

THE GUNNING OF AMERICA
Business and the Making of American Gun Culture
Author: Pamela Haag

Review Issue Date: February 15, 2016

Online Publish Date: January 27, 2016

Publisher: *Basic*

Pages: 528

Price (Hardcover): \$29.99

Publication Date: April 19, 2016

ISBN (Hardcover): 978-0-465-04895-3

Category: Nonfiction

An examination of the controversial realm of American gun culture through the perspective of gun manufacturers, with an emphasis on the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. Historian Haag (*Marriage Confidential: The Post-Romantic Age of Workhorse Wives, Royal Children, Undersexed Spouses, and Rebel Couples*, 2011, etc.) deliberately eschews detailed discussions about the Second Amendment, the rights of gun owners, the advocates of gun control, and other cornerstones of our current heated political debate. Instead, in each chapter, the author emphasizes that the United States became awash with handguns and rifles and other permutations of weaponry in large part because manufacturers saw potential markets for their products and then sold to those markets aggressively and effectively. Haag explores numerous manufacturers and their personnel, building her narrative mostly around 19th-century "rifle king" Oliver Winchester and his "less visible, more historically numinous daughter-in-law," Sarah Winchester. Oliver represents the bottom line-oriented businessman who thought little about the moral implications of selling a product meant to kill, while Sarah represents the second-generation tycoon haunted by those same moral implications. As Haag mixes a straight-ahead business saga with a soap-operatic tale of misfortune in spite of wealth, the opposing strands are not always well-integrated within the overall text. However, those threads are usually interesting, and the research is extensive. In an epilogue, Haag briefly addresses current gun politics, suggesting that imposing corporate accountability on gun manufacturers seems more productive than endlessly debating the rights of gun owners and what gun control partisans have a right to impose on those individual owners. It is important to recognize, she writes, "that gun violence and mass shootings are not really technocratic problems, to be most effectively solved through the correspondingly technocratic remedies of legislative campaigns that often fail, and that, in any event, tackle small facets of the problem." A refreshingly unusual approach by an author admirably transparent about why she wrote the book and why she chose to avoid more traditional approaches.