



Cross Purposes: *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* and the Struggle over Compulsory Public Education

Paula Abrams

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"A definitive study of an extremely important, though curiously neglected, Supreme Court decision, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*."

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In 1922, the people of Oregon passed legislation requiring all children to attend public schools. For the nativists and progressives who had campaigned for the Oregon School Bill, it marked the first victory in a national campaign to homogenize education---and ultimately the populace. Private schools, both secular and religious, vowed to challenge the law. The Catholic Church, the largest provider of private education in the country and the primary target of the Ku Klux Klan campaign, stepped forward to lead the fight all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925), the court declared the Oregon School Bill unconstitutional and ruled that parents have the right to determine how their children should be educated. Since then, *Pierce* has provided a precedent in many cases pitting parents against the state.

Paula Abrams is Professor of Constitutional Law at Lewis & Clark Law School.

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