



Written by [Staff](#) on September 27, 2022

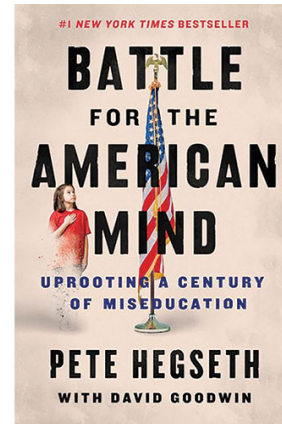
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## A Call to Arms for Classical Christian Education

***Battle for the American Mind: Uprooting a Century of Miseducation***, by Pete Hegseth with David Goodwin, New York: Broadside Books, 2022, 288 pages, hardcover.

Something is not true education unless it has taught you life's true values. While that sentence isn't specifically from the book under review, that is one of its key underlying messages.



This is a collaboration in many regards, including drawing from distinguished personages from the past. Many are quoted. For instance, Plato, who said, “Education is teaching our children to desire the right things,” and G.K. Chesterton, who wrote, “Education is not a subject and does not deal with subjects. It is instead a transfer of a way of life.”

Of course, *Battle for the American Mind* is much more than selected quotations. It both exposes the indoctrination that has infected most of American education and serves as a clarion call for its solution: classical Christian schools.

Serving as the volume's narrator, in the first person, is Pete Hegseth, co-host of cable television's *Fox & Friends Weekend*; author of other well-received books (this one is also listed as a *New York Times* bestseller as we write); a graduate of Princeton University and Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government; and a U.S. Army veteran with two Bronze Stars from service in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Guantanamo Bay. Military analogies, appropriate to the theme, are sprinkled throughout the book, many associated with Hegseth's experience with counterinsurgency.

In this book, Hegseth acknowledges several times how little he knew about the subject until recent years. During that period, he worked on a Fox Nation documentary (*The MisEducation of America*) with consultant David Goodwin, the co-author of this volume.

Goodwin, according to his bio, was raised on an Idaho farm, earned an M.B.A., and traveled the world with a Fortune 500 tech company, before quitting so he could invest in classical Christian education, founding the Ambrose School in Boise. Goodwin's knowledge and expertise — he is the editor of *The Classical Difference* magazine and president of the Association of Classical Christian Schools — clearly inform the book. Hegseth refers to Goodwin as “my Sherpa.”

### How the Left Took Over

Readers accompanying their trek learn how the Left in this country attained the “commanding heights” (quoting a phrase by Lenin), to the point that “more than 90 percent of students are educated in progressive public schools.”

And what do we find therein? We are inundated with “diversity, equity, and inclusion.” Teachers, notes *Battle for the American Mind*, demand “conformity to the woke lexicon, lest the students' grade take a hit.” As such, this becomes the “woke” language of the students.



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Sitting above are the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA), which, as we read,

control who becomes a teacher, what teachers are taught, who gets accredited as teachers, what curriculum is taught, the school board that oversee teachers, and which teachers get advancement. Teachers in teachers' colleges teaching other teachers what they are allowed to teach — all controlled by Progressives. This is not an understatement: education unions in America *fully* control our classrooms. [Emphasis in original.]

Yes, the book can be polemical. It's also generally on target.

Some of the names involved may be familiar, such as John Dewey (the father of progressive schooling in the United States) and Horace Mann (father of public education in the nation). (Hegseth and Goodwin recall that, by the early 1900s, that pair, along with George Washington, appeared in portraits in classrooms.)

Perhaps readers also know of Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States* (who called himself "something of an anarchist, something of a socialist. Maybe a democratic socialist"). His book is described (without exaggeration) as being American history "written from the perspective of the Soviet Union." No other book, they maintain, "has had a greater impact on the minds of American youth for the past forty years."

## **The Power of *Paideia***

A concept vital to the case being made in *Battle for the American Mind* is that of *paideia*, a Greek word that doesn't translate simply into English. According to proponents of Christian classical views, it motivates our decisions and behavior. It is, at its core, a blueprint of thought, affection, and narrative through which we view everything. It could be called a building block of culture. While the term was used in the United States in the early 1900s, *Battlefield for the American Mind* notes, "Western Christian Paideia" (WCP) was "buried by the Progressives a century ago."

The culture can be transferred through education in a broad sense, as well as in formal education. Other schools reinforce some type of *paideia*, but classical Christian schools assert that they design their programs to form a Christian *paideia*, based on around 2,000 years of experience. *Paideia* may also be transferred through family life and society.

The book makes stark distinctions between the WCP and the "American Progressive Paideia" that took its place; it has been succeeded in recent years by what is termed the "Cultural Marxist Paideia" (CMP). The authors also take note of other experts and observers who have decried the symptoms of the new *paideia*, many of whom will be familiar to our readers — including Allan Bloom, C.S. Lewis, Richard Weaver, Dorothy Sayers, and Jacques Barzun.

The Founding Fathers, recount Hegseth and Goodwin, "leaned heavily on the WCP in their debates as they formed the American Republic." John Agresto, the former president of St. John's College (and author of the recent *The Death of Learning*), makes a similar argument (not mentioned in *Battlefield for the American Mind*). As Agresto says of the Founders:

Without their philosophical, political, and historical studies of the preconditions of popular



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governments and the nature of tyrannical rule, [James] Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay could not have written *The Federalist Papers*, nor could the populace have read and understood them.

It was hardly modern political science that was behind the making of America — it was the liberal arts.

Our Founders were crucial in establishing the character of our country and, as such, also play important roles in classical Christian education. They integrated “politics” and “theology,” write Goodwin and Hegseth,

when they realized that sinful nature (a Christian idea) leads to tyranny whenever power is concentrated (a political reality). As a result, we got divided powers in government, a republic not a democracy, and a Bill of Rights. Social studies do not integrate, so they give democracy an open, unlimited pass. This leads to the pure foolishness of mob rule — something our classically educated founders understood, and warned against.

Years ago, when Goodwin was starting his examination of the progressives (as he describes in the book’s preface), he went through every issue of the progressive (and very influential) journal *The New Republic* between 1914 and 1940, discovering that “education” was covered in almost all of them, including articles by John Dewey. Yet, he also found that the editorial board was virtually as active in this regard, discovering that “Progressives were far more interested in K-12 education than I thought. I later found out they essentially invented it, at least as we know it today.”

## Need for Dramatic Reorientation

The Founders knew what they were talking about, with James Madison, for example, observing that the “advancement and diffusion of knowledge is the only guardian of true liberty.”

The Founding Fathers, on the one hand, as recounted in *Battle for the American Mind*,

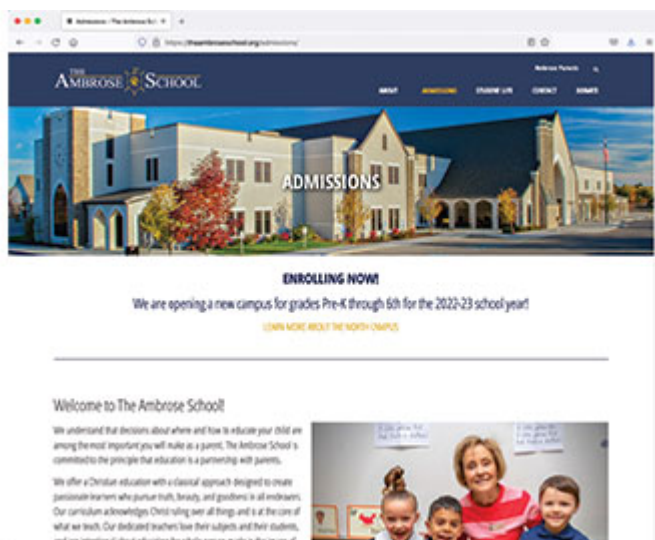
immersed themselves in the classical thinkers like Plato, Cato, and Cicero, while on the other, they were influenced by ... Christian thinkers like John Locke, Edmund Burke, John Calvin, and John Milton. All of these figures agree: liberty was dependent on citizens with “reason and virtue.” Moreover, this was cultivated through “liberty education” and Christianity — in the form of classical Christian education.

Little wonder that the Great Books are fundamental ingredients in classical Christian education.



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**Teaching the classics:** The Ambrose School in Boise, Idaho, founded by *Battle for the American Mind* co-author David Goodwin, is an example of a K-12 classical Christian school offering students a far better education than can be found in government schools.

Under Progressivism, by contrast, the idea of a universal classical education for free Americans became passé. For instance, Goodwin and Hegseth quote an article written for the High School Teachers Association of New York by prominent progressive Woodrow Wilson in 1909. Wrote Wilson:

We want one class of persons to have a liberal education, and we want another class of persons, a very larger class of necessity in every society, to forgo the privilege of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks.

The impact of the progressive Warren Court is also dissected, with the reminder that later Chief Justice Earl Warren had been an admirer and follower of the progressive Robert La Follette. This inclination had an ultimate impact on American schools.

Perhaps older readers recall Bible reading and prayers in public schools (as this reviewer does, even in deep-blue Massachusetts). This changed in large part because the Warren Court, as is correctly noted, considered our founding documents to be “an *impediment* to progress.” (Emphasis in original.) Three of its decisions, in 1962, 1963, and 1965, respectively, found it unconstitutional to start the day in public schools with a nondenominational prayer; banned Bible reading in public schools; and ruled against praying aloud over lunch. “In three rulings — and more to come,” we read, “the Supreme Court removed any remaining vestiges of the WCP in American classrooms.”

There’s a goodly amount of the book spent on “a solution as big as the problem” — describing how a classical Christian education works. The specifics are too lengthy and detailed to recount in depth in our limited space. But be assured that the authors do not pull punches about the challenges such a transformation faces.

As valuable as the book is, there are a few places that are going to throw up obstacles for some, which may limit its potential audience. Some are not going to get past the initial criticism of STEM backers or “vocational” education before they get deeper into the authors’ reasoning. There’s also an all-too-typical blind spot about Martin Luther King Jr. — who is lauded, in a largely extraneous aside, for one line in



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one speech — and an extolling nod that his March on Washington was not violent.

Overall, however, the book does an admirable job in describing how our American system has been poisoned and offering an effective antidote. This includes a valuable “battlefield assessment” on retaking the American mind, with details on groups and books to lean on and what progress has been made. Here’s one scorecard about how things are going:

In 2002, a modest 17,420 students were enrolled in roughly 125 classical Christian schools across America. A decade later, in 2012, that number had doubled. In 2020, there were 50,000 students in classical schools. In the 2021-22 school year — the year this book was written — that number jumped to over 60,000 students, filling more than 300 schools across America, including schools in 44 of the 50 states.

Three of Hegseth’s children, he says, now attend a Christian classical academy in Minnesota. He acknowledges, however, that the numbers of others doing so are “dwarfed by the 48,100,000 American kids currently enrolled — trapped — in government schools.”

The co-authors’ closing directive to parents is straightforward, if controversial, in these tense times: “*Join the insurgency! And then spread the word.*”

— William P. Hoar



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