

Educational Freedom in an Age of Anxiety

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The issues are clear.

The issue of freedom of inquiry versus inculcation of fixed answers.

The issue of the right of individuals to decide from among alternatives versus imposition on people of somebody's pet truth.

The issue of freedom of education versus censorship of education.

The issue, essentially, of the democratic method of intelligence versus the authoritarian method of "telling them."

Those are old issues. They have been and will be the cause of many struggles in the history of ideas. Man's fight for freedom has taken place on strange battlefields.

A court in Athens where a citizen was on trial charged with "corrupting the young"

A room where an Englishman (who was yet to write *Paradise Lost*) wrote in his pamphlet defending freedom of the press, "He who destroys a good book kills reason itself."

A Rhode Island wilderness through which trudged a refugee from Puritans who had come to the New World to worship God as they saw fit---and to force others to do the same.

Nineteenth-century England, where a libertarian, John Stuart Mill, put aside political economy to write *On Liberty*, "It is not the mind of heretics that are deteriorated most by the ban placed on all inquiry which does not end in the orthodox conclusions. The greatest harm done is to those who are not heretics, and whose whole mental development is cramped, and their reason cowed, by fear of heresy."

An American presidential inauguration when the great architect of the Declaration of Independence said, "Error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."

An American presidential inauguration in 1933, when a resonant voice said confidently, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

The chambers of the Supreme Court, where a Yankee from Olympus spoke out:

But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundation of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas--that the best test of truth is the power of thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground on which their wishes can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution.

Still today the old issues arc at the heart of man's struggles. The conflicts over educational freedom in the 1950s still take place on strange battlegrounds.

The crowded committee room in a Midwest state capitol where undramatic people wait patiently to appear before a committee in opposition to a proposed textbook censorship bill.

The editorial offices of a giant South American daily which presumed to speak against the regime of dictator Peron.

The board room of a great American state university where board members are deciding whether or not to subvert the principle of free inquiry on which the university was founded.

The office of a puppet commissar in Czechoslovakia where communist inquisitors question a sleepless teacher until he invents a confession.

The office of a university professor where he searches his files and writings at midnight for evidence to prove what the searcher had always seemed obvious, his loyalty; he has received an unexpected call to appear before a committee investigating un-American activities.

The strangest battlefield of all is man's mind.

A teacher in Portland (whether Maine or Oregon makes no difference) cynically wondering what topics are "too hot" this year for consideration in social studies by youngsters old enough to fight in wars.

A teacher in Springfield (whether Massachusetts, Illinois, Ohio, or Vermont doesn't matter) deciding whether to use an established standard textbook attacked as radical in Texas.

A teacher in Metropolis (whether New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, or Philadelphia doesn't matter) trying to decide whether joining World Federalists would peril her job.

A teacher in American City, USA, fearing freedom, fleeing from liberty, and gratefully returning to the security of the formal recitation.

Another teacher in American City, USA, thumbtacking on the faculty bulletin board an NEA poster, "Free men cannot be taught properly by slaves. Courageous citizens cannot be well educated by scared hired men."

An editor in the South wondering how much space he should give a dramatic, yet patently irresponsible, attack on the local schools.

A bright young Middle Western college graduate wondering whether to rule out government employment as a career because "they call you a security risk if you have any ideas different from Grover Cleveland."

A clergyman in New England thinking about his position on released time for religious instruction.

A businessman in the Rocky Mountain states wondering whether he should join a local committee on schools.

A patrioteer-for-pay on the west coast thumbing through his file and deciding on the next target.

A school administrator in the Southwest trying to decide what questions he might ethically ask an applicant for a job.

An East coast communist grinning over a reactionary newspaper smear of an anticommunist as communist.

Educational Freedom in an Age of Anxiety is about old and enduring issues. Its contributors are not neutral. They believe in freedom of inquiry. They believe in the right of individuals to decide from among alternatives. They believe in educational freedom. They believe in the democratic method of intelligence. They dislike totalitarianism in any shape. That includes communism. They believe that it would be tragic if in combating communism in this age of anxiety our nation should embrace totalitarian means and ends. They believe that we cannot save democracy by jettisoning freedom of inquiry. For freedom of inquiry is central in the meaning of democracy. Freedom of inquiry is what differentiates us from the totalitarians.

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