’ use of Tucker and modern gun rights interpretations of Tucker’s writings, see generally Saul Cornell, *St. George Tucker’s Lecture Notes, the Second Amendment, and Originalist Methodology: A Critical Comment*, 103 NW. U. L. Rev. 1541 (2009). Lindgren’s failure to provide a full and balanced scholarly discussion of the evidence and debate over Tucker’s thoughts only underscores the ideologically distorted and tendentious nature of his essay. For a model scholarly treatment of this controversy that acknowledges the divergent interpretations of the Tucker evidence, see Martin H. Redish and Matthew B. Arnould, *Judicial Review, Constitutional Interpretation, and the Democratic Dilemma: Proposing a “Controlled Activism” Alternative*, 64 Fla. L. Rev. 1485, 1499–1501 (2012).
to bear arms. In volume two of Tucker’s Blackstone there is an expansive footnote that explains his conception of rights. Tucker divided rights into four different categories: natural, social, civil, and political.49 The right of self-preservation was a natural right. The category of civil rights for Tucker included rights related to citizenship. Thus, Tucker expressly noted that “aliens, women and children under the age of discretion . . . negroes and mulattoes . . . have no civil rights in Virginia, taken in this strict and limited sense.”50 These were precisely the groups in Virginia that did not bear arms, so Tucker’s category of “civil right” corresponds to the modern category of civic right.51 Lindgren approaches the Second Amendment with the simple dichotomous model that has come to dominate modern debate over this issue. Any scholar who took Tucker’s thought seriously and sought to understand it historically would recognize that the learned Virginian’s eighteenth century conception of rights simply does not fit neatly into the modern categories Lindgren and other legal scholars have sought to impose on the past. Lindgren and others who share his approach to the Second Amendment systematically conflate the common law right to keep or use arms for lawful purposes and the constitutional right to keep

49 ST. GEORGE TUCKER, BLACKSTONE’S COMMENTARIES: WITH NOTES OF REFERENCE, TO THE CONSTITUTION AND LAWS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES AND OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA 145 n.42 (1803). My notion of a civic right, the concept that Lindgren disparages as a modern invention, was based on Tucker’s notion of a “civil right.” I deliberately chose not to use Tucker’s own language because his preferred term carries such a different set of associations in modern law. See Civil Rights: An Overview, LEGAL INFORMATION INSTITUTE, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/civil_rights (last visited Sept. 1, 2016); Saul Cornell, St. George Tucker and the Second Amendment: Original Understandings and Modern Misunderstandings, 47 WM. & MARY L. REV. 1123, 1143 (2006) (arguing that the Second Amendment, by contrast, fit into Tucker’s third and fourth categories, civil rights and political rights). “Tucker’s term ‘civil right’ might best be rendered in modern parlance as a civic right, a right that ‘appertain[s] to a man as a citizen or subject.’” Id. (quoting TUCKER, supra note 49, at 300). In response to Lindgren’s snide suggestion that someone needed to inform Tucker about the existence of a civic right, it would be more relevant to ask why Lindgren did not discuss Tucker’s eighteenth century conception of civil rights and its relevance to arms bearing?

50 TUCKER, supra note 49, at 145.

and bear arms as part of a well-regulated militia. In Tucker’s terminology, the former was a natural right modified by common law and the latter was a civil right. A Moravian pacifist in Pennsylvania might have been able to bear a gun for a variety of lawful purposes, but he would have been religiously scrupulous about bearing arms. Women and children might claim a right of individual self-defense under common law, but were not among those who were required to bear arms. Although not every use of the phrase “bear arms” was exclusively military, it was unquestionably the dominant usage in the print culture of the Founding Era. Even if one casts aside the actual patterns of usage, and treats the two usages as equally plausible, Founding Era rules of construction required a recourse to the text’s preamble as the appropriate way to decide which reading was legally correct.

Lindgren’s methodology also suffers from a common problem that nearly all originalist inquiry falls prey to, a failure to weigh and adequately contextualize eighteenth century texts, effectively treating all sources as if they were equally probative. Legal scholar Larry Kramer has described

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52 As Yale’s Reva Siegel observes, “there is more evidence in the majority opinion establishing the existence of a common law right of self-defense than there is demonstrating that such a right was constitutionalized by the Second Amendment’s eighteenth-century ratifiers.” Reva Siegel, Heller and Originalism’s Dead Hand, 56 UCLA L. REV. 1399, 1415 (2009).


54 See Cornell, supra note 49, at 400.

55 Nathan Kozuskanich, Originalism in a Digital Age: An Inquiry into the Right to Bear Arms, 29 J. EARLY REPUBLIC 585, 606 (2009) (reviewing the scholarly debate over the meaning of the term “bear arms” in the Founding Era and concluding that the dominant usage in the print culture of the period fits a military or collective self-defense understanding of the term).

56 BLACKSTONE, supra note 48, at *60.

57 As traditional originalist Richard Kay has noted, public meaning originalism has made it easier to manipulate sources about original meaning, not rendered originalism more rigorous. Richard S. Kay, Original Intention and Public Meaning in Constitutional
this originalist error as the “funhouse mirror” effect, in which evidence from the past is magnified out of proportion to its actual influence or significance, producing a grotesquely distorted version of the actual history.58 Lindgren’s discussion of Maine Anti-Federalist Samuel Nasson’s views of arms bearing illustrates this type of distortion.59 It is easy to see why Lindgren would have chosen Nasson’s text, which is readily available to modern researchers, because of its inclusion in modern documentary collections.60 The fact that a text is widely available to modern scholars does not necessarily mean that it was widely available in the Founding Era or even representative of broader views at the time it was written. Nasson was writing to George Thatcher, a Federalist member of the First Congress, and a lawyer who would go on to become one of New England’s most illustrious jurists.61 Nasson was a barely literate Maine Anti-Federalist, an odd choice for a proxy for the typical reader of the Constitution posited by most originalist theories.62 Lindgren never provides a compelling legal justification for taking the views of the Anti-Federalists electoral losers and substituting them for the victorious Federalists who dominated the First Congress that actually wrote the Second Amendment.63 There is no


59 Lindgren commits a common originalist error by treating the Founding Era as if it were a time of broad constitutional consensus instead of recognizing the profound tensions and conflicts in this period. See Cornell, supra note 51, at 47. On the range of voices in the Founding Era on the meaning of the right to keep and bear arms, see Saul Cornell, A WELL REGULATED MILITIA: THE FOUNDING FATHERS AND THE ORIGINS OF GUN CONTROL IN AMERICA 41–70 (2006). For a slightly revised version of this argument based on post-Heller scholarship, see Saul Cornell, The Right to Bear Arms, in THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION 739–44 (Mark Tushnet et al. eds., 2015).


61 See Cornell, supra note 59, at 64.


63 See generally Saul Cornell, THE OTHER FOUNDERS: ANTI-FEDERALISM AND THE DISSENTING TRADITION IN AMERICA, 1788–1828 (1999) (arguing that anti-federalism is best understood as including at least three distinctive groups—elites, middling radicals, and plebeian radicals; the backcountry was dominated by the latter two groups); Richard H. Fallon, Jr., The Many and Varied Roles of History in Constitutional Adjudication, 90 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1753 (2015) (analyzing different models of historical meaning relevant to constitutional theory).
credible historical evidence to support Lindgren’s assumption that Nasson’s views had any influence on Thatcher or any other members of the First Congress. If Nasson’s view had been as typical or as influential as Lindgren claims, Congress would have modeled the language of the Second Amendment on the Dissent of the Pennsylvania Minority, a widely distributed Anti-Federalist text which had demanded express protection for a right to hunt. Yet, despite its wide distribution, no other published author or state ratification convention echoed the Dissent’s demands for such a right and it was not included in the text Madison consulted when drafting the Second Amendment.

Lindgren’s silence about Thatcher’s extensive discussion of the meaning of the right to bear arms written in the Cumberland Gazette is also puzzling. “Scribble Scrabble,” the identity Thatcher adopted in his popular writing, offers yet another example of an eighteenth century source that supports a civic conception of arms bearing that Lindgren claims is a modern invention. As this brief response has repeatedly demonstrated, Lindgren has not grappled with the voluminous scholarly literature on this issue, especially scholarship written after Heller. Nor has he demonstrated a solid grasp of the relevant historical methodologies necessary to understand the meaning of Founding era legal texts. The role of history in constitutional adjudication remains controversial, but one thing seems indisputable: if we are going to use history in constitutional law we

66 George Thatcher, Scribble Scrabble, Cumberland Gazette, Dec. 8, 1786. In this essay Thatcher uses the term “bear arms” broadly to include both military and non-military uses, while simultaneously asserting that only bearing arms for the common defense was constitutionally entrenched in the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights. For a discussion of Thatcher’s views on the right to bear arms, see generally Patrick J. Charles, Scribble Scrabble, the Second Amendment, and Historical Guideposts: A Short Reply to Lawrence Rosenthal and Joyce Lee Malcolm, 105 Nw. U. L. Rev. 1821 (2015).
67 In his preface, Lindgren commends the articles in the symposium for adopting “a seriousness of tone and a commitment to evidence-based reasoning.” Lindgren, supra note 1, at 711. He further suggests that future scholarship must “follow the evidence to reach conclusions that our ideological compatriots might not embrace.” Id. at 715. Given these statements, the failure to cite or engage with post-Heller scholarship is even harder to fathom.
need to get the history right. At the start of his foreword, Lindgren warned: “Guns seem to have a strange power over people: too often passion drives out thought.” Ironically, Lindgren’s own essay has become yet another illustration of this sad fact. Instead of moving the debate forward, Lindgren’s account is stuck in the acrimonious pre-<i>Heller</i> world. It is time to move this debate forward and bring greater historical rigor to Second Amendment scholarship.

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69 Lindgren, *supra* note 1, at 705.