

## School prayer: When is it coercion?

The Supreme Court may soon “undercut decades of precedent” banning public school-sanctioned prayer, said **Joan Biskupic** in *CNN.com*. Last week, the court heard the case of Bremerton, Wash., high school football coach Joe Kennedy, who was let go after he refused to stop holding a prayer circle on the 50-yard line after every game.



Kennedy at the Supreme Court

The conservative supermajority appeared sympathetic to Kennedy, suggesting the school district’s actions reeked of hostility toward religion and offering “plenty of hypotheticals” comparing his praying to kneeling during the national anthem or protesting the Ukraine invasion. But the coach’s rights are not the only ones that matter, said **Caroline Mala Corbin** in *NBCNews.com*. One player, an atheist, said he prayed along because he worried Kennedy might limit his playing time otherwise. School officials offered Kennedy a more private space for prayer than the middle of the field, but he refused. Kennedy has “the right to pray,” but not to use his public, taxpayer-funded job as coach to “run roughshod over the rights of students” who have different beliefs.

It’s not quite that simple, said **Noah Feldman** in *Bloomberg*. Constitutional precedents on First Amendment cases are “complicated and con-

fused,” but they turn on whether Kennedy’s students felt coerced to go along. This case could boil down to the question of “who the coach was when he was praying”—an individual practicing his faith after games ended or an authority figure who represented a government-run school. Teachers and coaches “are state employees, but

they are not the state’s robots,” said **David French** in *The Atlantic*. “Whether they kneel in prayer or protest,” they’re exercising the free speech rights of all American citizens, and those rights do not end at the schoolhouse door. So “let Coach Kennedy pray, for all our sakes.”

Actually, “this should not be a difficult case,” said **Ian Millhiser** in *Vox*. In a 1992 case, the court ruled that “public school-sponsored religious activity is inherently coercive,” because of the pressure students inevitably feel from authority figures and peers to go along. But the new 6-3 conservative majority has made it clear it is eager to reverse previous rulings on religious expression and erode church-state separation. When the court rules, it’s likely to side with Kennedy, on the grounds he never actually said that “the school’s football program favors Christians,” even if students understandably drew that conclusion.

## Wit & Wisdom

“Freedom for the wolves has often meant death to the sheep.”

**Isaiah Berlin**, quoted in *The New York Times*

“Evil people usually know better than anybody else just what they are doing.

And go on doing it.”  
**Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn**, quoted in *The New York Review of Books*

“Hope, in reality, is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man.”

**Friedrich Nietzsche**, quoted in *the Las Vegas Sun*

“Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly.”

**Toni Morrison**, quoted in *Gawker*

“Dance is the hidden language of the soul.”  
**Martha Graham**, quoted in *The London Free Press*

“A poem begins with a lump in the throat.”  
**Robert Frost**, quoted in *the Lansing, Mich., City Pulse*

“If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything.”

**Mark Twain**, quoted in *WBUR.org*

## Poll watch

■ **82%** of Americans say abortion should be legal if a woman’s health is in jeopardy, and **79%** support abortion in cases of rape or incest. **48%** of respondents think abortion should be permitted when a woman cannot afford to have a child, while **45%** think that should be illegal. **75%** of Democrats, **53%** of independents, and **36%** of Republicans want to uphold *Roe v. Wade*.

*Washington Post* / ABC News

## Slavery: Harvard’s \$100 million reckoning

Harvard has delivered the nation an important lesson on healing the “deep wounds” left by slavery, said **Peniel Joseph** in *CNN.com*. School officials last week issued a report that “casts new light on how slavery helped forge one of America’s most prestigious universities.” The report revealed that Harvard faculty and administrators held more than 70 slaves before Massachusetts banned slavery in 1783, some of whom served generations of students. It documented how money derived from slave labor did much to build the university’s wealth during its first two centuries, and how faculty taught “race science” asserting whites’ innate superiority. The school pledged \$100 million to fund reparation efforts, including identifying the campus slaves’ modern descendants, creating a memorial, and building exchange programs with historically Black universities. Harvard’s reckoning is a meaningful step “toward a path of healing” at a time when dozens of state legislatures are trying to ban any discussion of America’s dark history of “structural and institutional racism.”

Harvard’s \$100 million splurge to absolve itself of guilt “won’t solve anything,” said **Arjun Singh** in *National Review*. The report merely imposes

a burden of “false guilt” on current students and faculty, who bear no responsibility, “moral or otherwise,” for the sins of the dead. “They wielded no whip; traded no slave; bought and sold no proceeds of bondage.” If Harvard really wanted to help descendants of slavery, it could have skipped the self-flagellation and invested in Black businesses in inner-city opportunity zones. That would actually improve Black lives “through market-based solutions.”

Facing the truth is never pointless, said **Eugene Robinson** in *The Washington Post*. Harvard is reminding us of a historical reality “many Americans prefer to ignore”—that “the whole nation, not just the South, grew rich and powerful from the unpaid labor of enslaved African-Americans.” Cotton picked by slaves supplied mills in the Northeast, and slavery-based agriculture enriched Wall Street. The slavery-derived wealth “compounded over the decades and centuries,” like “money in an interest-bearing bank account,” while slavery’s brutal legacy was perpetuated through racial discrimination in education, health care, property, and income. Harvard deserves credit for acknowledging its debt and redressing some of “the grievous harm” it inflicted.