

# Vigilantism and Voluntaryism



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*"One Voluntaryist's Perspective" is an original column appearing most Mondays at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).*

When you think of Batman, Spiderman, and Green Arrow, think "vigilante". What is that? It's Spanish for "watchman" and rose to use in America in the mid-19th century as "a member of a vigilance committee." Vigilance is "wakefulness, watchfulness". In other words, a vigilante is one who acts as a watchman for those who would disturb the peace and otherwise engage in crime. Here are my thoughts on vigilantism as it relates to voluntaryism.

## Vigilantism

Vigilantes are individualists. They see a problem (however accurately) and decide to do something about it themselves. They don't wait for someone else to fix what they perceive to be a problem. Waiting for others to act can be quite costly, especially if the problem hits close to home. Everyone who acts on their own to defend at least themselves and their loved ones are acting as a vigilante. When you shoot an intruder in your house, you are a vigilante. When you interfere with a bully on the playground, you are a vigilante. Vigilantism, then, is an important component in maintaining law and order.

When vigilantism is popularly accepted by society, the costs to crime are thereby increased. As John Lott has shown, when there are more guns, that is, more power to potential vigilantes, in society, there's less crime. And Dale Brown has shown the power of organized vigilantism with his Detroit-based company, Threat Management Center. Vigilantism is not just for superheroes. In America, vigilantism has an interesting history. The Old West was not nearly as wild as Hollywood and dime novels made it out to be, thanks in large part to vigilantism.

## Voluntaryism

A voluntaryist society would be fraught with vigilantism. Without a state, a monopolist of the provision of law and order, each individual would be well aware of his responsibility to protect himself and his property. There would be a strong culture of gun-ownership without

monopolistic gun control and vigilance committees and companies would come in all different shapes and sizes. Succinctly, you can't have voluntaryism without vigilantism. Because everyone is a potential vigilante, the question, "Who watches the watchmen?" is easily answered as, "Everyone else." For that, vigilantism is far less dangerous than statism.

## **Final Thoughts**

I love me a good superhero story, as do a lot of people. Perhaps it's instinctual, the love for vigilantes that is. They do what the state fails to do, maintain law and order. For that they embarrass the state and chip away at its perceived legitimacy. What I love most are superhero stories where the superhero is also declared an enemy of the state. Competition in the provision of law and order, like in the provision of any other good or service, is good for society. Vigilantes are that competition, and for that I praise them.

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