

“Moses” Goes Astray

May 10, 1997

The day after he was elected NRA First Vice President, Actor Charlton Heston told San Francisco’s KGO Radio Host Ted Wygant that his intent was to put NRA “Right in the middle of the mainstream.”

As the first step to remaking NRA’s image, he declared that the Brady Bill “is meaningless” and “AK-47s are inappropriate for private ownership, of course.”

That was on May 6, The Morning of “Moses” First Day as 1st V.P. – while the rest of the NRA Officers and Board were still meeting in Seattle.

Three days before, Mr. Heston was elected to the NRA Board at the annual meeting of members (thanks to a tortured interpretation of the Bylaws that allowed recipients of a single write-in vote to appear on the 76th Director ballot).

On Monday, Heston was elected First Vice President, defeating me by a Board vote of 38-34. Then Des Moines assistant chief of police Kayne Robinson defeated Albert Ross as 2nd V.P., by a single vote, 36-35.

If I seem bitter, I’m not; it’s somewhat flattering to lose to “Ben Hur /Thomas Jefferson/Moses/the Voice of God” by only four votes.

But I am angry that the NRA Board would ratify the trashing of a fine man such as Albert Ross—and the half of the board who are deeply concerned about NRA’s finances—by replacing him with one of the co-signers of a scurrilous character-assassinating piece trash.

More importantly, I am dismayed that a carefully scripted actor would immediately begin trying to rewrite the NRA Policy Manual—which includes a January 1991 declaration by the NRA Board that “semiautomatic firearms, regardless of magazine capacity, are protected by the Second Amendment.”

NRA’s response to the flurry of calls from angry members who heard

the interview, or read of it on the Internet, was (1) “You didn’t hear right;” (2) “Mr. Heston’s comments were taken out of context;” (3) “He was talking about full-autos;” or (4) “He was only saying that criminals shouldn’t have AK-47s.”

All four are false, as the transcript of the KGO program, made by Video Monitoring Services of America, makes clear.

After the first break, Wygant says “the image of NRA has been an organization that supports the right of people to buy any legal firearms” but that gun shops offer “things that are big, and brutal, and deadly, and far more than you need for hunting or home protection. Do you stand by—I mean, the image is...

Heston: “AK-47s are inappropriate for private ownership, of course.”

Wygant: “Yeah, but the image is that they’re- the fire power of these weapons is far more than a hunter or a homeowner would need. Why is it necessary to have those guns available anyway?”

Heston: “I just got through telling you. The possession- private possession of AK-47s is entirely inappropriate.”

Wygant: “Right, but AK-47s one thing, but I’ve been in a gun shop—I’ve been in gun shops, and there’s fire power there that doesn’t seem necessary and that people worry about being out there in- in the hands of, you know, potential criminals.”

Heston: “I’m not certain what you’re [sic] point is—that there are guns available in gun stores?”

Wygant: “No, guns that go beyond what a hunter would need. In other words, why does the NRA support guns that have overkill? Let’s put it that way. Shouldn’t there be some sort of limit?”

Heston: “Well, for any certain time, AK-47s are entirely inappropriate for private ownership, and the—the problem, of course, is not guns held by private citizens, but guns held by criminals. And where we have failed, where the government has failed is with entirely cosmetic actions like the Brady Bill, which is meaningless. I’m not even- don’t even think it should be repealed because it doesn’t do anything.”

Clearly, Heston is trying to remake NRA’s image. What’s disturbing is that instead of educating Heston, NRA’s Public Affairs firm—which also represents Heston personally—is trying to cover for him.

I’ve long appreciated Heston’s performances in carefully scripted radio and TV spots for NRA, but when he takes it upon himself to “improve NRA’s image” by taking positions that violate NRA policy, we NRA members must not follow Moses blindly.

Fallout From Heston's Gaffes

May 12, 1998

The night President Bill Clinton stretched the Gun Control Act of '68 to ban the importation of 59 “modified assault weapons” by Executive Order, NRA-ILA Executive Director Tanya Metaksa debated White House Spokesman Rahm Emanuel on national television—and was gutshot by her own side.

Emanuel gleefully hit her with: “When Charlton Heston was nominated and elected to the board of the NRA, he himself said in an interview in San Francisco it was inappropriate for a personal ownership of the AK47 because he knew then ... that the AK47 is a military weapon, it is not a sporting weapon.”

Tanya could do nothing but ignore Emanuel's damaging shot.

The anti-gunners will be quoting Mr. Heston a lot after his expected election as NRA President at the Philadelphia Board of Directors meeting June 8—unless he clearly and emphatically renounces his statement that “AK-47s are inappropriate for private possession,” and announces that he was wrong to support the Gun Control Act of 1968.

For the good of NRA and our gun rights, I sincerely hope he will make both statements clearly and forcefully at the June 6 annual meeting of members.

His powerful statements on the importance and significance of the Second Amendment, read eloquently in speeches at the National Press Club, at the Conservative Political Action Conference and elsewhere, are neutered by the obvious contradictions in his 1968 support for the Gun Control Act in 1968, and his current opposition to repeal of the Brady Act and the ban on so-called “assault weapons.”

Although the October 1968 *American Rifleman* identifies Heston as one of “little more than a handful” of “diehards” in the Hollywood anti-gun movement, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported March 15 that he “informally” supported GCA '68 law but “backed away from the law within a few years.”

“At the time, it seemed like a responsible idea,” he said. That is the closest Heston has come to renouncing those efforts, in which he worked directly with the Lyndon Johnson White House, according to documents from the LBJ Library in Austin.

Heston told the *Plain Dealer*, “reopening a 30-year-old debate is a little like a 1990s politician opposing the policies of President Johnson.”

Not really. The issue isn't Johnson's policies, but the anti-Second Amendment law that resulted from them—which was the basis for the “sporting purposes” import ban that Clinton expanded last month, and is the basis of virtually all Federal gun laws.

When Heston's support for GCA '68 first surfaced, *Gun Week* obtained a statement that “a handful of dissidents [...] seek to impugn my integrity regarding the Second Amendment and Bill of Rights, based on a couple of meetings held 30 years ago with suspicious types like Jimmy Stewart, Kirk Douglas and Gregory Peck. [...] I stand by my record.”

It is his record that people like Rahm Emanuel, Sarah Brady and Josh Sugarmann won't let him forget.

That “couple of meetings” included an appearance on the popular Joey Bishop television show, public speeches, and visits to Associated Press and United Press at which the actors provided statements prepared for them by the White House, according to the LBJ Library materials.

Former ILA Director Robert Kukla, in *Gun Control*, his history of GCA '68 (edited by Harlon Carter), quotes from a June 19, 1968 *Chicago Daily News* article which says “Five gunslinging movie stars urged citizens Tuesday to ask their senators and congressmen to vote in favor of gun control laws.”

The “statement distributed to newsmen” stressed that President John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King were killed by rifles. The actors were pushing GCA '68's addition of long guns and ammunition to the just-passed handgun law.

When Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre was on Ken Hamblin's “Black Avenger” radio show to explain Heston's “AK-47s are inappropriate” statement (Hamblin also called me) Wayne claimed that the NRA Vice President “got his tongue tangled in one interview on one little radio station.”

In fact, Heston precisely repeated his statement three times, as if reading from a script. The station, KGO San Francisco, is one of the most powerful in the West.

At Philadelphia, with many thousands of NRA members gathered, and reporters and television cameras there in force, Chuck Heston can pave the way for a near-unanimous crowning as NRA President by resoundingly declaring when and why he converted to the pro-Second Amendment side.

And the members, including this one, will cheer. For then Charlton Heston can become not only an eloquent speaker, but a credible spokesman for NRA.