

Intimidation and Open Carry in a Small Town

Written by Peter

Sunday, 18 August 2013 01:16 - Last Updated Sunday, 18 August 2013 02:03

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I thought I'd write about something. I was at a gas station today. Some of you haven't seen me in a while, but I am in full-on "bearded, wild haired mountain man" mode right now. So, in walks a guy. He's in a t-shirt, shorts. Gym clothes maybe. He's also got a pistol in a holster on his hip. This did not make me feel safer.

In theory, I believe in 2nd amendment rights.

In practice, today I found that although I agree that the rights should exist, I think in many cases

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people should voluntarily choose not to exercise them. This was one of them.

A pistol is not a hunting weapon. It is inaccurate at long distances. Its primary purpose is to kill humans at close range. I think open carry of a pistol in a place where there's no rational reason to fear violence is a bit of a jerk move. It's an intimidation tactic. It's basically saying to the world, "try something and I'll shoot you." There is no other reason to open carry a pistol. To choose to send that message to everyone around you without a rational reason to think they will try something is, in my opinion somewhat paranoid, actually offensive (to people who weren't planning on "trying something," and a bit scary. If a person were to walk up to me and say, "If you step out of line I'll shoot you" that's a death threat. With open carry, the death threat is implied instead of spoken, but directed at everyone around instead of just one person.

I question the mental state of the person who chooses to do such a thing in the absence of a credible threat to their safety. Even if there was such a threat, it is hard to imagine someone finding it necessary to wear a gun to go into a convenience store and buy a Dr. Pepper, then climb back into their truck.

In general, both people and animals tend to do what is expected of them. If someone treats everyone around them as if they are dangerous, the world as a whole will pick up on that. Intimidation tactics result in fear, which can trigger the violence such a person claims they are trying to prevent.

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I mentioned my appearance because the dude with the gun was giving me these looks. I mean, I do look unusual for this area. I think he viewed me as a potential threat. People's personal appearance can send a message to the world. My appearance marks me as different, and is something I choose. Others here are marked as different in ways they have no control over. One's beard, however, cannot be used to kill someone.

I was looking at him because he was open carrying a pistol in a gas station, and he was not an on duty police officer. A person with a gun who is deliberately using intimidation tactics does not make most people feel safe. Neither does a person who needs to openly display a weapon to feel safe. It put me on guard, and I was glad when he left. I viewed him as a threat, because he felt the need to openly carry a deadly weapon into a place that was not dangerous.

And if I had my own gun, it would not make me feel any safer, because a gun is an offensive weapon, not a defensive one. It only protects by intimidation (which was what the man in this case was doing) or by pre-emptive strike. If someone decides to shoot you with no warning, the gun at your hip will not prevent the bullet from killing you.

My unease in this instance might be a bit hypocritical. It's a convenience store. The owner might (and likely does) have a shotgun under the counter. But that doesn't bother me. Because it's hidden. He can defend himself without choosing to intimidate his customers. If he had a gun out in the open at all times- or if he had a bowie knife and used it to clean his fingernails- he'd lose customers for the reasons I cite above. I would be uncomfortable in such a situation, and probably choose to patronize a different store. Many, perhaps most people would. Even here in small town Tennessee where gun rights are highly valued.

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So in conclusion- if you want to carry a pistol for protection, do it. But go through the class and get a concealed carry permit, and be aware of the message your choices send to the people around you. There's a place for open carry- in areas where law and order has broken down to the point where intimidation and threats of force are necessary on a daily basis to ensure your survival. But right now, I don't think this is one of these places.

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P.S. It is not impossible there's a legit reason for it. It could be possible that he had a real reason to be afraid, in which case I apologize for my reasoning. It could also be possible that he was an off duty police officer (in which case he shouldn't have been wearing his weapon anyway but whatever).

But at best, he was doing it because he could. To me, that's not a good enough reason.

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P.S.S. There are other tangential issues that may come to mind after reading this (intimidation tactics by police, appearance based profiling, 2nd amendment rights and gun control in general. there are also implications for US foreign policy). This post is not meant to address any of that. What the man did today was legal. I'm not trying to argue about whether it should or should not be legal, only about whether it was right.

P.S.S.S. This article may seem more confrontational than intended. If you can think of an alternative explanation for the man's decision to open carry in a small town with little to no risk of violent crime, I'd like to hear it. I can think of one reason myself that I didn't write about, but it's not a good one. Please comment using JComment at the bottom. I will moderate if it gets out of hand but as long as the tone is civil and there are no ad hominem attacks. I welcome dialogue.