



Sikh Student Brings “Religious Dagger” to School

Are school children allowed to carry weapons to school? School districts throughout the nation have policies which ban weapons — and even objects that resemble weapons — from school grounds, buses, and events.

A rigorous enforcement of that policy has led to absurd results, usually weighing against the rights of students to carry weapons. In Rhode Island last June, eight-year-old David Morales wore a hat to school with an American flag on it and with toy soldiers (representing American soldiers) as a way of honoring U.S. troops. The hat was banned. Why? The tiny plastic soldiers held even [tinier toy guns](#) — and that violated the school’s policy of zero tolerance of weapons. Are children and teachers allowed to wear religious symbols to class? In [Texas City](#), Texas, last May, Christian Thompson was prohibited from wearing a cross at Blocker Middle School. The New District High School in San Fernando, California, has [banned crosses](#) (as symbols of torture), WWJD (“What Would Jesus Do?”) bracelets, and “Choose the Right” rings worn by LDS members. The Christian Bible has also been banned from the school library. The prevalence of politically-correct school administrations purges Christianity from even the tamest expression in public school. Courts in New York have upheld school bans on nativity scenes from the Christmas season (or, rather, the “Yuletide season,” as Nazis insisted it be called, or the “winter holiday,” as modern anti-Christians urge), even as the Islamic sword and crescent and the Jewish menorah have been allowed in the same schools.

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Does the Constitution say anything about rights of citizens to weapons or about religion? Yes, it does. The First Amendment, which the Supreme Court has “deemed” to have been incorporated into the Fourteenth Amendment (which means that the rights secured by the First Amendment and the Second Amendment apply to state government and its creature governments as well as to the federal government), provides that the “right to bear arms” may not be infringed and that “freedom of expression” of religion may not be prohibited. The Second Amendment does not speak directly about the right to bear “weapons.” People do not, explicitly anyway, have the right to carry machetes or switchblades; they have the right to carry firearms.

Government does not have the right to prohibit religious expressions, but this was long considered to be limited to the Judeo-Christian heritage of America. State constitutions, which long before the First Amendment rights were held to apply to states, spoke of the Christian faith and not Islam or Hinduism. This was true at the federal level in court cases. Thus stated the Supreme Court in the 1892 case, *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*: “Our laws and institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind. It is impossible that it should be otherwise, and in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian.”

How do we reconcile the banishment of tiny toy guns or WWJD bracelets from school with what the *Detroit Free Press* reports that authorities of Plymouth-Canton Community Schools have decided to do? Sikh students will be allowed, because it is a requirement of the Sikh faith, to carry a kirpan (photo, above), a three- to five-inch knife, into school. The weapon is euphemistically described as a [“religious dagger,”](#) which is true, but it is also true that part of the Sikh religion is militant self-defense, so although the kirpan is not a weapon of aggression, it is a weapon which must have practical value in fighting. Sikhs, like Zoroastrians, Baha’i, Jews, and Christians, make good citizens when they follow the tenets of their faith seriously. Americans have no interest in discouraging Sikhs from practicing their



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on February 2, 2011

faith.

But the stark contrast between the treatment of the tiny Sikh population, which sought refuge in a land founded by devout Christians, and the treatment of the descendants of that Christian heritage is extreme. Not only are Islamic and Jewish symbols simply “deemed” traditional and not religious, but when a symbol such as the kirpan is expressly religious, it is allowed. What is more, the kirpan, like the religious symbols of Islam and orthodox Judaism, is [limited to males](#). Women in the Sikh faith do not wear the kirpan any more than Muslim men wear the chader or orthodox Jewish women wear [tzitzits](#).

What would happen if a Sikh girl, or a girl who “professed” the Sikh faith, demanded the right to carry a dagger into school? Would the school board or a judge rule the Sikh faith misogynistic, and so not entitled to respect? What if mullahs ruled that carrying guns was a religious mandate for all Muslims, regardless of sex? Who decides what is a legitimate expression of a particular religion and what is invention? Moreover, what is to prevent anyone from simply creating a new religion out of whole cloth, and demanding the right to accommodate that faith? Will school boards and federal judges determine valid and invalid religions?

When the nation was recognized as Christian or, more properly, Judeo-Christian, the task was simple. Many grade-school Christmas programs included half a dozen beautiful Christmas carols sung by the school choir and an equally lovely Chanukah song, intended, specifically, to express respect for that Jewish holiday as well. No branch of either faith required carrying weapons, so reasonable school rules to ban particular weapons such as switchblades was enforced with no fuss.

Most importantly, school systems were locally controlled. Federal constitutional rights were not hot topics in schools. Local residents elected school board members and the policies of the school system reflected the sentiments of those members, who in turn reflected what the people in the community felt. What would have happened if a Sikh couple had approached that school board, explained the religious injunctions of their faith, and asked that their son be allowed to carry a kirpan in class? Almost certainly it would have been allowed, with members noting that their sons carried Scout knives to class and that a well-behaved student with a knife was no threat to anyone. In short, local governments exercising common sense would have solved the issue quickly and quietly.

Once schoolboys carried pocket knives and their father’s military paraphernalia from the Korean War, such as spent 50-caliber machine gun cartridges, into the classroom for “show and tell” with no one making a fuss. Once homeroom classes began with the Pledge of Allegiance, including “under God,” a short prayer, and a brief Bible reading. Once school systems reflected what communities believed in and wanted, rather than what school bureaucrats or federal judges dictated.

The eventual consequence of trying to formally accommodate all religions is impossible, and the attempt to ban anything that notionally reflects a weapon is equally vain. Local control and common sense works. Nothing else does.



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