



The Phyllis Schlafly Report



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The Teaching of Values in the Public Schools

Address by Phyllis Schlafly at a conference sponsored by the Office of Legal Services of the New York City Board of Education, Pocono Manor Conference Center, Pocono Manor, Pennsylvania, June 26, 1987.

I thank the sponsors of this meeting for presenting a balanced program, and I thank you for your willingness to hear another side of the issue.

First, it's important to know what frame of reference I am coming from. I am not part of the religious right or a fundamentalist group trying to impose my religion on public school children. I come from a state where prayer was banned from the public schools at the time of World War I, and I am not seeking to put it back in. I am not an enemy of public schools. I had a very happy public school experience. I certainly believe in education. I come from a family where the women and men have been college graduates for more than a century. I wanted college so much that, having no money, I worked my own way through college without any aid of any type, in a grimy night job, 48 hours a week. My husband and I have financed six children through 38 years of university education at seven secular universities. So, indeed, I care about education.

The three lawsuits pertaining to public school textbooks that have been in the Federal Courts this year (*Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*, *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education*, and *Edwards v. Aguillard*) are symptomatic of two movements which are current in our society. On the one hand, we have those people who seem to believe that the public school child is a captive of the administrators of the public schools, and that the schools can do anything they want with the children, pretty much as though they were guinea pigs. Those people seem to think that, if parents presume to interfere with or criticize curriculum, they can be called troublemakers, mischief-makers, censors, bigots — the whole host of epithets spun out by the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way.

On the other hand, there are those of us who believe that, since the children — and they are minor *children* in public schools — are a captive audience under compulsory school laws, the authority figure must be limited and restricted by two other factors.

First is the power and rights of the parents. It is good constitutional law in our nation that the parents are the

primary educators of their children. They have the right to safeguard the religion, the morals, the attitudes, the values, and the family privacy of their children.

Secondly, the schools are subject to the taxpayers and the citizens of our nation. I come from the frame of reference that anybody who spends the taxpayers' money simply has to put up with citizen surveillance. The President has to put up with it. The Congressmen have to put up with it. The state legislators have to put up with it. And teachers, school administrators and librarians have to put up with it. This is one of the penalties of being able to spend the taxpayers' money. Those who don't like other citizens looking over their shoulders and second-guessing their judgment should really go into some other line of work where they're not spending the taxpayers' money. So, we find it very distressing when schools resent parents and citizens looking over their shoulders.

Forty years ago it was not necessary to identify these different categories or types of rights because the public schools had a very high reputation in our land. I can remember that 40 years ago, when conservative speakers made some critical remarks about public schools, they were literally hooted down. Public schools then enjoyed a high reputation like the Post Office. They were sacred cows. Nobody could attack them and get by with it.

Children Are Not Taught to Read

That public confidence, frankly, is no longer there. Let me explain one reason why it's no longer there. Thirty-two years ago, I was ready to enter my first child in public school, thinking that the first task of the school was to teach the child to read. We now know that there are at least 23 million illiterates in this country, adults who have been through the public schools and didn't learn how to read.

Well, 32 years ago when my first child was ready to start school, I discovered that the public schools didn't teach children to read. They only taught them to memorize a few words by guessing at them from the picture on the page. That is why I kept all my six children out of school until I taught them to read at home — so that they would be good readers, and so they would not be six of the 23 million functional

illiterates in our country today. This is not a matter of Secular Humanism or morals, or affluence versus poverty, or anything else. No public school in my area taught children how to read. Schools only taught word guessing, which was a cheat on the taxpayers and on the children. We see the results today.

Thirty-two years ago I didn't know anybody else who taught her own child. Today there are about a million parents doing that because they feel cheated by the public schools.

Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment

In the mid-1970s something else came into the schools to use up the hours that could not be spent in reading the great books and the classics, which formerly children were able to do. This new element was best summarized and described by Senator Sam Hayakawa, who was a university president before he became a United States Senator. He called it a "heresy" in public school education. He said that, instead of teaching children knowledge and basic skills, the purpose of education has become group therapy. That's the best way to describe what has happened in the schools.

In public school classrooms, children are required to discuss feelings and emotions and attitudes. They are confronted with all sorts of moral dilemmas, instead of being given the facts and the knowledge they need. As a result, Hayakawa was a major promoter of a federal law passed in 1978 called the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment, which said that schools should not give psychological testing or treatment to public school children on subjects that include family privacy, sexual and other personal matters, without the prior written consent of their parents. The purpose of this law was to prevent the schools from engaging in psychological probing, invasion of privacy, or manipulation of values.

The education establishment was so powerful that no regulations were issued on this law until 1984. But the parents were discovering what was happening to their children, and they didn't like it. They discovered that these psychological manipulations in the classroom constituted a continuing attack on their religion, on their morals, on their family, and even on parents. We believe that the continuing attack is so gross as to rise to the level of a violation of the First Amendment rights of parents and their children.

Values Clarification and Moral Dilemmas

What happened is best illustrated by the classic lifeboat game presented in Sidney Simon's book on Values Clarification, and probably used in every school in this country. I had a reporter tell me that she had some variation of it at every level of elementary and secondary education. This is the game where the child is taught that ten people are in a sinking lifeboat, and the child must throw five of them out to drown. Which five will you kill? Will it be the senior citizen, or the policeman, or the pregnant woman, or the college co-ed, or the black militant, or whoever? You pick *which* you will kill.

This "game" is played widely, in many variations — the fallout shelter, the kidney machine, starting a new race, and so forth. To explain what's wrong about this game, we have the example of the child who answered the lifeboat problem by saying, "Jesus brought another boat, and nobody had to drown." That child was creative but she got an "F" on her paper. That explains what values clarification does. It is not

value neutral in any shape or form. It is a direct attack on the religion and the values of those of us who believe that God created us, and that it is not up to the child to play God and decide who lives and who dies.

The curriculum is filled with these moral dilemmas. The reason we know about so many of them is that, in 1984, the Department of Education conducted hearings across the country, where parents could come and describe what had happened to their own children. Those hearings had no press, but you can read much of the testimony in my book called *Child Abuse in the Classroom*. They are the authentic testimonies of parents. They told how the children were given such moral dilemmas as: stand up in class and give a good example of when it's okay to lie; write a paper on when it's all right to steal; discuss which kind of drugs you will take, how much and how many.

These moral dilemmas never tell the child that anything is wrong. The child is taken through all the areas of sex, with obscene descriptions, discussions, role-playing, and other psychological manipulations in the classroom. You can call this secular humanism, you can call it situation ethics, you can call it group therapy, you can call it psychological manipulation, you can call it counseling. You can call it no-name. But whatever it is, it is pervasive in the public schools, and it is a direct attack on the First Amendment rights of those who believe that God created us and that He created a moral law that we should obey. There's nothing neutral about the way values clarification is taught. The option that we should abide by God's law is never offered.

The Alabama Textbook Case

The Alabama textbook case (*Smith v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County*) finally brought out of the closet a situation that has been going on for 15 to 20 years, without media coverage or public attention. A previous speaker said how surprised he was to discover that home economics is about sex. Well, if you've been reading the textbooks, you would have known that. And that is why parents are so upset.

The issue in the Alabama textbook case was, simply, does the child who believes in God have the same rights in the public school classroom as the atheist?

In the 1985 case of *Wallace V. Jaffree*, the Supreme Court held that little atheist Jaffree had the right to be in the public school classroom and not be embarrassed when his peers said a prayer or spoke about God. In the Alabama textbook case, the U.S. District Court decision simply gave the child who believes in God the same rights as the atheist (but that decision was overturned by the U.S. Court of Appeals). I believe that the child has a right to be in the public school classroom, and not have his religion, his morals or his family, belittled or harassed, or told that they are irrelevant, or be presented with moral dilemmas which tell him that he can personally decide what is moral or legal.

We hear about teaching the child to make decisions. Of course, the child, if accosted by the drug peddler, must make a choice whether to buy or not. But it is so wrong to tell the child in class that he is capable of making a choice on an issue which the law has already decided. The schools should teach that the law has already decided that illegal drugs are bad and that he must not take drugs.

Since the First Amendment seems to prohibit the public schools from teaching a belief in God and His moral commandments, the school must also not be permitted to teach that there *isn't* any God, that God did *not* create the world, or that God did *not* give us His moral commandments.

If you look at what was involved in the textbooks in the Alabama case, you'll find textbooks saying that "what is right or wrong depends more on your own judgment than on what someone tells you to do." That's a direct attack on religion. One book tells the teacher to design a bulletin board showing conflicting values held by young people and their parents. This is mischief-making between the child and his parents.

Another textbook teaches that a family is a group of people who live together. That's not what a family is. A family starts with a marriage between a man and a woman. We find one textbook telling a child that, "in democratic families, every member has a voice in running the family, and parents and teenagers should decide together about curfews, study time, chores, allowances, and use of the car." Where does anybody get the idea that the school can tell the child that he's got a right to decide when he uses the car?

Here's another one. "Steps in decision-making can apply to something so simple as buying a new pair of shoes. They can also be applied to more complex decisions which involve religious preferences, use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs." Where did anyone get the idea that schools can teach children that the family should be democratic and that children should participate in making such decisions?

Here's a quotation from another Alabama textbook: "In the past, families were often like dictatorships. One person, or two, made all the decisions." Is that mischief-making? You bet it's mischief-making.

Here's a quotation from another textbook: "People who have strong prejudices are called bigots. Bigots are devoted to their own church, party or belief." That really puts your parents down, doesn't it!

Another textbook seems to say that it's okay if people want to experience parenthood without marrying. A long passage from another textbook says that divorce is an acceptable way of solving a problem. Then it calls on the class to role-play the circumstances that might lead the child to choose a divorce. The school has no right to attack the morals of children by telling them that divorce is acceptable.

Examples from Across America

Actually, the Alabama school textbooks are probably pretty mild compared to a lot of others we find around the rest of the country. In Seattle we found a textbook which said that promiscuity should not be labeled good or bad, that premarital sexual intercourse is acceptable for both men and women, that morality is individual — it's what you think it is, that homosexuality is okay, that prostitution should be legalized, that it is not deviant for teenagers to watch others performing sex acts through binoculars or windows, that alternatives to traditional marriage such as group sex and open marriage are okay, and then asks the child if he'd like to join such a group.

It took 18 months and finally some TV cameras, to get the curriculum committee to say the school would replace that textbook. It had been the textbook in a mandatory course in the Seattle public school system from 1978 to 1987.

Your New York City School Board video, "Sex, Drugs and AIDS," has been so controversial in New York that it is now being revised. But the original version has now gone all over the country. It blows my mind to think that anybody could believe it is constitutional to present a video in the public school classroom teaching children that fornication and sodomy are acceptable behavior so long as you use condoms, and telling them that homosexuality is all right, which is exactly what that video does. It is hard to believe that anybody could approve such an evil video for use in the public school classroom. The video is a direct attack on the First Amendment rights of those who believe that fornication and sodomy are wrong.

We want the same rights for people who believe in God and His commandments as the atheist has already established. Whatever you call it, this no-name ideology, it all boils down to an attack on religion, a war on parental rights, and a betrayal of trust. What a terrible thing it is to indicate, imply or even tell children that sexual intercourse, outside marriage, with males or females, of the same sex or the opposite sex, is okay and socially acceptable! Yet, that is widely taught in the public schools across the country.

The general attitude of most public school administrators, when parents make objections, is: If you don't like it, take your child out and send him to a private school. That is not an acceptable answer. Our position is that the child who believes in God and His commandments has a right to be in the public school classroom without having his religion, his morals, and his family degraded, belittled, subjected to "clarification" or role-playing, or subjected to any of the psychological dilemmas that are presented by authority figures, who tell them in every possible way, overtly and indirectly, that there is no right or wrong answer, that anything the little fifth grader decides will be perfectly all right.

While the public schools, with their great battery of lawyers, may be able to win in the courts, and the media are clearly on their side, these cases are not increasing respect for the public schools. These cases have brought into public debate issues which should have been debated for the last 20 years.

Whose Morality Should Be Taught?

Question: Whose morality are we going to be teaching in the public schools, and do you recognize that your personal morality may not be the morality of a majority of the other citizens in that community, and what would be the mechanism that you would establish in order to decide what morality should be taught in school?

Mrs. Schlafly: I think you heard me say I wasn't trying to impose my morality on the schools, and there wasn't anything in my remarks that could have possibly led you to believe that I'm trying to do that. I feel that the public schools can teach consensual values as indicated by the laws in this country. For example, it is a crime to lie, steal, cheat, kill, destroy property. It is against the law, in at least half the states, to engage in fornication or sodomy. At the very least, the public schools can teach that you should not do things which are illegal. Unfortunately, that is generally not done in the drug education courses. I've examined hundreds of these drug ed courses. They teach the child that we're in a drug society, that

everybody takes drugs, that it's simply a question of how many you take and which kind, that it's up to you, little child, to make your own decision. This is called "critical thinking" or "decision-making skills," but they don't tell children that drugs are wrong. I see no problem with teaching children that acts are wrong when they are illegal. Schools are now telling children that smoking is not preferable. In the sex courses, schools are definitely teaching that it is wrong to have a baby, but they are not teaching that fornication is wrong. Now, there's no constitutional difference between teaching that it's wrong to have a baby and teaching that sex with unmarried teenagers is wrong. So, my answer to that question is that, if schools would simply teach the criminal law version of morality in this country, we would go a long way toward promoting civil order.

Question: In regard to AIDS education, what do we do? Do we live in the real world or do we live in a world of what should be?

Mrs. Schlafly: Anything taught about AIDS should meet four tests. It should be true, it should be healthy, it should be legal, and it should be constitutional. If any public schools teach a child that sex with condoms is safe or healthy, they are telling them something that is not true. Just wait for the lawsuits that are going to come! Sex for teenagers is unhealthy for many reasons of which AIDS is only one. As I pointed out earlier, fornication and sodomy are illegal in about half the states. I believe it is unconstitutional to teach sex-with-condoms because the children who come from homes where they believe that premarital sex is wrong have a constitutional right to be in the public school and not have that belief diminished, harassed, or taught that something that they believe is immoral is socially acceptable. The schools have an obligation to teach only that which is true, healthy, legal and constitutional.

Dr. C. Everett Koop told the *Village Voice* that he has already discussed sodomy with his gifted nine-year-old grandson. If he wants to do that, that is his privilege, but he has no right to discuss sodomy with our nine-year-old children or grandchildren. That's what the New York video does, and that's what some people are trying to do all over this country. We should get this teaching out of the public school classroom because it isn't legal, it isn't constitutional, and it certainly isn't healthy.

Question: Is the remedy, then, for a parent to be able to bar a curriculum, or do you suggest a more restrained approach that a parent should have the right to opt his child out of a program?

Mrs. Schlafly: A parent should not have to opt his child out of the public school classroom. The child has a right to be in the public school classroom without being embarrassed by some teacher describing how to use condoms and how to engage in sex, or role-playing what to do when you get pregnant with an illegitimate baby, or discussing conflicts with your father or your mother. The child has a right to be in the public school classroom and not be subjected to that type of teaching by an authority figure.

Question: 85% of public school parents in a nationwide poll indicated that the public schools should teach a family living/sex education course. How can you deny these parents who want such a program in the schools?

Mrs. Schlafly: The 85% doesn't impress me at all because all Gallup and Harris polls say that at least 85% of the American people want prayer in the public schools. But the Supreme Court has said no. The atheist child not only has a right not to pray, he has a right to silence everybody else in the classroom. So, when we're talking about religion or attacks on religion, the one person, apparently, can silence the rest. As I said, those who believe in God and His moral law, including about sex, have a right to be in the public school classroom without having an authority figure telling them that fornication is acceptable behavior. Whether 85% want sex education becomes totally irrelevant because I see it as an unconstitutional attack on the First Amendment rights on those who believe that discussed behaviors are wrong. Those parents who want to give their children contraceptives, that's their privilege, but the public school shouldn't do it.

My answer is that schools cannot appear to give social acceptance or authority acceptance to a behavior which is contrary to the faith and morals of a number of children. Whatever the school teaches must be true, healthy, legal and constitutional.

You can make the same argument about drugs. Maybe half of your children are on drugs, but certainly we don't set up a room to pass out clean needles and tell them how to avoid some of the consequences. That isn't the way to teach. We should start by telling them that illegal drugs are bad and wrong and you shouldn't take them or they might kill you. The whole subject can be approached as a health measure. Furthermore, schools ought to teach that the consequences of sex fall twice as heavily on girls as on boys. The morals are the same, but the consequences are very different. It's contrary to feminist ideology to teach children that there's any difference between boys and girls. But little girls ought to be taught about the terrible price that girls pay in terms of the side effects of contraceptives, of abortion and its trauma, venereal diseases, the poverty, the cervical cancer, the emotional and psychological trauma. In all those ways, the girl pays twice as much.

Phyllis Schlafly has her B.A. from Washington University, her M.A. from Harvard University, her J.D. from Washington University Law School, and an honorary LLD. from Niagara University. She discusses a wide variety of education issues in her syndicated newspaper columns and her radio commentaries. One of her 12 books, *Child Abuse in the Classroom*, has sold 200,000 copies. Before her marriage, she was a librarian. She taught all her six children to read before they entered school.

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