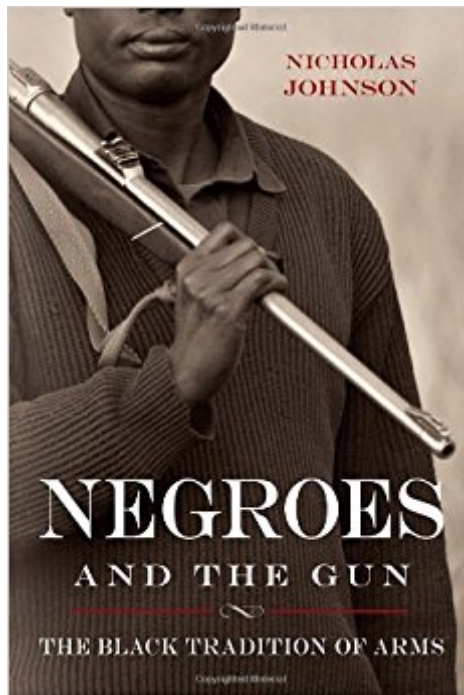




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# Negroes And The Gun: The Black Tradition Of Arms



## Synopsis

Chronicling the underappreciated black tradition of bearing arms for self-defense, this book presents an array of examples reaching back to the pre-Civil War era that demonstrate a willingness of African American men and women to use firearms when necessary to defend their families and communities. From Frederick Douglass's advice to keep "a good revolver handy as defense against slave catchers to the armed self-protection of Monroe, North Carolina, blacks against the KKK chronicled in Robert Williams's *Negroes with Guns*, it is clear that owning firearms was commonplace in the black community. Nicholas Johnson points out that this story has been submerged because it is hard to reconcile with the dominant narrative of nonviolence during the civil rights era. His book, however, resolves that tension by showing how the black tradition of arms maintained and demanded a critical distinction between private self-defense and political violence. Johnson also addresses the unavoidable issue of young black men with guns and the toll that gun violence takes on many in the inner city. He shows how complicated this issue is by highlighting the surprising diversity of views on gun ownership in the black community. In fact, recent Supreme Court affirmations of the right to bear arms resulted from cases led by black plaintiffs. Surprising and informative, this well-researched book strips away many stock assumptions of conventional wisdom on the issue of guns and the black freedom struggle.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“America’s gun culture is often thought to be lily white. In this groundbreaking book, Nicholas Johnson shows how African Americans, from the abolitionists to the Deacons for Defense and Justice, have taken up arms time and again to fight for their rights and their lives. You’ll never look at guns and the Second Amendment in the same way again.”

• Adam Winkler, professor of law, UCLA School of Law, author of *Gunfight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America*

“With *Negroes and the Gun*, Nicholas Johnson has provided a definitive and compelling history of the importance of arms for a people who have not been able to rely on the state for protection. This is must-reading for those who are interested in the history of race in America and in the enduring controversy over the right to bear arms.”

• Robert J. Cottrol, Harold Paul Green Research Professor of Law and professor of history and sociology, the George Washington University, and author of *The Long, Lingering Shadow: Slavery, Race, and Law in the American Hemisphere*

“Race has always been part of the unspoken motive for gun control in the United States. Johnson provides the best, most thorough history of the topic, telling the story mainly from the perspective and voices of blacks themselves. Shattering the myth of black passivity in the face of violent racism, the book is full of inspiring stories of genuine American heroes—some of them famous and many who were not—who used their Second Amendment rights to defend the civil rights of their people. Never shying away from the hardest questions, Johnson addresses the moral and practical complexities of armed self-defense, past and present. A major contribution to cultural studies and to the history of race in America.”

• David B. Kopel, research director, Independence Institute, Denver, Colorado

“Johnson opens a window on the increasingly airless and ever more heated dispute over the Second Amendment by examining blacks’ ambiguous relationship with guns over the centuries. He demonstrates that the right to armed self-defense was critical to saving black lives and livelihoods when confronted by violent hostility. This remarkable book remembers for us a long-forgotten, or possibly selectively forgotten, black tradition of arms—one too often overlooked in current debates over civil rights and gun legislation.”

• Alexander Rose, author of *American Rifle: A Biography*

“A fascinating and subtle history of the black tradition of armed self-defense. Carefully weaving social with political history from slave times to the present, Johnson explores the complex relation between this legitimate tradition and the occasional fruitless temptation of armed political resistance to oppression. He concludes with a strong argument for restoring the legitimate tradition even in the face of its rejection by the black political establishment and the inescapable reality that blacks are very disproportionately found among the perpetrators and victims of gun violence

today. It is Provocative and illuminating. — Nelson Lund, University Professor,  
George Mason University School of Law

Nicholas Johnson (New York, NY) is professor of Law at Fordham Law School, where he has taught since 1993. A graduate of Harvard Law School, he is the lead author of *Firearms Law and the Second Amendment: Regulation, Rights, and Policy* (Aspen 2012).

This book is headed for college classrooms everywhere. It is a fairly progressive author's trip down memory lane and how the facts of violent self-defense have been scrubbed from the anti-Slavery and Civil Rights movement. As a lawyer he documents the book exhaustively and as far as I can tell completely. He documents, time after, time how enslaved Africans, how fugitive Africans would fight their way to freedom with guns. How they had an underground market (gun shows) to buy, and or steal these guns. How these guns and their willingness to use them allowed many enslaved Africans to get to Free States. And once there, how many fugitive Africans would arm themselves with guns against those sent to re-captured them. I love the picture of Harriet Tubman one of the "conductors" of the underground railroad which helped enslaved Africans get to Canada (primarily) standing with a rifle. People claim she never used the rifle she was always pictured with, however the woman scouted for the Union army invading the south. This book appears to mainly for liberals, progressives and those active in, or study about the Civil Rights struggle, thus its language is in their nomenclature. It is a useful book for conservatives to read and understand for discussion with liberals, progressives and people who have a deep respect for the civil rights era. The history of the fight against slavery and the civil rights struggle has been modified and right of self-defense, political violence has been minimized. The truth is (as you would expect) there were people who used violence and there were many more people who used non-violence. Both were useful at times and under different circumstances. "The True Remedy for the Fugitive Slave Bill is a good revolver, a steady hand, and a determination to shoot down any man attempting to kidnap." - Frederick Douglass, 1854

How can I begin? This book shows how Black Americans used firearms for personal self defense and to get their freedom. The civil rights movement has been taken over by EXTREMELY left wing social justice people who are more interested in carrying a narrative than giving students a truthful all around honest look at history from the good to the bad. I doubt this book will be given much attention at most colleges but I hope it will. Everyone might not respect your ethnic heritage but

everyone respects a gun. I would like to thank Professor Johnson for writing this much needed and eye opening book which tells our stories as Americans of African descent.

This is an important book, and one well worth study. African-Americans in the USA have had a long history of bearing arms in this country, especially in self-defense where racism was the cause of the attacks. It's important to note that most gun control in our country's first 170 years or so was aimed not at controlling crime, but keeping minorities disarmed so they could be kept in their place. The author spends a lot of time and provides a lot of detail covering many instances of how African-Americans used guns for defense, often successfully, sometimes not. Why did I only give it 3 stars? While the scholarship is excellent, it's mostly a very boring read. For me, I could only read a few pages at a time, perhaps covering an instance or two, and then I'd find myself bored or nodding off. I'd love to see a documentary made using much of the material in this book, but the book itself is quite a tough slog to keep reading through.

An enjoyable and thought provoking romp through the Black Tradition of Arms. Wonderful, with comprehensively researched stories, told in a fluid style. The final final chapter will hopefully provoke meaningful discussions about the right to gun ownership in our inner cities.

This book really is quite illuminating. Self-Defense is seen to be an innate human characteristic common to all societies. Blacks have always engaged in self-defense. The gun was a means that allowed many blacks either to avoid mobs and extra-judicial lynching as well as personally directed violence. This book highlights the value of this gun possession to support the civil rights movements in the fifties and sixties. The book also highlights the futility of using the gun to elicit social and political change, especially considering the minority status of blacks. "Non-Violence" was a tactical and philosophical choice of the Civil Rights and not incompatible with self-defense. The book shows that our current thinking about the development of the civil rights movement is incomplete and filled with more complexities than was previously appreciated.

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