



The

Phyllis Schlafly Report



VOL. 36, NO. 8

P.O. BOX 618, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002

MARCH 2003

Fads and Follies in Public Schools

Schoolchildren and the 4th Amendment

The liberals have been going all out to protect the privacy of individuals against government efforts to ferret out al Qaeda sleeper cells that might be plotting to kill us. But there is one thing I don't understand: why aren't they just as solicitous to preserve the Fourth Amendment rights of U.S. citizens who attend public school?

Requiring schoolchildren to respond to nosy questionnaires has been a pervasive abuse of children in the classroom for more than two decades. The federal Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment was passed in 1978 to stop this practice, but it has never been enforced and its very existence is a rather well-kept secret despite thousands of complaints by parents and a few lawsuits.

The stated rationale for demanding answers to nosy questionnaires is that schools and academics need the information for research and to develop curriculum. It would seem that interrogating terrorism suspects in order to prevent future crimes would be a more compelling purpose than academic peeping-Tomism.

A nosy questionnaire to be given in April to students in Fairfax County, Virginia recently stirred up a hornet's nest. The 169-question survey asks children about their sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, whether or not they have considered suicide, and other personal matters. It should be no surprise that parents complained they didn't want their children asked nine nosy questions about sex such as "Have you ever had oral sex?" and "The last time you had sexual intercourse, what one method did you or your partner use to prevent pregnancy?"

The Fairfax survey comes from an organization called Communities that Care (CTC), which claims the survey was used in 128 sites in Pennsylvania and is now being given in 400 sites nationwide. Hiding behind all the do-good rhetoric about promoting "positive youth development" and "identifying community challenges," the real purpose is to use survey results to get government grants to finance useless programs about sex and drugs that masquerade as "education."

These survey questions sound a lot more personally intrusive of our constitutional right to be "secure" against "unreasonable searches" than asking terrorism suspects whom they conspired with and how they got their money to travel. Why aren't the people who are so concerned about the overreaching of PATRIOT Acts I and II also concerned about intrusive interrogations of schoolchildren?

In January, parents in Ridgewood, New Jersey filed their second lawsuit against the school district about a second nosy questionnaire given to schoolchildren. Seventh and eighth graders were required to answer 55 personal questions about their use of illegal drugs and alcohol, sexual and illegal behavior, then write their names on the survey and turn it in for credit.

Here are some questions asked in that New Jersey survey. "Are there guns in your home or the homes of your friends?" "Do you often think about yourself in negative terms (stupid, worthless, unlovable, etc.)?" "Are you engaging in risky sexual behavior (multiple partners, no protection from STDs or unwanted pregnancy, etc.)?" The survey also required children to inform on their own family's misbehavior. A typical question was, "Do you have a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, or uncle who is an alcoholic?"

This survey was given even though litigation was already pending about a 156-question self-incriminating survey given in the same Ridgewood schools in 1999. The earlier survey asked students as young as age 12 "How many times, if any, in the last 12 months have you used LSD?", "Have you ever tried to kill yourself?", and how many times have you "stolen something from a store?" or "damaged property just for fun?"

In December 2001, the U.S. Department of Education determined that the giving of that survey without prior written parental consent violated the federal Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment. The same month, the parents won their appeal in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, enabling them to go forward with discovery to get all the facts out on the table about nosy questionnaires in Ridgewood.

Parents' persistence also persuaded New Jersey to pass the Student Survey Act requiring schools to obtain informed written parental consent before giving surveys or tests that ask for information about political affiliations, potentially embarrassing mental and psychological problems, sexual behavior and attitudes, illegal or self-incriminating behavior, or critical appraisals of family members. The bill was vetoed by New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman in 2000, but it was re-passed and signed into law by the New Jersey Governor in 2002.

Despite parental complaints, despite adverse rulings from the federal appeals court and the U.S. Department of Education, despite federal and state laws, the public school establishment is determined to continue this abuse of children in the classroom. Schoolchildren deserve greater protection of their privacy than terrorists.

Reality History: 'Gods and Generals'

At last we have an epic movie that presents truthful history rather than fiction or politically-correct revisionism. *Gods and Generals* recounts the gripping history of the Civil War prior to Gettysburg, and there isn't a dull moment in its awesome four hours.

The movie faithfully shows the sincere motives of the valiant men of principle on both sides. The movie shows that the northerners fought to preserve the Union, and Virginians fought to defend their homeland against federal troops sent into their state (southerners certainly did not die to defend slavery, since few southern soldiers owned any slaves). Defending one's homeland evokes powerful passions. It's no accident that the Bush Administration chose the words "Homeland Security" to get Americans to accept the biggest expansion of government since the New Deal.

Gods and Generals doesn't take sides in the War Between the States. Script writer and director Ron Maxwell presents a balanced picture of a time long ago, when religious faith defined a man's duty and when leaders, such as General Stonewall Jackson, were devout and outspoken Christians.

It's downright comical the way that liberal movie critics are trying to discourage attendance. Here is a sampling of critics' silly complaints: the movie is "so old-fashioned," fails to convey enough "horror of war," is "devoid of pain and mutilation," and is "lacking in political awareness." But the critics have to admit that the movie is historically accurate and "scrupulous about geography, chronology and military logistics."

Gods and Generals can remedy a glaring gap in the teaching of American history. It's a must-see.

Whatever Happened to History?

President George W. Bush has asked Congress for \$25 million to spread knowledge of American history, especially among young people, and to sponsor an annual National History Bee. But will the schools teach history

as it really happened, or as the political correctness revisionists wish it had happened?

When the Federal Government financed a 271-page book in 1994 called *National Standards for United States History*, it was a public relations disaster. The U.S. Senate repudiated it by a vote of 99 to 1, and American Federation of Teachers spokesman Al Shanker said it was the first time a government tried to teach children to "feel negative about their own country."

The UCLA professors responsible for *Standards* then made cosmetic changes, but copies of the original book had already flooded schools and publishers and were easily available when the Goals 2000 law mandated the adoption of so-called standards.

Standards has a 14-page section on the Civil War and Reconstruction, mostly revisionist history. It's hard to see how any historian could write 14 pages about the Civil War and never mention General Robert E. Lee or General Ulysses S. Grant, but *Standards* accomplished that feat. On the other hand, *Standards* mentions Harriet Tubman six times, the Ku Klux Klan 17 times, and Senator Joseph McCarthy 19 times. The Gettysburg Address is mentioned once, but it doesn't rank as high as the 1848 feminist Declaration at Seneca Falls which is mentioned six times.

Standards instructs students to read Civil War fiction, suggesting at least a dozen novels. Conspicuously missing from the list is the greatest American novel about the Civil War period, *Gone With the Wind*.

The most amazing example of feminist political correctness in the Civil War section is this question posed for high school students: "Why is the word 'male' used for the first time in the Constitution in the 15th Amendment? Why were women excluded in the amendment?" In fact, the word "male" does not appear in the 15th Amendment! The Constitution is and always has been a sex-neutral document, using only neutral words such as "we the people," citizen, person, inhabitant, resident, President, Senator and Representative. The appalling ignorance of American history by students must extend to their professors, too.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the nation's report card, less than half (43%) of high school seniors have even a basic grasp of American history. A Boston newspaper editorial entitled "The Disappearing History Term Paper" noted that the prize-winning essays for Prentice Hall's nationwide history competition prove that students are expected to write compositions based on feelings and impressions, not on research and evidence.

When I went to college, a student couldn't graduate without taking courses in both American and European history. Learning the basic facts of history was considered necessary to become an educated citizen, to appreciate our heritage, and to avoid repeating mistakes in the future. Today, 55 colleges and universities, including the most prestigious, have no American history requirement and

only a fifth of colleges require any course in history. On the other hand, some colleges do require courses in "non-Eurocentric culture or society," a requirement that can be met by courses in human development, sociology, theater, dance, or film.

Why have colleges and public schools stopped teaching American history? One reason may be that this is the predictable result of the massive decline in reading skills and comprehension. You can't read much history if you can't read big words. Another reason may be that more than half of senior and junior high school teachers didn't major or minor in history in college. A third reason may be the current fad of teaching multiculturalism, the code word for the false dogma that all other cultures are superior to Western civilization.

Geography Is Missing, Too

The National Geographic Society, which just conducted a survey on geographic literacy, found that only one in seven — that's only 13% — of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 could find Iraq on a world map. A slight majority of young Americans surveyed knew that the Taliban and al Qaeda were based in Afghanistan, but only 17% could find that country on a world map. The survey asked 56 geographic and current events questions of young people in nine countries. Sweden scored the highest, followed by Germany and Italy. The Americans got a grade of "D".

When the young people were asked to find 10 of our 50 states, only California and Texas could be located by a large majority of those surveyed. Only half the students could find New York. Only 3 out of 4 of the young Americans could locate the Pacific Ocean on a map.

The National Geographic Society president called these results "stunning and in many ways discouraging." He blamed cultural and media influences for the dismal performance of Americans. He said young people are more likely to locate CBS's "Survivor" island than Afghanistan, Iraq, or even New Jersey.

It's really not surprising that young people are so ignorant about geography. After all, the schools stopped teaching geography a couple of decades ago, substituting a mish-mash called social studies. It would be a good idea to put the subject of geography back in the schools.

A new study made by a British university has concluded that many geography teachers are brainwashing children with what is called "green" geography, while failing to give them the basic facts of the subject. Green means teaching the political propaganda of the radical environmentalist movement. Many children finish high school knowing a lot about pollution but nothing about rivers and mountains. Many geography textbooks are dominated by "environmental values and attitudes." Some textbooks brag that they don't give students many facts.

Geography is inherently a very interesting subject with a multitude of fascinating and useful facts, but many

schoolchildren are missing out on learning them. Replacing knowledge with green geography means that the subject is less academic, less rigorous, less demanding, and even less interesting.

Green geography assumes that there is a correct attitude toward environmental problems. Teachers tell pupils what to think about such controversial issues as global warming and the so-called exploitation of underdeveloped countries by multinational corporations. Unfortunately, the textbooks don't offer any contrary views.

This study reported that 84% of the teachers interviewed agreed that there is a greater emphasis on attitudes today than before. Some teachers brag that they engage in selective presentation of issues, such as teaching their students that we must cut consumption rates and we must lower fertility rates. This sort of bias leads pupils to believe that humans are here to serve the environment, not vice versa.

One parent interviewed said she was shocked that her high school son could talk about renewable energy sources and population issues but could not find Africa on a map. Another parent found that his daughter was taught about the rainforest but nothing about families whose livelihood depends on cutting down trees. Parents should find out if their children are learning green attitudes and environmental propaganda instead of geography.

Can More Money Improve Schools?

Billions of dollars of federal money have poured into public schools over the last 20 years, but all that money shows no correlation to improved performance or better scores. The government's own evaluations report that Title I, the mammoth program for disadvantaged children, is a failure. President Bush's education law called No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the most expensive federal education bill ever passed. Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA) refers to it as a "tin cup" appropriation and claims public schools cannot overcome their problems "on the cheap," but he would make the same complaint if NCLB doled out double the money.

In 1996, Congress created a \$5.8 billion program called E-Rate to give subsidies of 20% to 90% to schools to wire classrooms for the internet in order to remedy the so-called "digital divide" between richer and poorer schools. The E-Rate program is paid for by a tax on everyone's telephone bill, dubbed the Gore tax.

The Center for Public Integrity, using Federal Communications Commission investigations, reported that the program is "honeycombed with fraud and financial shenanigans." "Accountability" was supposed to be the buzzword of education reform, but it doesn't seem to cover how money is spent.

Quite apart from who may have been lining his pockets with easy E-Rate money is the question, did computers improve students' performance or grades? University of Chicago researchers who studied the results

in California schools reported that internet access did nothing to improve the test scores of schoolchildren.

England's Department for Education did a comprehensive study on this very subject and found that equipping schools with a million computers connected to the internet had little if any impact on education standards. Despite the government spending more than a billion pounds over the past five years, "no consistent relationship" was found between computer use and pupil achievement in any subject at any age in primary or secondary schools. Technology is wonderful, but it's not the key to remedying the problems with U.S. public schools or raising students' scores.

The Key to Education Reform

The major, crucial, overriding problem with schools is that they fail to teach first-grade children how to read. That's not even on the agenda of education reform! It was not even one of the famous education goals of Goals 2000. All Republican and Democratic politicians pontificating about school reform consistently say they want children to be able to read by the end of the *third* grade.

So what are children doing in kindergarten, first and second grades? Spending their time on sex education or playing with computers? Year after year, the tests report a growing number of children who do not read at grade level, and the percentages of minorities are the highest of all. Despite billions of federal Title I dollars spent to "close the gap," the gap is just as wide as ever, and the only solution offered is to impose higher taxes and more costly fads.

The NCLB Act requires schools to administer reading tests to students in the third grade. But no real progress will be made in improving scores until schools teach first-graders how to read by a systematic, logical, straightforward phonics system. Teaching children to read is not rocket science and it doesn't require expensive equipment, materials or professionals. Teaching a first-grader to read requires teaching the child the sounds and syllables of the English language so he can put them together like building blocks and be able to read multi-syllable words like hamburger or toothbrush. Any parent can teach his child to read with a good \$50 phonics system such as *Turbo Reader*.

Current public-school ideology is based on the false belief that most children learn how to read automatically or naturally, and the non-automatic readers should be put in special education or remedial reading, which rakes in more federal dollars for the school. Anyone who questions this policy is vilified as part of a right-wing phonics conspiracy.

For decades, schoolchildren have been taught to guess at words by looking at pictures, a fraud called Whole Language. Most public schools give elementary schoolchildren books using a "controlled vocabulary," which means a series of books that repeat the same words *ad*

nauseam and add a few dozen more words each year for the child to memorize. Because the pupils are not taught to sound out the syllables, they cannot cope with the larger vocabulary and bigger words in the upper grades, and the percentage who can't read at grade level increases each year.

That's why third graders can't pass reading tests and why students fall farther behind each year as their schoolbooks contain more and bigger words. Of all the injustices that have been perpetrated on minorities, none is as devastating to their chance to live the American dream as keeping them in failing schools for 12 years without teaching them to be good readers.

The nonreaders are humiliated when called on in class. To hide their embarrassment, many become disorderly and delinquent, and end up jobless and sometimes in prison. But the schools have a solution for hard-to-manage nonreaders! Put them on mind-altering drugs such as Ritalin so they will sit down, shut up, and stop disrupting the class.

The *New York Post* ran a series of news stories about the horrors related by parents who have been required by schools to put their children (especially boys) on Ritalin. In one shameful case, the school coerced a boy to take a "cocktail" of drugs that his mother said turned him into a "zombie," and then filed a medical-neglect and child-abuse complaint against the mother after she stopped the medication.

The prescription of Ritalin in the New York schools became so scandalous that the New York Department of Education sent a letter to all district superintendents stating: "Recent press accounts have reported that some school district personnel have allegedly made the admission of some students to school contingent upon parental agreement to administer Ritalin or other psychotropic medications. Please be advised that school district personnel have no authority to impose such a requirement."

Parents say this order is a good first step, but it doesn't address other forms of coercion, such as threatening to hold the child back a grade or filing child-abuse complaints with the state.

It's not just poor and vulnerable parents who are intimidated into drugging their children. The President's brother, Neil Bush, announced that his son, attending a private school, was misdiagnosed with attention-deficit disorder and coerced into taking Ritalin, and the family had to spend years resisting the medication.

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PO Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002
ISSN0556-0152

Published monthly by the Eagle Trust Fund, PO Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002. Periodicals Postage Paid at Alton, Illinois. Postmaster: Address Corrections should be sent to the Phyllis Schlafly Report, PO Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002. Phone: (618) 462-5415.

Subscription Price: \$20 per year. Extra copies available: 50¢ each; 3 copies \$1; 30 copies \$5; 100 copies \$10.

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