

August 24, 1994

Gun Bans and "Schindler's List"

by William R Tonso & David B. Kopel

"I think that *Schindler's List* should be required viewing for everybody in this room." *Schindler's List*, of course, is the Academy Award-winning movie about the Holocaust. The speaker was crime victim Suzanna Gratia, and the setting was a U.S. House subcommittee hearing on the so-called "assault- weapon" ban. Among the people who Dr. Gratia felt should be required to view this movie were two congressmen supportive of the most restrictive gun controls: Jewish Congressman Charles Schumer (D-New York), and Black Congressman Mel Reynolds (D-Illinois). She may as well have been speaking to a couple of sign posts.

Then again, maybe seeing the movie would not have helped Representative Schumer or Reynolds, since the movie omitted a critical part of the real story: the part where Schindler gives all the Jews semiautomatic rifles. According to Mr. Schindler's wife Maria, when Schindler decided to liberate his Jewish workers, he handed them all semiautomatic weapons so they could fight the Nazis.

In today's politically correct Hollywood, Steven Spielberg probably would have ruined his chances for an Oscar by telling the whole story about Oskar Schindler's devotion to freedom.

The notion that genocide victims such as Bosnians or Rwandans should fight back, rather than counting on the United Nations or Bill Clinton to save their lives is not heard very often on the weekly news analysis programs.

Even some survivors of the Holocaust seem to think that we'll all be safer if only the government has all the force. Consider the following letter that recently appeared in *Guns & Ammo* magazine:

"I am a survivor of the Nazi death camp Treblinka and I remember just like it was yesterday how the Nazis came and forced me out of my home and into the death camp with their automatic weapons. I managed to survive the Holocaust and came to the United States. I settled in New York and saw gun violence everywhere. Later I learned that the United States says that Americans actually have a right to own

guns. I just couldn't believe it and I promised myself to do all I could to stop the violence. I am writing this letter- to every pro-gun magazine in the United States hoping that maybe just one gun owner will decide to do the right thing and turn his guns in to the authorities."

We still wonder if this letter should be taken at face value. Surely any Holocaust survivor would recognize that the guns used to victimize him or her were in the hands of the authorities; the same authorities that forbade the victims to possess guns for their own defense. And yet the views expressed by the writer, Samuel Goldberg, concerning the civilian possession of guns are apparently shared by many of the most politically and culturally influential of his ethnic kin in this country - politicians such as Schumer and Senators Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) and Dianne Feinstein (D-California), plus a long list of other politicians, academics, and news and entertainment media personalities, But the lessons of the Holocaust weren't lost on Israel, where all law-abiding citizens are allowed to own and carry guns. Whatever else may befall Israel, the people there will never be murdered *en masse* by a dictatorial government. You see, in every one of the major genocides of the 20th century (Nazi, Soviet, Chinese, Cambodian, Ugandan, Guatemalan, and Armenian), the victims were first disarmed.

As detailed in the new book *Lethal Laws* by Jay Simkin, Aaron Zelman, and Alan M. Rice, not every country with repressive gun laws has genocide. but every country with genocide has repressive gun laws. Put another way, a well-armed populace is a very effective guarantee against mass murder by the government.

So in response to Mr. Goldberg's letter telling people to give the government their guns, Aaron Lippman wrote back that his Holocaust-survivor father insisted that "never again would he or his family be rounded up like sheep for the slaughter! They would have the will, the training, and the means to fight back. He taught us that to die fighting tyranny like this is preferable to what happened to our family and relatives under the Nazis."

Even the scholarly and very liberal Constitutional law professor Sanford Levinson, no gun enthusiast, has acknowledged that "a state facing a totally disarmed population is in a far better position, for good or ill, to suppress popular demonstrations and uprisings than one that must calculate the possibilities of its soldiers and officials being injured or killed."

Likewise, not all prominent blacks are as eager as Mel Reynolds to remove from the Bill of Rights a right which was so long denied blacks. After all, not being able to possess guns was a condition of slavery that guaranteed that slaves would remain slaves, and Blacks still have to look out for themselves in many parts of this country. Long-time National Chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality, Roy Innis, economists Walter Williams and Thomas Sowell, are among the prominent blacks who strongly reject the notion that law-abiding Americans must be disarmed to combat high rates or black-on-black violence.

It's true, of course, that a risk associated with an armed populace is that occasionally even an individual who isn't part of the thug subculture may harm innocents with his weapons. Doctor Gratia herself survived a shooting rampage by a madman in a Texas cafeteria, Her parents weren't so lucky.

However, the risk associated with an unarmed populace is that it can be enslaved

or annihilated by a rogue government. Throughout history, the unarmed have been safe only as long as the armed (criminals or government agents) have allowed them to be safe. And Dr. Gratia reminded Representatives Schumer and Reynolds, our right to keep and bear arms was intended mainly as a means of protection against the kind of tyranny that the Founding Fathers knew was always possible, unless human nature were miraculously changed.

Of course, the idea that government should be kept under strict control, or the idea that government could one day start killing people is deeply offensive to the statist movers and shakers of the gun control movement, including the current occupants of the White House. The dangers posed by government apparently are conveniently forgotten by many who become part of it.

William R. Tonso is a professor of Sociology at the University of Evansville. David B. Kopel is Research Director of the Independence Institute, a think-tank in Golden, Colorado.

Website: <http://www.davekopel.com/>