

## Local Politics Matter

# The NRA Response to Shootings of Black American Gun Owners

## Hypocritical or Just Plain Racist



Videos capturing both shootings have led most who see them to believe that the men were innocent. Guns are legal in every state in America. There are 45 states that have open or concealed carry laws allowing qualified people to carry weapons on or near them. The two (2) states that have received the most attention recently are Louisiana an open carry state and Minnesota a concealed carry state because Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, Black American men, were both shot while carrying guns in these states. Police in both of these states know the gun carry laws. Beyond being more videos of senseless violence by police against Black Americans, what these two videos have in common is the police in question excuse their actions by citing the presence of a gun and the NRA's response has been tepid at best and they have not defended the men's legal right to bear arms in accordance with state laws. You would expect that the NRA would have immediately spoken out on both of these cases. This is especially true in the case of the Philando Castile's shooting where a legal gun owner was shot for doing everything right. He had a legal concealed carry permit and during the traffic stop told the officer that he had a permit and that there was a legal gun present in the car. There was no reason for the officer to believe that Mr. Castile was a bad guy or that his life was in danger other than the fact that he was a Black American. The early NRA response was not to comment, and when they did it was a tepid state-

ment saying that the reports from Minnesota were troubling and that they must be investigated. They never issued a response to the Alton Sterling shooting in Louisiana.

This has led to national outrage and has caused many to question the NRA's history of not supporting Black American's right to carry arms in accord with their states' laws. What message does this send to Black American gun owners around the country that is easy - DO NOT PUBLICALLY CARRY YOUR WEAPONS – you can be killed and we will not defend your constitutional right to bear arms. Let's face it folks the establishment's fear of Black American men is exacerbated if they are carrying guns.

We are not surprised that there is within the NRA a resistance to comment on police shooting and killing Black Americans. This has long been a part of their history because of their alliance with the cops and the practice of white identity politics. Criticism of the police is seen as a risky strategy by the organization. The NRS'S statement on the Castile shooting was extremely rare and was only forthcoming after many of their members were outraged at the organization's lack of an early response. The NRA has also actively built the idea of gun ownership in America on white identity politics. They have been aggressively messaging to white conservatives to push their membership.

Now let's step back and take a look at some of the history of Black Americans and guns in America to put the NRA's views in the proper perspective. There has been a long history of negative association of Black Americans and the

Second Amendment and Black Americans' to bear arms. Under the lenient Reconstruction policies of President Andrew Johnson, white southerners reestablished civil authority in the former Confederate states in 1865 and 1866. They enacted a series of restrictive laws known as "[Black Codes](#)" which were designed to restrict freed Black Americans' activity and ensure their availability as a labor force now that slavery had been abolished. These Black Code Laws forbade former slaves and [Black Freedmen](#) from owning and carrying arms. States were given the right to decide who could bear arms in direct contravention to the Second Amendment. The NRA formed in 1871 with the goal of promoting and encouraging rifle shooting on a scientific basis. In 1990 they became a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization. For most of its history, the NRA supported gun control laws and did not see government as the enemy. It was not until 1977 when the NRA that Americans know today emerged, after libertarians who equated owning a gun with the epitome of freedom and fomented widespread distrust against government—if not armed insurrection—emerged after staging a hostile leadership coup.

In the mid-1950s, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. applied for a firearm permit and amassed guns and guards to protect himself and his family after bombings at the Birmingham church and is home in 1955 and 1956 respectively. The lesson here was that if the police would not protect you then you had to protect yourself and your family. Dr. King did not get his permit because of prejudice. In 1964 Malcolm X gave a speech titled "[The Ballot or the Bullet](#)" where he implored Black Americans to be armed and disciplined to defend themselves or revolt if necessary.

In 1968 the assassinations of civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy were the tipping point, coming after several summers of race-related riots in American cities. The nation's white political elite feared that violence was too prevalent and that there were too many people—especially urban Black nationalists—with access to guns. In May 1967, two dozen Black Panther Party members walked into the California Statehouse carrying rifles to protest a gun-control bill, prompting then-Gov. Ronald Reagan to comment, "There's no reason why on the street today a citizen should be carrying loaded weapons." In the 1920s and 1930s, the NRA's leaders helped write and lobby for the first federal gun control laws—the very kinds of laws that the modern NRA labels as the height of tyranny. The legal doctrine of gun rights balanced by gun controls held for nearly a half-century.

Fast forward to today and you see that the country's new carry laws have not helped because now no one can tell the good guys from the bad guys and this is especially true of armed Black American men. Fear of armed Black Americans has not waned and may have even intensified and the NRA's tendency to lean towards the policy of gun ownership by whites only leads them to stay on the sidelines when these obvious killings occur. After all a Black American man with a gun is first considered a bad guy and the NRA has done nothing to dispel this notion. This has led to police and citizens with itchy fingers who will often shoot first and ask questions later. The NRA a proponent of the open carry laws in general remains an American institution with an overwhelmingly white membership. They will never side against the police in favor of Black Americans.

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