

# GARRY WILLS GETS SNOOKERED

In left-wing Catholic circles there is perhaps no one more admired these days than Garry Wills. Wills, as our members know, has nothing but contempt for most of what the Catholic Church stands for and it is this that makes him so popular among “progressive” Catholics. It should also be noted that these Catholics tout his intellect as if the guy were some sort of genius.

But now Garry doesn't look too bright anymore. We're not speaking of his writings on Catholicism (they are bad enough), we're speaking of how he got snookered by Michael Bellesiles.

In the fall of 2000, Bellesiles, a professor at Emory University, published a book titled, *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*. The book sought to demonstrate that it is a myth to believe that early Americans were a gun-toting people. The book quickly became the most cited source of the anti-gun crowd: they argued that the Second Amendment had very limited purposes and should therefore be honored today by making gun control a national priority.

But not everyone was buying this thesis. Some historians, for example, began to raise serious questions about Bellesiles' scholarship. It got to the point that more recently a three-person committee of scholars from Princeton, Harvard and the University of Chicago did a fact check of Bellesiles' work and concluded that it showed “evidence of falsification,” “egregious misrepresentation,” and “exaggeration of data.” They concluded by saying “His scholarly integrity is seriously in question.” In October, Bellesiles announced he will retire from Emory December 31.

So how did Wills get snookered? On September 10, 2000, in the pages of the *New York Times Book Review*, Wills raved about the

book: "Bellesiles has dispersed the darkness that covered the gun's early history in America. He provides overwhelming evidence that our view of the gun is as deep a superstition as any that affected Native Americans in the 17th century."

To which we say: Wills' review of the Belleslies volume provides overwhelming evidence that P.T. Barnum was right—"There's a sucker born every minute." It also shows that if Wills is so gullible in this area of history, his credibility in accurately analyzing Catholicism is questionable at best.