SKIPPING SCHOOL:
HOMESCHOOLING IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY, 1950-2010

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by

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Abstract

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America is a nation of schools. In a country famous for its early establishment of free schooling, American schools have historically provided foundational shared experiences for children, socializing them into American cultures and economies while also preparing them for intellectual adulthood. Yet in the 1950s, a small number of American parents began to reject normative schooling in favor of teaching their children themselves, an approach that had been out of favor for decades. To most Americans, the idea of a home school seemed oxymoronic, but twenty years later more than ten thousand American children were enrolled in such schools, and by 1999 the number had
reached 850,000. By 2010, that number had once again doubled; in that year, roughly 1 out of every 25 American students was a homeschooler.\textsuperscript{1}

In other words, thanks to homeschooling, on average every American school classroom is missing one student.

Such astonishing growth inspires questions relevant to the larger history of American society. Given that the idea that defines homeschooling -- that schooling belongs at home instead of in an institution -- stands in clear opposition to most modern schooling, how and why did contemporary homeschooling begin and then, eventually, thrive? Why are two million American children now going to "school" out of the sight and (largely) the control of the American public?

This dissertation seeks to answer these questions through an in-depth analysis of the history of homeschooling between 1950 and 2010, focusing on a case study of Los Angeles County. Drawing on both archival sources and oral history, I argue that the history of homeschooling highlights an increasing loss of public confidence in institutions, a loss that occurred as parents lost most of their ability to influence the local schools upon which both the public good and the private good of families and children relied. Homeschooling came to thrive not just because homeschoolers avoided schools but because they addressed the tension between family rights and the public good by creating ways to provide a responsible education -- one that the public would eventually partially accept -- under parental, rather than institutional, control.

\textsuperscript{1} Brian D. Ray, “2.04 Million Homeschool Students in the United States in 2010,” (National Home Education Research Institute, 2001), 3.
For Chris
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INTRODUCTION

America is a nation of schools. Her states, especially Massachusetts and the rest of New England, are historically famous for their early establishment (even before Europe) of free and often compulsory schooling. By 1918, when laggard Mississippi became the last state to formally require school attendance, school had become a foundational shared experience for American children. American public schools, in particular, were the community's way of teaching children not only the academic skills they would need to be good workers and informed voters, but also to socialize children into their community, whether for good or for ill.

Yet in the 1950s, a small number of American parents began to reject this model. Unlike most educational reformers both before and after them, they did not want to change the way American schooling worked, but rather to withdraw from it altogether. Unwilling to trust the public and its institutions with their children, these "homeschooling" families wished instead to educate their children themselves, at home. At the time, the idea of a home school seemed oxymoronic, but within 20 years several thousand American children were enrolled in living room schools whose only other students were their brothers and sisters, and by 1999, just under 2% (850,000) of
schoolchildren in America were being "homeschooled." By 2010, that number had doubled; in that year, roughly 1 out of every 25 American students was a homeschooler.²

In other words, thanks to homeschooling, on average every American school classroom is missing one student.

Such astonishing growth inspires questions relevant to the larger history of American society. Given that the idea that defines homeschooling -- that schooling belongs at home instead of in an institution -- stands in such clear opposition to most modern American schooling, how and why did contemporary homeschooling begin and then, eventually, thrive? Why are two million American children now going to "school" out of the sight and (largely) the control of the American public? What explains the surprising, if limited, political and religious diversity among homeschoolers? Why has homeschooling thrived when so many American public schools are failing? How did homeschooling survive social and legal opposition? How is it that, in an America obsessed with figuring out its schools, one of the most rapidly growing educational movements in history is one that eschews the idea of formal schooling altogether?

In summary, what is it about the history of the United States since 1950 that allowed -- or even caused -- this phenomenon? What can homeschooling reveal not only about itself, but about the nation? This dissertation seeks to answer these questions through an in-depth analysis of the history of homeschooling between 1950, before homeschooling even had a name, and 2010 when the method had finally become legal (and socially acceptable) in every U.S. state.

While families have always found ways to educate children in their homes, both academically and in other ways, modern homeschooling (post-1950) has a new flavor: I define it as an effort to conduct the bulk of a child's academic education under the direct supervision of a parent, usually in opposition to ordinary methods of schooling. (According to this definition, Abraham Lincoln, for example, was not homeschooled, because it was not unusual in his time to learn to read at home from the Bible; a child who attends a homeschool academy in 2015, however, is homeschooled, because the authority over his education rests centrally with his parents, while the authority over most children's educations rests with a public school district.) I will argue that the history of homeschooling highlights an increasing loss of public confidence in institutions, a loss that occurred as parents lost most of their ability to influence the local institutions, especially schools, upon which both the public good and the private good of families and children relied. Homeschooling came to thrive not just because homeschoolers avoided schools but because they addressed the tension between family rights and the public good by creating ways to provide a responsible education -- one that the public could recognize and would eventually partially accept -- under parental, rather than institutional, control.

This study will demonstrate and analyze how homeschooling developed from a fringe practice born of mid-century unrest to a post-institutional movement that now relies on public resources to support home-controlled education. To do so, this dissertation presents a case study of homeschooling in Los Angeles County, a region that not only has one of the longest histories of homeschooling in the nation, but also displays in one place the diversity of the national movement, allowing consideration of questions of difference and sameness that would otherwise require the study of several different
locales. By discussing the history of homeschooling at the local level but in national context, I am able to better analyze the conjunctions of the public and the private within the movement and illustrate important changes in how Americans have viewed the rights and responsibilities of family, community, state and nation in the last 70 years.

There are five pressing reasons that call for new historical study of homeschooling. First, the size and rapidity of the movement's growth, from only a handful of students in 1950 to roughly 10 or 15 thousand in 1980 and then to 2 million by 2010, or about 4% of schoolchildren, begs to be explored. Although most observers expected homeschooling to fizzle out by 1990, instead it achieved astonishing success across the country.

Second, homeschooling works, at least according to test scores. By 2010, numerous studies had found that homeschooled students scored significantly higher on average on standardized tests than public schoolchildren or children overall. These differences are often as high as 30 percentage points. Factors such as family income level, parents' educational level and race, which usually affect the scores of ordinary school students, have little or no statistical effect on homeschoolers' scores; on average, different types of homeschoolers all score within about 10 percentage points of one another. This success demands further investigation; educators and policymakers have an interest in better understanding this movement in their efforts to improve public school education and legislate on matters of school choice.

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4 See Ray, "Home Education Reason and Research: Common Questions and Research-Based Answers about Homeschooling" (Salem, Or.: National Home Education Research Institute, 2009) for a
Third, homeschooling has grown not only in size, but also in acceptance. It has traveled from the very fringes of society, the extreme right and the extreme left, to just inside the mainstream. This change has led to the creation of homeschooling programs within public school districts, to the inclusion of homeschooled students in public and private school extracurricular programs, to homeschooling support for military families, to an enormous homeschool curriculum industry, and to, as I will show, a general sense among the citizenry that homeschooling should be licit, even if there remains disagreement on how strictly the practice should be regulated. What could have caused such a dramatic reversal?

Fourth, one of the common misconceptions about homeschooling -- that it is a uniform white conservative Christian movement -- hides a diversity that makes homeschooling an excellent vehicle for examining general trends in the American public. To begin with, the homeschooling was initially far "whiter" than the general public, but by the turn of the century, about 23% of American homeschoolers were not white. While this is still lower than the general population, it is a significant representation of African American, Hispanic, and other racial communities. To put it another way, in 2003, about 62% of all American students were white and about 77% of homeschoolers were. It is a difference, but not as large of one as public the stereotype suggests.\(^5\)

Furthermore, the assumption that most homeschoolers are conservative Protestants, while correct, is overly simplistic. This point of view ignores one of homeschooling's most interesting characteristics: that it also includes a wide range of

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families from all along this country's polarized political and religious spectrums. Furthermore, this misconception tends to tar all conservative Protestant homeschoolers with one brush, while in fact, by their very nature as homeschoolers they follow a tremendous diversity of pedagogical, political, and social styles. This diversity has historically led to surprising alliances among homeschoolers of different types. In light of this, one can only wonder, why did these American families of differing political, religious, and even pedagogical beliefs all make this same educational choice? What could a family that homeschooled by sending their children into the woods during the day and to Hebrew school at night possibly have in common with a family whose children sat at desks in the living room every day, copying passages out of the Bible and reciting from an 19th-century McGuffey's reader? What does a movement that allows space for such a range of individual choices reflect about this period in American history?

Fifth, while homeschooling has gained some traction in a handful of largely English-speaking countries in the Western world, its success in America far outstrips that of the international movement. It is an educational option that particularly suits the United States. Americans' historical instinct that schools should be under a considerable (though lessening) amount of local community control is the exception in the developed world, where most states control schooling through the central government. Had Americans not had a sense that parents ought to have significant control over their children's schooling, homeschooling would never have grown as it did. The history of homeschooling is in this way directly connected to the history of education; how can it elucidate the changes and debates that have grasped our nation over education, culture, religion, and politics?
In sum, these five factors suggest that homeschooling bears numerous, varied, and revelatory ties to trends in American life outside of itself. What does the exponential growth in numbers, acceptance, and access in this movement across religious and political lines suggest about general American attitudes towards the state of education and the relationship between the local and the national in general over the decades?

On a more practical note, the time is ripe for new studies of homeschooling because it is a topic that is only now coming to the attention of researchers in any discipline. Even the federal government did not begin collecting regular statistics on homeschooling until the 1990s; and yet at that time our country's courts had already been grappling with homeschooling cases for forty years. From an analytical point of view, the subject has rarely been touched, and as a result the historiography is quite limited.

Until recently, the only published books about homeschooling available were philosophies, manuals, or calls to action written by educators. Although only tangentially historical, they provide an important introduction to the movement for researchers such as me. These include works by the first notable public face of homeschooling, John Caldwell Holt (1923-1985), such as the 1964 *How Children Fail* and its 1967 sequel, *How Children Learn*. As homeschooling's greatest early apologist, Holt did more than any other educator to publicize the idea and to explain it in a way that made sense to homeschoolers of all different political and religious beliefs. Holt believed that schooling was a barrier to education for most children, a problem rather than a solution. Along with his more than ten books on the subject, Holt's regular newsletter for homeschoolers, *Growing Without Schooling* (launched in 1977), and his numerous article and interviews were the lighthouse of homeschooling throughout the '60s, '70s, and '80s. Holt always
spoke directly to parents themselves, believing that mothers and fathers were the best teachers (other than the children themselves).\(^6\)

Other radical educators and philosophers who spoke out against schooling (or for dramatic school reform), such as Jonathan Kozol (b. 1936), Ivan Illich (1926-2002), Raymond Moore (1915-2007) and Dorothy Moore (1915-2002), similarly influenced the early movement and created important historical resources on the subject. The Moores appealed especially to conservative families considering homeschooling, but like the more liberal Holt they wrote groundbreaking books that homeschoolers of all types devoured. Their most important contribution was the careful study of early childhood education and the effects of early academics on children's learning and especially on their physiology: the title of their best-known book *Better Late Than Early* (1975) succinctly sums up their response to the push toward early reading.\(^7\)

In combination, for these authors provide a passionate but careful view into the problems and emotions that provoked the movement. They represent the body of work in the educational fields that most fully informs this historical study.

More recently, a small handful of historians, education specialists, and other academics have begun the scholarly examination of homeschooling. The earliest major book on the subject is the 1991 collection *Home Schooling: Political, Historical, and*

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Pedagogical Perspectives, edited by Jane Van Galen and Mary Anne Pitman. An interdisciplinary look at homeschooling when it first began to capture regular public attention, Home Schooling is the first book-length resource of note written by observers rather than homeschooling leaders. It offers the early thoughts of researchers of relevant disciplines as a first foundation for homeschooling research within the academy.8

Two decades later, educator Joseph Murphy followed in Van Galen and Pitman's footsteps with his book Homeschooling in America: Capturing and Assessing the Movement. Acknowledging "...just how thin the empirical knowledge base is on this social phenomenon and educational movement," Murphy gathers, summarizes, categorizes, and analyzes practically all the (American) homeschooling research that exists. Best used as a reference and starting point for further research, Murphy's book is an exhaustive tour-de-force that should bring homeschooling researchers to their knees with gratitude. No one embarking on a study in this area should begin without these Murphy's and Van Galen and Pitman's books in hand.9

Similarly, some homeschooling researchers have focused on online outlets for some of their findings, as well as for collecting perspectives and studies into central locations. These include the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), which, spearheaded by top homeschooling researcher Brian Ray, posts abstracts of the contents of its journal, Home School Researcher, as well as book and study reviews and


information at its website. Historian Milton Gaither also keeps tabs on homeschooling research online on his public weblog, "Homeschooling Research Notes," an invaluable aid when scouting sources. A final outstanding resource is the website of the relatively new International Center for Home Education Research (ICHER), directed by educator Robert Kunzman (Gaither, among others, also plays a role), which catalogs relevant publications while also posting reviews and enrollment data. Like Murphy's book, these sources combine information aids with analysis, and are in this way unlike ordinary secondary source monographs; they are, however, indispensable to anyone playing the tricky game of studying this elusive topic. Even as academic journals have begun publishing more and more articles on homeschooling -- Home School Researcher and the Peabody Journal of Education have taken the lead -- research on the subject is so scattered as to be extremely difficult to follow without such a guide. An article relevant to homeschooling is just as likely to appear in Pediatric Obesity as in a journal of education.

A smattering of monographs have also been written on the homeschooling in recent years, however, including Mitchell Stevens's Kingdom of Children: Culture and Controversy in the Homeschooling Movement (2001), Milton Gaither's 2008 survey Homeschool: An American History, Robert Kunzman's Write These Laws On Your

10 See http://www.nheri.org/

11 See https://gaither.wordpress.com/

12 See http://www.icher.org/index.html


The first of these volumes, Kingdom of Children, is an excellent case study of homeschooling in the 1990s. Presenting homeschooling from both the observer's point of view and that of a number of Illinois homeschooling families, Mitchell Stevens argues that although homeschoolers had many "traditionalist trappings," in the way they thought about childhood "they were living at a cutting edge of contemporary culture" and as a result were truly beginning to thrive as a movement.¹⁵ He also divides these homeschoolers into two rough categories of "Christian" and "inclusive." Although one can dispute these categories, Stevens does much to add specificity to the general two-party framework into which researchers attempt to divide homeschooling. My study differs from his in both discipline and scope; as a sociologist and educator, he is mainly concerned with contemporary homeschooling and its social and educational meanings.

Stevens's book is followed by another important work, Milton Gaither's study of the history of homeschooling from 1600 to 2008. Gaither was the first to set out a careful historical narrative of homeschooling. He follows not just the modern movement, but


¹⁵ Stevens, 180.
rather home education in many forms since the formation of the British colonies in North America. In writing a meta-narrative of home education, Gaither explores themes of the country's changing "accepted boundaries between public and private," the twentieth-century's development of "a new spirit of self-reliance," the question of how to care for orphans and other children in need, and finally disparate ideas about the needs of American families. As the only monograph available on the history of American homeschooling, Gaither's study leaves plenty of room for other scholars to take up the question of homeschooling in various times and places and categories.

Published at nearly the same time as Gaither's historical work, Robert Kunzman's 2009 *Write These Laws On Your Children* takes in hand one of the many aspects of homeschooling that cries out for varied and detailed study in its own right: conservative Christian homeschooling. The numbers are elusive, but this group clearly represents the majority of homeschoolers in the United States, as well as in the public imagination. Recognizing as I do that homeschooling cannot be understood without a close view of how schooling occurs within individual families, Kunzman limits himself to studying six families drawn from around the country in order to understand the motivations, practices, successes and failures of conservative Christian homeschooling. Over the course of two years, Kunzman interviewed, visited, and corresponded with these families repeatedly, developing an intimate understanding of each. A former high school teacher and now an associate dean and professor of education at Indiana University, Kunzman takes a particular interest in the pedagogy employed in each family and the apparent relational and educational results of their methods, which he finds to be mixed. His book is an

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16 Gaither, 4-5.
outstanding, descriptive exploration of what homeschooling really looks like on the ground level, which is in fact the "primary goal" of the book.¹⁷ I am especially indebted to him for his close look at two families in the Los Angeles area.

More recent still is Jennifer Lois's book on homeschooling and mothering, Home is Where the School Is. A sociologist, Lois explores the experiences of homeschooling mothers, focusing on the pressures and conflicts of "identity, emotions, and time" that these mothers face.¹⁸ Relying on personal interviews as well as other sources, Lois's deep vision into the relationship between predominant cultural views of motherhood, motherly emotions, and motherly labor opens up the motivations and restrictions on mother-teachers in a profoundly important way. Although historically most public discussion of homeschooling has focused on the needs and rights of children, ignoring their primary teachers or painting them as their children's enemies makes it impossible to evaluate the movement. My study speaks more to the general family experience and a particular regional point of view, but I could not have any hope of understanding these aspects of homeschooling without Lois's challenge to think carefully about homeschooling mothers.

Finally, my study situates itself in a handful of other, much larger historiographies. Perhaps the most obvious is the history of education. I have drawn much from books in this area in order to conduct my own research in context. Examples of such works including Lawrence Cremin's history of progressive education; Joseph Watras's Philosphic Conflicts in American Education, 1893-2000; Joel Spring's The American School; Steven Mintz's book Huck's Raft, on the history of American

¹⁷ Kunzman, 8.

¹⁸ Lois, 4.
childhood; Nicholas Lehmann's *The Big Test*, on assessment; Andrew Hartman's very fine *Education and the Cold War*; and Timothy Walch's survey of Catholic parochial education. I hope that my study, like those mentioned above, will serve as a resource for historians of education on homeschooling, that most under-researched branch of American education.19

My study also situates itself within the flourishing study of twentieth-century American conservatism, especially of conservative women and of the Religious Right. Examples of excellent works in this area, many of which focus as I do on Southern California, are Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors*; Michelle Nickerson's *Mothers of Conservatism*; Darren Dochuk's *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*; Eileen Luhr's *Witnessing Suburbia*; Matthew Lassiter's *The Silent Majority*; Rick Perlstein's *Before the Storm*; Joseph Crespino's *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution*; and for a good look at liberalism in the same time period, Douglas Rossinow's *The Politics of Authenticity*. To this historiography my dissertation contributes a fresh look into the importance of family sovereignty and education in motivating grassroots movements against the centralization of power in the United States.20


Recent works suburbanization, urban unrest, and Cold War America are also important to my study. Examples of these are Thomas Sugrue's *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier*; Kevin Kruse's *White Flight*, as well as Kruse and Sugrue's edited volume *The New Suburban History*; Jeremi Suri's *Power and Protest*, on the Cold War in global context; and on the relationship between individual rights and community responsibilities; Wilfrid McClay's *The Masterless: Self & Society in Modern America*. For a greater understanding of the history of the American family, I turned to books such as Allan Carlson's *The "American Way;"* Kristin Celello's book on marriage and labor, *Making Marriage Work*; Stephanie Coontz's numerous books on the history of the family and marriage, such as *The Way We Never Were*. And for the history of California and Los Angeles County, I rely on the unmatched prowess of Kevin Starr, particularly his long series on the history of the state.21

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In sum, there is ample space in these historiographies for new work on homeschooling. Like the few studies of homeschooling that have come before, my study occupies a unique place without much fear of overlapping with other publications. This dissertation differs from several of the writings discussed above in that it combines a detailed local study, in this case of Los Angeles County, with an overarching national analysis. Instead of focusing on a single type of homeschooler, or on the details of the experience of homeschooling, or on whether homeschooling works, or at homeschooling in a single decade, or on divisions among homeschoolers, or on homeschooling mothers, or on the literature or politics or pedagogies of homeschooling -- just a few of fascinating and crucial topics that the aforementioned books have explored -- my study focuses on homeschooling over time in a single region but among a diversity of families. As a historical study that combines oral history interviews with more traditional sources and on-the-ground research with examinations of national historical contexts, this dissertation adds a new dimension to the academic literature on homeschooling by asking both what homeschooling reflects about America and how America has uniquely influenced it. By focusing on questions at the intersection of the local and the national, the historical and the contemporary, I hope to offer an interpretation of the homeschooling phenomenon that will be interesting to a wide audience of homeschooling families, historians, sociologists, educators, and policy-makers.

Besides the relative lack of academic research available, historians interested in homeschooling are faced with the problem of a parallel lack of traditional primary sources upon which to base their analysis. Because early homeschooling was not only

rare but also usually hidden, newspapers, magazines, television and radio programs (with the notable exception of James Dobson's "Focus on the Family") touched upon the topic very rarely. My research has turned up only a small handful of relevant articles from the 1950s and early '60s, almost all of which report on court cases rather than on homeschoolers' experiences or motivations. Letters to the Editor in response to these articles are almost universally condemning of the homeschooling families involved. In the later '60s and 1970s articles were equally scarce, although this time they included essays penned by leaders in alternative education who supported the still-hidden movement. In the 1980s and '90s, coverage picked up as homeschooling grew larger and more respectable, but as a fringe movement, it still was of little interest to most media.

The problem is compounded by homeschoolers' reluctance in the early decades (and to some extent even now) to step into the public spotlight, largely because they rightly feared harassment or prosecution. If families did keep records, those records appear in libraries and archives rarely, again due in part to the hiddenness of the movement (as well as to its relative novelty). Thus the homeschool researcher finds her- or himself faced with the difficulty not only of interpreting sources, but of finding any sources at all. Studying homeschooling means much more crawling around in attics and digging through piles in basements than modern historians are used to.

The primary sources used in this study are of two sorts. First, I rely on a body of traditional printed and manuscript sources, such as newspaper articles, political tracts, minutes from organization meetings, curriculum lists, and books and pamphlets written by early homeschoolers, some of which were accessed through libraries and local history collections, but many of which I accessed only because of the generosity of Los Angeles
homeschoolers. For statistical and research data, I rely on the handful of government- and foundation-sponsored surveys that have been conducted in the past twenty-five years. The running lists of these and also of other up-to-date homeschooling research maintained online by the International Center for Home Education Research has been hugely valuable to me in this aspect of my research. I am also particularly indebted to educator Steven Gray for his research on the motivations behind homeschooling in Los Angeles, represented by his 1992 UCLA dissertation on the subject. Secondly, I rely on a series of oral history interviews which I conducted in person or by telephone with Los Angeles County parents, as well as related correspondence. (Regrettably, because children are a protected population, I was unable to formally interview any current homeschool students, although I did speak to some off the record, as well as to homeschool graduates.) I also depend on interviews conducted by other homeschool researchers, especially Robert Kunzman and Mitchell Stevens. While oral history remains controversial because it requires the historian to participate in the creation of sources, in situations in which historical experiences are so deeply hidden (in this case, because of homeschooling's historical illegality) and paper sources are consequently so few, oral history is an especially useful and revelatory tool.

The seventeen homeschooling or formerly homeschooled adults whom I personally interviewed in detail over the course of my research provided invaluable insight into the experience of homeschooling over time, as well as into the developments that most directly affected homeschooling families over the decades. Interviews conducted by other researchers supplemented these points-of-view with voices

responding to different interviewing personalities, circumstances, and questions. I also
visited homeschooling hubs such as the Christian Home Educators Association
conference in order to gain a more personal sense of the environment and resources
homeschoolers encounter in California today. Imperfect as my impressions and
conversations may have been, they offer a view into historical homeschooling that it
otherwise unattainable in the current research environment. The ultra-local, personal
dimension they add to the story is irreplaceable in the responsible study of a movement
that is both local and national.

In arguing that homeschooling represents a national, if limited, trajectory from a
nascent anti-institutionalism in the middle of the twentieth century to a post-institutional
approach that moves with comfort across educational, social, and political boundaries, I
will follow homeschoolers in Los Angeles County and more generally though four
stages, each represented by a single chapter. Chapter One, "Better at Home: 1950-1975"
chronicles the beginnings of homeschooling in Los Angeles, its relationship with postwar
and early Cold War unease, and especially its early anti-institutionalism. Most pioneer
homeschoolers believed that they would need not only to teach their children at home,
but to reject institutional schools entirely in order to protect their children's moral and
academic education and even physiological development. Because sources on
homeschooling during this period are so rare, the chapter focuses on the stories of three
major homeschooling leaders, John Holt and Raymond and Dorothy Moore, as well as on
the legal battles of two Los Angeles families, the Turners and the Schinns. I argue that
through their total withdrawal from schools, homeschoolers in this period developed a
willingness to operate not only outside of institutions, but also outside of the law.
Chapter Two, Living in the Gray: 1975-1989, identifies a crucial change in the trajectory of homeschooling in America. At a tenuous time in history, when homeschooling's very legality was unclear in California, homeschoolers were faced with the choice between hiding their homeschooling and dying out because of their isolation or risking public exposure by beginning to organize. Responding to this tension by building connections and eventually formal associations in order to protect their movement, homeschoolers remained anti-institutional but became pro-organization.

Chapter Three, "Leaving Home: 1990-1999," goes on to examine how homeschoolers adapted to function in the public eye without losing their fundamental commitment to parental authority. As homeschooling became more public, it could well have evolved into another system of institutions, but in reality, instead of institutionalizing their practices, homeschoolers developed ways to draw from and on institutions such as churches, schools, and school districts for support without either mimicking or completely rejecting these institutions. No longer anti-institutional, they were now becoming post-institutional: willing to draw upon institutions, but rejecting institutional boundaries.

Chapter Four, "A Certain Acceptance: 2000-2010," takes the discussion further by examining the results of this new approach and the final major battle over the fundamental legality or illegality of homeschooling in California. In analyzing this period I ask: what does it mean to homeschool in a post-institutional environment? And, more importantly, what is the public response to this new and suddenly omnipresent version of homeschooling?
Finally, in the conclusion I will explore the current state of homeschooling in America and differing opinions on its likely trajectory, especially in light of recent efforts to further nationalize school standards through programs such as the Common Core Initiative. I argue that in context, the history of homeschooling suggests that the post-institutional streak that now animates the movement is not limited to homeschooling alone. Rather, it represents a national trend that is apparent in the growing number of political, social, and religious alliances that, like homeschooling, cross boundaries in unexpected and powerful ways.
CHAPTER 1

BETTER AT HOME: 1950-1975

On February 6, 1953, Mary Turner and her husband, William, entered a Los Angeles Municipal Courtroom. Charged with three counts of violating of California's Education Code, Mary, a mother of seven, had not been sending her eldest three children to school. Instead, she was teaching them herself, at home. And now she was being called to account.23

Mary's testimony began.

"Are you a Communist?" asked her attorney.

"No!"

"Do you teach your children any Communistic doctrine?"

"I certainly do not!"

"Why don't you send your children to public school?"

Here, the prosecution stepped in with an objection. The presiding judge, Roger Pfaff, sustained it: to ask someone why they did or did not send their children to public

school, he complained, "would open up such a field of discussion that we would be here until next Easter." 24

Judge Pfaff eventually ruled against the Turners, setting an important precedent for California, a state whose courts and school officials would be tangling with families who wanted to school at home for decades to come. Yet the contentious question of whether or not a living room school could be as good as a public one would not be resolved in Los Angeles by one court case or one judge, or even before the next Easter. As the practice of homeschooling quietly took hold in scattered homes in Los Angeles county and other pioneering regions in the next twenty years, the tension between parental and societal control over education would find no rosy resolution.

Instead, in the 1950s and 60s the United States became a place where not only would a truant schoolchild's mother be automatically suspected of Communism, but a mother afraid of Communism might be willing to break the law in order to keep her child truant from school. Occuring at the beginning of the modern homeschooling movement, stories like Mary Turner's foreshadow an epidemic of disunity and distrust among Americans of varying stripes that would unsettle American society in the coming decades. As Turner and her compatriots entered the Cold War era, they began to lose the united front that drove the nation during the Second World War. The desire for everything to finally just be all right was a powerful force in post-war middle class American life, but in reality the Cold War and domestic upheavals would make for a volatile two decades ahead. Instead of peace following the defeat of both the Great Depression and the Axis powers, the country found itself plagued by fear and continued

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24 "Mother Defends Educating Child."
war: fear of Communism, fear of disruption, fear of not being heard, fear of losing control of the future.

One result of this fear was a decrease in Americans' trust in the public institutions and networks through which many of them, especially middle- and upper-class whites, had formerly exercised significant control over their communities and nation. As Americans looked for ways to strengthen the country in the face of the Communist threat, experts and governments began seeking greater control over American schools, which had historically been locally controlled. It was a transformation that produced elemental and long-lasting shock among some Americans even as it excited others. In response to this change of authority, a subset of Americans that would eventually include homeschoolers developed new ways to personally influence the local, national, and international contexts that affected their lives.

Homeschooling arose in the middle of the twentieth century both as a solution to and a result of this need. As sociologist Mitchell Stevens notes, homeschooling parents who came of age after (or during) the Second World War carried the ethos of that time with them, just as other Americans did. They belonged to an America that was becoming "rather more accustomed than it used to be to groups doing things unconventionally," whether those groups were "liberal" or "conservative" or just, like homeschoolers of the time, "a bit outside the mainstream."25 The stories of the first homeschoolers demonstrate this shift as their protagonists reacted to their fear and discomfort by negotiating new ways to exert control over their world. 

As families like the Turners sought to evade the effects of the experimentation that began to animate much American public education

25 Stevens, 6.
in this period, they developed a new willingness to operate outside of customary avenues and the law. They represent a telling part of the larger story of crumbling trust in government, in particular, and especially in the sort of "activist government" that was reaching its apex mid-century. As sociologist Joseph Murphy has written, the history of homeschooling highlights the changing relationship between American government and ordinary people, developing from "government as the unquestioned mechanism to produce a better society to government as a self-forged and confining manacle that also has the potential to hinder improvement;" in other words, I would add, the belief was growing that government might be helpful, but might also be damaging, depending on who is in control.

In illustrating the emergence of homeschooling and the nascent distrust of public institutions that it represents, I will begin by introducing two mid-century homeschooling families in Los Angeles County, the Turners and the Shinns, and the initial legal and social consequences of early homeschooling. Since sources about homeschooling families are scarce for the 1950's and '60s, legal case such as those brought against the Turners and the Shinns are invaluable resources for understanding homeschooling at the ground level in this period. Second, I will analyze the postwar and early Cold War climate that underlay the rise of homeschooling and investigate the responses of three national homeschooling figures, John Holt and Raymond and Dorothy Moore, as homeschooling moved toward the 1970s. Since most homeschooling was still hidden from public view at this time, following the influence of those early national leaders who

26 Murphy, 54.

27 Murphy, 2.
did work in the public eye gives a more complete vision of the growth of homeschooling than court records alone can offer. Together, the Shinns, Turners, Holt, and the Moores offer a window into the otherwise difficult to unveil origins of parents' efforts to maintain authority over their children's education through homeschooling.

Homeschoolers and the Courts: The Turners and the Shinns

In Los Angeles, as elsewhere, most families who homeschooled between 1950 and 1975 were very careful to keep their schooling to themselves as much as possible. As a result, most of the homeschooling that appears in historical records of this period is known to us only because it was forced into the public eye by government intervention in the actions of a family. To investigate early homeschooling as Los Angeles County residents experienced it, we turn to two exemplary families whose homeschooling came into public awareness through legal processes: the Turner family and the Shinn family.

While the publicity surrounding the Turners focused on their eccentricities, much about their family and the path that led them to the educational choices they made was absolutely normal. In many ways, when she came to court in 1953, Mary Turner did not seem much different from your average crusading PTA-er. Like most other mothers of her class, Mary Turner was a homemaker. Yes, she had more children than most -- seven, about twice the norm -- but she was white, she was not a wage-earner, and she was quick to declare herself most emphatically not a communist. She had even attended a widely admired junior college and then a local four-year college, Occidental. And like other up-and-coming middle class parents, she was committed to providing an academically
excellent, explicitly patriotic, utterly respectable education for her children. Through this her little ones would become, she attested, "good, loyal American citizens."\textsuperscript{28}

But while Mary Turner was not against public schooling per se and did not hold a teaching certificate, she believed that her children had the best chance of "a good fundamental education" not in a school system, but rather in her own home, under her own direct care.\textsuperscript{29} "I just feel," she explained mildly that January, "I can teach them better at home."\textsuperscript{30} In this way, "my children will have a complete education."\textsuperscript{31}

According to Mary Turner's explanation, she and her husband William, and aeronautical engineer, knew the benefits of education and professed to "quarrel with neither the 'progressive education people' nor the advocates of the 3 Rs."\textsuperscript{32} But they could not control their children's education at the level they deemed necessary unless they actually undertook it themselves. They had done so once before, in New York, briefly homeschooling there with some success. In Los Angeles, the Turners had argued that they were qualified teachers and sought to assure Judge Pfaff that their children were behind neither academically nor civically. They had their eldest daughter, Mariel, tested in a variety of subjects, and submitted her scores (her average was at the level of a college sophomore) as evidence of Mary Turner's teaching ability.\textsuperscript{33} They explained in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} "Touring Couple Cited as Children Miss School," \textit{Los Angeles Times}, January 30, 1953.
\item \textsuperscript{29} "Touring Couple Cited."
\item \textsuperscript{30} "Touring Couple Cited."
\item \textsuperscript{31} "Mother Defends Educating Child."
\item \textsuperscript{32} "Touring Couple Cited."
\item \textsuperscript{33} "Mother Defends Educating Child."
\end{itemize}
detail the very traditional structure of their school day (although they also schooled on the road at times) and insisted that officials had told them that teaching only one's own children without a credential was permissible.\textsuperscript{34} Even their general parenting came up for discussion as they described assigning chores in order to prepare the children "for adult life."\textsuperscript{35} But these arguments failed to convince Pfaff that homeschooling with a non-credentialed parent was legal under the state's Education Code. He ruled against the Turners, although the sentence he pronounced was quite mild: a simple $30 fine and, of course, the requirement that the school-aged Turner children be enrolled in a normative school.\textsuperscript{36}

The Turners appealed, and the case was heard again that fall in Los Angeles. The Turners' "main contention," as noted in the final decision, was that the compulsory education sections of the California code were unconstitutional because they "deprive[d] parents of the right to determine how and where their children may be educated."\textsuperscript{37} The Turners disapproved of the emphasis on public schooling in section 16601 of the code, which read,

\begin{quote}
Each parent, guardian, or other person having control or charge of any child between the ages of eight and 16 years, not exempted under the provisions of this chapter, shall send the child to the public full-time day school for the full time for which the public schools of the city, city and county, or school district in which the child resides are in session.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} "Touring Couple Cited;" "Mother Defends Educating Child."

\textsuperscript{35} "Mother Defends Educating Child."


\textsuperscript{38}People v. Turner, 1. The former section 16601 was a precursor to the current (as of 2012) section 48200, which is much the same (although children must now be enrolled by age 6).
Citing the opinion in the famous 1925 federal Supreme Court case regarding Catholic schools, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, however, the court ruled that the state has the right to "reasonably" regulate education and to determine what it would and would not accept as a valid school. It further noted that to require children to attend only public schools would indeed be unconstitutional, as *Pierce* had decided, but that the code did not do so -- it offered certain exemptions. Most notably, two later statutes in the same section specifically allowed for two additional options: private day schools and private tutoring by a credentialed adult. Section 16624 concerned private schooling:

> Children who are being instructed in a private full-time day school by persons capable of teaching shall be exempted. Such school shall be taught in the English language and shall offer instruction in the several branches of study required to be taught in the public schools of the State. The attendance of the pupils shall be kept by private school authorities in a register, and the record of attendance shall indicate clearly every absence of the pupil from school for a half day or more during each day that school is maintained during the year.\(^{39}\)

And section 16625 concerned private tutoring:

> Children not attending a private full-time day school, and who are being instructed in study and recitation for at least three hours a day for 170 days each calendar year by a private tutor or other person, in the several branches of study required to be taught in the public schools of this State and in the English language shall be exempted. The tutor or other person shall hold a valid State credential for the grade taught. The instruction shall be offered between the hours of 8 o'clock a. m. and 4 o'clock p. m.\(^{40}\)

Putting the constitutionality of the statutes aside, however, the question still remained whether the Turners could qualify under either of these exemptions. The defense claimed that they did. And it was in fact clear that the Turners had been careful to follow most of the technical directions of these two statutes; they taught their children the

\(^{39}\) People v. Turner, 1. The corresponding sections in the current (2012) code are 48222 and 48224. The language is much the same.

\(^{40}\) People v. Turner, 1.
proper subjects for the proper number of days during the proper daytime hours. The question in the court revolved more around whether or not the Turner home could qualify as a private school and whether Mary Turner could qualify under statute 16624 as a "person capable of teaching" even though she did not have the teaching credential that would have qualified her home school as simple tutelage under statute 16625. The defense argued that Mary was a capable teacher in spite of not having a credential and, furthermore, that it was "unreasonable" and "arbitrary" that a private school teacher teaching other people's children need not have a credential, but that a "tutor" teaching her own children at home did need one. The court, however, ruled that the legislature had the right to determine such requirements as it pleased, even if it meant that those placed on tutors or parents would "be stricter than those required of teachers in private schools." Teachers at private schools, the court pointed out, were still usually under supervision by their principal and the rest of the faculty; the state might decide to entrust supervision to these inner workings of such schools. Parents teaching their own children in their own homes, however, had no such built-in supervision. The state might reasonably be stricter with credential requirements in these cases, the court suggested, even if only because the task of inspecting these scattered home schools would be too

41 "Mother Defends Educating Child."
42 People v. Turner, 3.
43 People v. Turner, 3.
44 People v. Turner, 3.
45 People v. Turner, 3.
great of a burden on the state. The Turners appealed the decision to the United States Supreme Court the following year, but the appeal was dismissed as not pertaining to a federal question. The Turner children could no longer avoid school in California.

The conviction of the Turners became one of the most important legal precedents for California and other state courts dealing with homeschooling cases. Along with a 1960-61 case from nearby Imperial County, In re Shinn, the Turner decision became the background for school districts and municipal courts around the state denying uncredentialed parents the right to home school and prosecuting many of those who did. While often discussed together, however, from a social standpoint, the Turner and Shinn cases offer very different views of early homeschooling. Both cases were initiated before the major pedagogical changes of the 1960s and 1970s; the Turners and the Shinns were true mavericks, pioneers acting independently in what they perceived to be the best interest of their families. And California shut both of their home schools down.

There, however, the similarities end. A family that adhered to a normative daily schooling schedule, was not hostile to schooling in principle, and followed generally-sanctioned norms of homemaking and child-raising outside of their homeschooling, the Turners evoked the sympathy of many of their fellow Angelenos. Not that most agreed with them; they were still a curiosity, and they were still, according to the courts, breaking the law. But it seemed to some an unimportant case to pursue: in the words of Whittier resident Donald Tyler's letter to the Times, "Can't we find a better way to spend the taxpayers' money than to pay a judge and jury to convict an innocent mother who is

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46 People v. Turner, 3.

trying to give her children a better education…?48 Should Californians really be bothered to interfere with an education that, after all, did seem to be civically and academically responsible?

Tyler's comment gets to the heart of the matter: Americans disagreed about who was best suited to ensure that the next generation's education was a civically and academically responsible one. In fact, Mary Turner's local community in Pasadena, California, had recently been ravaged by just such a controversy in their public school system, illustrating the local effects of the tension between parental (or community majority) influence over institutions and expert (or government) influence. Having welcomed a new superintendent to head their shining star of a school system -- which, in the words of the National Education Association (NEA) report on the controversy, had for years "been looked upon as being representative of the best in our country" -- in 1948, Pasadena's largely conservative denizens organized to fire him in 1950, citing the Communist influences he had purportedly allowed into Pasadena classrooms.49 Superintendent Goslin's "progressive" pedagogy and, even more, his unwillingness to allow the PTA, the media, or prominent Pasadenans to influence district decisions (as well as his efforts to racially integrate the city's elementary schools against passionate conservative protest) caused a panic in Pasadena that was noted, with varying degrees of support or disbelief, around the country. Mothers and fathers -- Pasadenans argued -- should be able to control where their children went to school and what they learned there,

48 Donald Tyler, letter to the editor, Los Angeles Times, February 10, 1953.

as well as who taught them, and a superintendent and his staff should not be able to overrule those who hired them. Losing their old methods of maintaining authority to an expert whom, they feared, was overly influenced by national forces such as the NEA and federal government educational officials, was too much for parents worrying about their children's (and their country's) safety in the postwar world to accept. The Pasadena example shows just how unsurprising it was that Mary Turner should be called a Communist -- and how much fear and distrust influenced the environment that gave birth to early homeschooling.\textsuperscript{50}

The second family to become involved in a major homeschooling court case in the period, however, the Shinns, were not as easy on the educational eyes. While the two families' struggles provided a tidy pair of legal precedents for future judges, they also illustrate the two very different ways in which Americans have historically viewed homeschooling: as an unorthodox decision taken by reasonable parents, on the one hand, and as an extreme decision taken by untrustworthy ones, on the other. And since, as the Shinn decision noted, citing precedent, "a primary purpose of the educational system is to train school children in good citizenship, patriotism and loyalty to the state and the nation as a means of protecting the public welfare," the idea of schooling outside of that system made many Californians very nervous.\textsuperscript{51}

Unlike the Turners, the Shinn family's approach to education neither appeared normal nor claimed to be. Benjamin Shinn, a veterinarian, and his wife Mary, a musician and part-time receptionist, were the parents of three children: Mary Elizabeth (aged 13

\textsuperscript{50} For more about the Pasadena controversy, see Nickerson.

when the first court petition was filed in 1960), Barbara Ann (12), and John (10). When they moved to the area in 1954, the Shinns had enrolled all three children in public schools in the El Centro School District, a district situated along California's border with Mexico. All three children were rated average or above average by their teachers and did well, although not exceptionally so, when tested academically. A psychiatrist who was engaged by the court to examine the children in 1960 found them to be "of better than average intelligence," but also stated that he would not "be able to conclude that they were child prodigies."  

Their father, however, disagreed. He was convinced that all three children were brighter than the schools acknowledged, and began to look for ways to improve their educations. While they were still in public school, Dr. Shinn first implemented a "supplemental educational program" at home for all three children, although his daughters "resisted" the extra work. Next, he requested that John, then in second grade, skip third grade and go directly into fourth. He had made a similar request for Mary Elizabeth the year before, in their previous district. These requests were both granted. But whatever his intellectual abilities, soon after skipping the third grade, John began having trouble in his fourth-grade classroom. He was assigned to the lowest reading group and, in the opinion of his teacher, "refused to apply his energies and talents to the classroom." His teacher had major disciplinary issues with him as well; the school

52 In re Shinn, 1.
53 In re Shinn, 3.
54 In re Shinn, 5.
55 In re Shinn, 3.
principal told the Shinns that John "exhibited an attitude of contempt toward his school and his teacher." The day after meeting with the principal about these problems in early 1958, Dr. Shinn removed John from school, telling the Superintendent that since John did not cause disciplinary problems at home, his parents would teach him there.56

Convinced that their son was a prodigy, the Shinns placed him on an "accelerated course of study," and of the course of the next 19 months promoted him five grades, from fourth to ninth.57 Yet in September of 1959, the young high schooler had "had no formal course in geography, no study of United States history, no art instruction, no music instruction aside from piano lessons, no group physical education and no eighth grade spelling."58 In that year, the Shinns removed Mary Elizabeth and Barbara Ann from their public school as well and signed all three children up for correspondence courses through the International Correspondence School, a Pennsylvania-based program that the Shinns' hoped California would acknowledge as a private school.59 All three of the Shinn children embarked on a program of "self-education" using the school's ninth grade materials.60

In the meantime, the El Centro school district continued to investigate the children's status. In February of 1960, following a series of conferences, phone calls, and home visits, the district filed a petition in the juvenile court claiming that the children had

56 In re Shinn, 3.
57 In re Shinn, 3.
58 In re Shinn, 3.
59 In re Shinn, 4.
60 In re Shinn, 4.
become "habitual truants; that each was in danger of leading an idle, dissolute or immoral life; and each was violating the provisions of Education Code, article 7, chapter 6, division 9, the compulsory full-time education law." After a number of hearings over the course of the spring, the court found on May 3 that the children were indeed habitual truants and that they did not qualify under any of the exemptions to the compulsory education statutes, correspondence school or no correspondence school. Finally, the court ruled that all three children immediately return to normal school attendance, ordering that in this matter they be wards of the court.

The Shinns appealed. Their case differed from the Turner case in two ways: first, their children were enrolled in a correspondence school, and second, they believed their children were not only advanced, but so far advanced that it would be "inadvisable for them to attend school." And although the court-appointed psychologist had found the children to be have merely above-average intellects, the Shinns' own doctor found them to be "well ahead" of other children their ages. On September 18, 1961, however, the court upheld the original judgment, citing Turner, among others, as precedent. The court ruled that intellectually gifted children were not exempt from compulsory attendance laws as were deaf, blind, ill, or mentally disabled children. Furthermore, the court held that the correspondence school in which the Shinn children were enrolled did not qualify

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61 In re Shinn, 1.
62 In re Shinn, 2.
63 In re Shinn, 2.
64 In re Shinn, 6.
65 In re Shinn, 6.
for the private school exemption, since no teacher employed by that school had ever been physically present in the Shinn home, teaching the children. And Dr. and Mrs. Shinn, like the Turners, did not hold teaching credentials. The Shinns would not be allowed to homeschool.

The Shinn case added two important points to the precedent established by *Turner*. First, the court had ruled that a correspondence school did not qualify as a private school under California law as long as its teachers were not physically present with the students. Second, the court stated clearly that the education of Californian children was a matter for the state, not for parents, to decide: "the educational program of the State of California was designed to promote the general welfare of all the people and was not designed to accommodate the personal ideas of any individual in the field of education." In other words, the state asserted its rights to control and compel schooling even if it meant entering homes, arresting parents and, to homeschoolers' terror, overriding deeply-held parental convictions about what was good for their children. Local control, it seemed, even the ultra-local authority of a parent over his or her children, was no longer to be the basis for education in California.

**School Control and Homeschooling's First Public Figures**

The State of California's insistence that its right to direct a child's schooling overrode a parent's did not appear out of nowhere. In fact, the Turner and Shinn rulings are indicative of shifts in public concerns and educational methods that had begun soon after the close of the Second World War. The new effort to high-level government and

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66 In re Shinn, 8.
expert control of schooling and homeschooling's emergence as a rebellion against this had the origins not just in the courtroom or even the schoolroom, but in the international and domestic climate of fear that pervaded the America in which the Turners and Shinns lived.

On March 13, 1943, the popular American magazine the Saturday Evening Post published a bittersweet illustration of war on its cover. Entitled "Freedom from Fear," the painting shows a father and mother tenderly tucking their two children into bed, the mother adjusting the blankets while the father looks on with a smile, ignoring, for a moment, the newspaper in his hand. The picture is sweet, full of illustrator Norman Rockwell's usual nostalgic style, except for a single detail: the two visible words on the father's paper, "BOMBINGS" and "HORRORS."

Rockwell's image of the family at bedtime evoked the hope that if the war, however terrible, was won, American families would once again rest safely, and in peace. In this way, as historian Robert Westbrook suggests, Americans fought for their families in World War II, not just for some abstract cause.67 Protecting the American nation, as this wartime reasoning went, would also protect private lives and the family ideal. Americans expected that the postwar state would provide the "rewarding domestic life for which all Americans were fighting."68 Postwar Americans hoped to see the fears expressed in Rockwell's painting fade as the world grew safer for their children.

Instead, as the fires of the Second World War fell to ash, the dry ice of the Cold War began a vigorous burn. Intense competition with the Soviet Union during the first


68 Westbrook, 58.
twenty years of the Cold War had a dramatic impact on American educational policies, in particular. Both the American and Soviet governments knew that building up their respective political systems, their economic prowess, and their international influence required first, as historian David Raleigh writes, "educating the builders."69 As a result, soon after the Second World War American governments and educational experts began an unprecedented effort to direct the reform of schooling at every level across the country. Doing this, however, required dramatically increasing government and expert control over schools and thereby diminishing the influence of parents and local communities.

Community control of education, as Joseph Murphy calls it, had been gradually weakening since the country began to fully industrialize in the late 19th-century; now the transfer of power from "lay citizens to elite decision makers in government" was truly coming to completion, even if schooling was not yet as fully nationalized as in some other Western countries.70 In the century before Mary Turner was put on trial for homeschooling, Americans had gradually come to accept that schools could play an important role in influencing the workings of American society, from improving public health to Americanizing immigrants to perpetuating racial inequality. Yet in the most recent years, roughly 1920-1945, the leading lights of American education had wished not only to mold society through schools, but also to require that teachers exert tremendous personal effort to adapt to the local needs of their classrooms (as they saw them), even hoping that teachers would write their own textbooks to suit their particular


70 Murphy, 58.
students. In other words, while schools had been moving towards expert control in those, the golden years of Progressive Education and teacher professionalization, they did so with a profound respect for the importance of school and community ties and of teacher autonomy. The much more radical transformation from local to larger control that occurred in the 1950s and ’60s was a different thing altogether. This change was born of a pressing fear that without a nationally overseen education, the next generation of Americans would not be able to defeat the Communists as their parents had defeated the Nazis.

In 1958 President Eisenhower urged Congress to appropriate hundreds of millions of dollars in the coming years to underwrite science, math, and foreign language education in order to improve national defense. In the new international environment, he argued grimly, youth "must be equipped to live in the age of intercontinental ballistic missiles." Congress agreed: among its other provisions, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), passed on September 2, 1958, increased funding for the sciences and related disciplines in public schools and provided for increased testing in order to identify

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71 For more detailed discussions of Progressive Education and its connections to social engineering, professionalization, and community involvement, see Cremin; and Watras.


promising young students in these areas. Concurrently, the federal government increased its commitment to the National Science Foundation (NSF), an entity formed in 1950 to continue the emphasis on scientific research that had been so important during World War II.

While both the NDEA and the NSF focused on improving education and research at the college and post-collegiate levels in particular, they both had tremendous effect on primary and secondary education as well. Firstly, both the NDEA and the NSF had a strong emphasis on educating future teachers, providing for a trickle-down effect that would influence how those teachers later taught in schools. Secondly, as part of the NDEA the federal government claimed the right to direct the use of the educational funds it provided to states and communities to specific ends. In other words, because the federal government needed to ensure that education was directed towards the Cold War ends of defense and economic prosperity, it essentially required any states or schools that wanted federal money (which of course they did) to use it as federal (not state or local) policymakers instructed. As historian Joel Spring writes, "the NDEA became a means by which the federal government could control local educational policy simply by offering money for the establishment of specified educational programs."75

In addition to federal pressures due to the rise of Communism, school reform in the 1950s and '60s was also responsive to the many domestic cultural and social developments of the period. Much of the educational historiography of this period focuses on the tremendous efforts within the Civil Rights movement to desegregate

74 Spring, 403.

75 Spring, 404.
schools, many of which required federal intervention in local school policy decisions. Federal pressure through Supreme Court decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the use of federal troops to force integration in high profile situations helped activists to overcome the unjust status quo upheld by segregated schools. Similar, though less well-known, movements against racial and economic educational inequality would develop in the American Southwest and in urban centers around the country in the ‘60s, ’70s, and beyond.

Beyond segregation, however, changes in pedagogy and curriculum were also revolutionizing schools between 1950 and 1975, including two major trends in how and what children were taught. The first of these might be called conservative, a retrenchment that focused on academic and disciplinary "fundamentals" and increased the pressure on schools to produce citizens of greater academic prowess. This approach underlay much of the increased focus on science and mathematics as part of the effort to outrace Soviet technology, but also a more generalized concern among parents that their children were missing out on the 3 R's. This approach also sometimes (but by no means always) went hand-in-hand with some white parents' desire to evade racial integration by moving to the suburbs or by embracing "segregation academies," whites-only private schools that were "springing up like mushrooms" in the Southern states, especially. Like many conservative movements of the second half of the twentieth century, traditionalist retrenchment in education was often accompanied by racial and economic inequalities, even when the individuals involved in any given school were not deliberately prejudicial.

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76 Crespino, 228.
Sorting out what was unfair and, more to the point, illegal within this trend became a thorn in the side of educators and politicians at the highest levels well into the 1980s.77

The second of these two trends was a re-imagining of progressive education, the educational approach that sought in the first half of the century to combine professional and local expertise in order to reform American society through schooling. The new liberal educational ideal built on progressive education's most radical ideas, including its emphasis on experimentation, play, and child-centered learning, but did away with the emphasis on at least eventual traditional academic study that the dean of progressive education, John Dewey, found so important to the well-trained mind. In this spirit, for example, postwar educators John Goodlad (a major influence in Southern California, where he was Professor and later Dean of the Graduate School of Education at UCLA) and Robert Anderson proposed the idea of the "nongraded" elementary school, in which students of different ages might learn together in a variety of ways. Psychologists George Dennison and Paul Goodman campaigned for "free schools" based on relationships rather than traditional modes of instruction, order, and authority. Avant-garde teachers flirted with abolishing grades, using their first names with students, wearing jeans, and generally discarding the last vestiges of formality in schooling. None of these ideas were entirely new -- the most famous free school, for example, an English boarding school called Summerhill, had been founded in 1921 -- but never before had they held such interest in the educational mainstream. The tension between school styles was palpable. Although most schools embodied some mixture of the two, some school districts had to be more creative: the city of Pasadena, California, for example, operated one "fundamentals"

77 For a history of segregation academies and their relationship with American politics in this period, see Crespino, especially chapters seven and eight.
school and one progressive "school without walls" in addition to its mainstream schools. Over the next decades, there continued to be considerable tension and ebb and flow between these two approaches and their descendants; the only constant, in fact, was the continually increasing influence of experts and national and state governments over what would be taught, when, and where.

Meanwhile, efforts were also underway to extend the influence of standardized testing. Following the Second World War, America had been seized with an unprecedented obsession with statistics and averages. This accompanied a rapid formalization of testing at all levels of education, a decisive movement towards that went far beyond the first controversial forays into IQ and standardized testing for servicemen in the 'teens and 'twenties. With the establishment of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, N.J. in 1948, the scattered entrance exams of individual colleges and graduate schools became united under one institution and were soon replaced by two standardized exams: the SAT and the GRE. By the end of the 1950s, large-scale testing was becoming a common tool in lower schools, as well, including in the Los Angeles public school system.

Nation- and statewide testing did not sit well with many Southern Californians, however. As journalist Nicholas Lemann writes, Southern Californian conservatives saw ETS and its tests as a "liberal, Eastern way of doing things that, if it were permitted to

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79 Lemann, 65-66.

80 Lemann 103-106.
spread, would choke off all the freedom and vitality that had drawn them to the West."\textsuperscript{81} Rumors arose that one ETS test asked the question, "Would you rather spit on the Bible or the American flag?"\textsuperscript{82} This was untrue (although a short-lived test at the University of California, Berkeley, did include such a question) but bolstered the opinion of prominent conservative personalities that the tests contained anti-American sentiments.\textsuperscript{83} The flourishing organized conservative groups of the time, especially the John Birch Society (a radical anti-communist, anti-Civil Rights organization) also took up the call. The fundamental problem seemed to be that since the tests were administered by a national organization of uncertain politics, local conservatives had no say in what the tests asked or implicitly taught. They were more comfortable, however, with tests administered by a smaller company, the California Test Bureau, which provided all of the Los Angeles school district's tests.\textsuperscript{84} ETS eventually made headway in the state only by beginning with the (public) University of California's testing needs; local school districts were reluctant to submit to an outside influence, "preferring instead to have opportunity without a structure" that was not under their own, independent control.\textsuperscript{85}

As these many-sided efforts to consolidate school control reverberated throughout the country, they created a trend of decreasing local influence and increasing outside control that began to disturb some parents. This was the context in which the Turners, the

\textsuperscript{81} Lemann, 106.

\textsuperscript{82} Lemann, 106.

\textsuperscript{83} Lemann, 106-107.

\textsuperscript{84} Lemann, 107.

\textsuperscript{85} Lemann, 107-108.
Shinns, and other early families like them began to explore homeschooling -- and also began to be criticized and even arrested for doing so. Children had, of course, been educated at home for millennia, but the practice had lost its normalcy by the early twentieth century. As time went on, what was arising now was in fact something different: schooling at home as a countercultural, hidden, possibly even illegal activity that some parents believed was the only way to properly educate and protect their children.

While the social hiddenness of most homeschooling defined and even strengthened the practice in its early years in some ways, however, it also meant that homeschooling could not easily attract new adherents. Families searching for solutions to their school problems were, to put it simply, very unlikely to ever hear about homeschooling. In order to become anything more than a short-lived quirk of history, homeschooling needed public leaders.

The first such leader was John Holt. Born in 1923 into a wealthy New York family, John Caldwell Holt would become the most prominent face of homeschooling in America in the 1960s and '70s. Raised in the bosom of America's most elite educational systems, from private tutelage to Philips Exeter Academy and Yale University, Holt was nonetheless profoundly dissatisfied with his formal education.86 (He was more satisfied with his informal education, remembering fondly how his grandmother would read aloud to him and his sister with great seriousness, all snuggled together on the couch --

86 Gaither, 122.
although by that point he had, in fact, already taught himself to read.\textsuperscript{87}) He had been a successful student mainly, in his later estimation, in the sense that he had been "willing to parrot back to the teacher."\textsuperscript{88} When questioned as an adult about his schooling, in fact, he usually refused to name the schools he had attended, stating rather that "most of what I know I did not learn in school, and indeed was not even 'taught.'\textsuperscript{89} Yet after three years on a naval submarine and several more as an activist for world peace, Holt turned again toward formal education when he joined a school faculty for the first time in 1953. Holt's first teaching job was at the Colorado Rocky Mountain School, a member of the New School or Free School approach to schooling, which emphasized relationships, democratic school governance and a holistic concern for the child. In the following several years, he also taught at three different private schools near Boston. At the Colorado school and at the Lesley-Ellis school in Massachusetts, he found like-minded principals who daringly "gave me classes to teach and left me free to teach them as I thought best, free to make mistakes and to learn what I could from them."\textsuperscript{90} At these schools, the yoke was light and the teacher's enthusiasm for education high.

Yet even these friendly contexts left Holt and his colleague Bill Hull unsatisfied. Hoping to hone their craft, Holt and Hull began a long-term project in which they regularly observed one another's classes and worked with each other to identify obstacles

\textsuperscript{87} Holt, \textit{Learning All the Time} (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1989), 11. Readers may note that Holt died in 1985; the book was edited and published posthumously.

\textsuperscript{88} Holt, \textit{Learning}, 22.


\textsuperscript{90} Holt, \textit{Fail}, acknowledgements, n.p.
to their pupils' learning. Out of this experience came Holt's first and most famous publication, the 1964 book *How Children Fail*. A collection of memos drawn from four years of observation and teaching practice, the book boldly argues that "most children in school fail," even in the best schools in the country. Rather than helping students, Holt believed, schools made them "afraid, bored, and confused."91

*How Children Fail* and its 1967 sequel *How Children Learn* launched Holt as a major educational reformer and public figure. More importantly, however, they launched a most radical and chilling idea: Holt's observations about smart, privileged students in schools "of the highest standards and reputations" suggested that not only do *some* schoolchildren drop out of school or fail tests, but *almost all* children fail in an important way.92 Most children, wrote Holt, pass through their entire school career without "develop[ing] more than a tiny part of the tremendous capacity for learning…with which they were born." 93 In other words, the children who seem to be doing well in school, Holt argued, were in fact understanding very little, even if they were able to properly use formulas and otherwise supply the correct answers on tests. Through a series of small experiments, for example, Holt and Hull came to realize that a child could learn to complete mathematical problems accurately without actually understanding what numbers represent; he or she could use formulas, in other words, but could not explain what multiplication actually stood for. Holt came to believe that schools, inimical in his

91 Holt, *Fail*, 5.


opinion to the nature of a child, were at best masking some learning problems while still creating others.

Over the course of the 1960s Holt began to argue not that children needed better schools, but rather that children needed no schools. Like his contemporary Ivan Illich, an Austrian Catholic priest who was advocating educational anti-institutionalism around the world, Holt believed not in refashioning society's schools, but in "deschooling society." That Holt and Illich (who had a Texan grandmother and lived for some time in the United States) should arrive at this idea, shocking even to other reformers, makes sense in the context of the transformation of America that occurred during the 1950s and '60s. Holt began working within the bounds of institutions, but over the course of the period he became more radical in his assessment of institutions. Raised during the Great Depression and introduced to adulthood on a Second World War submarine, which he called "the best learning community I have ever seen," Holt was a prime candidate for disillusionment with the postwar world. His eventual rejection of that world's impositions in the 1960s was not radical, but typical; that is, rejection and resistance were themselves markers of the decade's zeitgeist.

In the short term, however, Holt's anti-school crusade seemed so radical that it did temporarily make him, as Milton Gaither points out, "a fringe figure" in education. Yet even as he became more radical, Holt would hold onto enough credibility that popular magazines, newspapers, and television shows would continue to turn to him to explain

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95 John Holt, quoted in Gaither, 122.

96 Gaither, 124, 125.
the educational "fringe" in his characteristically gentle though insistent manner. Who else could Time or Phil Donahue trust to explain from the inside those strange Joneses next door, whose children never seemed to be in school?

Given his historical context, it is no surprise that Holt should have turned away from traditional means of reform and towards a path that shunted schools altogether: homeschooling. As Holt looked for alternatives to schooling, he was surprised and delighted to hear from a small handful of families who had been quietly working one out on their own. Living on homesteads or in communes outside of the public eye, they shared Holt's vehement opposition to schooling, yet their local schools systems did not approve of their experimental solution: to simply teach the children themselves, at home. Holt took up their cause with an immediacy and dedication that soon made him American homeschooling's first public spokesperson. As homeschooling grew over the next two decades, the mainstream media began once more to seek information and articles from Holt as they sought to understand this strange new approach to schooling. As time went on, Holt's periodic appearances in national newspapers and magazines were often a parent's first exposure to the idea of educating without schooling, and his books among their only guides along the road. After many years' work in the area, Holt launched in 1977 the most important homeschooling publication to date, the newsletter Growing Without Schooling, which not only provided homeschooling information and ideas, but also published the names and addresses of subscribers in an early effort to help homeschoolers to network. It was one of the only ways homeschoolers had of finding

97 Gaither, 125.

98 Gaither, 125.
each other. As one homeschooling pioneer put it, early homeschoolers read all of Holt's works "voraciously."\textsuperscript{99}

Holt espoused a libertarian form of homeschooling, an approach he christened "unschooling" and for which his writings remain the primary resource. Holt argued that schools were harsh, controlling, and deadening, successful only in turning bright and inquisitive toddlers into "frightened, timid, evasive, and self-protecting" ten-year-olds.\textsuperscript{100} The solution, in his opinion, was to keep children away from schools and with their families. It is this absence of school that is the most important factor of unschooling. Beyond that, unschooling can vary widely from family to family: depending on the environment (and degree of guidance) that the parents provide and the personality of the child, an unschooler might spend his or her school day doing anything from watching 8 hours of television to building a sailboat to voluntarily writing a 10-page report on dinosaurs. Perhaps because of this diversity, as Holt began to publicize his ideas he uncovered interest among a politically wide range of parents who all shared an utter unhappiness with their children's educational options.

While vehement in his support of children's freedom to learn, Holt's efforts supported an ecumenism within early homeschooling that privileged the importance of teaching children at home over any differences of opinion over how or what homeschooled children should be taught. Even conservatives who considered Holt a

\textsuperscript{99} Carolyn Forte, interview by author, Monrovia, CA, May 18, 2011, transcript, author's collection, 4.

\textsuperscript{100} Holt, \textit{Teach Your Own}, 1.
"hippie,"101 as one traditionalist Catholic mother put it, relied on Growing Without Schooling and the ten books that Holt published before his early death in 1985. Holt never approved of the idea of simply reproducing a school environment of "busywork" at home, but the curriculum and even the way parents chose to teach mattered much less to him than the attitude they took towards their children: they needed to like their children, to see them as people, and to give them a chance to learn according to their needs. 102 That could be done through a correspondence school or through backyard play, among deeply religious Republicans in a conservative suburb or in a tepee at the heart of a leftist commune. The most important thing, as the title of one of Holt's books suggested, was just to "teach your own."

On the other side of the political aisle from Holt, homeschoolers also had a pair of prophets in the Southern California couple Raymond and Dorothy Moore. Although a deeply religious and conservative couple, like Holt the Moores provided important leadership for homeschoolers across the spectrum. (In fact, Raymond Moore would become much distressed by the divisions that would grow between homeschoolers in later years, decrying a trend toward "Christian' exclusivism" that would develop in the early 1990s.103) Also like Holt, both of the Moores began as teachers, although they had experience with both private and public schools. Born in 1915, both of the Moores received college degrees in education. Raymond served in the army during the Second World War, and after the war's close turned his attention back to his studies, earning a


102 Holt, Teach Your Own, 57, 59.

103 Stevens, 173.
Ph.D. in developmental psychology and teacher education from the University of Southern California in 1947. Dorothy, too, continued her formal education in the coming years, earning an M.A. from Andrews University in 1959; she also cared for her and Raymond's nine children. The Moores were Seventh Day Adventists, a Christian denomination with a strong presence in Southern California, and Raymond was professionally preoccupied with the Adventist school system in the area from the time he received his Ph.D. until 1964. Dorothy, meanwhile, was occupied with their growing family.

Unlike Holt, the Moores' entry into homeschooling began with their experience as parents, and particularly with their concerns about their young children. An experienced remedial reading teacher who had worked with children in public schools before becoming a mother, Dorothy disagreed with the push to send children to school at the age of 5 or even 6, believing them to be better served at this age by warm home environments and close contact with their mothers. When the Moores moved to Washington, D.C. in 1964 in order for Raymond to take up a research post at the U.S. Office of Education, both he and Dorothy began to encounter concerted efforts on the part of newly powerful organizations like the National Education Association (NEA) and high-level educational experts to lower compulsory schooling ages around the country. Raymond agreed with

104 Gaither, 129.
105 Gaither, 129.
106 Gaither, 129.
107 Gaither, 129-130.
108 Gaither, 130.
his wife, however, that there was no solid research behind this move. ¹⁰⁹ Upset by the ideological forces that seemed them to be overriding real concern for children, Raymond resigned his government post in 1967.¹¹⁰

Although a school expert himself, Raymond had become convinced that "the school pressures after World War II and especially since Sputnik" had taken too much of the role of educating away from parents and given it to wrongheaded experts.¹¹¹ The solution, it seemed to him, was not to reform school, but to keep children out of it as long as possible. His initial aim was to encourage the idea that "wherever feasible children should remain longer in the home."¹¹² By the time of Raymond's resignation, the Moores had come to believe that schooling of any sort was patently detrimental to young children, arguing that children did not in fact reach emotional and physiological readiness for academic study until between the ages of eight and ten.

The Moores then decided to revisit a pet project that they had initiated in 1961 but had never really gotten off the ground, the research-oriented Moore Foundation. It took a well-timed donation of $750,000 to jumpstart the foundation's real work when Raymond left the Office of Education. With their foundation, the Moores embarked on "an ambitious project to synthesize over 3,000 studies of childhood development to ascertain the impact of early school attendance on children."¹¹³ Through this research, not only did

¹⁰⁹ Gaither, 130.

¹¹⁰ Gaither, 130.


¹¹² Moore and Moore, Home Grown Kids, 13.

¹¹³ Gaither, 130.
the Moores become convinced that most children, as the Moore Foundation's current synopsis of its approach states, "are tired of school before they are out of the third or fourth grades," but that "neither the maturity of their delicate central nervous systems nor the 'balancing' of the hemispheres of their brains, nor yet the insulation of their nerve pathways provide a basis for thoughtful learning before 8 or 9." Rather, the Moores came to argue, early schooling dulled the brain and often "permanently damaged" young children's eyes through too much close study and school-induced anxiety.

The public result of all of this research and synthesis came in an article that was published in various versions in 1972 in *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Harpers*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Congressional Record*. The *Reader's Digest* article, especially, given major attention in what was then the nation's most read periodical, made a splash; readers responded with both criticism and relief at the Moores' bold challenges to common educational standards. These publications, as a later homeschooling leader would write, "caused people to begin asking questions about the conventional wisdom" in schooling, exposing many for the first time to the idea of responsibly keeping kids out of school. In addition, the publicity brought the Moores together with other experimental homeschooling advocates for the first time. In fact, John Holt responded to the *Reader's Digest* article with an (unpublished) letter which encouraged the Moores to take their


116 Gaither, 130.

117 Gaither, 131.

criticisms even farther; different as Holt and the Moores may have been in their political and religious convictions, they agreed that school was bad for young children. Rather, the Moores' research strongly suggested to them that "the family is the primary educational delivery system" and that "the highest educational priority in the nation should go to the family" rather than to preschools and early childhood daycare.

The publication of the Moores' early articles provided the jumping-off point for two major venues for the Moores' theories of education, which they eventually developed into a formal educational philosophy termed the Moore Formula. First, it led to the launching of their careers as authors. Following the record response to the article, Reader's Digest solicited and then, in 1975, published Raymond and Dorothy's first book, Better Late than Early: A New Approach to Your Child's Education, which laid out in greater detail their assertions about the harms of early schooling. The Moores also received a federal grant to conduct and fund research on early schooling through the Moore Foundation, research which led to the publication of their 1979 book School Can Wait, which reported their findings in detail. Citing studies new and old on early childhood education, reading readiness, and child development, the Moores concluded that "most early childhood education programs today are neither meeting the needs of children nor correcting the results and failures of child-rearing practices in the children's early years" (i.e., providing parenting that working or struggling parents could not

119 Gaither, 131.

120 Moore et al., School Can Wait, 221.

121 Gaither, 131.

provide during daytime hours) and that even children who attended excellent programs "would be much better off in their homes."\textsuperscript{123}

Second, by bringing the Moores into the public eye, the early publications facilitated another media connection of enormous importance. While the Moores were growing their foundation and fine-tuning their homeschooling approach, child development specialist James Dobson, then a professor at the University of Southern California School of Medicine, was preparing for his own career change. In 1977 he left USC to found the non-profit organization Focus on the Family, which would make Dobson one of the leading Evangelical Christian voices on family issues for the next several decades, and a major player in the retrenchment of conservative Christianity during the culture wars of the 1980s. The organization's first major endeavor was its radio show, also called "Focus on the Family," which Dobson began hosting in that first year.

Raymond and Dorothy Moore were among Dobson's first radio guests and would appear on the show twenty-one times over the next twenty years.\textsuperscript{124} Listeners were enormously enthusiastic about the Moores, as exemplified in a huge mail response to the early programs "with better than 95 percent of the letters being highly favorable."\textsuperscript{125} Dobson also heavily promoted the Moores' books, which could be purchased through Focus on the Family by mail.\textsuperscript{126} In his forward to the Moores' "practical handbook" for homeschooling parents, \textit{Home Grown Kids}, Dobson wrote that the Moores' "perspective

\textsuperscript{123} Moore et al., \textit{School Can Wait}, 221.

\textsuperscript{124} Gaither, 32.

\textsuperscript{125} Moore and Moore, \textit{Home Grown Kids}, 10.

\textsuperscript{126} Gaither, 133.
on early childhood education is like cool water to a parched land….I highly recommend *Home Grown Kids* to both educators and parents."127 Through these programs, as one of today’s most prominent homeschooling leaders, J. Michael Smith, remembered in a Washington Post op-ed in 2007, "millions of people were exposed for the first time to the idea that they could teach their children themselves."128

By now a widely-known public figure in alternative education, Raymond Moore also went on to appear on numerous mainstream television talk shows as well as making numerous appearances in court as an expert witness in support of homeschoolers.129 Meanwhile, Dorothy was working out the details of the Moore Formula. In 1983, Dorothy created the Moore Academy, a sort of correspondence school that aided families in tailoring the Moore Formula to their needs (and, as we will see in the next chapter, provided a potentially legal way for them to register in a school while still homeschooling).130 The Moores would publish numerous homeschooling and parenting guides over the next decades, and their ideas on early childhood education have remained critical in the development of many homeschooling approaches across the spectrum. Their analysis of studies of the development of children's eyes, in particular, is widely repeated among homeschoolers. However strongly they believed in their own approach, like most homeschooling leaders of this period, the Moores were most interested in


128 J. M. Smith, "Moore's Achievements."

129 Gaither, 133.

130 Gaither, 133.
simply helping families to develop their own home schools. And by the end of the 1970's, the families of around 15,000 American children were doing so.\textsuperscript{131}

Between 1950 and 1975, Americans experienced a number of changes that led to increasing distrust of public institutions such as schools. Motivated by Cold War-era fears of economic and ideological Communist takeovers, federal and state governments sought and achieved increasing influence over American schooling. Some parents, however, especially conservative ones, worried that it was lessening parental influence in schools that would be most dangerous to the next generation. The stories of early public homeschooling figures such as the Shinns, the Turners, the Moores, and John Holt show the beginnings of how some families responded to this problem: by trying, against great odds, to teach their children themselves, at home. In the spirit of their age, homeschooling parents looked for ways to work outside of the old systems and institutions to control their children's educations. They began to look, in fact, outside of schools themselves. Instead, they looked inward to the home, to the very most local sphere of control, where they hoped they might still raise their children with minimal government or institutional influence.

By stepping out of the mainstream in their educational practices, early homeschoolers reflected the defining characteristic of the developing America of the second half of the twentieth century: a growing tendency to distrust public institutions even as these institutions gained more and more influence over local affairs. In taking the shocking step of removing their children from school, they were in fact behaving in a

\textsuperscript{131} Stevens, 10; 11.
most mainstream and characteristically American manner. These innovators were simply foreshadowing a new American paradox: a nation plagued by distrust yet booming with consolidation.

Yet early homeschooling still had a long way to go. While their common concerns drew them together, such as in the friendship between Holt and the Moores or in the willingness of homeschoolers of various types to welcome the writings of both the conservative, religious Moores and the liberal, more secular Holt, in a starker way court decisions like those against the Turner and Shinn families exemplified real threats to families who attempted to buck the school system. The judicial responses to families' desire to homeschool overruled parental rights in favor of the rights of the state, and the few homeschooling families in operation did their schooling quietly and out of sight. In light of the forces arrayed against homeschooling, it seemed unlikely that it would continue. With few ways of supporting one another, little public influence, and legal uncertainty biting at their heels, the first homeschoolers seemed likely to see their experiment fade away as times continued to change. Even if the reasons to homeschool remained or even increased, living a hidden educational life was becoming a very difficult thing to sustain.
CHAPTER 2

LIVING IN THE GRAY: 1975-1989

In 1975, homeschooling seemed ready to disappear. In fact, although hard numbers are impossible to come by, by the late 1970s the practice had "waned to near extinction."\textsuperscript{132} In California, the nascent homeschooling movement was struggling mightily to survive in a legally and socially hostile environment. Court cases such as \textit{Turner} and \textit{Shinn} provided grim examples of what could happen if a homeschooling family somehow got itself noticed by the wrong official. Wary of the threat of a misunderstanding with a neighbor or truant officer, which could lead to a report to the school district, homeschooling families functioned in near-isolation in order to protect themselves; as one homeschooling mother put it, it was important to remain "under the radar."\textsuperscript{133} The general public was slowly becoming aware of homeschooling, but that public didn't like it: even ten years later, when the movement had grown considerably, 75 percent of respondents to a national poll thought that "the movement toward home schooling [was] a bad thing for the nation," with only 16 percent believing it was a good

\textsuperscript{132} Ray, \textit{Home Education Reason and Research: Common Questions and Research-Based Answers About Homeschooling} (Salem, Or.: National Home Education Research Institute, 2009), 274.

\textsuperscript{133} C. Forte, 5.
Having to tread carefully in the public sphere also meant that homeschoolers could not even help each other, since the need to remain anonymous made it difficult for homeschoolers to meet. And when they did meet, even something as simple as forming a playgroup at a public park -- during school hours, of course -- remained too much for many homeschoolers' nerves.

Scattered, unsupported, and sensitive to any hint of danger, homeschoolers in California did not in any appreciable way form a community or a cohesive movement in 1975; they simply represented an idea, an experiment tiptoeing along the fringes of society. Over the next fifteen years, however, homeschooling would defy all odds to grow in support, in organization, and in visibility, providing both the protection and the encouragement that homeschooling families needed in order to become a distinctive and self-sustaining community. As part of this growth, homeschoolers were forced to devise new strategies to deal with the public. On the one hand, this limited the security that came with secrecy; but on the other, it meant that now that homeschooling was becoming more publicly visible, potential homeschoolers -- families who might once have had no choice other than to send their children to school -- now had a much better chance of learning about and embracing homeschooling options. As a result, the national number of homeschoolers grew from around 10,000-15,000 in the early 1970s to an estimated 300,000 by the end of the '80s (although both figures, as one sociologist explains, are "thoughtful approximations, not counts.")


135 Stevens, 10, 11.
Yet although homeschooling was becoming more organized, more communal, and even more public, the legal status of homeschooling had still not been settled by either California's top court or its legislature. Anyone who decided to homeschool lived within a gray area of the law, putting themselves in real danger of prosecution and even the loss of their parental rights.

The combination of increased concern over deepening changes in institutional schooling and the greater (though still limited) availability of homeschooling information pushed pioneering parents to come up with creative ways to live in this gray zone. For these parents, the moral, religious, and intellectual risks of sending their children to school outweighed the risks of keeping them at home, but the nosiness of neighbors, the social pressure of friends and family, and above all the legal ambiguity of their choice made privacy attractive. Yet living in the gray was unsustainable except for those with the capacity to homeschool almost completely on their own; in order for the practice to have any real permanence, homeschoolers had to find a way out of the gray. And to find that way out, they began, both locally and nationally, to organize.

To demonstrate these tensions and the early solutions that resulted, I will first discuss how a handful of exemplary Los Angeles homeschooling families experienced homeschooling "in the gray." Secondly, I will explore the ways that they sought to organize and sustain an early informal homeschooling community, and thirdly, I will discuss the specific ways they tried to remain within the bounds of the law while homeschooling. Finally, I will examine how the experience of living in the gray and, significantly, trying to emerge from it led to the first large-scale organizations of
homeschoolers, in particular the Christian Home Educators Association of California (CHEA) and the HomeSchool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA).

Three Families

"Have you met the Fortes yet?"

Spend a week talking to Los Angeles homeschoolers and you'll hear this question more times than you can count. The owners of the Excellence in Education Academy (EIE) in Monrovia, California, a thriving homeschooling store-cum-school-cum-meeting spot, Martin and Carolyn Forte began teaching their two daughters at home over thirty years ago and have not stopped homeschooling since. A small store with a large classroom in the back, EIE and its charismatic, friendly owners are at the center of homeschooling in the San Gabriel Valley, a wide swath of suburbs, small towns, and industrial sprawl that makes up the Easternmost portion of Los Angeles County.

Yet as is the case with most homeschooling-related establishments, EIE at first seems unremarkable. Located in a drab stretch of industrial Monrovia, it occupies a small, hardly noticeable space in an out-of-the-way office park. At the end of the short hallway entrance, however, visitors are met with a beautiful hodge-podge of color and sound. The small store area bursts with books, toys, paper, plastic, and foam. It is a mixture of all the most interesting parts of a school-supply store: endless books, kits, CDs, gifts, and playthings. Unlike many stores, EIE has no mood music playing in the background, but you are likely to hear the sounds of small children playing with books on the floor while their mother or father chats with one of the Fortes.
Customers come to EIE not just to buy educational and creative items, but also to bend the Fortes' ears and hear their cheerful, wholly free advice. This unassuming store is a vibrant focal point in a surprisingly wide community, drawing in not only homeschoolers from around the region, but also neighbors and passers-by. More often than not, these visitors become fast friends with the owners; as Martin Forte says of a social worker whose office is in the same strip and often stops by to chat, "he never sees the light, [but] we're still drinking buddies."¹³⁶ ("That's right," adds the social worker, "and the occasional cigar!").¹³⁷ The Fortes' concern for the community accounts for EIE's third role, as well: as one of the growing number of homeschooling "academies" that draw homeschoolers together for classes and experiences that individual families might have difficulty creating for themselves. Yet such academies and co-operatives were almost totally unheard of when Martin and Carolyn began homeschooling in 1982. The Fortes' experiences homeschooling in the 1980s reveal some of the tensions that led to the blossoming of homeschooling in the following decade (and their own founding of EIE in 1991).

Martin and Carolyn Forte share many of the typical characteristics of homeschoolers: white, conservative Protestant, middle-class, and willing (and able) to survive on one income in order to allow the mother to direct the children's education. Also like most homeschoolers, the Fortes' reasons for choosing to homeschool were "multidimensional" and "complex," beginning with their own -- and especially Carolyn's


¹³⁷ M. Forte, 17.
-- childhood school experiences. While growing up in California, Martin and Carolyn attended both public and Christian schools. They met while backpacking on Mt. Whitney, fell in love, and married. Their daughter Tenaya was born seven years later, in 1977, and by the time she was approaching school age, the Fortes already "knew for a fact that we would not send [her] to public school." Carolyn had had first-hand experience with some very ineffective public schools both as a child and as a credentialed elementary school teacher and had lost all confidence in California's public education system. As a girl, she had "hated school," which was not only "boring" but also anxiety-inducing. The public schools she attended in Los Angeles County in the late 1950s and early 1960s upset her with their bizarre rules, such as an edict against playing with children not in your own grade, while also skipping over academic basics such as English grammar. The Lutheran private school she attended for a few years was quite a bit better, however, and led her to think that there was hope for schooling in the state. So she decided to become a teacher, "thinking, ‘Well, maybe, I can do it better. Maybe I can make it a better experience.’"

While teaching kindergarten, first grade, and sixth grade in the early years of her marriage, however, Carolyn only became more frustrated with California public

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138 Murphy, 79.

139 Typically, homeschooling parents in Los Angeles attended public schools as children at about the same rate as the general population: see Gray, 56, 60.

140 M. Forte, 3.

141 C. Forte, 4, 9.

142 C. Forte, 9-10.

143 C. Forte, 4.
schooling. The obstacles she encountered in her classroom teaching frustrated and
sometimes outraged her. She resented restrictions on curricula and methods, which forced
her to use approaches that she found "didn't work."\textsuperscript{144} Local laws further frustrated her
efforts to encourage a love for learning, in one city preventing many of her pupils from
checking out library books because their parents were not property-owners.\textsuperscript{145}

Without much hope of helping many of her students, Carolyn had to watch "how
kids were just falling through the cracks. How the ones that were really bright had no
place to go, and the ones that were struggling just got more and more behind….and my
heart broke."\textsuperscript{146} As another former public school teacher (and homeschooling parent) also
remembered of her days teaching in Illinois, the public schools' policy seemed to be that
"if the child has a problem and it is disruptive in the classroom, it's not dealt with in love.
It's….inhuman."\textsuperscript{147} Caring for students seemed a liability and helping them impossible.
As Carolyn has told many parents considering homeschooling over the years, it seemed
to her that "if you have a warm body, you can get a teaching credential. But if you have a
brain, it might be a problem."\textsuperscript{148} For these reasons, the Fortes concluded from the
beginning that public elementary school, at the very least, would likely do their
daughters, Tenaya and Tylene, more harm than good.

\textsuperscript{144} C. Forte, 5.
\textsuperscript{145} C. Forte, 4.
\textsuperscript{146} C. Forte, 5.
\textsuperscript{147} Marci Rayburn (pseudonym), quoted in Stevens, 31.
\textsuperscript{148} C. Forte, 11.
The obvious alternative would seem to be to send Tenaya and Tylene to a private, probably Christian school. The Fortes' concerns about public schooling, their Christian faith, their middle-class economic status, and their Caucasian race make them seem on the surface like prime candidates for this choice. In fact, they began by investigating both standard and alternative private schools, but unlike their own parents, Martin and Carolyn did not end up choosing this route. Instead, as Martin recalls, "one day, my wife read an article on homeschooling and she gave it to me to read and I go, ‘Yup, that's the solution.'" Carolyn remembered that back when she was a teacher, she had once sat "in the teachers' lounge thinking, ‘Teacher heaven would be a van and six kids and unlimited gas and we'd just go on field trips.'" Perhaps homeschooling could give them that flexibility.

The Fortes chose the largely uncharted homeschooling route over normative private schooling for three main reasons. The first two were partly tied to the family's particular circumstances. First, homeschooling was virtually free, while many private school tuitions packed a punch: in one 1992 study sample, 21% of Los Angeles homeschooling families said that would have used private schools had they been able to afford them. Second, homeschooling was flexible, both physically -- as a traveling salesman, Martin loved the idea of bringing his family with him on trips rather than having to be away from them for weeks at a time -- and pedagogically. Another local homeschooling father, Dennis Osmanson, whose work schedule meant that he would not have seen his children at all during the week had they not been homeschooled, described

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149 C. Forte, 5.

150 Gray, 90.
the advantage of such an arrangement succinctly: if his family had had to operate with a normal school schedule, "I [would] have lost that time where [I] can have input into their lives." The Fortes wanted to have wide influence over their children's education that went beyond academics and focused instead on increasing time spent as a family. They, like most homeschoolers, as researcher Robert Kunzman has pointed out, saw "education as more than just formal schooling;" it was a family orientation or lifestyle. In this way, homeschooling was not a compartmentalized portion of a family's day, but rather "a twenty-four-hour-a-day, all-encompassing endeavour."153

The third, and most ideological, reason was that the Fortes had become concerned that in terms of a balanced and pedagogically friendly, yet faith-based education, "private schools are not necessarily a safe haven either." In fact, as they grew as parents and educators, the Fortes became convinced that education in both private and public schools was increasingly based on indoctrination rather than education. The Fortes' believed that schools were closing down children's minds rather than opening them, shaping children according to an exclusively liberal perspective through an "educational scope and sequence" that did not take individual children's needs or other perspectives into account.155

152 Robert Kunzman, 5.
153 Kunzman, 6.
154 M. Forte, 5.
155 M. Forte, 4.
Martin cites history and science as areas of particular intellectual and moral concern. By adopting revisionist histories, he contends, for example, schools have reduced the Founding Fathers to nothing more than "angry white men," while in the meantime, the public schoolchildren he meets cannot recite basic facts about the timeline of American history (such as the differences between major wars).\textsuperscript{156} As for science, as biblical literalists the Fortes objected to the absence of creationism in the curriculum, even in many Christian schools: "creationism is not even allowed to be discussed; it's strictly an evolutionist perspective."\textsuperscript{157} And public schools, at least, were increasing unresponsive to calls for attention to faith-based perspectives in general. In sum, echoing an argument used by 1950s conservatives concerned about potential Communist influence in schools, Martin (along with Carolyn) was convinced that:

\begin{quote}
Education in America has gone from education to indoctrination. I hold conservative political views. And I did not see any benefit for that indoctrination….And then, we are a faith-based family and we wanted to have faith-based influence on our children. So, those primary reasons kept us away from public centers.\textsuperscript{158}
\end{quote}

This did not mean, however, that the Fortes wanted public schools to toe the line of their particular religious belief system. Admittedly, some homeschoolers did (and do) hold this view, but the Fortes and the community that came to surround them were in fact willing to embrace a significant range of both teaching perspectives and curricula within their children's potential classrooms. They did not so much want to ban interpretations they disagreed with as to make sure that their own beliefs were also represented. The

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{156} M. Forte, 4.
\textsuperscript{157} M. Forte, 4.
\textsuperscript{158} M. Forte, 4.
\end{flushright}
Fortes wanted their children to learn in an environment that both taught basic facts and allowed for diverse interpretations, something that they found wanting in the public schools. Citing the teaching of evolution as fact rather than theory, for example, Martin explains that "I wanted my girls to know both, evolution and creationism, so they can make their own choice."159 Carolyn agrees: "That's the sad thing about schools. They'll only look at one model…. You have to be free to develop multiple models to be scientific."160 The Fortes "did not want to participate in that type of learning process."161

The Fortes did, however, expect Christian schools to at least live up to a standard of diversity that included faith. Yet bizarrely, the Christian schools in their area seemed to be "giving up their faith-based materials for strictly secular material," perhaps in response to growing pressure to attain "WASC [Western Association of Schools and Colleges] accreditation."162 So while they would have chosen private schooling over public, and had even decided on which private school would be most appealing should they need it, private schooling was not the Fortes' first choice either financially, practically, or educationally. Even private schools seemed to be increasingly giving over control of what and how they taught, and so only by homeschooling could Martin and Carolyn "have total control of the training and raising of [their] children."163 The wider public of a school -- whether a Christian or government one -- could not be trusted to

159 M. Forte, 4.
160 C. Forte, 13.
161 M. Forte, 4.
162 M. Forte, 5.
163 M. Forte, 5.
have the Forte children's true interests at heart. Their parents would have to do it themselves.

As the Fortes' experience suggests, one of the most striking developments over the course of the late 1970s and 1980s was the growing minority of parents who turned away from private schools towards homeschooling. In fact, by the early 2000s, as sociologist Joseph Murphy points out, "homeschool enrollment [was] now about one-fifth the size of private school enrollment," and by 2008, according to one study, the total number of American homeschoolers was twice the number of children attending conservative Protestant schools. More surprising even than the Protestant situation, however, is the growing attraction beginning around 1980 of Roman Catholics to homeschooling as an alternative to the Catholic parochial school system (whose existence has historically made Catholics, as a group, less likely than Protestants either to homeschool or to use public schools). Since the late 19th century, when American Catholic bishops pronounced it the duty of Catholic parishes to at least try to build a school and of Catholic children to enroll in one wherever available, the Catholic parish school had held a privileged position in American Catholic life. In reality, due to parishes' inability to keep up with demand, families' distance from schools, and the indifference of many Catholics to the idea, only half of Catholic children attended Catholic schools even in the system's heyday in the 1950s. But the success of the schools is still staggering. Following the landmark Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965, however, Catholic parochial schooling entered a tailspin from which it has never

164 Murphy, 11.

165 Murphy, 83.
recovered. Some of the reasons seem to be purely social; as historian of Catholic education Timothy Walch points out, by 1980 the American Catholic "laity had shed the last vestiges of its ghetto mentality and was fully integrated into American society," leading many Catholics to question whether they really needed separated schools. It seemed that most Catholics had quickly come to believe that they did not: in 1964, a year before the conclusion of the Council, 44% of American Catholic schoolchildren attended Catholic schools, but by 1974 the figure had dropped 15 points to 29% (and has continued to decline ever since).

It should be noted that this was partly due to increasing operating costs and, as a result, tuitions. As the country's once-booming religious orders rapidly dwindled following the Council, parochial schools found themselves scrambling to find the money to pay lay teachers to replace the nuns and brothers who had once taught for free, sometimes shutting down entirely for lack of funds. Most of the Catholic families whose children attended public or other non-Catholic schools ten years after the Council did so not in protest against Catholic schools, but rather primarily because either they could not pay the increased tuition or because there were no longer any schools in their area.

In a more ideological change, however, Catholics who did continue to send their children to parochial schools after 1964 did so less often for religious reasons than because they felt that their children would receive a better general education there than in

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166 Walch, 169.

167 Andrew M. Greeley, William C. McCready and Kathleen McCourt, Catholic Schools in a Declining Church (Kansas City, Kans.: Sheed and Ward, 1976), 242.

168 Greeley, McCready and McCourt, 243.
a public school.169 As researchers Andrew Greeley, William McCready, and Kathleen McCourt note, parents in the new American Catholicism felt much less "the traditional need for arming children with the fundamentals of Catholicism[,] that they might do combat in the secular world without losing their faith."170 For most Catholics, the decision of whether to send their children to Catholic schools or non-Catholic ones was no longer predominantly a matter of faith.

Yet while many Catholics were now turning towards public schooling, another trend was taking hold among the most strictly observant American Catholics in the late 1970s and '80s. These Catholics -- those most involved in parish activities, most supportive of the entire range of Catholic moral teaching, and most financially supportive of their parishes, among other things -- were far more likely than their coreligionists to still support Catholic schooling in 1974.171 Yet this same group was also showing increased concern about the Catholicity of Catholic schools, based on issues such as sex education and the increasing predominance of lay teachers.172

As a result, some of the most "conservative" Catholics -- those whom one would expect to participate in Catholic schools despite other Catholics' withdrawal -- began to develop a preference for homeschooling over normative Catholic schooling between 1975 and 1989. It should be stressed that these Catholics were a minority among their coreligionists in almost every way -- but they would become a major part of the national

169 Greeley, McCready and McCourt, 243.
170 Greeley, McCready and McCourt, 243.
171 Greeley, McCready and McCourt, 240-242.
172 Greeley, McCready and McCourt, 240, 242.
homeschooling movement in the years to come, eventually drawing many other Catholics into their position on schooling, as well.

In the northern part of Los Angeles County, San Fernando Valley resident Mary-Mark Haggard was one Catholic who was deeply affected by these changes in Catholic schooling between 1960 and 1989. As a child, Haggard had attended Catholic schools in Hollywood, but as adults, she and her husband Nate chose to teach their children themselves in their Chatsworth home. Having attended high school during the 1960s, Haggard did not idealize her own Catholic education, which was characterized by a tumultuous overhaul in everything from the religion curriculum to the dress of the teacher-nuns after 1965. "I saw my Catholic high school change and just combust dramatically right in front of my eyes," transforming from a ordinary, somewhat conservative Catholic school to an unrecognizable place that was suddenly promoting birth control and other concepts alien to official Catholic teaching.173

In fact, while Mary-Mark's parents had sent her to Catholic school almost automatically, not even considering the public option, the overhaul of Mary-Mark's high school during her time there convinced her parents to send some of her younger siblings to public rather than Catholic school.174 Unfortunately, those public schools turned out to be, in Haggard's opinion even "worse" morally, and by the end of the '70s, her parents were convinced that American schools were "all terrible."175 The Catholic schools, they argued, were no longer teaching "good religion," and yet sending a child to the local high

173 Haggard, 2.
174 Haggard, 4.
175 Haggard, 4.
school meant risking them being "very steeped in the drug culture."\textsuperscript{176} So by the time her own eldest child was ready for school around 1982, Haggard had "no confidence in any schools in the area."\textsuperscript{177} Public schools were still not an option for her, as she wanted "an artsy, Catholic education" for her children, but she also felt that Catholic schools had declined even further and were no longer "of the same caliber as they were even when I went."\textsuperscript{178} Waldorf education interested her because of its artistic and creative elements, but there were no Catholic Waldorf schools available.\textsuperscript{179} At that point, it seemed as though she "didn't have really any choices."\textsuperscript{180}

Haggard did have an acquaintance, however, who schooled her own children. Although Haggard herself knew nothing about it, it seemed as though homeschooling might be a solution. But her husband Nate "thought that the whole idea was really crazy."\textsuperscript{181} It was around that time, however, that Nate came across an article on homeschooling theorist John Holt in the \textit{Los Angeles Times}.\textsuperscript{182} The article made an impression on both the Haggards: although Holt did seem like a bit of a "hippy, avant-garde homeschooler" to them, he agreed with the Haggards that what the public schools

\textsuperscript{176} Haggard, 4.
\textsuperscript{177} Haggard, 3.
\textsuperscript{178} Haggard, 2.
\textsuperscript{179} Haggard, 2.
\textsuperscript{180} Haggard, 3.
\textsuperscript{181} Haggard, 2.
\textsuperscript{182} Perhaps Mike Moreau, "Educator -- Keep children out of school; teach them at home," \textit{Los Angeles Times}, November 27, 1982.
were doing was clearly "a bad plan for kids."¹⁸³ Nate "was immediately convinced that we should homeschool," and Mary-Mark, already leaning in that direction, promptly called her homeschooling acquaintance and began considering how to attempt to homeschool.¹⁸⁴

The Haggards ended up loving homeschooling. Mary-Mark could be with her children for the hours they would normally have been away at school; she could tailor their schedule to the family's particular needs; she could take the children to Mass every morning. As it does with most families, however, figuring out how to successfully homeschool each child took continuing effort. Even if they were lucky enough to know another homeschooler or to have come across Holt's or the Moores' thoughts on the subject, as the Haggards did, most families seeking to homeschool still had to fend for themselves in terms of acquiring or even designing a curriculum, coming up with activities and ideas, and figuring out strategies for functioning legally. While publishers and academies cram convention halls at homeschooling conferences around the country today, in 1980 such bodies were almost non-existent. Combined with the tenuous legal status of homeschooling and its social unacceptability, this scarcity also meant that it was not always easy to find information about what resources did exist. So, like their fellow anonymous home educators, the Haggards simply started with what little information they had and spent the next several years trying things out in their living room.

Mary-Mark began by calling up an unusual Northern California school called Oak Meadow. Established in 1980 as one of the first homeschooling institutions in the

¹⁸³ Haggard, 2.
¹⁸⁴ Haggard, 2.
country, Oak Meadow Independent Study School was born out of Ojai parents Lawrence and Bonnie Williams' more than five-year, repeatedly frustrated effort to find some way to legally homeschool their children. Having been told by the California Department of Education that they simply could not legally homeschool their children, the Williamses had first founded Oak Meadow as a brick-and-mortar private school in 1975, but a series of obstacles ranging from condemned buildings to lawsuits to dwindling bank accounts led to the collapse of the first Oak Meadow within a few years. Abandoning their school, the Williamses moved to New York state in 1979 and fell in love with a Waldorf school on Long Island, where Philip obtained a job as a teacher. But that school soon went through its own financial and personnel crisis that left it, in the Williamses' opinion, bereft of its spirit. Meanwhile, their son Jay was struggling; with a class of 30 students to care for, his teacher could not pay him the individual attention he needed. Instead, Jay found himself banished to the hallway nearly every day for disrupting the class. The Williamses made up their minds that the family would leave the school in June. In the meantime, they quietly removed Jay for the remainder of the academic year, with plans to teach him at home.

Unfortunately, homeschooling was not easy in New York any more than in California; as a New York Department of Education official told Bonnie in no uncertain

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186 Williams, "Oak Meadow."
terms, their plans were "not legal. You can't do it."\textsuperscript{187} Crestfallen, they were preparing to begin yet another search for an acceptable option when they suddenly realized that they still had one in California: Oak Meadow, which was still registered as a private school in California, even though it no longer physically existed. The Williamses developed the idea of reforming their private school to be a simple supplier of curricula, rather than a brick-and-mortar school with pupils in the classrooms: the students, like Jay, would in fact be taught by their parents in their homes, but Oak Meadow would supply the materials these homeschoolers needed. Buoyed by a small inheritance that arrived in the nick of time, the Williamses moved back to California, designed a curriculum, and reopened Oak Meadow as a private distance-learning school based out of a spare room in their Ojai home.\textsuperscript{188} Soon after, they began enrolling students like the Haggard children and sending out curriculum nationwide.

In the beginning, Mary-Mark Haggard simply followed the curriculum that Oak Meadow sent her.\textsuperscript{189} Practically speaking, as she relates, "I used to open up a syllabus, and…I would tell the stories while I nursed the baby….it was only an hour or two, three or four days a week in the beginning."\textsuperscript{190} It did not take long, however, for Mary-Mark to discover that Oak Meadow's suggestions alone would not be nearly enough to ensure a good education for her children. Self-directed study, which Oak Meadow suggested to

\textsuperscript{187} Williams, "Oak Meadow." There were some court decisions in New York that suggested that the practice might in fact be legal in that state; but the blurry status of the question in practice is reflected in the dept. of education's certainty that it was illegal.

\textsuperscript{188} Williams, "Oak Meadow."

\textsuperscript{189} Haggard, 6.

\textsuperscript{190} Haggard, 7.
her once her eldest reached the age of about 10, did not work for her children, who did best when an adult interacted with them during their lessons rather than leaving them alone to complete them.\textsuperscript{191} As an alternative, the Haggards tried cobbling things together from various sources, but this path proved treacherous; one of Mary-Mark's son's struggled for months with an out-of-date, confusing math book (given to them by a friend) before his mother realized the book, not her son, was the problem.\textsuperscript{192} Looking back, Mary-Mark finds herself "scratch[ing] my head as to why my kids turned out so well when I didn't do [a] strong academic program…the conclusion is that I kept a very tight ship."\textsuperscript{193} Abandoning some things, starting up others, refashioning others, and focusing on their children's particular learning styles were no easy tasks. But with few others to rely upon, the Haggards' best resources were themselves.

Meanwhile, several miles further South and West, in the impoverished neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles, another mother was beginning her homeschooling career in still another radically different environment. Although they could afford to live in a middle-class neighborhood, Renée Brooks and her husband Rodney had chosen to live in South Central in order to "practice what we preach" as Christians.\textsuperscript{194} As both a lieutenant in the Los Angeles Police Department and an Independent Baptist minister, Rodney had experience with both crime and works of mercy. For her part, Renée had grown up "in the hood in the South Bronx" and

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\textsuperscript{191} Haggard, 7.
\textsuperscript{192} Haggard, 8.
\textsuperscript{193} Haggard, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{194} Renée Brooks, telephone interview by author, Mishawaka, IN and Los Angeles, CA, July 20, 2011, transcript, author's collection, 3.
\end{flushright}
understood the way of life in such a place.\textsuperscript{195} The Brookses decided that living and serving in South Central would be the best way for them to live out their faith.

One side effect of living in South Central, however, was that the Brooks children would have to attend school in a truly abysmal school district. When their son Jason reached school age in 1986, the Brookses decided it would be best if they "drew the line at education."\textsuperscript{196} The local elementary school was so low-ranked and the students there so far behind even in basic reading skills that Renée knew that she could not "send my honeybunnies there."\textsuperscript{197} The schools were both academically terrible and rife with gang violence.\textsuperscript{198} The Crips so dominated the neighborhood that even a child wearing the rival Bloods color, red, ran "the risk of being beat up or killed for a color."\textsuperscript{199}

Of course, just living in South Central at all, regardless of what school a child attended, exposed children to this risk, and the Brookses knew this. But sending their children to the local schools seemed as though it would increase the danger not just of being physically hurt, but of being educated into a gang mentality. "I can teach my kids how to fight," explains Renée. "That's not a big deal. But I just didn't want my kids to be drawn into the violent gang mind."\textsuperscript{200} So the schools were out, and although as a "traditionalist" at heart, Rodney was more skeptical of homeschooling than Renée was,

\textsuperscript{195} Brooks, 14.
\textsuperscript{196} Brooks, 3.
\textsuperscript{197} Brooks, 9.
\textsuperscript{198} Brooks, 8.
\textsuperscript{199} Brooks, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{200} Brooks, 9.
the quality of the local schools offered them no other option. Their lack of confidence in public school education, was, of course, typical of homeschooling parents, even when the general public was somewhat more sanguine. It was the fear of a dreadful education -- social, moral, and academic -- that was the deciding factor in the Brookses' decision to homeschool.

As the Brooks children grew older and began to bring other neighborhood children over to play, Renée's initial concerns about the local schools were confirmed. Her neighbors' children were hardly learning to read, and what they did learn was often incorrect. As part of their ministry, the Brookses worked to make their home "the hub of the neighborhood," an alternative to the pull of gangs and other dangers and temptations, and she got to know a number of local children well. As another homeschooling mother living in a depressed Los Angeles neighborhood described her similar approach, "a lot of these kids, ninety percent of them, are broken kids, so our family is being a light to them." Renée insisted on clean language and respectful behavior and tried to provide as homey and secure a setting as possible. Her rules were strict and her incentives were powerful; as she explains, "if you don't like what I say, you go home, because I can get just as ghetto and just as angry and uptight as you can. But at my house

201 Brooks, 10.
202 See Gray, 61-75.
203 Brooks, 7.
204 Lydia Rivera (pseudonym), quoted in Kunzman, 41.
205 Brooks, 7.
[if you behave and get to stay], we're going to bake cookies." The Brookses deliberately sought to provide the neighborhood children with "a sense of stability and normalcy." Among homeschoolers, the Brookses were normal: few homeschoolers shared their African American race (about 10% of homeschoolers at the turn of the century were African American, compared to 15% of all American students), but they were almost all "like-minded" in terms of prioritizing academics and certain home activities. In their neighborhood, however, their way of life made them "different."

One of Renée's rules was that children who came over after school had to do their homework before they played, because "if I'm going to believe in education for my kids, I have to believe in education for your kids as well." In helping them, Renée had a distressing view into what happened in the classrooms they attended. When a young boy names Chris asked for help learning a spelling list that contained the misspelled word "folktail," for example, Renée sent his teacher a note pointing out the error (Chris's own mother, a Mexican immigrant, spoke no English, and was ill-equipped to either notice the problem or meet with the teacher). But the teacher sent a note back: "Don't you ever..."
correct me. Who do you think you are?” Seeing this sort of situation repeatedly through her children's friends strengthened Renée's resolve and increased her determination to be an excellent teacher herself. Once again, a homeschooling family discovered the vital importance of self-reliance in educating their children, but also saw clearly the need for education to be a community endeavor in one way or another.

Getting Together

Families like the Fortes, the Haggards, and the Brookses found themselves in a difficult if exciting situation. In homeschooling, they had found a solution to some of their problems, but that solution was such a new and uncommon one that they had to make up most of what they were doing as they went along. When California families ventured into homeschooling in the late 1970s and the 1980s, they were truly pioneers. Although it has always been very difficult to count the number of homeschooling families, both experience and statistics suggest that homeschooling was still highly unusual. For the 1985-1986 school year, for example, only 76 families had registered their home schools with Los Angeles County (although, since many families did not register, the actual number of homeschooling families was almost certainly higher): that's 76 families out of a county population of roughly 7.5 million individuals.

213 Brooks, 7.
214 Brooks, 7.
215 Larson, "Ultimate Exclusive School." 76 families registered private schools with fewer than five pupils, which suggests that they were in fact home schools (as the article notes).
Such estimates, even if low, underscore the isolation plaguing homeschoolers at the time. Of course, the newness of homeschooling could not be helped; but the difficulty of making connections was another matter, and one that significantly limited homeschoolers' options. Both the Fortes and the Haggards had stepped into homeschooling with the help of an acquaintance (and the Brookses would eventually rely on help from the Fortes), but it was difficult to expand their homeschooling circles any further, since they had no way of meeting other homeschoolers.

Even taking the rarity of homeschooling into account, the issue at the heart of this difficulty was less homeschoolers' numbers than it was concerns about their safety. Carolyn Forte was lucky: as a credentialed teacher, she qualified under California law as a private tutor and could homeschool her daughters legally from the beginning. For the same reason, she could seek out homeschooling opportunities with less (although she still professed some) concern about public notice. But many of the other homeschoolers to whom she began to reach out had no such security, and gathering together, as a 1982 Los Angeles Times reporter seeking out homeschooling playgroups, noted was "unusual. Home schoolers often are isolated and unknown even to one another because many fear prosecution." This was the case even in California, which in that year was estimated to

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have more homeschoolers than any other state, and indeed "twice as many as the next highest state (Texas)."²¹⁸

In fact, when Carolyn began looking for a homeschooling group, the closest one she came across was a good 45 minutes' drive away (when traffic was light), in the coastal town of Pacific Palisades. The group met in a park in play-date fashion to "just generally [have] a good time," playing and talking and occasionally banding together for activities or to hear a speaker.²¹⁹ The distance, however, was a problem, and when the Fortes' neighbors stopped being willing to make the drive after the first year, the Fortes lost their ride.²²⁰ So Carolyn and her neighbor decided to take matters into their own hands and found a playgroup in their own area. Using a directory from an issue of one of the few homeschooling publications available to them, John Holt's newsletter "Growing Without Schooling" (which they read "voraciously"²²¹), they were able to arrange to meet with four other San Gabriel Valley homeschooling families in Wilderness Park in Arcadia. (While later on homeschoolers might gravitate towards either the conservative Protestant newsletter "The Teaching Home" or the alternative "Home Education Magazine" when trying to find a homeschooling community, the smallness of the movement in the 1980's meant that homeschoolers like the Fortes tended to all use many of the same resources, whether to find one another or simply to learn about homeschooling.) Eventually calling themselves the San Gabriel Valley Christian Home

²¹⁸ L. Smith, "Home Schools."

²¹⁹ C. Forte, 2.

²²⁰ C. Forte, 2.

²²¹ C. Forte, 4.
Educators, these six families began to meet weekly at lovely Lacy Park in the small town of San Marino.\textsuperscript{222}

The Fortes soon discovered that the need for such a group was far greater than they had anticipated. Although their initial searching had only turned up only four other homeschooling families in the area, once the San Gabriel Valley group began meeting publicly in the park, other families surfaced rapidly. Over the next two years, the group grew dramatically, with about eighty families participating at various times in the park days. "It was amazing," recalls Carolyn. "It just grew so fast."\textsuperscript{223} As these new connections blossomed and still other connections grew through information from a newsletter that some other homeschooling friends, Philip and Evella Troutt, had begun to produce, the Fortes began to uncover a wider world of homeschooling that they had not known existed. Yet it remained an experimental, informal world. Without any structures in place, recalls Carolyn, "we all knew that we were experimenting with our children."\textsuperscript{224} The groups in the Troutts' newsletter were play groups, not academic ones, and the field trips were often just a visit to some homeschooling father's workplace.\textsuperscript{225} It was almost all free and informal.\textsuperscript{226} As homeschooling mother Debbie Palmer remembers, there was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{222} C. Forte, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{223} C. Forte, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{224} C. Forte, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{225} C. Forte, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{226} C. Forte, 3.
\end{itemize}
no certainty about homeschooling in the 1980s; no one knew if it was legal and hardly anyone knew how to do it. Essentially, "nobody knew anything."  

It should be no surprise, then, that homeschooling was often nerve-wracking, especially when a group of homeschoolers met in public. The San Gabriel Valley group had its share of scares. One day, the children were practicing a folk dance in the park during school hours when a news crew suddenly walked into the middle of their circle and began filming. No one knew what to do; to ask them to stop might call even more attention to the situation than allowing them to film. When the dance was over, the parents were informed that the film would be on the six o'clock news, and immediately thought, "Oh, my goodness, what's going to be said about us? Are we busted?" Luckily, nothing came of it, but the incident "just freaked us all out….you never knew if somebody was going to be hostile." While groups such as theirs made enormous strides towards ending families' isolation, getting together also increased individual families' chances of being found out by the wrong people.

Most of the San Gabriel families, however, felt that they had no choice but to homeschool in spite of the risks, and they were coming to feel that they could no longer do it in isolation. Their reasons for homeschooling were varied. Sometimes one of their children had been "more or less abused" emotionally at school, as was the case for one family in the group; some parents "wanted a Christian education" but could not afford

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227 Kunzman, 22.

228 C. Forte, 6.

229 C. Forte, 6.

230 C. Forte, 4.
private school tuition;\textsuperscript{231} sometimes it was simply a matter of the state-mandated
textbooks or popular teaching methods not working for a particular child.\textsuperscript{232}
Homeschooling, in spite of its dubious legality, seemed the only other option. Confronted
by these pressing needs, the families who met at Lacy Park banded together in spite of
their other differences, including, in particular, religious ones. Although Christians did
make up the bulk of the membership, they represented a number of Protestant
denominations and were joined by a few non-Christians and even atheists, as well.\textsuperscript{233} As
Carolyn remembers, even attendees who were in the midst of an intra-denominational
feud "kind of agreed to be peaceable [in] the park."\textsuperscript{234} The need to homeschool overrode
other disagreements, at least for the time being.

A few towns up and over, Mary-Mark Haggard had been making connections of
her own. Mary-Mark's circle was different from Carolyn's, however, in that most of her
homeschooling acquaintances were Roman Catholic. The Haggards made many of their
initial homeschooling connections at a Latin rite Sunday mass (Mary-Mark and the
children often attended church on weekdays, also).\textsuperscript{235} While still economically,
educationally, and to some degree racially diverse, the Catholic homeschoolers they met
were all on nearly exactly the same page theologically.\textsuperscript{236} Their regular participation in a

\textsuperscript{231} C. Forte, 4.
\textsuperscript{232} C. Forte, 12.
\textsuperscript{233} C. Forte, 3.
\textsuperscript{234} C. Forte, 3.
\textsuperscript{235} Haggard, 8, 10.
\textsuperscript{236} Haggard, 17, 18.
Latin (or "Tridentine") mass, highly unusual for the time (and sometimes even disallowed), suggests that for the most part, they were very devout, very liturgically and often socially conservative Catholics. Even when the Haggards began attending the ordinary mass at their local parish and met a wider variety of homeschooling Catholics, Haggard noted a strong moral commonality among them in spite of their differences: "the only way they're not diverse is morally."

However diverse the Haggards' circle was in other ways, this moral and religious unanimity reflected the primacy of faith and morality in their decisions to homeschool. The Haggards and their Catholic friends made the choice to homeschool for many of the same reasons that the Fortes' more diverse acquaintances did, but their experience highlights the predominance of religious reasons to many homeschoolers' choices at the time. For the Catholics the Haggards knew, public schools had become so at odds with central Catholic moral teachings that a public education would be morally and spiritually dangerous to their children; and to compound the problem, even Catholic schools were either also morally dubious or financially and geographically out of reach.

Or to put it more precisely, the public who supported and attended the public schools seemed to have become at odds with Catholic teaching. One main issue was, again, contraception. While contraceptives of various sorts have been in use for thousands of years, Christian churches nearly unanimously decried the practice until the

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237 The Latin or Tridentine rite is the version of the Mass that was commonly used before the Second Vatican Council. The immediately noticeable differences between the Latin and the newer, "Novus Ordo" version are that the older form is said in Latin (rather than in the local language) with the priest facing away from the assembly and that the altar servers, rather than the assembly, speak the responses included in the mass. The Latin rite remains valid, but until recently required special permission in order to be used.

238 Haggard, 17.
twentieth century, as did most religions, and the use of contraceptives was not an assumed part of the sexual relationship in America until the second half of that century. While many Protestant churches, in particular, had come to accept contraceptive behavior as a regrettable but sometimes necessary action in the years following the Anglican Lambeth Conference of 1930, it was only following the introduction of the birth control pill in 1960 and the sexual revolution of the following decade that use of contraception became a socially accepted norm (even though actual use of contraceptives was relatively common among non-Catholics as early as the 1920s and Catholics by the 1950s). The Catholic Church continued, however, to teach that the use of contraceptives was usually sinful. By the 1980s, the overwhelming majority of American Catholic adults had come to side in their behavior with non-Catholic Americans on the issue, and a great majority of Catholic women reported having used contraception at some time.

The effect of this change on traditionally observant Catholics such as the Haggards was to situate them within a minority whom other Americans considered "fringe" in this respect. Yet Catholic teaching, along with the personal opinions of many in this group, saw contraception as insidious, affecting far more than the private sexual life of individuals. As average family size dwindled, it became apparent to Mary-Mark and her friends that most of the families at the local public school used contraceptives, and they worried about the wider effect that that community might have on their...

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children.\textsuperscript{240} Perhaps more urgently, even, Mary-Mark worried that she and her children would be unpopular because of their differing beliefs; as she admits, 'I don't fit well with people like that….and they usually don't like me very much. And I totally understand that, because I have a very big mouth!'\textsuperscript{241} Associating mostly with other conservative Catholics helped keep the peace, even though it took some effort.\textsuperscript{242}

Meanwhile, the Brookses, too, were reaching out to try to build more of a community of homeschoolers for their children. Renée and Rodney had made a decision to try to make their home a center for neighborhood children during after-school hours, but that did not mean that they wished to isolate their children between 8 and 3 o'clock. Like most homeschoolers, they did not understand themselves as anti-social. Renée began looking for other homeschoolers early on, setting up playdates here or there and participating in a playgroup in the distant (at least at rush hour) South Bay region of Los Angeles. It was not until later that the Brookses became more heavily involved in homeschooling groups, however; as Renée explains it, because of the worries of being caught, all of their organized activities at the time were "kind of 'quasi'….we organized, but not really, just in case there was a problem."\textsuperscript{243} It was only after the eldest Brooks child was old enough to attend community college part-time, in the late 1990s, that the family fully came out of the woodwork as homeschoolers, having met a "former public

\textsuperscript{240} Haggard, 16.
\textsuperscript{241} Haggard, 16-17.
\textsuperscript{242} Haggard, 17.
\textsuperscript{243} Brooks, 6.
school teacher" -- Carolyn Forte -- who was "making it all legal and making sure everything was on the up and up." The Brookses then joined the Fortes' EIE Academy.

Control, Legality, and Formal Organization

It seemed clear in the 1980s that moral and academic factors were usually the most important reasons to homeschool. But homeschooling families usually developed additional reasons as they grew in knowledge and experience, often shifting their emphasis from "reactive to proactive rationales" over time. Many families rejoiced in getting to know their children better than they believed they would have had the children been away at school for several hours each day. They enjoyed their children and did not "want to turn them over to the care of others no matter how well intended or competent those others may be." Homeschooling strengthened family unity. Homeschooling parents also found that they also had more opportunity to identify and adjust to each child's talents and challenges than a schoolteacher might: "almost to a parent," one researcher described when looking back on his interviews with homeschoolers, "they complain about the standardization of instruction in conventional schools." As they read widely in order to prepare to teach their children, some parents even embraced physiological reasons for homeschooling: learning to read too early, some came to

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244 Brooks, 6.

245 Murphy, 80.

246 Murphy, 99.

247 Gray, vii.

248 Stevens, 18.
believe, could overstrain children's eyes (as Raymond and Dorothy Moore argued) but early reading is the hallmark of normative school success. As one Los Angeles homeschooling father explained,

…we felt that children are not developmentally ready to learn [to read] until they are about eight or ten….You put a child in class at age five or six and let him read, he may have problems and may be labeled a slapstick….and the child gets a self image that something is wrong with me….that is a big factor…249

At home, children could learn through play for the first two or three years, if a parent so desired, and avoid reading or another academic activity until the parents judged them ready. Homeschooled children could also engage in far more physical activity than they could on any given day at a normative school, if the family took care to make time for it. They could go on more field trips, too, and parents could adapt the school schedule day-by-day to their family's needs and personality. Many families found that they could even manage to complete all of their schoolwork for the day in just three or four hours, leaving extra time for other activities.250

Most of all, however, the decision to homeschool and to continue homeschooling came down to the question of control. The Brookses, the Haggards, the Fortes, and others turned to homeschooling because they found themselves unable to effectively influence what their children might encounter in normative schools. Try as they might, they could not convince schools to adjust to fit the needs of their children as they perceived them. While homeschooling families have many different educational needs, they do not believe that any of these can be met unless parents have primary authority within the educational environment (even when, as in radical unschooling, they use that authority

249 Gray, 81.

250 M. Forte, 7.
mainly to remove restrictions rather than refashion them). Control, as Joseph Murphy has written, "is the foundation that informs all other motives. It is the vehicle to meet other goals -- for example, to impart cherished values or to protect children from social harm." Parental, rather than communal, expert, or government, authority is the one essential of modern homeschooling, and perhaps its most distinctive hallmark.

The problem was that parental authority was becoming more and more unimportant in most normative schools and especially in school systems. This is not to suggest that all schools were unresponsive to parents, or even that they should have been. But by the 1980s, the days when a single neighborhood supported and, to some degree, directed the norms at its local school had vanished. Teachers, for good or for ill, had the power to be unresponsive, as Renée Brooks found out. Tenure, the strengthening of teacher's unions, and increased bureaucracy all served to isolate teachers from the reach of their communities, whatever good they may have done otherwise. To complicate matters further, teachers themselves were gradually losing autonomy within their classrooms as state and national government weighed in more and more heavily on educational matters. Earlier in the century, Progressive educators had pressed teachers to be responsible for an enormous amount of creativity and control in the classroom, even down to creating their own textbooks for each course; but in the Cold War era curricula, methods, and assessment (standardized testing) were all increasingly managed at the state level, leaving teachers with fewer options for addressing distinctive classroom situations. School systems and departments of education could block both teachers and parents who wanted to take a more active role in schooling, as the Williamses of Oak Meadow had

251 Murphy, 77.
discovered. Cities could, as Carolyn Forte knew, thwart the efforts of dedicated educators to do something as simple as encourage their students to borrow books from their local library. And even religious schools could stray from faith teachings in an effort to keep up with the educational Joneses, as Mary-Mark Haggard learned to her dismay. It seemed to homeschooling families that the best way to avoid falling prey to this high-level control was to side-step normative schooling altogether.

As Martin Forte put it, homeschoolers came to believe that to get anywhere educationally, "you've got to believe in the freedom of the family to do what they want," even if that sometimes means allowing other families to make choices that seem bizarre.\footnote{M. Forte, 14.} The anti-institutional, mistrustful nature of homeschooling lay in the growing gulf between the wider public (and its institutions) and homeschooling families. This tension led most homeschooling families to feel forced into their decision to homeschool, however exciting and welcome the decision might be. Meanwhile, the still-threatening legal situation made this path even more challenging. Since homeschooling was not an explicitly approved option under California law, homeschoolers had to find ways to protect themselves from falling afoul of truant officers. At the beginning of this period, there were three main ways to do this. First, a parent who happened to have (or could earn) a California teaching credential relevant to the ages of their children could openly teach their own children under a legal provision for "tutors." Carolyn Forte was one such parent. Second, parents could take advantage of the near-total unregulation of private schooling in the state to technically legalize their teaching. By filling out a form, parents...
could instantly create a private school in their home for their children. Third, parent could simply not enroll their children anywhere and see what happened.

Surprisingly, the second, private school option did not require a parental teaching certificate. The loophole was dumbfounding; as Lawrence Williams exclaimed in disbelief to a Department of Education official in 1974, "You mean I'm not qualified to teach my own children [at home], but I'm qualified to teach a whole school full of children?" There were many requirements for public school teachers, but not for private ones: while Nancy Josefosky, a San Diego mother whose son Fred hated his public elementary school, had little control over his public schooling, she was able to have total control once she created the Frederick School in the family den. "We have very strict entrance requirements at this school," Mrs. Josefosky quipped to a reporter in 1983. "You have to be a member of the family." Yet many educational officials remained unsatisfied that the private school regulations should be applicable to such scenarios, and Los Angeles County districts were known as "relatively aggressive" against such arrangements, as the Los Angeles Times reported in 1984. As Kim Ujita, who was in charge of private school affidavits for the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1984, described at the time, "when we receive a copy of the affidavits from the county, we visit those schools with lower enrollment and talk to the person in charge to

253 Williams, "Oak Meadow."

254 Robert Montemayor, "Parents Turn to Private Schools -- in Their Homes," Los Angeles Times, September 6, 1983.

255 Montemayor, "Parents Turn."

256 Montemayor, "Parents Turn."

see if it is a bona fide school or not….If we see the school is being held in the parents own home and they are teaching their own children, then they are in violation of the compulsory education laws.” The third option -- covert homeschooling -- was even riskier, but many parents hoped that by not informing the authorities about their home school, they would have a better chance of not attracting trouble. And school districts did often fail to notice, a phenomenon which was in itself illustrative of the growing distance between families and school systems. But the fallout from being noticed could be great.

The comment of a Department of Education administrator in neighboring Orange County in 1982 sums up official opinions of homeschooling succinctly: "'I think it's illegal and if a parent is taken to court on it, they're going to lose.'" Most homeschoolers were more optimistic about the legality of their actions, yet they were placing their bets not on clear-cut statutes, but rather on what Milton Gaither calls "creative interpretations" of state law. While they believed their actions would hold up in court, an investigation, whether by a school principal who noticed children who were not enrolled, a truancy officer tipped off by a neighbor, or a district attorney could ruin a family emotionally and financially. Child Protective Services could become involved; parents could be arrested; children could be traumatized, even taken away. They could certainly at least be ordered back to a regular school. To homeschool in the legal and social climate of this period was at some level an inherently unnerving experience.

258 Thiesen, "Teaching by Mothers."

259 L. Smith, "Home Schools."

260 Gaither, 176.
Although this fear of government intervention was widespread among homeschoolers, some observers have emphasized that most homeschooling families never actually got into any legal trouble or even any trouble with a school district. But even without most families personally going to court, more common minor tussles with officials or with the law, or even just close calls with neighbors, understandably alarmed homeschooling parents. With many school board officials operating under the assumption, as the Los Angeles Times noted in 1984 that "home schools in general are in violation of state compulsory education regulations" -- whether or not that was in fact the case -- some registered home private schools did come under investigation, especially in "aggressive" Los Angeles County.261 And some homeschoolers' neighbors, whether irate or genuinely concerned, really did turn in families to the local public school district. In one example, the Whittier City School District brought parents Eddie and Sheila Merrill to court after the Merrills' neighbors reported that they had seen the Merrill children playing at home during school hours, even though the Merrills had properly filed an affidavit with the state for their home school.262 (The charges were dropped after the family enrolled their children in a slightly more official "tutorial system" school nearby.)263 Whether or not they themselves were at a high risk of being investigated, families took such examples seriously. Knowing of such an ordeal was enough to bring the concern home to any homeschooling parent. Even credentialed teachers such as Carolyn Forte, who were undeniably homeschooling legally, worried that they might

261 Thiesen, "Teaching by Mothers."
262 Thiesen, "Teaching by Mothers."
263 Thiesen, "Teaching by Mothers."
come under investigation: "I knew that even though I was a teacher they could attempt to
attack and I would have to spend money to defend myself. So we all stayed under the
radar."\textsuperscript{264}

This effort to stay out of sight provides strong evidence that the fear of
government intervention into a homeschooling family's life affected homeschooling in
spite of the relative infrequency of actual legal proceedings. Carolyn and other
homeschoolers like her were very careful about allowing their children to be seen in their
own town during school hours: the Fortes never used the Monrovia public library during
the day, for example, instead traveling to libraries in other cities, where they were
unlikely to be recognized.\textsuperscript{265} Almost anyone could criticize a homeschooler at anytime --
"school officials…store checkout clerks, talk show hosts, and wary relatives," among
others -- and while most would simply be irritating or at worst disheartening, it only took
one to make a report to the school district.\textsuperscript{266} With such potentialities around every
corner, many homeschoolers even drove to another town to buy their groceries when their
children were in tow during school hours, just to avoid being noticed at their
neighborhood store.\textsuperscript{267} Even as the situation and the overall comfort level improved over
time in the following decades, the fear behind such actions remained easily triggered; in
fact, when I began interviewing homeschoolers thirty years later, a handful of
homeschooling playgroup leaders refused to speak with me because of a recent rumor

\textsuperscript{264} C. Forte, 5.

\textsuperscript{265} C. Forte, 5.

\textsuperscript{266} Stevens, 32.

\textsuperscript{267} C. Forte, 5.
that Child Protective Service agents were trying to enter homeschoolers' homes by posing as harmless interviewers. Yet the difference over time is still monumental: unlike in the 1980s, most homeschooling families visited by a CPS or truant officer in 2010 would have had the law clearly behind them: "when they come to the door….they don't have any right to come in; you are enrolled in a private school."268

The homeschooling option, therefore, was not a secure one. Homeschooling parents found themselves between a rock and a hard place: most felt that they had no choice but to homeschool, but the choice to homeschool entailed significant risk. In trying to protect their children from what they, for whatever reason, believed was a harmful public school education, these parents found themselves exposing their families to other threats, instead.

In response, as homeschooling grew and more homeschoolers in the region came to know one another, homeschooling parents and advocates began to develop a fourth way to protect their families and their choices legally: they began to organize, to link themselves together in more official ways in order to protect and support one another. By formalizing their relationships with one another, they benefited from safety in numbers, but they also created new and innovative structures that legitimized homeschooling but still maintained direct control over their children's education.

Rather than creating their own in-home private schools and hoping for the best, one way in which homeschoolers achieved this creative formalization was to establish exterior school-like entities that would, by providing some (often quite small) level of guidance, be able to officially enroll homeschooling children even if they lived far away

268 Rivera, quoted in Kunzman, 47.
and were taught almost exclusively by their parents. The Williamses' school, Oak
Meadow was one such institution. While the Williamses' efforts had begun in the late
1970s, it was the 1980s that saw the first real blossoming of this approach. California saw
particular growth in this area -- in 1986, for example, Philip and Evella Troutt, early
members of the San Gabriel Valley Group, founded Keystone Academy, still a major
independent study resource for Southern Californians and others -- but leading
homeschooling schools around the county, such as the enormously successful Seton
Home Study School (a Catholic program founded in Virginia in 1980) also trace their
origins to this period. Now parents could homeschool while also telling their local Board
of Education that their children were officially enrolled in a school outside the home.
This provided a major boost in security for homeschooling families, since it was the
school, and not individual families, that assumed the risk of being misunderstood,
challenged, or otherwise investigated by the state.

In many cases, it was a threat to just one or two families that prompted the
formation of broader new connections and even new schools. Although she and Martin
did not establish their store and school, EIE, until 1991, Carolyn Forte first branched out
beyond her own children because the Monrovia schools began threatening two
homeschooling friends of hers.269 They had the misfortune to live near public schools,
which made it easy for other parents and for school employees to notice that their
children were not enrolled. Both families were instructed to enroll their children by the
time they turned six years old. Since both children were currently five, they needed a
legal solution fast. So Oak Meadow, in contact with the parents, signed Carolyn up as a

269 C. Forte, 5.
"local teacher," allowing her to use her credential to protect her friends.\textsuperscript{270} The parents still did most of the teaching, but they never encountered any problems with the school district again.\textsuperscript{271} Such options allowed parents to maintain near-total control over their children's education without having to isolate themselves. Since it was lack of control over the content, teaching, and ethos of the public schools (and in some cases, such as that of conservative Catholics like the Haggards, private schools, as well) that initiated so much of homeschooling, this approach created a much more stable environment for those who chose to homeschool than simply going it alone.

Oak Meadow and programs like it also offered a solution to another problem that made homeschooling a particularly difficult endeavor: the bewilderment many parents felt when trying to come up with an entire curriculum and teaching style for each of one's children. Of course, it was an exciting problem in many ways, one which allowed parents to read and experiment and tailor their teaching to their children's needs. But it was also an object of dread for many a young mother who might well be nursing a baby, chasing a toddler, folding laundry, making a grocery list, \textit{and} trying to teach both kindergarten and third grade all in one morning. Some homeschoolers solved this problem by buying the textbooks used in the local schools (although they often abandoned this approach quickly, as it did not differ sufficiently from normal schooling). Others made up their own curriculum, drawing from library books, their own schooling experiences, and a large dose of ingenuity. Schools like Oak Meadow and Seton, however, offered an even easier solution by completely removing the burden of devising curriculum from parents' responsibilities.

\textsuperscript{270} C. Forte, 5.

\textsuperscript{271} C. Forte, 5.
shoulders. Yet they did so without requiring that parents stifle their own creativity about teaching their children; parents could still supplement and, to a certain extent, adjust the curriculum. More importantly, however, parents could choose a school based on its curricular approach in the first place, a freedom they usually did not have within a public school system.

Meanwhile, other homeschooling curriculum providers, such as the Christian publisher A Beka and the (also Christian) Midwestern Advanced Training Institute of America (ATIA), were also beginning to catch onto the rising tide of homeschooling. Whether freestanding, part of a larger press, or blurring the lines between school and publisher (as in the cases of both Seton and the ATIA), these resources gave homeschooling parents the guidelines they needed to make sure their children would not fall behind. The investment was small -- only $400 for the Osmanson family of Santa Clarita, for example, who homeschooled using the ATIA curriculum in 1986 -- but the return was large. Homeschoolers were also increasingly turning to educational history for curricular and pedagogical inspiration, seeking out educational methods that seemed particularly suited to homeschooling. These include everything from rigidly structured classical models to the great books, home-centered Charlotte Mason approach (based on the ideas of a British educator) to the highly unstructured philosophy of unschooling.

This same tension between the two basic homeschooling needs of legal protection and support or resources was also behind the dramatic growth this period of the simplest of homeschooling organizations, play- and park groups. For example, the Fortes' early

272 Now the Advanced Training Institute International.

273 Larson, "Ultimate Exclusive School."
attendance at the Pacific Palisades group led them to found their own San Gabriel Valley group, which in turn led to an explosion of new connections between San Gabriel Valley homeschoolers. The growth in such groups, which were difficult to find in 1975 but common by 1990, was exponential. In fact, by the time the Forteses founded EIE the original San Gabriel group had split into a handful of independent groups, so that now there were five or six options where there had once been only one.274 Of course, there was some loss in this, as the diverse original group had "sort of disappeared" into these new ones.275 But broader organizations that once again united diverse homeschooler were on the horizon in 1990, including EIE. Both Renée Brooks and Mary-Mark Haggard would also later turn to diverse organizations to supplement their park and playgroups and to buoy up their spirits.

However much social and strategic support park and playgroups offered their members, however, the question of legality was still not completely resolved. And although signing up with a registered school such as Oak Meadow could lessen the chances of a tussle with a school district -- or worse, a district attorney -- homeschoolers did not have any means of representation on a larger scale. While small-scale solutions like distance-learning schools and local playgroups eased the pressure both to operate under the radar and to create and teach a full curriculum by oneself (while also changing a diaper), they did not solve the larger problem. Homeschooling families still had nowhere to go if they did happen, in spite of these safeguards, to fall under suspicion or

274 C. Forte, 3.

275 C. Forte, 3.
investigation. The law was still unclear; the neighbors were still suspicious; and the costs, financial and familial, of a legal battle were still tremendous.

Homeschoolers around the country were finding that without organized legal defense, any charge mounted against them had the potential to nearly ruin them, whether or not they were actually operating legally. The famous 1972 Supreme Court case Wisconsin v. Yoder, in which the Court ruled that Amish parents could "provide continuing informal vocational education" to their young teenagers at home rather than sending them to high school, both illustrated the costs of tangling with compulsory education laws and the potential that courts might eventually clarify the ability of legislatures to restrict families who pursued unusual educational paths.276 The court's final decision that state compulsory education laws must be "balanced" against the freedom of religion provided by the First Amendment opened the door for homeschoolers of various types who had religious or even merely conscience objections to sending their children to school.277 Remarkably, the court even held that in at least this case, "forgoing one or two additional years of compulsory education" would neither harm the children in question nor "materially detract from the welfare of society."278 Amish children who were effectively homeschooled after the eighth grade could still be responsible citizens.279 Yet Amish fathers had had to go to prison -- telling their children first to run into the woods if the truant officers came to their homes -- and their families to court in


277 Wisconsin v. Yoder, 1.

278 Wisconsin v. Yoder, 2.

279 Wisconsin v. Yoder, 2.
order to reach the point of taking this step without fear of prosecution. The fight, though eventually won, was devastating to families and indicated the widening gulf between the Amish and their neighbors, with whom they had once shared ideas of schooling in common. In fact, as late as twenty years before the Yoder decision, Amish and non-Amish children in many rural communities had customarily attended the same public community school; so dramatically has the consensus about what schooling should be like fragmented that the idea is now almost unthinkable, even if public schools were to abandon their computers and digital white boards.

In terms of Yoder's effects for homeschoolers, however, as Milton Gaither notes in his review of homeschooling law, in the decision the Justices explicitly expressed doubt that the Amish exemption could be extended to many other religious groups. The Court seemed to be convinced by the particularities of the Amish situation rather than by any argument that any parent should be able to sidestep compulsory schooling laws for religious reasons. The situation for homeschoolers remained open to interpretation.

As homeschoolers' numbers grew over the course of the 1980s, so did the number of court cases against them across the country, notably in Minnesota, Indiana, Michigan, North Carolina, Texas, and California, gaining public attention while draining the affected family's resources. In 1986, a major California case, People v. Darrah and Black, et al, in Santa Maria ruled that the Education Code was too vague to be enforced

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280 Gaither, 178.
regarding homeschooling. Like *Yoder*, however, this case and the numerous other less-prominent ones heard in California in the 1980s have been largely seen as too specific to a single family's situation to settle the issue of homeschooling more generally. Though the fire was fanned, the legal situation remained unresolved.

On the other hand, as sociologist Mitchell Stevens points out, in the 1980s American homeschoolers did operate in a better "legal context" than they might have in another nation; Stevens goes as far as to call that context "favorable to their cause." Although American schooling was becoming increasingly centralized, it still was a far more locally-controlled affair than education in any other Western country. In most European countries, for example, educational laws are so well-defined, and national, that courts would be hard-pressed to even entertain the idea of legal homeschooling. This distinctive American environment made it possible for homeschoolers to fight legal battles and even, eventually to win. Yet this "favorability" should not diminish recognition of the familial, financial, and emotional costs of such battles, costs which caused most homeschoolers to shy away from the light. For most families, the reality was that if they ran afoul of a truant officer or an unsympathetic judge, there was simply no "low-cost method of obtaining quality legal defense" available, and even when the money was there, the support might not be. With these risks hanging over homeschoolers, living in the gray was uncomfortable and often frightening.


282 Stevens, 6.

One homeschooling father who recognized this problem was J. Michael Smith, a Santa Monica attorney whose family began homeschooling in 1981. Smith was working closely with an upstart homeschool association that was officially founded in 1982 by the Fortes' friends Philip and Evella Troutt. The Christian Home Educators Association of California (CHEA) sought to fill the informational, experiential, and spiritual void that homeschoolers experienced in the state. CHEA's founders were keenly aware of the threats homeschooling families encountered and, by designing their organization as a Christian ministry, set out not only to help parents homeschool, but to help them do so within a secularizing nation as a "God-given right." Soon developing a pattern of hosting two conferences a year (one in Northern California and one in Southern), CHEA's membership grew steadily, providing both practical help and a sense of protection to its members. For Christians, in particular, CHEA conferences became a yearly gathering place that provided practical (including curricular) and moral support.

CHEA itself, however, could not provide the sort of legal protection and expertise that an attorney such as Mike Smith could. So when another attorney and homeschooling parent, Michael Farris, approached one of the CHEA founders for a recommendation of another like-minded attorney, his contact enthusiastically recommended Smith. Drawing on their cares as homeschooling fathers and their legal expertise, together Smith


and Farris founded the home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) in March of 1983.  

The idea was simple, but revolutionary for the homeschooling movement: the HSLDA would provide a lawyer immediately and at no charge to any paying member. In doing so, the organization would not only offer protection to families in need but would also take on much of the task of chipping away at educational codes around the country until homeschooling would be uncontrovertibly legal in all 50 states. Numbering about 200 families at the end of its first year, the organization grew steadily and across political and religious boundaries (though dominated by conservative Christians) and by the spring of 1987 boasted over 3500 members, about one third of whom were Californians. Establishing firmer headquarters in Virginia, where they both now lived, in that year Smith and Farris also were finally able to work full-time themselves at HSLDA. With lawyers in place and a growing membership, the HSLDA began to work on solving the fear that, as the organization's first full-time lawyer, Christopher Klicka remembers, was the primary characteristic of the homeschooling movement in the early 1980s.  

It would be difficult to exaggerate the change that HSLDA membership bought to the security of its early members. As Angelenos Alan and Priscilla Bartlett (pseudonyms), who began homeschooling in 1982 and later headed a thriving

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289 "Marking the Milestones."

290 "Marking the Milestones."
homeschool academy in the area, note, if it were not been for HSLDA, "everything in California would be different, because the fact that homeschoolers could [now] say "call my attorney" made all the difference in the world."291 The HSLDA provided one of the most successful safeguards against the legal dangers of homeschooling in the 1980s, winning many of its cases and contributing to the slow shift towards stability for homeschooling in the last half of the decade. As a result, in the 1990s, HSLDA would see such dramatic growth in its membership that by 2000, the majority of American homeschoolers -- no matter their religious, political, social, or pedagogical characteristics -- were members. The HSLDA's simple system of providing lawyers to homeschoolers at the drop of the hat enabled families to continue to homeschool in spite of the lack of legal clarity that still surrounded the practice in California and elsewhere. Furthermore, each case that an HSLDA lawyer took on brought homeschooling one step closer to a more formalized, secure legal status in all fifty states.

In conjunction with the legal protection provided through HSLDA, solutions ranging from distance-learning private schools to park groups developed out of the tensions of the late 1970s and the 1980s in order to prevent the even more likely burnout of the movement from simple lack of support. In Los Angeles County, homeschoolers like the Haggards, the Fortes, and the Brookses found themselves banding together in all number of creative ways to help one another with the practical and philosophical problems of, as John Holt put it, teaching your own. Both these local relationships and CHEA's major influence on many Christian homeschoolers brought isolated families together in an environment that also conveniently presented them with social, curricular,

spiritual, and legal options that they could tailor to meet their own family's needs. Homeschooling had by no means become easy, but it was also no longer quite so lonely.

Between 1975 and 1989, homeschoolers in Los Angeles creatively transformed the resources and environment within their movement in order to ensure its survival into the next decade. As homeschooling became even more visible and more accessible in the 1990s, however, rising in numbers alone from 10,000 or 15,000 homeschooled American children to over a quarter of a million by the end of the period, both homeschooling itself and its relationship to the more usual American patterns of education changed in surprising ways.292 As homeschoolers became more adept at operating within the system, they developed ways of educating their children that began to look like they might not be homeschooling at all -- but then, what were they? The next chapter will examine Southern California homeschoolers' experiences at the forefront of these changes and how both homeschoolers and the type of education they practiced would look radically different by the time they entered the new millennium.

CHAPTER 3

LEAVING HOME: 1990-1999

Edward Miank did not like middle school. He was good at sports, which made him popular for awhile, but he was also good at geography. Really good. Third place in geography in the entire state of Oregon!

It was a terrible middle school sin. "And then the bullying began," remembers his mother, Karen. "And it was very hard."293 Luckily for Edward, his family was about to move back to Southern California, where he had been born and had lived until the previous year. The only problem was that there was still a month left of school before the family would move. A month left of being picked on for being smart.

If it had been even just a few years earlier, a child like Edward would have had to grit his teeth and just wait that month out. But in 1993 and in the Miank family, Edward did not have to just suffer. Instead, his parents decided to homeschool him for a month. Karen had some friends in California who homeschooled, and they liked it, so why not

give it a try, she thought, just to make the last month in Oregon a little better? "And the next year," the Mianks planned, "we'll put them in school."\textsuperscript{294}

In the end, however, homeschooling "was so much fun" that they just "decided to stay with it."\textsuperscript{295} Edward never went back to school, and his two younger siblings, Geoffrey and Alice, never darkened the door of a school at all. According to one study, roughly 50\% of Los Angeles homeschoolers at the time were like Edward: former normative schoolchildren whose parents had removed them from their schools, often because of a "straw that broke the camel's back," such as the bullying Edward suffered. The other half, including Geoffrey and Alice, were homeschooling natives.\textsuperscript{296}

According to one estimate, when Edward left middle school in 1993 he was joining close to one million other American children who were already being homeschooled.\textsuperscript{297} This did not mean that homeschooling was easy, however "fun" it may have been, but beginning to homeschool in the 1990s was quite a different experience from doing so in previous decades. Karen Miank was not arrested for removing her children from school, as Mary Turner was when she began homeschooling in the 1950s. Karen's husband David did not hear about homeschooling for the first time from a stray magazine article, as Martin Forte did in the 1980s. The Mianks did not have to call up that one strange acquaintance whose children never seemed to be in school and ask what magic she was brewing to keep them out. Instead, their family already knew a handful of

\textsuperscript{294} Miank, 5.

\textsuperscript{295} Miank, 5.

\textsuperscript{296} Gray, 78.

homeschoolers, and when they returned to Irvine, California, there was already a homeschooling group ready and waiting for them to join, St. Michael the Archangel. When they relocated again soon after to the city of Alhambra, in the heart of Los Angeles County, they joined a homeschooling group, Christ the King, that had already been active for seven years.

To begin homeschooling in the 1990s was to join a movement, not to start one. Philip Troutt, head of the influential Christian Home Educators Association of California (CHEA), estimated that 100,000 young Californians were homeschooled in 1994. A 1995 estimate put the national number at close to 1 million. By mid-decade, the number of homeschooling families (not individual students) in Los Angeles County alone was at least 250, but more likely over 500. In addition, the state of California had 6,000 registered private schools that it suspected were in fact home schools in the 1993-1994 school year; and this figure only includes those home schools actually submitting affidavits. By the 1990s homeschoolers who did not officially register or enroll in some way "usually suffer[ed] little or no consequence" for their failure to register.

Most new homeschoolers in this period found a welcome amount of structure and support for homeschoolers in their area. As I argued in the last chapter, homeschooling survived between 1975 and 1989 because pioneering families in that period developed

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298 Diane Tegarden, "All the World's a Classroom," Pasadena Weekly (September 2, 1994).
299 Means, "Learning at Home."
301 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
302 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
new and safer ways to meet one another, support one another, and exchange ideas and information. In other words, they began to organize for their mutual benefit. But it was in the 1990s that the playgroups and associations that Southern California families had initiated in the previous fifteen years transformed into something resembling a structured, publicly recognized social movement.

Between 1990 and 1999, homeschooling developed from a fringe approach that relied on shaky associations for a shred of legitimacy to a public opportunity based on an impressive network of locally-based organizations. Homeschooling grew stronger over the course of the decade as it began to invite individuals and institutions outside of the family back into its children's education, providing for an easier, more accessible, and publicly recognizable method of schooling.

Homeschoolers in the 1990s were not mainstream, of course; they still had to worry about being socially shunned and their legal status was still uncertain. They also did not all get along with one another; divisions over religion and ideology prompted the development of competing factions, a phenomenon that I will discuss in the next chapter. But by building on the work of homeschoolers that had gone before, homeschooling grew in numbers, in support, and in safety over the course of the 1990s. As they did so, they also grew in visibility, in public acceptance, and in infrastructure. As one homeschooling mother, Terri MacQuarrie, remembers, the beginning of the 1990s was "the end of the
dark ages...the end of the underground movement. Yet it was still difficult, but it was possible to continue because homeschooling families no longer felt so alone.

Yet as they increased their investment in homeschooling groups and organizations, homeschoolers in the 1990s gave some of the power over their children's education back to influences outside of the family. The 1990s saw homeschooling change from an isolated family endeavor to a vibrantly social one as homeschoolers entrusted more and more of their children's education to communities outside of the family alone.

To discuss and analyze these developments, I will address how homeschoolers involved wider communities in two general areas. First, I will discuss how homeschoolers reached outside of the family to help provide an academic education that was (in their opinion) intellectually and morally more appropriate for their children than what local schools offered. Second, I will examine homeschoolers' efforts to socialize their children -- in the words of Karen Miank, to teach them "how to get together and have fun" -- without exposing them to what they saw as negative influences.

Academics for the Whole Child

One morning when she was sixteen, homeschooler Skylar Lenox was dropping off a friend at a local high school when she decided to park and go inside for just a few moments to meet some of her companion's school friends. The introductions were made, the bell rang, and Skylar was prepared to leave. But a school official stopped her.

303 Terri MacQuarrie, interview by author, Mishawaka, IN and Pasadena, CA, July 15, 2011, transcript, author's collection, 11.

304 MacQuarrie, 11.

305 Miank, 7.
"No, you can't leave. You're a student here."

"No, I'm not," said Skylar.

Unsurprisingly, the official didn't buy it. But Skylar had no immediate way to prove she was not a student. As she remembers, "I realized that it was going to be a bigger deal...to say that I wasn't a student than to follow my friend around in school all day." So that's what she did; until she got bored, at which time she "ended up climbing up the chicken wire fence and escaping."306

Homeschooled since kindergarten, that morning was the first time Skylar had attended an ordinary high school class. She had been taking courses at a local community college since eighth grade, but had skipped over the "high school experience," as she calls it, altogether.307 While "other people had to take the prescribed course loads" at their schools, Skylar loaded up on college classes that interested her.308 She joined the college diving team and worked for the college newspaper. At 17, she had an impressive enough transcript to allow her to transfer to U.C. Santa Cruz; having earned most of her lower-division credits while still at the community college, she graduated from Santa Cruz at the age of 19. And she did all of this in spite of -- or perhaps, she might in fact say, because of -- living with severe Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder as well as other significant learning challenges.309

307 Lenox, 5.
308 Lenox, 3.
309 Lenox, 12.
Skylar's experiences exemplify one of the obvious strengths of homeschooling, the flexibility that allows parents and students to tailor schooling to a particular child's needs -- if the parents have the funds, time, and creativity to meet that challenge, of course. (The obvious flip side of all this flexibility is that a child's academic education can also end up being "haphazard" or even neglected in favor of other priorities.\textsuperscript{310}) Educator Robert Kunzman has noted that in recognizing that "the educational process is first and foremost about their child's individual learning needs," homeschoolers saw that process as extending "well beyond traditional school standards, structures, and schedules."\textsuperscript{311} At first this meant operating in opposition to traditional schooling; but as relations warmed between homeschoolers and the wider public, homeschoolers began to look toward public resources to support their efforts to educate their children while still eschewing those aspects of traditional schooling that would be, in their opinion, counterproductive. In this vein, for example, homeschooling enabled Skylar and her parents to play to her intellectual strengths without drawing unnecessary attention to her ADHD, which they suspected but was not officially diagnosed until her last year at U.C. Santa Cruz.\textsuperscript{312} (In fact, when she finally saw a psychologist, the doctor told Skylar that most students with her range and severity of learning disabilities never graduate high school, let alone college.\textsuperscript{313}) They were able to do so not just because of their own

\textsuperscript{310} Kunzman, 53.

\textsuperscript{311} Kunzman, 6.

\textsuperscript{312} Lenox, 12.

\textsuperscript{313} Lenox, 12.
determination and beliefs, but also because they were able to incorporate resources and communities outside of the family into Skylar's education.

Skylar credits homeschooling with her success. Like most homeschooling parents, John and Marsha Lenox wanted their daughter's education to fit both her learning needs and their circumstances as a family. A television and film producer until his untimely death when Skylar was nine, John often had to travel far from home; homeschooling allowed Skylar and Marsha, a homemaker, to accompany him on many of his trips, keeping the family together.\textsuperscript{314} In addition, although Skylar had attended some preschool, when the time came to start kindergarten, the family was not able to find a school that matched their beliefs about early childhood education. Marsha felt strongly that the curricula at the local schools were "far too academic…at five years old you should be playing and drawing, not learning to read already and learning basic math."\textsuperscript{315} So the Lenoxes started homeschooling and, finding that it worked well for their family, continued.

The Lenoxes practiced unschooling, a philosophy which focuses on child-centered, interest-directed learning. If Skylar wanted to read a certain book, she did. If a certain museum "sounded cool" to her, they went; and by the early 2000s, many local museums and parks (even Sea World!) had begun offering discounted tickets on special "homeschool days," a marketing tactic becoming popular around the country.\textsuperscript{316} As Skylar explains it, she had enough natural interests that, with each pursuit leading to

\textsuperscript{314} Lenox, 7.
\textsuperscript{315} Lenox, 7.
\textsuperscript{316} Kunzman, 18.
another, they covered a wide array of information. When she was interested in mummies, she spent two weeks reading and wrapping up her dolls in bandages; but studying mummies led her to come across the large culture of ancient Egypt as well as introducing her to archaeology. (This does not mean, of course, that Skylar studied without her parents' input; unschooling, however freely practiced, still often involves enormous parental attention. 317)

Skylar believes that this approach introduced her gently to the need for structure in learning, allowing her to develop her own ways to deal with her learning disabilities rather than labeling and isolating her within a normative school. As she puts it, "I got to figure out what kind of structure I like." 318 As she became older and her interests became more sophisticated, she learned through experience that she had to find ways to learn about things that she did not enjoy but were important to achieving her goals. In other words, having learned how to read and study as a younger child by pursing topics that intrigued her, as a teenager she was able to apply those skills in order to get through the required classes for her B.A. Because of her unschooling, she and her family were able to figure out the structure that worked best for her, so that when she was ready, she "was able to understand that…what I'm interested in and what needs to be done can be two separate things, but they can lead to the overall goal….It was just an opportunity that I don't think I would have had had I been in a structured classroom." 319

317 Stevens, 114.
318 Lenox, 11.
319 Lenox, 12.
Yet for Skylar, the entire enterprise depended not only on avoidance of "structured classrooms" but also on the engagement with a wider community that Skylar's unschooling involved. Skylar might have done just fine had she stuck to reading books and going to museums with her parents, but instead she thrived on an "amazing" homeschooling community that allowed her to pursue her interests along with others who shared them.\textsuperscript{320} The Lenoxes joined the Home School Association of California (HSC), a growing organization that had originated in Northern California in 1987, and helped to found a thriving local homeschooling group, Family-Centered Education of Los Angeles (FaCE-LA). Through FaCE-LA in particular, the Lenoxes developed an education-oriented social circle of great diversity, all united by a common interest in homeschooling.

Functioning in this learning environment, Skylar developed the skills needed to create her own education. From FaCE-LA, she learned "how to find the commonalities" among disparate people.\textsuperscript{321} She also learned from an early age how to engage with adults and how to advocate for herself. The community aspect of homeschooling gave her a "stronger support network" than she might otherwise have had.\textsuperscript{322} "At the end of the day," she remembers, "the important part is that it's not…insular."\textsuperscript{323} For families like the Lenoxes, reaching out beyond the family was as important to a successful homeschooling education as keeping the family at the center of it.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{320} Lenox, 8.  
\textsuperscript{321} Lenox, 10.  
\textsuperscript{322} Lenox, 13.  
\textsuperscript{323} Lenox, 15.}
Community resources like those the Lenoxes tapped were appearing all over the country during the 1990s. Homeschoolers in the 1990s cited moral concerns and simple physical safety as important reasons to homeschool, but like their predecessors, they were also unsatisfied with the academic education that their local schools were providing.\footnote{Means, "Learning at Home."}

But in order to sustain and enrich their children's academic growth, many families felt the need for outside support, especially as children approached high school. Over the course of the decade, homeschoolers provided this support in two ways: first, by pooling local expertise and talents through playgroups, cooperatives, and conferences, and second, by drawing on public school systems themselves.

Although homeschooling did not provide the funding and specialist attention that some such children might be able to access through public schooling, it did offer families the chance to arrange a child's education around his or her needs. As homeschooled seventh-grader Darren Matthews told a reporter in 1993, "My mom adjusts to my needs as a student, so I can do things better and more efficiently. It's just easier for me to work."\footnote{Chris Eftychiou and Tatiana Butko, "Home Schooling Makes the Grade," \textit{Pasadena Star-News} (April 8, 1993).} Like Skylar, Darren had learning disabilities; in his case they went undiagnosed until after he left his Pasadena public school, where he did well in reading but poorly in writing and math.\footnote{Eftychiou and Butko, "Makes the Grade."} Darren's family homeschooled with the "guidance" of Sunland Christian School, one of several organizations that had begun popping up around the county in the 1980s to provide a place for homeschoolers to legally enroll their children without having to send them to a physical school. Sunland provided families like the

\textit{...}
Matthewses with advice and curricular suggestions, but had few requirements. But the Matthewses also belonged to two local homeschooling groups, in which parents shared their academic strengths in order to fill in the gaps in their children's education. As families joined resources, Dad's fear of trigonometry or Mom's weakness in foreign languages could be overcome by another parent's strength in these subjects; Mom could teach history to the Jones kids along with her own, and Mrs. Jones could teach everyone Spanish. By sharing teaching duties, families were able to continue to direct their children's education even in areas in which they did not consider themselves qualified teachers. Families also got together to more formally share curricula and materials, as well as to bring in experts and experienced homeschoolers to give presentations. At one San Gabriel Valley conference in 1993, a Catholic homeschooling organization brought together 35 vendors to display "religious and educational materials" as well as providing six presentations by experienced homeschoolers, with a dance to follow the conference. Meanwhile, the major homeschooling associations active in California were beginning to hold conferences that would grow larger every year until they eventually filled some of the largest convention centers in the region.

As families began to share materials and teaching more frequently, the idea of the homeschool academy was born. An organized, brick-and-mortar organization where homeschool students could attend classes, the homeschool academy was a cross between a school and a home, both formal and intimate, both private and public. One of the first of these schools was Excellence in Education (EIE), a classroom and bookstore founded in

327 Eftychiou and Butko, "Makes the Grade."

328 "Home-schooling parents will share techniques," Pasadena Star-News (July 10, 1993).
Monrovia in 1991 by Carolyn and Martin Forte. The Fortes were veteran homeschoolers who had been teaching their two daughters at home since the early 1980s; neither Tenaya nor Tylene Forte had as yet ever gone to a regular school.

From the beginning, the Fortes had recognized the need for more interaction and support among homeschooling families. Because Carolyn held a California teaching credential, they homeschooled with more security than many families but found themselves just as much in need of support. In the 1980s they had been instrumental in the founding of local homeschooling playgroups (and later they would be among the founders of the statewide homeschooling association California Homeschool Network (CHN)). But in 1991 they decided to go a step further and start their own physical support network, the store and academy Excellence in Education. Supporting homeschooling "became a mission for us," Martin remembers. Distressed by the exclusivity of many of the Evangelical Christian-focused homeschooling groups they knew, they wanted "anybody who walks in here to feel welcome." Since EIE was registered as a private school with the state of California, homeschoolers could simply sign up with the academy as a legal way to homeschool, relying on the Fortes for guidance (and on their store for curricula). Or, alternatively, their children could eventually actually attend classes at EIE taught by taught by teachers (often parents) in a physical classroom. By 1995, 50 local families were registered with the EIE academy.

329 M. Forte, 11.
330 C. Forte, 13.
331 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
While homeschooling co-ops still thrived with their informal teaching-sharing, schools like EIE represented a step beyond these informal exchanges of teaching. Homeschooling academies offered flexibility to parents that allowed them to closely direct their children's education without having to personally supervise learning in every subject. Families who participated in EIE's formal classes could pick and choose their children's courses freely while also having the advantage of a warm and personal relationship with the directors of the school, thereby allowing families to "merge interests and resources" without jeopardizing moral or intellectual safety. 332 Nothing characterizes EIE so much as the Fortes' friendliness and commitment to helping parents homeschool as the parents see fit; as Carolyn told a reporter in 1995, "I'm not doing this to get rich; I just want to provide a service that will help parents educate their children." 333 Parents whose children's academic interests outstripped their own could rely on academies not just for legal protection, but also for what seemed to be relatively safe formal teaching by trusted acquaintances. Such parents entrusted these parts of their children's education to teachers outside of the family and outside of the home, yet they retained powers of choice, supervision, and close communication with teachers that had become all but impossible in public schools. Strangely, by the end of the 1990s, it was possible for a homeschooled child to do most of his or her schoolwork at a desk, in a classroom, and outside of the home.

It was also not uncommon for homeschoolers to turn to normative schooling as their children got older. In part, this depended on the comfort level of the parents with

332 Kunzman, 19.

333 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
supervising both high-school level math and science, but just as often it was the result of a particular child's lobbying to try out the school experience. One of the Monrovia Forte family's daughters -- in the years before homeschool dances were common -- wanted to experience the social life that public high school could offer. A few years later, Angeleno teenager Carly Palmer lobbied for two years before her parents decided she was "responsible enough" to try a year or two at a public high school; the transition for Carly was seamless, as she explored art classes while still breezing through the academic curriculum, which her mother reported suffered from a "lack of rigor" compared to that of their homeschool.\textsuperscript{334} Carly's social life did change, and the diversity of opinions and lifestyles she encountered in public school thrilled her; for her parents, Carly's experiment with public schooling became the biggest challenge yet in "navigating the tension between instilling a foundation of Christian commitment in their children while also providing them the freedom they need to make those commitments their own."\textsuperscript{335} Homeschooling parents whose children want to transition to normative schools commonly worry about whether their children are ready to go out in to the world, or, in the words of homeschooling mother Lydia Palmer, whether they're "going to be taken under by the world."\textsuperscript{336}

Of course, some students did not thrive, and often homeschooling families saw individual children move in and out of homeschooling depending on the year and that child's needs and desires. Others are hesitant to leave the security of home, even though

\textsuperscript{334} Kunzman, 21.

\textsuperscript{335} Kunzman, 36-37.

\textsuperscript{336} Kunzman, 42.
they see the possible benefits of a normal school environment. Carly's sister Joanna, for example, in the early 2000s, felt too shy to try public high school, where she feared she "wouldn't fit in a lot of things," but as an interviewer points out, she also felt "lonely" in the "relative seclusion" that homeschooling can provide for an innately shy child. As a result of this child-by-child approach, families like the Palmers and the Fortes could find themselves homeschooling some children while daily sending others off to public or private institutions. In fact, with their confidence in the need to tailor-make their children's education, homeschooling families often also tried different homeschooling approaches in different years, switching co-ops and playgroups, trying out academies, even throwing out the structure for a year or two of unschooling. And while they believed in the importance of maintaining their primary role in the education of their children, parents were also becoming willing to use resources outside of homeschooling when appropriate.

In fact, especially as homeschoolers began to lean more and more on school-like entities like EIE to help with their children's academic education, they also began to turn back towards normative schools not for total education, but rather for support as they homeschooled. In the 1990s, several Los Angeles County public school districts began to experiment with ways to allow parents to homeschool fully-enrolled public school children. These programs enabled parents to teach children themselves, at home, while using free public school curricula and other resources under the guidance of public school teachers.

337 Kunzman, 25.
The controls were many and strict, but for parents who did not object to the public school curriculum, the structure and support of such programs solved many problems. Rather than "glaring at each other across the table of educational debate," as one article on the subject put it, families and schools could work together to accommodate homeschooling while still bringing in the per-student funding that local schools lost each time a child did not enroll.338 It was now possible for public school students like 13-year-old Adrianne Presnell of Glendora to "roll out of bed and into her…living room for her daily lessons."339 By 1995, over 660 California school districts offered a homeschooling or independent study program.340 (In the following decade especially, some of these programs would develop into full charter schools, operating largely online as the internet became more widely available.)

Many homeschoolers jumped at the chance to partner with schools instead of eschewing them. Robin Dolan was delighted to stop having to purchase curricula for her very bright 14-year-old, instead drawing from the many resources provided by the Monrovia school district.341 Lydia Padilla enrolled her four children after another family, suspicious of her homeschooling, reported her to Child Protective Services; since her main reason for homeschooling was to protect a highly allergic son who would have been unsafe in a normal classroom, she was glad to solve the problem by enrolling her family

338 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
341 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
in her public school system's homeschooling program. Teena Ness's son Marc had been bored in public school, but with through his district's program, he was able to graduate high school early at age 15. And many other families were doing the same, for varied reasons; the Charter Oak School District's program, instituted in 1991, grew from 13 to 87 families in its first four years. Walnut Valley's program, which pioneered the concept in 1984, had 120 credentialed teachers involved by 1995; the teachers met weekly or monthly with homeschooling parents to oversee children's work and to provide planning and support for upcoming weeks. Such programs also provided field trips for enrolled children, workshops for parents, and opportunities for children to participate in their local schools' music and sports programs: "everything a student in class would receive, except a desk and a chair."

Not every school district was comfortable with setting up such arrangements, however. Some teachers and administrators did not share Walnut Valley administrator Joe Gillentine's comfort with "giving parents the opportunity to stay at home" and teach their own children, even using "good educational guidelines" provided by the public system. Pasadena deputy superintendent Bruce Matsui was dissatisfied with the idea of parents doing the actual teaching, even if overseen to some degree by public school teachers: "I'm not going to go to any old guy to get my appendix out, and it's the same

342 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
343 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
344 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
345 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
346 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
thing with teaching. Teaching is a profession of professionals, and we want to make sure that our students are protected.”

He was echoing the beliefs of the early Cold War federal government: educators should be professional experts and students should be protected from any possible ignorance on the part of their parents. In the last word of an opinion page spat over what might qualify a mother to teach, Temple City resident Karine Younce put it succinctly: "I feel the school system should [require] equal qualifications for teaching in the home or in a regular school." Ronald J. Leon, superintendent of the Rowland public schools, also had concerns about allowing parents to teach, even when under some public school supervision: "Philosophically, I have some concerns….I wouldn't want my child educated by someone who wasn't trained, and I would be concerned about the legality of such programs." As well-intentioned as families might be, the idea that schooling might be conducted by non-professionals deeply troubled both a majority of educators and Americans in general. This sincere concern on the part of professionals and school-supporting parents clashed with homeschoolers' and alternative educators' fundamental belief that parents could "teach their own," increasing the tension between calls for government and family control of schools.

Many homeschoolers also disliked the school district programs, but for different reasons. For some, it was the simple matter of what the mandatory textbooks contained -- Karen Miank, a practicing Catholic, tried such a program but left after a year because she

347 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."


349 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
still found some of the textbook material offensive to her faith. For others, it was a matter of chafing under micromanagement. The experiences of a family from Torrance, the Dewberrys, speaks to the difficulties as well as the blessings of partnering with a school district. When Kim Dewberry took her skeptical husband Steve out to dinner one night in 1994 to discuss homeschooling their three boys, she presented him with an apparently moderate option: independent study through the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Their two elder sons, John and James, were attending Torrance public schools but were struggling in some areas and not being challenged in others; rather, their teachers wanted to slow their progress in reading in order for them to be able to participate in the classroom group. Kim and Steve had also seen their sons grow increasingly "agitated" and "disrespectful" since starting school. But both Kim and Steve had attended Torrance public schools themselves, and had no problem with public schooling per se. And so, with four months left in the school year, "sitting in Marie Callendar's, even before the entrées arrived, [Steve] said, 'Okay, let's do it.'" If it didn't work out, they could always put John and James back in regular school the next year.

At first, it seemed that the program would provide the perfect combination of support and freedom. Kim, who would do the majority of the teaching while Steve worked outside the home as an engineer, would receive free textbooks and supplies and

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350 Miank, 9.


352 Dewberry, 2.

353 Dewberry, 3.

354 Dewberry, 3.
advice from the district, but her sons would be able to learn at their own pace in a moral and social environment under close parental supervision. And it worked: by the end of the following school year, both boys were testing a year ahead of grade level, whereas they had both tested below grade level while attended normal classes.355 As for their personal development, their formerly nay-saying grandmother put it well after they had been homeschooled for just five weeks, telling Kim that "your children are benefiting from homeschooling. They're more respectful to each other, they're more respectful to adults, they play with children, they play with their cousins, and they are obedient. They respond to you."

By the end of the following school year, however, the Dewberrys had become frustrated with homeschooling through the public school system. Where they had hoped for a strong combination of support and freedom, they instead found a dearth of each. LAUSD provided textbooks, but when Kim needed anything else, she would only be given some of the needed supplies, and of these only a small amount for a single project on any given day: "If I needed to have some paint, I needed to [bring] the smallest container I had, a baby food jar, and they put a drop of paint in it….And I brought it home with my toothbrush and my paintbrush and my Q-tips."357 And when she had any sort of problem or question and called the supervising teacher to ask for advice, there was none to be had: "That's your problem."

Yet the district was very controlling of both

355 Dewberry, 5.
356 Dewberry, 5.
357 Dewberry, 3.
358 Dewberry, 4.
the curricula and the pace and manner at which Kim taught. Once again, the Dewberrys were told not to let their children read books above grade level and to reduce the amount of writing they did; yet they concurrently required John and James to document all of their physical playtime (homeschooling P.E.) by writing a paragraph about each instance of play.359 Such frustrating requirements were too much for the Dewberrys, who were baffled by the lack of support and supplies they received even though the district was receiving state funds to support both John and James. Disheartened, the Dewberrys became convinced that "it was just a dollar game."360 They left the program.

After the Dewberrys left the local school systems behind them for good, they followed a more typical path. First, the children enrolled in a Coastal Academy, one of the many homeschool private schools that allowed parents to do all of their own teaching and make all their own curricular choices. John, James, and now David did well with this much more parent-directed format. When the older boys were in middle school and high school they became interested in robotics and so left Coastal in order to focus on preparing for the annual competition put on by the non-profit For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology (FIRST), briefly joining a homeschooling academy that was willing to underwrite their work (their team one third place in the national competition in their first year). By the time David reached high school, the Dewberrys had decided it was better just to go their own way, and so they named their

359 Dewberry, 5-6.

360 Dewberry, 4.
own homeschool West Hills Academy, otherwise known, in Kim's words, as "Kim and Steve's School of Sun and Fun."³⁶¹

The Dewberrys continued looking, however, for a way to draw on outside resources in their homeschooling. The FIRST competitions provided enormous direction and motivation for their science-oriented sons, but that was not enough. So they took what was becoming a common step for such families: they sent their young teenagers off to community college. John began classes at El Camino College at 15, James at 14, and David at only 12, taking ordinary courses and doing much of the ordinary academic maturing that usually happens in college -- learning to study at a fast pace, dealing independently with conflicts with professors, and creating an official transcript that "matters" in the working and academic world. Each boy did consider attending public high school at some point, too, but none of them did, largely because the local school refused to accept the credits they had earned at El Camino. All three of the Dewberry boys eventually used their El Camino credentials to transfer, with dozens of credits, to four-year colleges: Cal State Dominguez Hills, A.S.U., and U.C. Davis.

The Dewberrys were by no means the only family to entrust their highschoolers to community colleges. The community college was an outstanding solution for many homeschooling families in the 1990s to the problem of homeschooling college-bound high schoolers. Homeschooling was not yet well-enough recognized for four-year colleges to accept unofficial and often predominantly qualitative transcripts written up by a homeschooled applicant's mother. However, both brick-and-mortar homeschooling academies like the Fortes' EIE and community colleges could provide transcripts that

³⁶¹ Dewberry, 10.
would be meaningful to admissions offices looking for evidence that these students could thrive in a classroom setting. Community colleges also provided a chance for homeschoolers to participate in the extracurriculars that they would normally have had at their fingertips at most public high schools in the 1990s: Skylar Lenox, for example, was a member as a teenager of her community college's diving team as well as its newspaper staff. Moreover, community colleges actually gave students the chance to try out a classroom setting and to learn skills of discussion, questioning, time management, and even simple things like how to finish something by a deadline rather than just turning it in whenever it was done. Finally, attending community college classes seemed safer from a social and moral standpoint to many parents. Homeschooled highschoolers, or teenagers who finished high school early through homeschooling, could use community college courses to ease into formal school with a parent-controlled mix of independence and supervision.

By drawing on resources outside of their own families, homeschoolers developed ways to sustain homeschooling while also meeting the often challenging academic needs of their children. They experimented in cooperation with public systems and with each other as they looked for ways to safely entrust certain areas of their children's academic educations to teachers other than Mom and Dad. In doing so they extended the roots of homeschooling into new institutions outside of the home as well as reintegrating in small ways into normative schools. By 1999, at least one in five homeschoolers in America was
enrolled part-time in public or private school; unfortunately, we have no hard numbers on those who were enrolled full-time while still considering themselves homeschoolers.362

By drawing creatively on such resources, families refashioned homeschooling into a more public enterprise, but one that was still entirely under parental control. But the public would not be satisfied with merely academic formalization of some homeschooling: even if some homeschoolers were now proving themselves academically well-formed, could homeschooled students ever really function as well socially as the veterans of ordinary schools could?

The Big Question: Socialization

Deanna Cheung is a doctor, so even in the early 1990s, few people objected when they found out that her children were homeschooled. No one worried about the academics for her family: "'Oh, you're a doctor," they said. "'You can do it; you're smart. Your daughter's smart.'"363 (As for concerns about the academics taught by parents without advanced degrees, Los Angeles homeschooler Debbie Palmer makes another point: "there seem to be plenty of kids in the public school system who lack basic skills," so can homeschooling parents really do much worse?).364 But even with several academic and


364 Kunzman, 20. In fact, research has found that children homeschooled under even uncertified parents -- and even parents with less than a high school education -- score far better than average on standardize tests; see Ray, "Reason and Research."
medical degrees between them, Cheung and her husband still heard one objection over and over again from friends and even strangers: "What about socialization?"\textsuperscript{365}

Non-homeschoolers often treat the socialization question as a slam-dunk against homeschooling. Yes, \textit{some} parents might be qualified to teach their own children, and \textit{some} children might be well-suited to learning at home, but isn't going to school \textit{the} basic shared experience of an American childhood? How else can citizens be guaranteed an essential level of civic and social abilities? Does skipping school doom you to a life of denim jumpers or high-water pants and a basic inability to have a conversation or play baseball, much less engage responsibly in a political debate or sort out a workplace conflict?

Homeschoolers are plagued by the widespread assumption that to opt out of schooling means to opt out of healthy social formation and diverse community involvement. But the irrepressible question, "What about socialization?" is something of a joke among them, even if it is one that they groan over. When someone asks Cheung the question, she learned to just laugh to herself; but, she notes, "You don't laugh at people; you have to answer them."\textsuperscript{366} Her response is to ask questions of the questioner, asking,

Well, what do you mean by socialization? You know, do you mean that hierarchical, authoritarian structure that you put kids in that's supposed to prepare them for democracy? Or do you mean hanging out with kids their same age -- which is not necessarily actually human? Or do you mean learning to say please and thank you and think about treating other people the way you'd like to be

\textsuperscript{365} Cheung, 9.

\textsuperscript{366} Cheung, 9.
treated? …Then I would explain how what we did in our family was appropriate for us.\textsuperscript{367}

Research suggests, in fact, that despite the public's worries about the matter, former homeschoolers are usually highly civically and socially involved as adults: they are considerably more likely to perform community service, belong to community organizations, vote, and write to or call their elected representatives than the average American.\textsuperscript{368} Whether this is due to their homeschooling or not is unclear, but the numbers do suggest that homeschoolers by and large are not anti-social.

In the eyes of homeschooling advocates, in other words, the main difference between homeschoolers and others in terms of socialization is less in the level of their social skills than in how they acquire them. As in other areas, the socialization of homeschooled children depends on the family rather than the school -- although for most humans, of course, homeschooled or not, the family is the original social community. Homeschoolers' socialization occurs under greater family control than it does for most schoolchildren, however, who are responsible to their families but also spend a great deal of their time in the social environment of their schools. Yet even for most homeschoolers, socialization still occurs within a wider community than the family As one 1994 magazine article reported, homeschoolers believe that "children taught at home generally get along better with a wider range of age groups and social backgrounds than do children from public schools," since a homeschooled child's schooling does not occur

\textsuperscript{367} Cheung, 9-10.

\textsuperscript{368} Ray, "Reason and Research."
exclusively in the company of children his or her own age. In fact, in part because of the endless questions and criticisms regarding socialization that they receive, many homeschooling families are extremely careful to keep to a full social calendar. Yet especially in terms of providing opportunities for peer relationships (which some homeschool parents seek to limit and others encourage), ensuring adequate socialization can require more creativity for a homeschooling family than for a normative-schooling one.

To address this problem, homeschoolers turned once again to organization and formalization to create a social environment for their children that in some ways mimicked ordinary school social opportunities but kept parental direction at the center of social life. Although homeschoolers tend to strongly believe in keeping their own family at the center of their social lives, in the 1990s they experimented with various ways of allowing outsiders to participate in the socialization of their children to a greater degree than their predecessors had done. Just as they were finding that the broader public and even schools could help meet their children's academic needs, homeschoolers worked hard in the 1990s to create ways for their children to grow socially beyond the family while holding true to the family's moral, philosophical, and religious worldview. They did so by (in many cases) taking their children to church or by having playdates, of course, but they also developed two new approaches: first, they began to recreate traditional high school experiences, such as singing in the school choir or going to a dance, for homeschoolers, and by participating in non-school groups such as the Boy

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369 Tegarden, "World's a Classroom."
Scouts; and second, they sought ways for their children could participate in extracurriculars through local schools.

The Miank family, for example, had begun to homeschool for social as well as academic reasons. When they took their son Edward out of middle school and began their homeschooling career, they had already been dissatisfied with the academic and especially the social aspects of public and parochial schooling for many years. The third of five Miank children, Edward had been preceded in his school troubles by his half-sister Leslie and half-brother Aaron. The family's school difficulties really began when Aaron was attending Catholic high school, where he played football for a coach whom all the players idolized. Unfortunately, the coach also bought beer for his students and let them into the women's locker room. (The coach also arranged for Aaron to receive cortisone shots after an injury without his parents' permission.) The school did not act on complaints about the coach, who had led the team to an important championship; and in the meantime, the school's tuition was rising. And so Aaron transferred to the local public high school, where drinking and other such things happened but "at least…it wasn't condoned by the faculty." 370 Furthermore, when a public school taught something against the Mianks' faith, they could tell their children, "No, that's a secular point of view, and here's what we believe, and why." But when a Catholic school did the same thing, the Miank parents had found it much more confusing and difficult to address: "No, Catholic school is teaching you wrong; I'm teaching you right…It becomes a very difficult situation." 371

370 Miank, 8.
371 Miank, 8.
The Mianks were not, however, against fun. In fact, fun was a major factor in their decision to homeschool their younger children. While devoutly religious and strict about moral standards, they had no interest in isolating their children from the world. They simply wanted to introduce them to the world in a way that would not threaten their faith, morals, or personhood. They wanted to better direct and supervise their children's socialization, not to stifle it. As another Los Angeles homeschooling parent put it, "when you bring a child into a group of peers, their view of authority is gleaned from their peers;" consequently, homeschooling parents wanted a greater degree of control over whom their children saw as peers, and in what circumstances. In fact, like many homeschoolers, the Mianks believed that socialization was another area in which normative schools were failing. In this view, as one researcher puts it, it was the public schools that had the "socialization problem," not home schools; in fact, homeschoolers argued that "homeschooling provides the only effective anecdote" to the "dysfunctional socialization" of the public school. Socialization, the argument goes, is healthiest when directed from the home. As Karen summarizes, "I believe that the children need to be taught how to socialize in a reasonable, moral kind of way. If you don't teach 'em how to have fun….a lot of kids kind of get caught up in the whole drinking and drug thing."

To do so, the Mianks relied not only on their own supervision in their own home but on the Catholic homeschooling group to which they belonged, Christ the King. Already seven years old by the time the Mianks joined in the mid-1990s, Christ the King

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372 Gray, 85.

373 Murphy, 99.

374 Miank, 7.
was rapidly developing a handful of extracurricular activities for homeschoolers that went beyond the park days of the 1980s. Through Christ the King, Edward and eventually the younger children, Geoffrey and Alice, could sing in a choir, act in a play, or participate in a geography bee with dozens of other homeschoolers.³⁷⁵ And when Edward reached high school, Karen decided it would be a shame if he never got to go to a prom; so she and the other Christ the King parents put one together, a huge bash that drew hundreds of homeschoolers from as far as 200 miles away. But the Regina Coeli Ball also had rules: parents came too, no one officially brought a date, and the dress code was strict. This way the teenagers could have the "perks" of school without what their parents perceived as the dangers.³⁷⁶ A homeschool organization could provide social opportunities with a level of supervision and intergenerational action that an educational institution -- a regular school -- might not.

However, homeschool families also began to reach outside of the family circle for socialization by relying on institutions, including those outside of both homeschooling and normative schooling. Youth ministries were highly important. Skylar Lenox, for example, attended Hebrew school as a young child even while homeschooling for the rest of her education.³⁷⁷ The Miank children also participated in their church's youth group and Alice, the youngest, even taught Sunday School as a teenager.³⁷⁸ Scouting was another important resource for "safe" and supervised socialization, whether the troop was

³⁷⁵ Miank, 6, 7.
³⁷⁶ Miank, 6.
³⁷⁷ Lenox, 11.
³⁷⁸ Miank, 15.
linked to a church or not. Some homeschooling families objected to the Girl Scouts for moral reasons, but it was common for homeschooled boys to rely on scouting throughout their childhoods, often persevering until they had become Eagle Scouts. In fact, one study found that 8% of homeschoolers were involved in scouting in 1997; the percentage of boys involved in scouting is likely much higher than girls. Some families efficiently linked their homeschooling lessons to merit badges; and as homeschooling mother Terri MacQuarrie remembers of her son's experience with scouting, "it was fun, it kept him moving, it kept him active, and it provided socialization for him outside the family. And of course there's a lot of emphasis on character in scouting…" In fact, scouting was sometimes an important influence even for those families who did not wish to participate in homeschooling groups. The sons of the McConnell family of Temple City, for example, were avid Boy Scouts even though the family otherwise kept mostly to itself even in homeschooling circles.

In the 1990s, however, homeschoolers had more to rely on than just church, scouts, and one another. Just as they had with academics, homeschoolers in this period began looking for ways to cooperate with the school systems that they had once-abandoned, this time in order to provide social, athletic, and artistic opportunities. Most

379 The two most common reasons for these objections are first, the purported connections between the national and international girls' scouting organizations and abortion providers, and second, parental disagreement with parts of the Scouts' curriculum on sexuality.

380 Miank, 15; Haggard, 23; MacQuarrie, 9, 13.

381 Ray, "Reason and Research," 5.

382 MacQuarrie, 9.

383 Sue McConnell, interview by author, Temple City, CA, July 15, 2010, transcript, author's collection, 4-5.
homeschooled at least in part because they had one problem or another with their local schools, but as taxpayers, many of them believed they should have access to those parts of public schooling that were acceptable to them. They began to press to allow homeschoolers to play in public school orchestras and pitch for public school baseball teams. School district homeschool programs such as the ones discussed in the section above picked up some of the slack, just as they did for academics; families who homeschooled fully-enrolled public school students could send their children to gym or music classes at their local school, sometimes even to classes held specifically for students in the program. But other families made their own, usually informal arrangements parent-to-teacher.

The experiences of the Cheung/Sharifi family are a good example of how public schools as well as other extrafamilial resources could enrich the socialization of homeschoolers. Deanna Cheung and her husband Rasoul Sharifi had been delighted with the small, university-affiliated lab school that their first child, Marina, had attended for preschool in the late 1980s. But when Marina reached kindergarten age in 1990, her parents could not find a private school of similar quality that was within reasonable driving difference; Cheung's experience attending California public schools growing up had been so bad that the couple would not consider public schooling. So they decided to homeschool using interest-led learning. A medical doctor and a botanical ecologist, Cheung and Sharifi were highly educated themselves and had few concerns that they would be able to provide the academic formation that they desired for Marina and her younger brother, Julian.

384 Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."
They were not worried about socialization, either, although strangers in the grocery store always seemed to have questions about it. They were committed from the beginning to finding ways for their children to socialize and to pursue group-related activities according to their interests. They also realized, however, that their endeavors would benefit from support outside of the family. Deanna actually put an ad in *Mothering* magazine when they began homeschooling in order to meet other homeschoolers, eventually founding a homeschooling group with some of the parents who responded.\(^{385}\)

As their children grew, Deanna and Rasoul found that homeschooling allowed each child to grow socially in ways suited to their personalities. Julian was "incredibly social" and outgoing; with little effort on his parents' part, he always had "dozens and dozens of friends."\(^{386}\) As was the case for many homeschoolers, many of these friends were not of his own age, but represented a wide range of ages and backgrounds. Julian was as comfortable conversing with adults as with his peers.\(^{387}\) Marina, on the other hand, was more introverted and in Deanna's opinion, "would have been miserable in high school."\(^{388}\)

However, Marina's interest in piano and violin went beyond what her parents could search out for her. The conductor of a youth orchestra in which Marina played suggested looking to public school for specialized music classes. So the family began to consider one of Southern California's public magnet schools for the arts -- in this case,

\(^{385}\) Cheung 9.

\(^{386}\) Cheung, 10.

\(^{387}\) Cheung, 10.

\(^{388}\) Cheung 10.
the high school in neighboring Orange County -- where academic courses were held in the mornings and the afternoons were devoted to artistic pursuits. But signing on for the entire school day would have meant giving up homeschooling and its benefits (including, to Marina's distress, sleeping in). And of course, they already knew that Marina could supplement her homeschooling academically with courses from Long Beach City College. The solution was for Marina to attend the afternoon and afterschool programs at the public high school while continuing to homeschool as usual for the rest of her education. Playing in the high school orchestra and attending some Advanced Placement afternoon music courses, she honed her musical skills and had a healthy, though not overwhelming dose of ordinary high school social interaction.

Again, however, this solution neither worked nor was available for everyone. There was no explicit legal right for homeschoolers to use public school resources in California law (and still is none). The decision was made district-by-district, just as some districts chose to provide academic homeschool programs and some did not. In fact, most such arrangements seem to have been worked out between particular families, such as Marina Sharifi's, and a local school or even a just a single teacher who was willing to bend the rules. Such arrangements for extracurricular activities were by and large informal in California, and almost never (yet) systematic, unlike the academic programs that flourished in certain districts.

Finally, I must admit that my sample is a skewed one. Only relatively outgoing homeschoolers respond positively to requests for interviews; only one of the families I

389 Cheung, 7.
390 Cheung, 7.
met with was markedly introverted. Yet the impression that homeschoolers do make
efforts to socialize their children seems to be a true one, both from my observation and
from recent research on civic and community involvement. By 1997, 98% of
homeschooled children were involved in two or more activities outside of their homes;
this is not an example of an under-social population.\textsuperscript{391}

The disconnect may be less that homeschoolers are not socialized, and more that
homeschoolers are not always socialized into the broadest version of American society,
not inculcated in the most popular side of the nation's culture. Homeschoolers are
socialized, but they are socialized primarily \textit{by their parents} and often \textit{through other
homeschoolers}, especially before they reach puberty. Whether attending a home school
or a normative school, however, children will always be socialized into a local, limited
community before a broader one; in Los Angeles County, wealthy children attending San
Marino schools will have a very different socialization than impoverished students
attending many of the public schools in neighboring Alhambra. Socialization is as
socialization does.

By employing made-to-fit combinations of homeschool group resources,
institutional resources, and public resources, homeschoolers like Marina and Julian
Sharifi, Skylar Lenox, the Mianks, and the MacQuarries sought to experience the best of
many worlds. (Some private schools would also come to open their doors to
homeschoolers for certain activities, but this phenomenon became common in the early
2000's rather than in the 1990's.) By drawing on resources curated by parents but
provided by non-family members, homeschoolers were able to grow academically,

\textsuperscript{391} Ray, "Reason and Research," 5.
artistically, and socially at the rates and in the ways that their families thought best. They had found a way for homeschooled children to be both family-centered and widely social.

It would be difficult to find a more well-rounded highschooler than Abel Odusanya in 1994. When a reporter asked him about his homeschool social and academic experiences, he replied,

> We live in apartments, so we know the neighborhood kids....Last month my brother and I took classes in mime and art from The Armory Center of the Arts, and we have a meeting once a month through our home schooling support group. They hire tutors to come and speak on different topics. Last year we had a guy come from J.P.L. [a NASA laboratory] come out, and we put together a working clock. I also play football through Pasadena's public football team.\(^{392}\)

Not only were Abel's interests diverse, but he was also widely involved in his community, able to both hang out with neighborhood kids and speak intelligently with an adult reporter. His formal education, extracurriculars, and socialization were home-based but not insular, giving him regular opportunities to interact with others and to draw on local resources for his education. He defied homeschooling stereotypes not only by being both knowledgeable and well-adjusted, but also by being involved in all sorts of extrafamilial educational and social activities. He also defied earlier trends by continuing to be homeschooled in high school; in fact, while in early decades most homeschooled children were elementary or middle schoolers, by 2010 families were just as likely to homeschool their teenagers as their kindergarteners.\(^ {393}\)

In the 1990s, homeschooling in Los Angeles County began to leave the home. While a family-centered and -supervised education remained of vital importance to most

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\(^{392}\) Tegarden, "World's a Classroom."

\(^{393}\) Murphy, 26.
homeschooling families, many of them were also finding ways to invite a wider community back into their children's educations -- within certain limits. Homeschooling no longer had to mean schooling at home or, at the most, in the car or at a library in another town while wearing a fake school uniform. Instead, it could mean home-centered, home-directed learning that relied on a broader community for enrichment, support, and even ordinary classroom teaching. In addition, as homeschoolers began relying more on cooperative teaching, brick-and-mortar homeschool academies, public school programs, they left behind the non-school attitude that had characterized early homeschooling. The local school system might be bad for their children, a homeschooling family might reason, and perhaps even for most or all children -- but did that mean that going to school just for band practice would hurt? And what about home school academies -- were they homes, or were they schools?

Homeschoolers in the 1990s walked a fine line between returning to school and staying exclusively within the home (or at least the family). They worked creatively and cooperatively to develop ways to use school and school-like resources to ensure their children's academic and social success, but they always sought means that preserved high levels of parental control. Even unschooling, interest-led families were drawn only to outside resources that would support the flourish of their educational philosophy; at community college, for example, unschooler Skylar Lenox could pick and choose her courses, while in a normal high school they would have been largely chosen for her. By widening their circles outward in carefully chosen ways, homeschoolers preserved the family-focused spirit of their movement while gaining resources that helped them better
meet the academic and social needs of their children. In doing so, they grew dramatically in numbers and brought their movement closer to the mainstream than it had ever been.

At the end of the 1990s, homeschooling was still unorthodox, but it was no longer so private, and public approval had swelled: in 1985, according to one poll, only 16 percent of Americans thought that homeschooling was good for the country, but in 2001 that number had grown to 41 percent, nearly half of those surveyed.394

By involving people and institutions outside of the family -- even by creating academies and co-operatives that rivaled normative schools -- homeschoolers tiptoed away from the edges of society and into a more cooperative realm open to a cafeteria-like, pick-and-choose approach to schooling. Yet in re-entering public spheres, homeschooling also tacitly acknowledged itself to be in some manner a public matter as well as an individual one. As homeschooling methods grew more visible, more public, and more school-like, homeschooling seemed poised to enter the mainstream. But the idea of homeschooling as "normal" would come with changes and challenges of its own.

394 Kunzman, 4.
CHAPTER 4

A CERTAIN ACCEPTANCE: 2000-2010

Tom and Abigail Spencer (pseudonyms) were walking to their local community college when a police car pulled up next to them. The officer wondered why they were not in school. They were homeschooled, the teenagers explained, and were on their way to the college to sign up for classes.395

That wasn't good enough for the officer. Into the cruiser the Spencers went, and down to the holding center where all the youth arrested in the day's truancy sweep were being confined. Both teenagers were cited for violating Los Angeles's daytime curfew, which prohibits school-aged Angelenos from appearing without a parent in any public place other than school during school hours.396 As was customary in such cases, Tom and Abigail were released to their mother later in the day, but not before being cited for truancy and directed towards a court date.

Unlike most of the arrestees, however, the Spencers were members of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), a national umbrella organization to which a


majority of American homeschoolers belong. This meant that at the drop of a hat -- or the slam of a police car door -- they were guaranteed free and immediate (even in the middle of the night) access to an HSLDA attorney. With the help of that attorney, James R. Mason, Tom and Abigail only had to appear in court once, whereupon the citation was dismissed. Yet the Spencers did not leave the matter there; again represented by the HSLDA, the family brought suit against the city in May of 2010, seeking damages for unlawful arrest as well as assurance that the LAPD would specify to its officers that only public school students should be included in truancy sweeps.

Luckily for them, the Spencer teenagers were arrested in 2009, not in 1989 or even in 1999. Unlike in earlier days, by the time Tom and Abigail tangled with the police, the local court had no difficulty in quickly and confidently acknowledging that homeschoolers were not in fact truants. And while Tom and Abigail had to endure a trying day in a holding center, the Spencer parents were never arrested. There was also no attempt to shut down their academy, or to question whether their community college courses were sufficient compared to those offered in public high schools. At the end of the first decade of the 2000s, homeschooling was so prevalent and so public in Los Angeles County that when a cop on his beat questioned its legality, it was he who was censured, not homeschoolers. Homeschooling in Los Angeles had come out of the shadows.

But what did this new visibility mean? How did homeschoolers and the wider public navigate the inclusion in public life of such a private activity? Following homeschooling's tentative emergence from its mostly private sphere during the 1990s, in

the early 2000s homeschoolers and the communities they dealt were faced with sorting out what it meant to so prominently straddle the line between public and private. Homeschooling in this period not only continued to grow -- representing four percent of American schoolchildren in 2010, up from just under two percent in 1999 -- but also became considerably more organized, and community-oriented. The question of the final legality of homeschooling also came to the fore; no longer consisting of a handful of families operating at the edges, homeschoolers were now assuming public legitimacy. But what could it possibly mean to have homeschooling that wished to be both public and private? How did homeschooling adapt to its new status at the middle of the Venn diagram of American community life? As the American public grew to accept homeschooling more fully, what was it exactly that it was accepting -- and what does this suggest about changes in the public as a whole?

To address these questions, I will explore three major issues in homeschooling in this period. First, as homeschooling grew in both size and visibility, the institutions that regulated schooling in America needed more concrete information about homeschooling, from numbers to basic definitions. In other words, someone needed to count homeschoolers, yet homeschoolers remained difficult to count.

Second, I will discuss the ways that homeschoolers sought to protect and enrich homeschooling as it became more interwoven with public resources and public life. At the beginning of the decade, homeschoolers found themselves roughly divided on the state level into two communities with somewhat different approaches to homeschooling in the context of public life. Yet at the local level, and through the extraordinary new

opportunities offered by the internet, they were further developing ways to transcend some boundaries even as they created others. The desire to retain parental authority over homeschoolers' educations while also making it easier for homeschooled children to participate safely in public life led homeschoolers to cease simply looking away from traditional educational resources and instead to create an approach that looked beyond them. In doing so, homeschooling took the last step in developing from an anti-institutional movement into a post-institutional one.

Finally, I will examine efforts to develop the relationships and regulations necessary to satisfy both homeschoolers and non-homeschooling educators, officials, and communities as homeschooling sought public and, critically, legal approval in California. By straddling spheres and eschewing institutional boundaries, homeschooling forced the outside world to reckon with its insistence on public participation based on private control, unveiling new commonalities that exemplify the spirit of the decade and point to a growing streak of post-institutional sentiment in the country.

Between 2000 and 2010, homeschooling in America solidified its transition from a fringe community to a one characterized more by the gaps it bridged than by the gaps it created. It had moved from the edge -- or, as sociologist Joseph Murphy has more colorfully put it, the outhouse -- to the center of society, enjoying "considerable legitimacy and support."^399 Homeschoolers remained faithful to their belief in local control, but reached out to larger communities for the resources needed to protect that control and to help it thrive. They believed in the public serving the private, but also in the private informing and enriching the public. In adapting their movement to better fit

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^399 Murphy, 36.
into public life, homeschoolers also pressed for the adaptation of public institutions and communities to respect their vision of local control as part of the larger public good -- the public good would truly thrive, in this line of thinking, when respecting families' highly individualized needs. In doing so, homeschoolers exemplified a major trend in early twenty-first century America: the development of unforeseen commonalities among differing groups, all based on a deep belief in the potential for private groups to contribute to the public good without submitting to institutional control. In doing so, they also gained, finally, some measure of public approval.

Counting Homeschoolers

Any homeschooling parent can tell you that homeschooling has grown dramatically over time, especially in the past twenty years. Yet actual statistics on homeschoolers in America at any given point in history, including today -- or even just reliable estimates of their numbers -- are hard to come by.

The problem is, homeschoolers are just plain hard to count. For a long while, this did not much matter, for there was no need to count them; and this suited most homeschoolers fine, since going unnoticed meant avoiding tangles with the courts. By the end of the 1990s, however, homeschooling had grown common enough (just under 2% of school-aged children) that many communities felt the need for more formal ways to address it.\(^{400}\) Public schools had even begun to cooperate with homeschoolers, setting up special programs for them and often looking the other way when coaches and choir directors allowed homeschoolers to participate in public school extracurriculars.

\(^{400}\) Princiota and Bielick, 5.
Community colleges were enrolling teenaged homeschoolers and providing them with bona fide transcripts that they could present when applying to four-year colleges and universities. There were homeschoolers on my own youth soccer team in 1990s Southern California. To many ordinary families, homeschooling was beginning to seem a little bit less weird and a quite bit more present.

In many states, including California, there was still no state law explicitly addressing the legality of homeschooling and few official policies about homeschoolers' relationship with school and government. The federal government had supported one or two efforts to estimate homeschooling's size before, but these had been small in scale; the government had not yet made an institutional, regular effort to assess the national homeschooling population. So, in 1999 the federal government began to estimate and categorize homeschoolers as part of the regular National Household Education Surveys Program, a telephone survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The NCES would now collect data on homeschooling every four years, reporting information ranging from the estimated number of homeschoolers nationwide to the type of curricula used by most homeschooling parents.

The NCES numbers revealed startling rates of growth. Based on information gathered through phone interviews with nearly 60,000 American parents, in 1999 the NCES estimated that there were 850,000 homeschooled children in the United States, equaling 1.7% of the total school-aged population.401 It estimated that in 2003, there were

401 Princiotta and Bielick, 5.
almost 1.1 million, or 2.2%. And by 2007, the estimate had risen to 1.5 million, or to 2.9% of American schoolchildren. In other words, the number of homeschoolers in the United States had increased by nearly 50 percent in four years. A 2010 study by the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), an independent institute founded in 1990 to study homeschooling, estimated the number of American homeschoolers to have reached two million, or 3.8% of school-aged Americans. (The NHERI study used government data as well as relying on the NCES studies for triangulation; it is reasonable to expect that the 2011 NCES study results will be very close to the NHERI numbers.) In other words, by 2010, 1 out of 25 American schoolchildren was a homeschooler.

If these numbers are correct, then, thanks to homeschooling, in 2010 every ordinary first-grade schoolroom in America was missing one student. At this level, homeschooling could no longer be ignored by the general public or its institutions. In fact, homeschooling's mere inclusion in the NCES' investigations marked information on homeschooling as a "high priority education data need" in the eyes of the U.S. Department of Education. The government recognized with this change that homeschooling had, in a sense, "made it" in the educational world.

Yet the estimates put forth by differing groups over the course of the early 2000s still varied to a disappointing degree due to the problems inherent in studying

402 Princiotta and Bielick, 1.
405 Ray, 1.
406 Princiotta and Bielick, ii.
homeschoolers. Striking as they may seem, the NCES numbers, for example, could be seen as quite conservative since they excluded students who were enrolled in public or private schools for more than 25 hours per week, thus passing over the growing number of children attending homeschooling academies, public school homeschooling programs, or online charter schools full-time (the NCES surveys did count part-time attendees).  

But homeschooling organizations, prone to take a wider view of homeschooling, sometimes suffered from the opposite problem: one estimate picked up by the largest California homeschooling association, the Christian Home Educators Association of California (CHEA), put the number for the 2002-2003 school year somewhere between 1.7 and 2.1 million, almost twice the 1999 NCES estimate. Another estimate cited in a Los Angeles newspaper had put the national number at about 1 million in 1993-1994, five years before the first NCES estimate of 850,000. In California, CHEA estimated a population of 100,000 homeschoolers in 2010, but acknowledged that this number was based on family membership in homeschooling organizations, and did not "take into consideration the growing numbers of children who are being home educated through public school programs such as charter schools and independent study." 

To complicate things further, the confidence intervals attached to these estimates -- the range in which the researchers are confident that the actual number lies -- range

\[ 407 \text{ NCES, "1.5 Million," 1.} \]


\[ 409 \text{ Means, "Learning at Home."} \]

\[ 410 \text{ CHEA, "Questions and Answers About Home Education in California" (CHEA, 2010), 2.} \]
from 300,000 to 600,000. Of course, something like a confidence range must accompany any serious estimate, but for a number around two million, hundreds of thousands is a large variance. According to the NHERI calculations, for example, the number of American children being homeschooled in 2010 could be 2 million, but it could just as well be 1.74 million or 2.3 million. And of course, CHEA had estimated nearly the same range (although less reliably) eight years earlier, suggesting that that organization would put the 2010 number much higher.

Although there are many frustrations in conducting such studies, the main problem seems to be that homeschoolers are what sociologists refer to as a hidden population, a group that "cannot be studied using standard sampling and estimation techniques." (Other examples of hidden populations include illegal immigrants, the homeless, and drug users.) Douglas Heckathorn, one of the leading sociologists working on methodologies for estimating hidden populations, explains that the difficulty lies with a hidden population's two defining characteristics: "first, no sampling frame exists, so the size and boundaries of the population are unknown; and second, there exist strong privacy concerns, because membership involves stigmatized or illegal behavior…" In other words, the population is difficult to identify both because its boundaries are fuzzy and because its members may be reluctant to cooperate with researchers. To complicate matters further, hidden populations are also usually small, as is the case with homeschooling, making techniques such as randomized telephone surveys (like those


used in the NCES) hugely inefficient.413 Such populations remain among the very most challenging to investigate.

Homeschooling's small, though growing numbers; the uncertain legality of the practice; the omnipresent nervousness about visibility; and the longtime reflexive negative social reaction to homeschooling all contributed to making homeschooling very difficult to study at all, much less quantify. But as homeschooling changed, its relationship with its informal designation as a hidden population also changed. By 2000, the majority of homeschoolers had come to the realization that homeschooling would best succeed in a sort of limbo between privacy and publicity. As one mother put it, in order to homeschool well and with protection in the new millennium, "we need to be visible."414

Yet as homeschooling moved away from some aspects of hiddenness as it began to draw on the public for more support, it retained others. First, a significant section of homeschoolers still deliberately hid their activities throughout the early 2000s. One leading researcher estimated that at least 10% of homeschoolers living in states, such as California, where they would normally be required to register failed to do so, continuing instead to homeschool "underground."415 While homeschoolers in California, for example, were developing a heretofore unheard-of level of cooperation with people and institutions outside of their immediate families, they still did not have the protection of laws explicitly establishing the legal boundaries of homeschooling. While the increased

413 Heckathorn, 174.

414 C. Forte, 7.

415 Ray, 2.
visibility of homeschooling helped many homeschoolers feel more relaxed about the public acceptability of their activities, others remained concerned about potential negative legal and social ramifications. Section II of this chapter will explore further the ways that different homeschooling communities have responded to these changes.

Second, although homeschooling was now more public, it remained a self-defined activity. Unless one is willing to use a definition that some section of homeschoolers would not recognize, it is nearly impossible to definitively describe, and therefore define and even restrict, the practice. Homeschooling was no longer limited to the home, so it could not be defined as full-time academic education at home, or even just in the presence of one's family; in fact, students who were enrolled full-time in homeschooling academies outside of the home, full-time public charter school students who did all their classwork over the internet, and unschoolers who spent their time digging in the mud in their neighborhood woods all might consider themselves homeschoolers. Homeschooling could not even any longer be defined as schooling outside of schools, as many homeschoolers and normative schools were now working cooperatively; moreover, homeschoolers were setting up their own schools, enrolling children beyond their own, but still calling their activities homeschooling.

Because of this resistance to definition, researchers have had to place limits on homeschooling that are useful mainly only for providing boundaries for the study itself. The NCES studies, for example, exclude students who are enrolled full-time in a public school program, even though these students may consider themselves homeschooled and belong to various homeschool associations. Most formal studies also must exclude underground homeschoolers, as it is nearly impossible to count them in a scientific
manner; however, homeschooling leaders and other experts may still have a sense, through their own experience, of such homeschoolers' numbers.

The difficulty of counting and categorizing homeschoolers drives home the extraordinary ability of this movement to straddle hiddenness and visibility, privacy and publicity. Homeschoolers conservative and liberal fiercely held to their belief in the primacy of parental rights and yet they now relied in increasingly formal ways on community, including government, to uphold their moral vision and enable their exercise of ultra-local family sovereignty. Like their predecessors, homeschoolers in the 2000s both believed in government and suspected it; both believed in community and feared community influence; and sometimes even both believed, in fact, in schooling and resisted efforts at school-related regulations. They rooted their movement on the conviction that families should have enormous legal freedom, but they also operated from a fierce desire to protect children.

The great questions surrounding homeschooling would proceed from these paradoxes. How could both homeschoolers and the government protect family sovereignty while still making sure that all children received their universally-accepted right to a decent education? And how could a choice rooted in ultra-localism survive stepping back into the public sphere? Would it even remain homeschooling at all?

**Becoming Post-Institutional**

The 2010 convention of the Christian Home Educators Association of California (CHEA) buzzed with activity, good will, and the conversations of like-minded friends. Sprawled out over two enormous buildings in the Pasadena Convention Center, the
convention was a hub for Southern California homeschoolers and for many the highlight of the homeschooling year. An introductory session, free and open to the public, offered information and encouragement to prospective homeschoolers. Hundreds of sessions on more specific topics, from raising "Godly" children to navigating the ins and outs of California's compulsory education statutes, were crammed into three days; fortunately, audio recordings of each session were available for purchase within an hour or two of the event, so there was no need to fret over having to chose between the several edifying sessions. The attendees varied in dress, sex, and race, although a majority were white; many married couples attended together, sending all but the youngest children off to their own specially curated activities. There was even a chance for homeschooled teenagers to celebrate their graduation with the sort of large, formal ceremony that is a hallowed rite of passage for students attending ordinary schools.

One of the leading homeschooling organizations in the country, CHEA holds two annual conventions, one in the San Francisco Bay area and a larger one in Southern California. The main convention includes concurrent children's and teen's conventions to occupy and enthuse homeschooled youth while their parents attend sessions and peruse the curricula for sale in the exhibitors' hall, a homeschooling marketplace of truly mind-boggling size (often boasting more than 200 separate booths). Its location shifting every year or two, the convention has also recently been held in cities such as Long Beach and Anaheim, where homeschoolers essentially took over the Disneyland Hotel for three summer days. In the early 2000s the convention regularly drew close to 5,000 attendees.416

416 Kunzman, 39.
Yet although the 2010 conference was full of excitement, support, and good will, another, less-pleasant undercurrent peeked through the sessions, the old tormenter that had followed homeschoolers from the beginning: alarm. Mixed in with practical sessions like "Math Games" and pep talks ("Wake Up with the Gloves On") were protection-oriented sessions like "Legislative Update," "Law for the New Home Educator," and "How Life Will Change with Obama." Such session titles did not overwhelm, but concerns about running afoul of school officials or the courts ran throughout the conference; every session I attended included some reference to the need to protect oneself against government officials. The introductory session fielded numerous questions about threats to homeschooling, emphasizing the importance of family vigilance and HSLDA membership in order to protect oneself legally and socially.

This aspect of CHEA's tone underlines the fact that even as homeschooling voluntarily integrated into public life, worries about negative public reactions did not disappear. CHEA responded to this situation by emphasizing safety in numbers and self-protection. By banding together, its members educated each other not only on how to coax reluctant first-graders into reading, but also on how to assert their rights publicly without having them taken away, something which they still believed could happen to any of them. In doing so, they prefigured other conservative alliances that would arise over the next fifteen years in opposition to increased federal or national-scale direction in formerly private sectors (for example, opposing "Obamacare" and increased government regulation of health care, or protesting the Common Core initiative in education, which applies a single standard across the country to all schools adopting its curriculum).
In circling its wagons and implicitly limiting its membership, CHEA provides a trustworthy social and spiritual community of support for its members. CHEA members can trust, for example, that the vendors selling curricular materials at a CHEA conference are Christian at least in sympathy. They can trust each other with their children, whether through friendships formed or simply by sending the kids along to the children's area at the conference while they attend to adult matters. While still seeking the good in public life, CHEA also still functions as a bulwark for its member families, nearly all Christian, against the dangers of the public.

In other words, CHEA represents a section of homeschoolers in California who responded to the movement towards a more public homeschooling by creating a controlled community in which they could continue to homeschool, in their perspective, safely. They belong to what sociologist Mitchell L. Stevens has called the "Christian" or "heaven-based" community of homeschoolers, as opposed to the "inclusive" or "earth-based" community.417 (Researchers such as Milton Gaither and Patricia Lines have identified similar distinctions, but not as the focus of a book-length argument.)418 Stevens argues that homeschoolers had roughly divided into these two communities by the end of the 1990s as a result of their differing commitments to exclusive Christian versus liberal or even "alternative" education, and especially their "incompatible ideas about the nature of persons and of legitimate authority."419 I would like to add to Stevens' work, completed in 2001, by suggesting that these divisions work best when looking at

417 Stevens, 7.

418 See Gaither; and, for example, Patricia M. Lines, "Private Education Alternatives and State Regulations," *Journal of Law and Education* 12, no. 2 (1983).

419 Stevens, 109.
homeschooling communities at the state and national level, but that locally, homeschooling in the early 2000s showed a different flavor. This helps explain, too, how homeschooling can be "a dynamic, talkative and diverse movement on the one hand" but one of "miscommunication and division on the other."\(^{420}\)

CHEA is a convenient organ through which to study this Christian homeschooling community in California. Although not every Californian homeschooling family of the type Stevens had in mind belonged to the organization, anecdotally it seems that most gravitated toward it. Most homeschoolers of any persuasion in California belong to at least one national umbrella organization, most often the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) which boasted 13,500 Californian member families in 2008.\(^{421}\) In terms of HSLDA, it should still be remembered, as some homeschoolers are quick to state, that however large HSLDA may be, it does not quite speak for all homeschoolers, especially when referencing a particular sort of Christian belief.\(^{422}\) Yet while other national organizations exist, their numbers pale in comparison. The most prominent of these during the 1990s, in fact, the National Homeschool Association, never reached more than a few hundred members nationally and dissolved in 2000. To point this out is not to dismiss diversity at the national level, but rather to suggest that as the movement developed into the 21st century, most non-conservative, non-Christian homeschoolers (who made up a minority in the first place) made their peace with the HSLDA.

\(^{420}\) Stevens, 109.


\(^{422}\) Stevens, 145.
At the state level, however, homeschoolers did tend to divide themselves according to their beliefs and methods. In California, they did so among three state-wide organizations: the Christian-focused CHEA, the HomeSchool Association of California (HSC), founded in 1987, and the California Homeschool Network (CHN), founded in 1994. The same principle holds for more local play- and park groups, such as the Catholic Christ the King group in the San Gabriel Valley or the mostly secular Family-Centered Education of Los Angeles (FaCE-LA): homeschoolers usually only belong to one. In this way some homeschoolers participated in religiously and philosophically diverse groups from the local to the national level, while others created communities of shared faith locally and state-wide, though still joining with other homeschoolers in the HSLDA. (Though heavy in Christian references and points-of-view, as a legal defense organization, HSLDA is not exclusive.)

By making their state-level community Christian rather than mixed, CHEA members and those like them retained a sense of safety and protection against outside threats real and potential. CHEA's almost exclusively conservative Protestant membership also reflects a restricted yet common definition of the word "Christian;" while other believers are by no means excluded from membership, it is not the mix of Presbyterians, Southern Baptists, Catholics, Seventh-Day Adventists, and countless others suggested by a strict definition of the word. Seeking like-minded support outside of their own families, this section of Californian homeschoolers has reached outward, but it has done so primarily into a conservative Protestant community that can provide guidance and protection to conservative Protestant families homeschooling in the public
eye. They have, essentially, chosen to function largely in the context of a private sort of public, not a public one.

Other California homeschoolers responded differently to their new visibility, however. The California Homeschool Network (CHN) and the HomeSchool Association of California (HSC) exemplify another way of organizing to promote homeschooling, one that aligns with Stevens' concept of the "inclusive" homeschool community. Billed as "the only inclusive statewide organization with an elected board of trustees," the CHN seeks to "serve families from all religious and ethnic affiliations that practice all homeschooling styles." CHN members belong to different faiths and homeschool in a variety of ways. Similarly, HSC describes itself as "an inclusive homeschooling organization dedicated to the support of homeschooling families in all their many flavors." Like CHEA, both CHN and HSC hold annual conferences; yet both organizations are smaller than CHEA, and while their memberships are statewide, HSC leans more towards the northern part of the state and CHN towards the southern.

CHN co-founder Martin Forte explains the differences between the organizations in this way:

In the state of California, you had CHEA, which is strictly faith-based and…attracts the Christian community, and then you had HSC, which is the HomeSchool Association of California, up in Northern California….and they come from more of a secular perspective. And there was a group of us [in Southern California] who wanted to have just homeschooling. Forget the religious side of the things and the secular side, let's have homeschooling, all-inclusive….we didn't care who you were, what you were, just so you wanted to homeschool with success. So there was a group of us who started this CHN back


in the early 90s. And it's been going on ever since. And we started doing a conference…this conference coming up [in 2010] will probably draw around 1,000 individuals….we have family dances, we have family movie night, we have activities for the kids, activities for the adults, good teaching, although a smaller vending hall….CHEA's got the biggest vending hall in the state. There's no question about it.425

CHN's approach is also more casual that CHEA's, certainly in part because of the somewhat simpler logistics of managing a smaller organization. The organization sponsors popular campouts, for example, and its presentations and positions somewhat less concerned than CHEA's; CHN, for example, does not share CHEA's concern that the online charter school movement will damage homeschooling by drawing homeschoolers back into public schooling. But perhaps the major difference is that this "inclusive" homeschooling community does not exclude conservative Christians -- the Forte family, for example, are Evangelical Christians whose homeschooling was explicitly faith-informed -- but has provided an alternate community for those who do not fit into CHEA for reasons of either faith or homeschooling philosophy. CHN includes members like Bonnie Wallace, a Pasadena mother of two whose homeschooling involves no religious component; her children read and enjoy the Chronicles of Narnia without exploring religious themes.426 Likewise, HSC includes parents like Deanna Cheung, who unschooled her two children in Seal Beach while also drawing on public school resources for her musically talented daughter.

While both CHN and HSC exhibit less alarm in their tones and materials, both inclusive organizations do share CHEA's continuing concern that simple changes in law

425 M. Forte, 10-11. Forte was also a member of HSC's board at the time of CHN's founding in 1994.

or policy could easily bring homeschoolers under intolerable restrictions. Homeschoolers in California, whichever communities they belong to, realize that threats to their ability to homeschool freely do exist. As leading light Carolyn Forte puts it, "really it only takes a stroke of a pen to make homeschooling illegal in California. So we need to stay vigilant."\(^{427}\) With the legality of homeschooling still unclear, even inclusive homeschooling organizations formed in part in order to protect those within their boundaries from the unpleasant potentialities outside. For inclusive communities, supporting diverse homeschoolers is part and parcel of the main effort, in the words of the CHN website, "to preserve our own educational freedom."\(^{428}\) As that organization's mission statement declares, the community "exists to protect the fundamental right of the family to educate its children in the manner it deems appropriate without regulation or interference by federal, state or local agencies." All three California organizations carefully watch legislation and support pro-homeschooling lobbying.

In this way, while the experience of participating in CHEA versus CHN or HSC is distinct and leaders do disagree significantly in matter of emphasis, to the outside eye they are ultimately concerned with many of the same issues, and not just legal ones -- members of all three organizations, it should be remembered, spend most of their homeschooling energy on teaching children Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic, not on excluding one another or fighting legal battles. The difference is mostly that for "Christian" CHEA, the like-mindedness of the community revolves around protecting and supporting conservative Christian homeschooling, while for "inclusive" CHN and

\(^{427}\) C. Forte, 7.

\(^{428}\) CHN, "About CHN."
HSC, it revolves around protecting and supporting homeschooling, period, and makes more space for ecumenism in the fight.

This said, while the alignment of Californian homeschoolers in terms of state-wide organizations proves the significance of the "Christian" and "inclusive" division proposed by Stevens, trends over the course of the early 2000s suggest that this division can be overemphasized. Focusing on difference within homeschooling can lead researchers to miss homeschoolers' many commonalities and cooperative endeavors across even these boundaries. Because homeschoolers operate at the family level but organize at every level, from a two-family teaching partnership all the way to the 80,000-member HSLDA, homeschoolers pick and chose their alliances based on a combination of circumstances, faith and values, and raw needs. Unlike at the state level, at the community or even neighborhood level -- where the actual work of homeschooling occurs -- there are many ways in which families do not fall neatly into exclusive and inclusive categories. Rather, they blend exclusiveness and inclusiveness in ways that suit their family needs in particular, rarely following the same course from family to family.

To look at it another way, most homeschoolers create their local educational communities based on shared values and personal circumstances. Often, the values and resources that homeschoolers prioritize on this level lead them to cross the Christian/inclusive boundaries, as well as to turn away from resources that at first glance seem well-suited to their identities.

As Trina Morell, a Temple City mother of four puts it,

I used the phrase "it takes a village" in my conversation with you, and I think I implied that I didn't believe that it takes a village to raise a child. I should have said that it is definitely preferable for a whole village to give assistance and support to the nuclear family; however, I don't want our present government and
certain leaders in the Archdiocese of L.A. Catholic school system and many of the students within the public and Catholic school systems being the main influences in raising my children. I do want the Catholic and Protestant homeschool community that I've found in the San Gabriel Valley to be that village, because we share the same core values.429

For the Morells, "core values" were the most important factor in choosing a homeschooling community, not, for example, affiliation with the Catholic Church, or even Catholic orthodoxy. In seeking out a community that would help them guide their children into becoming "the authentic people that God has created them to be," they looked for companions who shared the "core" of their worldview; this included like-minded Protestants, including those who might be CHEA members, but could not include Catholics who disagreed with official church teachings.430 It included the Boy Scouts, too, for example, but only once they made sure that their particular troop included numerous families, both Catholic and Protestant, who shared their values.431 After all, says Trina, even "all-American Boy Scouts" falls prone at times to "bullying" and "drug incidents."432

Does all this make the Morells inclusive or exclusive?

The question sets up a false dichotomy when applied to local homeschooling. Perhaps the Morells were exclusive by avoiding too much influence from families that were not like-minded and from "some" but not all of their local church leaders (as well as "many" schoolchildren), but they were also inclusive by supporting and cooperating with

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429 Trina Morell, e-mail message to author, May 17, 2011.
430 Morell, e-mail.
432 Morell, interview, 4-5.
families who were like-minded in some ways but quite different in others. The same could be said of virtually every homeschooler in California, whether they belonged to CHEA or CHN or no group at all, not even the HSLDA; the question depends on what characteristics one considers when setting up the dichotomy.

In fact, functioning beyond the hiddenness of the 1980s and the first reintegration into the public sphere brought on by the 1990s, homeschooling in the 2000s gave families like the Morells the ability to define their own communities according to their needs and beliefs, not according to their own or their neighbors' institutional affiliations -- even religious ones. In this way, they were indeed exclusive in that they made conscious decisions about each family, group, or activity they associated themselves with, but these decisions were often more inclusive than one might imagine. Even though the terms "inclusive" and "exclusive" are ones that certain homeschoolers, notably the members of non-sectarian groups (Stevens in fact drew the terms from "the local lingo" of this type of homeschoolers in the Chicago area), they are less useful in describing practical, local-level homeschooling than on other levels.433 In fact, while homeschoolers were willing to draw upon institutions and to support and enrich state-wide and national organizations, including supporting their general exclusivity or inclusivity, their philosophy and practical needs counter the idea that they ought to be either defined or circumscribed by those organizations. When homeschooling began to leave its fringe, anti-institutional infancy behind in the 1980s, it entered into a period of amazing acceptance among homeschoolers across religious and philosophical boundaries; in the 1990s, the strengthening of major homeschooling organizations ended this honeymoon as

433 Stevens, 151.
homeschooling leaders focused on the differences in their platforms. But in the first decade of the twenty-first century, as the legal stakes continued to diminish and the social context in which homeschoolers lived became friendlier, homeschoolers were once again finding ways to work together even while they sensed and even upheld certain boundaries.

The astonishing development of technology during this period contributed greatly to homeschoolers' ability to transcend institutional and social borders. As internet access became ubiquitous, so did homeschoolers' abilities to build community with homeschooling comrades beyond their geographic communities. The internet not only improved the ability to search for like-minded people and programs and to contact them with unheard of speed, but also to create homeschooling programs that students from across the country could access despite their physical separateness (and even their different time zones).

The development is best exemplified by the numerous private online academies and public charter schools, all commonly known as virtual schools, which cropped up in this period. Both types of virtual schools creatively used new technologies to provide the security, support and guidance of a brick-and-mortar school while allowing for significant flexibility in the rhythm of the school day, as well as sometimes in curricula. They allowed homeschoolers, who had refused the institutional package of regular schooling, to benefit from some aspects of an expert-led education while keeping their children physically away from schools. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to pin down accurate enrollment numbers for this category of schools because the California

434 Stevens, 198.
Department of Education has classified them in several different ways over the decade, sometimes including some or all such students in their "independent study" category, and at others mixing them in with other "alternative schools" and "thematic schools," among still other categories, and including many charter schools in their standard public school enrollment figures. However, the growth in such schools indicates a growth in the number of families choosing such schools, as well.

Private virtual schools functioned much as brick-and-mortar homeschooling academies, providing resources and structure for homeschooling families but allowing parents and children themselves the greater hand in directing learning. Like the correspondence schools that were their predecessors, such schools could enroll dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of students but physically only occupy a few rooms somewhere in an office park or even a private home. These schools provided guidance and -- crucially -- opportunity to homeschoolers without claiming ultimate authority in the way of public school systems. More unusual, perhaps, was the development of online public virtual schools. An outgrowth of the charter school movement of the 1990s, which sought to allow private individuals and even companies to direct semi-independent schools with public funds, these schools represented a growing willingness among public educators to customize schooling according to individual families' needs.

One of the foremost virtual schools in America in fact straddles the public-private category, thus offering an example of virtual schooling as a whole. Founded in 1999, K\textsuperscript{12}

\footnote{See, for example, Stevens's description of Clonlara School in Ann Arbor, Michigan: Stevens, 107-108.}
is the largest online curriculum and schooling provider in the nation. K12 functions in three ways: as a private school, a meta-public school, and a curriculum provider. Families can participate by signing up with a public online school that functions with K12 curricula; by enrolling in one of K12's private schools or simply with "teacher support;" or by purchasing access to courses and doing them as independent study (the child does the course online with parent guidance; essentially, he is homeschooled, but uses a K12 course). In most cases, K12 essentially assigns a teacher, certified to teach in the student's home state, to each enrolled student; together the teacher and the "learning coach" (usually a parent) customize the student's coursework and help them through it. When the student reaches high school, the learning coach hands over more control to teachers with subject-based expertise, similar to the multi-subject, multi-teacher model of most public high schools.

If a student should wish to enroll in a public school through K12, they can chose from a handful provided in each state. A Californian example of these "networK12 schools" is the iQ Academy California, Los Angeles. Publicly funded through the California Department of Education, iQ Academy connects students with teachers and K12 curricula while they complete their work exclusively online. A major advantage is that, as public schools, such schools are tuition-free; but, like their non-internet-based predecessors in the 1990s, they do place more restrictions on families than ordinary


437 See http://www.k12.com/schools-programs/online-public-schools#.Uf-xY5JJOAg for listings by state. The number and diversity of schools functioning within K12 is astonishing.

438 See http://losangeles.iqacademyca.com/ for more on the school.
homeschooling would, even homeschooling directly through an online curriculum provider such as K12.

Each of these options opened up an at least minimally-customized online education to Californian children whose families wanted or needed to keep them at home. Terrie MacQuarrie, a former homeschooler who now works for K12 herself, remembers the relief of purchasing K12's curriculum for her daughter and later enrolling her children in one of K12's first school programs:

[As a homeschooler,] my approach to my children's education was not as balanced as it could have been…. I realized that I actually passed off some of my own weaknesses and biases. And so I felt really good about how the [K12] curriculum was designed. And that it was providing the things that I had not done well. But it was also, you know…developmentally appropriate.439

By using K12 as a tool, MacQuarrie felt that she was able to partner with experts yet still significantly direct her children's schooling. In the public school her daughter had initially attended, she had been able to influence neither the curricula -- her daughter's teacher refused to provide more challenging language arts, for example -- nor the social influences (her daughter witnessed a drug deal at her public school while a young child).440

As with the pioneering public homeschooling programs of the 1990s, not all homeschoolers supported the move towards public virtual schools. CHEA, for example, has maintained a strong objection to homeschooler involvement in charter schools over the years because they limit parental authority over a child's education while also excluding religiosity from the school day. As one CHEA publication on the matter states,

439 MacQuarrie, 4.

440 MacQuarrie, 5.
Charter schools are funded by taxpayer monies and, according to the California Constitution, all publicly funded schools must be under the "exclusive control of the officers of the public schools." The very heart of homeschooling is the return of that control to the parents. THIS CANNOT HAPPEN WITHIN A PUBLIC SCHOOL [emphasis CHEA's].441

The distinction is accurate; by enrolling a student in any way in a public school, the parent does agree to cede significant control to the public. And unlike when homeschooling through a brick-and-mortar homeschooling co-op or academy -- still a hugely popular and growing approach -- at a virtual public school, the principal and teachers were not always well-known within the family's homeschooling community. They might not even be Christian, something that mattered greatly to CHEA families.442 CHEA worried, too, that this halfway option between normative schooling and homeschooling could damage the progress that homeschoolers had made in the public eye, both by simply reducing the number of private homeschoolers and by "support[ing] the assumption among many 'professionals' that parents are incapable of raising their children without government supervision."443

However, for homeschoolers like MacQuarrie, virtual schools could offer a compromise that would at least allow parents to retain more authority than they would have in a normative school, yet without having to take the lead in daily schoolwork, as they would have to in many homeschooling scenarios; in this case, the parent was glad to be principal. It was almost as if online schools offered a step back in time in terms of parental authority; now, in the early 2000s, parents could have the influence on culture


442 CHEA and FPM, 2.

443 CHEA and FPM, 4.
and curricula that many had once tried to exercise through PTAs and community pressure in the 1940s and '50s, but they could do so without sacrificing the benefits of school support and resources, as homeschoolers had done until the late 1990s. This new form of schooling -- online schooling in which one could keep a foot in both the homeschooling and the normative schooling worlds -- allowed families to educate without being anti-institutional. allowed families to school without being anti-institutional. Indeed, in the early 2000s, developments in both communities and technology opened up new ways for homeschoolers to go beyond either eschewing or embracing schools and instead to operate post-institutionally, drawing from but refusing to be limited by traditional institutions. Instead, homeschoolers were finding ways to use school resources without ceding control; in fact, many homeschooling families even move in and out between homeschooling and public or private schools on a year-by-year, child-by-child basis, depending on the family's needs at the time.444 All of this was acceptable not because homeschoolers were abandoning their distinctiveness or embracing normative schooling, but rather because they felt free to create, in essence, their own childhood-long lesson plan for each child, which might draw from many different resources but would always be based on parental supervision and choice. Moving beyond their anti-institutional roots, they were becoming educational networkers, advocates, and multi-taskers.

Homeschoolers built on the resources they had developed in the 1990s to create a fascinating post-institutional approach to educational, political, religious, and geographic boundaries in American society. On a state and national level, they swelled the ranks of two types of organizations devised to help protect and grow their movement, dividing

444 See examples in Murphy, 27.
their ranks between "Christian" and inclusive perspectives. However, at the family and local community levels, they eschewed these boundaries as well, instead ignoring traditional categories when it suited them in order to create communities based on the values that mattered most to each family's homeschooling. They used new technologies, especially the internet, to establish academies and alliances across physical space, as well as drawing on public school resources tailored to their needs and accessible in their own living rooms, by computer. By adjusting established categories to fit their needs in a variety of important ways, from sharing teaching with unlikely religious allies to demanding access to the pool at their local public high school, homeschooling families had taken the lead in something quite new. No longer defined by being against the institutions of American education, they had instead become post-institutional.

The Rachel L. Case: Changes in Public Acceptance

When the Los Angeles Police Department mistook Tom and Abigail Spencer for truants in 2009, the Spencers, their lawyers, and their homeschooling academy reacted swiftly and angrily. Why should two well-behaved teenagers have to take a ride in an LAPD cruiser just because the driver didn't understand about homeschooling? Yet unlike what might have happened had the incident occurred in 1989 or 1999, the youths were only held a few hours and their parents were never arrested; indeed, even the citations against Tom and Abigail were dismissed at the first court appearance. In the Spencers' case, the actors on all sides realized fairly quickly that treating the youngsters as truants was, indeed, a mistake; the LAPD officer was operating under a lack of information and simply made the wrong call.
In fact, while in the past the worst homeschooling truancy cases in California had led to parent arrests, court orders that children be enrolled in normative schools, temporary removal of children from parental homes, and long legal ordeals that caused much personal damage to families, the Spencer incident led to an entirely different legal situation: the Spencer family bringing suit against the city Los Angeles for the unlawful arrest of their children (and also in order to force the better education of LAPD officers regarding homeschooling and truancy). At the time of this writing, the suit has not been resolved, but the change is clear. By 2010, homeschoolers had gone from hiding out to stepping out, from expecting to constantly be on the defensive to demanding that legal and social systems support rather than threaten them. They not only considered their actions to be for the public good, but they expected the public to formally uphold them as such.

Yet for all the formal and informal connections that homeschoolers in the early 2000s were developing with the public and its institutions, homeschooling still did not entirely relinquish its hidden status. Some homeschoolers remained markedly isolationist, although these seem to have been the exception rather than the rule by the mid-1990s, and many others remained nervous. For most homeschoolers, the problem was that even as homeschooling gained ground in social and institutional acceptability, it still remained in a legal gray zone in California, with the state's education code still unclear on whether or not the practice was allowed. Organizations like CHEA, CHN, HSC, and especially the HSLDA still reverberated with alarm (although also determination) when any homeschooler had a run-in with the courts. Decided on a state-by-state level and with
many policies often decided even more locally, homeschooling's legality was still uncertain in California, and could quite conceivably be decided in the negative.

The more than half-century of legal uncertainty over homeschooling in California finally came to an end in 2008, when the state's highest court ruled definitively that homeschooling, when properly registered, did not violate the state's compulsory education laws. It was a revolutionary change, so much so that Tom and Abigail Spencer found themselves clearly on the right side of the law when they were arrested a year later, rather than unclearly so. The ruling would not, of course, preclude future legislation against homeschooling or prevent police officers and school officials from making mistakes, but it did give homeschooling a full and legal place in the public sphere in California. Homeschoolers would not suddenly be free from threats or from alarm, but the battle to homeschool would no longer be so uphill or so constant.

The case that created such a change, *In re Rachel L.*, highlighted the crux of the relationship between homeschooling and the public at the end of a sixty-year journey to legality in California: the dilemma of reconciling families' rights to protect and nurture their children with the public's responsibilities towards those same children. The case is notable in particular because it paired child abuse with homeschooling in its substance, but separated the two in its rulings.

The case began soon after Los Angeles teenager Rachel L. ran away from home on October 29, 2005, and did not return. Soon after New Year's, Rachel contacted a Los Angeles police station asking for help because she was "tired, hungry, and had no

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445 The court truncated the family's last name in all documents in order to protect the minors involved.
place to live."446 The fourteen-year-old told the police that her father both abused her and kept her from receiving a decent education and that she had been sexually molested by a family friend. She also expressed concern about her younger brother and sister, Jonathan and Mary Grace, who were still living at home. The police called Rachel's parents, and her father Philip came to the station, where according the police he was "sarcastic, contrary, belligerent, and bullying."447

The case proceeded as many abuse cases sadly do. Rachel was placed in the care of an older sister during the investigation, while Jonathan and Mary Grace were provisionally released back to their parents after an initial removal. Rachel, those of her seven brothers and sisters who were questioned, and her parents all gave different and sometimes changing accounts of the lifestyle, rules and discipline prevalent in the family home. The L. parents did not cooperate with the court, hiding the younger children and refusing to provide documents and information needed to obtain funds for Rachel's care in the foster system. It seemed clear to the Superior Court of Los Angeles that the corporal punishment inflicted by Philip on some of his children exceeded legal bounds. The court also credited Rachel's reports of sexual abuse.

The case was supported by the L. family's twenty-year history of run-ins with the courts over the welfare of their children, beginning in 1987, when Rachel's half-sister Cam was permanently removed from the family home because of physical abuse. The juvenile court again heard petitions based on the welfare of the L. children in 1989, when three of the L. children reported sexual abuse by family friends, and in 1993, when the

446 In re Rachel L., B192601 and B195484 (Cal. App. 2d Dist. 2007), 3. This document summarizes the background, rulings, and various appeals connected to the L. family case.

family came under investigation for allegedly providing a "dangerous" and "filthy" home for the children. All of the children remained with their parents at the resolution of these cases last two cases; in 2001, however, the court determined that fifteen-year-old Elizabeth L.'s "physical and emotional health were at risk" in her parents' home and placed her in foster care until she turned eighteen.\textsuperscript{448} It was Elizabeth who would later care for Rachel during the investigation into Rachel's welfare.

All this is to say that in terms of abuse of at least the L. teenagers, the case was fairly clear-cut. But a second aspect arose over the question of the L. children's right to a decent education. All but the eldest of the L. children had never attended any school outside of the home, and the eldest had only done so through the first grade. One of Rachel's complaints was that her father "would not let her attend public school."\textsuperscript{449} During the court proceedings, attorneys questioned several of the L. family members in detail about the nature of the family's homeschooling. Rachel, Jonathan, and Mary Grace were all enrolled Sunland Christian School, a homeschooling academy whose independent study style allowed the L. parents to conduct their homeschooling with great freedom. Through Sunland Christian, the L. family was relying on one of the standard methods of attempting to homeschool legally in California: registering children in a private school but teaching them at home. The school stated in a letter that Philip and Mary L. "consistently complied with all regulations concerning homeschooling their children. They maintain the appropriate interaction required, which includes

\textsuperscript{448} In re Rachel L., 2007, 2-3.

\textsuperscript{449} In re Rachel L., 2007, 3.
accountability, record keeping, testing and attendance of required meetings."\textsuperscript{450} The school's director also stated that the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Los Angeles Office of Education were both satisfied that the school was in compliance with the California's education code, which was in fact the case.

At the conclusion of the Los Angeles case, the court removed Rachel permanently from her parents' care; at first, she seemed to be doing well living with her sister Elizabeth, but at the time of the six-month-review of the case, she had run away and her whereabouts were unknown. Jonathan and Mary Grace were allowed to remain with their parents, but under the close supervision of the court, the children's court-appointed attorneys, and child welfare officials. Quite unlike its decisions in homeschooling cases in the 1950s and '60s, the Los Angeles court also sustained the L. parents' right to home educate, indicating that "it believed the parents have the legal right to home school their children assuming the home schooling education is appropriate."\textsuperscript{451} The court arranged for extra oversight over the family's homeschooling, but otherwise allowed it to continue.

If left there, the case would have been more or less unremarkable, although distressing in the abuse it revealed. However, Jonathan and Mary Grace's attorney filed an appeal on their behalf. The appeal concerned not the question of their safety with their parents, but rather the issue of their education. The attorney's petition requested that the California Court of Appeals "direct the juvenile court to order that the children be enrolled in a public or private school, and actually attend such a school."\textsuperscript{452} The Court of

\textsuperscript{450} In re Rachel L., 2007, 6.
\textsuperscript{451} In re Rachel L., 2007, 11.
\textsuperscript{452} In re Rachel L., 2008, 3.
Appeals took a different approach that the lower court had; citing precedents from several decades earlier, including the federal decision in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925) and the California cases *People v. Turner* (1953), and *In re Shinn* (1961), the court ruled sweepingly that homeschooling was in fact illegal in California unless conducted by a credentialed tutor. Jonathan and Mary Grace would have to enroll in a public or private school and physically attend it; they could not longer be schooled at home.

The ruling meant a great deal more than this, however. In fact, by ruling that home schools and homeschooling academies such as Sunland did not count as private schools under the compulsory education sections of California's education code, the court effectively declared that almost all California homeschooling was, in fact, illegal. Not only Jonathan and Mary Grace, but also almost every other California homeschooler of every type and persuasion might now be legally required to attend a normative school.

It was a moment of terror for homeschooling advocates. It was also one of surprise. The L. family were members of neither HSLDA nor CHEA, CHN, or HSC, and were represented only by court-appointed lawyers, so none of these homeschooling organizations had known of their troubles. In part because of this, but also because the proceedings were kept confidential (by law) due to the involvement of minors, homeschoolers as a group were completely unaware of the case until the moment of the February 28, 2008 appellate ruling. In the alarmed words of an HSLDA statement following the ruling, neither the major homeschooling organizations nor homeschooling families "had any knowledge that the right of all homeschoolers in California was depending upon the outcome of this family's case" until the ruling had already been

issued.\textsuperscript{454} Until then, those who knew about the case knew only that it concerned the welfare of children in a family accused of "physical and emotional mistreatment," something that everyone of course wished to be addressed as quickly and firmly as possible.\textsuperscript{455}

Homeschooling advocates acted quickly. Thanks to homeschooling's decades-long history of tangles with the courts, the California homeschooling organizations and especially the HSLDA were prepared to immediately contest the ruling. HSLDA, CHEA, CHN, HSC, and CHEA's legal defense and lobbying arm, Family Protection Ministries (FPM), sprang into action. The L. parents were already petitioning for the case to be reheard based on the need to more thoroughly address the "complex" nature of California law regarding homeschooling;\textsuperscript{456} California homeschooling organizations and academies prepared for that rehearing by issuing statements, petitioning legislators to assure them that no anti-homeschooling laws would go forward at the moment, and appealing to government officials, as well as setting their lawyers to work on their arguments. Staffed with experienced and committed pro-homeschooling attorneys, the HSLDA filed an \textit{amicus curiae} brief in support of the L. family's homeschooling rights, and also prepared to petition for the decision to be depublished should the ruling stand, an action which would limit the ruling's jurisdiction to the L. family alone, making it inapplicable to other homeschoolers. The HSLDA promised to "take the lead" in the depublishing effort.

\textsuperscript{454} HSLDA, "Response to Ruling."

\textsuperscript{455} In re Rachel L., 2008, 3.

should the need arise. The most prominent of the HSLDA lawyers and one of its founders, Michael Farris, prepared to support the family in court, as did a prominent handful of other pro-homeschooling attorneys. Dozens of other organizations also filed amicus briefs before the rehearing, including CHN, CHEA, HSC, FPM, smaller religious associations such as the Jewish Homeschoolers of Napa and Sonoma, rights-based organizations such as the American Civil Rights Union, and homeschooling academies such as Monrovia's Excellence in Education. Once again, homeschoolers ranging from classical-education-oriented Evangelicals from San Diego to ultra-liberal San Francisco unschoolers found themselves binding together to support their common right to direct their children's education.

The February decision of the court to rule on homeschooling in general rather than on the welfare of the L. children in particular made no sense to homeschoolers. As the HSLDA noted at the time, "the ability to homeschool freely in California should not depend upon one family in a closed-door proceeding. All families should have the right to be heard since the rights of all are clearly at stake." Perhaps more surprisingly, however, when considering homeschooling's extended history of conflict with the public, was that it was not only homeschoolers who were concerned by the ruling. Ten days after the ruling, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger issued a forceful statement decrying the decision:

Every California child deserves a quality education and parents should have the right to decide what's best for their children. Parents should not be penalized for acting in the best interests of their children's education. This outrageous ruling

457 HSLDA, "Response to Ruling."

458 HSLDA, "Response to Ruling."
must be overturned by the courts and if the courts don't protect parents' rights then, as elected officials, we will.459

The head of the California Department of Education, Jack O'Connell, also chimed in:

…traditional public schools may not be the best fit for every student. Within the public school system there are a range of options available. Students can take independent study classes, attend a charter school, or participate in non-classroom-based programs. But some parents choose to send their children to private schools or to home school, and I respect that right. I admire the dedication of parents who commit to oversee their children's education through home schooling.460

In the same statement, O'Connell promised homeschoolers that in spite of the ruling, "California Department of Education policy will not change in any way as a result."461

The head of government-run education in the most populous state in the country was so convinced that homeschooling was legal that he was prepared to ignore the court's ruling to the contrary.

The reactions of these powerful non-homeschoolers are a clear representation of the changes that had occurred since Los Angeles prosecuted local mother Mary Turner for homeschooling in 1953. Not only had homeschooling grown in size and visibility, but it had also grown in acceptance. In spite of the distressing situation of the L. family, major Californian public figures as well as the actual government department of education jumped to the defense of homeschoolers in general, even though home schooling meant the absence of tens of thousands of California children from public (and


461 O'Connell, "Statement."
normative private) schools. In fact, the Los Angeles Unified School District itself filed an *amicus* brief not opposing, but instead *supporting* the right to home school. It was a reversal that would have been unthinkable 20 years earlier.

The case, now known as *Jonathan L., et al., v. The Superior Court of Los Angeles County*, was reheard on June 23, hearing arguments from HSLDA and CHEA lawyers, among others. On August 8, 2008, the court released its decision in favor of the petitioners, effectively reversing its previous ruling. In one restriction, the ruling did uphold the right of the court to direct the schooling of a homeschooled child who has been declared a dependent of the court -- a child like Rachel -- in order to protect his or her safety. The appeals court had, for example, ordered that Jonathan and Mary Grace go to school as a practical protective measure, "so that they would be in regular contact with mandatory reporters of abuse and neglect."462 (This is a common tactic used by courts when they are concerned about a child's well-being but do not wish to break up a family unnecessarily; schoolteachers are legally bound to report any signs of abuse they may notice in their daily interactions with their pupils.) However, the court also definitively ruled that "California statutes permit home schooling as a species of private school education."463 The legality of homeschoolers' decades-long practice of registering their living room lessons or cooperative academies as private schools had finally been affirmed by the highest court of the most populous state in the nation.

The reasoning behind the court's reversal of its February ruling perfectly illustrates the change in the relationship between homeschooling and the California


463 Jonathan L. v. Superior Court, 5.
public in the decades leading up to the provision. The court noted that its role was to interpret legislation, not to enact it, but that this task had been "made more difficult in this case by legislative inaction." As was common in the 19th century, California had once legally allowed for schooling exclusively at home, but in the early twentieth century this allowance had been essentially removed as the legislature revised its compulsory education codes. Cases such as Turner (1953) and Shinn (1961), in which parents were prosecuted for homeschooling, set precedents of honoring these revisions and interpreting the codes as excluding homeschooling from the provision for private schooling. The 2008 court noted, too, that "while the Legislature could have amended the statutes in response to these cases, to expressly provide that a home school could be a private school, it did not do so." In its first ruling on the L. family, the appellate court had followed these precedents.

However, in a fascinating revision, the court found that while legislators had not changed the law, they had gradually come to behave as if homeschooling was legal and acceptable. The state legislature had not enacted any laws directly addressing homeschooling, but the court noted that there were several statutes enacted that referred to homeschooling in such a way as to imply a legal acceptance of practice. For example, one section of the education code dealing with disabled children refers to those who are homeschooled; in another example, a section of the state Health and Safety Code exempts "any private school in which education is primarily conducted in private homes" from


465 See chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of these precedents.

466 Jonathan L. v. Superior Court, 7.
one of its air quality regulations. Ruling that home schooling was illegal would "render meaningless" these legislative acts, which were based on legislators' assumption that homeschooling was legal. It became clear to the court that even though the legislature had not specified that home schools could count as private schools under the compulsory education code, the legislature's intent was no longer that that code should be interpreted to exclude homeschoolers.

Homeschooling was legal, the court ruled, not because a law explicitly made it so, but because the people of California, from the Los Angeles school board all the way up to the state legislators and the Governor himself, believed it was.

The story of Rachel L. and Jonathan L. highlights a fundamental responsibility that homeschoolers and non-homeschoolers, school districts and private academies, the state and the family all share: the duty to protect children. But from whom should they be protected? While the public had once seen protecting children from abuse and protecting them from homeschooling parents as one and the same, by the end of the first decade of the new millennium, this was no longer the case. Homeschoolers and the wider public had realigned so that they believed that court involvement in homeschooling should be restricted to families suspected of abuse; no longer did they consider homeschooling inherently abusive. Parents who beat their children; who emotionally abused their children; who failed to protect their children from abusive friends; these parents were no longer to be considered in the same category as parents who wanted to teach their


468 Jonathan L. v. Superior Court, 32.
children away from public control. The state of California had come to believe that while the public still had a strong right and responsibility to protect children, in the realm of education, it was also acceptable for parents to homeschool, even when their aim in doing so was in part to protect their children from the public.

As homeschooling grew in size and sophistication between 2000 and 2010, it developed ways of interacting with the public that both protected its privacy and hiddenness and drew upon public resources and support. By not only creating home schools but also going beyond normative schooling, homeschoolers exhibited a post-institutional approach to schooling that continued to link education with the public good without relinquishing the right and responsibility of parents to protect and educate their children in a private manner. They believed in private rights, but also in the public protection of morality and privacy. They wanted the L. children protected from abuse, but they also wanted to uphold the right of parents to protect their children from negative influences in the public. And the public had somehow, over time, come to agree. Once, the notion that Los Angeles mother might teach her children at home shocked and appalled both ordinary citizens and government officials; now, it was the idea that parents might not be allowed to homeschool that the Governor of California himself called "outrageous."
CONCLUSION

In 1950, homeschooling was nearly unheard of, even in Los Angeles County. In 1975, it was a fringe activity that seemed ready to disappear. But by 2010, homeschooling caused the absence on average of one student from every normative American school classroom. Homeschooling is now something that many "normal" people do as well as radicals. Why? How? What does this mean?

The history of homeschooling suggests that homeschooling arose and eventually flourished because of the refashioning over time of the relationship between individual families and institutions, especially schools. The stories of homeschooling families; radical educational leaders; homeschool playgroups, coalitions, and organizations; homeschooling academies and online schools; homeschool programs within public schools districts; court cases and changing public responses to them; and even the words of the Terminator offer detailed evidence for the development of homeschooling from a radical activity on the edge of legality to a still somewhat unusual but by no means outrageous educational choice, and in particular for the trajectory from anti-institutionalism to post-institutionalism that allowed this development to occur.

I have argued in this dissertation that it was the organization of homeschooling, its path from anti-institutionalism to post-institutionalism, and the resulting semi-integration of homeschooling into public life that caused this change to occur. I also suggest that the
unique educational history of the United States, especially during the Cold War period, allowed enough public support of local control to survive in an increasingly centralized environment for Americans to change their minds about homeschooling overall by the first decade of the twenty-first century. This change, I suggest, parallels and forms a part of a growing tension in public affairs in the country: the division between those Americans who seek government and expert participation in the lives but wish to retain private authority over sectors such as education, health care, and even agriculture -- a post-institutional approach -- and those Americans who believe that increased government and expert oversight of these matters, in contrast to local or individual authority, will best protect and enrich the nation and its children. It is the division between a locally-oriented, libertarian approach that figures that as long as something's not hurting anybody, it's probably okay, and an institutionally-driven approach that believes that only expert institutional control can ensure that something like local education is in fact actually not hurting anybody. The difference is not one of motivation -- all Americans are seeking to care for themselves, their country, and especially their children -- but one of differing beliefs about the effectiveness of private, even personal v. institutional oversight.

Between 1950 and 1975, homeschooling's first pioneers struggled with public disapprobation, prosecutions both apparently fair and unfair, and an inability to connect easily with one another for support. In the context of Cold War anxiety over the academic ability of the next generation, American educators and policy-makers pursued a course of increased federal and state influence over formerly local school decisions while also continuing the trend toward the school consolidation. Combined with the era's zeitgeist of
social upheaval and distrust, these changes in authority led a small number of parents to
develop an anti-institutional idea that would protect their children by teaching them in the
bosom of the family: homeschooling. As a hidden population, these early homeschoolers
were rarely noticed by outsiders, but the legal troubles of the Turner and Shinn families
in Los Angeles County illustrate how difficult and dangerous early homeschooling could
be, as well as public responses to it. Meanwhile, the writings of public figures who
became interested in homeschooling, especially John Holt and Dorothy and Raymond
Moore, gave early homeschoolers of all types -- liberal and conservative, religious and
secular -- encouragement and support in their loneliness.

This combination of the willingness to operate in isolation and the desire to seek
support prefigured the next step in the history of homeschooling: the effort between 1975
and 1990 to organize, but not institutionalize, homeschooling in order to protect
homeschoolers legally and aid them practically. Creeping towards public visibility, Los
Angeles families such as the Fortes, the Haggards, and the Brookses struggled with
strategies and regulations in order to help each other homeschool. They also developed
additional reasons for homeschooling due to the deepening concerns of the era, especially
worries about secular influences in normative schools, poor academic standards and
practices, and gang violence. This led also to the development of major homeschooling
associations, such as the Home School Legal Defense Association and the Christian
Home Educators Association of California. By side-stepping educational institutions but
embracing organization, homeschoolers in this period preserved their movement without
giving up their authority to the institutions they distrusted.
In the 1990s, homeschooling changed once again. In an era of increased support and organization, new families could enter homeschooling with the assurance that they would not be starting from scratch. Curricula, academies, stores, magazines, playgroups and organizations were all at the ready to help -- even if their numbers were only then just beginning to grow. There were now over 500 homeschooling families in Los Angeles County.\footnote{Walker, "Stay-at-Home Students."} Families such as the Mianks, Lenoxes, Palmers, Cheung/Sharifis, and Dewberrys began to envision a new type of homeschooling, one that was no longer anti-institutional but instead post-institutional. Homeschooling in the 1990s was protective, but no longer isolationist. Instead, homeschooling families sought ways to reach out to the public, both in its educational institutions and in churches, neighborhoods, and private schools, in order to support and supplement their homeschooling. Some homeschoolers began to attend community college in their teens; others began to play on local school sports teams; still others went to homeschool proms to socialize. Some homeschooling families set up co-operatives and academies, sharing their strengths by teaching each other's children in a centralized location: they removed homeschooling from the home, but not from an environment of parental authority. In these ways, homeschoolers went beyond traditional institutional boundaries to create a new, tailor-made means of education that combined both public and private goods. And some school systems even went along with them, creating homeschool programs and allowing homeschoolers to participate in school extracurriculars. Yet all of this was still done under primarily parental control.
By 2000, homeschooling was close to reaching a point of public acceptance in California, as elsewhere. In its new ability to visibly combine the public and the private in educational practice, homeschooling had crept from the fringe to just inside the mainstream. Homeschoolers were no longer easily divisible into inclusive and exclusive categories. As the public outcry following the 2008 California Supreme Court decision declaring homeschooling illegal demonstrates, although laws and regulations had not yet clarified homeschooling's acceptability, public opinion in fact assumed that the practice was legal. In fact, even the legislature did, indirectly addressing homeschooling throughout the education code without ever stopping to think whether it really ought to be an option. Comprising 4% of American students by 2010, homeschooling seemed here to stay.470

The history of homeschooling since 1950 suggests a counterpoint in the history of education to the story of increasing school consolidation, higher-stakes standardized testing, and shared curricula and standards across the nation: homeschooling began as a rebellion against schooling at a time when it seemed that parents would lose all control over their children's education, but it did not flourish until homeschoolers and the public began to find acceptable ways for homeschooling families to draw on public support without forfeiting parental authority. The public acceptance that homeschooling now enjoys in Los Angeles County suggests that this trajectory from anti-institutional efforts to abandon schooling to post-institutional efforts to refashion it is an echo of a broader historical trend in the relationship between Americans and their institutions. While consolidation and increased government or national expert oversight continues to be a

major thread in American life, the past twenty or so years have seen the development of another broad trend towards protecting local and especially family sovereignty over the details of American life.

Rather than simply rejecting government and institutional oversight, however, this trend has moved beyond traditional boundaries to form coalitions and protests willing to draw on whatever resources best promote their welfare. Homeschoolers' willingness to cooperate with surprising allies in their quest for parent-directed education parallels a number of other seemingly unlikely coalitions. This post-institutional approach means not only working beyond institutions, but also beyond traditional American boundaries, just as when conservative Catholics and secular Hollywood Jews work together to expand and protect homeschooling. Examples of other elements in this trend include the pro-life movement, which joins conservative Mormons, conservative Protestants, and conservative Catholics in action against their liberal co-religionists (who, sixty years ago, could have imagined such an alliance?); other socio-political coalitions such as the gay-rights movement; and "green" movements such as the push for organic food and personal products (drawing supporters based on their concerns about chemicals rather than their conservative or liberal political or religious beliefs).

Participation in this wider trend gives homeschooling a greater chance at long-term sustainability than it might otherwise have: more and more Americans now sympathize with the motivations and methods of the practice. Yet homeschooling also continues to be limited by laws and regulations seeking to balance family, community, district, state and national authority over education. With every change of gubernatorial and presidential administration, new possibilities open for the increased regulation or
deregulation of homeschooling. Formally, the states of Pennsylvania, Utah, Iowa, New Hampshire, and Minnesota have all reduced the regulations on homeschooling in the past three years; yet federal actions (and some other state and local activities) in the past 10 years have tended toward increased restrictions on homeschooling.

Sometimes the changes are indirectly caused, as in the case of the federally-supported Common Core initiative, which has encouraged the standardization of curricula and learning goals across the country. In adopting the Common Core standards, forty-three states, including California, have created a national testing environment that requires that college-admissions tests like the SAT tailor themselves to this common curriculum. Furthering this domino effect, changes in such tests and in state requirements based on the Common Core will likewise require homeschooling families to adjust their curricula in order for their children to score well on the SAT. This is all perfectly well if you agree with the Common Core standards, but it bodes ill for homeschooling parents who want a different sort of education for their children. In further limiting local authority over schooling, the Common Core seeks to protect children from parental or community neglect; but it assumes that the experts and government officials behind the project know better than parents what any given child needs (although under the standards, teachers do have some flexibility in small choices, such as which books their literature classes will read). Even though the Common Core is not designed to regulate homeschooling, in practice it will place nationally-determined restrictions on many living room schools.

An even more striking example of homeschooling's political instability in spite of its growing social acceptance is the convoluted tale of the Romeike family. In 2006,
German parents Uwe and Hannelore Romeike began homeschooling the eldest of their five children in the town of Bissingen, Germany, in apparent violation of German law (which forbids virtually all homeschooling). Over the course of the next two years, the Romeikes received numerous visits and phone calls from local school, child welfare, law enforcement, and elected officials demanding that the Romeike children be enrolled in the local school. On Friday, October 20, 2006, police officers entered the Romeike home and, without a written order, physically removed the children and took them to the local government school. Officers attempted to repeat the removal on the following Monday, but sympathetic friends and neighbors gathered in front of the home to protest, resulting in the officers leaving without the children. Following these events, government officials temporarily allowed the children to remain out of school based on a doctor's letter stating that forcibly removing the children could cause them psychological harm. (As the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) brief on the case noted, however, this decision "alarmed Mr. and Mrs. Romeike, as such reasons have been used in other cases in Germany to force homeschooled children into a psychiatric clinic and to take children away from their parents." The family was eventually fined the equivalent of over $15,000 for their children's continuing non-attendance. While protesting these fines in court, the Romeikes became concerned that the government would take action to seize their home as a collection method; rather than wait and see, the Romeikes left Germany.

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471 The Romeikes were homeschooling using curricula from a licensed correspondence school. But according to German law and recent court decisions, homeschooling is illegal in the country except in certain restricted cases (for example, when working parents travel frequently and wish to keep their children with them rather than send them to a boarding school). In fact, even non-German, American military families living on German soil could not legally homeschool until very recently.

and flew to the United States, settling temporarily in Tennessee. Entering as visitors, they had the right to remain in the country for three months.

Fearing that they would lose custody of their children if they returned to Germany, the Romeikes filed for political asylum in November of 2008. The family was allowed to remain in the United States while awaiting their court date. The HSLDA engaged an attorney to represent the Romeikes, who in order to be granted asylum needed to prove that if they returned to their home country, they would be subject to persecution because of their "race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." The Romeikes argued that the family had indeed already suffered persecution because of their political opinions about education, the religious and conscience-based motivations in homeschooling, and their membership in an unwelcome social group (homeschoolers). A Memphis immigration court judge granted their request for asylum on January 26, 2010.

On February 26, however, the federal department of immigration, the United States Government Agency for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), filed an appeal of this decision, arguing that any government (explicitly including the United States) has the right to regulate or prohibit homeschooling and to prosecute those disobeying such a law. On May 4, 2012, the federal Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) overturned the earlier ruling and withdrew the Romeikes' refugee status, requiring that they return to Germany. The ruling stated that the Romeikes did not face persecution in Germany, but only prosecution. It further argued that homeschoolers did not constitute a protected social group because, essentially, any homeschooler could avoid prosecution by simply sending their children to a normative school. A qualifying social group, in the
government's definition of a refugee, must be joined by a shared characteristic that either cannot be changed or should not be required to be changed; but the BIA ruling disagreed with the HSLDA and the Romeikes that the choice to homeschool should be a sacrosanct parental one, not a government one. In other words, the BIA ruling suggested that homeschooling was not a right, but a mutable choice, and therefore the Romeikes could return to Germany without any infringement on their rights. The right of the state to regulate schooling trumped the potential right of parents to choose how their children were educated.

The HSLDA quickly moved with the Romeikes to appeal this decision in the federal courts. In April 2013, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals sustained the BIA’s decision that the Romeikes not be granted asylum, and in the following October HSLDA attorneys filed another appeal, *Romeike v. Holder*, with the United States Supreme Court. On March 3, 2014 the court declined to hear the case.

The next day, however, the Department of Homeland Security inexplicably informed the Romeikes that they would not in fact be deported, but would be granted residency. There is no information explaining the reasoning behind this sudden reversal. It was good news for the Romeikes, of course, but it brought little comfort to American homeschoolers overall. Legally, the immigration officers of the Obama administration and a federal appeals court had both stated that parents did not have an unalienable right to homeschool -- even for religious reasons -- and that governments could reasonably force homeschooled children to attend public schools. This seemed to homeschoolers to increase the danger to homeschooling in the United States, not to decrease it.
statement e-mailed to HSLDA members on March 11 and now available online, HSLDA chairman Michael Farris wrote that

> If our government contends that Germany did not violate the principles of religious freedom when it banned homeschooling in order to gain philosophical control over children, then it implies that it would not violate religious freedom or parental rights if the United States decided to ban homeschooling for the same purpose.\(^473\)

As in the past, whether or not Americans should be allowed to homeschool seems based less on clear-cut legislation or policy and more on interpretation. As the Romeike rulings show, in spite of decisions such as California's *Jonathan L.*, rightly or wrongly, homeschooling's future remains uncertain as long as states and the federal government can constitutionally legislate against it. Yet public opinion, as Homeland Security's reversal towards the Romeikes implies, tends toward supporting homeschooling.

In addition, homeschooling's objective success in preparing children academically and socially for adult life suggests that it is likely to continue growing in favor in many sectors. Recent research by leading homeschool researcher Brian Ray has found that homeschoolers average twenty to twenty-five percentage points higher than public school students in language, reading, math, science and social studies on standardized tests.\(^474\) A summary of other studies found an advantage of between 65 and 80 points over public schoolchildren.\(^475\) And yet another study found that even homeschooled children of parents without teaching certificates scored over twenty points higher on average than

\(^473\) Michael Farris, "Dangerous Policy Lurks Behind Romeike Triumph," HSLDA, http://www.hslda.org/hs/international/Germany/201403110.asp?elq=ae08ea636d9d431cb10a38c2f3a92db0 &elqCampaignId=401 (accessed January 7, 2015). The ruling did in fact explicitly note and approve that Germany wished to exert social control over the schoolchildren and to discourage "parallel societies."


\(^475\) Ray, "Reason and Research," 2.
students in government-run, all-certified schools. Finally, an average of 71% of former homeschoolers were involved in ongoing community service in 2004, as compared to 40% of all American adults, and 95% of former homeschoolers aged 25 to 39 voted, as compared to 40% overall. Furthermore, unlike among the general population, factors such as family income, parents' education level, amount of money spent on schooling, and amount of state regulation made little-to-no difference on achievement outcomes among homeschoolers. There is no denying that on average, at least in comparison to Americans overall, homeschoolers are academically well-educated and prepared for social and civic activity.

Despite this success, in a still politically-tenuous environment, it is unclear if homeschooling will eventually be made illegal. This dissertation has shown a historical tenacity and growth in the movement, however, as well as a trend toward post-institutionalism that is mirrored in other sectors of American society, that would suggest that homeschooling is unlikely to simply fade away. The movement, instead, will likely require much further historical analysis to come.

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