

THE VIOLENT SOUL OF AMERICA

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE

"Bowling for Columbine¹" is an alternately humorous and horrifying film about the United States. It is a film about the violent soul of America. Why do 11,000 people die in America each year at the hands of gun violence? It also was the first documentary film accepted into competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 46 years. The Cannes jury unanimously awarded it the 55th Anniversary Prize. The following excerpt is a cartoon pointing to America's past as a clue as to why the American pursuit of happiness is so riddled with violence.

Now it's time for a _____ of the United States of America.

Hi, boys and girls! Ready to get started?

Once upon a time there were these people in Europe called "_____" and they were afraid of being persecuted. So they all got in a _____ and sailed to the New World where they wouldn't have to be scared ever again.

But as soon as they arrived they were greeted by _____ and they got scared all over again! So they killed them all.

Now you'd think wiping out a race of people would calm them down but no! Instead they started getting frightened of each other! They burned _____.

In _____ they started killing _____ so they could be free – and it worked!

But they still didn't feel safe so they passed a second amendment which said every white man could keep his gun, which brings us to the genius idea of _____!

You see, boys and girls, the white people back then were also afraid of doing any work, so they went to Africa, _____ thousands of black people, brought them back to America and forced them to work very hard for no money – and I don't mean "no money" like "I work at Walmart² and make no money", I mean zero dollars, nothing, not a zip!

Doing it that way made the USA the richest _____ in the world!

So did having all that money and free help calm the white people down? No way! They got even more afraid! That's because after two hundred years of slavery _____ now outnumbered the white people in many parts of the South! Well, you can pretty much guess what came next: the slaves started _____! There were uprisings and the old masters' heads got cut off, and when white people heard of this they were freaking out and going: "Oh! I wanna³ live! Don't kill me big black man!"

Well, just in the nick of time came _____, who in _____ invented the first weapon ever that could be fired over and over with having to reload. And all of a sudden the whites were like "Yea! Ha!". But it was too late! The North soon won the _____ and the slaves were freed. Yup! They were free now to chop all the old masters' heads off! And everybody was like "Oh! No! We're gonna⁴ die!" But the freed slaves took no _____. They just wanted to live in peace.

But you couldn't convince the white people of this! So they formed _____ (KKK) and in _____, the same year the Klan became an illegal terrorist organization, another group was founded – _____ (NRA).

Soon politicians passed one of the first gun _____, making it illegal for any black person to own one! It was a great year for America, the _____ and the _____ – of course they had nothing to do with each other and it was just a coincidence: one group legally promoted responsible gun ownership and the other group shot and _____ black people.

And that's the way it was all the way to _____, when a black woman broke the law by refusing to _____ to the back of the bus. White people just couldn't believe it! Hell broke loose. Black people everywhere started demanding their rights and white people had a major _____ feeling and they were all like: "Run away! Run away!", and they did! They all ran fleeing to _____ where it was all white and safe and clean. And they went out and bought a quarter of a billion _____ and put locks on their doors, alarms in their houses and gates around the neighborhoods. And finally they were all safe and _____ and snug as a bug.

And everyone lived happily ever after.

Bowling for Columbine, Michael Moore, 2002

¹ Columbine: Two senior students at the Columbine High School in Littleton, CO, murdered 14 students and one teacher; they also injured 20 students. The perpetrators were 18 and 17. After the killing rampage, on the 20th of April 1999, they committed suicide.

² Walmart: leading American chain of discount department stores.

³ wanna (informal): want to

⁴ gonna (informal): going to

- 1. What is the main topic of this cartoon?**
- 2. Describe the genre of this piece.**
- 3. What groups of people did the Americans kill in 200 years of national history?**
- 4. How are fear, racism and violence connected here?**
- 5. What are the "suburbs" like in the US, as opposed to "inner cities"?**
- 6. "*And everyone lived happily ever after.*" Is the end ironic?**
- 7. Do you think this account is fair? Is this an objective history of the US?**

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