

Hi, I'm Mr. Beat, and I have a confession to make.

I break the law every day. As a matter of fact...

I'm breaking the law right now. I'm jaywalking.

Jaywalking is the act of walking across the street when you're not supposed to.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDjy6QWBR3o>

"Jay" is historically a word you didn't want to be called. A "jay" was an idiot or unsophisticated.

So "jaywalker" means literally a stupid walker. No Walker Texas Ranger. A stupid walker.

In other words, jaywalking means being a naughty, naughty pedestrian. It means crossing a street that goes against traffic regulations. You see, the idea is that if a pedestrian...

What you don't know what a pedestrian is?

A pedestrian is a person who walks to and fro in or near a street. Ok?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M16as9ORv5s&t> Yeah that's the world's most famous pedestrian. Still a pedestrian at best, though.

Anyway, the idea is that if a pedestrian is jaywalking, they are endangering the lives of people in automobiles. Therefore, several countries around the world have made jaywalking illegal. You heard that correctly, a 50-pound person crossing the street is illegal because it endangers the people in the 5,000-pound truck nearby.

Some countries take jaywalking really seriously. In Japan, you could be fined the equivalent of hundreds of American dollars for jaywalking. In Zimbabwe, you could be jailed for up to six months for doing it.¹ Generally here in the United States, if there's traffic in the area, you have to find a crosswalk. And if there's a traffic light, you have to wait for it to change green before you cross. On the other hand, if you're watching this in the United States, you might be surprised to find out that jaywalking is mostly legal in a bunch of countries. It's perfectly legal in the Philippines, the Netherlands, and Mexico, for example.

Hey, I'm walking here. I'm walking here. So why IS jaywalking illegal? I mean, doesn't it seem a little bit...I don't know...doesn't it seem a little bit SILLY? Well, you clicked on the right video, buddy. Because in this motion picture, I'll explain the crazy story of how walking across the street became a crime.

Mr. Beat here. Off the streets and back in the studio to tell you about this video's sponsor, MeUndies. It's the holiday season, in case you didn't know, and MeUndies has all kinds of cozy gifts. I got mine right here. Ya know what, I'm going to put this on. It's on. Very cozy and comfortable indeed.

What's that? Oh yeah, that's their website. Check out all that cozy and comfortable stuff. MeUndies has over 20 different styles in 100 different colors and prints. MeUndies signature fabric is as soft as a warm hug. They use sustainably sourced materials and work with partners

¹ <https://www.herald.co.zw/pedestrians-to-be-jailed/>

that care for their workers. And MeUndies isn't just about underwear, as you've probably already noticed. They've got joggers, hoodies, onesies, and more!

Knock out your holiday gifting needs today with MeUndies. To get exclusive holiday deals and savings all month long, go to MeUndies dot com slash mrbeat and use promo code mrbeat. Thanks to MeUndies for sponsoring this video.

I am once again breaking the law. (Hey man, get out of the street!)

But yeah, let's talk about the streets. Well, before 100 years ago, city streets were considered to be a public space for ANYONE.

Before 100 years ago, city streets looked much different than they do today. You're looking at footage of New York City from 1911. Here's some restored footage of a New York City street in 1902. Here's some restored footage of a New York City street in 1896. Pretty cool, huh? As you can see, the streets looked a lot different back then. First of all, the automobile was still a relatively new invention that only the wealthy could afford at that time. You saw a few automobiles around, but you also still saw quite a few buggies pulled by horses. And of course, you saw streetcars. Mostly, though, you saw PEOPLE in the streets. This is a somewhat famous picture of Mulberry Street in New York City, taken around the year 1900. I love this picture. I've actually used it in a bunch of my videos. And yeah, as you can tell, these streets were for PEOPLE. Today looking back at this footage, these streets may seem a bit chaotic. This was before traffic lights or stop signs or even street lights were common. Sure, traffic POLICE were around to make sure things didn't get too backed up. See that one there? He's pretty comfortable out there, right? Like, he doesn't seem worried at all that he's about to get hit by a streetcar.

Streets used to be a common place where kids played. Oh goodness, those kids just walked through some horse poop. Did you see that? Nice. But yeah, before the 1920s, people generally didn't think twice before entering a street. They certainly didn't expect to get hit by anything. But this began to change after more and more people could afford automobiles.

It was in New York City on September 13, 1899, that Henry Bliss became the first pedestrian killed by an automobile. He was getting off a streetcar when a taxicab ran him over. The person driving who hit Henry Bliss didn't have a driver's license...because NO ONE had a driver's license at that time.

It wasn't until 1903 that some states began requiring a person driving an automobile to get a license, and even then they often didn't have to pass a test to get one.² South Dakota, by the way, didn't force its citizens to take a driver's exam to get licensed until 1959.

Meanwhile, with more and more automobiles on the road, there were more and more pedestrians getting killed by them. In 1909, there were around 200,000 automobiles on the road

² <https://www.history.com/news/when-was-the-first-u-s-drivers-license-issued>

in the United States. Seven years later, there were 2.25 million.³ And there were hardly any laws restricting drivers of those giant, dangerous vehicles. By 1914, New York and New Jersey finally had laws saying it was illegal to drive an automobile while drunk.

Around that time, pedestrians were pretty much always seen as the victims in automobile accidents. The drivers were the ones charged with being reckless. THEY were the ones always at fault. Dang jay drivers. Seriously, the term “jay driver” was the term for drivers who drove on the wrong side of the road or were overall just reckless. There’s a jay driver right now. Perhaps “reckless” is the wrong word here because they often DID get in wrecks. Get it? “Reckless” but they got in a lot of “wrecks.” Ok I’ll stop.

Anyway, the media often talked trash not about pedestrians, but of automobiles, saying they were ruining the streets. KILLING MACHINES. In 1923, around 42,000 citizens of Cincinnati signed a petition for a ballot initiative to force all automobiles to not be able to go more than 25 miles per hour in the city. Well this terrified the local automobile industry, who thought this law would dramatically hurt car sales. Local automobile industry folks spent lots of money to organize a huge “vote no” campaign, and on election day, voters indeed voted it down. Well, this inspired industry leaders around the country to take action to prevent any future attempts at limiting automobiles.

Auto industry folks realized the best way to save their butts was to redefine the city street. They wanted politicians to know that the streets were for automobiles, not people!

Fortunately for the auto industry by that point, a growing number of automobile DRIVERS were also getting frustrated with pedestrians walking in front of them as they drove.

About an hour and a half from where I’m standing right now and about 115 years in the past, the term “jaywalker” was used for the first time.

In 1909, the Chanute Daily Tribune in Chanute, Kansas, (I used to live there by the way) first coined the term, saying “The jay walker needs attention as well as the jay driver, and is about as big a nuisance.”

About 30 minutes from where I’m standing right now and about three years after the Chanute Daily Tribune coined the term “jaywalker,” Kansas City passed the first law...possibly the first law in the world of its kind...requiring pedestrians to cross streets at crosswalks.

That was in 1912, and other cities began to steal the idea. By the 1920s, the term “jaywalker” was becoming just as common as the term “jay driver.” The auto industry seized the moment. They promoted a bunch of propaganda across the United States that talked trash about jaywalkers, always in the name of “public safety,” of course. In January 1925, the city of Los

Angeles passed a law that implemented strict pedestrian control measures and fined those who went against them. And yep, a big reason why the law got passed was local auto industry folks calling for it...again, in the name of "public safety." The Los Angeles law became a model for the rest of the country. In 1928, future president but then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover held meetings to try to standardize traffic laws across the country. Well, the auto industry DOMINATED those meetings, and after this LOTS of cities adopted jaywalking laws.

And yet, jaywalkers continued to...uh...jaywalk. Much like I am right now.

In response, auto industry groups worked to change how newspaper reporters covered car accidents. The National Automobile Chamber of Commerce even created a free wire service for newspapers. Reporters could send in the basic details of a traffic accident, and in return the Chamber of Commerce would complete an article the next day. Whenever these articles covered accidents between pedestrians and automobiles, they almost always made the pedestrians look like the idiot who was reckless, not the drivers. Other auto industry groups got propaganda in schools talking trash about jaywalkers. Due to these propaganda campaigns, the term "jaywalker" was much more common than "jay driver" by the 1930s. Ever since, the streets have primarily been a place for cars, not people. Well, at least in the United States.

I have good news to report, though. You see, there's some good work happening to reverse jaywalker persecution. As some of you may have already noticed, this video is partially inspired by one of my favorite channels, Good Work. Jaywalking will soon be completely legal in New York City.⁴ I mean, everybody already jaywalked there anyway, but at least now they can't get arrested for it! It also became decriminalized in California back in 2022.⁵

And yet, today, even in countries where jaywalking is completely legal, it's quite dangerous to cross a busy street on foot. Heck, even on a bicycle it can be terrifying. In some places, cities have banned cars from certain streets, but it's safe to say that cars aren't going away any time soon.

But I'm not going anywhere either. Come at me, cars. Oh crap is that a cop?

I'm sorry, I just got to read to you the AI-generated video summary of our Zany Time video about the world's most famous pedestrian.

This video features an interview with a self-proclaimed "world-famous pedestrian." They discuss the importance of crosswalks, the challenges of dealing with jaywalkers, and the potential for a future where pedestrians are respected and celebrated. The interviewee also shares their personal journey as a pedestrian and offers advice on how to become a professional walker.

AI doesn't know that's satire. The whole video's not real. That's good stuff. Good work, AI.

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2024/10/30/nx-s1-5172504/jaywalking-legal-new-york-city>

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<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-10-01/jaywalking-decriminalized-in-california-under-new-law>

Yeah y'all were not supposed to find out about my Zany Time channel. I've kept it a secret because I'm embarrassed by it, frankly. You see, that's the channel in which my brother and I try to release funny videos. The videos, as it turns out, are not funny to the vast majority of human beings. Perhaps in another universe somewhere, I am a comedian. Alas, it is not this universe. In THIS universe, I am cursed to teach social studies until the day I die. Thanks for staying curious.

Sources/further reading:

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