

Some things you probably don't know

Here are a few things our legal experts explain, which few activists know: The English duty to own arms goes back at least a thousand years, and the right to have them was proclaimed an "ancient and indubitable right" in 1688. Arms were so widespread in early America that they were used to decorate government buildings, and colonial governors could bring Indian tribes under control by threatening to cut off their gunpowder supplies. After James Madison introduced his Bill of Rights in Congress, a close friend of his published newspaper articles that said the Amendment protected American's "private arms," and Madison thanked him for giving the explanation. When the First Congress passed the Bill of Rights, a Senator moved to change the Second Amendment to read "keep and bear arms for the common defense" — and the Congress voted it down. Four great early legal writers — two of them friends of the Founding Fathers — wrote on the Second Amendment, and all said it protected an individual right, and forbade Congress to disarm Americans. One of these legal authors had sat in his state's legislature when it voted to ratify the Second Amendment. After the Civil War, America adopted the 14th Amendment — and a major purpose of that Amendment was to outlaw gun confiscations by State officials, aimed at disarming Black Americans so as to leave them vulnerable to Klan attack. Some legal experts say the 14th Amendment gives a clearer individual right to arms than does the Second Amendment! In the 1960s, civil rights workers armed themselves to ward off the Klan (two of them appear in this film and tell their story). One civil rights organizer registered his NAACP chapter as an NRA-affiliated club, and they drove off a Klan attack with their rifles. Legal scholars are pressing the UN and other international bodies to recognize an international right to arms, as the only real protection against genocide. Americans use firearms to defend against criminals around 2.5 million times per year, and such defense saves more lives than murderers take. Courts have held that law enforcement has no legal duty to protect you, even if a 911 operator promises that police are on the way and then refuses to alert officers. Mayors may say, for public consumption, that their police are there to protect you, but when they fail, will invoke court rulings that say their city has no duty to protect its citizens.