

Modern Times and the Illusion of Safety

Something's been bugging me lately and it has to do with safety—at least the *illusion* of safety. Here in the twenty-first century, there are many ways people lie to us about our safety. How? Let me elucidate.

Take air travel. In order to board a plane, we stand in line with our shoes in our hand, make sure all the bottles in our carry-ons are no larger than 3 ounces in size and are subject to body-scanning equipment or physical pat-downs. Do these precautions actually make us safer? Did they protect the passengers on the flight the “Underwear Bomber” took? A malfunction prevented him from doing serious damage, but, had he been more proficient, the result could have been far more different *and ominous*.

How about traffic signals? “But they use them to direct traffic and prevent accidents,” I hear someone say. Oh yeah? I'm a careful driver and haven't collected even a traffic ticket in decades. Yet, since 2000, I've been involved in three serious accidents, *all at traffic lights*. In the first, I entered an intersection on a green light—not a stale one, but one that had changed as I approached, when a young woman attempted a left turn in front of me. I had no time to stop and ended up totaling my car and hers. Thankfully, no serious injuries resulted. In the second one, I proceeded to move on a green light, when a woman in a silver car ran a red light and smashed across the front end of my car, destroying the towing hookup and front bumper and bending the frame. A surveillance camera caught the whole thing and proved she had passed a red light, putting her at fault. The third time, I proceeded to turn on a green arrow, when a woman ignored the red light on her side and smashed into my car's right rear at thirty-five miles per hour, driving it twelve feet to the side. I didn't so much as hear the squeal of brakes. A witness behind me testified to the fact the woman passed the light, again putting her at fault. At the scene, her passengers told me she had recently had surgery and was under the influence of painkillers!

I offer these three accidents, not to prove that women have it in for me, but to illustrate how unsafe traffic signals really are. We're all safer with four-way stop signs, or no signs at all. The lights merely gave me the *illusion of safety*, not a guarantee. Traffic lights do very little, in my humble opinion, to prevent accidents. All it takes is one person ignoring a red light to cause trouble.

How about this? When you cross a bridge, or enter a tunnel, do you ever consider whether it's safe? Granted, a city's department of public works is *supposed* to inspect and repair such things, but budget cuts and revenue shortfalls can cause neglect. Study after study is proving that the infrastructure of big cities is crumbling, due to such neglect and for various reasons. It's enough to make you paranoid.

What about money? Do you think your investments are safe? Think Bernie Madoff, the Wall Street crash of 2007/2008 and the mortgage crisis. Not very safe, huh? The simple fact is, if your money isn't in your hands, you really have no guarantee you won't lose it. Even burying it in the backyard, or stuffing your mattress with it isn't completely safe. A “sure thing,” when it comes to investing, *isn't*. Safety is an illusion in that arena too. Just ask those who've lost their life savings, homes, and jobs.

My last “exhibit,” if you will, involves the right of citizens in this country to carry guns. Many cities, in direct violation of the Second Amendment to the Constitution, forbid private citizens to carry firearms in city limits. They supposedly do it to cut down on gun crimes, citing the presence of a police force for protection. “Call 9-1-1,” they say, but, in a city of millions, the odds of a police unit arriving to stop a violent crime are slim to none. Now, I have no problem with that, IF they allow me to carry my own protection, but that could end with me in jail, if law enforcement discovered my firearm, or, heaven forbid, I used it to protect myself. I’d end up in jail for having it illegally on my person, *even if it saved my life!* Worse yet, the attacker’s family could sue and bankrupt me. The end result of such ill-advised laws is to insure that only *criminals* are armed and can prey on unarmed, law-abiding citizens. It’s the illusion of safety again.

Let’s face it—laws don’t stop crime—only the *observance and enforcement* of said laws stop crime. Now, I’m not saying that our streets are theaters of crime and death, but, if people en masse decided to flout the law, how long before the police are overwhelmed? Why do we think that restricting law-abiding citizens from carrying weapons makes city streets safer? Short answer? *They don’t.* It’s the *illusion of safety* thing again.

And so it goes: from FDA approval of drugs, USDA laws governing the quality of food and beverages, trusting that the mechanic fixed your brakes correctly, or the aircraft mechanic put the right part in your airplane—it all comes down to beating the odds. Quite frankly, all we have is the *illusion* of safety. Now, I’m not discounting other factors at work to keep us safe. A car mechanic wouldn’t stay in business long if customers began crashing from his shoddy maintenance. The same goes for airlines, restaurants, drug manufacturers, et cetara, et cetera, et cetera. Laws don’t protect us; people *observing them* protect us.

Many people, especially lawmakers, think they are making us safer by enacting ill-advised laws and practices, when they’re doing nothing of the kind. Studies have proved that, when roads have no, or nearly no traffic signs, accidents plummet. So ... why do we have so many damnable traffic lights and signs? Studies also show that, far from increasing crime and deaths, when states, cities and towns allow people to arm themselves—AS OUR CONSTITUTION DIRECTS—crime and deaths go down. So ... why do so many places forbid firearms, flying in the face of the logic of the Founding Fathers?

I’m as puzzled by these questions as you must be, but I know this much: larding on law after law in the face of rising crime does little to stop it. Legislators *always* revert to knee-jerk reactions in the face of a gun-related crime, when the causes are far more than the mere possession of a firearm. Think about this the next time you read of some student going on a rampage in a school. Think back on a couple of the most egregious examples. Columbine. The University of Virginia. What if some student, legally carrying a firearm, shot back? Would it result in more, or less, deaths?

The next time you read of a tragedy, think about the cause of it; of the people that died, I’ll bet they all thought they were safe. Yet, that *illusion of safety didn’t do one darn thing to save them.*

It's time our lawmakers, law-enforcement officers, civil engineers, traffic control experts and money managers woke up and realized that simple fact.

A large part of safety is an illusion and you can put that in the bank—that is, if you trust banks.