

Case #8: Home schooling:

In 2010, the U.S. granted asylum to the Romeike family. They fled their native Germany because they faced stiff fines and legal prosecution for home schooling their children — a crime under German law. They are now free to educate their children at home, pursuant to the requirements set forth for home schooling within Tennessee's state and local school systems.

The purpose of mandatory public schooling is to foster citizens' "ability to peacefully interact with different values and different religions."¹ A 2007 survey by the U.S. Department of Education² confirms that many parents home school their children because they disagree with public schools' "liberalism... [and] humanism."³ Eighty three percent of polled parents claim to home school their children in order "to instill religious or moral values."

Critics of home schooling note that lack of exposure to contrary views leads to ideological extremism.⁴ They claim that home schooling not only harms children (by depriving them of the opportunity to develop their own values) but also is detrimental to the public good. As Chris Lubiensky argues, "home schooling undermines the ability of public education to improve and become more responsive as a democratic institution."⁵ Such concerns likely precipitated Germany's current political disfavor for home schooling, given the country's history with Nazism, genocide, and resulting world wars.

On the other hand, the Tennessee judge who granted asylum to the Romeikes deemed the parents' right to educate their offspring of paramount importance, and he denounced the German law for being "utterly repellent to everything we believe as Americans."

¹ Campbell Robertson, "Judge Grants Asylum to Home Schooler," The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/01/us/01homeschool.html>, February 28, 2010.

² "Kitchen-Classroom Conservatives," The Economist, http://www.economist.com/node/14177435?story_id=E1_TOTSSOPV, August 6, 2009.

³ Robin West, "The Hams of Homeschooling," Philosophy and Public Policy Quarterly 29, no.3/4 (Summer/Fall, 2009): 7-11.

⁴ "The Big Sort," The Economist, <http://www.economist.com/node/11581447>, June 19, 2008.

⁵ Chris Lubienski, "Whither the Common Good? A Critique of Home Schooling," Peabody Journal of Education, 75, 1 (2000).