

Why Won't We Let the Children Go?

School Choice and a Liberal's Examination of Conscience

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which she notes below.*

To begin with

At an informational meeting on school governance and management reform several weeks ago, I reintroduced myself to the former principal of an elementary school that two of my daughters attended in our affluent suburban school district. We liked him quite well when the girls were in his school, and knew his lovely daughters slightly when they were in high school with my elder daughter. It was pleasant to see him again.

That afternoon at the Capitol I discovered that he is no longer a school principal, but an executive with one of the professional organizations that represent the interests of school administrators. He asked how I came to be at the meeting, and what the girls are doing now. I explained that I am executive director of a school choice organization. In response to his quizzical look, I said: "Crudely put, we're the voucher people." He understood without much enthusiasm. I told him (in some detail) that all three daughters have grown to be accomplished women with interesting lives and gratifying work. He said, archly polite, that it seems the district schools hadn't done too badly by my family; I replied, archly but perhaps less politely, that we had a good experience in his elementary school.

We listened attentively to the featured speaker, and we each asked one or two questions specific to our constituents. When the meeting broke up, he and several professional public school advocates went to one side of the room; I joined advocates for parental choice and low-income families in another corner. I expect that he and I shall meet again, opposing one another over what I believe is one of the most crucial issues facing Americans in my lifetime: parental choice in education. The question of whether my children were well-served by his colleagues will resurface in useful and ugly ways.

Contests over school choice—by which I mean the right of Americans of all income and provenance to exercise discerning parental choice about where and how their children learn—are shaking up American politics, state budgetary and policy negotiations, and notions about what public education is and who it best serves.

The tremors can be felt and are growing difficult to ignore here in Minnesota, where I received all my formal education, and my daughters their preschool through high school. Choice is coming soon, I hope, but inevitably; many children will be lost to a failing status quo while we argue its merits. Because we cannot "fix" the existing system of public schools fast enough, it matters that we untie the most vulnerable children from

the serfdom of the status quo sooner rather than later. My own children's children's lives are unlikely to depend on swift justice—but the culture and society they live in will be profoundly shaped by what we do to give low- and moderate-income parents access to meaningful power over their children's K-12 education—whether that is public district open enrollment, public charter schools, or private or home schooling.

Considering the Source

During the years my daughters attended schools of some privilege in a district noted for providing high-quality math and science instruction to talented students, I was a student pursuing a graduate degree in English language and literature. Though “non-traditional” our situation was hardly original, as I was to learn; one department chair bitterly informed me that large numbers of thirty-something women whose children had gone to school or who had left their husbands seemed to think the English department at Minnesota's flagship research university was the perfect place to find themselves.

I wouldn't say perfect. I did learn from the Marxian feminist post-colonial deconstructionists (of many genders) with whom I studied that it is sometimes obligatory, often helpful, and occasionally irksome to declare one's subject position when professing to know something about something. Such declarations are not to be confused with claiming a credential, and ought not to become competitions for superior victim status; they are acknowledgements that transparency and objectivity are, if not impossible, difficult to achieve. So, having already privately performed the exercise of self-criticism, I offer the reader the opportunity to consider, as my mother has so often advised, the source.

This is going to take a little while, so I ask for your forbearance and promise to try to make it worth your while.

I identify myself as a political liberal who believes that government has a role to play in ameliorating some of humanity's ills, and (for lack of an apter signifier) a feminist who believes that women have historically been treated unjustly just because they were women. With politically alert grandfathers, I grew up expecting all German-Americans to be Catholic, Democrats, and troublemaking intellectuals. My family managed not to thrive financially during the post-war boom, but we were able to buy, thanks to the GI Bill, a suburban home for \$100 down in a community whose name has become synonymous with good living. Because we had little money but plenty of second-hand books and an adequate if over-rated public school district, upon my timely undistinguished graduation from high school, I received an astonishing amount of financial aid to attend a very good private college. An accident of history meant that my eight younger siblings had similar opportunities, despite diminishing quality in the various K-12 public schools they attended elsewhere.

In my youth, I inaccurately insisted, that, among other things: it was preposterous to suggest America would settle for ubiquitous abortion instead of equity for women and their vulnerable children. We could never elect as our president a sentimental B-movie actor, Richard Nixon, and the former head of our secret police. The War on Poverty would be won. Schooling would get better and better for all kids, everywhere in

America, and all educated people would speak at least two languages fluently.

I expected that by the year 2000 America would approach a millennial perfection. All mothers would breastfeed their children and none would smoke tobacco; all aquifers and the air we breathe would be fervently and popularly protected; every mentally ill or mentally retarded or otherwise handicapped person would be empowered to live a decent life while making their own maximum contribution to the life of what I, derivatively (and inaccurately), called “the polity as a whole.”

Dopey, huh? Well, I also believed that Democrats would never betray poor people for partisan advantage.

Today, you see, my optimism falters. I nevertheless continue to advocate for protecting the vulnerable from exploitation by those more powerful without creating a caretaker caste, think we ought to take care of the planet on which we ride out our mortal lives, believe that noblesse oblige, and seek to include people of all conditions and provenance in what I (inaccurately, but perhaps slightly originally) construe to be “the franchise.” I think guns should be controlled; abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment abhorred; homosexuals and unmarried heads of households equally advantaged with traditional marriages; and that money and good intentions are no substitute for real civil rights, real enfranchisement, or real education.

Personally, I am Euro-derived; culturally rather than religiously Catholic; heterosexual and glad to have divorced nearly twenty years ago; gratified at having successfully reared the above-mentioned daughters as a “single parent.” I am impatient with fools and malingerers, sarcastic, kind to geriatric mammals, have appalling handwriting, and no fashion sense. I am a social drinker, no longer blonde, voluntarily give about 5 percent of my pre-tax income to others less fortunate than I, and have taught college English courses in various settings, sometimes not very well. I’ve been poor, and now I am not.

Considering the venue in which I meet you, Dear Reader, I feel I must further confess that I’ve voted for most of the biggest Democrat political winners and losers of the past thirty-odd years, and would have happily voted for a Lieberman-McCain ticket in the most recent election. I have been told by ideologues of various ilk that these inclinations prove that I am lukewarm, a class traitor, perverse, wrong, complicit, unintelligent. I’ve been asked whether I don’t worry that I may be damned—not every day.

Hence, the subject positions upon which I stand to air my disappointment, sorrow, and shame that the liberal democrats—who I believe are the natural advocates for educational freedom and excellence and accountability—have instead opted for stale loyalties and insupportable arguments over which they fly banners with such captions as equality, democracy, secularism, social justice, and fiscal responsibility.

And that’s how I come to be writing about school choice and educational freedom for you, a reader of a journal published by a conservative think tank (!)—the founder of which happens to be my boss. Is that ancestral bones I hear rattling? Pace, Grossvaters: this is not inconstancy—it is an examination of our national conscience.

The Equality Banner

Public schools have historically been engines of equality, tolerance, and self-expression that take every child who comes to them. Private and parochial schools foster a fragmented, class-aware culture that ignores the needs of children with special needs.

Universal public education in the United States is only slightly more than a hundred years old. Its most coherent construction is usually traced to Horace Mann, a Northerner, a Protestant, and a mild-mannered abolitionist. His wife's brother-in-law was American literary forefather Nathaniel Hawthorne, and her sister brought the kindergarten concept to America. His motives and philosophies for promoting mandatory basic education were inarguably nativist, assimilationist, bourgeois, sectarian, and today would be deemed racially retrograde. The "common schools" were designed to teach the children of immigrants to cast aside other identities to become "generic" Americans—and the genre to be achieved was predetermined and rife with privilege. Still, most children who attended these common schools learned to read and write and calculate sufficiently to do unskilled labor or service jobs, and well enough to vote and otherwise participate—according to their station in life—in the public life of the community.

Long before the establishment of what we today consider public schools, private schooling was actually the new nation's tradition, and much tutoring was done in the homes of literate parents both for practical reasons and to keep one's children from the riffraff of the neighbors' kids. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries large systems of private schools developed when European Catholics and Jews began to arrive in large numbers. Disdained by those who operated public schools (where "non-sectarian" prayer was ubiquitous if not especially fervent, and seemed sometimes to be directed against non-Protestant children), parents and clergy from the old countries (determined to have their children educated without being constantly assailed for their religion or politics or domestic habits) founded their own ethnically and religiously distinct schools. Some of them, like some of the public schools, were not very good; some were good enough, others extraordinarily good, and most – like the public schools—would be considered today to be parochial in the broadest sense, and not very user-friendly.

Today, most American children attend a government-operated public school and most parents have no idea how recent this arrangement is, or how recently white and brown children began sharing classrooms in some parts of the nation. While we have come a long way as a society in, at least, mandated equality of rights and opportunities in a diverse public, each generation has another challenge in accepting difference. Human nature being stubborn and the automobile making it possible for people of widely disparate economics and education and ethos to live in geographic proximity to one another, today we bring our class and ideological and ethnic baggage to over-large public schools that change programs and curriculum, administrators, and teachers with head-spinning frequency. Then we get back on the road and hang out with whomever we hang out.

Despite the best of intentions, Americans still tend to hang out with people they con-

sider like themselves. Walk into any public school cafeteria to see how desegregation—random or ordered—really works on behalf of racial coexistence. Watch which kids go home with which other kids. After the long walk or bus ride, after they’ve finished competing for material and staff resources, what happens?

Walk, then, into the cafeteria of Ascension School or Trinity First Lutheran or Peace Academy or Cesar Chavez Academy where severely economically challenged parents of white and brown children have chosen to send their children. Most of the kids wear uniforms and so absorb the idea that they are to be identified as “us” in some way in addition to pigment. Do these children know the parents of their peers? Does the teacher?

Until quite recently, almost no public schools were required to serve children with serious disabilities; many were physically inaccessible to children with physical handicaps, and most declined to serve children with significant cognitive disabilities. Children were often institutionalized if they were unable to fit in. Private schools often shared these traits— but many were formed expressly to serve children mis- fit to the status quo.

Today, many private schools do serve children with special needs of various kinds and degree of seriousness. Because we now know we can teach children with Down Syndrome and spina bifida and cerebral palsy, we expect more than we have done. Because these services cost more and require a large student population to be affordable, many small private schools acknowledge that they cannot do a creditable job of educating these kids and, with varying degrees of reluctance, do not enroll them

Public district schools, on the other hand, get funding for taking on even children they do not teach well—special or general education, it makes no difference whether the child learns, the district school gets paid. In Minnesota, children who are behaviorally or otherwise ill-suited to the status quo are served—sometimes pushed—into alternative learning programs. Not every single district school serves every single kid who walks in the door. Why a higher bar for every school in the private or charter sector?

It is not “equal” if people get to take money for something they don’t do well—and that other people are forced to give them their children’s lives while they don’t do it. People with money leave; people without money are tied to the system just as surely as my Thuringian ancestors were tied to the land—until they started walking west.

To be equal, one has to be equally able to leave a bad situation.

The Democracy Banner

This kind of choice is retrograde. White kids and middle-class kids will escape to enclaves of their own, in effect “creaming” the best students for privately run schools. We will establish a new caste system and a return to “separate but equal.”

To liberals looking for evidence that private schools have a deleterious effect on democratic values and the desire for social equity, I offer this non-comprehensive list:

Theodore Roosevelt; Franklin Delano Roosevelt; Eleanor Roosevelt; Adlai Stevenson; Massachusetts Kennedys John, Robert, Edward, and Eunice; Sen. Dianne Feinstein; senators John Kerry and Howard Dean; senators Mark Dayton and Joseph Lieberman; Minnesota state senators Lawrence Pogemiller and Mee Moua; Minnesota Rep. Neva Walker; former Minnesota attorney general Hubert “Skip” Humphrey; Sen. Jesse Jackson, Jr.; Chelsea Clinton; Amy Carter; Caroline Kennedy Schlossburg.

Just for fun, we can start another list for liberals’ consideration of the result of public education on the same values and desires: let’s begin with Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan; Newt Gingrich; Tim Pawlenty....

As the parent of three accomplished graduates of public district schools, let me point out that there were a significant number of parents with kids in those schools who were not told—as I was—that they were “lucky” to have the child who was theirs. Those kids sometimes later showed up in technical colleges, having been taught little about the founding of the nation or the Constitution or Bill of Rights, or even how to write a good letter of application for the jobs that were available to them without good math and reading skills. They’d been told, overtly or in some pernicious covert way, that they didn’t need that knowledge. Some of the liberal elite of the educracy (Bracey, Turner, and others) suggest that there’s nothing wrong with some kids being brought up to be mere proles.

Rather than charter schools and vouchers “creaming” the best students from the district schools and creating a separate system of schools for less-privileged children left behind, the middle class currently creams the best resources off the milk of public education. My kids got the best that was available in their district—as do the children of professional parents and stubborn mothers in even the most fraught school districts. And if we don’t, we take our kids elsewhere.

Everybody else has to stay in those schools to, in effect, subsidize my children’s success—otherwise, who would bring in the enrollment dollars that make possible the international baccalaureate programs, the honors and advanced placement courses, and post-secondary enrollment option funds that allow us to look the other way when “children like that” from “homes like those,” and “parents who don’t participate” in school meetings where nobody thinks they’re lucky to have “a child like her” drop out or just get ripped off, cooling their heels while waiting for graduation—or getting their GED in jail.

People don’t leave schools that are serving them. People, even poor people, know skimmed milk (or curdled). And they know when they are being blamed for their own victimization in order to protect the interests of powerful others—including teachers and principals and food service workers and bus drivers and families like mine.

The Secularism Banner

There is a long tradition of secularism in public education, and allowing parents to exercise school choice would threaten that tradition.

Before World War II, public schools operated, in many cases, as de facto sectarian schools. For instance, where there were Catholic schools in the community, the Protestant denomination most extensive in the community also tended to dominate the

public schools. American—and Minnesotan—literature is full of references to the prestige of some congregations and social inferiority of others. As late as the 1970s, communities in Minnesota held separate Protestant and Catholic bacalaureate ceremonies, to avoid prayer that was objectionable to one denomination or another. One such obstacle was the addition of Martin Luther's marginal notes to the Lord's Prayer—if you didn't know "for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory" you were outed as Roman Catholic. And that mattered to people.

Rather than begin my usual spiel about the Founders remembering the established Church of England as well as Puritan excesses when they wrote the Establishment Clause, I will instead simply say that I do not, myself, advocate the return of routine religion and public prayer to the public schools. First of all, because I think it's bad for religion and prayer and unnecessary, since it is possible to pray without requiring everyone else to either participate or listen. But also because public prayer is prone to offensive and even oppressive particularity. Not everyone prays in Jesus's name; not all monotheists think of the Almighty as male; a whole lot of people aren't monotheists. Despite the irrefutable fact that America has historically been a dominantly Christian and Jewish culture, I find it unmannerly to insist that this history demands that I be an audience for prayer I may not share or with which goals I may take exception.

But if people and their kids want to pray, if they find that helpful, as I find a few quiet moments throughout my day or a recording of Bach's Lutheran masses to be helpful, and if they want to gather with like-minded others who feel that the Lord's Prayer or rosaries or spontaneous devotions or sage burning or chanting mantras help them be good people and good learners, let them have that as part of their school day in a school my kids don't have to attend. I'll allow them their cultural specificity if they will allow me mine. Each school will be busy with the mission of educating the public; prayer won't be an issue in any of them.

Just as importantly, children whose parents object to the isms of secularists ought not to be constantly subjected to accommodating them. Families that object to contraception for married people are going to feel themselves aggrieved if their child attends a school where contraceptive information is disseminated to unmarried people. If they are principled vegetarians, they are going to be unhappy about hot dog lunches and the sale of pepperoni pizzas for the hockey team and the trips to McDonald's after track practice.

If they object to taking oaths, the Pledge of Allegiance is going to be a divisive way to start their school day. One might say, such children can be exempted from these activities—but that's hardly a neutral situation, is it? It moves kids out of the mainstream and onto the margins—because, despite being excused from participation, they are still in an environment in which their beliefs are defined as marginal. This marginalization is at the very least unmannerly and unseemly. Liberals, of all people, ought to object to such undervaluing of difference.

We are trying to educate all children—we want them to know how to read, write, calculate; we need them to have higher reasoning abilities; we want them to be curious rather than defensive; knowledgeable rather than reactionary. We shouldn't pretend that secularist values and aims are any less subjective or less potentially oppressive or

politicized than other orthodoxies. Why not? Because we're Americans.

Private schools will balkanize communities, and some will proselytize both religiously and politically.

Please. Can anything be more balkanizing than insisting people who don't want to spend six hours a day together—or whose parents don't want them together—must be together for the sake of some abstract purpose about which reasonable people differ? Especially if only those with insufficient funds to be left alone are forced to associate with people they condemn. Tell me we will require every child to attend a state-assigned school, and then we'll talk; tell me we will insist teachers send their kids to school in whatever system they are employed; shame elected officials into using the schools they defend—then we'll talk about the social fracture of choice.

Public schools are about as politically driven as it's possible to be—and I'm not talking about the teachers unions sending home brochures supporting local levies or pay raises. I'm talking about schools wrestling with “standards” that say more than just measure a few objective skills, and the requirement to take x-number of English, history, geography, phys ed and music appreciation courses in order to graduate.

In Minnesota, we've seen that both political left and right want to run schools from the Legislature. Rather than real, measurable accountability for dollars spent and skills and knowledge acquired, we want to settle whether Christopher Columbus was a great guy and visionary explorer, or a genocidal colonizer. We're arguing about whether the Puritans or the planters, deists or theists were the “real” founders; we spend more time bullying each other about Darwin vs. Genesis than we do teaching photosynthesis, conservation of matter, electricity, and the periodic table of the elements – all things that are discernible and necessary knowledge and that can actually be understood by someone getting a sixth or seventh or twelfth grade education.

My daughters were proselytized by believers and un-believers in the public schools they attended. It was a distraction from what I sent them to school for and it ticked me off that time out of their lives was co-opted that they can't get back.

Children ought not to be conscripted in venues to which their parents have little choice but to relegate them to. Let's just allow parents to pick their schools, and keep elective politics out of the classroom. This will be good for the left and good for the right—but more importantly, it will be good for reading, writing, math, and America.

The Social Justice Banner

We can't close the “achievement gap” between children of color and their white peers until we address white racism. We can't improve the learning of children of color unless we have site-by-site desegregation. School choice through vouchers won't help children of color as much as multicultural sensitivity or integration would.

These claims seemed plausible in the 1950s and '60s and even into the '70s. But today I have to ask how long parents of black and brown kids are willing to let my blonde daughters dine off theirs?

If we are going to wait for whites to stop being racist in their response to people of color we will never have to do anything to improve education for America's most vul-

nerable kids. Some people are going to be racist for as long as there are humans. This is unfortunate, unjust, and wrong. It is unhelpful. I find it odious, disappointing, boring, wasteful, sinful, and have struggled against it my entire life.

But where did we get the idea that we could wait to educate minority children until racism goes away? Minority parents ought to stop letting white parents and professionals sell them this snake oil. It's a racket that white professionals and black activists unwittingly participate in, meaning well but accomplishing the worst possible result.

Look here: The daughters of black mothers can learn whether or not mine become virtuous. Even though white parents and kids may have bad attitudes and behave badly, brown children can still be smart and accomplished. White kids like mine are given too much credit for their importance in the success of black kids—and that gives them too much power.

If we are going to romanticize race and insist that black kids can't learn until the white kids and parents reform, then we will never make things right for children of color. Imagine the dumb stuff we've taught brown kids: they have to sit next to my blonde daughters in order to learn; they can't learn in a classroom full of kids who "look like" them, or whose parents only earn as much money as their own parents do.

This thinking imbues my daughters with magical properties: just their presence makes black and brown kids smarter, more diligent, more successful. This is dumb stuff to teach white kids if we really want to become less racially identified and motivated. Notice that under such a schematic it is only brown children who can't learn in a classroom full of similarly pigmented kids, while they wait for a Great White Hope.

When we settle for this nonsense, however well-meaning, we allow white middle-class kids to consume the hopes and lives of their brown peers. White teachers and social workers and probation officers and lawyers and judges and prison guards and slumlords (not only white ones, but mostly) get paid when children of color don't learn in schools that cannot, for whatever reason, teach them. The middle class gets paid; brown boys go to jail—and we get paid some more.

Recently one of the teachers unions complained that black kids whose parents enrolled them in Chicago's urban Catholic-run schools have sent them to schools that are insufficiently integrated—that a greater percentage of kids in these private schools are black than is the case in the district-run alternative. The implication of this complaint is that these black mamas and papas foolishly valued reading and writing and math and good jobs in the end more than they did having their daughters sitting next to mine! Foolish mamas and papas, caring so much for learning and so little for the industry in desegregation and multiculturalism that feeds professionals and bureaucrats even while children are not learning.

More than they need my virtuous attitudes about race and culture, the parents of these kids know they need the same power I have to take my kids away from people and systems that won't, can't, or just don't serve them. Before their children grow up to become lunch and college tuition for my kids, they ought to get a shot at leaving for a school that just might—only might—be better suited to them than the bureaucracy that profits whether or not they learn.

Meanwhile, my kids are making out like bandits up at the top of the heap. But

there's room up there for more—they just can't get there via the status quo.

The Fiscal Responsibility Banner

School choice drains money away from the public schools. Charter schools are the reason large urban public districts are losing enrollment dollars and having to lay off teachers. Vouchers and tax credits give money and choices to people who have already made their [presumably traitorous] choice, and they shouldn't get any more. We can't afford any more choice.

Check the facts by asking yourself a few questions.

- If we fund public education by giving all of a kid's funding to a school rather than to the parents, who is going to have the most power and money?
- If we fund schools on a per-capita basis, shouldn't parents with the largest number of children have the most influence?
- If people decline to have large families, should we keep a large infrastructure available to serve children who don't exist?
- If children are served in schools their parents prefer, is this disloyalty to the schools they discern to be less desirable?
- Should such disloyalty be made illegal or impossible?
- Is public education of the young really just an employment program for adults with college degrees?
- Should the 6,500 Minnesota families (earning less than \$37,500) who pay some tuition to non-district schools be required to subsidize public education with annual savings in excess of \$39 million in order to get their children the education they need?
- How much choice can we afford?
- Whose choice can we afford? Mine? Yours? Only that of white people above the median income?
- Who says so? A powerful group of unions that support candidates who vote against the best interests of their constituents while claiming to defend them from their own needs and desires? Shame on us.

I ask my fellow liberals to look first into the eyes of a mother desperate to save her child's life through education, and then into the eyes of a lobbyist before answering these questions.

Contrition and Resolution

But lest you imagine that I hold liberals alone culpable for the intransigent mediocrity of the education Borg, let me have a rant at conservatives.

We won't get the choice the poorest families need if the privileged—white, middle- and lower-middle class—insist on a whole loaf or nothing. Conservatives can't just insist on taking the money from the elitist Borg for their own projects. They will have to acquiesce to accountability of various sorts, which may include academic evaluation, and they will have to be willing for other parents to choose for their children what they themselves do not wish for their own.

For example: it is possible to pay less than \$2,000 in tuition for a high-performance, low-cost private school. It is almost impossible to actually educate a child for that cost: current tuitions that low in a decent school depend on private philanthropy for families below 250 percent of federal poverty to sustain the cost. Educational philanthropy is notoriously uneven, and many schools have either not had or not taken the opportunity to establish endowments and permanent or emergency funds. I'm not in the business of saving struggling schools, but for schools to exist someone has to put some money into them. If we offer vouchers or access grants too small for most families to be served in most schools, we will have given a stone where bread is needed.

And if taxpayers are giving funds to students who choose to attend schools operated by someone other than the government, they are still going to insist on some kind of periodic measurement of performance. If we insist on it for one group, we must accept reasonable reporting of student performance from others. Reporting is not the same as jeopardy; no child now getting low grades (as I did) in geometry or physics or German in a public school is in danger of losing her tuition; but someone ought to know how well this particular child is doing individually and in comparison to her peers. We will have to find a way to satisfy the need to know with the freedom to create the school parents of various points of view desire and support with their time and attention and children's lives.

Some while ago, a committed "right-winger" informed me that settling for parental choice was a cop-out—that there is a specific philosophy of education that we must demand, and allowing school choice to be separated from what she believes is a whole cloth (not the seamless garment I wish to wear, in this case) will fail America. But I cannot agree with her position; I know, going forward, that some of the beliefs or "content" one desires other people's kids to have inculcated won't be addressed in every school of choice. The pledge may be let go; *Heather Has Two Mommies* will be in some school libraries; though it makes me unhappy, some parents will choose schools in which they know staff may tell students where to get abortions; some schools will have kids write letters to the president asking him to support the death penalty; not every civics or history class will speak of either Ronald Reagan or Paul Wellstone as great statesmen.

So, you see, this movement to give parents genuine choices and responsibility about their children's lives requires something very difficult: to courteously allow people to have their differences without interference. The past fifty years have proven to me that neither the political left nor right is very likely to want what it will get if it gets what

it asks for when it asks for freedom.

And In the End

I started out to express disappointment and sorrow and shame at the failure of liberal Democrats to authentically engage school choice as a tool for equity and justice. I thought I would indulge myself in a little salon deconstruction. And you, Kind Reader, have stayed with it this long, only to learn that I am, when all is said and done, just another angry mother.

I have cracked a crown and shed a few tears while I wrote this. I fear that, if we tarry longer to let families at the bottom of the heap have the choice to climb, future generations will curse our selfishness. Please don't waste any more time with me, here, in these hospitable pages. Call a local liberal and a local conservative, and tell them the kids can't wait. Call the governor, the school board, the president, the party leadership (all parties), and the grouchy single woman across the street. Please. ■