

UC SANTA BARBARA

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UCSB SCHOLAR ARGUES TIME IS NOW FOR REAL GUN CONTROL

It is not that Alexander DeConde is philosophically opposed to guns.

What bothers the emeritus professor of history is that in the United States, they are so readily available to so many.

In his just published book *Gun Violence in America: The Struggle for Control* (Boston: Northeastern University Press), the retired UC Santa Barbara historian recounts the history of gun-control efforts in the United States and makes worldwide comparisons.

He argues against the supposed Second-Amendment right of individual Americans to bear arms and debunks many of the arguments offered to explain why the United States stands alone among the developed nations in making guns accessible virtually to all.

"I'm not contending that the use of guns by individuals is in itself evil," said DeConde, who taught at UCSB for 30 years before retiring in 1991.

"But ready accessibility of guns of any kind ... is a flawed privilege that has to be controlled effectively, and it is about time that this happened."

DeConde said he wrote the book to try to make clear the history of private gun violence in the United States and hopefully also to contribute to the dialogue for

resolving the problem.

"The United States has the most deplorable record of gun violence among industrially advanced nations," DeConde said.

"There are more gun-violent nations -- Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Afghanistan -- but among the more advanced countries, the experience of the United States is the worst."

He blames the problem largely on the ease with which firearms may be obtained here.

He also attributes it to the opposition of meaningful controls by probably the most effective lobby in the nation's history, that of the National Rifle Association and other gun organizations, and on a supine Congress.

DeConde acknowledges that possession and use of guns has been a legendary part of America's pioneer history and culture, a legacy to which many Americans remain bound. But he points out that there are other nations with a frontier history -- most notably Australia -- that have nonetheless agreed to control strictly the availability of guns for the greater public good.

Blaming the gun problem on male machismo doesn't wash either, DeConde said.

Many countries with cultures more afflicted by machismo than ours have regulated gun use with good results.

DeConde also differs with those who hold up the Second Amendment to the Constitution as sacred

and as guaranteeing individuals the right to bear arms. First, he sees no persuasive evidence of such a guarantee and secondly, even if that guarantee had existed, it could be changed.

The Constitution -- which once sanctioned slavery and denied women the vote -- frequently has been altered for the better.

To those who advocate the right to keep guns for personal protection, DeConde points out that reliable statistics show a gun in the house is far more likely to be used by family members on one another than against an intruder. And to those who

feel the freedom of the nation is guaranteed by an armed citizenry, he says, many democracies have survived with tight gun controls, and that armed citizens have never been much of a match for trained military forces anyway.

Those who want to possess guns, DeConde said, usually desire them more for pleasure than for defense or some other necessity.

The struggle for sound gun control breaks down at present into a battle between rural and urban cultures.

Since urban Americans far outnumber the agrarians and hunters, logic indicates that ultimately gun control advocates will win.

"In many aspects it's a rural vs. urban conflict," DeConde said.

"And urban society is larger.

I don't know when effective rather than Band-Aid gun control will happen.

But, despite the recent victories the George W. Bush administration handed to the anti-control faction, it is fighting a last-ditch defense."

About UC Santa Barbara

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