

Behind Enemy Lines

We finally have a new president, and for gun owners, it was a lucky break. I know that there are some purists out there who worry that during the campaign, George W. Bush, Jr. sounded a little too willing to back gun control measures. I like to remind people that during the Republican primary, Senator John McCain *said* the right things about gun control—but often voted against us. Governor George Bush of Texas sometimes didn't *say* what we wanted to hear, but when non-discretionary CCW issuance arrived on his desk, he signed it. When a bill to prohibit local governments from suing gun makers into bankruptcy arrived on his desk, he signed it. An ounce of action is worth a pound of words.

Ellen Goodman's December 27, 2000 column despaired that the Million Mom March had failed to make gun control a factor in the election. But she was wrong. The Million (give or take 900,000) Marching Moms did make gun control a factor in the election. That's why Gore lost!

Back on April 24, 2000, Al Gore was banging the drum for how mandatory child safety trigger locks, and photo license IDs for the purchase of new handguns was going to stop incidents like the shooting between rival gangs at the National Zoo. By the final debate with Bush, Gore was doing his best to not sound like a gun control advocate, and with good reason: Gore's campaign had figured out that "gun control" was selling well with liberal, urban Democrats on the coasts—who weren't going to vote for Bush no matter what—and was hurting Gore badly in the rest of America.

Don't take my word for it. Ask President Clinton. On December 19, 2000, he told Dan Rather on CBS's *60 Minutes* that, "I don't think there's any doubt that, in at least five states I can think of, the NRA had a decisive influence" in costing Gore the election.

America is fast becoming two countries, and this was obvious when you looked at maps showing which counties voted for Bush, and which voted for Gore. The Gore counties were overwhelmingly the Northeast and the West Coast, with a few urban and college counties in the Midwest. In most of the West, the Midwest, and the South, Bush steamrolled right over Gore—even in Gore’s home state of Tennessee.

What distinguishes these two Americas? I live in Sonoma County, just north of San Francisco. It is, in some ways, one of the more extreme versions of Al Gore’s America. I am writing to you from behind enemy lines. Gore took 59.6% of the vote here; Bush received 32.3%. For those of you who live in George Bush’s America, you probably have an image of the sort of people that vote so strongly for Al Gore—and you would be wrong.

This county has so many millionaires that I distinguish among my acquaintances between the “ordinary millionaires”, the “decamillionaires”, and one slight acquaintance whose driveway is several *miles* long. There are “starter homes” available around \$180,000, and a nice but perfectly ordinary suburban home like mine approaches half a million dollars. Porsches, BMWs, and Corvettes are pedestrian; you need a Lamborghini, a Ferrari, or (drumroll, please) a stretch limo Humvee to turn any heads around here.

My children figured out by fourth grade that we were the “weird family” because Mom and Dad were still together; by seventh grade, being sober makes you an outcast here, and quite a few parents supply alcohol and marijuana to their ninth graders. (As a co-worker explained it to me, “Getting drunk is just a part of being a seventh grader.”) There are *way* too many junior high age girls here who have been raped while drunk or stoned at parties. This place is a moral cesspool. And because a few of you might be making some

assumptions about this—this place is overwhelmingly white. There are poor people here, but not as many as you might expect for a solidly Democratic place.

And does this county hate guns. A few years back, I was standing in line at Sears, waiting to get a watch battery replaced. There was another guy about my age in line, and the subject of raising kids came up in conversation. He started to talk about the importance of getting your kids involved in team sports early, certainly by nine or ten, “before they get into”—okay, *you* finish the sentence. Drugs, right? No. The closing word of the sentence, what he feared that the kids would “get into,” was “guns.”

I was so startled that I didn’t know what to say. (Speechless is not a normal state for me.) I just stared at him in amazement, not quite sure that I heard that last word correctly. I have since discovered that to much of the population of this county, and I fear, much of the rest of Al Gore’s America, the prospect of a kid learning to shoot a gun under adult supervision is far more frightening than little Johnny getting loaded before he reaches middle school.

There is another America out there, one that hasn’t demonized guns, and still tries to teach responsibility to their kids. This last New Year’s, our family went to a cabin in the Trinity Alps of California—a part of George Bush’s America. Bush won Trinity County by almost exactly the margin that Gore won Sonoma County. Neither the cars nor the houses are fancy in Trinity County—I have enough credit limit on the cards in my wallet to buy a three bedroom house there. It is low density, scenic, and there are no high paying jobs there—just ordinary people doing hard jobs for low wages.

My wife and I drove off to find some breakfast makings, and on our way back to the cabin, “THWACK!” I could see a trace of green paint on the outside window next to my

wife, and I figured out pretty quickly that the kids that I had seen an hour earlier with a paintball gun had fired on us as we drove past.

We parked near our cabin, and while still trying to find a grocery store, I struck up a conversation with a guy about my age. He would not have “fit in” to Sonoma County. His clothes were a bit ragged, no designer labels, and he had a couple of days of stubble on his face. By the standards of Sonoma County, he was a “hick.” I told him about the paintball gun incident, and he immediately asked what color. I told him, and he said, “I know what kid did that. My son just got a paintball gun for Christmas.” Then he gave me directions to come back to his house, where his two sons washed the car with that look that told me that they were in *big* trouble with Dad. I don’t think the paintball gun was going to be in Junior’s hands for a little while.

There are two Americas that have formed. One is obscenely rich, and unsurprisingly, in moral decay. The other isn’t quite as poor as it was ten years ago, but it is richer morally than it is financially. That father who owned up to his kid shooting at our car could have just stared blankly at us, and said, “Wow, that’s a bummer.” But he considered that there was a moral lesson to be taught to his son. He made no excuses for his son’s actions, nor did he try to hide from us that his son was the shooter. It is perhaps a sign of how corrupting living in Al Gore’s America is that I was actually surprised to see the father do the right thing.

In some sense, Al Gore’s America is right to be concerned about guns. Intoxication and dangerous machinery—and that includes guns—don’t mix. Parents who consider getting drunk “just a part of being a seventh grader,” or who supply intoxicants to their

children *should* be concerned about their kid finding a gun. But even more, it should be asking if perhaps they have lost sight of something a bit more important.

Clayton E. Cramer is a software engineer with a Northern California telecommunications equipment manufacturer. Praeger Press published his most recent book, *Concealed Weapon Laws of the Early Republic: Dueling, Southern Violence, and Moral Reform*, in 1999. His web page is <http://www.ggnra.org/cramer>.