

## THE MEANING OF EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM

An Address Delivered to the First Graduating Class of Hyde Park Academy

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by

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I was indeed honored to be asked to address the first graduating class of Hyde Park Academy, for in many respects this is something of an historic occasion. It is historic because it represents an important change in the thinking of American parents about their children's education, a change as revolutionary for American education as was the American Revolution for the cause of political freedom. In that struggle, which we celebrate in this our Bicentennial year, the American colonists created not only a sovereign nation independent of Great Britain, but a political system based on the consent of the governed. And at this graduation, which is the first fruit of an equally important struggle, your parents are celebrating one year of educational independence -- that is, education free of the dictates of government bureaucrats, federal judges, liberal politicians, professional educators, and our new breed of behavioral engineers. Your parents, and many others like them across the nation, are making it clear to all who will listen that the education of one's children is first and foremost a parental

responsibility -- not a government responsibility. Your parents have learned, like so many others in embattled communities across the land, that the government is neither a fitting educator nor, for that matter, a fitting parent substitute.

Like every revolutionary change, it took a long time in coming. In fact, the process started back in the mid-fifties when parents began to discover, much to their dismay, that Johnny, who spent five hours a day, five days a week in the neighborhood school, couldn't read. Why? Because the professional educators had decided to change reading instruction methods throughout America's primary schools without so much as consulting the parents or even seeing if the new methods would work. Concerned citizens then began to organize groups to exert influence over an educational establishment which had already decided that its only responsibility was toward itself. That's when such organizations as the Council for Basic Education and the Reading Reform Foundation were founded. They were lay organizations which soon discovered how frustrating and futile it was to try to change the attitudes of arrogant professional educators whose financial patron was the government and who were therefore immune from parental pressure. The result is that after twenty years of unceasing parental complaint the reading situation today is worse than ever and our public schools are in a state of academic disintegration.

While academic disintegration stirred many parents to abandon public education, it was but one reason for parental disillusionment with that hallowed institution. In New York, during the sixties, for example, thousands of Jewish parents, as millions of Catholic parents had done before them, put their children into religious schools in order to preserve an ancient religious heritage threatened with extinction. Elsewhere, Protestant parents began to patronize private church

schools because the public schools had come to represent not so much religious impartiality as simple atheism.

However, it took court-ordered forced busing, with all its dangers and irrationality, to get parents to finally act on any large scale to free themselves from the government school system. The emotional traumas caused by this judicial edict brought parents face to face with an agonizing choice: either they had to abdicate entirely parental responsibility and authority for their children's education, or they had to reassert them. And reasserting them meant taking on the full financial, academic, and administrative burdens of creating nongovernment schools which their children could attend. It is a joy to be in a room with parents who made that difficult but right choice, who took on their shoulders an enormous burden, and who have shown what determined, devoted parents can do when faced with such incredible pressures and obstacles. And still you must pay for the public schools you have abandoned.

I am proud that I was able to play a small part in helping you do the impossible. So much has happened since that day in April 1974 when I took a copy of my book, How to Start Your Own Private School and Why You Need One, to Fran Johnenne at the State House where parents had gathered to protest Judge Garrity's forced busing plan. I knew then that neither demonstrations, nor motorcades, nor mothers' marches would make the Judge rescind his order and stop the buses from rolling in September. I knew then, and you people soon agreed with me, that the only sane, legal, and responsible way out of the busing nightmare was to abandon the government schools. Public education had been taken over by the professional social engineers financed by your tax money, and once these self-styled directors of social change had grasped power, they would never

relinquish it.

When I wrote my book in 1971 I described what had happened in the South after the Supreme Court's forced busing order of October 1969 and how parents in communities large and small, rich and poor had abandoned the "federal" schools as they were called and created new independent schools controlled by themselves. I had gone down South to see these new schools for myself and was not only impressed by what I saw but greatly encouraged by the actions of parents reasserting their responsibility and authority for their children's education. Their success in overcoming judicial dictates and state monopoly education was then and is still the best kept secret in America. But it was hard to believe then that a similar situation would arise in Boston three years hence. When it did, I took the earliest opportunity to inform those parents who would listen that there was a perfectly legal way out, but that it would take a great deal of work and money and perseverance -- or as Winston Churchill had put it: blood, sweat, and tears. Freedom was not free, as our Founding Fathers discovered when they fought a costly six-year war against the British Crown to win it.

I was therefore very happy indeed when Hal Lodge called me one day and asked if I would speak to a gathering of parents in Hyde Park who were interested in starting their own school. That was in August 1974. The rest is history. I had been invited to address the South Carolina Independent School Association in October 1974, and my host, Hillyer Rudisill, headmaster of Summerville Academy, told me to bring down from Boston anyone interested in seeing how they in South Carolina had built their own schools. Hal and Karen Lodge and Bob and Rosemary Clinton went with me. In South Carolina we Yankees were given the warmest and friendliest of welcomes. We toured schools, we asked many questions, we got

many sensible answers. Above all, we found out that it could be done. All that was needed was parent power -- parent power in the form of patience, persistence, and perseverance.

And what is behind parent power? Parent love. What is behind government power? The Tactical Police Force. Force and love are at opposite poles. The human being tends to resist force. Governments are in the habit of forcing men to do what they do not want to do. Love, on the other hand, is irresistible. None of you parents in this room was forced to start a school. It might have been easier to put your child on a bus and send him or her into a potentially dangerous situation. But your consciences did not permit you to do so. Your love for your children made you take a much more difficult course, one that would tax your resources and labors to the fullest. Perhaps some of you in moments of discouragement and despair asked for God's help. And you were probably reminded of the saying that God helps those who help themselves.

It's a very common saying but its meaning is quite profound. What it really means is that to conform with God's will we must invariably choose the more difficult course of action. For example, a man is out of work, his wife and children are hungry, and he asks God for help. What does God tell him? To go out and rob the nearest innocent victim he can find? No. God tells him to take any menial job, to perform any honest task, which would permit him to earn some money to get him through the difficult time. And that is why so few people turn to God for help. They would rather turn to Uncle Sam and go on welfare.

The truth is that God and love require the most out of us. It is never easy to fulfill what love and God ask of us. Yet, neither God nor love can force us to do anything. But I venture to say that the most valued and difficult

accomplishments of men, individually or as a species, have been the result of love rather than force.

In the last fifty years our people have come to rely more on force than on love to solve their problems, and the result is that our problems are multiplying. Through taxes we are forced to support schools that can't educate and teachers who can't teach. And the more force we use the worse it gets. One would think that the whole idea of "forced" busing would be repellant to an American judge who supposedly understands the principle of government with the consent of the governed. But what is so frightening are the lengths to which a federal judge will go to enforce the unenforceable. In city after city, the public schools are being abandoned by the white population so that the schools now are less integrated than they were before forced busing. And what do you think is being offered as a solution to this problem? More force: forced busing across urban and suburban district lines.

So you have abandoned public education none too soon. It is going to get much worse than it is now. The spread of the open classroom, another untested pedagogical experiment, will accelerate the academic disintegration now taking place. Teacher power through teacher unions will force our politicians to keep the educators living in the style to which they have become accustomed. The schools will become part of a new penal system based on compulsory attendance, with guards, weapons checks, security systems more in evidence than ever as the student inmates perpetrate more acts of violence, extortion, arson, and vandalism, and behavioral psychologists devise new theories, drugs, and techniques to control student behavior. More and more parents will see that they have no choice but to remove their children from such mentally and physically unhealthy surroundings. And so

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it is inevitable that the movement for educational freedom will grow.

All of you here, parents and students alike, are in the forefront of that movement. You have chosen the way of love over the way of force, and the price you must pay for that choice is high. But many of you know that if the price were higher still you'd be prepared to pay it. We must be grateful that in America we still have the freedom to make that choice. The great Russian writer, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, has shown us how high that price can be when one makes that choice in a Communist state. Yet we know that even under the worst conditions of tyranny, people make that choice everyday, privately, secretly, quietly.

When I speak of love I am not talking about the general abstract concept of loving your fellow man. I am talking about specific parents loving specific children, deeply concerned with their well-being, making great sacrifices in their behalf; specific children loving specific mothers and fathers who feed and clothe them; specific husbands loving specific wives, each endeavoring to give the other those moments of profound happiness that make life worth all of its agonies. I am talking about specific people with specific names -- whose birthdays we celebrate, whose deaths we mourn. I am talking about the real fabric of human attachment and loyalty which is woven primarily around family, friends, and community. A nation, if it is to remain free, must recognize and respect that primary social fabric which is the result of love, not force, of voluntary association, not forced cohabitation. We fought a bloody civil war to establish the principle of voluntary association for all human beings living in this society.

Forced busing is a failure because the races cannot be forced to love one another. Love precludes force. But the social theorists say that if you place a black child and a white child in the same classroom they will get to know one

another, and that familiarity will foster love and understanding between the races. But what is forgotten is that love between the races cannot be achieved in the schoolhouse at the expense of everything else. It cannot be achieved at the expense of academic standards, physical safety, freedom of choice, community stability and harmony, fiscal moderation, emotional well-being, parental authority, energy conservation, time -- for after all busing also takes valuable time that could be used for other things, and last but not least, general peace of mind. And what is also forgotten is that each dependent child, no matter how well he or she may get along with the other of a different race, is still attached to his own parents and that the fabric of human attachment and loyalty is woven around the family, not the classroom. Any system of education that violates or goes counter to that basic human reality cannot succeed in a free country.

It is very important to be aware, especially during our Bicentennial, when we celebrate our institutions and traditions, that the independent academy as an American institution is older than public education. As a matter of fact, the academy grew out of the American experience, while the idea of state monopoly education was imported from Prussia. Contrary to popular belief, compulsory public education did not come with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Our Constitution, in fact, makes no mention of education at all. Except for the tax-supported schools which originated in the Calvinist theocracy of New England, American education prior to the American Revolution and for some fifty years after it, was a wholly private affair. In fact, in Massachusetts alone, there were about three hundred independent academies in 1835. And although there was no such thing as compulsory school attendance, literacy was just about universal.

To give you an idea of what some Americans thought about government involvement in education in those days, here are some remarks made in 1845 by Edward Hitchcock,

an educator, at the dedication of a new building at an academy in Easthampton, Massachusetts:

In this country the government presumes that every parent is intelligent and judicious enough to judge what sort of an education it is best to give his children; and, therefore, it leaves the community to establish such seminaries as it pleases; extending to them only its protection and occasional pecuniary aid. It never enquires where or how a man was educated, in order to judge whether he is eligible to a post of honor or profit; but only whether he is educated. The people know this; and, therefore, if the government undertake to establish and control literary institutions which do not suit them, they neglect such seminaries and set up others. Indeed, I know of no case in which an institution has been started and controlled by the government of a state, or of the United States, that has had any thing more than an ephemeral success. It may be liberally endowed, and supplied with able instructors, and a profusion of libraries and apparatus. But a free and intelligent people prefer to have the control of so important a business themselves; and it has come to be pretty well understood, that if we wish to have an institution fail, let the government start it and attempt to support it.

The wisdom of those words spoken in Massachusetts 131 years ago is all too evident today. American public education is probably the most colossal governmental failure in our two-hundred year history. But there is little likelihood that it will put itself out of business. The only way that will come about is if more and more parents exercise parental power and remove their children from the ruins of an ill-conceived experiment. And there is every reason to believe that as

more and more parents are faced with the choice that you in Hyde Park, and South Boston, and West Roxbury had to make, they too will choose the path of educational freedom.

Hyde Park Academy, along with the hundreds of other academies created by families and communities across the country, represent the most eloquent expression of fundamental American freedom in this our Bicentennial year. Your academy proves that Americans are still basically a free people. But it also proves that freedom must be exercised if it is to be preserved.

In closing, let me say this to the graduates: be grateful to your parents for having lived up to their responsibilities, for having assumed such difficult additional burdens, for acting like free Americans so that you and your children may enjoy the benefits and joys of freedom in the years ahead. Love your parents, respect them, honor them: for they are passing on to you a heritage of freedom which others would deny you, a heritage that took untold human suffering and sacrifice to achieve. The future will soon be in your hands, and if you will follow the example of your parents, that heritage of love, of reason, of fairness will not be lost to those millions yet to be born.