

Locke Vs. Lockdowns: Has America Lost Its Way?

In my 2019 book, *Unschooling: Raising Curious, Well-Educated Children Outside the Conventional Classroom*, which gained even more traction throughout 2020 and 2021 as schools closed and homeschooling soared, I trace the roots of non-coercive, self-directed education back to the Enlightenment and, particularly, to the writings of philosopher John Locke.

Locke was really an early guru of what we would today call “gentle parenting.” He advocated for abundant childhood playtime, developmentally appropriate academics, positive discipline techniques, and freedom over force to cultivate an eagerness for learning. In his 1693 book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke wrote:

“For a child will learn three times as much when he is in tune, as he will with double the time and pains when he goes awkwardly or is dragg’d unwillingly to it. If this were minded as it should, children might be permitted to weary themselves with play, and yet have time enough to learn what is suited to the capacity of each age. But no such thing is consider’d in the ordinary way of education, nor can it well be. That rough discipline of the rod is built upon other principles, has no attraction in it, regards not what humour children are in, nor looks after favourable seasons of inclination. And indeed it would be ridiculous, when compulsion and blows have rais’d an aversion in the child to his task, to expect he should freely of his own accord leave his play, and with pleasure court the occasions of learning.”

I have been thinking a lot about Locke lately. As one of the eminent Enlightenment thinkers, Locke promoted the ideas of tolerance, reason, personal property, self-determination, and non-coercion that became the gateway to a new era of freedom, individual rights, innovation, and prosperity. My favorite quote of his comes from a letter he wrote in 1689 where he says: “it is one thing to persuade, another to command; one thing to press with arguments, another with penalties.”

Today it seems we have forgotten Locke’s powerful message. Beginning with 2020 lockdown policies and government orders determining which businesses were “essential,”

and continuing to current mask mandates, vaccine passports introduced in major American cities, and even new, military-imposed lockdowns in previously free nations such as Australia and New Zealand, we have condoned government force over individual freedom. That needs to stop.

Mandates. Coercion. Censorship. We have completely dismissed John Locke's enlightened insight:

"It is one thing to persuade, another to command; one thing to press with arguments, another with penalties."

— Kerry McDonald (@kerry_edu) August 17, 2021

We should protest the ongoing assault on individual rights, and we should also take action to preserve those rights. FEE's Hannah Cox wrote an excellent [article](#) recently about what she did when her yoga studio re-imposed a mask mandate. She reminds us of the rich American tradition of civil disobedience and peaceful noncompliance.

Similarly, as school districts impose mask mandates and even student vaccine mandates, as the largest teachers union in Massachusetts recently [proposed](#), parents should speak up against these actions while also pulling their children out of government schools for homeschooling and other learning options—like those I write about in my new, free ebook. Voice and exit are a powerful combination.

Indeed, [headlines](#) continue to mount indicating that parents are pulling their children out of schools that impose mask mandates this fall, and choosing homeschooling instead. Other families who began homeschooling in 2020 due to the coronavirus response are continuing to homeschool because they don't like mask mandates and related back-to-school policies. Homeschooling is likely to remain a popular option this year for millions of families.

In fact, I was on Fox & Friends last Saturday talking about the rapid growth in homeschooling over the past 18 months. [Here is the replay link.](#)

It's up to individuals, and especially parents, to reclaim our individual liberty from politicians and bureaucrats drunk on power and control. We can champion consent over coercion, arguments over penalties, and take action to preserve freedom for our own families.