

## *Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage*

Westheimer, Joel. (Ed.). (2007). *Pledging allegiance: The politics of patriotism in America's schools*. Edited by Joel. Teachers College Press: New York. pp. 219.

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This collection bring together many writers who have also been featured on the website [www.DemocraticDialogue.com](http://www.DemocraticDialogue.com). The collection includes stories about minority groups and their attachment to the military arm of the government, the psychological roots of authoritarianism, student attitudes towards government and being patriotic, cultural diversity in classrooms and historical accounts of the emergence of civil celebrations. There is one chapter that contrasts Canadian patriotism with American patriotism. There are many additions or comments by well-known writers, photographs, cartoons, and a listing of websites on similar themes along with the bibliography.

Dr. Westheimer wants to make certain that the readers draws the right conclusions by both his introduction on personal opinions and his own essay on the difference between authoritarian and democratic patriotism. He presents a polarity between conservatives who have led the United States down the path of war and prejudice and liberals whom the conservatives have attacked for not being patriotic. This polar difference is never considered a problem for a man opposed to authoritarian positions.

Westheimer draws heavily on personal experiences and those whom he admires. In the introduction he cites his mother's personal experience of being released from a Nazi prison. It is not clear why his mother, the well-known Dr. Ruth, has an experience that transfers to him or why her gratitude to the American soldiers encompasses the American government for many years later. Dr. Westheimer could have discussed his denial of tenure because he supported the unionization of graduate teaching assistants, but does not. Instead, he is drawn to the unrepentant terrorist, Bill Ayers, who writes a chapter. Ayers criticizes the American wars, deaths caused by their military and recruiting students in schools for their armed forces without ever mentioning the destruction that he and his wife tried to cause.

Ironically, excellent historical accounts are based on the emergence of civic holidays as a result of American wars. Cecilia O'Leary writes on the emergence of civic holidays, particularly Memorial Day, as a means of stressing unity and common values after the War Between the States. Another chapter shows how liberals and radicals have contributed symbols for national unity. No one must get the idea that the left is in any way inferior. The limited focus of this collection does not reflect the broader research on political socialization.

What Dr. Westheimer does do is show how a liberal teaching of civic education can be developed. He praises a teacher who used a curriculum of primarily cartoons to teach social studies. The possibility that neither liberal nor conservative interpretations of social studies should ever be included in the curriculum is not considered. Perhaps Joel Westheimer should

consider that social studies distracts from academic achievement by the emphasis on that student discussion of their own opinions. Furthermore, he might want to consider the positions of James Coleman that volunteer organizations are critical for maintaining democracy. The historical writers that are included show that volunteer organizations were responsible for the emergence of civic holidays that schools later supported.

Democracy in schools can be enhanced by teachers and writers who practice democracy. The writers in this collection never talk to each other and we are left with only Dr. Westheimer's authoritative comments on these writers. Particularly, is support for Dr. Ayers, who Canada recently would not allow to cross its borders, remains questionable. Dr. Westheimer does not question Ayers or promote discussion of this controversial character; such controversy is the soul of democracy. Perhaps if many of the dated photographs available free from the Farm Security Administration, or the dated references to the mistakes of George W. Bush were omitted, there might have been space for the writers to comment on each others' essays. This collection is not like the democratic dialogue that Dr. Westheimer himself has sought to promote.