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Opinion

Will Texas' New Open Carry Protect Black People?

At the stroke of midnight, beginning Jan. 1, 2016, any individual who holds a Texas Concealed Handgun License (CHL) will be allowed to openly carry their handgun in the Lone Star State.

The law, passed by the 84th Texas Legislature and signed in June by Texas Governor Greg Abbott, will allow people with permits to carry their handguns outside their clothes, and those who already have concealed handgun licenses will only need to renew their permits when it comes time for renewal.



Jeffrey L.
Boney
NNPA
Columnist

CHL holders will be allowed to carry handguns as well.

History shows us there has been a tremendous element of risk that Black people have faced when it comes to dealing with law enforcement. There has been a consistent pattern in society, and in the mainstream media, of Blacks

intended for Black people, but for non-Black people. When members of law enforcement constantly use the narratives that they thought the "suspect" was "reaching for his/her waistband," or that they had to shoot because they were "in fear of their lives," one can see how the implementation of this new "open carry" law has many Texas residents concerned.

According to a recently released report from law enforcement watchdog Mapping Police Violence, between Jan. 1 and Dec. 15, 2015, police officers in the United States shot, beat, used stun guns on or otherwise killed a staggering 1,152 people.

What is even more troubling in the Mapping Police Violence report is the fact that 59 out of the nation's 60 largest police departments killed at least one individual or let someone die in their custody, and 100 percent of the people killed at 14 of those police departments were exclusively Black. Only five of those U.S. police departments killed only White people.

In Houston, some entities have chosen to embrace the law and others have not - in-

cluding the University of Texas at Houston and some area businesses.

In the end, "open carry" is the law of the land and it will take some serious getting used to. For those law enforcement officials who violate the law and profile lawfully carrying Black people, it may take several federal lawsuits in order to address the issue and stop the behavior.

Gun rights are civil rights and are not just for non-Black people, and there is some form of legal "open carry" law in 43 states in the U.S. In the state of Texas, any law-abiding, African American citizen has the legal right to exercise "open carry" if they so choose, without harassment or without being racially-profiled.

Whether driving while Black, walking down the street while Black or, now, legally carrying a firearm while Black, the skin color of Black people should not be used to stereotype and treat Black people like very few other races in America are treated.

Time will tell how this law will impact the African American community, but there is one thing African Americans should always be mindful of in Texas - don't let "open carry" get you carried away.

“History shows us there has been a tremendous element of risk that Black people have faced when it comes to dealing with law enforcement

Everyone else will need new training on the new "open carry" law.

The real question, however, is: will Black people receive the same level of respect and consideration when it comes to the application of this new law as non-Black people will?

Prior to the passage of the new law, current Texas law only allowed open carry of rifles or shotguns. Now, only

being viewed as the guilty aggressor - while Whites are typically viewed as "not guilty" and focused on protecting themselves when they carry firearms.

As we look at the significant number of unarmed Black people who have been killed in this country by members of law enforcement, it leads many people to believe this new "open carry" law is not

Students: What Will You Sacrifice for Justice?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, "It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important."

Those students who are protesting campus racism need to keep that quote in mind as they assert their right to feel safe and comfortable on campus. When the protests have been well defined and include an end game, such as the University of Missouri protests that toppled a President and Chancellor, they have been effective. When protests broadly address issues like comfort, they are less successful. And while it is satisfying to force a President (or a faculty member for that matter) to resign, the conditions of campus life will not necessarily change because there is a new leader. Structural racism is so firmly embedded in our culture that it will take years, if not decades, of focused work and commitment to eliminate it.

Unfortunately, too many are less dedicated to eliminating institutional racism than they are to maintaining the status quo. Consider, for example, the rhetoric during these Republican Presidential debates. Or, consider the clumsily racist question Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia posed when he asked whether



Julianne
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Columnist

Black students should attend "lesser schools" than schools like the University of Texas.

Student activism was one of the highlights of 2015. Without waxing nostalgic, though, I'd suggest that some of these young activists take a page

“‘Back in the day,’ we were far less concerned with ‘feeling’ comfortable than with being empowered

from the playbook written in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when protests shut campuses down for weeks. Student protests led to curriculum review on some campuses, the development of academic departments like African American studies and Ethnic Studies, the addition of faculty of color, a commitment to enroll more students of color, and more. "Back in the day," we were far less concerned with "feeling" comfortable than with being empowered. We wanted change, and we were willing to fight for it. And, the change we wanted was tied to

metrics. More scholarships, more faculty, more student admits. Not necessarily more comfort.

From my perspective discomfort is a good thing. Discomfort is a sign that something is wrong. Clearly there is much that is wrong on our campuses and in our nation. Racism is alive and well, though it shows itself in different forms than it did decades ago. The signs don't say "white" or "colored" anymore. Few "civilized" Whites use the n-word, but expletives are

nation. Student activists of 2016 could learn from the '60s activists, and they can also teach "mainstream" leaders twenty-first century organizing techniques. And across generations, there must be teaching and learning about complacency and discomfort, about what change looks like, and about what people are willing to give up to get change.

This 2016 election year promises lots of conversation about justice and change. Some political leaders will talk of "overregulation", while others will suggest that we must pass new laws. Some will suggest that affirmative action is no longer necessary, while others are clear that there remains unequal access to higher education. When questions of law are debated, I find it useful to consider Dr. King's view of law - it won't make you love me, but it will keep you from lynching me and, as he said, "that's pretty important." Dr. King described himself as a "drum major for justice," not a drum major for comfort. The campus activists who are raising critical questions are motivated by justice and cannot allow themselves to be sidelined with conversations about comfort. Comfort will always be elusive in a racist society. And that's a good thing.