

Our Children Are Not Slaves of the State

Last week brought two special delights.

Though I had read and even taught Francis Gray Patton's novel *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, I had never seen the [movie](#). With forlorn hope, I went to YouTube, punched in the title, and there it was, a wonderful film released in 1955 starring Jennifer Jones as "The Terrible Miss Dove," an elementary school teacher whose principles, stern classroom discipline, and general demeanor terrify her students but make her a beloved figure in the town of Liberty Hill.

On the same site was *Cheers for Miss Bishop*, a 1941 film starring Martha Scott as Miss Ella Bishop, a university teacher of literature devoted to her profession whose students love her because of her encouragement of and affection for them. In a speech at a banquet to honor her life of service, the elderly Miss Bishop declares to her colleagues and former students, "Wisdom is the first cousin of freedom, and freedom is the glory of our nation and our people." She then lifts her glass and offers this toast: "So here's to our nation. She's young, she's growing too fast, she makes a lot of mistakes, but somehow she does manage to keep her people free."

How would those sentiments fare in the high schools and college campuses of today's America?

In his online article "'Social Action' as a Bogus Alternative to True Education," E. Jeffrey Ludwig [reports](#) on an inquiry sent him from the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) asking whether he wanted to receive emails about a "list of pressing concerns" regarding the classroom. These concerns included such topics as Environmentalism/Sustainability; Immigrant Rights; LGBTQ Rights and Issues; Racial Justice; and Political

Activism. After taking the UFT to task for this mélange of social issues, he asks why the organization failed to address the teaching of traditional academic subjects.

Ludwig goes on to recall what a colleague told him in 1997: “Communism is finished in the USSR, but it is alive and well in this high school.” Ludwig’s examples of teachers promoting communism in the classroom include the distribution of communist newspapers at school and advocacy for this failed political philosophy on a daily basis in classrooms.

What would “The Terrible Miss Fleming” – my third-grade teacher – have made of such “pressing concerns?”

Meanwhile, Harvard University will host “Homeschooling Summit: Problems, Politics, and Prospects for Reform” in June, [an event](#) featuring speakers like co-organizer and Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Bartholet, who [wrote](#) in an essay:

“This article calls for a radical transformation in the homeschooling regime, and a related rethinking of child rights and reframing of constitutional doctrine. It recommends a presumptive ban on homeschooling, with the burden on parents to demonstrate justification for permission to homeschool.”

Who knew homeschooling was a regime? “A “rethinking of child rights?” A “reframing of constitutional doctrine?” A “presumptive ban?”

Huh?

James Dwyer of William and Mary Law School, another speaker and organizer for this event, [has stated](#) that “fundamentalist Christian and Catholic schools may be damaging to children,” and accuses them of the “instilling of dogmatic and intolerant attitudes.”

Power and control, control and power: these lie at the heart

of this effort to strip away the fundamental rights of parents. Both the UFT and these anti-homeschooling fanatics don't care so much about education as about ensuring a system that produces citizens exactly like themselves. They are attacking the traditional family, not redressing poor school performance.

But here's the good news.

The closure of schools across our country this spring gives parents a golden opportunity to observe what their children are actually learning in school and at university. Are they studying topics such as the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Second World War? Are they reading authors like Shakespeare, Dickens, and Twain? What about poets like Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning?

Perhaps even more importantly, what is the framework of morality in their schools? Are students being taught classic virtues? In their history and literature classes, are they given models for emulation, or antiheroes who inspire despair?

Many young people and their parents want schools reopened. The kids miss their friends, and a good number of parents need the schools back in session in order to return to work. But these same parents now have insights into education they likely never had before. They are becoming aware of the indoctrination delivered in some classrooms, and might work to offset its effects by direct involvement with their children's education.

Some parents, I suspect, will elect to continue teaching their children at home after schools do reopen. A friend who has long contemplated home education is astonished that her daughter completes in just two or three hours at home the work of what is normally a seven hour day at school. Why the discrepancy? This friend has also discovered she enjoys spending time with her child and exploring other subjects for

study.

Our children are gifts entrusted to our care and love. It is we who raise them, tend to them, and try to make adults out of them. We're the ones who rock babies to sleep in the middle of the night, who comfort five-year-old Jennie when she's frightened or hurt, who cheer for Joey at his basketball games and help him stay on track in algebra class, who send our young people into the world hopeful we have prepared them for the vicissitudes of life.

We direct our children's steps as they grow up, and we love them and worry about them as they make their way outside our homes.

That sure as blazes is not the role of the state.

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