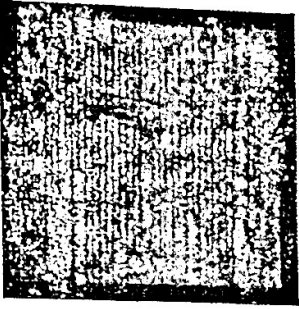


The Second Amendment

"I SAY THAT THE SECOND AMENDMENT IS, IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE, THE FIRST AMENDMENT. IT IS AMERICA'S FIRST FREEDOM, THE ONE RIGHT THAT PROTECTS ALL THE OTHERS. ... IT IS THE FIRST AMONG EQUALS. IT ALONE OFFERS THE ABSOLUTE CAPACITY TO LIVE WITHOUT FEAR. THE RIGHT TO KEEP AND BEAR ARMS IS THE ONE RIGHT THAT ALLOWS RIGHTS TO EXIST AT ALL."

Charlton Heston



Amendments are additions to the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights is the term for the first ten amendments (there are 27 in all). In the Bill of Rights, we find the Second Amendment, which by many is seen as the document that gives all Americans the right to own and carry guns.

The Second Amendment

A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

(infringed [kranke])

The message of the Second Amendment is not completely clear, and Americans do not agree on how to understand the meaning of it.

In plain words, the amendment states that:

A well regulated militia, consisting of members of the people, has the right to keep and carry weapons when this is necessary for the security of a free state.

The statement contains both:

- A right to keep and bear arms, "the right of the people to keep and bear arms".
- A context in which this right should be used, "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state".

In America today, the discussion of the Second Amendment is focused on how to understand the context: "A well regulated militia."

In pairs

- 1 In an American dictionary, the word 'militia' has two definitions:
 1. a part of the organized armed forces of a country, called on only in emergency
 2. a private group of citizens organized for military service

Look at the statements below and decide if they describe the word militia by definition 1 or definition 2. Look up the words you do not know.

- a. A militia is a kind of reserve army, controlled by the government.
- b. The militia groups meet in private and organise military training.
- c. A militia is the common man's defence against government tyranny.
- d. Armed citizenry is a duty for responsible Americans.
- e. The guns in their homes are registered state property.
- f. The militia members assist police and fire-fighters when ordered to do so.
- g. The militia members are ready to take the law into their own hands.
- h. Private, unregistered guns are kept in the home.
- i. The militia members feel patriotic.
- j. In America, the definition matches the National Guard.

- 2 The word 'regulated' also has two meanings in the dictionary:
 - a. controlled or governed according to rule or principle or law
 - b. marked by regularity or discipline

Match the definitions of 'militia' 1 and 2 with the definitions of 'regulated' a and b.

- 3
 - a. Which understanding of "a well regulated militia" would you have if you were an activist taking part in a campaign against unregistered gun ownership? Prepare to explain your answer in class.
 - b. Which understanding of "a well regulated militia" would you have if you were a militia member? Prepare to explain your answer in class.