

Come down from the mountaintop

By: Edward H. Oh – January 25, 2013

Among the usual cabal of nail-biters and hair-splitters on the pro-gun side of what is turning into an historic national debate about our gun culture, now comes the Cato Institute in a pair of blogs critiquing New York's just-passed weapons bill, as well as President Obama's compendium of gun regulatory proposals.

To put it succinctly, the Cato Institute worries that recent state legislative and executive steps to curb gun violence amounts to cosmetic, but ineffectual, emotional gestures at best and crass government over-reach at worst. There is a point to be made that when you're trying to define the contours of what we all acknowledge is every American's fundamental right to bear arms under the Constitution, prudence and deliberation must guide the fashioning of any proposed regulations. But you have to do more than simply question whether any new gun law would prevent the next mass killing.

Last I checked, we ban murder in this country whether by hand, knife, gun, car or brick. The instrument of murder is immaterial to the prohibition, and is only factored in the sentencing phase to measure the level of depravity with which that murder was conducted. We can find that a defendant is guilty of murder if he kills someone with one shot from a revolver. We can label such murder as depraved and worthy of greater punishment if the murderer gratuitously unloads his entire clip into the body of his victim.

The fact that homicide appears to be an immutable part of the human condition has not prevented civilized society from taking a moral and legislative stand to outlaw it. Every state has laws making murder illegal because we as a country want to deter it, but also because we want to make a statement that we as a civilized people do not morally condone it. The fact that we continue to have murder every day in this country is not an argument for taking laws against killing another human being off the books. Laws against murder are there because they reflect our society's ethos that individuals have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and that right shall not be impinged.

When considering arguments against stricter gun controls, I invite anyone to substitute the term "murder" for every mention of gun or ammunition magazine, and re-read the argument to yourself. Consider how silly the argument sounds when that is done, and you will see why the naysayers of reasonable gun legislation do not have a leg to stand on in this fight. Their contrarian arguments seem on the surface to be reasonable, but are betrayed as facile and intellectually disingenuous when fully explored.

Perhaps such arguments are good enough for those who like to play patriot games in the mountains on weekends or dress up for Renaissance festivals in the fall, but they should not be satisfactory to anyone with a smidgeon of good sense. Now, I'm not trying to make fun of the Renaissance demographic, as I, myself, took my family to our local

Renaissance festival this past fall, and we enjoyed ourselves immensely. But, at the end of the day, we went home and back to our lives.

The problem with today's gun debate is that it has to accommodate a contingent that sees itself as latter-day Patrick Henrys defending freedom from an ever-growing government tyranny. These people need to come down from the mountain top and rejoin their communities to make a better world of our children.

It's time for Americans to stop play-acting and work for meaningful change to our gun laws.