

Democracy Matters 4

Lesson Seven: Be reflective if you must be armed.

If you carry a weapon in service to the public, may the higher powers bless you and keep you safe. May you never lose sight of your responsibilities and the people to whom they are owed. And may you always find the courage to refuse commands that are unjust or unlawful.

Those among us who serve in such capacities carry an extra burden and the weight of it must be felt. Consider this: in the final analysis, every large-scale shooting action of the Holocaust involved the regular German police. Many of these men had no special animus toward their victims and no preparation for this task. They simply had their orders and did not want to look weak. What this example and others like it teach us is that without the conformists, the great atrocities of history would not have been possible. Particularly if you carry a weapon, always be ready to say “no.”

Lesson Eight: Stand out.

It can feel uncomfortable to do or say something different. But you can be sure that without this discomfort there is no freedom.

The moment you set a different example, you open the door to the possible, not just for yourself, but for anyone else who is watching. Once the spell of the status quo is broken, others will realize that they too are free to be themselves. In this way, we will teach each other to expect and demand better from our government.

The powerful rely on our conformity to shape the world to benefit themselves. Simply by standing out, we can reclaim some of that power and benefit not just ourselves but others as well.

(Adapted from Snyder, Timothy. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Vintage Digital, 2017.)