



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

GUNS AND GUN LAWS

## Teachers packing heat

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Have you ever noticed that people who witness and survive mass shootings often describe the gunmen as having been extremely relaxed and calm during their rampage? This level of composure stems from the detailed planning that is typical of these massacres -- planning that includes where and when to attack as well as with what weapons. Strategizing prepares them logistically and psychologically for "warfare."

In contrast, the rest of us are taken by surprise and respond frantically. A sudden and wild shootout involving the assailant and citizens armed with concealed weapons would potentially catch countless innocent victims in the crossfire.

The effectiveness of concealed-carry laws in deterring mass murder is actually an empirical question, one that has been examined by criminologist Grant Duwe and his colleagues. Using fairly sophisticated analytic techniques, they assessed the extent to which various "right-to-carry" laws in 25 states across the country were associated with any change in the incidence of public mass shootings in the years from 1977 through 1999. Based on their estimates, the impact of these laws was negligible, neither encouraging nor discouraging mass murder.

Notwithstanding this evidence, since the Newtown shooting, lawmakers in as many as six states have called for legislation to arm school teachers and train them to shoot. The latest is a bill in South Dakota that would create school sentinels -- teachers, administrators, security guards and even volunteers from the community who would carry guns to protect their schools. And based on a recent Gallup poll, apparently 62% of Americans see merit in this idea.

Supporters of firearms-for-faculty laws argue that ever since the early 1990s when the U.S. Congress established schools as gun-free zones, an armed assailant, be it a student-insider or a stranger-intruder, could be assured to face little opposition. The belief -- or hope -- is that arming teachers and administrators might serve as a powerful deterrent to anyone contemplating a schoolyard massacre.

It is hard to imagine, however, that a vengeful student, who is willing to die by police gunfire or by his own hand, will be dissuaded by knowing that the faculty were packing heat. He may even welcome the chance to shoot it out with the principal at high noon in the school cafeteria.

More importantly, we want faculty to educate their students, not execute them. For school teachers, especially the ones who are frustrated when dealing with the belligerent bully seated in the back of the classroom, marksmanship should just be about A's and B's, not guns and ammo. Let us not confuse the NEA with the NRA. Concealed chalk is fine, concealed Glock is not.

Just yesterday, the Senate Judiciary Committee endorsed a plan to provide \$40 million annually for schools to invest in safety programs, including training for teachers. Let's hope than no one gets the crazy idea of using these funds for gun purchasing or firearms classes for the faculty.

And what about college campuses? The national grassroots organization Students for Concealed Carry has had some success in convincing lawmakers in a couple of states that the body count in episodes like Virginia Tech would be reduced were properly licensed and trained students allowed to carry guns to class. However, in light of the low rate of serious violence on campus and the high prevalence of substance abuse and depression among college students, it makes little sense to encourage gun carrying by anyone other than duly-sworn public safety personnel.

It is an unfortunate fact that college campuses are not violence-free. For that matter, few places are. Perhaps those who are so worried about personal safety that they would want to study with gun at hand should explore the risk-free alternative: an online degree from the University of Phoenix.