

A Reflection On The Town Square Test

A free society is not just a place that lacks oppressive laws. It is a place that is made free by people taking freedom seriously. They not only value freedom, they want to live in a free society, and they want to do, and to speak up for, what is necessary to keep their society free. Such as defending freedom for others, not only themselves.

In regard to the events we reported [here](#), where someone was harassed and threatened for wearing an Israeli-flag cape in Oxford (see also [here](#)), some have said that being threatened by one individual is not a failure of the town square test: one person is not representative. But the town square test is not about whether a society has any criminals. It is about whether citizens take steps to create a free atmosphere. It is true that the police can't be everywhere, so if you aren't necessarily safe to express your political opinion in dark alleys, at night, that is no failure of the town square test. However, the point of the test is that you are in the town square. It's daylight, people are there. Are you now afraid to state your political opinions? If you are, the people around you are not reliable in their commitment to freedom. They can't be counted on to help you be free, should you need that help. In a country that properly passes the test, you will feel safe despite the existence of some criminals, because the other people in the square will stand up for you even if they [disagree](#) with your view.

Sat, 10/07/2006 - 02:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permlink](#)

Setting the bar a bit high?

I think any urban centre should be expected to fail the town square test. Some people are violent and unreasonable, by their nature. As for by-standers, most don't want to get involved, daylight or dark night. Isn't that human nature, rather than a reflection of a society's commitment to liberty?

Chris Pontius is a case in point. I doubt that he knows about Natan Sharansky, but one of Chris' videos amounts to a failed attempt at the town square test. He suffered physical harm while stating a religious belief. On the other hand, a few people stood up for him. Anyway, watch it all [here](#).

by [Pond](#) on Sat, 10/07/2006 - 16:27 | [reply](#)

More evidence

that the "Town Square" test is a BS test.

by a reader on Sat, 10/07/2006 - 16:58 | [reply](#)

The bar

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First, nobody is aggressively violent by nature, rather some people are violent because they are idiots. They can learn to use violence only in self-defence or defence of others and to settle other differences through discussion.

Second, if doesn't cost a group of people much to stop an attack by a single aggressor. The real issue is do they want to stop the attack?

The mere fact that Pontius was harmed doesn't seem to be the point of that video. The man who hit him was rather large. The people around him just could not stop him immediately, but they did try and eventually succeeded. They were trying to make it safe for Pontius to express his views. The delay might have also been because they thought the idiot would stop attacking him because he would feel ashamed at his actions. This would be a better outcome than the thug being forced to stop his attack.

If I were to be beaten up in the middle of Oxford for wearing an Israeli flag would anyone even try to stop the attacker? I don't know. I don't think I would bet on it.

Finally, I am somewhat confused as to why anyone would say that this constitutes evidence that the town square test is BS. Perhaps the poster who said that would explain further.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Tue, 10/10/2006 - 21:38 | [reply](#)

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Maybe because they're from a farm. Not everybody has the point of view of a city slicker or a town mouse.

by a reader on Sat, 10/14/2006 - 16:49 | [reply](#)

Town Squares

I happen to think that the most important lesson of this is that we do not have enough Town Squares. If I parade around town or at the mall with a hammer and sickle hat at most I may generate a few odd looks and frighten a few old ladies. A North Korean flag wearer might get some people angry but most would not recognise it. Easy Rider Captain America flag wearing is good for the movie posters and would not get me shot at today on the highway but I might get pulled over and be given a sobriety test.

Town Squares however should be a place for recognized public discourse and the occasional odd hat or flag wearer. There are too few of them. Reasonable debate, visual statements, and speech giving is generally confined to the whispers of electronic bloggers on their fave websites. Political smear ads on the other hand have taken over the media and made ad executives easy millions. It is hard to turn away from their visual onslaughts.

However where is the Town Square in all of this? Reasoned debate is drowned out by the sound of trucks and autos whizzing by and ignored by the masses of blue light shoppers absorbed in the ring tones of their cell phones as they rush by on sidewalks.

by a reader on Mon, 10/23/2006 - 15:04 | [reply](#)

Armed Robbers Off Limits

this might be a little off the center of the topic, but i recently learned that CCW holders are forbidden from shooting an armed assailant in the process of robbing someone else - say, a convenience store clerk - unless the assailant is accosting the CCW holder personally.

i think if an armed maniac enters a store one is in, one is plenty endangered and justified on that ground alone, but apparently the law is that if it's not our hide it's not our business and we should just duck behind the slurpee machine until the clerk is dead and the assailant gone, or face murder charges.

this struck me as perverse and an insult to the concept of civic responsibility, but there it is.

by [susan28](#) on Sun, 01/28/2007 - 23:58 | [reply](#)