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## Safe spaces revisited

ANTHONY DAVIES AND JAMES R. HARRIGAN | Saturday, May 27, 2017, 9:00 p.m.



Handguns are displayed at the Smith & Wesson booth at the Shooting, Hunting and Outdoor Trade Show in Las Vegas last year. (AP Photo)

The world appears to be quite a terrifying place to a lot of people. They are convinced, for example, that unsupervised children will be abducted. Busybody neighbors are prone to involving the authorities, but what are the actual odds of that happening? About one in 750,000 ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-missing-children/2013/05/10/efee398c-b8b4-11e2-aa9e-a02b765ff0ea\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.ffc837e140de](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-missing-children/2013/05/10/efee398c-b8b4-11e2-aa9e-a02b765ff0ea_story.html?utm_term=.ffc837e140de)).

College students are similarly terrified. “Trump 2016” written in chalk on a sidewalk ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/03/24/someone-wrote-trump-2016-on-emorys-campus-in-chalk-some-students-said-they-no-longer-feel-safe/?utm\\_term=.b17b9abd725c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/03/24/someone-wrote-trump-2016-on-emorys-campus-in-chalk-some-students-said-they-no-longer-feel-safe/?utm_term=.b17b9abd725c)) at Emory University was so jarring that the university provided counseling for everyone who saw or heard about it. One student put it succinctly, saying “I don't deserve to feel afraid at my school.”

Students at the University of Michigan claimed (<http://www.breitbart.com/tech/2017/05/18/university-of-michigan-students-intimidated-by-masculine-wood-paneling-in-academic-buildings/>) that wood paneling — yes, wood paneling — marginalizes minority students because it is “quiet, imposing, and masculine.”

And travel is also a place of, well, terror. Just last year, an airline passenger was so frightened of a foreign-looking economist ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/rampage/wp/2016/05/07/ivy-league-economist-interrogated-for-doing-math-on-american-airlines-flight/?utm\\_term=.a557bac414f3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/rampage/wp/2016/05/07/ivy-league-economist-interrogated-for-doing-math-on-american-airlines-flight/?utm_term=.a557bac414f3)) scribbling mathematical equations that the pilot had to return to the gate. But then, math has always been scary.

The reality is that the United States has become so incredibly safe over the past generation that we have, thankfully, forgotten what real fear is. The downside is that people feel compelled to invent new and ever more ridiculous bogeymen to keep themselves occupied. And there is apparently nothing so asinine that it won't suffice.

Not to be outdone by college students, public school administrators have declared “zero tolerance” for nearly everything that ever scared anyone, reasonable or not, including bringing a squirt gun to school, which resulted in a year-long suspension for a Prattville, Ala., student. Could any rational person possibly be afraid of a squirt gun? The key word here is “rational.”

No, the problem isn't that the world is unsafe. The problem is that a vocal minority of people appear to have come unglued. When faced with possible fears, rational people take a deep breath and look at evidence. And there is plenty of evidence available.

According to FBI crime statistics

(<https://www.ucrdatatool.gov/Search/Crime/State/TrendsInOneVar.cfm>), the incidence of murder and non-negligent manslaughter is down 47 percent since the 1980s. Robbery is down 51 percent, aggravated assault is down 25 percent, rape is down 26 percent and property crime is down 43 percent during the same period. Over just a few decades, virtually every category of serious crime has seen incredible declines.

The United States itself is a safe space — and it is getting safer.

As if that weren't enough, the firearm-homicide rate is down 33 percent since the 1980s — and down a whopping 49 percent from 1993. Yet in a 2013 Pew poll (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/05/07/gun-homicide-rate-down-49-since-1993-peak-public-unaware/>), 45 percent of respondents said they believed gun violence was up in recent years, and 39 percent said it was about the same. Think about that: 84 percent of people said they believed gun violence was either the same or worse over the same period that gun violence had actually declined by half.

These aren't people who are unjustifiably afraid. These are people who are woefully ignorant of reality or, worse, simply like being afraid. Either way, that these people vote at all is the real cause for concern.

If you need to be afraid of something, be afraid of that.

Antony Davies is associate professor of economics at Duquesne University. James R. Harrigan is CEO of FreedomTrust.

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