

# *Homeschooling in the USA*

## Past, present and future

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### ABSTRACT

This article first examines why the homeschooling movement in the USA emerged in the 1970s, noting the impact of political radicalism both right and left, feminism, suburbanization, and public school bureaucratization and secularization. It then describes how the movement, constituted of left- and right-wing elements, collaborated in the early 1980s to contest hostile legal climates in many states but was taken over by conservative Protestants by the late 1980s because of their superior organization and numerical dominance. Despite internal conflicts, the movement's goals of legalizing and popularizing homeschooling were realized by the mid-1990s. Since that time homeschooling has grown in popularity and is increasingly being utilized by more mainstream elements of society, often in conjunction with public schools, suggesting that 'homeschooling' as a political movement and ideology may have run its course.

KEY WORDS *education, families, homeschooling, social movements*

AMERICANS HAVE BEEN USING THEIR HOMES as educational space from colonial times to the present. Yet there is a key difference between the domestic education of past centuries and the homeschooling movement that emerged in the 1970s and has grown steadily ever since. The home-based education of the past was nearly always done for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. Sparse population and limited resources meant that formal schools were impracticable for many in colonial America or on the western frontiers of the nineteenth century. Laws criminalizing schooling for slaves drove many African Americans to clandestine learning in private quarters. Women and lower-class men who could not gain admittance to colleges enrolled in correspondence programs by the millions. Missionaries, diplomats and world

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travelers with children relied on mail-ordered curricula to keep their children up to par while they were in the field. These are but a few examples of the many ways the home was called upon, and in some cases still is, to fill in for formal schools when necessary. But this is not homeschooling (Gaither, 2008: 7–81).

In this article I would like to define the compound word ‘homeschooling’ more narrowly. Here it will stand only for the use of the home to educate as a deliberate act of political protest against, and alternative to, formal educational institutions. Though one can find examples of isolated families rejecting institutional schooling in earlier decades, the 1970s saw for the first time the emergence of a *movement* of parents who kept their children out of schools not by necessity but by design. Why did they do so? Why did ‘homeschooling’ happen?

The answer to that question raises other questions, for Americans of widely different political orientations came to the same conclusion about homeschooling at about the same time. How did this happen? And what did it mean for the movement to have such profound ideological diversity among its members? How did such diversity affect the movement’s aims and achievements?

Finally, as we shall see, the movement’s primary aims, that of connecting homeschoolers and making homeschooling clearly legal and socially acceptable, were for the most part accomplished by the mid 1990s. What does the movement’s success suggest about its future? I will end this article by discussing whether ‘homeschooling’ might at present be evolving into something more like the home education of the past, where families employ it less for ideological reasons and more because it simply makes sense given their situations.

#### WHY HOMESCHOOLING HAPPENED

Several broad social trends of the second half of the twentieth century conspired to make the homeschooling movement possible. Here I would like to discuss four: suburbanization, feminism, political radicalism and privatism, and the increasingly bureaucratic and secularized public school system.

##### *Suburbanization*

The migration of Americans from farms and cities to the suburbs is one of the major contextual factors in explaining the homeschooling movement. The family farm had been in decline for decades by the 1970s, killed off by mechanization. Earlier suburbanization had occurred along rail lines, with

settlement extending in thin tendrils out to the countryside. But the automobile opened up vast new tracts of land for development, allowing homes to be built far from public transport. By 1955, 63 million Americans owned cars, and government rushed to build roads for them. This infrastructure quite literally paved the way for mass suburbanization, especially after World War II. In 1946 937,000 new homes were built. By 1950 over 1.5 million new homes were being built a year. By 1980 over 40% of the population, more than 100 million people, lived in suburbia, a geographic space sequestered from the civic-mindedness and public outlook that historically characterized both urban and small town American life (Hayden, 2003: 165–7; Jackson, 1985: 162–8, 233, 4).

Government subsidies did not stop with road construction. The Federal Housing Administration and the Veteran's Administration (created in 1944) provided mortgage guarantees on new home purchases, allowing developers to build and sell at will, confident that the Fed would bail out anyone who couldn't pay. Developers also received huge tax breaks for such commercial projects as strip malls, fast food restaurants, industrial parks and gas stations. Government underwrote sewerage, zoned undesirable public housing away from suburbs, gave developers virtual free reign over land use, located job-rich Department of Defense sites in outlying areas, and drafted income tax laws allowing deductions for mortgage interest and property taxes. As one historian has put it, 'Sprawl became the national housing policy.' Given such extravagant government largesse, it is little wonder that few middle-class Americans during the 1950s and early 1960s expressed concerns about 'tax and spend' liberal programs, and it makes the subsequent libertarianism that has typified so much of later suburban politics more than a bit ironic (Hayden, 2003: 163–4; Jackson, 1985: 233, 293–5).

Suburban homes have grown ever bigger and more comfortable since the 1950s. According to the National Association of Home Builders, the average house size increased 15% in the 1970s and another 21% in the 1980s. The median size of a new home in 2002 was 20% larger than in 1987. As people have invested more and more in the interior space that situates their private lives, it has seemed natural to shift energy away from public space. We see this in the degradation of public architecture, as civic and educational buildings are decentered from any sort of prominent place and designed to look just like the shopping malls, warehouses, and megachurches that dot the suburban landscape. The comfortable, technology-rich interior spaces of suburban homes, not to mention the traffic and ugliness of the outside environment, have made homeschooling a far more compelling option for many. Suburbia has provided a comfortable material space for homeschooling,

and the privatized, anti-government outlook it encourages has contributed to homeschooling's growing popularity (Mandel, 1995: 26; Samuelson, 2004: 22–3).

### *Feminism*

This mass movement toward suburban life impacted American women in many ways. Much has been written and said about the fate of suburban women, a good bit of it in response to Betty Friedan's famous *Feminine Mystique*, first published in 1963. In that work Friedan argued that suburban life served as a sort of comfortable concentration camp for women, segregating them inside the walls of domestic bliss from adult conversation, meaningful work, and political involvement. Friedan's critique was joined by a host of other works that consistently portrayed postwar suburbia as a 'smug and phony world'. Yet more recent historians have uncovered a very different 1950s. While many women did express concern over 'cultural isolation', especially given their separation from extended family, postwar suburban women on the whole were far more engaged civically than the stereotype would allow. The suburban home was often the springboard for aggressive political involvement. Women organized locally to fight pornography, to promote or hinder integration, to defeat communism, to add a traffic light here or change zoning laws there. They were particularly motivated by school-related issues. In many respects conflicts between parents and school officials in the 1950s 'set the stage for the residents' negative reaction toward the integration plans' that were to come later. Many postwar suburban women began to feel a 'growing disenchantment with the state' even before the events we think of as 'the 1960s' happened (Filene, 1998: 198; Lynn, 1994: 103–27; Meyerowitz, 1996: 9–36; Murray 2003: 12; Nickerson, 2003b: 35–43).

Women's roles were changing too. Women's employment outside the home had been increasing slowly in the decades before World War II. After the war more and more women, especially married women, went to work. Each decade between 1940 and 1990 saw a 10% increase in the percentage of married women in the workforce. By 1985, 50% of women with children under six were working outside the home. Such shifts correlated with ever-increasing levels of education among American women. By 1960 one third of all higher education degrees in the US were awarded to women. By 1980 almost half were. The number of women earning Bachelor's degrees between these years more than tripled (Bailey, 2004: 108; Blackwelder, 1997; USNCES, 2008).

The homeschooling movement cannot be understood apart from the dramatic rise in female education and political participation that the feminist

movement has secured. Though most homeschooling mothers would utterly reject the term 'feminist' as a self-designation, it is clear that such women 'no longer see themselves as simply housewives or mothers' (McDannell, 2005: 210–11). Homeschooling has become a means for women who believe they should stay at home to nevertheless put their educational experience and talents to good use. Home has become workplace; the mother an educational professional. In addition, fathers with homeschooling wives are urged to and often do become more domesticated. Homeschooled boys learn to cook, clean and take care of younger siblings. Children in general are raised with less gender specificity. Some scholars studying homeschooling have noted how a movement 'generated partly in reaction to feminism' has nevertheless selectively incorporated 'many feminist family forms', including the softening and domestication of the male, the therapeutic orientation to marriage and childrearing, and of course the provision of excellent education to girls (Stacey, 1990: 145). Women form 'the backbone of the homeschool movement's impressive organizational system', crafting lives of powerful dissent from established norms even as they seek to convince others that homeschooling is, after all, pretty normal (Stevens, 2001: 15–16).

*Political radicalism and privatism*

Since the 1980s commentators have been much exercised over the division of the country into warring camps on most social issues. But what is often missed in such an analysis is the underlying symmetry of vision that unifies the two camps. The cultural left and right may argue incessantly, but they speak the same language, share a similar set of background beliefs. Since the 1960s many of the most radical Americans on both sides of the political spectrum have been more interested in local community and self-determination than in national identity. Conservative and liberal Americans have had radically different private visions of the good life, but they have all shared a commitment to private vision. 'Conservative' churches, for example, were anything but conservative in their celebration of private, direct experience of God and their appropriation of countercultural music and hairstyles. Radicals of all stripes waxed apocalyptic, whether they were Christians discerning Antichrist's imminent arrival in the latest headlines or hippies predicting an environmental holocaust. Both groups saw themselves as the small faithful remnant surrounded on all sides by the forces of darkness. By the 1970s many young Americans on both the left and the right had largely given up on building a better America, hoping instead to 'build alternative institutions and create alternative families – a separate, authentic, parallel universe' (Farber, 1999: 8–9; Schulman, 2001: 246–52, 77, 16–17; Steigerwald, 1995: 277).

Given this pan-ideological commitment to local, authentic, private life and contempt for establishment liberalism, it is not surprising that members of both the countercultural right and the countercultural left began to practice and advocate for homeschooling. On the left, disillusionment with the pace of social change prompted many to drop out of mainstream America. Many turned instead to communal living or to homesteading. By the early 1970s there were some 2000 rural communes in existence and perhaps as many as 5000 less organized 'collectives', ranging from urban villages to more informal 'crash pads' where anyone was welcome to a couch or space on the floor. Though the rhetoric of such groups was profoundly countercultural, the agrarian and do-it-yourself spirit pervading this movement was classic populist Americana. Family and childbearing were big parts of the earthy orientation, and natural childbirth was often associated with permissive parenting and education. Many on the left saw formal schools as symbols of everything wrong and destructive in modern life and kept their kids at home. They found a champion and organizer in the person of John Holt, a leading school critic of the 1960s who by the mid 1970s had given up on schools entirely and was urging parents to liberate their children from them. Holt's magazine *Growing Without Schooling* became the first national homeschooling periodical when it debuted in August of 1977, and his celebrity advocacy and frequent appearances on *The Phil Donahue Show* and other venues brought homeschooling into the national limelight for the first time (Gaither, 2008: 122–8; Miller, 1999; Schulman, 2001: 88–91).

On the right, profound changes were happening to American Protestants. The old denominational distinctions were fading, replaced by a sharp binary between 'conservative' churches that embraced a fierce biblical literalism wedded to moral traditionalism even as their worship became more free and casual, and 'liberal' churches that, even if they still worshipped in a manner consonant with earlier centuries, tended to shy away from the more miraculous and exclusive claims of Christianity. American Protestants realigned themselves according to this divide, and the results were good news for conservatives and bad news for liberals. Dramatic growth in the conservative, separatist sector spawned a host of alternative cultural institutions that mimicked even as they condemned the cultural mainstream: Christian bookstores, romance fiction, radio and television stations, rock concerts and festivals, music awards, theme parks, summer camps. A parallel Christian culture was emerging that allowed 'kids to be normal, blue-jean-wearing, music-loving American teenagers without abandoning the faith, . . . to be devout without being nerdy' (Isserman and Kazin, 2000: 241–5; Kaestle, 1991: 2; Schulman, 2001: 92–5; 87; Wuthnow, 1988: 132–72).

One important facet of this new Christian counterculture was its political activism. Early in the 1960s studies of voting patterns consistently found that religiously conservative people were the least likely Americans to be involved in politics. But the ensuing decades saw an infusion of countercultural sensibility into the most conservative segments of the population. Shocked and outraged by social change, conservatives adopted the techniques of the left to forward their own agenda. While earlier conservative political movements, such as prohibition or anti-obscenity Comstock Laws, had used government to accomplish their aims, for conservatives of the late 1960s and 1970s government itself was the problem, suffused as it was, as many conservatives believed, with communists and moral libertines. Groups like the John Birch Society and later the Moral Majority organized millions of Americans to fight government initiatives. Their bases of operations were tens of thousands of living rooms across the country, and their membership was largely female. Homemakers and mothers did much of the grassroots organizing and not a little of the actual teaching at conservative meetings. These were not Betty Friedan's etiolated domestics. They were empowered, articulate and unabashedly conventional. As Colleen McDannell has shown, they were the spiritual descendents of nineteenth-century Victorians, trying to preserve a place for domestic Christianity in contemporary society. In the name of the home these women were coming out of the living room into the public square (Flipse, 2003: 136–7; McDannell, 2005: 187–219; Nickerson, 2003a: 51–60; Schoenwald, 2003: 21–36).

*Bureaucratic and secular public schools*

By the 1970s disillusionment with government schooling had become quite fashionable. Parents looked on as fights between teachers and administration got nasty. They worried about the records schools kept on their children and would not let them see. Some parents protested against schoolbooks that mentioned witchcraft, evolution, world government, pacifism and other cultural flashpoints. Sex education, life adjustment, progressive pedagogies like the 'new math' and whole language reading instruction came under attack. Schools were attacked from the right for being insufficiently intellectual in titles like *Educational Wastelands*, *American Education: A National Failure*, and *The Literacy Hoax*. Left-leaning books, indicting the authoritarianism of public education, were even more merciless, bearing titles like *Growing Up Absurd*, *Free the Children* and *Crisis in the Classroom*. Finally, court-ordered busing to racially integrate public schools was for many the last straw, making 'bitter and immediate antagonists of parents' in many parts of the country (Cremin, 1989: 5–6; McClellan, 1999: 76–7).

This growing animus against government schools, however, coincided with ever-increasing reliance on them by most American families. By the 1970s public education had become a massive, nearly universal experience for Americans. Despite pronounced population growth and increases in school enrollments, the number of school districts contracted profoundly (from 117,000 districts in 1939 to 16,000 in 1980), meaning that more and more children were going to bigger and bigger schools further and further away from their neighborhoods. Such schools ‘tended to become more similar, as mass textbook publishing, state and national testing programs, and national reports . . . exerted ever more powerful effect’ (Cremin, 1988: 544–51).

By the late 1970s Americans of various political persuasions were looking for an alternative. The left wing, led by John Holt, was first to put home-schooling on the national agenda. Homeschooling was not at first considered by many conservatives. In the 1960s and 1970s most conservatives were still trying to keep public school values consistent with their own. But while activism gained them victories in some locales, conservatives rightly discerned that they were losing the battle over control of the nation’s public schools. The 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court decisions outlawing organized school prayer and school-sponsored Bible reading shocked and devastated many conservatives, and over the ensuing decades many of them began pulling their children out of public schools and placing them in upstart Protestant day schools. In 1967 the three leading Christian school umbrella organizations had a combined membership of 102 schools. But in the late 1970s and 1980s new schools blossomed across the country. By 1990, over 3000 Christian schools were on the rolls (Carper and Hunt, 2007: 203–4; DelFattore, 2004: 67–105; Nickerson, 2003a: 57).

For some conservative Christians, however, private schools were not the answer. Reasons for dissatisfaction with private schooling varied: some families couldn’t afford the tuition; some disagreed with the theology their local school(s) espoused; some had negative experiences with principals or teachers; some, especially those with special needs children, felt that the private school couldn’t adequately address their child’s individual circumstances; some believed that the Bible gave responsibility for education to parents only; and some, especially mothers, simply wanted to spend more time with their children. In the early 1980s Christian psychologist and radio show host James Dobson repeatedly featured Seventh-Day Adventist educators Raymond and Dorothy Moore on his program *Focus on the Family*. The Moores, who had for some time been arguing that children should not go to school until age 10 to 12 at the earliest, delivered a message that resonated with thousands of disaffected Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, and the Christian homeschooling movement was born. As we have seen, circumstances were right. By the late



1970s many conservatives lived in comfortable suburban homes that could easily accommodate a homeschool. Many housewives were well educated and committed both to their children and to staying at home. Housewives ‘formed the backbone’ of most pro-family movements. If such women as these could protest, organize voters, conduct study groups, and lead Bible studies and women’s clubs at their churches, could they not teach their own children how to read, write and cipher? Many decided they could (Filene, 1998: 223; Gaither, 2008: 128–34; Lytle, 2006: 282; Shepherd, 1990: 57).

#### THE MOVEMENT: SUCCESS AND SCHISM

Homeschoolers in the late 1970s and early 1980s organized themselves into support groups all over the country. They were led by John Holt and Raymond Moore, both of whom travelled the country constantly speaking at group meetings and advocating for homeschooling in legislatures and courts. In the early years these groups usually accepted all comers regardless of religious affiliation or pedagogical philosophy. Homeschoolers in those days were in a precarious position – misunderstood and held in suspicion by neighbors and family members, distrusted and occasionally persecuted by authorities, confused about what was legal and how to do what they were trying to do. Support groups were a lifeline for many struggling homeschooling mothers, providing sympathetic ears, advice for the daily grind of teaching, and especially expertise regarding how to navigate the educational and legal system. And since homeschooling’s fundamental ideals made intuitive sense to many Americans, the movement was quite successful at convincing the nation, especially its courts, legislatures and media, that this was a harmless and perhaps even noble phenomenon. At first exposure, many Americans recoiled against the notion of children being kept out of school, but as they listened to Holt describing how schools destroy the native curiosity of children or to Moore citing scores of studies purportedly showing that early institutionalization damages children, and as they saw that many homeschooled children were excelling academically, attitudes and laws shifted (Gaither, 2008: 118–34).

Though it is frequently claimed that homeschooling was illegal in most of the country before the 1980s, in actuality the homeschoolers of the 1970s and 1980s faced a complex and often vague tangle of state compulsory education statutes. These varied widely concerning the legality of teaching children at home. At the dawn of the movement in the late 1970s, 14 state statutes said nothing at all about education at home but usually mentioned the acceptability of children being taught in a private school; 15 explicitly mentioned home instruction in one way or another. The remaining 21 contained phrases like

‘equivalent instruction elsewhere’ or ‘instruction by a private tutor’ that could be read to imply recognition of home education as a legitimate option. The 36 states with either explicit or implied provisions for home instruction differed markedly over the specificity of their rules governing non-public school instruction and over establishing who was in charge of it all. Some were very vague. Some empowered local school boards to govern such matters. Some statutes established robust requirements. Six even required that any teacher of children, regardless of venue, be certified by the same standards the state used to certify public school teachers (Stocklin-Enright, 1982: 609; Tobak and Zirkel, 1982: 1–60).

As the homeschooling movement grew, much energy was devoted to clarifying and in many cases changing the legal codes. Two basic lines of attack were adopted. Some homeschoolers sought to define home-based instruction as a fundamental Constitutional right, grounded either in the First Amendment’s free exercise clause or the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process clause. With rare exception such arguments failed at the state level, and to date no case with these principles at stake has made it to the Supreme Court. The second, and much more successful strategy, was to secure either state court decisions that interpreted state statutory language in a manner favorable to homeschooling or, barring that, to change the state statutes themselves to make homeschooling clearly legal and uncumbersome. In some states, homeschoolers secured favorable court decisions that found homeschools to be private schools. In others courts agreed that the state statutes were unconstitutionally vague, forcing the legislatures to compose new homeschooling legislation that was nearly always more permissive than public school personnel wanted. Finally, states with explicit requirements that homeschoolers found onerous were put under tremendous pressure, often involving massive demonstrations, to relax their laws. By 1993 every state in the union had done so and homeschooling had become legal nationwide even for parents without teacher certification. To this day differences remain in the level of state scrutiny of homeschoolers, and minor skirmishes flare up any time an ambitious legislator seeks to increase regulations on homeschooling. But those who wish to regulate homeschooling have never been able to match the political energy and organizational aptitude of these highly motivated parents (Gaither, 2008: 175–200).

Yet even as the homeschooling movement was moving from victory to victory in the legislative and legal arena during the 1980s, internally matters were growing tense. 1985 is a seminal date for the homeschooling movement, for it marked both the death of John Holt, by far the most visible national advocate, and the emergence of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) on the national scene. In hindsight schism looks inevitable. In the

early 1970s there were perhaps 10,000–15,000 homeschooled children in the United States. By the mid 1980s the best scholarly estimates place the number at somewhere between 120,000 and 240,000, and most of these new recruits, perhaps as many as 85% or 90% of them, were conservative Protestants. These new homeschoolers chafed against a national leadership headed by Holt, an atheist and advocate for child rights and world government, and the Moores, Seventh-Day Adventists with a very low view of formal pedagogy. From within their own ranks emerged a younger generation of conservative leaders who quickly coordinated their efforts and wrested control of the movement. Support groups around the country that had been open to many different religious and pedagogical orientations split into rival groups, one (usually much larger and better organized) for conservative Protestants only and another for everyone else. Statewide organizations and their annual conventions split along the same lines. Suddenly homeschoolers who could not sign Protestant statements of faith were not allowed to join, speak at, or advertise their products at conventions across the nation. Veterans of the Holt and Moore years broadcasted their frustration as much as they could, but they were such a small minority within the movement that their anger and criticisms of HSLDA and other conservative leaders made little impact on the movement (Gaither, 2008: 141–73; Lines, 1991).

HSLDA's membership figures best illustrate where the movement's momentum lay. When it was founded in 1983 HSLDA had about 200 members. In 1985, its breakout year, it grew from 1200 to 2000. By 1987 it had 3600 members. Throughout the 1980s membership figures doubled every thirteen months. By 1994 38,000 members were served by 38 full-time employees. By 1999 HSLDA employed 60 people full-time, and membership topped 60,000 for the first time. At the same time, the organizations founded by Holt, Moore and other leaders not connected to the conservative Protestant culture either stagnated or declined. Why was there such one-sided growth? Homeschooling is nearly impossible without at least one full-time houseparent, and the conservative Protestant celebration of the stay-at-home mom gave it a far larger population of possible recruits than more liberal orientations, which tend to sanction public roles for women. Furthermore, it was a deep suspicion of secular people and ideas that had led conservative Protestants to homeschooling in the first place, and they were not about to flee from secular liberalism in one venue only to embrace it in another. As a result, by the 1990s homeschooling had become associated in the minds of most Americans with separatist, far right fundamentalist Christianity. But since the late 1990s that public perception has been changing (Hunter, 1991: 208; Seelhoff, 2000: 32–44; Stevens, 2001: 178).

THE NEW HOMESCHOOLING

In 2009 homeschooling has been around long enough that it does not draw the same level of press attention or public comment as it did in the 1990s. Occasionally something homeschool-related will make the news, the most notable recent example being the brouhaha over a lower court ruling in California declaring homeschooling without a teaching certificate illegal (a decision that was quickly thrown out after a massive national outcry). On the whole, however, a peace has settled over the land regarding this issue. As homeschooling has become less controversial and more familiar, more and more people, all kinds of people, are turning to it as an option for their children. Most people who use their homes to teach their children still do so as a form of protest against public education. They are still ‘homeschoolers’. But more and more people are choosing this path not out of frustration with secularism or numbing bureaucracy or inflexible curriculum or age segregation but simply because it makes sense for the time being given their family circumstances. They are the new domestic educators, returning to the historic practice of using the home to educate for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. In this final section we will briefly examine a few examples of this broad and amorphous trend (Dunn and Serthick, 2008: 11).

Recent survey research has revealed a considerably more heterogeneous population of homeschoolers than earlier and more limited studies had found. Polling data from the National Center for Education Statistics has found far higher rates of minority homeschooling than previously believed: around 23% in both 2003 and 2007. African American homeschooling has received the lion’s share of media attention, but the trend also extends to Hispanics, Native Americans, Orthodox Jews, conservative Catholics, Mormons and Muslims, as well as more fringe elements like neo-pagans and white supremacists. Many of these people are turning to homeschooling for some of the same ideological reasons that Protestants did so in the 1980s and 1990s, and support groups and resources, especially online, have multiplied to meet their needs (Gaither, 2008: 218–24; Planty et al., 2009: 134).

Homeschooling has begun to make sense to some Americans for very different reasons, however. Many families with children in time-consuming activities such as music or dance programs, sports, acting, or modeling have turned to homeschooling for its flexible scheduling. Parents with children who have special needs of all sorts, from autism to peanut allergies, are finding home-based education a more convenient and comfortable approach for their child’s needs. Some ‘creative class’ families are turning to homeschooling as a way to integrate education into the telecommuting, globetrotting lives they

lead. Home-based tutoring is experiencing such rapid growth that tutoring agencies cannot meet demand. With increasing frequency the popular press reports on the latest celebrity to have grown up homeschooled or to be choosing this option for her or his own child. Homeschoolers such as these make it clear that what was at one point a fringe movement of hippies and Fundamentalists is now quite fashionable (Bollinger, 2006: 415–21; Conlin, 2006: 80–1; Gaither, 2008: 223; Schetter and Lighthall, 2009).

The look of homeschooling has become nearly as diverse as its practitioners. New hybrid forms have made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between home school and plain old school. For years now, homeschoolers, especially those with older children, have created co-ops, sports teams, bands, clubs, resource centers, and the like, often meeting in area churches or community centers that look quite a bit like traditional schools. More recently, public schools, having lost the fight to suppress homeschooling, have begun to court homeschoolers and the tax dollars their patronage represents. Some districts have opened up satellite campuses that offer free enrichment courses to homeschoolers. Others are experimenting with dual enrollment programs that allow students to attend public schools part-time and stay home for the rest of the day. Homeschoolers are increasingly participating in after-school activities like school sports. Some districts have opened to homeschooled teens their programs that pay for community college classes for high schoolers. Most dramatically, and most controversially, many states now allow children to receive a complete public school education in their homes for free through non-classroom-based virtual schools, or ‘cyberschools’ as they are often called (Gaither, 2009: 11–18).

My brief summary here of the increasing diversity of children being taught at home and of institutional configurations being used to do so should not obscure the fact that most who homeschool still choose this option out of frustration with or protest against formal, institutional schooling and seek to offer an alternative, usually conservative Christian, worldview to their children by teaching them at home. The Christian homeschooling movement is still alive and well and growing ‘by both conversion and conception’. Yet it is the case that increasing numbers who opt to homeschool do so as an accessory, hybrid, temporary stop-gap, or out of necessity given their circumstances, and it is this newer group of homeschoolers who are challenging the historic dichotomies between public and private, school and home, formal and informal that have played such an important role in the movement’s self-definition and in American education policy. Trends toward accommodation, adaptation and hybridization, such as we have discussed here, will likely increase as US education policy seeks to catch up to the sweeping demographic, technological and economic changes that

characterize our society today. Ironically, a movement born in opposition to public schools might offer public education one of its most plausible reform paradigms for the twenty-first century's post-industrial, virtual, destabilized global soul (Ayer, 2001; Carper, 2007: 260).

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## *Gaither: Homeschooling in the USA*

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