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The Last Word: Home as Castle or Fortress

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Home As Castle or Fortress

I have always considered my home to be my castle, but with 200 million privately owned guns in the United States it appears that a vast number of people consider their home to be their fortress.

These people will contend that they have guns primarily for recreational purposes but that does not remove the possibility of the home owner using his "recreational" gun to protect his home, his property, and his loved ones.

For any unannounced visitor, the sign over the back door of many American homes should no longer be "My Home is My Castle." In its place should be a sign stating "My Home is My Fortress." Enter, then, at your own risk.

I own no guns. And as much as anything else, I have tried to teach my children about the evils of gun ownership. So I have a special curiosity for the rationale of those who do keep guns in their homes. Notwithstanding the sporting uses, these gun owners point to the alarming number of armed robberies in homes.

I am obviously affected by such data because I can count ten kwikset locks on the five doors of my house. They are all latched each night and also when the family is away in order to secure our home. My nightly locking ritual could be considered paranoid or it could be justified. My late father never locked any door at anytime in his home. But that was years ago.

So, then, why do I choose to secure my home with locks while my friend chooses to secure his with weapons? After many discussions with him, I have finally forced him to reveal his rationale for the possession of his Smith and Wesson .22 caliber pistol and his Lugar.

He believes in a fire-arms deterrent policy similar to our nation's philosophy of nuclear arms deterrence. He contends that if all homes were armed fortresses then all our individual little domiciles would be safe from attack. Invaders would know this in advance so none would cross our domestic boundaries.



This otherwise kind and gentle friend of mine informs me that his home is a fortress because there is a need for a balance of terror in order to prevent crime and to ensure his family's safety. Sounding a little like Winston Churchill, he assures me that his homespun mutually assured destruction policy has protected his home and the homes of others from invasion.

This microcosmic application of the world arms buildup reminds me of Thoreau's essay examination of an ant war in WALDEN. The point of Thoreau's essay is the futility of war motivated by jingoism. My friend's

jingoistic approach "ban outlaws don't outlaw guns" -- reminds me of "My country right or wrong" and "Life Free or Die" -- both of which were invoked to justify armament, war, and killing.

Slogans sound so neat and clear until the moment of conflict arises. Imagine the petty thief on my friend's living room floor after a shoot out -- "his own breast . . . all torn away exposing what vitals he had" and the protector looking down at his "ghastly trophy."

I question him by pointing to some of the foibles of his home security strategy. First, an intruder who is determined to invade a home to rob it of some valuable resources will *not* be deterred. He will simply apply greater stealth to his misdeed and will become, perhaps, more jittery and dangerous in the process.

Secondly, what if an otherwise unarmed intruder, knowing that he is about to enter an armed fortress decides to employ "first-strike" tactics and, armed-to-the-teeth, enters my friend's home? The terms of confrontation have escalated, and my friend is not guaranteed that he will be able to deploy his weapons system in time. If my buddy thinks about this long enough he may get jumpy and trigger happy. Now the prospect of shooting an innocent visitor or some well-intentioned neighbor becomes great.

Despite my pointing this out to him, my fellow human continues to stockpile weapons in his home, and he supports passing laws which would mandate that every dwelling be protected by firearms on the premises. My frustration builds. I begin to equate the industrial weapons manufacturers pushing increased defense spending with the American Rifle Association's suspected lobbying for laws mandating a gun in every home. Paranoia sets in. I think of my home, my castle; my father's home, his castle; and my friend's home, his fortress. I return to my backyard garden and, like Thoreau, contemplate the great ant wars.

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