

Bureaucracy Doesn't Allow Courage

The tragedy in Uvalde, Texas, has shifted dramatically in the last few days from the horror of young lives needlessly snuffed out by a gunman, to the horror of why more wasn't done to save them. Finger-pointing and blaming abound, particularly toward the police who responded to the shooting. Video footage and firsthand accounts have left many wondering why officials were so slow to respond and save the teachers and children who eventually died at the hands of the shooter.

We can rant and rave and shout "coward" or "defund the police" as many on Twitter are doing in the face of such a tragedy. Or we can also stop and consider that these people may simply be products of a bureaucratic culture in which no one can move, think, or act without following official procedure ... which therefore greatly hinders the display of courage and initiative which once was so characteristic of America.

"Courage," Aristotle told us in [*Nicomachean Ethics*](#), "chooses action or endures pain because this is the noble course or because the opposite course is disgraceful." As stories continue to emerge about what went on in the Uvalde shooting attack, there seems to be a recurring theme regarding courage. Thus far, the ones who showed true courage seem to be those who weren't acting in an official capacity: the parents and those officials who were off duty but came to the crime scene anyway.

Jacob Albarado is one of those officials. Albarado, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection agent, was sitting in a barber chair when he heard about the shooting, [*The New York Post reports*](#), but he didn't allow his off-duty status let him off the hook. He raced to the school and began evacuating children. Another Border Protection agent, the one [who](#)

[eventually stopped shooter Salvador Ramos](#), was also off-duty.

The off-duty Border Patrol Agent who reportedly killed the mass shooter at Robb elementary school in Uvalde is pictured on the left.

There were many unsung heros that day from teachers to first responders. We thank you for your service and sacrifice.
[#HonorFirst #BackTheGreen pic.twitter.com/JR3Le6MNeS](#)

– Mayra Flores Vallejo (@MayraFloresTX34) [May 26, 2022](#)

Many parents also courageously attempted to get into the school and save their children, regardless of the risk to their own lives. Unfortunately, [those who did so were detained by police](#), one mother ending up in handcuffs and one father pepper-sprayed and tackled by police as he headed for the school.

Where was the courage of those officially trained to respond to the situation—the ones who were equipped with bulletproof vests and guns of their own? In pondering this question, it's helpful to consider what our society has become.

Today, when any crisis occurs—be it a shooting or even something as simple as a debate in a college classroom—there is constant criticism of how the individuals involved acted. If they didn't act on something, they're blamed (as in this case). If they *did* act, they are also blamed—for the fact that they used a gun, or didn't treat a minority with sensitivity, or used the wrong pronouns, or some other inane reason that is so common these days. Thus, we get a situation where people are paralyzed in crisis because they know that in some way, the powers that be will crush them regardless of whether they show courage or not.

Hannah Arendt [described the situation well](#)—both with regard to violence and our response to it—when she wrote that “The

greater the bureaucratization of public life, the greater will be the attraction of violence.” The problem, she explained, was that “In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one can argue, to whom one can present grievances, on whom the pressures of power can be exerted.”

Arendt goes on to write, “Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant.”

Hence, we see the situation where frantic parents couldn't get the police to go into the school, or even let the parents themselves go in. The police were stoic, likely trying to follow official procedure. Why should they risk their lives in courageous acts or let parents do the same when to do so would risk their necks by crossing official bureaucratic procedure no matter which way they turned? And thus everyone in this situation was sorely hindered in their freedom and power to act.

We have a legitimate reason to bemoan the failures and apparent cowardice of those who are supposed to protect us. But when we do, we should realize that a greater force is at work. When we have a bureaucratic government that watches every step and plans every move of its officials, then we can kiss courage—and initiative and all the characteristics that we admire during a crisis—one big, long goodbye.

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Image Credit: Twitter