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Book Review: *Battleground: One*
Mother's Crusade, the Religious Right,
and the Struggle for Control of our
Classrooms

David Moshman
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, dmoshman1@unl.edu

Battleground: One Mother's Crusade, the Religious Right, and the Struggle for Control of our Classrooms. By Stephen Bates. New York: Poseidon Press, 1993. 365 pp. \$24.00.

Many church-state controversies of the 1980s and 1990s have involved objections by conservative Christians to public school textbooks and curricula. One of the major legal cases in this area is *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education* (1987), in which the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit decided that public schools need not accommodate parents who have religious objections to aspects of the curriculum. In *Battleground*, Stephen Bates presents a thorough and balanced account of the events leading up to *Mozert* and argues convincingly that the case was widely misunderstood and wrongly decided.

The tale begins in 1983, when Vicki Frost discovered that her sixth-grade daughter had been assigned stories that, in Frost's view, conveyed messages inconsistent with a Christian perspective. Some other parents, it turned out, shared these concerns. Most of the school administrators and school board members, however, deemed the objections absurd and refused to make any accommodation. Ultimately, this led to a nationally publicized legal battle, with Concerned Women for America supporting the parents and People for the American Way defending the school. In the national consciousness, the trial was part of the ongoing struggle between fundamentalist Christians and the public schools.

Bates emphasizes, however, that the Christian parents in *Mozert* were not asking the schools to remove objectionable books, topics, or ideas, nor were they requesting that religious views or materials be added to the curriculum. They simply asked that their own children be permitted an alternative to a Holt reading series. It is not obvious that such an accommodation would have been as unwieldy as the schools maintained.

Bates suggests, then, that what appeared to be a victory for public schools over a fundamentalist effort to insinuate a religious curriculum was actually a victory for governmental bureaucracy over the free exercise of religion in raising one's children. Whether or not one agrees with this analysis, *Battleground* is the definitive account of an important case.

David Moshman
University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska