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## **Drugs and Schooling: The Meaning of State Education** **by Sheldon Richman**

When an opponent declares, “I will not come over to your side,” I calmly say, “Your child belongs to us already.” —Adolf Hitler [November 6, 1933]

What do government schooling and the mislabeled “war on drugs” have in common? Both are primary mechanisms of social engineering, each designed to subordinate the individual to the bureaucratic state. As such, each should inspire undying suspicion and hostility in everyone who values his life and liberty.

Last November these two government campaigns intersected starkly and horribly in Goose Creek, South Carolina. On a quiet day 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. Some students were handcuffed. The police then 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 supposedly been bought and sold by students previously.

Did this justify a terrifying armed invasion by what used to be called peace officers? School principal George McCrackin said he’d use “any means” to keep his school “clean.” A police spokesman also defended the raid.

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 government 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. Attendance at private schools was common. The government set up its own schools to accomplish something that the flourishing private-school market wouldn't do: indoctrinate children into pliant subjects of the state — future taxpayers, soldiers, bureaucrats, and industrial workers. 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 [shape] 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" has always been 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 malign 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 for 2004. ("I believe that the call to service is the highest calling any American can answer — that your time and talent and energy are the greatest gifts you can give your country. That service to your country is patriotism. . . . Under my plan [for a Civilian Reserve], the President will have the power to call up to 5,000 civilian reservists by Executive Order, and with an act of Congress would be authorized to mobilize even more." [Clark speech, October 14, 2003.]])

### **The war on drugs**

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 some drugs (but not others). Like the prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s, this war has no basis in pharmacology;

outlawed drugs, including heroin and cocaine, are no less capable of moderate and responsible use than scotch or bourbon. That statement will shock many people. There's a simple explanation for that. The government unremittingly issues lies to bolster its persecution of drug sellers and users, and moderate, responsible users are socially invisible because their activity is illegal. (For documentation see *Saying Yes*, by Jacob Sullum.) The media report only on those who get in trouble through drugs, so it's no mystery that people think drug use can only lead to degradation and death. (There is a parallel here with guns: The government and news media only pay attention to the criminal use of guns. Stories of armed self-defense, which abound in real life, are rarely covered, leaving the impression that guns provide no benefits.)

Even former drug czar William Bennett admits that most users of illegal drugs are not addicts: As he wrote in his 1989 introduction to *National Drug Control Strategy*, published by the Office of National Drug Control Policy,

Non-addicted drug users still comprise the vast bulk of our drug involved population. The non-addicted casual or regular user . . . is likely to have a still-intact family, social, and work life. He is likely still to "enjoy" his drug for the pleasure it offers. (*Saying Yes*, page 49.)

What counts most with *any* mood-altering substance is the sense of responsibility in the individual using it. Habits and addictions have their roots in the individual's values and psychology, not in pharmacology.

But what about kids? In 1933 Americans gave up the idea that general prohibition of alcohol is necessary to keep kids from drinking. Likewise, we should give up the idea that general prohibition of drugs is necessary to keep kids from using them. Responsible parents should already know what to tell their kids about drugs: the same thing they tell them about alcohol. (Even the prohibition of alcohol to minors is harmful, since it prevents parents from training their children in how to handle wine, beer, and spirits. One is expected miraculously to know how to drink on his 21st birthday. And people wonder why college students binge-drink as soon as they get away from home.)

Thus the "war on drugs" is an exercise in authoritarianism that has nothing to do with the welfare of the American people. Its purpose is to persuade people that only the government stands between them and mayhem. The key to the state's objective is making us believe that addiction chooses us and not the other way around. This is a lie exposed by the many responsible people who enjoy drugs in moderation the way others enjoy cocktails. (In this regard, also see Jeffrey Schaler's *Addiction Is a Choice*.)

But the government-drug-rehab complex doesn't want you to know that. Too much power and money are at stake. Now, in Rush Limbaugh, the state has an influential new witness to testify on its behalf.

Adults may encounter the truth, but most children belong to the state already. Naturally, the drug war 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. The government's campaign, of course, does not keep children from trying drugs. (The DARE program, for example, is a spectacular failure.) In fact, prohibition encourages drug use because forbidden fruit is the most tempting. This is undoubtedly a source of great frustration for the guardians of the general welfare. So what better way to make their point than to have gun-pointing cops drop in at the schools now and then?

I wonder whether some parents in Goose Creek are considering private school and home-schooling these days.

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