
Youth Truth



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Spanking Old News

Lisa Freeman

The July 2002 issue of *Psychological Bulletin* contains a “meta-analytical and theoretical review” of 88 studies on corporal punishment of children conducted since 1938.¹ The results are unsurprising to anyone who has followed the research and the politics surrounding the issue. Researcher Elizabeth Gershoff found that spanking is associated with “aggression and lower levels of moral internalization and mental health.” Gershoff identified eleven outcomes associated with corporal punishment of children, of which ten were negative (the only positive outcome was “higher levels of immediate compliance”). She concluded that “psychologists cannot responsibly recommend” spanking or hitting as a disciplinary method.²

Spanking “works” only on a very limited basis. Instead of encouraging *self-control* of behavior—thinking about what’s right and wrong before acting, considering effects of actions on oneself and others—corporal punishment fosters dependence on *external control* of behavior—the fear of punishment by a more powerful authority figure.³ The fear of physical pain can be very effective in gaining obedience in *any* group of people, not just children—as long as the threat of punishment is present.

Even when spanking is accompanied by reasoning, the message of the spanking overpowers all other attempts to communicate. When a person is experiencing pain, anger, or fear, they are much less willing and able to listen to explanations or lectures.⁴

Yet Gershoff didn’t go so far as to support a legal ban on parental corporal punishment, saying such a ban would be “unlikely” in the United States. And she’s right. In spite of the evidence, most American psychologists don’t condemn “non-abusive” spanking; that same issue of *Psychological Bulletin* gave equal time to other “experts” still convinced of the effectiveness of spanking.

There are strong indications that spanking actually leads to increased misbehavior, increased aggression and hostility, reduced empathy and compassion for others, and increased likelihood of a wide variety of emotional and behavioral problems, such as low achievement, depression, patterns of victimization, drug

abuse, child and spouse abuse, and suicide.⁵ The evidence was strong enough to convince the American Academy of Pediatrics to condemn corporal punishment. As early as 1979, the nation of Sweden found the case against hitting children compelling enough to ban the practice by law; nine other nations have outlawed spanking since then.

But American parents insist upon their right to punish “their own” children as they see fit, and psychologists tend to back them up, finding it unrealistic to expect parents in this country to raise children without hitting them.

Proponents point to the lack of absolute proof of a cause-and-effect relationship between spanking and the problems so often associated with it. Isn’t it possible that children who are most frequently spanked were already troubled *before* ever being spanked, inherently defiant or disturbed, and that their underlying mental disorders explain *both* the frequent thrashings and their long-term maladjustment? Researchers know that causation of one phenomenon by another is nearly impossible to establish with absolute certainty (even though many of the same “experts” will readily accept claims that TV or video games *cause* violent behavior, or other similar claims, with far less evidence). Researchers who associate spankings with problems in later life are accused of being “ideologically motivated,” fishing for evidence to support their pre-existing opposition to spanking.

If getting spanked were simply the result of having an aggressive disposition, the kind that culminates in violent behavior, then we’d expect the percentage of violent felons who *weren’t* hit as children to be about the same as the percentage of parents who refrain from hitting their children. However, one study found that 100% of violent San Quentin inmates reported frequent, harsh physical punishment as children.⁶ For these inmates, anyway, parental *permissiveness* certainly wasn’t responsible for their lives of crime. Even so, some convicts conclude that they just weren’t beaten *enough* to keep them out of jail!

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Redirect

The ACLU has posted a nice summary of the Supreme Court's 2001-2002 decisions, several of which will interest our readers, at <http://www.aclu.org/news/2002/n062802a.html>; a longer report in PDF format is also available from that page.

The Summer 2002 issue of *Education Next* contains a superb article at <http://www.educationnext.org/20022/50.html>. "Monster hype" by Joel Best, explains the media's role in the public's misperception of youth violence. Other articles in the issue discuss school vouchers and the reauthorization of the U.S. Elementary and Secondary School Act.

A new report from the U.S. Department of Education's Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance is available in PDF format at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/AC/ACSF/whatnew.html>. *Empty promises: the myth of college access in America* discusses the failure of college student aid programs.

News Links

Drug War on Students Not Over Yet

In February 2001, U.S. Rep. Barney Frank introduced HR 786 to repeal section 484 of the Higher Education Act, which denies student aid to anyone ever convicted of a drug offense. Despite tons of co-sponsors and supporters, the bill's been stalled in a committee ever since. But the Coalition for Higher Education Act Reform, initially active in promoting Frank's bill, hasn't given up; they're talking to the media again, and a recent letter they wrote to House members appears at <http://raiseyourvoice.com/letter>.

Church Loses Again

First the Archdiocese of Boston tried to get out of a lawsuit, claiming the church/state division exempts them from being sued. Then the Archdiocese of Kentucky tried to keep all of its sex abuse lawsuits out of the public eye. No way, said the judge at http://www.abcnews.go.com/wire/US/ap20020712_356.html; the article also gives updates on priest problems around the U.S.

Opinions expressed may not reflect the views of ASFAR.

Letters

On the Pledge of Allegiance Ruling

None of these cases would be necessary if public school were voluntary (with tax credits or vouchers), or public schools were directed by the students themselves. Not to mention, being full citizens in every sense of the constitution from the start.

The entire court ruling seems to turn on three fundamental points:

- (1) The public school context is different from other places
- (2) Public schools are directed by the state
- (3) Young people are different from "mature" people.

In *Lee v Weisman*: "At a high school graduation, teachers and principals must and do retain a high degree of control over the precise contents of the program, the speeches, the timing, the movements, the dress, and the decorum of the students. *Bethel School Dist. No. 403 v. Fraser*, 478 U.S. 675, 92 L. Ed. 2d 549, 106 S. Ct. 3159 (1986). IN THIS ATMOSPHERE the state-imposed character of an invocation and benediction by clergy selected by the school combine to make the prayer a state-sanctioned religious exercise in which the student was left with no alternative but to submit. This is different from *Marsh* and suffices to make the religious exercise a First Amendment violation. Our Establishment Clause [**2661] jurisprudence remains a delicate and fact-sensitive one, and we cannot accept the parallel relied upon by petitioners and the United States between the facts of *Marsh* and the case now before us. Our decisions in *Engel v. Vitale*, *supra*, and *School Dist. of Abington v. Schempp*, *supra*, require us to distinguish the public school context."

This from the *Lee* case makes it necessary to move on to setting up "special" protections for young people in the current *Newdow* case. If they had rights, would they need protections?

Jesse

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Editorial and Publishing Staff

Editor in Chief: Justin Mallone editor@asfar.org
Research Coordinator: Brendan Perez
Electronic Edition Production: David Schneider-Joseph
Print Edition Production: Susan Wishnetsky swishnets@aol.com
Print Edition Design: Synimo Designs synimo@aol.com

ASFAR
P.O. Box 11358
Chicago, IL 60611-0358
e-mail: info@asfar.org
web site: www.asfar.org

Editorial correspondence may be addressed to editor@asfar.org or Justin Mallone, Editor, *Youth Truth*, P.O. Box 11358, Chicago, Illinois 60611-0358.

Just In My Opinion

Chris
ASFAR Member

Time will not do the work for you

While growing up, one of the things I was taught was that if I wanted something, I had to get it with my own hard work. I couldn't rely on someone else or something else to do the work for me. I wanted what I wanted, and I alone—nobody else but me—had to put forth the hard work and effort to get it.

I believe most parents *want* to instill this value when raising their kids, but the problem is, as small children growing up, we are often taught something else. Although we aren't taught this directly, we learn that for some things we don't *need* to do the work in order to get certain stuff—time will do the work for us. We all see how little kids look forward to getting older, how birthdays are a really big event for small children, where they are given all these nice fancy presents and told congratulations for reaching a new age. Well, they need to realize that they did not get to that age by their own work, but rather time brought them there, time did the work for them. Now, don't get me wrong, I have nothing against birthdays and I have nothing against kids getting presents on their birthdays. It's just that it should be realized that time did the work, not the kid.

How often is it that kids want to go do something that their parents think they're too young for and so their parents tell them "when you get older." In essence, what their parents are telling them, although indirectly, is that *time* is going to do the work for them, time will do the work that will give them the right or privilege to do whatever it is that the kid wants to do, that the kid will not do the work himself.

We are brought up on this idea, the idea that time will do the work for us. This is evident from the attitude that many of the adults in our world have about experience: that it's *how much* experience a person has that determines what they're capable of. Well, I also believe in the value of experience; however, one principle I've learned in life is to "trust quality not quantity" and I apply that to experience along with most other things in life. It's the quality of the experience that counts, not the quantity. One year of good experience is much better than twenty years of bad experience.

Somebody who lives as a deadbeat for forty years is going to have a much lower quality of experience than someone who for the last three years has worked hard and has lived a productive life. Although the person who has lived as a deadbeat for forty years will have a much greater *quantity* of experience than the

person who has lived productively for three years, he will have nowhere near the *quality* of experience that the person who has lived the productive three years will have. The person who has lived well for the last three years will have a much better quality of experience than the person who has lived badly for the last forty years, and therefore will be much more capable of functioning in society than the deadbeat. I think any intelligent person would choose the person with the productive three years to do a job for them over the person who has lived the forty years as a deadbeat.

If experience is a major determining factor in deciding what a person is capable of, then people should get out there and get good experience. They should go out in the world and experience it and learn from that experience, and they should start at a young age and learn as much as they can as early as possible—not just sit on their asses and wait for time to bring them the experience that they think they will need to succeed in the world. A person should start going out in the world and getting the good experience they need as early as possible, because time flies and you only live so long, and before you know it you will be an old person. If you don't take advantage of the opportunity soon enough it will pass you by. Make the years count, before they pass you by, because otherwise, your life will amount to practically nothing.

It's good hard honest work that gets people what they want. It's good hard honest work that gives people the wisdom and experience that is necessary to function in society, not time.

I don't rely on time to do the work for me, I don't "wait till I'm older" before I do something, because if I did that I would be counting on time to do the work for me rather than me doing the work myself. Although there are some things that I'm not ready for, if I want to do them, I work to make myself ready, I work to learn what's necessary to make myself ready and I work to bring myself up to that level where I am ready. So there is nothing I consider myself too young for, not chronologically, there is only some stuff that I don't consider myself ready for. Instead of saying I'm too young, I say I'm not ready, and the way to get ready is through good hard honest work and good hard honest effort, and by me, myself, doing the hard work and effort, not expecting time to do the work for me.

Perspectives

Heather Ferguson
ASFAR Member

As youth we are constantly faced with the reminder that we are “just kids.” It is the emphasis on the word “just” that disturbs me. The older generations act as though our minds and abilities are inferior because of our ages. If anything we have *more* time and energy to put behind our efforts. When we brainstorm, our minds are not held back by so-called wisdom. The ephemeral wisdom that most adults speak of is actually over-cautionary forethought. We learn from our mistakes but we don’t let those mistakes limit us. There are no boundaries to our

thinking. Impossibilities do not exist in our minds until they are instilled in us by parents and teachers. When a child rises up to be seen as equal to adults, the child is no longer seen as a kid but instead as a miniature adult. But all the respect and recognition flies out the window once the adults are reminded that, yes, this incredible person is a child.

I am involved in several organizations that consist primarily of adults. In these I have learned how to gain their respect and how to be treated as a peer, but when I mention an activity that reflects my age, a sudden cloud passes over their eyes and

Age Discrimination

I am once more a child. They go from speaking about complex political situations to abruptly regressing, asking me if I like the latest teen pop band, with condescension coating their every word.

It is a simple case of ageism permeating society. The only way to combat this problem is for young people to boldly jump into the world taking on the roles that adults usually reserve for themselves within organizations. We must fight to be taken seriously and to hold on to the respect and recognition we deserve. We are not “just kids” and we are certainly not the future ... we are the present!

Daniel McGuire
Vice-President, ASFAR
<free_radical@ziplip.com>

If young people are ever to achieve full equality with older people, we must enlist their support.

Young people need allies in the older generations to speak up on behalf of our cause, people with established credibility to go public with the truth that young people are just as deserving and capable of full rights and privileges as older people. For change to happen, a message needs to come from many angles and points of view. When Libertarians say it, Socialists say it, Democrats, Republicans, Communists and Anarchists say it, it will happen.

How do we gain such broad support?

We need arguments tailored to the many ideologies. We need to be interested in others’ causes and in return, they’ll listen to ours. It goes both ways. How can we expect knowledgeable, caring people to learn about youth rights if we’re unwilling to learn what they care about? Let’s not be one-issue activists. Find other successful campaigns that seem worthy and join them, learn from them, then come back and apply what was learned to youth rights. If you

hear of a demonstration, go check it out; if you don’t understand the point, ask people to explain it to you. Join mailing lists, get into conversations and debates. Once you establish yourself as someone who gives a damn about what people are doing, talk about the stuff *you* have a passion for. Wonder aloud why society segregates you from your older and younger friends. Express your anger at the blatant and limiting discrimination that is on all sides. In this way, perhaps we can gain the allies we need to strengthen our movement.

It doesn’t take much, really, for people who already care. Many have already thought about these issues, or even been involved at some point, and just need reminding that their help is still important. The ones who care but haven’t thought about the specific issues before will be glad of a new topic and new challenges to think about. Bring up facts. Then bring them up again in a few days or week and see if they’ve thought any more about it. Chances are they’ll notice a few things they’d tuned out before. They’ll pay more attention to that little sign that says “you must be born on or before such and such a date to buy this or that.” Or to conversations they hear between young people about “the fucking curfew” and how cops use it to further their power trips, or how a friend can’t get work on account of his age.

My view is that small things like this add up to influence society on a grand scale. I’m optimistic. I believe in the possibility of a new enlightenment sweeping the world, ending war for good, mutual respect all around, full equality and the necessary healing for a full recovery from this mess of a world we’ve been handed. Maybe I’m naive. In fact, I’m sure I am, but it can’t hurt to try, eh? And besides, who knows what mysterious forces may be at work behind the scenes we see. Maybe we won’t blow ourselves up after all.

I’m not the only one who senses change in the air. There’s revolution happening. I don’t know how this major change will manifest itself, but it’s happening. Things are speeding up. Unfortunately, armies are being amassed. People are getting fed up. Angst is at a high. People are taking action.

It’s exciting. It’s scary. It’s inspiring. It’s amazing and beautiful. The outcome is uncertain. Radical, peaceful, revolutionary, global enlightenment is what I hope for. Let the movement grow. Let it inject itself into the international struggles that are so very connected to every other worthy cause. Let the pieces fall down into place. Let masses come together, begin to think critically. Let that critical mass explode.



Mildred Augustine Wirt Benson
1905-2002



Astrid Lindgren
1907-2002

In Memory

Susan Wishnetsky
<swishnets@aol.com>

Lots of Americans go through their entire lives without ever reading a book that isn't required by a teacher. Our experience with our country's educational system, and the watered-down fare offered to young people in the children's sections of libraries and bookstores is enough to convince a large portion of our population that reading is a drag. But there are a few unusual or irreverent children's books that challenge accepted ways of thinking, that open the reader's mind to new possibilities. Young people touched by these kinds of books often come away hungry for more ideas, more questioning, more reading.

Two authors of such books—both female, both born at the very dawn of the 20th century in very different parts of the world—died this year. I did not count either of these authors among my favorites as a child, but many young readers did, and I think, in retrospect, that their books may have had an influence upon me as well.

In 1930, Millie Wirt was a young reporter when she took a job with the publisher of adventure books for boys (including the Hardy Boys series, among others). Her assignment was to write adventures for a sixteen-year-old female detective named Nancy Drew. Her contract required her to conceal her identity, and she received no royalties for anything she wrote. In 1980 a court decision allowed Millie to take the credit for writing the first 23 books of the series—the pen name “Carolyn Keene” appeared on all the Nancy Drew books long after Millie resumed her journalism career with the *Toledo Times*. Millie was writing her regular column for the *Toledo Blade* on May 28, 2002, the day she died.

The character of Nancy Drew had two big advantages that almost no real girl has: an extremely wealthy father, and a nearly complete lack of parental supervision.

Nancy's investigations regularly placed her in truly dangerous, threatening situations; she chased down real criminals. Her boldness would be called irrational, risky or self-destructive behavior if done by a real teenager, but Nancy had the unflagging support of her father, her friends, and local police. She was, as Nancy Drew authority Ilana Nash put it, “a teenage character who insisted upon being taken seriously”, who “allowed little girls to dream of what they could be like if they had that much power.”

Another new idea that the series gave to readers of the 1930s was a young female heroine who not only had her own car, but also knew how to fix it. Despite her wealth and privilege, Nancy Drew wasn't afraid to “get her hands dirty.” Although a family housekeeper was available, Nancy was also quite capable of cooking and sewing, and didn't believe in pampering herself. Nancy was as self-reliant as any male.

I recall the style of these early books as heavily plot-driven, without the kind of character exploration I seek out and admire in novels. The bad guys were generally just villains, with little depth. One can well imagine that the author saw herself as a reporter, not a novelist. But because of the innovative characters and the dreams and goals they inspired, the books gained worldwide readership and fandom.

An even stranger female character was Pippi Longstockings, a funny-looking girl of around eight created in 1945 by Swedish author Astrid Lindgren to amuse her sick daughter. Pippi, according to the story, had spent her early life sailing with her beloved father. After he was lost at sea (although Pippi was certain he survived, and in one sequel, he did turn up), Pippi moved into an abandoned house with a trunkful of gold coins, her pet monkey, and a horse. The neighborhood soon

learned, to their astonishment, that Pippi had bought the house herself and was living there with no adults.

Besides wealth and absence of parental supervision, Pippi had an advantage that would have made Nancy Drew a superheroine: incredible physical strength. She sometimes *carried* her horse instead of riding him, just to give him a break. But Pippi had no interest in promoting justice or solving mysteries, nor was she well-mannered or well-educated. Barely able to read and write, she apologized humbly for her ignorance and lack of social grace, blaming her upbringing at sea—but just as often, she would slyly poke fun at the manners and education of others.

In the first Pippi Longstockings book, the legal issue of a child living by herself was addressed, when a pair of social workers attempted to remove her to an orphanage. Frustrated by Pippi's playful refusal, the social workers had to give up after Pippi carried both of them bodily out the door. Pippi also enjoyed herself with some robbers who were after her box of treasure, dancing with them long into the night and winning their friendship and respect before sending them on their way. And she entertained the kids next door, even going with them to school—once. Pippi, although kind and caring, was a controversial character because of her refusal to conform to anyone else's rules.

Written as only a pastime and a frolic, the books were hardly literary masterpieces, but Lindgren did receive a great deal of recognition for them, including awards and two museums devoted to her work. She died on January 28, 2002.

Both these authors can be commended for rejecting the accepted thinking about what a child can and should be.

Sue's Review

Susan Wishnetsky
Treasurer, ASFAR
<swishnets@aol.com>

The Bush Administration likes to call its reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act the “No Child Left Behind Act of 2001”. The revised act focuses on “accountability”, “increased local control”, “more options for parents”, and “emphasis on teaching methods that work.” (More details can be seen at <<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea/summary.html>>.) We know darn well that *plenty* of kids are gonna be “left behind.”

Mel Levine, pediatrician and cofounder of the nonprofit institute All Kinds of Minds, knows the true meaning of leaving no child behind. Much as I might question the validity of his theories or disagree with him on youth rights issues, I have to admire his direction, his spirit, and his caring.

Dr. Levine is truly a people person, and *A Mind At A Time* is filled with stories of people—mostly kids, but also adults—struggling to cope with schools or jobs that don't fit them. Some are case histories, others made-up examples, but all of them radiate with awe and delight at the variations Levine sees in human minds. He marvels at the strengths and talents of students labeled “stupid” or “lazy”. I doubt that Dr. Levine *ever* met a person he didn't like. (If he met the teachers who were labeling these poor students “stupid” and “lazy”, he'd most likely find special traits and abilities to appreciate in them, too, and try to guide them into careers where they could put their talents to use!)

Levine theorizes that we all have deficits in one or more “neurodevelopmental systems” (he names and discusses eight of them). Most of us also have areas in which we're exceptionally able. Trouble arises when the particular area in which kids have difficulty happens to be one that they're expected to know how to use in school.

Levine, Mel. *A mind at a time*. New York : Simon & Schuster, 2002.

“Through no fault of their own,” Levine sympathizes, “they are the owners of brains that somehow don't quite mesh with the demands they come up against When they grow up, they will be able to practice their brain's specialties; in childhood they will be evaluated ruthlessly on how well they do everything.” Levine believes that children must have “the right to differ.”

The “no fault of your own” theme could be seen as insulting. All kids *want* to learn and succeed in school, all kids try. What appear to be laziness, recklessness, or rudeness are really signs of good minds struggling to adapt to a world that does not fit their needs. This implies that kids (and adults), hard-wired to behave and learn as they do, should never be judged or blamed or held responsible for anything they do. Does that mean that we're not responsible for our successes either? Wouldn't we rather claim the responsibility for our own faults than feel that they are out of our control? But the kids he describes have already been subjected to so much blame, these ideas are probably a great relief and a great help to them. And it's largely true, I believe, that such “faults” often result from disabilities so difficult to overcome, it's often better *not* to try to overcome them.

His methods for dealing with learning problems aren't discussed in great detail, but that's not surprising, since each plan would be tailored to a particular child. The first step is always to identify the particular areas of strength and weakness, as well as personal “affinities”, such as hobbies or love of animals. The solution always involves some accommodation of weaknesses, allowing the child to work around the problem in school, but often includes private coaching or exercises to work on the area of difficulty, away from the threat of public humiliation. Sometimes

the solution involves a new school or a new teacher. And although Levine argues against the use of drugs like Ritalin, he doesn't entirely rule out this option.

The book is enjoyably written and entertaining. Levine presents his theories as fact, with great authority, but the text includes no references to any prior research. A list of “Helpful Readings and Other Resources” appears at the end of the book, but there is no indication that Dr. Levine derived his theories from any of those works. As a physician, I suppose he's entitled to develop his own constructs based upon his experience, and his ideas do resemble those found in some earlier works, such as Howard Gardner's theory of “multiple intelligences.” Still, the credibility of the book is called into question.

Never, *never* does this nice man realize that many of these kids' problems might not even arise if school were not compulsory, if kids had the right to pursue their strengths and “affinities” as careers, if they were given freedom. Nor does he ever suggest that the child should be asked for his opinion or approval of his own “treatment plan”, *even* if it includes medication. While he believes in giving the child full information, the decisions are up to the adults. He sympathizes with their plight, but sees no need to change the system. He respects and admires the remarkable minds of his patients, but fully accepts that their minds—and bodies—should remain under the control of others.

Maybe he made the conscious decision to be a pediatrician, not a politician. His mission is to help individuals *within* the system our society mandates. Yet he does propose reforms of teacher education and schools. His ideas, I think, are on the right track, but I wish he'd give more thought to the concept of youth autonomy. He'd be a great ally if he ever crossed that line.

News Links

“Under God” Unconstitutional

On June 26, the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals declared that recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance by schoolchildren violated the Constitution’s church-state separation clause, as reported at http://www.cnn.com/2002/LAW/0626/pledge_ofallegiance.ap/index.html>. But the very next day, after a massive public outcry by politicians and other public figures, the court issued a restraining order blocking the enforcement of its own ruling.

Ventura Ahead of His Time, As Usual

On May 23, a little over a month before that controversial Circuit Court ruling on the Pledge of Allegiance, Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura vetoed his state legislature’s bill that would have required all of the state’s public school students to recite the pledge at least once a week, according to <http://foxnews.com/story/0,2933,53460,00.html>>.

Court Gives Up On Public Education

A 5-4 Supreme Court ruling on June 27 held that Cleveland’s school voucher program is constitutional, even though the “increased school choice” it offers is mainly between one Catholic school and another. According to <http://www.salon.com/mwt/wire/2002/06/27/vouchers/index.html>>, tuitions at most *non*-religious private schools (few of which accept vouchers anyway) are not nearly covered by the amounts granted in vouchers.

Colorado Coroners Overlook Abuse

On July 9, Colorado researchers presented findings that over half of the state’s child abuse fatalities are wrongly attributed to “natural, accidental, or undetermined causes”, according to http://www.rocky_mountainnews.com/drmn/state/article/0,1299,DRMN_21_1246668,00.html>.

Be Patient, We’ll Eat Next Year

The Farm Security & Rural Investment Act of 2002 (“Farm Bill”) signed by President Bush in May restores food stamp benefits to immigrant children. The bad news, reported at <http://www.nilc.org/immspbs/fnutr/foodnutr014.htm>>: this provision won’t take effect until October 2003.

Third Strike for Censors

The Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which would have forced public libraries to install blocking software on all public workstations or lose federal funding, was struck down by a federal panel of judges on May 31. An article at <http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,52903,00.html>> recalls two earlier attempts by Congress to restrict online expression, the 1996 Communications Decency Act (ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court) and the 1998 Child Online Protection Act (still sidelined by a lower court injunction, which was upheld by the Supreme Court).

It’s For Our Own Good

In our last issue we reported that the California Medical Association was seeking legislators to sponsor a bill raising the state’s smoking age to 21. According to <http://www.msnbc.com/news/761331.asp?cp1=1>>, they found a few state lawmakers who were willing, and the bill was introduced on June 3.

New Runaway Study, Old News

At <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/runaways020711.html>>, the experts are all shocked to learn that many runaways are abused more at home than they are living on the street (from early results of the 3-year Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents).

New and Improved!

The latest revision of the SAT, due out in 2005, will contain an essay section but no analogy questions, and it’ll be longer, says http://www.boston.com/daily_globe2/179/metro/SAT_adds_essay_removes_analogies+.shtml>.

Boy Jumps to Escape Filthy Prison

A seven-year-old boy is recovering after his jump from a second-floor window on July 10 to escape a foul-smelling, garbage-filled Chicago apartment, where he’d been living with an unrelated couple for the past two years. The story at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uslatest/story/0,1282,-1875276,00.html>> says the boy had been locked in for at least two days.

“Virtual” Kids Attacked Again

On June 25 the House of Representatives passed *another* bill outlawing images of apparent minors in sexual situations, barely two months after the Supreme Court struck down their earlier attempt. From the article at <http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/news/editorial/3542567.htm>>, it seems the new bill is not much different from the previous one.

Deceased Daughter Left in Bed

Shanecia McClellan of Harvey, Illinois, a nine-year-old girl with cerebral palsy, wouldn’t wake up one day, so her mother just let her lie in bed. Her decomposing body was found in the bed on July 11. The story at <http://www.nandotimes.com/nation/story/465414p-3721223c.html>> says that the state’s child welfare agency had just closed the family’s case in June, finding the four children no longer at risk.

Chess Players Can Be Checked

The Supreme Court ruled on June 27 that random drug testing of students participating in extracurricular school activities doesn’t qualify as an “unreasonable” search. A disappointed ACLU lawyer gives his thoughts on the ruling at http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/2002/06/28/boyd_interview/index.html>.

Young Umps Back In Game—Sort Of

Responding to public demand, Illinois labor officials worked fast to craft an exemption to the state’s child labor laws allowing Little League teams to continue their tradition of hiring 12-year-olds as umpires, reported at http://www.il-ipra.org/1%20time%20stuff/child_labor_news.htm>. But their solution, public act 92-0592 (passed June 27 and found at <http://www.legis.state.il.us/publicacts/pubact92/acts/92-0592.html>>), includes severe restrictions, such as the requirement that players be at least three years younger than umpires, and that at least one of the ump’s parents be present at all games!

Spanking Old News

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Many parents point to their own upbringing as evidence of the effectiveness of corporal punishment: "I got whupped, and I turned out okay." One can easily find many people who say this who, in fact, aren't "okay". Many of the meanest, most ignorant, least successful adults one meets will attest to the positive effect of the spankings they received in their youths. There are a few exceptional, admirable people who were paddled as kids without apparent harm—just as there are examples of heavy smokers who live healthy long lives. The fact that some are lucky enough to escape the consequences doesn't prove that smoking—or spanking—is harmless.

Still, suppose spanking were actually as "effective" as parents seem to believe. Suppose all the research showing the negative effects of spanking were "ideologically motivated". Even so, supporters of corporal punishment would have to defend their *own* ideology. To argue that corporal punishment is okay if it "works", if it makes people behave the way "we" want them to behave, is to say that "the ends justify the means." This, too, is an ideological position, one which our society generally rejects.

We forbid "reasonable chastisement" of wives (as well as servants, soldiers, and convicts), but *not* because of evidence that this type of punishment is "ineffective"—there's no question that it *can* be "effective" in gaining obedience. We forbid this kind of "discipline" because we believe that respect for humans beings is more important than maintaining order and obedience. We believe that civilized people should be able to work out their problems without resorting to physical attacks. We believe that people, no matter how much they try our patience, should have the right *not* to be hit.

Yet in the case of children, we reject our ideology and we close our eyes to years of research. Clearly we are not yet civilized. We can never be rid of violence until we show our children with our actions, not just our words, that violence is wrong. Our institutions will remain full of individuals wounded in their earliest years until we realize that corporal punishment is abusive to minds and bodies. We will never see a society of mutual respect until we start treating our youngest citizens as people, not as possessions. We will never heal our own emotional scars as long as we keep beating our children.

1. "Spanking can cause long term harm," <<http://www.msnbc.com/news/772626.asp?cp1=1>>.
2. "Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviors and experiences: a meta-analytic and theoretical review." *Psychological bulletin*, v.128, no.4 (July 2002), p.539-579, abstract available at <<http://www.apa.org/journals/bul/702ab.html>>.
3. Straus, Murray A. *Beating the devil out of them : corporal punishment in American families and its effects on children*. 2nd ed. New Brunswick, N.J. : Transaction Publishers, 2001, p. 144-145.
4. Pitzer, Ronald L. "What does research say about the effects of physical punishment of children?" <<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/7266a.html>>.
5. Ibid.
6. Maurer, Adah and Wallerstein, James S. "The influence of corporal punishment on crime," <<http://silcon.com/~ptave/maurer1.htm>>.

News Links

Abusive Caseworker Convicted

In 2001, five-year-old Logan Marr of Maine died of suffocation after her foster mother bound and gagged her with 42 feet of duct tape, winding multiple layers around the girl's face and body. On June 25, says <<http://www.nandotimes.com/nation/story/446529p-3573584c.html>>, the foster mother, a former adoption caseworker, was convicted of manslaughter.

Kids Dead, But Mom Looks Nice

Three-year-old Adonnis and ten-month-old Acacia Maynor of Michigan died on June 28 while sitting for more than three hours in a parked car with the windows closed, while their mother had her hair done. See <<http://www.cnn.com/2002/US/07/01/children.left.ap/>> if you want to get madder. The siblings are two of ten kids who have died trapped in hot cars so far this year, according to <http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/GMA/DailyNews/children_hot_cars020714.html>.

Another Florida Caseworker Lied

The case of two-year-old Alfredo Montez, allegedly beaten to death by his babysitter July 1 for soiling his pants, was reported at <http://www.abcnews.go.com/wire/US/ap20020711_2002.html>. Now it turns out that the child's caseworker claimed to have visited the boy the very day he died—when no one was even home. (She wrote that the boy "was clean and appeared happy.") The caseworker, according to <<http://www.nandotimes.com/nation/story/465608p-3724028c.html>>, has been fired and charged with falsifying welfare case records; she's the very first person to be charged under this new law.

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