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**OPINION L.A.** OBSERVATIONS AND PROVOCATIONS FROM THE TIMES' OPINION STAFF

## Putting pro-gun theory to test, man shoots himself in backside

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Atlanta gun salesman Jack Riddle shows off an AR-15, a once-banned assault weapon used in the Aurora, Colo., theater massacre. (Erik S. Lesser / EPA / July 27, 2012)



Double talk from Obama on reinstating an assault-weapons ban

By Dan Turner  
August 16, 2012 | 11:52 a.m.

An armed society is a pain in the butt. Just ask the guy in Sparks, Nev., who recently shot himself in the backside in a movie theater.

Ever since last month's deadly shooting in an Aurora, Colo., cinema that left 12 people dead, we've been treated to the same tired arguments from both gun-control advocates and

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Dan Turner has been an editorial editor or writer with the Times since 2004.

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How about a No More Assault Rifles Act of 2012?



Seattle mass shooter benefited from lax gun law

gun-rights proponents that seem to crop up in the wake of every gun-related bloodbath. To wit: If we had [stronger gun laws](#), such killings would happen less often. Countered by: If gun laws and theater rules were looser, theater patrons would have been [packing heat](#) and could have shot down accused killer James Holmes before the body count mounted.

The gun-control argument has its limits. Holmes, though he may look deranged at court appearances, had never done anything that would have disqualified him from legally buying a gun. So the kinds of measures sought by gun-control advocates, such as closing the [gun-show loophole](#) that allows used-gun sellers to transfer guns without any federal background check, really wouldn't have made any difference: Holmes passed two background checks. Moreover, gun laws vary so radically from one state to another that if you can't buy in gun in your state, you can just cross the border to a more-permissive one next door. And Holmes is reported to have compiled much of his arsenal [over the Internet](#).

Yes, it would be possible to solve some of these problems. Holmes passed the federal background check because he had never been involuntarily committed to a mental institution or ruled mentally unfit by a court. Yet he had been [seeing a psychiatrist](#). Should everybody seeking mental health treatment be banned from owning a gun? That's quite a stretch, and would almost certainly fail court scrutiny.

Still, we could do more to crack down on Internet gun sales, and we could reimpose the federal ban on assault weapons whose expiration allowed Holmes to easily pick up an AR-15. But the Internet is notoriously hard to control, and Holmes had ample firepower at his disposal even without the assault weapon. Meanwhile, the 2nd Amendment prevents the federal government from imposing strong gun rules over the states. So it's very unlikely that gun laws could have prevented the Colorado tragedy.

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As futile as the arguments from gun-control advocates might be, though, they're nothing compared to the outright lunacy of the counter-argument from the Guns & Ammo crowd. The idea that theatergoers at Aurora's fateful midnight showing of "The Dark Knight Rises" would have been safer had there been dozens of armed patrons shooting blindly in a darkened theater further obscured by tear gas, with panicked moviegoers jumping to their feet and running for the exits all around, simply beggars belief. Unless Wyatt Earp happened to be in the audience, the collateral damage would have been appalling.

Meanwhile, there is the incident in Sparks, in which a theatergoer appears to have put the armed patron theory into practice -- and unwittingly demonstrated what really happens when untrained people are allowed to run around in public with deadly weapons.

During a showing of "The Bourne Legacy," a 56-year-old man with a concealed weapons permit [shifted in his seat](#). His shooting iron fell to the floor, went off and shot him in what for some gun enthusiasts seems to be the thinking organ. Fortunately, neither he nor anyone else was seriously hurt; he was able to stand up, apologize to the audience and make his way to a local hospital.

It could have been much, much worse. But the incident demonstrated, graphically, how half-assed the rationale for an armed society really is.

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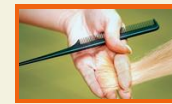
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**budlite6** at 4:41 PM August 16, 2012

First a couple of points: 1) NONE of the "Joker's" firearms were purchased over the internet without being shipped through a licensed FFL dealer, who checked that the NICS paperwork was approved by the FBI. 2) The author suggests that "dozens of armed patrons shooting blindly" would have been reality if "concealed carry" was allowed in the Aurora's movie theater. Approximately, 10 million people are licensed for "concealed carry" (CCW) in the US. Can the author (Dan Turner) provide references to these people "shooting blindly" as a regular course of action? This is from an author who is pretending to take a "balanced" look at both sides? Really?

Yes, the guy in Sparks needs some serious gun safety refresher courses. We are lucky that no one else was injured or killed. The same could be said dozens of times a day for drivers. A single incident does NOT make a definitive argument for or against any gun control policy. Can you honestly state that the Joker could not have caused greater damage with a few gallons of gas and a road flare? He was crazy. Consider his "bobby-trapped" apartment. He would have had no trouble causing greater damage without the firearms.

**jhklat** at 4:19 PM August 16, 2012

If every gun accident is a rationale to ban guns, why isn't the same also true for every car accident?

When a man with a butterknife in his pocket impales himself, will we start banning silverware?

At the end of the day, the world is a dangerous place, and individuals have a right to the means to defend themselves.

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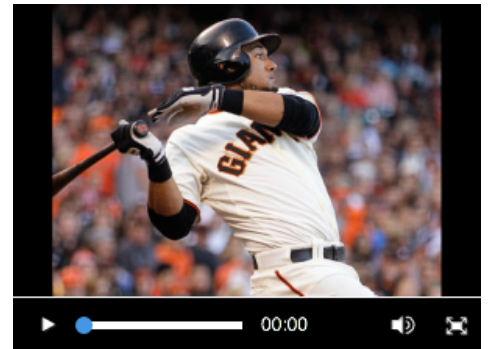
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