



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on February 6, 2026

Professor: America's Young Increasingly Have "Moral Certainty" About Using Political Violence

"Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." This line was uttered, infamously, by Chinese communist dictator and murderer of millions Mao Zedong. It's also now agreed with by millions of American young people, citizens who don't see violence as a means to an end.

They may see it as the *only* means — realistically speaking.

Writing about this Friday, Sarah Lawrence College politics professor Samuel J. Abrams is alarmed. He [relates](#) a recent discussion in his politics class on civic protest. It was, not surprisingly, inspired by the Minneapolis anti-ICE demonstrations and the shootings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good. Abrams told the class that he'd discuss, among other things, the non-violence imperative and distinguishing between civil disobedience and coercion.

His students, he says, balked almost right away.

As the professor writes, "'What are we supposed to do?' one asked. "'Hold signs while people are being shot?'"

"'You're asking us to play by rules that only we follow,' another said."

(Actually, no, you're supposed to "hold signs" and the like — and only that — so no one *has* to be shot. And the people who got shot were not following "the rules.")

Abrams' students then cited the Stonewall riots and the Black Panthers. They asserted that in America, only violence or the threat of it has delivered results. (Of course, they were cherry-picking. The women's suffrage movement was nonviolent and successful, as was Mohandas Gandhi beyond the U.S.) Several undergraduates also justified violent resistance against Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.

This view not only "dominated the discussion," the professor then adds, but was expressed "with moral certainty."

Bad Examples From the Top?

Now, Abrams says he's been studying American polarization for decades. And he claims the country's "center" hasn't changed much in *most* ways. It is still, he writes, "broadly moderate, tolerant, and pragmatic." Yet he also seems to say that it's more disengaged than ever. In contrast, a negative



AP Images
Minneapolis Auto Zone destroyed by rioters in 2020



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radicalism once restricted to activist types has imbued America's children. How and why?

Just consider, Abrams laments, what the young are hearing from government officials. He writes:

Last month, Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner issued a statement that would have been unthinkable from a major American law-enforcement official a generation ago. Speaking about federal immigration agents, Krasner declared: "In a country of 350 million, we outnumber them. If we have to hunt you down the way they hunted down Nazis for decades, we will find your identities. We will find you. We will achieve justice."

This was not a call for lawful accountability, but a threat of extrajudicial pursuit with language more suited to revolutionary tribunals than a constitutional republic. His sheriff followed with a blunt endorsement: "You don't want this smoke."

These were not rhetorical slips uttered in haste. Krasner chose his words deliberately. He did not call for investigation, prosecution, or judicial review. He invoked the language of collective pursuit and moral retribution, explicitly likening federal officers enforcing U.S. law to Nazi war criminals.

That comparison is not merely offensive. It is profoundly un-American.

But the attitude has caught on. Just consider data Abrams shares:

- More than one-third of students believe using violence to silence a campus speaker is acceptable.
- Only three percent of adults 65 and older believe political violence is sometimes justified. This figure rises, however, to 19 percent among the under-30 cohort.
- Democratic and Republican students increasingly agree on the legitimacy of using force.

What's the Real Issue?

And those are the professor's observations, findings, and thesis. Unfortunately, though, while many are touching on the issue here, they're not actually getting a grip on it. We have a habit today of viewing problems as disconnected social or psychological accidents. Thus do we speak of "road rage," "oppositional defiant disorder," or "influenza" — or political violence. But all these problems and others are part of a deep cultural malaise.

That is, a lack of moral character, or virtue, in the people.

Our Founding Fathers stressed its importance repeatedly. Notably, our second president, John Adams, warned in 1798, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

Does "moral and religious" describe 21st-century America?

The Deeper Dive

Now let's delve further. Professor and commentator Thomas Sowell once noted, "Each new generation born is in effect an invasion of civilization by little barbarians, who must be civilized before it is too late." This civilizing process should involve inculcation with what would be on the ingredients label if morality came in a jar: the virtues. "Objectively good moral habits," they include Charity, Chastity, Courage, Kindness, Love, Faith, Temperance, and Diligence, among others.



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As for leaders such as Krasner, sure, they're sorely lacking in virtue. They are bad people.

But who elected them? How virtuous are those voters?

There's a reason why you wouldn't have heard Krasner's rhetoric from a law-enforcement official a generation ago.

He couldn't have been elected a generation ago.

Declining Virtue

This brings us to the so-called "moderate" center. Are its members really the same as previous generations' "moderate" middles? Is what constitutes *perceived* moderation the same?

In reality, the middle's consensus ideology — its conception of *what's right politically* — has changed markedly over the decades. For example, did 2000's moderate-middle Americans accept same-sex "marriage," "transgenderism," or anti-American revisionist history to the extent they do today?

The truth is that Americans, the moderate set included, have a very difference sense of virtue than did their ancestors. This is *reflected in our leadership*.

Just consider Abrams' mention of the middle being tolerant but also disengaged. These two things go together. G.K. Chesterton called tolerance "the virtue of the man without convictions." For sure, without convictions you'll be tolerant — even of evil. You'll be disengaged, too — even as evil carries the day.

Who Is at Fault?

So Abrams is painting a picture in which the "tolerant" middle is MIA and the radical fringes are increasingly choosing our leaders. Yet the indifference displayed by the disengaged is a *sin*. It is contrary to the virtue of Diligence and is known in theology by the Greek term [*acedia*](#) ("without care").

Thus are certain radical fringes guilty of sins of commission while an indifferent plurality is guilty of sins of omission. If that fringe is the engine of destruction, the "moderate middle" is the caboose allowing the country to be dragged over the cliff.

Then there's this: Who failed to properly civilize recent generations of invading barbarians? Many thus guilty weren't too barbaric themselves — just disengaged, indifferent, permissive, and oh-so tolerant.



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