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Washington Post, April 9, 1986

William Raspberry

Teaching Values . . .

A pair of new government-sponsored studies tell us what we already know: that students who believe in hard work, are religiously active and have parents and friends who encourage these values tend to do better in school than those who do not.

But they also tell us something that many of us have trouble accepting: that the values commonly known as the "Protestant work ethic" work for minority and low-income children as well as children of affluence. Indeed, the researchers found that values have twice as much impact on academic success as family background.

That finding so supports the preachments of Secretary of Education William Bennett, whose department commissioned the studies, that the temptation is to conclude that the studies were designed to prove his point. In fact, the researchers say, the studies were under way before Bennett started extolling the importance of traditional values. The wonder is not that the researchers—Alan L. Ginsburg of the Department of Education and Sandra L. Hanson of Decision Resources Corp.—reached such unsurprising conclusions. The wonder is that such common-sense conclusions have eluded so many public educators.

Every major newspaper has carried stories of Asian children who arrived here with no money, little schooling and hardly any English and who quickly became academic leaders in their schools. The stories almost always explain the phenomenon in terms of deeply held values: hard work, respect for learning (and for teachers) and parents who lay great stress on academic achievement.

But somehow the public schools have been reluctant, in recent years, to work at instilling those values

in our children. The schools from time to time have taught about values. But they have been shy about teaching the values themselves: the self-evident importance of hard work, dedication to task, reliability, discipline, long-sightedness and basic morality. Maybe it's because of a fear that these things somehow amount to unconstitutional religious instruction.

It is a disastrous mistake. Giving young people—including young people from disadvantaged households—a solid grounding in the basic values may be more helpful than the best of the remediation courses in helping them to achieve academic success.

The best way to do that is to create an environment in which these values obtain: at school as well as at home. One of the great advantages private schools have over public ones is that the former have no compunctions about teaching values quite directly. But it is also true that the best of the public schools, including those public schools that regularly produce academic

winner in unlikely circumstances, are led by principals who refuse to allow poverty and racism to become excuses for neglecting the basic values.

The two new studies do not suggest—and I certainly don't—that values training can, by itself, eliminate the negative effects of hunger, social disorganization and racial discrimination. And I, for one, find it discouraging that Bennett preaches his values sermons while serving an administration that seems hell-bent on putting the government on the wrong side of the war against poverty and racism.

But values do matter, in education and in life. As the authors put it: "Encouragement of positive values is essential for higher achievement. Remediation alone does not foster high aspirations to achieve educational excellence. If disadvantaged students are to believe that they can succeed outside school, they must be challenged to achieve success in school."

William F. Buckley Jr.

. . . And Religion

Last Sunday night CBS's "60 Minutes" devoted attention to the problem of teen-age pregnancies. The protagonist of the documentary was a bright and articulate woman in her 30s. She and a doctor had a well-developed thesis. It was as follows: a) Promiscuous teen-age sexual activity in the United States is no greater than in Europe. b) We have many more teen-age pregnancies than in Europe, however, because we are a "prudish" society. c) Evidence of our prudishness is the difficulty local school boards have in instituting sex education programs, which are opposed by many parents. d) These programs are absolutely necessary because of the failure of parents to undertake such teaching at home.

It all sounds very neat, notwithstanding that the camera goes on to show children who a) have taken the sex courses, but nevertheless b) have borne, and continue to bear, children. But what strikes the viewer most is the sudden switch in the orthodox line of liberal argumentation.

Whenever the subject of religion comes up, the First Amendment rampart-watchers rise to declaim that religion is a matter for the home. It is never asked whether, in fact, children are receiving religious instruction at home. But with respect to sex, the moment you get pregnancies or venereal diseases, it is quickly inferred that desirable sexual habits are not taught at home, and therefore it is the responsibility of the public schools to teach sex.

If you ask: Why does it not follow, then, that it becomes the function of the public schools to teach religion?

More . . .

William F. Buckley Jr.

... And Religion Continued...

Ah, the rejoinder is anticipated, because, don't you see, public problems are the result of casual sex habits: last year it cost the public \$17 billion to look after illegitimate children.

But there is of course an appropriate counter-rejoinder. It is that instruction in religion diminishes promiscuous sexual activity. If a child is taught to believe that premarital sex is "wrong," and if the conscience is cultivated and trained, among other things by invocations of divine sanction, illicit sexual activity is by no means eliminated, but it is reasonable to suppose that it diminishes. If a conscience is to develop among young people, then they will ask themselves not merely utilitarian questions (Is sex fun? Answer: yes), but also corollary questions (Is sex without regard to other factors

okay? Answer: no). It is impossible to deny, however secular the spirit of the age, that the activation of the conscience by religion isn't an important factor in the development of character. Why should a society concerned with the sexual explosion not be asking itself these questions, and exploring the absence of religious training in the schools and its possible relationship to abandoned moral sanctions?

But what is it that has caused a rise in illegitimate children by a factor of 600 percent during the past 20 years? Our slide toward prudishness? During the past 20 years, we have had a) diminished religious training in the schools, thanks to the Supreme Court; b) a sharp increase in federal care for dependent children, thanks to Congress; and c) a sharp rise in the availability of sex-oriented material, in song, in movies, in television, in books and magazines, thanks to our entrepreneurs.

Our thought leaders have got a lot of paradoxes to face. To avoid doing so, they have developed near-perfect prophylactics.

BURRELLE'S

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Amen

Forest Hills: In the event of nuclear attack, the law banning prayer in public schools will be temporarily suspended.
Peter J. Godfrey