

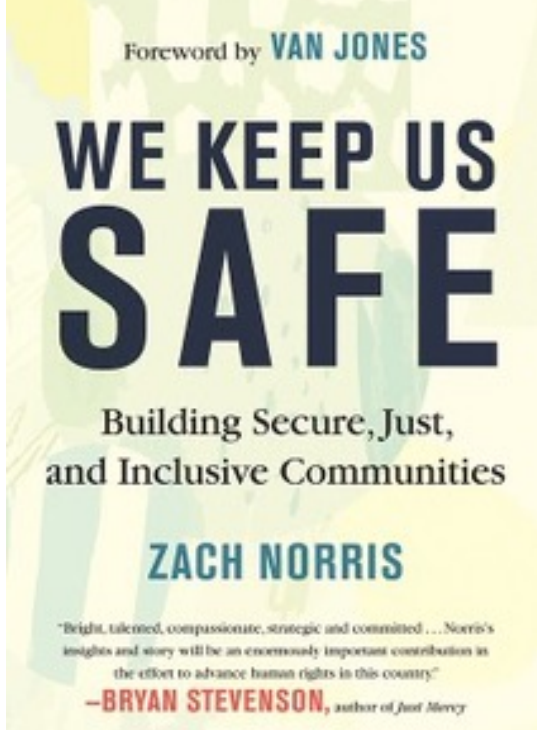
We Keep Us Safe

Building Secure, Just, and Inclusive Communities

Zach Norris

Boston: Beacon Press. [2020]

Why is this book worth our time?



#1 – What we are doing now is not working all that well. It's time to try something new and better.

#2 – We lose too many; we cast aside, and lock up, and separate from too many. We've to to bring folks together to create safe places; safe communities.

#3 – We get what we invest in. Where are we investing our resources? What are we getting for our investment.

Quotes and Excerpts from the book – the “best of” Randy’s highlighted passages:


What is the point?

We need a safety force that is at least as visible, and available, as the police force. We have to find ways to care; not just continue our ways to punish and separate.

1. Decades of funneling money toward a punishment dragnet, instead of investing in a real social safety net, means that one lost job, one healthcare crisis, one traffic stop can be the end of a secure life. pg. 4
2. For the purposes of argument and clarity, in this book I use safety both in the sense of physical integrity, in the sense of not being harmed, as well as in the sense of security: do I have a roof over my head, do I have a job that pays me enough, can I start a family if I am young, can I retire if I am old? pg. 4
3. There is no greater motivation for making America a safer place than raising two children, perhaps especially those who represent a trifecta of vulnerability: being young, female, and brown. pg. 4
4. San Leandro, which put racially restrictive covenants into place in 1947 that limited property sales to “members of the Caucasian race” and didn’t begin integrating until the 1980s...
5. ...mostly-white, more suburban property owners relied on racial segregation, rising property values, and low taxation, which benefited suburban areas to the detriment of urban areas. pg. 16



6. Between 1979 and 1983, Milwaukee's manufacturing sector lost more jobs than during the Great Depression—about 56,000 of them. pg. 16
7. Rather than setting them up to thrive, our society has created an environment where people with all kinds of disabilities face constant threats to their safety. pg. 23
8. There's a serious disconnect between actual harm and crimes. pg. 26
9. Outraged, public defenders tweeted that their clients received more time for theft of a hundred dollars than Manafort had for his much more sinister crimes.
10. If they are even imposed, punishments for corporate crimes are typically fees that are absorbed as a cost of doing business and passed on to consumers, and many crimes, from investment fraud to insider trading and price fixing, are not even prosecuted. pg. 26
11. Belief systems that have to do with the allocation of power—such as capitalism and sexism and racism—are also the cause of immense harm. ...But how do you hold a belief system accountable? pg. 27
12. In a system where the primary directive is to promote profit, human well-being will always lose out. pg. 28
13. If you are a parent of black children, your confidence in their safety is likely to be at an all-time low. pg. 30
14. **People of color almost always bear more harm. pg. 31**
15. Women must get less of the power and the resources. ...Like white supremacy, patriarchy is baked into our culture. pg. 32
16. As Senator Kamala Harris asked Brett Kavanaugh during his Supreme Court nomination hearings, pressing him on his stance on abortion rights: "Can you think of any laws that give government the power to make decisions about the male body?" pg. 33
17. **In a punishment society, wanting to be perceived as "tough on crime," elected officials—including judges and district attorneys—are incentivized to show high conviction rates. pg. 55**
18. And in a punishment society, not just crimes but all social ills are treated with penalization. pg. 56
19. ...society-wide systems and cultures are composed of individual choices that humans made along the way. pg. 59
20. **John Powell believes the systematic exclusion that occurs with "othering" can be combated with "belonging," or strategic inclusion: pg. 59**
21. That means we can make different choices now to achieve different outcomes. pg. 59
22. Consequences cannot make the original harm go away, but there's the possibility that it can lead to healing and behavioral change across society. pg. 75
23. Because our solution to almost everything is "lock them up," we have to build more jails. The US has 1,719 state prisons, 109 federal prisons, 1,772 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian country jails, as well as military prisons, immigration detention facilities, and prisons in its territories. pg. 56

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24. To build an inclusive economy that is the foundation for safety and well-being, the government should directly ensure universal access to those goods and services that are essential for human dignity, including housing, healthcare, higher education, child-care, eldercare, and pensions, as well as basic financial services and internet access. pg. 89
 25. I don't believe that we make neighborhoods safer by encouraging people to spy on each other and report back to the police. pg. 92
 26. When we come together, hard though it may be, we increase the likelihood of resolving conflict. When we separate, there is no such opportunity. pg. 91
 27. Currently there is too expansive a view of the role police should play—they essentially are expected to act as social worker, mental health provider, school discipline officer, vice principal, etc.—while there is simultaneously too narrow a view of how community members can engage and take a role in creating safety. pg. 95
 28. "When someone gets shot in our neighborhoods we deploy law enforcement in force but we don't deploy healers, therapists and counselors in force to help folks deal with the after effects of violence in our communities." pg. 133
 29. **Reentry programs that provide support with housing and jobs training for all who are released from incarceration, and psychotherapy for those with mental health needs, are essential to reducing recidivism and helping people become productive and healthy members of their communities. Pg. 135**

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Some of the Key Content and Ideas from the Book

We have an obligation to make matters better whenever we can. This obligation is also to the people that incarcerated folks might harm upon release. Hurt people hurt people.

But also true is that healed people heal people.

Problem:
our current structure
does not make us safe

Solution:
care, instead of
punishment, might
make us much
more safe

- **The dangerous myth of the “superpredator”** – John Dilulio conceded “that he wished he had never become the 1990’s intellectual pillar for putting violent juveniles in prison and condemning them as “superpredators.” . . . ‘I’m sorry for any unintended consequences,’ Mr. Dillulio said
- **First do no harm...**
 - those with disabilities are especially vulnerable
 - consider that those whose jobs depend on _____ are especially vulnerable (think servers/waitresses, and the reality of sexual harassment)
- **Some stories...**
 - the separation stories – so many people put away, into isolation (Allen, the father who cared for shoes, and Durrell, his son)
 - the first impulse of police...the lack of “how can we stop the bad from happening” impulse...
 - from hanging out in factories to hanging out on street corners in California
 - Jon Burge, and the torture of those in jail for almost 20 years – in Chicago, 1972-1991 (Why the “it’s just a few bad apples” argument does not hold up – it was, the police leader, the police officers, the Mayor Richard Daley, the courts... all “protected” the evil doers,
 - *Their genitals were shocked with electricity and loaded guns were placed inside their mouths and pointed at their heads during rounds of Russian roulette. Burge called the electric shock device “the n_____ box.”*
- **There is plenty of blame to go around – maybe, mostly, including among people with good intentions.**
- **Poverty + lost opportunity + (school) debt + incarceration = disaster**
- **The framework of fear – (our public safety model)**
 - e.g., we “criminalize” youthful misbehavior...

- **Why such a shortage of housing?**

- #1 -- the U.S., alone among other such countries, does not provide the kind of help the poor need (e.g., true housing vouchers – usable anywhere... with mandated demand for safe housing)
- #2 – housing value, thus cost of renting, goes up because of speculators and investors.

- **(Reminder – the book is set in California)**

- **Proposition 13: In 1978, California voters passed Proposition 13, which essentially locked in the tax on a property to the year the property was purchased,**
 - *An example in real-life numbers: investment magnate Warren Buffett paid property taxes of \$14,410, or 2.9 percent, on his \$500,000 home in Omaha, Nebraska, but on his \$4 million home in California, he paid only \$2,264, or 0.056 percent (this was in 2003).*
 - *Needless to say, Proposition 13 decimated California's tax base.*
 - *From 1980 to 2000, California built twenty-three new prisons and just one new university. From the state's general fund revenue in 1970, corrections received 3.7 percent, while nearly 14 percent was allocated for the state university systems; in 2014, corrections received nearly 9 percent and the state university system received 5.2 percent of funds.*

- **Some of the recommendations:**

- community forces of care -- in other words, not just *police* officers, but *care* officers (for example: mental health officers; de-escalating specialists; addiction counselors and helpers)
 - *We need to improve teacher-to-student ratios and counselor-to-student ratios in all of our schools*
 - *Especially for adolescent years, our schools should experiment with rules made to be broken and adapted, as learning experiences for youth, rather than zero tolerance policies which criminalize students without giving them the breathing room they need to mature.*
- community decision makers – i.e., the people in need, being “served,” are the people who decide
- the human basics (basic human needs) as human rights:
 - a home
 - health care
 - mental health care
 - education – through college; debt free (i.e., “free”)
 - income -- universal, guaranteed, and unconditional monthly child allowance payments
 - *We need a federal program of child benefit payments that provides universal, guaranteed, and unconditional support for parents.*
- Institute Real Safety -- *Real safety results from reinstating full humanity and agency for everyone*
 - Don't “spy” – instead, “see” -- *“I don't watch my neighbors. I see them. We make our community safer together.”*
 - Practice Restorative Justice – *imagine the young man (teenage boy) who steals a car, having to meet with the car owner, and make it “right”*
 - provide (restore) a sense of agency: *agency as “the feeling of being in charge of your life: knowing where you stand, knowing that you have a say in what happens to you, knowing that you have some ability to shape your circumstances.”*
 - Implement SEL Programs in Schools -- *As part of a “whole child education” philosophy, SEL programs train students in how to be self-aware and aware of others, how to set and achieve positive goals and make responsible decisions, and how to exhibit empathy and compassion for others in order to navigate relationships more successfully. Schools that adopt SEL see a drop in suspensions and expulsions, while students who receive SEL show “improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement.”*

• **The book:**

Foreword by Van Jones

INTRODUCTION Us vs. Them

PART I: THE UNSAFE WORLD

CHAPTER 1 Who and What Harms Us

• capitalism • white supremacy • patriarchy • violence • trauma

CHAPTER 2 The Framework of Fear

PART II: A VISION OF SAFETY

CHAPTER 3 Addressing Harms

CHAPTER 4 Preventing Harms

PART III: REIMAGINED REALITIES

CHAPTER 5 Allen and Durrell

CHAPTER 6 Marlena and James

CHAPTER 7 Anita

CONCLUSION We the People

Some Lessons and Takeaways

1. There will be harm. How shall we prepare for it?
2. There will be harm. How will we lessen it?
3. We are asking the police to handle too much. They need help. And, the people need help.
4. Yes, we need to spend more money: for creating “care forces,” and providing basic human needs.
5. We need to establish practices of restorative justice.
6. We need to be (more than) a little bold – he recommends that we close all youth prisons.
 - We must close all youth prisons and replace them with community safety centers that house restorative justice programs, earn-while-you-learn work opportunities, and wraparound services.
7. We need to know each other, within community, so that “we” can “keep us safe.”

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