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The Government's War on Children **by Sheldon Richman**

Goose Creek, S.C., recently was the scene of a horrific event spotlighting two government institutions: schools and the war on drug users.

On a quiet day early in November a squadron of policemen stormed into Stratford High School, automatic pistols and shotguns drawn. They ordered the students to the floor and forcibly placed some there themselves. Then the police searched for drugs.

They found none. (Had they found Ritalin it wouldn't have counted. That's an approved drug, administered by compulsion when "necessary.")

Police and school officials later explained that they conducted the raid, which was captured by a security video camera, because marijuana and pills had allegedly been bought and sold by students previously.

This justified an armed invasion? School principal George McCrackin said he'd use "any means" to keep his school "clean."

In television interviews several parents angrily pointed out that a tragedy could easily have occurred. The image of belligerent cops pointing loaded guns at children was not what they had in mind when they sent their kids off to school that day.

Yet we really shouldn't be surprised. Concern about the schools' inability to teach reading and arithmetic has overshadowed the fact that those schools were not set up mainly for that purpose. Before there were "public schools" literacy and numeracy were high and growing. The government set up schools to accomplish something that the flourishing private-school market wouldn't do: indoctrinate children so that they would become pliant subjects of the state. As education historian Ellwood Cubberly wrote approvingly in 1919, "Only a system of state-controlled schools can be free to teach whatever the welfare of the State may demand." Or as the 19th-century sociologist Edward Ross said, the job of schools is to gather "little plastic lumps of human dough from private households and shap[e] them on the social kneadingboard." Or as the U.S. Bureau of Education put it in 1914, "The public schools exist primarily for the benefit of the State rather than for the benefit of the individual."

That's why "socialization" was always the first objective of government school systems. Academic subjects were a distant second. "Socialization" has two meanings. The benign sense denotes teaching children social skills so they can get along with others at work and play. The malignant sense means instilling collectivism in children so they will see themselves not as autonomous individuals, but rather as more or less identical worker bees serving the Nation. The latter sense, promoted last century by education philosopher John Dewey, directly conflicts with America's founding tradition of individualism and freedom. Such collectivism sometimes becomes the overt theme of presidential campaigns, such as John McCain's in 2000 and Wesley Clark's in 2003.

Given this mission — the conditioning of each child to believe his own life is less important than the Nation — the raid in Goose Creek is no surprise at all. For decades the government has conducted a ruthless war against the distributors and users of certain drugs (but not others). Like the prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s, this war has no basis in pharmacology; outlawed drugs are no less capable of moderate and responsible use than scotch or bourbon. Even former drug czar William Bennett admits that most users of illegal drugs are not addicts. (The quotation is in Jacob Sullum's book *Saying Yes*.) What counts with any substance is the sense of responsibility in the individual using it. We don't need prohibition aimed at adults to prevent children from using drugs, just as we don't need it to prevent children from drinking. In fact, prohibition encourages drug use because forbidden fruit is the most tempting.

Thus the "war on drugs" is an exercise in authoritarianism that has nothing to do with the welfare of the American people. Of course it is a big part of the school curriculum: schooling's main purpose is to mold children into Good Citizens who will obey the state without question. What better way to teach that lesson than to have gun-pointing cops dropping in at the schools every now and then?

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