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The Growth of Home Schooling

by Steven Alan Samson

A generation has passed since Rudolf Flesch explained "Why Johnny Can't Read" and Paul Goodman complained about "compulsory miseducation." The little red school house that once symbolized the rugged spirit of American democracy was boarded up before my time. It was replaced by a secularized learning mill that rendered the teaching of intellectual skills and moral values subservient to a progressive social agenda.

The tumult on college campuses stole the headlines in the 1960's, but the story behind them is largely untold. A superfluity of federal subsidies steadily converted community schools into public policy laboratories. Thus it came to pass that young people were seized by political messianism and sent crusading against the corruptions of the "Ancien Regime." Johnny still couldn't read, but his empty head was brimming over with noble sentiments that tugged at his heartstrings with all the ardor of youthful idealism. The experience nearly drowned him.

Two dacades have passed. A somewhat chastened Johnny has replaced his elders as the trustee over another generation of non-readers. Yet I am heartened when I see members of my free-wheeling generation turn the old crusading spirit back upon its source: educational messianism.

Too much attention is given to yuppies and their demand for accelerated day-care programs at public expense (old habits are hard to break). What is really scandalous today is the trend toward home schooling. It is the most rapidly growing alternative to an educational system that still snubs "the lost tools of learning" in favor of programs for social change. The public schools are threatened with losing pride of place to a whole array of free enterprise competitors.

When a family emergency took me to Oregon last October, I had an opportunity to stop by the National Home School Convention in Portland. I must have visited 100 literature booths before I caught my return flight to Indiana. The three-day affair, which drew over 1600 registrants, concluded with a flourish when its sponsors publicly threw down the gauntlet to the NEA. The size of the crowd was no fluke. Over 1100 registrants packed the Indiana home school convention last February.

The home school movement is clearly entering the mainstream. Not yet fully respectable, it is still hampered by legislative and regulatory challenges from the public education lobby. Radical on the surface, home schooling is fairly conventional in practice and conservative in the best sense of the word. I saw nothing suggesting its reputed origins in the 1960's counterculture and dissident religious cults. The sessions were devoid of the usual anachronisms — the expressions of solidarity with downtrodden minorities and the New Age hucksters hawking their wares — that are still a fixture on university campuses and at teachers' in-service conferences. The movement can expect to draw strong support as long as it remains faithful to the civilized values of an earlier era.

Indeed, it could have been a booksellers' convention. The sight of newly rediscovered riches from our cultural past made this bibliophile's heart leap with pleasure. Reprints of the McGuffey readers that provoked smug comments a decade ago are now joined by a wide range of literature, from early Puritan sermons, to Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, to now forgotten classics of constitutional history. The curriculum programs are often roughhewn but engaging, and a good sight more sophisticated than what I first saw when the movement was in its infancy. As a handy reference, *The Big Book of Home Learning* now fills the niche vacated by *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*.

We would do well to remember that a series of sixteenth century Reformations were launched with the aid of the fifteenth century printing press. We may be witnessing much the same today. The keynote in home schooling circles is a can-do attitude that seeks to instill the character that once built America and to raise a new generation to rebuild the shattered foundations of western civilization.

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America Has Its Own Ayatollahs in Textbook Publishing

by Sandor Balogh

Without attempting to belittle the seriousness of the Ayatollah Khomeini's threat against Salman Rushdie, it should be noted that few in the West realize that the Ayatollah only follows the "best" Western traditions.

Science fiction author Asimov proudly admitted in *The Velikovski Affair* that in the 1950's the American science establishment threatened textbook publishers with an across the board boycott of their textbooks, causing corporate death, if they dared publish anything on Velikovski's controversial theory.

More recently, several participants at the sociology caucus at the National Association of Scholars' 1988 meeting complained about the scarcity of traditionalist or even balanced textbooks in sociology. One member disclosed that in the early 1970's the feminists issued a corporate death threat against publishers who would publish textbooks that didn't pass the feminist muster.

Thus, we have a censorship of the textbook business that makes the Ayatollah seem like a newcomer, and makes academic freedom a mockery in these United States.

It is not limited to sociology texts. In the sciences, including the social sciences, no textbook would see the light of day that does not follow the evolutionist orthodoxy. Another blind spot in sciences involves parapsychology. Since this area does not fit neatly into the current, positivist scientific worldview, it is off limits to respectable scientists. Thelma Moss, a medical psychologist at UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute, reveals that she was advised that she would "commit professional suicide" by publishing her findings about parapsychology (see Moss's recent book: *The Probability of the Impossible*).

More recently, a similar debate is raging in the most unlikely field: physical therapy. The conflict is between conventional and holistic practitioners, with the traditionalists attempting to curb the other group.

In economics, the corresponding orthodoxy is Keynesianism. Even the much touted text by Gwartney follows the basic orthodoxy when he says the "Keynesian framework will continue to form the core of macroeconomics in the foreseeable future" (2d ed., 1978).

In political science, especially in American Goverment texts, it is pluralism, subject to some challenge from Marxist and middle-of-the-road perspectives.

Even history textbooks are affected by this apparent censorship. One may try to make excuses for historians that they are not aware of institutions like the Trilateral Commission, which supplied many major officeholders for the Carter Administration and the following figures for the 1980 election: Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale, George Bush, and John Anderson. Bush had suspended his membership in 1980 but never resigned. In addition, Brzezinsky was the originator and executive director of the group, and Henry Kissinger an executive committee member at the same time.

Another point where history texts are deficient is the treatment of the revisionist interpretations of the origins of World War II, especially about FDR and the Japanese.

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