

One form of segregation persists in public schools

Do all high school teachers hate capitalism? Or just the ones in Colorado?

By now, you've probably heard of geography teacher Jay Bennish and his 60's-era classroom rants. Bennish delivered a 20-minute "lesson" to his 10th graders, comparing Bush to Hitler, decrying the evils of capitalism, and blasting America as the most violent nation on earth.

Thanks to the wonders of capitalism, you can hear Bennish's entire diatribe on the web. Unbelievable stuff.

What you may not know is that we have our own issues closer to home. Just last year, a retiring social studies teacher honored at Mitchell High School's graduation ceremonies ended his speech to students with "What is capitalism based on?" The answer came roaring back: "GREED!"

His mission in life clearly accomplished, he sat down.

It's tempting to blame the comfortably-left-of-center politics of public school teachers on some sort of conspiracy. To be sure, politics play a role. Public school teachers are the largest single occupation represented at Democratic Party functions (over 500 delegates at the 1996 Democratic convention were teachers). Normally progressive Democrats are reactionary when it comes to vouchers, because public school teachers are a key Democratic constituency.

Teaching in the public schools is also normally a lifetime job. After a short probationary period, you get a job forever as long as you don't commit a felony (and even then the union can pull a few strings).

People tend to hire and promote people who think like they do, so it's no wonder there's not much ideological variety. Labor unions, after all, are about solidarity. Diversity of thought is not a priority.

But there's more to it than politics.

Suppose you're young, idealistic, and entrepreneurial. You understand economics, you appreciate freedom, maybe you've got some science, math or business skills. It's a cruel fact that you're probably not going to teach high school. You're probably going to work for a company, or maybe start your own. That's a great thing, but it's also a shame.

It's a shame because by choosing a career in the private sector — where you will certainly make more money — you are ceding territory to people who think capitalism is evil, corporations are criminal, and America



OPINION
BARRY FAGIN
Contributing columnist

is a warmongering imperialist bully set on conquering the world.

These people are more than happy to accept a teacher's salary in exchange for a lifetime of opportunity to influence children to carry on the Great Work of the Left.

What to do? There are a couple of things that can help.

American children in public schools will never be exposed to teachers with diverse opinions until concerted efforts are made to pay people with expertise in math, science and economics something closer to what they can get in the private sector. Those careers are far less politicized and attract people with a far wider range of views.

The same goes with hiring retired engineers, military officers, business executives, and other professionals who are looking for a chance to share what they know with America's youth.

But those solutions will take a lot of work, and they'll be fought tooth and nail by the powers that be. There's something that can be done right here, right now, and that doesn't cost any money at all.

You can call me.

Call me, or any of my colleagues at the Independence Institute, and we'll come to your classroom. We'll explain why America is a great nation. We'll convince your students that capitalism is based on freedom, not greed.

We'll bring news that nobody outside of a few tenured professors takes socialism seriously any more, and that the entire developing world wants to be more like America, not less. And get this: We actually believe that capitalism is morally right. I bet that's something your students have never heard before.

So call us. Think of it as an affirmative action program to bring advocates of markets, freedom and choice to a school near you.

American schools used to be segregated by race, to our national shame. American schools are still segregated, but this time by ideas. Free-market economics, support for vouchers, and belief in the greatness of America are increasingly banished to independent and religious schools.

It's time to break that color line.

Fagin, of Colorado Springs, is a senior fellow at the Independence Institute. His column appears on alternate Thursdays. Readers may e-mail him at barry@faginfamily.net.