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School Controversies Harm Education

Wolf! Wolf! Censorship! Censorship!

Censorship is one of those buzz words that starts the adrenalin flowing. Like sex, it's a word that arouses strong emotions, knee-jerk reactions, and animosities.

When Boris Yeltsin shut down the Communist propaganda sheet called *Pravda*, the liberal press in the United States went into a frenzy about this "undemocratic" act. These liberals are the same self-appointed guardians of free speech who never raised a peep about the fraud of *Pravda* calling itself a newspaper during the 75 years when it was just a house-organ for the Soviet Communist Party.

A spokesman for Norman Lear's People for the American Way (PAW) held a news conference in Washington in September to complain about the terrible problem of censorship in the United States. PAW's president Arthur Kropp issued the organization's annual 125-page report called *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn*. This charade is basically a fundraising gimmick to convince recipients of desperate fundraising letters that the danger of books being tossed on a bonfire is so great that they should send their widow's mite from a social security check. PAW's material is always embellished with emotional graphics; this year's report shows nine books padlocked under a heavy chain.

Tear-jerking fundraising letters have filled the coffers of PAW and built a donor base of 300,000 people. That donor base enabled PAW to buy expensive newspaper scare ads to attack the nominations of Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court.

PAW can't produce any examples of a U.S. governmental authority preventing or forbidding the publication or distribution of a book or newspaper or article. So PAW's entire 9th annual report is an attempt to justify PAW's peculiar use of the word "censorship" to excoriate parents who try to protect their children in public schools from being required to participate in classroom activities which parents believe violate their parental rights.

More than two-thirds of the 229 "incidents" involved classroom materials which public schools were *requiring* children to read (i.e., they were *not* just library books). Parents were often not even allowed to opt out their children and secure alternative reading assignments.

The target of the most number of challenges from parents last year, according to PAW, was the controversial series of

readers called *Impressions*. Parents object to these readers used in grades 1-6 because they are trashy stories filled with monsters, witches, and gruesome acts that give little children nightmares; they have pseudo-religious imagery and innuendoes, particularly New Age and the occult; and they use word-guessing instead of phonics to teach reading.

The second largest number of challenges from parents, according to PAW, targets the controversial drug education course called *Quest*. *Quest* is typical of a large number of psychological curricula to which parents object because they are "non-directive" (i.e., they tell the child that he alone can decide for himself whether participating in drugs and sex is OK) and they are anti-parent (i.e., they reject parental authority for children's behavior).

The whole idea that the public schools should be allowed to thrust such materials onto minor children over the opposition of the parents is unacceptable in a free society. That's exactly the kind of totalitarian mind control against which the Russians are rebelling today.

The PAW news release tries to spread the myth that the "classics" are under attack by narrow-minded parents who don't want their children to learn. But the only acknowledged classic in the entire list is *Huckleberry Finn*, to which the so-called "fundamentalist" parents do not object.

So desperate is PAW to claim that "classics" are imperiled by the "censors" that it lists Little Red Riding Hood as a "classic." Actually, the objection to this fairy tale was to an off-beat version in which Little Red Riding Hood brings a bottle of wine to a red-nosed grandmother, which the principal felt was out of harmony with the school's anti-drug program.

Math Achievement Or "Feel Good Math"?

Fewer than one in seven students in the 4th, 8th and 12th grades can do mathematics at or above their grade level, and more than half are two or more grade levels behind, according to the 1990 NAEP Mathematics Assessment. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, which conducted the survey, is a federal agency that since 1969 has been monitoring American students' educational achievement (or non-achievement). NAEP tested 26,000 students in grades 4, 8 and 12 from 1,300 private and public schools in 40 states and territories.

Although only 11 percent of 4th graders passed a test of 4th grade arithmetic, 62 percent "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they were "good in mathematics." This shows the impact of the self-esteem classes that now begin in kindergarten.

Only 14 percent of 8th graders could pass a test based on math concepts that should have been learned in the 5th, 6th and 7th grades, and a third of them flunked the 4th grade test. But 63 percent esteemed themselves good in math.

The 12th grade results were the most dismal of all. A pitiful 5 percent of high school seniors passed a test of standard high-school algebra and geometry, and less than one-half of 1 percent knew any calculus.

More than half (54 percent) of 12th graders were still flunking the 8th grade test. But 57 percent of these same high-school seniors *thought* they were good in math!

The simple arithmetic that children should learn in the elementary grades is absolutely essential to survive in our society. Everyone needs this skill in order to make small purchases and get the correct change, and to know whether you have enough money in your bank account to write a check that doesn't bounce.

Al Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, points out that most of the horror stories about the failure of the public schools focus attention on the plight of poor minorities. The typical middle-class parent thinks his child is doing fine because he is getting good grades and being admitted into college.

According to Shanker, middle-class children are *not* doing OK at all; they are being cheated in their education and deceived about the results. It's obvious that the test scores are fraudulent when every state, and nearly every school, reports that its students score "above average" — a statistical absurdity.

Don't assume that middle class kids must be doing all right just because they get into college. Shanker points out that the reason most students get into college is that most colleges have dumbed down their requirements, both for admission and for graduation. Only a handful of the nation's 1,400 colleges and universities are truly competitive.

Shanker concludes that the overwhelming majority of U.S. students — about 90 percent — are *not* learning much in public schools, and they spend a large part of their college years learning what they should have learned in high school. So what are they doing all those hours and years in public schools?

Take, for example, the 4th grade, where children ought to be reviewing already-learned multiplication tables and learning how to do long division and fractions. Here is a typical 4th grade exercise — I didn't make this up; it's an actual example of a questionnaire given to some 4th graders in Oklahoma.

The pupil is told to blacken circles to reveal whether the answer to the following statements is "never, sometimes, or a lot": "I go to church or synagogue. I talk to my parents about my problems. My parents make me follow certain rules. I have to be home at a certain time. I go to parties. I go on dates. The kids at school like me. I feel lonely."

Then the child is told to reveal "Within the past year how often have you . . . smoked cigarettes? Chewed tobacco, snuff? Drunk beer? Drunk wine coolers? Drunk liquor? Smoked marijuana (pot)? Sniffed glue, gas, etc.? Used other drugs?"

The test then asks each child to answer the same questions in regard to his friends.

Here's more. The 4th graders are asked "Where do kids your age get . . ." each of those same drugs. And then, "Why do kids your age start to use . . .", again, the same list of drugs.

This is some of the privacy-invading nonsense that uses up so much class time and is generously funded by some of the more than one billion dollars that has flowed out of the U.S. Treasury under the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act. Phony drug and self-esteem curricula and surveys occupy hours and weeks of classroom time in the public schools. Teaching children to feel good about poor achievement is a cheat on students, parents and taxpayers.

Multiculturalism Is Not History

The New York State Board of Regents has adopted a controversial report calling for the public school social studies curriculum to be revamped in order to promote a leftwing agenda. It's described in an 89-page report released in June by the Social Studies Syllabus Review and Development Committee.

The report attempts to impose a world view on public school students that is labeled "multiculturalism" and "cultural diversity" but can better be described as divisive, destructive, and false. It is so "way out" that it has been criticized even by such authentic liberals as Governor Mario Cuomo and Kennedy court historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who was a member of the committee.

As Schlesinger explained it, "The underlying philosophy of the report is that ethnicity is the defining experience for most Americans, and that a main objective of public education should be the protection, strengthening, celebration and perpetuation of ethnic origins and identities." That's a prescription for dividing the young into separate ethnic and racial groups, each taught to cherish its own separateness from the rest instead of to revere our common heritage.

It should not be the mission of the public schools to promote ethnic separatism and thereby heighten racial tensions. The public schools have been a major factor in uniting us as a nation, in taking immigrant children from countries all over the world and educating them to be Americans, speaking one language and cherishing our American institutions.

We've been spared the ethnic divisions and animosities which so many other countries have suffered, such as Yugoslavia, Iraq, Canada, and Ireland, to mention only a few that have boiled up in recent years. Surely, we don't want to promote that kind of ethnic assertiveness!

In the past couple of years, as the American public has awakened to the failure of the public schools, we have witnessed a growing demand to remedy the academic deficiencies of the public schools. This New York report diverts the entire reform movement into pursuing the foolish illusion that schools should teach self-esteem and cultural identity instead of knowledge and skills.

The report rejects the fundamental principle that education means teaching students knowledge; indeed, it calls for a shift away from "mastery of information" and adopts the notion that history must be presented through the prism of "politically correct" social policy. Specifically, it asserts that "the subject

matter content should be treated as socially constructed and therefore tentative -- as is all knowledge."

The report clearly promotes its particular political agenda, starting out with the alien concepts of "world citizenship," "interdependence," and "global village." However, Americans do not want the public schools to teach our children to be citizens of the world or to believe that we are dependent on other nations; we want our children taught to be good American citizens, patriotic and proud of our country, and determined to maintain our independence, liberty, and uniquely American governmental institutions.

The report starts out with the statement that "The United States is a microcosm of humanity today." That, of course, is totally false; America, with its extraordinary freedom and prosperity, cannot accurately be viewed as a microcosm of the rest of the world with its repression, never-ending wars, inhumanity, poverty and starvation.

This report follows one of the many obnoxious trends of modern-day public schools, namely, concealing from parents what is going on in the classroom. It does this, first, by demanding that "multicultural perspectives should infuse the entire curriculum, preK-12." "Infuse" is a code word used by the educators to mean integrating something within all school subjects (the report specifically includes mathematics) so that parents can't find it.

Secondly, the report wants "to move away from focusing on textbooks." Without textbooks, parents have an almost impossible task of finding out what is really being taught to their children.

The report wants to rewrite the language in the name of "Language Sensitivity." Teachers and students are to be forbidden to talk about Latin America because some Caribbean islands are non-Latin, to refer to "slaves" instead of "enslaved persons," to "the Far East" instead of "East Asia," or to the "Middle East" instead of "Southwest Asia and North Africa." "The New World" would be another prohibited concept, Christopher Columbus would become a voyager instead of a discoverer, and Thanksgiving would be censored out because the Indians didn't have anything to be thankful for.

Those who thought George Orwell was writing about some planet other than ours when he wrote his famous *1984* had better take another look. Political commissars who would drop our history down the Memory Hole are holding forth in the New York public schools.

Moving Forward With School Choice

President Bush has been encouraging business to get involved in education. The recent news that SAT scores dropped for the fourth straight year, and that verbal scores are now the lowest they have ever been, is only one more proof (if any were needed) that innovative ideas are desperately needed.

Apparently the public school establishment expected business involvement to consist principally of writing checks while the same teachers unions would have the joy of spending an influx of new funds. On the other hand, sometimes tax dollars flow *from* the schools *to* businesses—that is, to the businesses which have figured out how to make profits by selling psychological curricula, teacher

workshops, or television commercials to the schools.

J. Patrick Rooney, CEO of Golden Rule Insurance Co., responded to the challenge in a different way. He took President Bush's words about school choice seriously: he set up a \$1.2 million Choice Charitable Trust to award scholarships to 500 low-income students in Indianapolis.

Each student will receive a voucher to pay up to 50 percent (capped at \$800) of the tuition at any Indianapolis private school. Most private schools in the area charge less than \$1,600 a year, whereas the public schools spend an average of \$4,000 per pupil.

Within three days after Golden Rule's announcement, the company had received 1,076 applications. Golden Rule has expanded the program to take 686 students, invited other local corporations to participate (Eli Lilly has indicated it may), and put other applicants on a waiting list.

The public school establishment, however, is unhappy about this project to help minority children. The 47,000-student Indianapolis public school district feels threatened by the impending departure of 686 poor students and has been busy rallying its friends to attack the Golden Rule plan. One group called it "disastrous" that the \$1.2 million will not be just given outright to the public schools. Another is urging parents to refuse the grants. A third group charges that the Golden Rule project will "undermine" public education.

Getting down to the real motive for the outcry, Indianapolis school superintendent Shirl E. Gilbert 2nd complained that the loss of 250 students would cost the district \$1 million in state aid. That's good news for taxpayers, but it brings anguished yelps from the public school monopoly that has built its empire on a headcount of bodies inside the public school buildings.

A newspaper voice for the public school monopoly leaked out another reason for the objection to the Golden Rule plan. "What makes Golden Rule's plan controversial," *Education Week* reported, is the fact that it is "couched in the rhetoric of parental choice." That runs counter to the liberal programs which are based on the elitist notion that mere citizens, taxpayers and parents really don't know how to make their own decisions and spend their own money, and therefore tax-salaried functionaries (usually self-identified as "experts") should do these things for them.

The school establishment's reaction to the Golden Rule plan is similar to the public school-generated flap against the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, which is now into its second year, with 554 pupils participating. Known as the Polly Williams plan (after the black State Representative who sponsored the legislation), up to one percent of low-income Milwaukee public school students are allowed to attend private, nonsectarian schools, each with a \$2,500 voucher from state tax funds.

State Representative Polly Williams said that the black groups opposing the Golden Rule plan are "speaking with a forked tongue." Putting her finger on the problem, she said that those who claim they represent black groups really base their objections on the false premise that poor and minority parents cannot decide for themselves what is best for their children.

The Bush choice-in-education proposal started out as a plan to offer choice among a limited number of *public* schools, all

offering the same curriculum, and differing principally in location. But choice in education is an idea whose time has come; it's a steam engine rolling downhill and taking many varieties, and there may be no way for the teachers union monopoly to put the genie back in the bottle.

Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander is now espousing the once-heretical notion that "parents should have the ultimate say in how their children are taught." In a recent letter, he said: "There is no reason in our free country that parents should be told which school their children will attend and which values in which they will be steeped, any more than they are told where to live, what church to attend, what car to buy, or whom to marry."

Secretary Alexander also shows himself supportive of the concept of choice in *curriculum* — that means, even when parents do not effectively have a choice of *schools*, they can still choose from "alternatives on curriculum, teaching methods, and other matters." That, indeed, is good news for parents.

It's Time To Amend Title IX Again

The American Civil Liberties Union and the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund have persuaded a federal court to issue an injunction against an elementary school in Detroit planned to meet the special needs of black urban boys. This is another defeat for common sense and a victory for the silliness of the feminist-liberal agenda. The ACLU and NOW found three black girls to use as pawns in their attack on the school for black boys. The court injunction requires the schools to admit girls to the boys' school.

The tragic plight of fatherless black boys in the inner cities is obvious, and for several years educators have been considering the idea of establishing special schools to address their needs. Single-sex schools for boys have been discussed in New York, Milwaukee, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., San Diego and Chicago.

The Detroit Board of Education decided in February to try this experiment in order to give urban black boys some male role-models and steer them away from a self-destructive path that often leads to drugs and prison. The school is aimed at increasing their self-esteem by stressing discipline and civic responsibility.

But look out, little boys; the radical feminists are ready to swing their whip against any deviation from their goal of a gender-neutral society. The Molly Yards and Betty Friedans and Gloria Steinems feel threatened by this one elementary boys school, and the federal judge acquiesced in their demands.

Detroit school board vice president Frank Hayden said the board had been willing to work with the ACLU and NOW to set up a girls-only school; and, indeed, Detroit already has a school just for pregnant girls. But that didn't stop the lawsuit because their feminists' goal is not to solve real problems but to force us all into a gender-neutral society.

The ACLU/NOW Detroit lawsuit against the boys elementary school is based on Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination in 16,000 school districts and 2,700 colleges and universities. Title IX is sweeping in its language, but the original statute exempted admission to single-sex colleges (and that's why it was legal for the feminists to keep Mills College all women

when the college tried to go coed last year).

Two years after passage, when the social engineering bureaucrats in the then Department of Health, Education and Welfare issued 80 pages of proposed regulations to effectuate Title IX, they announced that Title IX prohibited single-sex fraternities and sororities because they discriminate on account of sex.

The fraternities and sororities responded quickly to this challenge to their existence, and some 9,000 letters descended on Washington. Congress passed an amendment exempting from Title IX all high school fraternities and sororities, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls, YMCAs, YWCAs, and Boys' Clubs.

The Department of HEW labored another year to finalize its Title IX regulations, with the feminists demanding mindless sex integration in all aspects of schools and colleges. In order for the regulations to go into effect, however, they had to be signed by the President, and the militants knew they could never persuade former All-American football player Gerald Ford to require sex integration on the football field.

As a concession to practical necessity, the final regulations specifically exempted football, wrestling, boxing, ice hockey, and rugby from its requirement for the sex integration of all school and college activities.

In 1975, the Title IX ideologues announced that the high school good-citizenship program, Girls' State and Boys' State, long sponsored by the American Legion, would have to be sex integrated. So, Congress had to pass another amendment specifically exempting Girls' State and Boys' State.

In 1976, Title IX created another series of headlines when the gender-neutral extremists in the bureaucracy banned father-son and mother-daughter events from public schools because they allegedly discriminate on account of sex. After President Ford expressed his irritation at this nuttiness, the Senate voted 88 to 0 to exempt father-son and mother-daughter school activities from Title IX sex-discrimination laws.

It's time for another amendment to Title IX to allow a sensible experiment to help black boys in the inner cities. They should not be held hostage to the feminist demands for a gender-neutral society.

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