

*We are NOT suggesting that Bikes Belong become as strident and adversarial as the NRA. We simply urge that we learn from their phenomenal success.* Dan Baum w/Leslie Bohm: 11/28/11  
(Dan's an avid cyclist and a nationally-recognized author who is completing a book on Guns in America. His recent cover story in Harpers is at: [harpers.org/archive/2010/08/0083063](http://harpers.org/archive/2010/08/0083063). More at [danbaum.com](http://danbaum.com))

The NRA has successfully elevated a hobby to a **moral crusade**. Gun enthusiasts aren't just hunters or target shooters or collectors; they're defenders of America's unique freedoms and guardians of a God-given right to self-defense that pre-dates the Second Amendment. Because bicycling can do so much for our country and the planet, there is a parallel here. It's not just a nice thing to do—it can materially improve our country and our lives.

The NRA existed for 100 years before it became political. After JFK was shot, the agitation for gun controls began. The NRA exploited that moment, and manufactured an **interpretation of gun control as anti-American**. Moreover, it gins up tremendous resentment among its members toward anyone who would oppose gun rights.

Most bicyclists have no idea what kind of the challenges we face, or who our enemies in Congress are. Gun owners are bombarded with that kind of information constantly. We as good, rational citizens may not like playing the politics of resentment, but it works. Bicycling is morally, ethically, and environmentally on the side of the angels. Bicycle proponents are proponents of healthy living. Bicycle enthusiasts need to be energized about our challenges and made incensed, even angry if necessary.

**The NRA is ubiquitous in firearms retailing.** At gun shops or gun shows, the NRA has a big presence. Many gun shops have NRA membership forms on the counter. Customers are urged to join, gun magazines exhort readers to join, and gun classes are largely NRA recruiting pitches.

The pressure to be part of the NRA, if you're a gun owner, is intense and constant. The NRA has managed to create an atmosphere in which if you're a gun owner and *not* a member of the NRA, you're letting the team down; you're a mediocre citizen, a freeloader enjoying the benefits bestowed by the organization without contributing to it.

The NRA is feared partly for the size of its membership -- about four million -- so **building numbers is key**. If bike shops were convinced that Bikes Belong was really working for them and making a difference, they might be convinced to offer, say, a small discount on a purchase in exchange for the customer signing up on the spot for a membership to Bikes Belong.

**The NRA considers itself in a fight to the death and acts that way.** It communicates constantly with its members, with everything from political bulletins to marketing NRA-embossed day planners and ash trays. It doesn't shy away from whipping up resentment.

Gun owners are made to feel like valued foot soldiers in a bigger campaign to create a better America. Similarly, cyclists might be able to be recruited as the vanguard of the campaign to save the planet from climate change, urban congestion, overweight children, and so on.

**The NRA doesn't talk much about guns.** They connect directly to what guns stand for. They elevate their campaign to rest on many unassailable American values.

For us: It's not really about the bike. It's about communities, it's about kids developing healthy lifestyles, it's about quality of life.

We are NOT endorsing the extreme fervor of the NRA, however we do believe our efforts can move a bit in that direction without the least bit of acrimony or even minor discomfort.