

PRAISE FOR *LATTER-DAY RESPONSIBILITY*

“How refreshing it is for voters in this year of Mitt Romney to have a voice that is both Mormon and libertarian. Here is that voice: Clear, compelling, full of faith, and understanding the need for limited government. Connor Boyack’s *Latter-day Responsibility* should be on Governor Romney’s desk, and the governor should read it for its extraordinary explanation of the shared values of Christianity, Mormonism, and personal freedom. This book will open your eyes to a well-spring of Western religious values that recognize the primacy of the individual over the state and insist that the government do the same.”

—Judge Andrew P. Napolitano
Senior judicial analyst, Fox News Channel

“America’s responsibility deficit is a more pressing challenge than anything we face in the economy, energy, education, or defense. Citizens must renew an individual ethic of doing the right thing by choice. People of faith, including my Mormon friends, understand this—but we need a sense of urgency and an action plan. Connor Boyack’s wise, timely, and practical book provides exactly that.”

—John Andrews
Former Colorado Senate president and author of
Responsibility Reborn: A Citizen’s Guide to the Next American Century

“Many patriotic Americans demand a more limited government, but few seem to have figured out the path to reach that goal. Connor Boyack’s important book explains in simple and compelling terms that limited government and liberty will be obtained through personal responsibility. The duty to take care of ourselves and those around us must be lived, encouraged, and popularized if we are to create a free society. *Latter-day Responsibility* helps pave the way for a restoration of this primary virtue.”

—John Pestana
Cofounder, Omniture

“Connor Boyack makes a compelling case for a return to personal responsibility as the bedrock principle needed to maintain the best virtues of our society. In this highly readable and informative book, he explains why our desire for preserving freedom will not become a reality until we first emphasize the importance of personal responsibility. ‘We will secure freedom for future generations,’ Boyack writes, ‘by first taking care of ourselves and those around us—a forgotten virtue that once permeated our culture. The battle for keeping our freedom alive and vibrant will not be won in the halls of Congress,’ he claims, ‘but in the hearts and homes of every individual.’ Boyack’s new book speaks to the heart of those who respect the role a spiritual perspective toward preserving freedom plays.”

—Daniel L. Bolz
President, The Statue of Responsibility Foundation

Latter-day
RESPONSIBILITY

CHOOSING LIBERTY
THROUGH
PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

CONNOR BOYACK
AUTHOR OF *LATTER-DAY LIBERTY*

SOCIAL **HARMONY**

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To Mom and Dad
Thanks for teaching me
to be responsible.

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Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild. It would be like the authority of a parent if, like that authority, its object was to prepare men for manhood; but it seeks, on the contrary, to keep them in perpetual childhood . . . For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances; what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?

Thus it every day renders the exercise of the free agency of man less useful and less frequent; it circumscribes the will within a narrower range, and gradually robs a man of all the uses of himself.¹

—Alexis de Tocqueville

Liberty will not descend to a people, a people must raise themselves to liberty; it is a blessing that must be earned before it can be enjoyed.²

—Charles Caleb Colton

PREFACE

hen I wrote *Latter-day Liberty* in 2011, it was meant to be a standalone volume. I consider what I wrote in that book to be extremely important not only for Latter-day Saints, but for every person, regardless of religion. Individual liberty is inexorably linked to agency, and these fundamental principles should guide not only our personal lives but also our interactions with others both directly and indirectly through government. It is my hope that what I perceive to be widespread ignorance on the subject will be increasingly corrected through the ideas presented in that book, as well as through the like-minded efforts by others working to advance the cause of liberty.

In the first few weeks after the book was published, many friends and supporters asked me if I was thinking of writing another. Given the time and energy required to write a book, I often replied that while I had a few ideas in mind, I probably would not attempt a second book for a few years. I have a young family, a busy career, and a significant time commitment to liberty-oriented activities and interests. The last thing I needed was to tackle another writing project so soon.

In what has become a long-standing cycle of course corrections in my life, I soon thereafter realized that my initial intentions would not last long. Just one month after the publication of *Latter-day Liberty*, the idea and structure of this book illuminated my mind with profound clarity while driving home one evening; I couldn't pull out my iPhone fast enough to make an audio recording of everything I was thinking. Once the brain dump was complete, I realized that I had the blueprint

for what was the obvious and necessary companion to my first book. It made sense, and I felt foolish for not having previously realized that in *Latter-day Liberty*, I had presented only one half of a two-part equation.

This book does not reflect a change of position from the principles and policies contained in *Latter-day Liberty*. That book deals with a subject that merits its own focus and discussion in order to fully understand what liberty is and how it applies to government and politics. In a sense, it can and should stand alone to allow for a narrow study of the specific issues it presents. Amplifying that understanding, though, requires expanding the discussion to related concepts that influence the degree to which our liberty can be attained and enjoyed. This book serves, then, as a companion volume to address the other half of the equation, for with increased liberty comes the obligation to assume more responsibility.

Latter-day Responsibility provides additional and needed context to help readers understand what our responsibilities are as citizens, including working to restrain the government and defend individual liberty. Just as we would only enter into a fight if we had the proper armor and training, so too must we understand the content in this book before battling the state.

NOTES

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2 (New York: The Century, 1898), 392.
2. Charles Caleb Colton, *Lacon: or, Many Things in Few Words*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1826), 123.

INTRODUCTION

If we wish to be free; if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending; if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained, we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight!¹

—Patrick Henry

Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibility. In fact, freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility.²

—Victor Frankl

Freedom is the best of things which can be found around the world if you can bear the burden.³

—Bishop Thomas Simonsson

s the saying goes, even a broken clock is right twice a day. So it was with a gentleman named George Bernard Shaw—an Irish playwright who cofounded the London School of Economics. Shaw was a staunch socialist and wrote many articles and brochures for the semi-secret Fabian Society⁴—a group dedicated to advancing socialism through politics and propaganda. Shaw’s political clock, while usually incorrect, struck correctly when he wrote: “Liberty means

responsibility. That is why most men dread it.”⁵ For his many intellectual failings, Shaw’s conclusion in the foregoing quote is accurate: liberty means responsibility.

It is not difficult to debate the various intellectual points of what liberty is and how it applies to government and politics. In doing so, it is easy to observe how the government is infringing on our rights and to point out problems needing correction. What is not so easy is understanding the related responsibilities, which is the corollary component of the equation, and how they apply to each of us. The following example illustrates this seeming paradox.

Thomas Paine was a master essayist during the seventeen hundreds known for his vitriolic and passionate pamphlets, in which he excoriated monarchy, oppression, and a government out of touch with its people. Paine wrote to convince the reader of the need to dismantle the reigns of unjust government. Frequently he wrote to point out violations of individual liberty at the hands of King George. John Adams was initially impressed with Paine’s *Common Sense* and was flattered when some suspected he was the author of the originally anonymous document. But as biographer David McCullough notes, “the more [Adams] thought about it, the less he admired *Common Sense*.” Writing to his wife Abigail in 1776, Adams commented that Paine was “a better hand in pulling down than building.”⁶ Adams’s uneasiness with some of Paine’s proposed ideas fueled a desire to propose his own. As McCullough notes:

It was Paine’s “feeble” understanding of constitutional government, his outline of a unicameral legislature to be established once independence was achieved, that disturbed Adams most. In response, he began setting down his own thoughts on government, resolved, as he later wrote, “to do all in my power to counteract the effect” on the popular mind of so foolish a plan.⁷

A decade later in a changed world, Adams reiterated his assessment of Paine’s efforts in a letter to James Warren, a fellow patriot from Massachusetts: “It is much easier to pull down a government, in such a conjuncture of affairs as we have seen,” he wrote, “than to build up at such season as present.”⁸ A few short years later on the issue of the French Revolution, Adams wrote in similar fashion to revolutionary Samuel Adams: “Everything will be pulled down. So much seems

certain. But what will be built up? Are there any principles of political architecture? . . . Will the struggle in Europe be anything other than a change in impostors?”⁹

In today’s world of rampant corruption, sky-high spending, and a pervasive erosion of the principles necessary for good government, it is tempting and—in fact—easy for each of us to be a modern Tom Paine. Many people expend significant amounts of time and energy tearing down offending politicians, pointing out violations of individual liberty, and attempting to throw off the heavy burdens of tyranny increasingly being imposed upon a once-free people. However, many of these well-intentioned individuals lack a principled, philosophical foundation upon which to build a solid substitute structure. They tear down without being ready to rebuild. They grasp in the dark for liberty without understanding how it applies to government and individuals and without being prepared to live it themselves. They claim to want liberty but do not want the corresponding responsibility.

This is not to say, of course, that all those who chafe against an encroaching government suffer from this intellectual dissonance. Indeed, many who realize the scope of the problem, and its darker implications, are often compelled to better understand true principles and engage themselves in a serious study of history and government. In this sense, their Paine-like criticisms are precursors to Adams-like study and actions.

Restraining government in order to secure individual liberty requires more than simply pulling down usurpations of power.¹⁰ As Shaw noted, liberty has a symbiotic relationship with responsibility; our opportunity and ability to defend individual liberty increase proportionally with our capacity and willingness to assume personal responsibility. Correspondingly, when we collectively disregard or delegate our responsibilities, we in turn lessen and ultimately risk losing our liberties. We should see personal responsibility as the price of liberty. We cannot properly claim the latter without also complying with the former.

For Latter-day Saints, this connection between liberty and responsibility should especially ring true. Lucifer’s counterfeit plan to “redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost” (Moses 4:1) would have necessarily nullified each individual’s agency. With neither the power nor the opportunity to choose and reap the consequences of our choices, personal responsibility would become irrelevant. Satan’s dictatorial

desire opposed both liberty and responsibility, while God's plan of salvation elevates both as part of an "individual effort"¹¹ in which men are "punished for their *own* sins" (Article of Faith 12, emphasis added). God has given us our agency and the opportunity (and responsibility) "to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil" (2 Nephi 2:27). The relationship between responsibility and liberty, or agency, was further articulated by President David O. McKay:

With free agency there comes responsibility. If a man is to be rewarded for righteousness and punished for evil, then common justice demands that he be given the power of independent action. A knowledge of good and evil is essential to a man's progress on earth.

If he were coerced to do right at all times, or were helplessly enticed to commit sin, he would merit neither a blessing for the first nor a punishment for the second.

Man's responsibility is correspondingly operative with his free agency. Actions in harmony with divine laws and the laws of nature will bring happiness, and those in opposition to divine truth, misery.¹²

In other words, the very purpose of our agency, or liberty, is to allow us to choose to do what is right—to do what God has commanded us to do. We are given our agency to see "if [we] will do all things whatsoever the Lord [our] God shall command [us]" (Abraham 3:25). This very agency provides us with the liberty to be either responsible or irresponsible. As Elder B. H. Roberts noted: "The agency of man would not be worth the name if it did not grant liberty to the wicked to fill the cup of their iniquity, as well as liberty to the virtuous to round out the measure of their righteousness."¹³ If we are not free to choose wrongly and irresponsibly, then we are in fact not free at all.

To effectuate this mission of perpetuating free agency, we must refrain from two forms of wickedness: sins of commission and sins of omission. Most people recognize that it is wrong to commit adultery, to steal, or to unjustly use violence against another person. These are sins of commission and overtly interfere with the life, liberty, property, and therefore agency of other individuals. Some people, however, do not sufficiently understand the much more lengthy list of sins of omission,

through which we surrender agency by neglecting responsibility. Not actively supporting good, honest, and wise men for positions of power and influence; not actively promoting morality in the public square; not learning skills and acquiring resources to be self-sufficient; not taking the steps necessary to provide for and protect those within our stewardship—these and many other responsibilities have been increasingly ignored in recent decades, yet they are part and parcel of promoting individual liberty. These responsibilities are generally recognized as being incumbent upon us, but they often go unfilled—a neglect of duty that has eternal consequences. As President John Taylor taught: “Besides the preaching of the Gospel, we have another mission, namely, the perpetuation of the free agency of man and the maintenance of liberty, freedom, and the rights of man.”¹⁴

Simply abstaining from explicitly violating God’s more well-known commands is not sufficient, neither for our individual salvation nor for the perpetuation of the individual liberty of mankind. Rather, we must proactively, willingly, and eagerly assume the personal responsibilities that are intertwined with individual liberty and, through persuasion (and never coercion), encourage others to act likewise. God has taught that “men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness . . . But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded . . . the same is damned” (D&C 58:27, 29). Fulfilling our personal responsibilities is how we “bring to pass much righteousness.” It is an effort with eternal implications, and one that should not be treated as a mere checklist of burdensome items to muddle through.

The rise of the welfare state, the police state, and the nanny state¹⁵ has occurred only because individuals have, in the aggregate, avoided the responsibility to take care of and to control themselves. As conservative columnist Walter Williams notes: “Our increased reliance on laws to regulate behavior is a measure of how uncivilized we’ve become.”¹⁶ It therefore follows that if we wish to dismantle the welfare, police, and nanny state, and to restore our lost liberties, we need to once again become civilized and responsible. We must relearn and assume the responsibilities that the government has taken over. Building up good government, as John Adams advocated, requires that we first build up ourselves.

Once more, individuals must recognize the importance of

responsibilities such as self-defense, self-reliance, charity, preparedness, financial freedom, education, food production, faith and morality, civic duty, and the family. Some of these can be supplemented or sometimes substituted with services by others through a division of labor. Nevertheless, we must recognize and personally act on the principle of personal responsibility. It is not our neighbor's duty, neither directly nor indirectly through government, to provide us with food, shelter, health care, or an education. The proverbial village should not shoulder the burden of raising our children for us. We should not consent to a government that competes with, and at times fully usurps, our natural responsibility to act in these and other areas of life.

John Adams, ever the builder, wrote to his wife, Abigail, in 1775:

It should be your care, therefore, and mine, to elevate the minds of our children and exalt their courage; to accelerate and animate their industry and activity; to excite in them an habitual contempt of meanness, abhorrence of injustice and inhumanity, and an ambition to excel in every capacity, faculty, and virtue. If we suffer their minds to grovel and creep in infancy, they will grovel all their lives.¹⁷

Unfortunately, we have become a nation of dependents. A full 48.5 percent of Americans receive some form of financial assistance from the government.¹⁸ Just as independence is secured by independents, so too do dependents foster dependence. Individuals today grovel at the feet of the state, begging to be cared for from cradle to grave. Even those who do not receive direct financial assistance from the government often strongly support government-run education, the “war on terror,” the voluminous regulations imposed by the FDA/EPA/USDA, the use of taxation to finance social services both at home and abroad, and a host of other government interventions that encroach on individual liberties. Having outsourced or shirked the responsibility to care for itself, this body politic has proven it is neither able nor willing to reclaim its lost liberties. Americans have given up their liberty for economic, physical, and social safety, and as Benjamin Franklin warned,¹⁹ we now have neither liberty nor safety.

Abigail Adams agreed with her husband, once remarking that “we have too many high-sounding words, and too few actions that correspond with them.”²⁰ The actions that correspond with a sincere desire

for individual liberty are those that demonstrate an individual's willingness to care for himself and those within his stewardship, along with a charitable outreach to others in need. It is not sufficient to simply talk about and work toward reducing the government's size and scope to the point at which we feel free—we must become free by living accordingly. When that point arrives, government will have no choice but to recede to its proper role and authority. We learn in the scriptures that "Satan shall have power over the hearts of the children of men, no more for a long time" (2 Nephi 30:18) specifically "because of the righteousness of [God's] people" (1 Nephi 22:26). Satan will not first be bound, providing people with the opportunity to become more righteous. His defeat will be secured because the people over whom he might otherwise exert control are already living righteously. The same pattern can and should apply to our relationship with the state: by becoming righteous and responsible, the state loses its power over us. President James E. Faust taught:

The Lord said that it is important for the Church to "stand independent above all other creatures beneath the celestial world" (D&C 78:14). Members of the Church are also counseled to be independent. Independence means many things. It means being free of drugs that addict, habits that bind, and diseases that curse. It also means being free of personal debt and of the interest and carrying charges required by debt the world over.²¹

One might reasonably argue that the state is one such "creature" above which the Church is to stand independent. The Church's independence is predicated upon the independence of its members, and individual independence will only be secured as we each perform our personal responsibilities. Our eternally important mission to pursue "the perpetuation of the free agency of man and the maintenance of liberty," as President Taylor said, depends in large measure upon whether we are each acting as a wise steward in individually doing what agency and liberty requires.

Many are familiar with the prevailing, founding-era idea that, in George Washington's words, "religion and morality are the essential pillars of civil society."²² In 1778, the Continental Congress passed a resolution declaring that "true religion and good morals are the only solid foundations of public liberty and happiness."²³ John Adams opined that

“our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”²⁴ While these ideas are sound, some interpret them to mean that we do not deserve, and should not have, a government confined only to moral and legitimate powers until the people who comprise that government are righteous and peaceful. This argument suggests that because people refuse to take care of and control themselves, that a welfare, police, and nanny state becomes justified and necessary. While such individuals may claim to understand the importance of individual liberty, they disregard its application to the government today by pointing to the rampant irresponsibility of the people around them. Why do we deserve good government, they ask, when so many people are so bad?

The underlying question is whether liberty should be held hostage to responsibility. Should we as a people only be granted the privilege of enjoying our unimpeded individual liberty when we collectively have achieved some arbitrary societal standard of sufficient personal responsibility? Must we implicitly consent to a government that infringes on those rights until and unless we all are living our lives as we should? The answer is found in understanding the nature of the relationship between liberty and responsibility. The one implies the other, and each are codependent states. Liberty is not fully contingent upon responsibility, nor is the reverse true. Rather, each influences the other—as we become more responsible, we are able to enjoy more liberty. Conversely, as we become less responsible, we become less free.

Thus, while some would erroneously argue that individual liberty should not be fully enjoyed until each person is living responsibly (a standard that will never be reached in our fallen world), an increase of individual liberty would actually prompt higher levels of personal responsibility. Consider an example: if the Federal Emergency Management Agency were abolished, along with all of its state-based counterparts, individuals would realize that in the event of a disaster, they would not be able to rely upon a team of bureaucrats and government funding to arrange and pay for food, shelter, clothing, and to otherwise assist them in the weeks following the disaster. Accordingly, individuals would either acquire needed skills and supplies to prepare for a potential disaster, or they would suffer the consequences of their irresponsibility. Either way, they would have the individual liberty and use of their agency to do as they please, realizing that they will ultimately

be held accountable for their choices. The same holds true in the reverse: by encouraging people to become more responsible—to prepare, to be charitable, to be financially independent, to have strong families and faithful lives—we reduce the influence and reach of the state and raise up an entire generation of independently minded people who do not need (and who therefore oppose) the government’s overreach.

By confining the government to its moral size and scope, we likewise provide an opportunity for individuals to reclaim their responsibilities and become wise stewards. By removing the government’s tentacles from so many aspects of our lives, we encourage people to learn to live independently as moral agents. Liberty is thus no longer held hostage by responsibility. Rather, both are augmented by reducing the reach of the state and persuading individuals to responsibly act rather than be acted upon.

If individual liberty is our desire, then personal responsibility is our duty. In discussing liberty, we concern ourselves primarily with what the government should not do. In discussing responsibility, we concern ourselves with what we as individuals should do. Lord Acton defined liberty as “the highest political end.”²⁵ Responsibility, then, is the highest personal end. Without it, liberty cannot exist.

NOTES

1. Patrick Henry, Speech in Virginia Convention, Richmond, March 23, 1775.
2. Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1984), 155–56.
3. Bishop Thomas, “Freedom Ballad,” accessed May 12, 2012, <http://runeberg.org/vitaband/0128.html>.
4. Shaw’s contributions also included designing a stained-glass window, now on display at the London School of Economics, which features Shaw and fellow Fabian socialist Sidney Webb striking the Earth with hammers, as the caption describes at the top of the window, to “remould it nearer to the heart’s desire.” The Fabian crest, also included in the window’s design, portrays a wolf in sheep’s clothing—a symbolic reference to the group’s avoidance of controversial and recognizable labels in aiming to instead advance its agenda incrementally and subtly through propaganda and legislation. At the bottom of the window, a group of people depicting the world’s population is shown kneeling in adoration at a stack of books which promote socialism.
5. George Bernard Shaw, “Maxims for Revolutionists,” *Man and Superman*:

- A Comedy and a Philosophy* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1903), 229.
6. Frank Shuffelton, ed., *The Letters of John and Abigail Adams* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004), 89.
 7. David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 97.
 8. McCullough, *John Adams*, 373-4.
 9. McCullough, *John Adams*, 418.
 10. An example is found in Alma 60:36, in which Captain Moroni wrote: "I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country." It might be argued that freedom relates to liberty, as welfare relates to responsibility. Thus, Moroni embodied both characteristics.
 11. Dallin H. Oaks, "Repentance and Change," *Ensign*, November 2003, 40. The full quote reads: "The gospel plan is based on individual responsibility. Our article of faith states the eternal truth 'that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression' (Article of Faith 1:2). This requirement of individual responsibility, which has many expressions in our doctrine, is in sharp contrast to Satan's plan to 'redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost' (Moses 4:1). The plan of the Father and the Savior is based on individual choice and individual effort."
 12. David O. McKay, In Conference Report, Apr. 1950, 33.
 13. B. H. Roberts, *A New Witness For God* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons., 1895), 48.
 14. John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 23 (London, 1883), 63.
 15. The "welfare state" is a term which references the collection of policies that provide for "free" resources for individuals allegedly in need, such as food stamps, unemployment insurance, health care, education, and so on. The police state is the collection of policies which turn the government into a militaristic institution that treats people as guilty until proven innocent, restricts or rejects the right to habeas corpus and due process, and which authorizes the strict regulation, invasion, and confiscation of personal property to allegedly suppress crime and punish those who have violated some statute. The nanny state is the collection of policies which aim to shape society and protect people from themselves, such as seat belt laws, business licensure, heavily taxing or completely prohibiting soda or cigarettes, and so on., each of which presumes that politicians and bureaucrats know better how to live our lives than we do.
 16. Walter Williams, "Laws Are a Poor Substitute for Common Decency, Moral Values," *Deseret News*, Apr. 29, 2009, A15.
 17. Shuffelton, Letters, 74.
 18. "Nearly Half of U.S. Lives in Household Receiving Government Benefit," *Wall Street Journal*, October 5, 2011, accessed May 12, 2012,

- <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2011/10/05/nearly-half-of-households-receive-some-government-benefit/>
19. Benjamin Franklin, *The Memoirs of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: McCarty & Davis, 1834), 99. The quote reads: “Those who would give up essential liberty, to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety.”
 20. Shuffelton, Letters, 28.
 21. James E. Faust, “Responsibility for Welfare Rests with Me and My Family,” *Ensign*, May 1986, 21.
 22. Jared Sparks, ed., *The Life of George Washington*, vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1839), 315.
 23. Continental Congress, *Journals of the Continental Congress, containing the proceedings from January 1, 1778, to January 1, 1779* (Philadelphia, 1779), 590.
 24. The Works of John Adams, vol. 9 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1854), 229.
 25. Lord Acton, *The History of Freedom and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1907), 22.

LIBERTY

I believe that a man is a moral, responsible, free agent.¹

—Joseph Smith

To address the importance of responsibility as it relates to liberty, it is necessary to first understand liberty. While the subject is treated at length in *Latter-day Liberty*, a brief summary is presented here to ensure that the reader has the necessary context to continue through the material in this book.

Liberty is a commonly used word, especially during election seasons, but only a relative few have a foundational understanding of what it is and, more important, what it implies. Liberty is the right to peaceably act as one pleases, provided he does not violate anybody else's equal, unalienable rights. It is, as described by Thomas Jefferson, "unobstructed action according to our will, within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others."² Elder Bruce R. McConkie similarly defined it as "the privilege to be free and to be unrestrained in all activity except that which interferes with the equally sacred rights of others."³ President David O. McKay described it by teaching that "a man may act as his conscience dictates so long as he does not infringe upon the rights of others."⁴ So long as you do not violate another person's rights, liberty demands that you be free to act as you peaceably please—whether that's ingesting a dangerous substance, owning a weapon, refusing to employ a certain type of people, or tearing out your front lawn and putting in a garden.

Liberty is an all-encompassing political philosophy that implies and requires economic freedom, political independence, and moral agency. It is an affirmation of each individual's unalienable right to life, liberty, and property—a position based on and supported by eternal principles and natural law. Liberty is a mindset and a comprehensive way of living wherein independent, self-reliant individuals affirm their ability to determine their own destiny, free from control by their peers either individually or collectively through government. In a way, liberty is rigid and stubborn. It often deals in absolutes, which runs contrary to how many people believe and behave. Just as a person cannot be partially alive, mostly alive, or almost totally alive, so too can a person not be partially, mostly, or almost totally free. We are either alive or dead. We either have liberty or we do not. If people are in bondage in one area of their lives, then they are not free. If they are dependent upon the government for anything, then they are not independent. If the state prohibits peaceful people from using their property how they please, then they do not have liberty. While freedom may be enjoyed in certain areas of our lives even while it is denied or discarded in other areas, a person who is not fully free cannot in fact say that he is free. Those who fight for liberty recognize its rigidity and work to remove the forceful arm of the state from all areas of their lives.

A political framework founded on liberty contemplates a society that functions through persuasion rather than through force. This is a key concept in the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we learn in the Doctrine and Covenants: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41–42). Liberty recognizes and respects the sovereignty and worth of each individual. It presumes that nobody (except God) knows how better to run a person's life than that person and therefore rejects policies that aim to control the actions of others without just cause. Those who champion this political philosophy see a great need for improving society, enforcing justice, encouraging charity, and promoting virtue. Unlike many, however, they know that the coercion by which the state operates cannot foster these important characteristics. Like the prominent journalist H. L. Mencken states, they “do not believe in even liberty enough to want to force it upon anyone.”⁵

What does liberty have to do with responsibility? Consider, for example, a society in which each individual has unrestricted enjoyment to all his rightful liberties. This society has governments that in no way exceed their authority to only impose justice against those who violate another person's liberty by committing an act of aggression. In this scenario, there would still be poor people, criminals, natural and man-made disasters, and evil influences pervading society. The only feasible way such a society might exist is if the people who comprise it were independently and individually taking care of themselves, helping to take care of others, preparing for future emergencies, and promoting faith and family to spread the gospel of peace and persuasion. A society that enjoys unadulterated individual liberty cannot exist without the vast majority of individuals acting responsibly of their own accord. Responsibility is the prerequisite to liberty.

Considering the opposite scenario reinforces this point. A society of individuals who don't look after themselves—who refuse to learn new skills, work more than one job when necessary, prepare for the proverbial and inevitable rainy day, defend themselves and their property, get out of and avoid debt, promote sound political principles, and so on—is effectively asking for the state (or someone else) to take care of them. Rather than acting, they implicitly invite the consequence of being acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:14). Into the vacuum created by inaction and irresponsibility, the state eagerly interjects itself. Thus, responsibility is an important trait that is inherently tied to individual liberty. More important, it is a core component of the agency God has given us.

THE AGENCY OF MAN

Agency is a fundamental doctrine and gift from God. It triggered an epic war in which a third part of God's children decided to follow Lucifer and as a result were denied the opportunity to experience mortality and progress toward becoming like their Heavenly Father. This agency led to their downfall yet enables us as individuals to be "free forever" (2 Nephi 2:26), if we utilize it correctly.

To better understand agency, consider the related word *agent*. An agent is an individual given responsibilities by the person he represents in a business transaction or other decision. Noah Webster defined agent

in his 1828 dictionary as “one that exerts power, or has the power to act” and “one entrusted with the business of another.”⁶ While this word is used in modern scripture, the Bible identifies agents as *stewards*. The responsibility of a steward is his *stewardship*, just as the responsibility of an agent is his agency.

Both an agent and a steward are responsible to make decisions and take action and later be held accountable by the delegator of the agency or stewardship. Dozens of scriptures demonstrate this relationship. For example, God has said that “Every man shall be made *accountable* unto me, a *steward* over his own property” (D&C 42:32; emphasis added). We also learn that “it is required of the Lord, at the hand of every *steward*, to render an *account* of his *stewardship*, both in time and in eternity” (D&C 72:3; emphasis added). Further, we are told “as ye are *agents*, ye are on the Lord’s *errand*; and whatsoever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord’s *business*” (D&C 64:29; emphasis added). Another scripture shows its importance: “For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man *accountable*, as a *steward* over earthly blessings . . . I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be *agents* unto themselves” (D&C 104:13, 17; emphasis added).

Thus, agency is simply one’s stewardship—the duties assigned by God. We can only fully discharge that set of responsibilities when our agency is unimpeded. As Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained, agency’s existence and effectiveness requires several components:

Four great principles must be in force if there is to be agency: 1. Laws must exist, laws ordained by an Omnipotent power, laws which can be obeyed or disobeyed; 2. Opposites must exist—good and evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong—that is, there must be an opposition, one force pulling . . . the other; 3. A knowledge of good and evil must be had by those who are to enjoy the agency, that is, they must know the difference between the opposites; and 4. An unfettered power of choice must prevail.⁷

As stewards of the individuals and resources God places in our care, we have been given specific, associated responsibilities. If we do not act righteously of our own accord, guided by God’s commandments, then we mismanage our stewardship and will suffer the consequences. As dictated by the law of the harvest, “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall

he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). By sowing actions in fulfillment of our personal responsibilities, we reap increased liberty. If we fail to sow such actions, then we risk implicitly justifying our neighbors in trying to act upon us (supposedly with our best interests at heart) through the collective force of government. As Benjamin Franklin once observed, “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.”⁸ If we as agents on the Lord’s errand do not fulfill our responsibilities, we cannot feign surprise when others attempt to do it for us and seize our liberty in the process.

Agency, stewardship, consequences, responsibility, duty—these and other interrelated concepts all describe a relationship between God and his children. We are on earth to acquire a physical body, gain experience, and prove ourselves worthy to return to our Heavenly Father. That process occurs by using our agency to obey God’s commandments and repenting of and learning from our mistakes and sins along the way. We obey God’s commandments by carrying out the many responsibilities we are given, each associated with the stewardships we have. In our roles as parents, business owners, citizens, neighbors, caretakers, teachers, and so on, we have an associated list of duties we must perform if we are to be faithful and effective. If we use our agency to be irresponsible and fail to fulfill these duties, those needs will either go unfulfilled or will be met by another individual or institution. In a society where a large percentage of individuals shirk or evade their responsibilities, those in need begin to believe that the state should be their protector and savior, intervening to satisfy unfulfilled needs. One of the most effective ways to oppose the state’s interventions, then, is to make them unnecessary by being wise stewards and using our agency to make good choices—in other words, by acting in accordance with our personal responsibilities and obeying God’s commandments. We gain ground for individual liberty by simply becoming more responsible and encouraging others to do the same.

AGENCY MEANS LIBERTY

Just as was the case during the war in heaven, it is imperative that we fight here on earth to defend our agency against any who might wish to inhibit it or take it away. As President Hinckley taught, today’s

continuation of that protracted war is “between truth and error, between agency and compulsion,” and requires “that we close ranks, that we march together as one.”⁹ It is arguably more important, however, that rather than simply defending agency, we promote its wise use. This entails, among other things, making good decisions, obeying God’s commandments, and using our agency in a righteous and responsible manner. By acknowledging, accepting, and acting upon our personal responsibilities, and by encouraging others to do the same, we switch from playing defense to playing offense in the battle to preserve agency. We put Satan and his legions on the ropes, and we increase tactical advantages. We win battles and gain ground, rather than defensively trying to limit our casualties.

Responsibility is one of the three *Rs* of agency, the other two being *right* and *results*. The right to choose is paramount and precedes the others, since having the unfettered ability to weigh and choose between different options is what allows agency to even be possible. This right comes directly from God, who made his children “agents unto themselves” (Moses 6:56) who are “free to choose” (2 Nephi 2:27) their course. The *responsibility* of choice requires taking accountability for one’s decisions, suffering whatever the consequences of those choices are, whether for good or for bad. This leads to the *result* of choice, where the consequences of one’s decision are brought to pass, whether immediately or in the future. The rights, responsibility, and results implicit in our agency are either a burden or a blessing, depending on how they are used. When we choose to fulfill our personal responsibilities—when we pay the price for the results we seek after—then we increase our ability to be free and independent. By choosing to abandon those responsibilities, the result will be much like what is occurring in the world around us: staggering debt, dependence upon the state, weak and broken families, and a general deviation from God’s commandments.

By being responsible, we become wise stewards of the many things God has placed under our care. As wise stewards, we protect our agency and promote righteousness. In becoming righteous, we ensure that our individual liberty has a strong and sure foundation upon which to resist the encroachments of the state. It is a virtuous cycle. In short, only by “supporting and defending the principles of truth, right, and freedom”¹⁰ can we truly preserve liberty. The cycle begins by choosing to be responsible.

NOTES

1. B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 78.
2. Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball, ed., *Jefferson: Political Writings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 224.
3. Bruce R. McConkie, "Know Your Constitution," *Deseret News*, March 26, 1945.
4. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, October 1938.
5. Guy J. Fogue, ed., *Letters of H. L. Mencken* (New York: Knopf, 1961), 281.
6. "Agent," 1828 Webster's Dictionary, accessed May 2, 2012, <http://1828-dictionary.com/d/search/word,agent>.
7. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 26.
8. Benjamin Franklin, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: Williams Duane, 1817), 199.
9. Gordon B. Hinckley, "An Unending Conflict, a Victory Assured," *Ensign*, Jun. 2007, 4–9.
10. L. Tom Perry, *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, 72. The full quote reads: "As Church members, we live under the banner of many different flags. How important it is that we understand our place and our position in the lands in which we live! We should be familiar with the history, heritage, and laws of the lands that govern us. In those countries that allow us the right to participate in the affairs of government, we should use our free agency and be actively engaged in supporting and defending the principles of truth, right, and freedom."

SELF-DEFENSE

*The great object is, that every man be armed.*¹

—Patrick Henry

*One loves to possess arms, though they hope never to have occasion for them.*²

—Thomas Jefferson

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. If an intruder entered your home at night, intent on doing harm to your children, how would you respond?
2. Would you be prepared to defend yourself after a large disaster, when police could not quickly respond to your 911 call?
3. Should a person defend himself from an attacker or submit himself to harm?
4. Would America have been founded if the colonists did not own and know how to use firearms?
5. Are Americans free because they are armed, or are they armed because they are free?

he September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on US soil created in their wake a pervasive sense of uncertainty and fear. In the days and weeks that followed, those feelings seemed to manifest

themselves in a few common questions asked by many. Why were we attacked? Why do the terrorists hate us? Are we at war? Why didn't the government foresee and prevent this from happening? In response, the government quickly erected a massive police state. The first step was the rushed introduction of the USA Patriot Act through Congress six weeks later—a 240-plus page bill that was previously written, not available to the public prior to the vote, and barely available to the elected officials in Congress, *none of whom read it* before casting their vote.³ This act expanded the federal government's ability to gather intelligence, engage in domestic surveillance and secret searches, and detain immigrants with little restraint—all in an alleged attempt to prevent a future attack like 9/11. On the same day it was introduced, October 23, the bill was brought to the floor of the House of Representatives for a vote. "No one has really had an opportunity to look at the bill to see what's in it," remarked one Representative.⁴ It passed 357 to 66, was passed by the Senate on a 98 to 1 vote the very next day, and then was signed into law two days later by President George Bush.

Two weeks previous, President Bush had announced the establishment of the Office of Homeland Security to "develop and coordinate the implementation of a comprehensive national strategy to secure the United States from terrorist threats or attacks. The Office will coordinate the executive branch's efforts to detect, prepare for, prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks within the United States."⁵ The office's efforts culminated in the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) one year later as a result of the Homeland Security Act of 2002. This law consolidated executive branch organizations related to "homeland security" into a single Cabinet department; twenty-two total agencies became part of this new apparatus.

A further attempt to prevent future terrorist attacks was the establishment of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) on November 19, 2001, as a result of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act. Later folded into the DHS in 2003, this much-loathed agency⁶ has become infamous for frisking, groping, and irradiating innocent individuals simply trying to visit a loved one or conduct business. Like the other institutionalized attempts to react to and prepare for future terrorist attacks, the TSA's efforts have created a colossal wake of collateral damage by violating the rights of peaceful people not

suspected of having committed any crime—leading its own creator to call the entire agency he once spearheaded “a complete fiasco.”⁷ Toddlers being frisked,⁸ elderly folks in wheelchairs with medical implants or devices being strip searched,⁹ a nursing mother who emptied her bottles of breast milk to avoid a security hassle then being forced to actually demonstrate her breast pump to prove that the pump was really for that purpose,¹⁰ a teacher having her frosted cupcake confiscated by TSA authorities because its gel-like frosting “counted as a [prohibited] gel-like substance,”¹¹ and thousands of stories like these all attest to a government boondoggle more interested in security theater¹² than in the actual security of each passenger.

These actions, and many more like them in the years following 9/11, could have been completely avoided—just as 9/11 could have been avoided. Understanding how requires a deep look into common questions like “Why do they hate us?” or “Why were we attacked?” We should have immediately considered the question of whether the attacks *could have been prevented*, and if so, how? One answer to this question could have been (and still is) the immediate termination of military interventions around the world. As the CIA has noted, the US government’s foreign policy can be negatively impacted by the “blowback”¹³ that occurs when the government’s agents kill people around the world, leading the family, friends, and countrymen of those (often innocent¹⁴) people to become angry and seek revenge. Osama bin Laden himself stated that he and his cohorts were attacking America “because of their evil and injustice in the whole of the Islamic World, especially in Iraq and Palestine and their occupation of the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries [Saudi Arabia].”¹⁵ While this is one answer, there is a much simpler one that is less known, and certainly much less controversial than complete military withdrawal.

To orchestrate the 9/11 attacks, terrorists commandeered planes using box-cutters as weapons. Why were pilots, charged with protecting their crew and plane, outmatched by a small piece of metal? The answer: just months before the attack, pilots were prohibited by a federal bureaucracy’s regulation from possessing a gun on board their planes. Since 1961, regulations from the Federal Aviation Agency (now Federal Aviation Administration) exempted law enforcement officers and other authorized airline personnel, including pilots, from a general prohibition against possessing weapons aboard aircraft. On July 21, 2001, the

FAA bureaucracy banned pilots and other authorized personnel from being armed on board their planes—thus making the cockpit a “gun-free zone” in which men with box-cutters could dominate the unarmed victims and gain control of the plane.¹⁶ Had that edict not been made by an unelected government employee, and had the pilots been armed, the tragic events of 9/11 may have been minimized if not altogether prevented.

Similar “gun-free zones” have been the setting of other catastrophic attacks. In 2006, Virginia Tech University lobbied their state legislature to prohibit concealed-permit holders from carrying a gun on campus. The bill which would have changed this policy in favor of permit holders was defeated at the committee level, prompting Virginia Tech’s spokesman Larry Hincker to congratulate the legislature for denying students the use of firearms on campus. “I’m sure the university community is appreciative of the General Assembly’s actions,” Hincker said, “because this will help parents, students, faculty and visitors feel safe on our campus.”¹⁷ Whether they *felt* safe or not, the mass murder committed on that campus just one year later proves that they were in fact *not* safe. Over the course of two and a half hours, a cold-blooded gunman killed thirty-two defenseless people and injured twenty-five others. Had any of the victims or those who successfully escaped been carrying a gun and been willing to fight back, it is extremely likely that the shooter’s rampage would have been substantially cut short; according to witnesses, the shooter often took his time and paused to reload.¹⁸ Even the shooting at Fort Hood two years later, in which a disgruntled Army major killed twelve fellow soldiers and wounded thirty-one others can be blamed in part on the “gun-free zone” created by a rule requiring soldiers to not carry guns on base unless as part of a training exercise.¹⁹ Soldiers who are highly trained and experienced in the use of their weapon, and with which they are constantly in contact while in potential combat zones, were disarmed and unable to minimize or prevent the assailant’s aggression.

Fortunately, these draconian restrictions have not turned everyone’s home into a “gun-free zone,” though some states such as New York, New Mexico, Virginia, and a few others have limited or no laws that codify people’s right to defend their person and property within their homes. An estimated one hundred-eighty million Americans²⁰ have a gun within the home, one of whom is Sarah McKinley of New York. In

September 2011, eighteen-year-old Sarah gave birth to a little boy. Three months later, on Christmas Day, her husband died of cancer. On New Year's Eve just one week later, Sarah was home alone with her infant son when two men, one armed with a knife in hand, attempted to forcibly enter her home. She called 911, retrieved a shotgun and handgun, and positioned herself defensively to use the guns if the would-be intruders were to successfully enter her home before police arrived. The men broke down the door, and as the first man entered the home, Sarah fired the shotgun and felled the intruder immediately. The other man fled and later turned himself in. Commenting later to reporters on her use of the gun to defend herself and her baby son, Sarah said: "I knew that I was going to have to choose [the intruders] or my son, and it wasn't going to be my son so I did what I had to do."²¹ Sarah acted responsibly and successfully defended herself and her son.

Every thirteen seconds, an American uses a gun in self-defense according to a comprehensive 1994 study.²² The study determined that in 15.7 percent of an estimated 2.5 million annual instances in which a gun was used in self-defense in America, the defender believed that someone "almost certainly" would have died had the gun not been used for protection. This suggests, if accurate, that a life is saved within the United States of America about once every 1.3 minutes. (In another 14.2 percent of cases, the defender believed that someone "probably" would have died had the gun not been used.) In over half of the gun defense incidents, the defender was being confronted by two or more attackers; three or more attackers were involved in over a quarter of incidents.

With millions of Americans finding themselves in circumstances where a gun is needed for defensive use, a need for the tools and training required to deter a threat is clearly needed. Of course, a gun is by no means the only weapon that can be successfully used to defend one's self and one's property. Six-year-old Rivers Hobbs was attacked by a mountain lion at Big Bend National Park in February 2012 as his family was walking to their room.²³ As the animal bit Rivers's face, his father pounced on it to break his son free. Mr. Hobbs quickly reached for a pocketknife he was carrying and stabbed the mountain lion in the chest, causing it to flee. Knives, baseball bats, pepper spray, a hammer, and even car keys—these and many other tools can be and often are successfully used in self-defense. Historically, however, guns have proven

to be the most effective way at matching an assailant's threat while keeping the assailant at a safe distance. Yet despite so many examples of the responsible use of a firearm to literally save hundreds of thousands of lives, institutions and individuals continue to lobby for "gun control" laws, which violate the individual right to self-defense.

THE RIGHT OF SELF-DEFENSE

Most Americans know of the Second Amendment to the US Constitution, which reads: "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." This right "to keep and bear arms" (put differently, to own and use guns) is important and foundational to the other constitutionally protected rights. As gun champion Charlton Heston once quipped, it "is the one right that allows 'rights' to exist at all."²⁴ It is not inaccurate to claim that there exists a right to own and defensively use a gun, but this right is incomplete. In truth, we possess a right to *self-defense*, not just a right to use a *gun* in self-defense. The right to defend ourselves against a would-be aggressor implies that any tool necessary can be employed to achieve that end, whether a gun, a knife, a baseball bat, or any other tool.

The right to self-defense is merely the extension of the right to own property. If a person has the right to his life and the property he owns, it then follows that he has the right to keep that property and protect it from the unjust and unauthorized aggression of others. Violence is justified in actual cases of aggression to defensively deter that threat, but no violence is justified in seeking revenge for an aggressive action that already occurred or in escalating the defensive response more than is necessary to terminate the threat. Further, violence is not justified in cases of indirect or perceived harm, such as a neighbor's unkempt property decreasing one's property values or an organized boycott against one's place of business. In short, the right to self-defense only relates to actual defense of life, liberty, and property, and nothing more.

This right is individual; we each inherently possess the moral authority to repel an aggressor. While that aggressor is often a common criminal, historically it has also been a tyrannical state sending its armed forces to disarm the populace, incarcerate innocent individuals, and kill

dissenters without due process. As the patriots from the founding generation demonstrated, and as was boldly proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, it is necessary at times “to throw off [despotic] government, and to provide new guards for [our] future security.” Pitted against a ruthless military machine in a quest to “secure the blessings of liberty,” the seceding colonists had only one realistic recourse: their firearms. Without guns, revolution would not have been possible. “Personal firearms were vitally important for the success of the American Revolution,” notes one historian. “The brunt of the initial fighting during the war was borne by state militias, composed of citizen-soldiers who carried their own hunting rifles and personal weapons into combat.”²⁵ The founders exercised their right to self-defense, not only against individual aggressors, but also against other institutions, including government, which committed acts of violence against them.²⁶

While few people would object to the assertion of an individual right to self-defense, many do not agree that a similar and subordinate right to keep and bear arms exists. Such persons have argued that the right to own weapons is a collective one only, allowing for military and law enforcement officials to keep the peace through the use of arms. To understand why this argument is wrong, and why the right to keep and bear arms is an individual one, imagine that the government was completely abolished. In such a scenario, does a person have the moral authority to prevent his neighbor from obtaining and using a gun? Would this person be justified in using violence against his peaceful neighbor—imposing a fine upon him, incarcerating him in his basement, openly beating him, and so on—when that neighbor uses his gun for recreation or self-defense? Clearly, peaceful individuals can in no legitimate way be prevented by their peers in possessing and appropriately using a gun. When those neighbors collectively delegate some of their powers to a government to execute on their behalf, they cannot delegate a nonexistent power. Lacking the individual authority to prevent a person from having and using guns, government cannot therefore be delegated that power. As such, the right to keep and bear arms (a subset of the right to self-defense) is one that predates and thus *supercedes* government. As articulated in a 1788 editorial by the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, “the unlimited power of the sword is not in the hands of either the federal or state governments, but where I trust in God it will ever remain, in the hands of the people.”²⁷

The constitutional clause aiming to guarantee the right to keep and bear arms is commonly known, but it is not the first such appearance in the governing documents of early America. During the Revolutionary War, many colonies created declarations of rights, which explicitly recognized the individual right to bear arms. Virginia's declared "that a well regulated militia, composed of the body of the people, trained to arms, is the proper, natural, and safe defense of a free state."²⁸ Pennsylvania's stated "that the people have a right to bear arms for the defense of themselves and the state."²⁹ Vermont's asserted "that the people have a right to bear arms for the defense of themselves and the state."³⁰ The emphasis placed on the right to defend against both an individual aggressor and a tyrannical government was also indirectly supported by Massachusetts, which maintained that "the people have a right to keep and bear arms for the common defense."³¹ By referencing the "common defense" alone, the argument that guns were only authorized for individual self-defense was preempted. However, some citizens of that state objected to the decision not to explicitly guarantee the right to individual self-defense. The man who drafted the language was John Adams, who did not intend to deny such a right, and who actually defended that right, noting that "arms in the hands of citizens [may] be used at individual discretion . . . in private self-defense."³² The colonies' joint Declaration of Independence argued for the right to self-defense against both an individual and a government by affirming the unalienable right of individuals in "defending their lives and liberties . . . and protecting property . . ." The protection of one's life, liberty, and property extends to all enemies who might seek to do them harm—governments and their standing armies included. The developing worldview in early America, writes one expert on the subject, "entailed not only the right of individuals to keep and bear arms, but also the right to have and use arms in concern to defend their freedom against an oppressive government."³³

Though the right exists in truth and allegedly is protected on paper, it is one that has been willingly rejected by many people. In his day, James Madison wrote that Americans, unlike those in Europe, had "the advantage of being armed," whereas in Europe "the governments are afraid to trust the people with arms."³⁴ Today, in contrast to two centuries ago, many Americans are afraid to trust *themselves* with arms, and their government shares in the skepticism. Sure, a majority

of Americans are estimated to own a gun, but how many of those who bothered to procure a weapon have ammunition at the ready, have the training necessary to efficiently use it, and have the willingness to actually shoot another person were that to become necessary? Whether with guns or not, the right to self-defense implies a corresponding responsibility to exercise that right in order to protect it. If we do not defend ourselves, then the government will increasingly involve itself in the issue. Regulating gun ownership and use, restricting access to the necessary tools for self-defense, and criminalizing the right to carry the tools needed for such self-defense have become the byproducts of this intervention—an intervention brought about because too many individuals have shirked the responsibility to provide for their own protection.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SELF-DEFENSE

The leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints authored and signed a document in 1995 titled “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” In that review of the importance of and responsibilities associated with the institution of the family, the following is included: “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families.”³⁵ As this indicates, husbands and fathers have three primary roles in their stewardship,³⁶ which are generally prioritized and proactively worked on in the following order: provide, preside, and protect. Almost all men recognize the duty to work and provide for their family; most men do a good job at being the patriarch and being the leader of the family, and some take the issue of protection and defense seriously enough to assume the responsibility. In today’s world of outsourcing and delegation, however, it seems that most prefer to appoint the duty of defense to the police department rather than concern themselves with weaponry and tactical training. Political fear-mongering, Hollywood hype, and a general misunderstanding of the history and practical use of guns has resulted in a massively successful campaign to create an atmosphere in which very few people know how or are ready to defend themselves.

To be sure, families face a variety of threats, including but not limited to violent attacks. Further, owning weapons increases the potential

for an accident to occur with that tool, if stored or handled improperly. Like any responsibility, individuals must weigh the alternatives according to their circumstances to determine the best course of action for them. Any tool, whether it be a vehicle, chainsaw, computer, or gun, should be treated with care and used after instruction and training so as not to cause a mishap. But the infrequency of accidents that occur with such tools should not stand as a strong reason against their acquisition and use; fulfilling the responsibility to defend and protect yourself and others requires exploring what tools can assist in that duty.

Joseph Smith—himself known for organizing a strong defensive force when faced with personal threats—once commented on this subject as follows: “There is one principle which is eternal; it is the duty of all men to protect their lives and the lives of the household, whenever necessity requires, and no power has a right to forbid it, should the last extreme arrive, but I anticipate no such extreme, but caution is the parent of safety.”³⁷ Also calling those who will not defend their families “cowards,”³⁸ the Prophet seemed to emphasize this basic responsibility of every man. A similar statement was unanimously approved for canonization in the “declaration of belief regarding governments” in section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

We believe that all men are justified in defending themselves, their friends, and property, and the government, from the unlawful assaults and encroachments of all persons in times of exigency, where immediate appeal cannot be made to the laws, and relief afforded. (D&C 134:11)

It is important to note the conditional in this verse: we are justified in defending ourselves, our family and friends, our property, and our nation “in times of exigency”—that is, when another (legitimate) recourse is not available given the time constraints. This caveat succinctly illustrates why every family should be armed and knowledgeable in defense. Many individuals presume that the police will defend them should something happen, likely not realizing that the average response time of a police officer nationwide is seven minutes.³⁹ This amount of time, of course, is an *eternity* when faced with an immediate threat. In fact, police rarely *prevent* crime at all—much of their job is to write crime reports after a crime has taken place and conduct an investigation to try and seek justice. By no means are they a proper and adequate

substitute for personal defense since crimes can occur in mere seconds, and waiting around helplessly for police assistance will likely not work to your benefit.

For many, fear is the main deterrent in taking the necessary steps to become armed and skilled. First, there is fear of the threat itself. If faced with a physical threat, some would rather give up and die, throwing their life upon the mercy of the assailant. These seem to be the “cowards” the Prophet described—unwilling to do whatever is necessary to ensure the safety and security of themselves or their family.⁴⁰ The other fear is a fear of the weapon. This uneasiness stems largely from inexperience and ignorance. When necessary security and precautionary measures are implemented, a weapon inside the home is no more a threat than the matches in the garage or the swimming pool outside. Ignorance has never been a justifiable excuse for inaction; we cannot excuse our unwillingness to fulfill our personal responsibilities by claiming that we didn’t know they existed. It is a husband’s responsibility to seek the proper training, experience, and self-confidence that will help him better fulfill the duties he inherently has and responsibilities associated with his role as protector of his family. Women are not exempt from this; just as the police aren’t able to continually guard everyone against potential aggressors, so too are husbands away at work or elsewhere on a regular basis. Many women are not married and must rely on themselves for protection. Thus, the individual right of self-defense is also an individual responsibility, and men and women alike need to equip themselves with the skills and tools necessary to successfully repel a would-be aggressor.

This responsibility isn’t just a “good idea” and wise counsel—it carries the weight of being a commandment from God. So taught Brigham Young:

We all believe that the Lord will fight our battles; but how? Will He do it while we are unconcerned and make no effort whatever for our own safety when an enemy is upon us? If we make no efforts to guard our towns, our houses, our cities, our wives and children, will the Lord guard them for us? He will not; but if we pursue the opposite course and strive to help Him to accomplish His designs, then will He fight our battles. We are baptized for the remission of sins; but it would be quite as reasonable to expect remission of sins without baptism, as to expect the Lord to fight

our battles without our taking every precaution to be prepared to defend ourselves. The Lord requires us to be quite as willing to fight our own battles as to have Him fight them for us. If we are not ready for an enemy when he comes upon us, we have not lived up to the requirements of Him who guides the ship of Zion, or who dictates the affairs of his kingdom.⁴¹

Brother Brigham's words are echoed in principle within the proclamation on the family, which affirms the responsibility we have to protect our loved ones. Additional instruction is found in the scriptures: Captain Moroni reminded his people of the Lord's counsel that "ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed" (Alma 43:47); the same people were "taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives" (Alma 48:14); under the Law of Moses, "If a thief be found breaking [in], and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him" (Exodus 22:2); the apostle Paul's declaration that "if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Timothy 5:8) applies as well, for protecting what you provide is as necessary as providing it in the first place; as previously noted, the Doctrine and Covenants states that "all men are justified in defending themselves, their friends, and property" when circumstances require it (D&C 134:11).

One who would prefer to abdicate his right of self-defense, shirk the corresponding responsibility, and submit himself to an attacker are certainly entitled to do so; it is, after all, his own life. This attitude, however, is cowardly and irresponsible—even more so when that individual is the guardian of other people. Oddly, almost everybody who can afford to do so goes to great lengths to obtain insurance for their lives and possessions, yet few take the proactive (and less costly) steps that would potentially make filing claims against such insurance unnecessary.

Those who value their lives—and the lives of those within their stewardship—have the responsibility to defend those lives should it ever come under attack. Fulfilling that responsibility requires an investment of time and money to become better equipped and trained. President Joseph F. Smith believed that "it is righteous and just for every people

to defend their own lives and their own liberties, and their own homes, with the last drop of their blood.”⁴² While becoming armed is ultimately a personal decision that should absolutely not be undertaken carelessly, we must remember that this responsibility is justified of God and, as noted in the Proclamation, is part of his “divine design.”

DISARMAMENT PRECEDES DEMOCIDE

History offers one devastating story after another of people who were unable or unwilling to defend themselves against aggressors. While assault and murder are as ancient as man, the modern trend of highly centralized government has produced a system of destruction and death that far surpasses the aggregate random acts of violence individuals may commit on their own. It is estimated that in the twentieth century alone, 262 million people were killed *by their own government*.⁴³ Known as “democide” (or the intentional killing of an unarmed person or people by their government), this statistic is hard to fathom yet tragically true.

For example: the USSR killed sixty-two million of its people; China killed forty-five million; Nazi Germany killed twenty-one million; Japan killed 6 million; Cambodia killed 2 million; the list continues to include many other countries whose repressive regimes physically pitted the state against the individual. Based on the population at the time—over eleven billion people lived during the twentieth century—this means that governments killed roughly 3.7 percent of the entire human race, or a number equal to over 80 percent of the population of the United States of America at the time. If all of these bodies were laid from head to toe, and assuming an average of five feet in length per body, they would span the entire circumference of the earth *ten times*. This number of government murders is *four times* more than the number of people who died in combat or as so-called “collateral damage” during all foreign and internal wars during the same century.⁴⁴

While the dictatorships and authoritarian governments responsible for such reprehensible crimes were created and succeeded for various reasons, they all share the same vulnerability. One societal trend could have mitigated if not prevented these mass exterminations of human life: widespread civilian gun ownership. No well-armed society has

been susceptible to such a degree of tyranny, nor is it difficult to understand why this trend exists. Yet even among countries that enjoy a rich pro-gun culture (such as the United States of America), an overwhelming amount of propaganda is consistently promoted in the public square and adopted by government to hamper the right to self-defense.⁴⁵ Given that democide is a condition in which the government kills its *unarmed* citizens, it may be correctly argued that gun prohibition is far more deadly than gun ownership. Put differently, the estimated 262 million deaths by government in the twentieth century could be blamed on “gun control”—government policies which violate the right to self-defense by prohibiting civilians from owning and using guns. As the saying goes, “When guns are outlawed, only criminals (and the government!) will have them.” The world is witness to what results such policies produce.

Disarmament of the civilian population is a key step in the rise of all dictatorships. Whether freely elected like Adolf Hitler and Hugo Chavez, or instituted after a violent revolution such as Mao Tse-Tung and Fidel Castro, dictators cement their newfound control by confiscating and prohibiting guns amongst the general population, thereby facilitating the extermination of any opposition. Just as 9/11 could have been partially or fully prevented had the pilots been armed, so too could these oppressors have been checked in their coercion by an armed populace.

Nazi Germany provides an instructive lesson. During the Weimar Republic, licensing and registration of guns became an exhaustive, mandated effort.⁴⁶ Passed under the guise of public safety, these detailed registration records gave Hitler the ability to begin a complete disarmament; knowing precisely who owned how many guns, he was able to selectively target the Jews and others deemed untrustworthy of being armed. As historian Stephen P. Halbrook notes:

The existence of firearms regulations providing for records on all individuals lawfully possessing firearms, coupled with searches and seizures of firearms from the houses of potential dissidents, guaranteed that firearms would be possessed only by supporters of Nazism. These firearms policies made it far easier to exterminate any opposition, Jews, and unpopular groups.⁴⁷

What was intended for the public good became used for public evil. Though the narrative today is that the Jews were collectively slaughtered—and most in fact were—there were pockets of resistance where emboldened individuals gathered whatever weapons they could find in order to mount a defense. One well-known story is that of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in which up to one thousand Jews who knew they had almost no chance of survival decided, rather than being sent to die in a gas chamber, that they would die fighting their enemies. As one person wrote in his journal of the event: “We took stock of our position and saw that this was a struggle between a fly and an elephant. But our national dignity dictated to us that the Jews must offer resistance and not allow themselves to be led wantonly to slaughter.”⁴⁸ Warsaw was the first of many other civilian uprisings against the Nazis throughout Europe. For these Jews and almost all others hoping to repel their would-be murderers, guns were scarce. As two thousand troops marched into the ghetto in 1943 to exterminate the remaining Jews, they were surprised to encounter resistance. Equipped only with a few guns, grenades, and limited ammunition they had acquired from soldiers who had previously attempted to raid the ghetto, the Jewish Combat Organization was able to hold off the Nazis for almost a month, killing three hundred of its highly trained and fully equipped soldiers in the process. Some of the Jews escaped, others committed suicide, but not one of them was captured and sent to the gas chambers. Guns—even when in extremely limited supply—and the bravery to use them created opportunity for resistance and defense of life, liberty, and property.

As Holocaust historian Abram L. Sachar writes, “the difference between resistance and submission depended very largely upon who was in possession of the arms that back up the will to do or die.”⁴⁹

Guns also made the difference for the Bielski brothers. These Jewish siblings assisted in saving and protecting the elderly, women, and children who otherwise would have been rounded up and summarily killed; nobody who fled to their group in the forest was turned away. Growing to over twelve hundred people, they enjoyed a 95 percent survival rate—the highest among the Nazi’s victims.⁵⁰ In less than one year, roughly one hundred fifty of their group who had engaged in active resistance carried out thirty-eight combat missions, destroyed two locomotives, twenty-three train cars, thirty-two telegraph poles, four bridges, and killed three hundred-eighty-one enemy fighters.⁵¹ This

was made possible by their ability to repair broken guns and assemble new ones from spare parts. Sachar notes: “The indispensable need, of course, was arms. As soon as some Jews, even in the camps themselves, obtained possession of a weapon, however pathetically inadequate—a rifle, an ax, a sewer cover, a homemade bomb—they used it and often took Nazis with them to death.”⁵²

These stories and hundreds more like them demonstrate a trend found among disarmed societies. Guns (and other weapons) are important and necessary, both for our individual self-defense against would-be aggressors and for the preservation of liberty against the encroachments of an oppressive government. In 1967, the International Society for the Prevention of Crime held a congress in Paris to discuss the prevention of genocide. This body concluded that “defensive measures are the most effective means for the prevention of genocide. Not all aggression is criminal. A defense reaction is for the human race what the wind is for navigation—the result depends on the direction. The most moral violence is that used in legitimate self-defense, the most sacred judicial institution.”⁵³ The illegitimate, anti-liberty action of confiscating guns from peaceful individuals by the state that governs them renders those individuals unable to resist the democidal destruction that is soon to follow.

People recognize that armed and trained soldiers are an important asset to protecting a group of people from external threats, such as an invasion from another country. But what happens when those soldiers are commanded by their superiors to turn on you? The framers of the Constitution knew from experience the importance of firearms both as a personal tool (for protection, hunting, and so on) and as a method of actively resisting unjust government. Noah Webster, the founding-era statesman and prolific author, voiced their common views as follows:

Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in America cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be, on any pretense, raised in the United States. A military force, at the command of Congress, can execute no laws, but such as the people perceive to be just and constitutional; for they will possess the power, and jealousy will instantly inspire the inclination, to resist the execution of a law which appears to them unjust and oppressive.⁵⁴

It is important that we recognize this historical trend toward tyranny. Many Americans think that it couldn't happen in their country, but so did many of those who are now unknown to history, other than being a simple statistic—one of hundreds of millions of unarmed individuals put to death by an oppressive government. Tyranny is not limited by geography; the same trend can happen in America. Dr. Miguel Faria, a Cuban doctor who escaped his native country during Castro's takeover, has written about the connection of gun registration, confiscation, and authoritarianism. After noting the connection between disarmament and democide, he observed the failure of many Americans to consider such a trend in their own country:

When presented with these deadly chronicles [of democide] and the perilous historic sequence, Americans often opine that it cannot happen here. As to the dangers of licensing of gun owners and registration of firearms, they frequently retort, "If you don't have anything to hide, then you don't have anything to fear!" Followed by, "I see nothing wrong with gun registration because we have to do something; there are just too many guns out there that fall into the wrong hands." These naïve attitudes ignore the penchant of governments to accrue power at the expense of the liberties of individuals.⁵⁵

Those observing this trend and wishing to prevent its future occurrence must identify early and seemingly innocuous actions (such as mandatory registration) that may lead to later, deathly consequences. Americans cannot claim that confiscation will not happen here—it has already happened here. The revolution of 1776 was fomented in large measure by the ruling government's attempts to disarm its citizens. Using arbitrary searches and seizures, false promises of safekeeping, entrapment, and a ban on the export of arms and ammunition from England to the colonies, King George's empire had clamped down on the colonists' right to keep and bear arms. Samuel Adams wrote that the British "told us we shall have no more guns, no powder to use, and kill our wolves and other game . . ."⁵⁶ Indeed, in a confidential order written on October 19, 1774, King George forbade the exportation of arms and gun powder to the colonies and mandated that the various governors prevent importation of such items into their jurisdictions.⁵⁷ In defiance of such actions, Patrick Henry's famous "liberty or death" speech directly confronted the importance of an armed people:

They tell us, sir, that we are weak—unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week or the next year? *Will it be when we are totally disarmed*, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance, by lying supinely on our backs, and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot? Sir, we are not weak, if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. *Three million people, armed* in the holy cause of liberty . . . are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us.⁵⁸

Less than one month later, in April 1775, the governor of Massachusetts dispatched around seven hundred soldiers to seize the arms and munitions being stored by the colonial militia in Concord. On the way to their destination, the soldiers were confronted by the minutemen—select members of the militia serving as a highly mobile, responsive force—who had gathered to block the way. Major John Pitcairn and his fellow officers demanded that the men throw down their weapons and disperse. The minutemen stood their ground, willing neither to disperse nor surrender their weapons. That defiance resulted in the confrontation that today is known as “the shot heard ’round the world,” when an unknown person fired the first shot which led the British Army regulars to open fire and charge with bayonets, despite not having been given that order. As revolution broke out in the months ahead, disarmament policies were still promoted as a means to curtail the opposition’s success in resisting. In 1777, the Under Secretary of State in the British Colonial Office drafted a proposal advocating disarming all Americans and relying only on a standing army:

The Militia Laws should be repealed and none suffered to be re-enacted, & the Arms of all the People should be taken away, & every piece of Ordnance removed into the King’s Stores, nor should any Foundry or manufactory of Arms, Gunpowder, or Warlike Stores, be ever suffered in America, nor should any Gunpowder, Lead, Arms or Ordnance be imported into it without License; they will have but little need of such things for the future, as the King’s Troops, Ships & Forts will be sufficient to protect them from any danger.

Standing armies were scary institutions to most of the founders, and rightly so. They knew from experience how often these soldiers, who were organized in the name of defending the country against external threats, had instead become used to violate the life, liberty, and property of the very people they were employed to protect. In the debate surrounding what became the Second Amendment to the US Constitution, Representative Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts emphasized the importance of the militia—armed and trained civilians—over standing armies. “What, sir, is the use of a militia?” he asked. “It is to prevent the establishment of a standing army[,] the ban[e] of liberty Whenever Governments mean to invade the rights and liberties of the people, they always attempt to destroy the militia, in order to raise an army upon their ruins.”⁵⁹ As President, James Madison spoke to Congress on the importance of the militia: “An efficient militia is authorized and contemplated by the constitution, and *required by the spirit and safety of free government*.”⁶⁰ Being an association of armed and trained citizens, the militia makes it possible to repel democidal governments and their standing armies; an unarmed public unable and unwilling to defend itself enjoys no such liberty.

Whether loosely organized as a militia or operating independently as sovereign individuals, the people’s right to self-defense is rightly perceived as a threat by would-be dictators. Adolf Hitler, himself a dictator who had consolidated power by disarming his enemies, noted: “The most foolish mistake we could possibly make would be to allow the subject races to possess arms. History shows that all conquerors who have allowed their subject races to carry arms have prepared their own downfall by so doing.”⁶¹ While we may be led to believe that we live in one of the freest nations and still enjoy a healthy amount of individual liberty, the historical trend toward tyranny should suggest the wisdom of proactively fulfilling the personal responsibility to defend one’s life, liberty, and property. Joseph Story, an early American lawyer who served on the Supreme Court, wrote that the right to keep and bear arms is liberty’s best defense since “it offers a strong moral check against the usurpation and arbitrary power of rulers; and will generally, even if these are successful in the first instance, enable the people to resist and triumph over them.”⁶² While we should hope that another armed revolution will never be necessary, we must ask ourselves whether armed resistance would even be possible. If we continually submit to gun registration,

regulation, confiscation, and related steps leading toward a future disarmament, we will be forsaking our rich American heritage regarding the right to keep and bear arms, and instead we will be casting our lot with the 262 million dead by democide. The Constitution states that a well-regulated militia—armed and trained citizens ready and willing to use their weapons in self-defense—is “necessary to the security of a free State.” If we don’t fulfill this essential responsibility, we cannot adequately defend liberty; a state will exist, but it will not be a “free” one.

SHIRKING THE RESPONSIBILITY

The “gun control” lobby—a coalition of anti-gun political groups such as the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and sympathetic politicians—promotes its restrictive policies on the basis of an interpretation of the Second Amendment which argues that the militia is today’s National Guard, suggesting that trained professionals are those for whom this right is guaranteed. This was an opinion held by the Supreme Court in 1965, which concluded that “the National Guard is the modern Militia reserved to the States by Art. I. 8, cl. 15, 16, of the Constitution. . . . The passage of the National Defense Act of 1916 materially altered the status of the militias by constituting them as the National Guard.”⁶³ Thus, according to this view, the right to keep and bear arms serves as a military or law enforcement function only, and the government-sanctioned entities organized to perform those duties are therefore constitutionally guaranteed the right to equip themselves as necessary for the common defense. While citizen militias were important and necessary in the early days of the nation, proponents of this argument claim that the creation of National Guard units “modernized” this anachronistic idea of each person wielding and using their own gun.

This misguided interpretation of the Second Amendment—a constitutional clause that explicitly states that keeping and bearing arms is a “right of the people,” as individuals—is merely a manifestation of a more fundamental belief. The central argument underlying all “gun control” legislation is that individuals don’t need firearms because the police or military are there to protect us all from crime. Further, these individuals argue that guns in the wrong hands unnecessarily kill

people, and by limiting or denying individuals the ability to own and use firearms, the related death count would substantially decrease.

This belief is completely false for two reasons. First, the police simply cannot protect everybody from crime, nor do they. This flies in the face of what the “gun control” lobby claims, as exemplified by one of its most famous advocates, James Brady—the former assistant to President Ronald Reagan who was nearly killed during an assassination attempt on the president’s life. When asked whether handgun ownership is legitimate, Brady replied: “For target shooting, that’s okay. Get a license and go to the range. For defense of the home, that’s why we have police departments.”⁶⁴ One story (of thousands more like it) shows the danger and factual bankruptcy of this claim. Leasa Ivory of Florida contacted her husband by telephone one day in 1998 to inform him that he was not the father of her six-month-old son.⁶⁵ Enraged, the husband drove to their apartment and attempted to enter. Ivory called 911 hoping for help, as her husband had a history of abuse. “He’s trying to get in. Hurry up, hurry up,” she yelled to the 911 operator. “He’s taking the door off the hinges and coming in!” The call concluded with the sound of Ivory’s phone crashing to the floor and her subsequent screams. When police arrived just two minutes later—an impressive feat given the average response time for most 911 calls—they found Ivory stabbed in the back three times with a six-inch fishing knife, lying in a pool of her own blood. Though the police officers responded in a timely fashion, they were unable to save Ivory’s life. Brady’s contention that police departments exist to defend us in our homes is completely misguided and demonstrably false. This rebuttal is backed up by more than just anecdotal evidence such as this story—the data itself disproves Brady’s claim.

In 2010 alone, 1,246,248 violent crimes were reported in the United States.⁶⁶ Of that number, 14,748 people were murdered, 84,767 were raped, and 367,832 were robbed—all within a single year. This turns out to be one violent crime committed every 25.3 seconds—a murder every 35.6 minutes, a rape every 6 minutes, and a robbery every 1.4 minutes. *All of these crimes were not prevented by police.* In cases where victims have advance warning of the attack and are able to call 911 for help, rarely do police arrive in time to be of any real assistance. A 2004 report by the *Washington Times* found that the average time for police officers to respond to a high-priority 911 emergency call was *over eight*

minutes in several major cities around the country.⁶⁷ Detroit's average is twenty-four minutes,⁶⁸ Atlanta's is eleven minutes,⁶⁹ and Oakland's is fifteen minutes.⁷⁰ The familiar saying "When seconds count, the police are only minutes away" may sound humorous, but it represents a matter of life and death played out many times each day across the country. The primary activity of police officers is not the deterrence of a future crime, but the investigation and pursuit of justice once a crime has already been committed. For victims, this is often too little, too late.

The second reason that the police protection argument is false is that the government has no legal obligation to protect people from crime. A well-known example graphically illustrates a common policy across the nation. On March 16, 1975, two men broke into a three-story home in Washington, DC. A woman on the second floor was sexually attacked, and her housemates on the floor above her heard her screams. The housemates called 911 and police were dispatched on a low-priority assignment to check out the incident. After knocking on the door and receiving no answer, the police left the scene. The frantic housemates, responding to the woman's continued screams, called 911 a second time. The dispatcher promised the women that help would come, but no officers were even sent. The attackers discovered the other women, and all three women were kidnapped, raped, and beaten over the next fourteen hours. When they later sued the city and its police department for failing to protect them and for not even responding to their second call, the court dismissed the case, stating that the police have no duty to help individuals and only exist to provide services to the "public at large." There exists a "fundamental principle," argued the court, "that a government and its agents are under no general duty to provide public services, such as police protection, to any particular individual citizen."⁷¹ "Accordingly," they continued, "courts have without exception concluded that when a municipality or other governmental entity undertakes to furnish police services, it assumes a duty only to the public at large and not to individual members of the community." This is not just the opinion of a few judges, but a pervasive policy regarding police services throughout the nation.

Many states have explicitly codified this refusal to defend individuals into their law. California law states that "Neither a public entity nor a public employee [may be sued] for failure to . . . provide sufficient police protection service . . . [or] for injury caused by the failure to

make an arrest.”⁷² Illinois law says the same thing, adding that police officers are not liable for “failure to prevent the commission of crimes, failure to detect or solve crimes, and failure to identify or apprehend criminals.”⁷³ Delaware offers immunity to all levels of government and their employees provided that they are performing their duties in good faith, are exercising discretionary powers, and are not acting with gross negligence.⁷⁴ The Court of Appeals in Kentucky commented on the law of its state, which is common amongst a majority of the other states: “The general rule of thumb, in the absence of some ‘special relationship,’ is that a municipality or a law enforcement agency or official does not owe individual citizens a duty to protect them from crime.”⁷⁵ Put more bluntly by a California appellate court, “Police officers have no affirmative statutory duty to do anything.”⁷⁶

In other words, we’re on our own.

Most people believe that the core function of government is to defend and protect individuals from those who would do them harm. After all, this is an innate right we each have and therefore can legitimately delegate to the government. Some people, however, incorrectly understand the principle of delegation and feel that since police officers exist and are paid to protect us, that we don’t need to worry about protecting ourselves. They then completely set aside the responsibility of self-defense—an action that is especially problematic in light of the information in this chapter. As they refuse to defend themselves, and will not be defended by the police whose job they think it is, they unnecessarily expose themselves to the actions of an aggressor.

The gun control movement perpetuates this promotion of a paradox wherein individuals are denied the ability to adequately defend themselves because that’s what police are for, yet police are freed of any liability for failing to protect them. One expert on the subject notes the same trend, which he dubs a “fatal irony”: “while the government owes no duty to protect citizens, the government is also taking away the citizens’ ability to protect themselves.”⁷⁷ While many law enforcement officials support the right of individuals to keep and bear arms, plenty do not. Former Chicago Mayor Richard Daley famously declared, “If it was up to me, no one except law enforcement officers would own a handgun.”⁷⁸ This line of thinking was proven absurd in a case from 1959 when a New York man, Burt Pugach, threatened his lover, Linda Riss, for wanting to leave him after she found out that he was married

and had a child. Riss reported the threat to the police, who did nothing. Worried about her lack of police protection, she applied for a gun permit but was denied. On the night of a party celebrating her engagement to another man, Riss received a phone call warning her that it was her “last chance.” She frantically called the police, begging once more for protection, but they still refused to assist her. The next day, a thug hired by Pugach threw acid in her face, blinding and permanently disfiguring her.

Unsurprisingly, given the policies and precedent listed here, Riss’s lawsuit against the City of New York was unsuccessful. An appeal to the state’s Supreme Court resulted in the previous ruling’s affirmation, meaning that judges all the way up the chain in New York agreed that the police held no responsibility for failing to respond to Riss’s repeated requests for protection. The lone dissenting judge on the New York Supreme Court noted the paradox in this case:

What makes the city’s position particularly difficult to understand is that, in conformity to the dictates of the law, Linda did not carry any weapon for self-defense. *Thus, by a rather bitter irony she was required to rely for protection on the City of New York which now denies all responsibility to her.*

It is not a distortion to summarize the essence of the city’s case here in the following language: “Because we owe a duty to everybody, we owe it to nobody.” Were it not for the fact that this position has been hallowed by much ancient and revered precedent, we would surely dismiss it as preposterous.⁷⁹

Police claim a responsibility to protect the “public at large” but not the individuals who comprise the public. Those who believe that they need neither the tools nor training to defend themselves assume a significant risk that need not—and should not—exist. The right to self-defense, and the corresponding responsibility to defend ourselves, does not become unnecessary merely because the government provides police services. In cases where the police are willing to respond, they will almost assuredly be too late to defend us from an aggressor. In cases where the police are not willing to respond, we are left to our own devices.

The simple truth is that this right and responsibility cannot be completely delegated to another group, such as the police, military, or even private security. Our own protection requires that we take the steps necessary to protect ourselves. Though it may be tempting to believe that

trained police officers will be our primary line of defense, both history and legal precedent clearly explode this myth. We are effectively on our own, so we should prepare and act like it.

THE MEDIA BIAS

Since law enforcement officers are often unable (and sometimes unwilling) to defend us from aggressors, one might assume that there would be a public recognition of the importance of defending ourselves by obtaining the necessary resources and training to do so. Along with that assumption, one would conclude that the media would highlight stories of successful self-defense to demonstrate the importance of fulfilling this basic and essential responsibility. As it (perhaps unsurprisingly) turns out, the opposite is true.

Major news agencies can and do shape public opinion both by what they selectively choose to report, and by what they decide to exclude. The media, for example, overwhelmingly and almost universally excludes stories about successful self-defense using guns. During 2001, the *New York Times* printed 104 news articles related to crimes when guns were used, for a total of 50,745 words. They printed only one story where a gun was defensively used, for a total of 163 words.⁸⁰ *USA Today* devoted 5,660 words to gun-related crimes and zero words for the defensive use of guns.⁸¹ The *Washington Post* spent 46,884 words describing gun-related crimes that year while offering up only 953 words reporting on their use in self-defense.⁸² Further, the stories that actually do mention self-defense using a gun are almost always local, while the gun-related crime stories often are given national and international attention. There is clearly a media bias as it relates to the omission of information describing the successful and responsible use of firearms to defend life, liberty, and property.

Even when the media report on a gun-related issue, they often omit information that demonstrates the appropriate use of firearms in self-defense. For example: on January 16, 2002, a former student at the Appalachian School of Law in Virginia returned to campus and used a gun to kill three people and wound three others. The event made international headlines with most commentators clamoring for more “gun control.” What was omitted from the overwhelming majority of reports was

the fact that the attacker was stopped by two students who had guns in their cars, retrieved them, and pointed them at the assailant to demand he stop. Out of two hundred eight news stories in the week after the event, just *four* mentioned that the students who stopped the attack did so using guns.⁸³ Most simply stated, as did the *Washington Post*, that the students “pounced on the gunman and held him until help arrived.” *Newsday* said that the attacker was simply “restrained by students.” Seventy-two news stories described how the attack was stopped without so much as mentioning that the student heroes were armed with guns.⁸⁴

Millions of people consuming this “news” therefore conclude, even if only subconsciously, that instances of a successful defense using guns must be rare if not nonexistent. This helps perpetuate the fallacious and detrimental belief that the police should and do exist to protect us. Those who hold this belief, molded by what they’ve been told and by what they haven’t been told, do not recognize their right to—and responsibility of—self-defense. If a person is not aware of the responsibility (or if they are aware of it but simply have not made it a priority), then they will not act upon it. As with all other responsibilities, education precedes action.

Guns are used far more often in self-defense than they are in a crime, yet as previously shown, the media overwhelmingly reports their wrongful use. Further, by downplaying the benefits and successful use of firearms, the media encourages ignorance as to the best form of defense, effectively endangering the lives of their customers. Fortunately, positive stories of the responsible and successful use of guns still circulate through the Internet and other media sources, and sometimes in the mainstream media. Ultimately, providing the necessary balance against the media’s anti-gun campaign is left up to us by educating and encouraging those within our sphere of influence to recognize and act upon the right and responsibility of self-defense.

A NATION OF FREEMEN

During the Massachusetts ratifying convention for the US Constitution, delegate William Symmes warned (some might say prophesied) that the proposed federal government at some point “shall be too firmly fixed in the saddle to be overthrown by anything but a general

insurrection.”⁸⁵ As the discussion later turned to standing armies and the likelihood of their assisting that government to become so “firmly fixed,” delegate Theodore Sedwick rhetorically asked that if such a threat were to exist, “whether they [the standing army] could subdue a nation of freemen, who know how to prize liberty, and who have arms in their hands?”⁸⁶ In pondering such a question, consider two alternatives to Sedwick’s perception of what a future America would look like: A nation of men who are well armed but who do not know how to prize liberty might be one where everybody’s firearms gathered dust, were considered unnecessary or only for recreational use. Alternatively, it might encourage rampant crime and wrongful use of those weapons in a society of individuals who do not value their liberty nor the liberty of those around them. On the other hand, a nation of unarmed men who prize liberty is one in which that liberty will not long exist, for they lack the ability to effectively secure and defend it against dictators and despots.

The founding generation of America was one in which individuals were well armed *and* prized liberty. The revolution against their oppressors would not have been won without armed, supplied, and skilled shooters. What would they say of our generation? Are we armed? Are we disciplined? Do we prize liberty?

Self-defense is both a right and a responsibility—one that Joseph Smith called “eternal.”⁸⁷ It cannot be fully delegated to another individual or institution. While we may employ others to assist us in aspects of our own protection, we cannot exempt ourselves from this responsibility. Though we may petition God for protection or assistance in repelling a threat, as Brigham Young taught, divine aid will come as we “tak[e] every precaution to be prepared to defend ourselves.” For our own sake, and for that of each person within our stewardship, it is imperative that we become responsibly armed in order to protect and defend our lives, our liberty, and our property.

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are offered on how to better fulfill the responsibility of self-defense:

1. CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON.

If you are interested in acquiring a gun, visit your local shooting range and talk to the store clerk. These experienced salesmen can help you determine what your best options are given your personal circumstances. Where possible, rent the gun you're interested in and practice using it at a shooting range to ensure that you are comfortable with and able to use it. If you are nervous around guns or for other reasons (including restrictive laws) choose to obtain a less lethal weapon. Do some research to determine what option is best for you—whether a pocketknife, taser, pepper spray, or other device. Be sure to also get holsters, ammunition, or other accessories your weapon may need to be as effective and versatile as possible. Be sure not to discount close combat skills such as martial arts; if you are unarmed or disarmed by your attacker and are being restrained, it would be helpful to have the strength and skills necessary to fight back and escape.

Acquiring firearms and other self-defense tools should be done only after first reviewing the related laws which govern their purchase, ownership, storage, and use.

2. GET EDUCATED.

Just as a responsible driver first learns the mechanics of driving through an educational course and then receives training from an experienced driver, so too should individuals receive both educational and hands-on instruction to become disciplined in the use of their defensive weapon of choice. Gun owners should seriously consider a training course such as those offered by Front Sight Firearms Training Institute in Nevada (or many comparable companies around the country) in order to become both mentally educated and physically trained with their preferred weapon. Many of these companies also offer courses on hand-to-hand combat, knife training, and related defensive skills that are not gun-specific. Ask the salesmen at your local shooting range for recommendations on where you might receive training.

3. TRAIN WITH YOUR WEAPON.

In his first annual address to Congress, President George Washington stated that “a free people ought not only to be armed, but disciplined.”⁸⁸ Simply purchasing a gun is not sufficient and can in certain circumstances be more dangerous than not owning one at all, such as if the untrained owner does not responsibly secure the gun, and a child later finds it and accidentally takes his own life.⁸⁹ When seconds count, police are only minutes away, and in those mere seconds where an attacker may injure or kill you, being able to successfully defend yourself requires being able to quickly retrieve and properly use your weapon of choice. Routine practice with that weapon is an important preparation for ever having to use it. If the time comes to use a weapon defensively, an individual will almost always not rise to a level of heroic greatness, but rather fall to whatever practice and experience he has had. Converting the actions of self-defense into muscle memory through training and frequent practice will increase your chance of success should the need for self-defense ever arise.

4. BE SECURE AND ALERT.

Being able to successfully defend yourself also requires taking defensive measures to help ensure that such a situation never presents itself in the first place. Secure your home with adequate locks, keeping in mind windows and other points of entry into your home such as a side or back door. Learn to observe the environment you’re in each day, constantly evaluating it and watching out for any form of danger or concern. Learn the “Cooper Color Codes” (you can find them online) to develop a state of awareness necessary to quickly and successfully react to a threat.

NOTES

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26. As noted in the Declaration of Independence: “Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.” Accordingly, the use of defensive force against the aggression of the state is almost always inadvisable, even when justified. There are, quite simply,

much safer ways to check the state's aggression than to open fire against its agents. This author does not in any way suggest nor advocate the use of force against the government, even when it violates your rights. You may have a gun, but they have thousands more . . .

27. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Feb. 20, 1798, as quoted in Stephen P. Halbrook, *That Every Man Be Armed* (Oakland: The Independent Institute, 1984), 69.
28. *Ibid.*, 64.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 65.
33. *Ibid.*, 57.
34. John C. Hamilton, ed., *The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1864), 371.
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38. Andrew F. Ehat, Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 166.
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