



AMERICA'S MOST UNUSUAL LAWS: BROKEN, PHOTOGRAPHED AND PUBLISHED IN A NEW BOOK

By Rachel Gould, September 11, 2017



Did you know that it's illegal for children to sport unusual haircuts in Texas? Or that undressing in front of a man's portrait is against the law in Ohio? These are among America's innumerable outrageous legislations, fearlessly broken and artfully photographed by New York City-based photographer Olivia Locher for her new book, *I Fought the Law*.

In her brand new hardcover published by Chronicle Books, Olivia Locher playfully documents some of the strangest laws in each of the 50 states.

Through a series of arresting photographs taken between June 2013 and June 2016, Locher demonstrates the bizarre things that are, were, and may have at some point in history been illegal in the United States. The ultimate page-turner, each successive tidbit in *I Fought the Law* is weirder than the last:

If you live in Arizona, you may want to think twice before purchasing your third dildo because two is the legal limit. If you're in Connecticut, make sure that pickle you're eating bounces, otherwise it's not officially a pickle. And Pennsylvania pranksters be warned—it's against the law to tie a dollar to a string and yank it away when someone goes after it. Sound too outlandish to be true? In some instances, it may be. "Several of [the laws] remain on the statute books, the majority of them were at one point removed, others never became laws (but came close!), and a few of them are complete myths," Locher writes in the book's introduction.

She cites a trivial question once posed to her during a photo shoot as the ambitious project's inspiration: "Hey, do you know it's illegal to have an ice cream cone in your back pocket in Alabama?" A seemingly inconsequential footnote of history, the anecdote stuck with her.

Upon further investigation, Locher discovered that it is in fact not illegal to pocket your ice cream in Alabama, but it was against the law in 19th-century Kentucky and Georgia.

"The legend suggests that it became common practice for horse thieves to lure horses away with ice cream cones," Locher explains. "The horse, unable to resist the sweetness, would follow the thief, resulting in a situation where the burglar could announce, 'I didn't steal him, he followed me!'"

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A fun fact to keep in your back pocket (in place of the ice cream cone, of course), but Locher's discovery is significant if it's any indication that historical facts have been passed around like a game of telephone—mutating through the generations until they're flat-out untrue.

"It's [also] interesting to think about how some of these laws can be enforced to target specific groups of people," Locher tells Culture Trip. "A 1926 cabaret law in NYC was repealed just this past week which limited clubs from having groups of people dance [...] Law enforcement used it if they wanted to shut a place down, often targeting ethnic gatherings and homosexual communities."

Other state laws have less consequence, but Locher makes a point of concealing their legitimacy in order to take creative license where and when she deemed appropriate. Ultimately, you'll have to do your own research if you wish to find out which laws are true, which are antiquated, and which regulations never were.

"I Fought the Law is not a place to look for cut and dried facts," she explains to Culture Trip. "If more information was included it would become a different project. I like the ambiguity and history of the audience not knowing what is true vs. false. It can also allow people to fall into a rabbit hole searching for the truth if they wish."

So which law shocked Locher most deeply? "I was most shocked that Sesame Street was banned from PBS Mississippi for a period of 22 days in May 1970 due to its multicultural setting," she responded. "The show was popular and had very high ratings. President Nixon even wrote a congratulatory letter to the producers. With no regard for the show's success, a five-person panel in Mississippi ruled the show be banned. ...[It] thankfully resumed airing after its 22 day hiatus."