



Gun Violence in America: The Struggle for Control

Alexander DeConde



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Few Social Issues Have produced more exaggerated claims and contention among Americans than the struggle to control gun violence. Fueling the emotional fire in debates between firearm groups such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) and gun control advocates is the dispute over the importance of guns in American culture. Is the fondness for firearms truly part of a venerable American tradition, one to be observed with very few limits? In this fascinating inquiry, Alexander DeConde delves into the myths and politics regarding gun keeping, as well as the controversies over gun use, crime, and policing from the early days of the republic to the present. The fact that the second amendment to the constitution appears to protect the right of the citizenry to keep and bear arms has led many Americans to assume that our forebears were uniformly a gun-loving people. By the early 1900s, the image of the American pioneer building the nation with gun in hand had become a widely recognized symbol of virtue, self-reliance, and the fight against tyranny. This glorified perspective of civilian gun keeping, maintains DeConde, offered an appealing reason for allowing private citizens easy access to firearms. It also often intimidated those who deplored their lethal use. The nation's early gun control advocates do not figure prominently in the history books, but despite their small numbers, they created a political legacy as impassioned as that of their pro-gun neighbors. DeConde shows that far from being a recent development, the gun control movement gained momentum among private citizens as an increasingly urbanized and industrialized country expanded westward and as small firearms became more numerous and deadly. In addition, he shows that local authorities increasingly sought to keep guns out of the hands of the wrong people. In response, gun owners banded together, forming a strong lobby capable of silencing these dissenting voices for their affront to the assumed American spirit. DeConde's in-depth analysis challenges the folklore surrounding gun use and brings balance to the debates about gun control. It also explains why the United States, with all its resources, fails repeatedly to confine gun violence to the same low levels achieved by other advanced democracies.

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