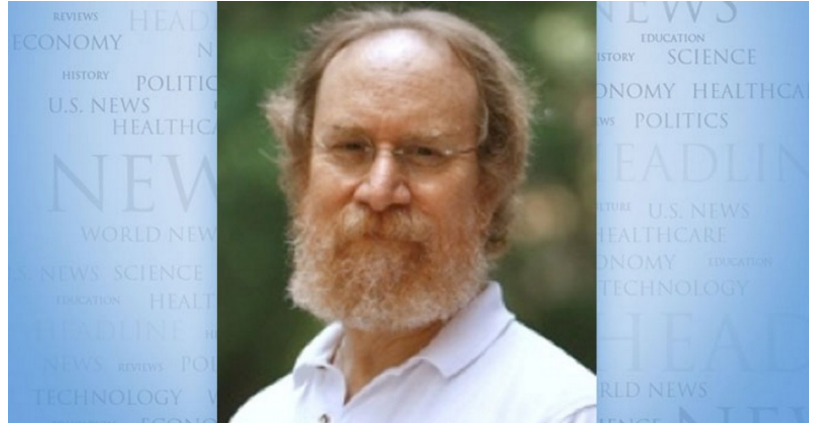




Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on July 24, 2012

## Don't Let Aurora Shooting Curtail Right of Self-Defense

The shooting in the Aurora, Colorado, movie theater has incited the usual debate over guns. One side says tighter gun restrictions could have prevented the horrible incident that night. The other responds that more guns in the hands of law-abiding people might have prevented it.



While the theater chain prohibits firearms, it is hard to say that the alleged shooter, James Holmes, would have been stopped by armed moviegoers. He wore protection from head to toe and caused mass confusion by setting off tear gas. This isn't to say that a few shots might not have stunned Holmes, giving others time to subdue him. Perhaps there would have been fewer victims that night. We'll never know.

However one comes down on this issue, we should understand that it is not relevant to the gun-policy question. Even if there was no chance of stopping Holmes, that would not justify restricting law-abiding people from carrying handguns.

Let's go over some basics, which the gun controllers stubbornly refuse to acknowledge:

People intent on breaking the law against murder are not likely to respect a law against possession of firearms. The only people restricted by gun laws are law-abiding people. This point is so obvious, one wonders why some deny or ignore it.

The criminal, unfortunately, chooses the time, place, and manner of his crime. I don't like that rule either, but that's the way it is. Criminals aren't irrational, so they tend not to pick victims standing near cops. When you are attacked, calling 9-1-1 will do little good. For the record, the police are under no legal obligation to defend you. The courts have spoken on this — not that your survivors' ability to sue the police would bring much comfort.

The upshot is that, high-flown political theory aside, no one can truly delegate his or her right to or responsibility for one's own self-defense. Ultimately, you are the only one who can look out for your safety, because you are only one who is with you 24/7 and therefore the only one you can count on when the criminal targets you. That's just a fact.

Another fact is that while guns are used to take innocent life, they are also used to protect innocent life.



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The numbers are in dispute — ranging from 100,000 to over 2 million times a year — but no reasonable person can doubt that people use guns to prevent violent crime, often, if not usually, without firing them. Gun opponents downplay this by distracting us with dubious statistics on how often criminals disarm and kill their victims or how often guns are used to escalate arguments over card games and fender benders. The fact remains: Guns save lives.

Many people don't appreciate this because most such incidents are not reported to police or the news media. Moreover, the national media are uninterested in defensive gun-use stories. Local news outlets pay attention when an elderly person or shopkeeper uses a gun to thwart a would-be criminal, but the national media, which give wall-to-wall coverage to mass shootings, apparently have no time to report life-saving uses of firearms. No wonder some people believe handguns are only tools for criminals.

Even if we concede that tighter gun laws would have stopped the Aurora shooting — unlikely, because a determined Holmes could have acquired guns in the inevitable black market — those laws also would have cost innocent lives, because people who would have used guns to defend themselves would have been unable to do so. Why are those lives less important than the others?

People are not interchangeable. Even if gun control could save one life — or a hundred — in one place, that would not justify putting other people at the mercy of criminals somewhere else. People have a right to defend themselves, and handguns are by far the best way for smaller, physically weaker innocent people (women, please note) to protect themselves from larger, stronger bad people. (If all guns were to disappear, who would gain the advantage?)

Finally, it is unappreciated that along with increasingly wider gun ownership and liberalized concealed-carry laws, violent crime has been declining for years. The Aurora tragedy should not overshadow that happy fact.

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