



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on January 16, 2013

Are Guns the Problem?

When I attended primary and secondary school — during the 1940s and '50s — one didn't hear of the kind of shooting mayhem that's become routine today. Why? It surely wasn't because of strict firearm laws. My replica of the 1902 Sears mail-order catalog shows 35 pages of firearm advertisements. People just sent in their money, and a firearm was shipped.



Dr. John Lott, author of [More Guns, Less Crime](#), reports that until the 1960s, some New York City public high schools had shooting clubs where students competed in citywide shooting contests for university scholarships. They carried their rifles to school on the subways and, upon arrival, turned them over to their homeroom teacher or the gym coach and retrieved their rifles after school for target practice. Virginia's rural areas had a long tradition of high-school students going hunting in the morning before school and sometimes storing their rifles in the trunks of their cars that were parked on school grounds. Often a youngster's 12th or 14th birthday present was a shiny new .22-caliber rifle, given to him by his father.

Today's level of civility can't match yesteryear's. Many of today's youngsters begin the school day passing through metal detectors. Guards patrol school hallways, and police cars patrol outside. Despite these measures, assaults, knifings and shootings occur. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2010 there were 828,000 nonfatal criminal incidents in schools. There were 470,000 thefts and 359,000 violent attacks, of which 91,400 were serious. In the same year, 145,100 public-school teachers were physically attacked, and 276,700 were threatened.

What explains today's behavior versus yesteryear's? For well over a half-century, the nation's liberals and progressives — along with the education establishment, pseudo-intellectuals and the courts — have waged war on traditions, customs and moral values. These people taught their vision, that there are no moral absolutes, to our young people. To them, what's moral or immoral is a matter of convenience, personal opinion or a consensus.

During the '50s and '60s, the education establishment launched its agenda to undermine lessons children learned from their parents and the church with fads such as "values clarification." So-called sex education classes are simply indoctrination that sought to undermine family and church strictures



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against premarital sex. Lessons of abstinence were ridiculed and considered passé and replaced with lessons about condoms, birth control pills and abortions. Further undermining of parental authority came with legal and extralegal measures to assist teenage abortions with neither parental knowledge nor consent.

Customs, traditions, moral values and rules of etiquette, not laws and government regulations, are what make for a civilized society. These behavioral norms — transmitted by example, word of mouth and religious teachings — represent a body of wisdom distilled through ages of experience, trial and error, and looking at what works. The importance of customs, traditions and moral values as a means of regulating behavior is that people behave themselves even if nobody's watching. Police and laws can never replace these restraints on personal conduct so as to produce a civilized society. At best, the police and criminal justice system are the last desperate line of defense for a civilized society. The more uncivilized we become the more laws that are needed to regulate behavior.

Many customs, traditions and moral values have been discarded without an appreciation for the role they played in creating a civilized society, and now we're paying the price. What's worse is that instead of a return to what worked, people want to replace what worked with what sounds good, such as zero-tolerance policies in which bringing a water pistol, drawing a picture of a pistol, or pointing a finger and shouting "bang-bang" produces a school suspension or arrest. Seeing as we've decided that we should rely on gun laws to control behavior, what should be done to regulate clubs and hammers? After all, FBI crime statistics show that more people are murdered by clubs and hammers than rifles and shotguns.

Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University. To find out more about Walter E. Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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