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Civil Religion in American Schools

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Abstract

This article argues that public schools play a key role in producing and transmitting American civil religion. Data from classroom observations, college-age informants, and the author's experiences reveal that civil religion in schools is manifested in daily rituals such as the pledge of

allegiance; in holiday observances, with activities such as music and art; and in the social studies curriculum. Analysis of these data permits one to describe the beliefs, symbols, and rituals of American civil religion. The data further show that the practice of civil religion in schools plays a dual role: while it socializes American youth to a common set of understandings, it also sets off subgroups of Americans whose backgrounds or beliefs prevent them from participating fully in civil religious ceremonies.

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