

Free Speech Auditors

2-8-26

(or... The Knights of TikTok?)

Part 1

1 of 1

The little guy is me!



Question: Did you know that in America you have a right (whatever "rights" mean anymore) to film literally anyone and anything out in public? Conversely, you have NO right to Not be filmed by whomever is inclined to capture you on camera when you're out and about. A lot of people seem pretty shocked by this basic civics lesson, but many are learning, and getting pissed about it, thanks to a new breed of social media content producers called "First Amendment Auditors".

Have you heard of these guys? Have you seen their videos?

Have you met one in public yourself? (Do tell! 😊)

Here's a typical scenario: an auditor goes to some well travelled sidewalk, parking lot, shopping center, or even inside a public building. Then he very conspicuously begins recording. Everything, everyone, the entire scene, perhaps crowds coming in and out of a popular store. The rest unfolds like clockwork: Someone gets upset, managers are called, the auditor is asked to leave. He (nearly always a he) declines, then someone forcefully proclaims, "You do NOT have my permission to take my picture!" The auditor then says something like, "Well, I actually don't need your permission, but thanks for your input." Police are often called soon after. Sometimes someone is pepper sprayed; sometimes cameras are broken.

I admit that most of these auditors are obnoxious. Many are sorely lacking in people skills and seem to just want the drama (it is for social media, after all). They often become cringily antagonistic at the first opportunity. I don't like that part of the trend at all, but overall... I'm a huge fan. I genuinely feel that these guys are doing important work, ultimately schooling the public, business owners, and even (especially!) the police on what it means to have civil liberties in a purportedly free country. Myself, I HIGHLY value privacy for myself and everyone else, but it's clear that most auditor-objectors are not really fighting for privacy at all. What they want is control. They want to control others in public, to dictate their own preferences, and they are sickeningly quick to employ the guard dogs, i.e. cops, to get their way. If they truly gave even half a shit about actual privacy, they'd protest (and preferably vandalize) the ubiquitous surveillance equipment that litters our public landscape. Instead, the vast majority of the very loudest Karens screaming about others not having their permission to record them almost certainly have doorbell cams and more at home, recording everyone who comes within 100 yards of their houses. So really, what they are is hypocrites, because I guarantee if some kid on a bicycle knocked on their front door to complain about being filmed in the street without their permission, these same "outraged citizens" would give him a smug smirk and tell him to run along and be a good boy, because after all, he's being watched.

I cherish my own privacy and vigorously defend that of others, but these anti-auditors are not privacy advocates... they're just garden variety control freaks who can't stand someone else disregarding their commands to stop filming.

(* Part 2 coming later)