

When was it legal to shoot at people?

Pay attention folks. There's a new law in town, and it states that firing a gun in the direction of any person, structure or car within the range of the weapon is strictly prohibited.

Excuse our ignorance, but isn't that already illegal?

The law was passed by the U.S. House and Senate as a more specific charge to use in drive-by shootings.

But just how necessary is Senate Bill 638? Without this new law would citizens be able to fire at people, structures or cars while those objects were within their weapons range? This will indeed be news to most law-abiding citizens. Think of all the lost opportunities.

The chance to gun down bad drivers has passed before most people even knew the option was available. Those pesky legislators are always one step ahead of the game.

However, this new law will help students trying to cope with the effects of Measure 5. Now students can use cash they would have spent on bullet proof car windows to help offset the tuition surcharge the legislature wasn't able to find a solution for.



FORUM

Even swap: One heart of stone for a little remorse

It can be startling sometimes to realize how much the crowd surrounding you dictates your own personal opinions. This realization can be especially surprising to Americans who believe so strongly in individuality and personal freedom.

A high school chum of mine, Ethan, seemed to learn this lesson sooner than the rest of us and in a conscious effort to retain his own free will, he distanced himself from hanging out with any particular mob. Ethan kept mostly to himself and always seemed to be occupied in thought about some somber question. When he did enter our conversations, it was usually to reproach us for being too quick to judge and condemn other people. He had the ability to always find good things to say about everyone.

Ethan's unique perspectives set him apart from the rest of the in-crowds, so none of us were surprised that when graduation rolled around and we all made plans to go off to college, join the army or become part of the labor force, Ethan turned down a job at the local foundry to, as he put it, "go off in search of the unpardonable sin." None of us had seen him since.

That's why I was shocked when I got a phone call from him the other day. I don't know why he picked me to contact, but I got the feeling he wanted to test the waters of the average American attitude and I was his guinea pig.

We awkwardly meandered through the usual "how and what are you doing" questions although he wouldn't tell me where his spiritual search had taken him. Right away I noticed a change in Ethan. His voice didn't reflect the self-assured sense of inner peace that marked him during high school. The voice on the phone was harsh, impatient and agitated.

Curiosity got the best of me and I

asked him how his quest had gone. He chuckled slightly before speaking. It was the peculiar laugh of someone who is disgusted with something, but has long since ceased to care.

"I'm still on the trail," he said. "I just can't quite grasp what the one unpardonable sin is. But, I'm very close to it. A few more months of searching through the filth of humanity should lead me to the answer."

I told Ethan that I noticed a change in him. I heard again his eerie chuckle over the phone before he launched into an unexpected tirade.

"Change? Me?! I'm not the one who has changed. I'm still the same. It's just that I've finally seen what this world is. No one cares. Human beings are a cancer destroying all that is good in this world."

What could I say. Obviously Ethan's journey had soured him on the species.

"Look at the latest war," he said apparently referring to the war in the gulf. "And it's not just the war. It's everything else. There is absolutely no feeling of remorse in this country."

I cut Ethan off short and asked what there was to feel remorseful about.

"I don't know where you're at Ethan, but you do know that we won the war don't you?" I asked. "We bombed them for a month and the ground war lasted less than a week. There were fewer than 100 U.S. combat casualties. It was the biggest rout since Bull Run. What is there to be somber or remorseful about? And where the hell are you at anyway? Do you have T.V.s or newspapers there? You are really out of it,

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man." "As a country we failed," Ethan snapped back. "I guess I should've expected such an ignorant response

from you. No one escapes the mass stupidity of this society? Is killing 100,000 people something to be celebrated? How come in such a Christian-dominated country there is absolutely no realization that although the war was short, and few Americans were killed, it would only be decent to regret having to have unleashed such destruction. There ought to be just an inkling of sadness that the best solution we could come up with was to destroy a country to the point that even the United Nations said Iraq has been left in 'apocalyptic' conditions."

He paused. But when I sat in stunned silence saying nothing, he continued on getting louder and angrier.

"Iraqi human beings have suffered so much. A sadistic leader, a long and bloody war with Iran that added nothing but grief and economic deprivation to the country, and now this. Americans should take at least a moment to ask for forgiveness for supporting Hussein for many years, and then having to make the entire country suffer because of his actions."

He laughed sadistically.

"And the bastard that started it all is still in power."

"But does anyone in this country care. No f-king way. Everyone here just wants to party or try and make money off of the slaughter. The only mood here is one of celebration. People are nothing but happy. Hell, there are 90 days worth

of victory celebrations for a war that lasted 45 days. You can buy Operation Desert Storm commemorative coins, posters, Norman Schwarzkopf videos, Victory in the Air videos, and don't forget the Operation Desert Storm trading cards and comic books for the kids.

"For those who want to let everyone know how proud they are of the U.S. war machine, there are bumper stickers, t-shirts, yellow ribbons and red, white and blue ribbons. Christ, I'm sure if a person looked, you could find Operation Desert Storm toilet paper. I can see the commercials now. 'Operation Desert Storm bathroom tissue: It goes in and wipes out assholes.'"

Ethan finally stopped shouting into the phone, but I still couldn't find any words to calm him. He had caught me completely off guard. He started chuckling again. When he finished he calmly spoke.

"I wish a plague would sweep across the world and kill every last miserable human being. Let the animals have the planet."

That was the last thing he said to me before hanging up. Although Ethan's thoughts were tainted with hatred caused by a mysterious, deep and permanent grief, he had made a point about America's collective repression of what really took place in Iraq. Ethan's search for the unpardonable sin had changed him considerably from when I knew him last. And even though he said he had not yet finished his quest, I got the feeling that he was just one painful, but releasing realization away.

(With apologies to Nathaniel Hawthorne.)

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