

Does College Chaos Increase When Schools Fail to Teach this One Subject?

Over the weekend, *The Washington Post* brought an interesting West Virginia school fight to the forefront.

As the *WaPo* [explains](#), schools in Mercer County have long held optional Bible classes during the day. Among other things, the classes teach character and classic stories from the biblical text.

Many parents are supportive of the classes – even to the point of raising money for them – but others are not. And those other parents have decided to bring a lawsuit against the classes, alleging “that the program violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment” and fails to offer alternatives for children who choose not to participate.

Regardless of the position with which one sides in this particular instance, it’s difficult to deny that such an issue is a rarity today. The Bible, whether as a vehicle for religiously-minded values or as a medium for expanding cultural literacy, has passed out of both the school and the home. And as Allan Bloom (1930-1992) explained in his book, [*The Closing of the American Mind*](#), we’ve been witnessing the results for decades.

An Ivy League professor, Bloom explained how he once thought that American students started fresh, with no cultural background or nationalistic principles ingrained in them. Bloom’s observations led him to believe that such a blank slate was not a problem, for he was successfully able to teach and train his young college students anyway.

However, that changed as a new generation of students came

under Bloom's instruction. He soon realized that his former students were not the blank slates that he once thought. Instead, they had been influenced by a general knowledge of the Bible, which provided a common groundwork on which to build further understanding of history, culture, and ideas. When this groundwork was removed (from both school and home) Bloom found it increasingly difficult to train students at the university level:

"This gradual stilling of the old political and religious echoes in the souls of the young accounts for the difference between the students I knew at the beginning of my teaching career and those I face now. The loss of the books has made them narrower and flatter. Narrower because they lack what is most necessary, a real basis for discontent with the present and awareness that there are alternatives to it. They are both more contented with what is and despairing of ever escaping from it."

This description of listless, narrow, despairing students was written nearly thirty years ago, but it seems to live on in the young people we see today. Only now there is a difference. Instead of listlessly sitting back and letting the world go by, young people are using their despair to lash out, break free, and reject many of the norms, common sense, and ideas that have pervaded Western civilization for centuries. The result is chaos.

Many have scratched their heads as to what is to be done to resolve this chaos. Could it be that Bloom's observations hold the key? Might the next generation simply need a common groundwork of knowledge and cultural literacy upon which to build their understanding of the world? And is it possible that classes such as the optional ones being challenged in West Virginia fit the bill?