



# What

## THE 2ND AMENDMENT

Means  
for Black  
America

# **Project 21**

is a program of the

## **NATIONAL CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH**

a non-profit, non-partisan educational  
foundation based in Washington, D.C.

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## WHAT 2ND AMENDMENT POLICY MEANS FOR BLACK AMERICA

is the sixth topic in the Project 21 series  
"What It Means for Black America"

Other topics in the series include:

**CRITICAL RACE THEORY**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**  
**ELECTION REFORM**  
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## PROJECT 21

### Black Leadership Network

## WHO WE ARE

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Project 21 is a program of the National Center for Public Policy Research, launched in 1992 to promote conservative and libertarian black leaders in the media so that news coverage better reflects the true diversity of thought within the black community.

Project 21 members have been interviewed over 50,000 times — currently averaging more than two television interviews each day — appearing on Fox News Channel, CNN, C-SPAN, MSNBC, NewsMax and One America News Network. In addition, Project 21 members are interviewed on radio an average of nearly 1.5 times per day and have appeared on major radio stations and shows with hosts such as Sean Hannity, Jim Bohannon and the late Rush Limbaugh. Members are also frequently published and quoted in newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, *Detroit News*, *Houston Chronicle* and many others.

Project 21 members come from all walks of life and from all over the country. Its membership includes members of the clergy, business leaders, entertainers, athletes, economists, journalists, attorneys and students.

What Project 21 members have in common is a desire to make America a better place for black Americans — and all Americans — to live and work.

They do so not only by writing op-eds and participating in radio and TV interviews on the most important issues of the day, but also by advancing a positive vision for improving the lives of black Americans. Project 21 publishes the "Blueprint for a Better Deal for Black America" offering specific policy recommendations for helping black America reach its full potential. Notably, these recommendations build on key aspects of Americanism — free enterprise, personal responsibility and limited government — and consequently would result in benefits for the country, not just blacks. It also publishes the "What It Means for Black America" series of monographs that assess policy initiatives for their specific impact on people of color.

Project 21 members give speeches before student, community, business and religious groups; testify before Congress and other government bodies; advise policymakers at the national, state and local level and file public comments on federal rulemakings.



## PROJECT 21 LEADERSHIP

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### **HORACE COOPER** CHAIRMAN

In addition to serving as chairman for Project 21, Horace Cooper is a senior fellow and member of the board of directors of the National Center for Public Policy Research. He previously served as deputy director of Voice of America, chief of staff at the U.S. Department of Labor and was a senior aide to the leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives. He also taught constitutional law at the George Mason University School of Law. He is the author of *How Trump is Making Black America Great Again* and *Put Y'all Back in Chains: How Joe Biden's Policies Hurt Black Americans*. He appears regularly on the Fox News Channel and talk radio shows across the nation as a legal and political commentator.



### **DONNA JACKSON** DIRECTOR OF MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Project 21's Director of Membership Development Donna Jackson is also a seasoned accountant with public and private sector experience as well as previous forays into politics and ministry. She earned a Bachelor of Accountancy (cum laude) from the California State University San Marcos. She has worked in accounting, auditing and management roles with major companies such as Ernst & Young and Marriott International before serving in the public sector as a deputy controller for the Export-Import Bank of the United States. Prior to her career in accounting, Donna was a political operative in the state of Arkansas where she worked on campaigns for Governor Mike Huckabee, Senator Tim Hutchinson and Representative (later Governor) Asa Hutchinson. Donna is a regular op-ed contributor and frequent guest on Fox News Channel, Newsmax and OAN.







# What the **SECOND AMENDMENT** Means to Black Americans

Throughout our history, Americans of every race, gender and political persuasion have relied on firearms to secure their freedom, safety and property. Guns have afforded millions of Americans a means of self-defense and personal protection, particularly when there is no time to alert police to a life-threatening situation.

America is one of the precious few countries that enshrines the act of self-defense as an inalienable right by providing in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:

***A well-regulated Militia, being necessary for the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.***

Efforts by progressives to impose gun control in the name of curbing violence not only run counter

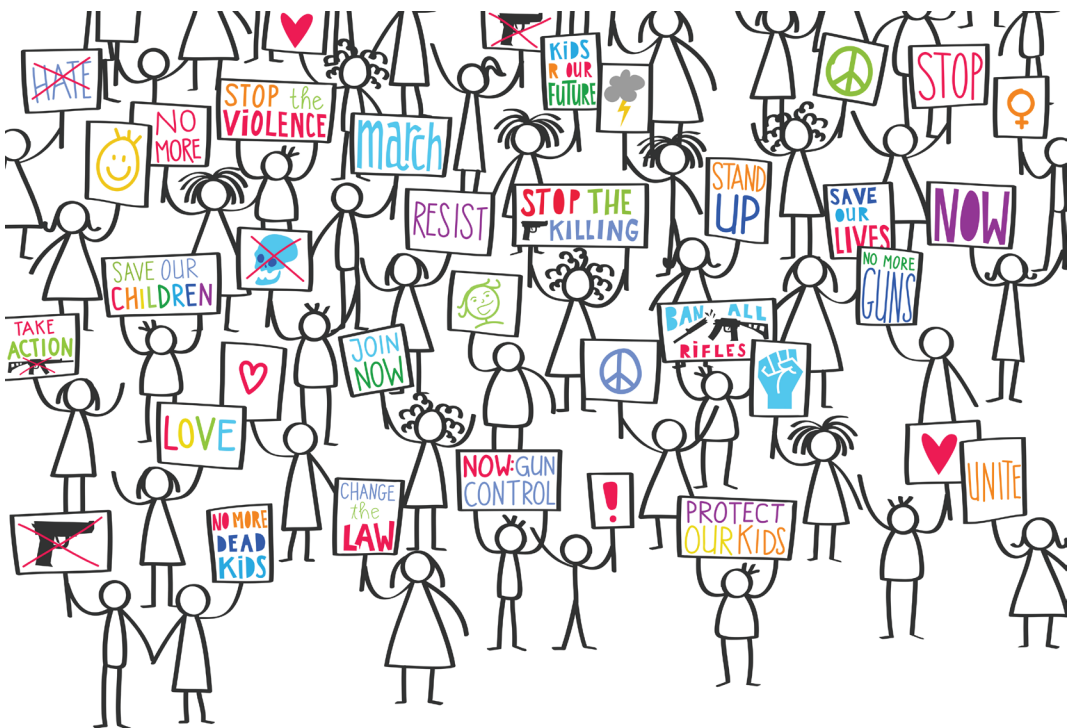
to the Second Amendment, but they also pose a particular risk to black Americans who are disproportionately victims of gun violence.

The challenge presented to our nation today is preserving that right as we also address the urgent need to reduce the growing levels of violence Americans face in their communities. This challenge weighs most heavily on women and minorities, who have disproportionately seen their right to bear arms restricted or denied altogether — either by law or by custom. They also continue to disproportionately be on the receiving end of violence in American society.

In the name of addressing the growing crime rate in recent years, the left pushes only one solution: limiting access to firearms by law-abiding citizens who have every right to possess them.

Recent efforts to curtail the epidemic of gun violence have resulted in millions of law-abiding Americans across the land of every race being left defenseless because of limited access to firearms through increased fees or burdensome restrictions on owning them. These policies, usually originating from liberal or





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progressive circles, often lead to illiberal or regressive outcomes for the very people the policies are supposed to protect. Blacks disproportionately make up those facing these negative outcomes and are particularly harmed by these efforts.

The Second Amendment guarantees a right to bear arms, but current policies have left many Americans without that right — unable to exercise that right because of increased fees and restrictions or left in the dark about their ability to exercise that right. The future will undoubtedly bring other threats to this fundamental right, and ability, to defend ourselves.



# The History

When the Second Amendment was first drafted, those free blacks living in the North were protected by it. The adoption of the Second Amendment was no accident. The Founders' understanding of the right to bear arms grew out of their memory of government deprivation of firearms rights to politically unpopular populations. Catholic Kings of England had used an early gun control law, the 1671 Game Act, to disarm Protestant homes. King George limited the ability of colonists to have access to firearms to prevent native American uprisings with ordinances requiring firearms to be kept locked away.

Fundamentally, our founders knew that the right to bear arms had to remain with the citizen and not with the government. This principle was and is color-blind.

However, with the adoption of the Constitution and the Bill of



Rights, the notion of who was a citizen was limited — women, many blacks and Native Americans were not yet included.

And in the South, things were worse. Millions of enslaved Americans in the antebellum South were considered mere property, which meant that very few blacks had the ability to legally acquire arms. Nonetheless, when enslaved Americans finally did gain their freedom, they often sought the protection of firearms to secure their newfound independence.

Nat Turner's famed slave rebellion in 1831 revolved around capturing the local armory to ensure safe passage to the nearby Dismal Swamp, where they had hoped to shore up their defenses.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, seizing the Harper's Ferry Armory was also a central part of John Brown's plot to instigate a slave rebellion in 1859.<sup>2</sup> And Harriet Tubman famously armed herself with a pistol during her efforts to guide escaped slaves to freedom in the North.<sup>3</sup> She would later take up a rifle in defense of the Union during the Civil War.

Even after slavery was abolished, and especially after Reconstruction ended, many black Americans faced oppression from the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and its allies in state and local governments in the South. But they were not idle in the face of new tyrants. Black communities armed themselves

*Harriet Tubman famously armed herself with a pistol during her efforts to guide escaped slaves to freedom in the North. She would later take up a rifle in defense of the Union during the Civil War.*



and organized patrolling militias. The Klan knew full well that resistance to their violence-laden ideology was bolstered by firearms, and would therefore raid black homes to seize them. Many state and local governments aided and abetted the Klan's efforts. Yet well-armed blacks were able to push back.<sup>4</sup>

Take the case of Henry Denegle, a black man from Georgia. In 1899, he was accused of raping a white woman. While held in jail, pending his trial, a group of armed black men fended off a white mob aiming to get their hands on Denegle. Their successful effort to protect the accused paid off, as Denegle was later acquitted in court.<sup>5</sup>



In 1906, famous black writer and left-wing activist W.E.B. Dubois made a significant change in his philosophy about combatting racism. Following a race riot in Atlanta that year, he purchased a shotgun to aid him on patrols of his property. This change in his perspective stayed with him for the rest of his life. Indeed, after a black man was lynched in Gainesville, Florida, Dubois effectively chastised local black residents for letting this happen. He argued that if blacks do not arm themselves, lynchings would continue.<sup>6</sup>

During the course of his work at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Dubois found powerful allies for his message of self-defense as guaranteed by the Second Amendment. For example, Walter White — who later served as executive secretary of the NAACP for a quarter-century — was just a boy in 1906. But White's memory of that same Atlanta race riot, and how his father kept his family safe by brandishing arms, stayed with him and impacted his beliefs for the rest of his life.<sup>7</sup>

**“A man’s freedom  
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the cartridge box.”**

**~ FREDERICK DOUGLASS**



In Mississippi during the early 1960s, many black families took up arms to protect themselves from white mobs. In Canton, Mississippi, C.O. Chinn would often have to defend his home and businesses from Klansmen and sheriffs sympathetic to the Klan’s hideous agenda. His reputation enabled him to further protect his fellow black residents as they exercised their right to vote with a cadre of other armed blacks to bolster his numbers.<sup>8</sup>

Hartman Turnbow was another black Mississippian who defended his home against white attackers. What instigated the attack against Turnbow was his involvement as one of the First Fourteen blacks in Holmes County who attempted to register to vote. During the attempt, the 14 were accosted by a large group of white racists — including the local sheriff, who taunted the 14 by placing his hand on his pistol and asking who wanted to be shot first. Turnbow responded: “Me, Hartman Turnbow. I came here to die to vote, I’m the first.”<sup>9</sup>

Not long after, a group assaulted Turnbow’s home with firebombs and bullets. Turnbow, wielding his .22 rifle, fended off the invaders and is believed to have killed one of them. He vigorously defended his actions as self-defense. Afterwards, even his wife began carrying a pistol wherever she went.<sup>10</sup>

This long history of black self-defense is perhaps best summed up by one of our nation’s best advocates and thinkers, Frederick Douglass, who said in 1867: “A man’s freedom rests in three boxes: the ballot box, the jury box and the cartridge box.”<sup>11</sup>





# Present Challenges

Over 60 million guns have been purchased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a large share of these purchases coming from black Americans — particularly black women. Some evidence suggests that this trend predates the pandemic.<sup>12</sup>

This development comes as black American gun owners increasingly bear the cost of policies that, while in theory were enacted in the name of public safety, end up creating a much more dangerous situation in the neighborhoods where they reside.

The prevalence of gun-related and other forms of crime in black communities compared to the nation at large, is a long-standing reality. Some of this crime is experienced in all demographic groups, such as domestic violence. But some are more often seen in urban minority communities, including gang violence. In such areas, poverty, fatherlessness, substance abuse and decades of awful public policy have left social vacuums that make gangs appear to be an attractive alternative.



Unfortunately, like the push by racial separatists in the 19th and 20th century to deny blacks access to firearms, many urban leaders today favor raising barriers to firearm access. Nonetheless, high rates of crime in a community cannot be effectively countered by making it more difficult for a law-abiding American to arm him or herself in self-defense. Instead, these restrictions further hurt urban communities because they disproportionately affect black residents who simply want to defend themselves. Going through all the hoops to legally acquire a gun can take months — if possible at all. For peaceful residents of crime-ridden neighborhoods or victims of previous assaults, that may prove too late.

Blacks today are at a serious risk of being victims of crime because a high percentage live in the very communities that limit personal protection. These same communities also fail to take actions to punish lawbreakers. Indeed, the situation is exacerbated by progressive prosecutors in many big cities who refuse to prosecute crimes, hold criminals accountable or seek justice for victims.

A recent report by the National Academy of Sciences revealed that Native Americans and blacks are the most likely to be victims of serious violent offenses. Tragically, a disproportionate number of victims were attacked by fellow blacks.



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Black Americans constitute roughly 14 percent of the total population, according to the most recent U.S. Census data, but comprise

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This statistic can become much more pronounced in many urban areas, such as Chicago, where that number rises to

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At the same time, urban leaders and progressive lawmakers are making it incredibly difficult for citizens who respect the law, and cannot always rely upon first-responders, to make a stand against the clear and present dangers threatening their homes and families.

# Looking Ahead

The “Bipartisan Safer Communities Act,” signed into law by President Joe Biden in June 2022, was heralded the first major, national gun control legislation in decades. While not as expansive as some gun control advocates might have wished, it does raise the prospect of future federal legislation coming down the pipeline.

Second Amendment advocates are rightly concerned over how the bill will be applied. According to the National Rifle Association, the bill could **“...be abused to restrict lawful gun purchases, infringe upon the rights of law-abiding Americans and use federal dollars to fund gun control measures being adopted by state and local politicians.”** The NRA also said: **“This bill leaves too much discretion in the hands of government officials and also contains undefined and overbroad provisions — inviting interference with our constitutional freedoms.”**

There are also extralegal methods being employed to restrict the Second Amendment. Corporations are beginning to test the



**No answers:** As the head of the new Office of Gun Violence Prevention, Vice President Kamala Harris participated in a conversation about the “Bipartisan Safer Communities Act” where she neglected to answer questions regarding what the administration was doing to end gun violence. Harris instead veered off topic to talk mainly about recent victims of gun crime, student and parent fears, and how mental health assistance was needed for those with gun violence trauma.

waters on undermining the Second Amendment by tracking weapons and ammo purchases, and pausing transactions on those deemed to be sufficiently dubious. Corporate surveillance, without due process, sparked enormous outcry from some conservative attorneys general. For Second Amendment advocates, these protocols, pushed by firms such as Mastercard and Visa, are not all that different from schemes hatched by the Chinese Communist Party — like their infamous “social credit scores.” Companies say they are responding to proposals in various states, but who is to say these policies will be limited to left-leaning states?

The pushback has since led Mastercard and Visa, specifically, to pause the implementation of these new purchasing codes.<sup>14</sup> However, none of these companies have disavowed the plans, leaving an expectation that progressive corporations may try again when no one is looking.

Liberal states will continue to push the boundaries of gun control, and conservative states will seek to expand the current scope of gun rights. A recent opinion by the U.S. Supreme Court, the most staunchly originalist court in generations, will affect how lower courts throughout the nation will handle the complexities of issues surrounding the Second Amendment.

The high court's June 21, 2024 ruling in *United States v. Rahimi* was the culmination of a case that had crept through the court system for years. Zachery Rabimi was sentenced to 73 months in prison under a 1994 federal law that prohibits firearm possession by people subject to certain domestic violence



restraining orders. Rabimi had allegedly threatened his girlfriend with a gun and shot at the house of a man to whom he had sold drugs. In an 8-1 decision, the court said the Constitution permits guns to be stripped from people deemed dangerous.

Writing for the majority, Chief Justice John Roberts said: "An individual found by a court to pose a credible threat to the physical safety of another may be temporarily disarmed consistent with the Second Amendment."<sup>15</sup>

The specter of future mass shootings ensures that the topic of outright bans on certain guns, ammunition and accessories will persist and old talking points revived. An assault weapons ban could become a real possibility the next time liberals obtain a working legislative majority in Washington, and state governments will continue to try new ways to either control guns or tighten the bonds of government control.

Volatile crime rates also present a particularly difficult reality for black Americans as it is usually those communities that bear the brunt of both the violence and the government response. This means that the voices of black Americans are of immense consideration in finding good, sustainable solutions to gun violence while ensuring that the rights afforded to all Americans are not violated.

Policies adopted to curb violence in crime-ridden communities should be grounded in a thorough understanding of the real-world consequences of their enactment. For example, an April 2020 study addressing the impact of state-level firearms laws on homicide rates by race and ethnicity found that "permit requirements to purchase and possess firearms and stricter requirements on who can obtain a concealed carry permit were associated with lower homicide rates among both the white and black populations." The U.S. Justice Department-funded study concludes that determining "who" has legal access to firearms may have an appreciable impact on firearm homicide, "especially if access is restricted specifically to those people who are at greater risk of violence: people with a history of violence."<sup>16</sup>





**PROJECT 21**  
Black Leadership  
Network

## What We Believe

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### The 2nd Amendment

We believe that American citizens possess an inalienable right to bear arms in self-defense. The Constitution enshrined that right in the Bill of Rights, and the Fourteenth Amendment extends that recognition to all American citizens. But growing calls to enact a range of regulations, prohibitions and restrictions around guns disproportionately affect minority communities and women. We urge caution, prudence, restraint and respect for the Constitution in all matters regarding the Second Amendment.

Black Americans have long endured the blunt end of the stick when it comes to gun control measures. Giving a voice to the conservative black community on these issues is well past due because the ramifications of getting these policies wrong will affect all black Americans, and indeed, all Americans.

We believe that reducing gun violence is not a simple process of removing guns from law-abiding Americans. Instead, it requires a holistic approach that improves policing, healthcare, education and enforcement of the criminal code for violent offenders, among other things. There is no panacea for deep problems, but the American spirit will brave the darkest depths to bring light.

Following in the footsteps of freedom fighters like Nat Turner and Harriet Tubman, we believe that true peace comes from the ability to be secure. When people are unable to defend their life and liberty, the pursuit of happiness is nothing but a dream.

Recent developments in Second Amendment law present many problems in securing that right. From interstate travel to grappling with

domestic violence and combatting gang violence, solutions proposed by many gun-control advocates place unnecessary and indefensible burdens on minorities. To those ends, we at Project 21 encourage the following policy approaches:

✓ **Support policies that keep firearms accessible for all law-abiding citizens, especially those most at risk:**

- Gun control policies often raise the cost of ownership, pricing out low-income Americans. This especially affects minority communities — particularly women — who may be single parents with little disposable income. We support policies that keep firearms accessible for all law-abiding citizens, and not just the wealthiest among us. The cost of acquiring a permit is unreasonably high in some states, and the associated classes of permits can be very difficult to parse. In some regions, where cross-state travel is commonplace, multiple permits may be required to stay in compliance — exacerbating the problem. Lawmakers should adopt policies that streamline and clarify the associated classes and work across jurisdictions to reduce the cost of getting a permit.
- Criminals need to understand that they will pay a price for preying on the innocent. This is particularly the case in urban communities. Local governments must act with dispatch to make firearms access easier for law-abiding citizens.

✓ **“Stand Your Ground” laws must be adopted and applied equitably:**

People have a natural right to defend themselves, Stand Your Ground (SYG) laws empower people to do so. We agree that SYG laws apply equally to all Americans regardless of their race or sex.

✓ **Government must prosecute criminals:**

State and local governments must undertake a reinvigorated effort to punish criminals, including adopting “three strikes and you’re out” laws, as well as placing limits on parole.

✓ **Local and state governments must be held accountable:**

The dramatic increases in firearm purchases by blacks should be seen as a vote of no confidence in the ability or willingness of many local and state governments to reduce crime.

✓ **Anti-police policies and rhetoric must stop:**

Progressives have pursued policies that have destroyed the black family for 60 years and compounded that harm with policies that limit law enforcement from operating effectively in the communities where they are most likely to live.

✓ **Establish reciprocity for permit holders:**

Interstate travel means that legally compliant gun carriers may suddenly become lawbreakers simply by crossing into a new state. This places a heavy burden on all carriers, but specifically those more likely to be stopped by police or faced with violent crime. We support policies that seek to establish safe-travel frameworks with increased reciprocity including, but not limited to, a National Carry Permit.

✓ **Expedite permits for those most at risk:**

Expedite permit policies for those in high-crime areas and/or victims of previous violent crimes — including rape, domestic violence and other sex crimes. Women are particularly vulnerable to retaliatory violence from former partners, even after the perpetrator is released from prison.

✓ **Transparency of data:**

We call for better transparency and accessibility for protective order data. While respecting the need for anonymity of the person filing the request, data compiled from these orders can help law enforcement develop better strategies and help policymakers understand the scope and dynamics of these problems

✓ **Reduce permitting costs:**

We believe that, pursuant to the recommendations above, policymakers should reduce the administrative costs associated with overseeing these gun regulations. This money could be better used for, among other possibilities, law enforcement

We must put forward to the American people a rigorous defense of the Second Amendment that keeps all of us safe, and our freedoms secure, from all forms of tyranny and violence.

To learn more about Project 21, please visit:  
**[www.NationalCenter.org/Project-21](http://www.NationalCenter.org/Project-21)**

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Project 21 works to promote the views of  
black Americans whose entrepreneurial spirit,  
dedication to family and commitment to  
individual responsibility have not traditionally  
been echoed by the nation's civil rights establishment.

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