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For Immediate Release

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BATTLEGROUND

"A balanced, well-documented account of a battle recently fought by a handful of Tennessee fundamentalist parents against high-school textbooks. While never encumbering his text with ponderous arguments about constitutionality or educational theory, Bates strikes with range and depth at the heart of these issues, crucial for educators and all concerned Americans."

--Kirkus Reviews

"A fascinating, compelling, highly readable account of a major cultural clash in American society. I think that anyone who is interested in the politics of education will want to read it, and will find it to be a real page-turner. I think that what I most appreciated is Bates' sense of the complexity of the events and his unbiased and balanced treatment of the ideas and key players. An excellent and important book."

--Diane Ravitch, author of
The Great School Wars and
The Schools We Deserve

"A fine book...I was drawn into it the way I am into a good novel, like a story by Anne Tyler. The protagonists have human faces, real lives. Marvelously balanced...an invaluable resource."

--Harvey Cox,
Professor of Divinity, Harvard University

"Lucid, balanced, and compelling....The book reads like a novel, with characters fully drawn and moments of high drama, at the same time as it illuminates some of the most difficult dilemmas of democracy."

--Albert Shanker,
President, American Federation of Teachers

In the famous "monkey trial" of 1925, Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan battled over the fate of schoolteacher John T. Scopes. Sixty-one years later, lawyers once again assembled in an East Tennessee courtroom to dispute the role of religion in the public schools. The star witness in "Scopes II" (as the press dubbed the case) was Vicki Frost, a Hawkins County housewife who believed that her children's schoolbooks were promoting feminism, evolution, satanism, and other aspects of "secular

humanism." Stephen Bates tells the story behind this legal and cultural conflict in **BATTLEGROUND: One Mother's Crusade, the Religious Right, and the Struggle For Control in Our Classrooms**, (Poseidon Press; September 16, 1993; \$24.00).

"The belief of fundamentalists are alien to most Americans, myself included," writes Bates, a lawyer and self-described "lapsed Episcopalian." "Nevertheless, I believe that the Hawkins County fundamentalists raised profound and difficult questions-- questions that were lost amid the 'Scopes II' hoopla. How should a secular, tolerant state cope with devout but intolerant citizens, in both the public school and the public square? How much control should parents wield over their children's education? How should the public schools handle religious topics and religious students?"

Frost's legal odyssey began in 1983. Glancing at her daughter's new sixth-grade reading textbook, she saw a story about telepathy, which she considered a power of the Antichrist. Subsequent stories featured other themes that conflicted with the family's faith. After civil disobedience fizzled--Frost was arrested and jailed for trespassing on school property--she and a small band of allies filed suit against the school district, relying on free legal help from the religious right behemoth Concerned Women for America. Soon the school district got legal assistance of its own through the liberal organization People for the American Way.

The entry of these two powerful interest groups transformed a grassroots conflict into a fierce proxy war, waged in the courtroom and on the nation's front pages. In the end, the fundamentalist parents lost on both fronts. Not only were they defeated in court (after an initial victory); they became nationally infamous for detecting sacrilege in The Wizard of Oz and The Diary of Anne Frank. They were chided by George Bush, belittled by Lewis Grizzard, denounced by The New York Times, and (to their shame) lauded by the Ku Klux Klan.

Bates relates this saga with scrupulous fairness. In place of the usual stereotypes, he provides vivid, nuanced depictions of the players, including Frost, a mother so determined to insulate her family from ungodliness that she once burned a pile of children's books in her backyard; her lawyer Michael Farris, a quick-witted but hot-tempered Christian activist (who is now the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor of Virginia); and Reece Gibson, a philanthropic Hawkins County lawyer who spearheaded the battle against Frost.

In his final chapter, Bates notes that fundamentalist textbook protestors "may advance endless demands, supported by unfathomable arguments, in a tone of exasperating self-righteousness." Even so, he urges educators to do everything feasible to keep them in the public school system. Excusing fundamentalist students from some

assignments, he contends, can reduce the pressures that provoke activists to seek voucher programs and school board takeovers, as well as help all students grasp the true meanings of pluralism and tolerance.

"If you want to understand how the activists of the religious right think and why they do what they do," writes E.J. Dionne, Washington Post columnist and author of Why Americans Hate Politics, "you should read **BATTLEGROUND**. No matter where you stand, Bates' sensitive and well-crafted account...will give you a new angle of vision."

About the Author:

Stephen Bates is a Senior Fellow at the Annenberg Washington Program. A graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, he is the author of If No News, Send Rumors, and coauthor, (with Edwin Diamond), of The Spot. He has also written for leading periodicals, among them *The New Republic* and *Washington Monthly*. He lives with his wife and young daughter in Silver Springs, Maryland.