

high school students in a service learning project studied community members' use of a neighborhood park and provided written and oral reports suggesting new initiatives to the park governing body. Older students in an elementary school developed an after-school program for first and second graders. They read to these students, helped them with their homework, and supervised some athletic and artistic activities. In a different class, students ran a year-long project where they studied the social and scientific issues associated with recycling and organized recycling efforts throughout their school. Service learning activities help students reach out to others while they acquire important knowledge and develop a broad array of valuable skills. Most importantly, service learning asks students to work together while responding to social needs they help identify. Simply put, students come to understand the rights and responsibilities that define citizenship in a democracy.

Efforts to promote these alternative goals require actions on many levels. But most fundamentally, they require recognition that the pursuit of democracy and community may require significant changes in current educational practice. Until these goals are pursued aggressively, we remain at the level of rhetoric.

Joseph Kahne

Notes on Public and Personal Character

PUBLIC LEADERS

An overwhelming majority of voters believe that our problems are mainly moral/social; little wonder that the moral stature of the person to lead us matters. And as we agree that the government should control, mandate, and entitle less—the president must cajole, convince, and lead *more*. As presidents become less the CEOs of the United States and more the masters of the bully pulpit, their character rises in importance; it determines their credibility.

The character of politicians cannot be drawn in black and white; it comes only in shaded hues. And while all its stripes are relevant to public office, some are more significant than others. Having an inner, non-negotiable core is more important than how one deals with one's wife (or ex-wife). Having true compassion for the deserving poor but only tough love for the others is more important than being kind to the staff, and so on.

We should not look for a person with perfect character unless we want to limit the race to Mother Theresa. But we should insist that the candidate's character be good enough—enough to ennoble rather than diminish us.

WHEN IS RATTING VIRTUOUS?

We each have a little militia man within us, and he refuses to get out. We are still reluctant to recognize the necessity of a firm authority to maintain social order. Take the most recent fuss about the use of teenagers in sting operations, the purpose of which was to reduce the sale of cigarettes to minors. The police are sending 15-year-olds, who look their age (not some of those overgrown hunks), to try to buy smokes. When cigarettes are sold to these minors, the offending party is warned the first time and fined as much as \$125 thereafter. When liquor is also sold to minors, the business license may be revoked.

This type of sting operation is reported to take place in at least 17 states and is fostered by the National Cancer Institute. Given that as many as 54 percent of the merchants are found to violate the law in some parts of the country (Madison, Wisconsin for instance), the fines suffice to cover a good part of the cost of the program. Most interesting, in several communities teens have organized themselves into antismoking squads, who identify merchants who illegally sell cigarettes and chewing tobacco, and who call the police all on their own.

At first blush, it would seem that preventing the sale of death nails—as cigarettes were called long before science established the aptness of this early folk characterization—would bring nothing but cheer. The public and personal good involved is crystal clear: according to the Center for Disease Control, the damage cigarettes cause

to health in the United States exceeds that of drugs, alcohol, automobile accidents, and AIDS combined.

All this may be true, both libertarians and the tobacco lobby argue, but all individuals should be free to choose what they wish to do with their life. The facts about the secondary effects of smoking (that is, on nonsmokers) are fairly contested. And, there are no net public costs, ghoulish economists tell us, because smokers die younger than the rest of us, and often do not live long enough to collect their social security.

We tend to forget, when we are subjected to the free-choice rhetoric, that choice is a right of adults. When children are involved, parents, educators, and communities have a duty to protect them—including limiting their choices, from how late they stay up to how they drive—until they are “brought up” to be able to make responsible choices of their own. Most smokers these days (89 percent to be specific) start smoking before they reach the age of 18. Given that teens become addicted before they reach a stage at which they can make mature decisions, it is our obligation to help them ward off cigarettes and other addictive substances. Ergo, laws that prohibit selling cigarettes to minors are in place not merely because some old-fashioned or paternalistic legislature enacted them; they seem quite justified.

And, the militia man in us oddly needs to be reminded, laws are meant to be reinforced. According to police reports, cigarettes are sold to minors rather freely in many parts of the country. When laws are ignored with impunity, we are left with more than a new generation of addicts; we teach youngsters disrespect for the law.

A subtle indication of how reluctant we are to support authority can be gleaned from the fact that the powers-that-be find it necessary to provide merchants advance warning about the stings. The mere existence of a law (and elementary decency) seems an insufficient ground for action. Extra warnings need to be issued to those who violate the law: “Watch out this week; you may be caught.” Otherwise, we may consider that the police acted “unfairly,” as if we were playing cops and robbers and the cops are the only ones who have sneakers.

Still my liberal friends are in a tizzy. Getting teens to snitch to the police, ratting on their neighbors or parents to the government, agitates the militia man in them. Actually, neither neighbors nor parents are involved. Nobody is asking the children of the shopkeepers, or those who live next door, to sting those they are personally close to. Moreover, while in some previous ages, when values were strong and laws were vigilantly enforced and thus the need to keep authorities from overpowering the citizens was paramount, today the case is different. Given our declining social order, shoring up public authorities has become the order of the day. Such shoring up is impossible if we block every new tactic communities come up with to curb violations of the law. Stings, when they do not involve entrapment, when they do not entice individuals to commit crimes they otherwise would not be inclined to commit, are such a tool.

Teens would do well—and those who work with teens might wish to encourage them—to learn to draw on their moral voice before they turn to the police. Antismoking activists may express their concerns to first-time offenders by sending letters to the shopkeepers when they are first caught in the act, expressing their concerns about such behavior. And teens would do well to picket the shops of repeat offenders. But when these civic measures fail, collaboration with the police is part of one's civic duty and not an un-American act.

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