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# Youth Truth



Official 'Zine of Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions [www.asfar.org](http://www.asfar.org)

Volume 4, Issue 1 January/February 2003

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## Doctored Documents

*Susan Wishnetsky*

Twenty years ago, I entered the School of Library Science of the University of Michigan. At the time, in 1983, the first few brave libraries were experimenting with computerized library catalogs—still keeping their card catalog drawers up-to-date, just in case.

I took a course on government documents. I didn't do too well in that class. All the documents were printed on paper, of course, dusty volumes shelved in the gloomiest section of the library.

The internet was barely born. There was little our professors could teach us about our future careers in online searching and electronic maintenance of information—not much to show us, not much for us to practice on. But the internet, they warned us, was going to be *big*.

That fall, a lot of people bought and read George Orwell's *1984*. Just as people worried in 1999 about the coming year 2000, people in 1983 superstitiously seized upon those four ominous digits. In the midst of a bellicose Reagan administration (as it seemed at the time), many wondered if the repressive government described in that book might be just around the corner.

In *1984*, the concept of *truth* was that of an ongoing series of revisions, based upon what served the current interests of the all-powerful government. Vast numbers of government workers toiled at the sole task of keeping all available information continuously in line with the current version of "truth," altering or destroying documents to ensure universal conformity with the daily versions of facts and events issued by "Big Brother," the symbolic leader of the state. Any citizen who displayed doubt or disbelief of the official government versions would almost surely be arrested and ultimately executed.

But my fellow library school students and I would serve as the guardians of information in the years to come. We stood ready to protect our collections of "truth" against censors or vandals with razorblades, or thieves ... or even government officials!

A lot has happened in twenty years. There's scarcely a library in the country that still uses a card catalog. The majority of newspapers, popular magazines and technical journals are now available online, and more and more subscribers—including libraries—are purchasing these materials in online formats *only*. A few government documents are now being issued *exclusively* online, the printed versions discontinued to save money.

We all know that web sites can move, change, and disappear. A newspaper article may be freely accessible for one week after it is published, then moved to an "archive" section and made available for a fee. A link to a web page today may not work tomorrow. The contents may radically change. And there's nothing wrong with that, as long as the contents belong *exclusively* to the owner of the web site.

But when online documents are bought and paid for by others, as in the case of online publishing, web site owners must guarantee their purchasers continued access to that content. The content must remain as it appeared when it was purchased; any necessary revisions should be included in notes, or in new editions of the work, with the original text unaltered. If a document is moved, purchasers must be informed of its new web address.

U.S. government documents are paid for by citizens of the United States, and are therefore the people's documents. Whether they are issued in print or electronically, the people have the right to know that, except for certain classified or internal documents, the information that is compiled and produced with their tax dollars will be there.

After September 11, 2001, thousands of online documents began to disappear from the sites of the U.S. Defense and Energy Departments, and the U.S. Geological Service asked libraries to destroy its CD-ROM of a certain geological survey. The Department of Transportation removed airport security data,

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## News Links

### Senate Hides “RAVE Act” in Larger Bill

Due to the tremendous public outcry, Senate bill S. 2633 (the “Reducing Americans’ Vulnerability to Ecstasy”, or “RAVE” Act), which would have placed businesses and property owners in greater danger of prosecution and property forfeiture, never came up for a vote. But the same language has now reappeared within Tom Daschle’s “omnibus domestic security bill” S. 22; see <[http://www.nomoredrugwar/music/rave\\_act.htm](http://www.nomoredrugwar/music/rave_act.htm)>.

### Stop the War, But Draft Youth Anyway

New York’s Rep. Charles Rangel plans to introduce a bill to require mandatory military service for all Americans. Details, reported at <<http://www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/12/29/mandatory.military/index.html>>, were sketchy, but Rangel made it clear that the purpose of introducing the bill is to discourage Congress from authorizing military action against Iraq.

### More On the Drugged Generation

A new study in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* of Jan. 2003 reports on the increase in prescriptions of psychotropic drugs to kids. See the story at <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/01/13/health/main536269.shtml>>, and a forceful commentary at <<http://www.townhall.com/columnists/joelmowbray/jm20030115.shtml>>.

## Buzz

### ASFAR Represented at Voting Age Rally

The drive to lower Anchorage, Alaska’s voting age to 16 was kicked off by a rally in the town square on December 6, 2002. The *Anchorage Daily News* article about the rally appeared at <<http://www.adn.com/alaska/story/2280898p-2343248c.html>>. ASFAR member Winston Featherly-Bean attended the rally, and is helping to collect enough signatures to get the proposal on the city’s April ballot.

## News Links

### Faith-Based Funding Follow-Up

Last month’s cover story speculated that faith-based grants might become available to religious “gulag schools” such as the chain of Roloff Homes. On December 12, George W. Bush issued executive orders which come *close* to doing just that. The orders, viewable at <[www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/20021212-3.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/20021212-3.html)>, allow publicly-funded social service providers to keep religious references in their names, display “art, icons, scriptures, or other symbols” of their religious identity, and maintain their “religious character” in programs receiving federal funding. They don’t have to observe the non-discriminatory hiring practices required of other public agencies, either. These orders won’t satisfy places as extreme as the Roloff Homes, however, since using federal dollars for “worship, religious instruction, or proselytization” is still prohibited.

## Redirect

Mike Males is, as always, on the job, fighting the mistaken perception that young people are responsible for most crime. His two recent editorials for the *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* can be viewed at <[http://www.cjcj.org/press/youth\\_menace.html](http://www.cjcj.org/press/youth_menace.html)> and <[http://www.cjcj.org/press/oakland\\_murders.html](http://www.cjcj.org/press/oakland_murders.html)>.

In the latest issue of the *Harvard Mental Health Letter*, “Scared Crooked” reports on new findings that scaring “at-risk” kids with prison visits makes them *more* likely to end up in trouble or in jail; the article appears at <<http://www.health.harvard.edu/article.cfm?id=134>>. Along the same lines: “Trick or Treatment,” a January 3, 2003 editorial in MSN’s *Slate* magazine, contends that, by lumping all drug users together and labelling them all equally dysfunctional, drug treatment programs for teens often turn first-time experimenters or infrequent users into hard-core abusers; see <<http://slate.msn.com/id/2076329/>>.

*Youth Truth* (ISSN 1527-4489) is issued bimonthly, six issues per volume, by Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions. New volumes begin with the Jan./Feb. issue of each year. The electronic edition is available at [www.asfar.org/zine/](http://www.asfar.org/zine/) and is free of charge. Reproduction and reprinting are permitted as long as no sections are taken out of context and credit is given to *Youth Truth*. Annual subscription rates for the print edition: Members \$2.00 per year; Nonmembers and Libraries \$10.00 per year. Printed copies of single issues are available at \$2.00 per issue. Checks should be made payable to ASFAR. Special rates may be negotiated.

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## Why “Minor” Is A Hateful Term

All too often in society nowadays do you hear somebody telling young people that they cannot do something they want to because of laws designed to restrict that—anything from having sex with someone they love to standing on a street corner watching the people walk by late at night. My questions are: why are younger people targeted for victimless crime laws? and always assumed to be less intelligent than the older population?

Age brings experience, one may say. By that reasoning people into their eighties should be the wisest and most intelligent people. So why is it that they are so often locked away in old folks’ homes, senile or not in control of their own bodies?

Well, what about people who are forty. Surely they are wise. Well, why must people who are of that age draft younger people to work for them? Why is it that they have to solve everything with war and cannot look beyond themselves (a trait often attributed to younger generations)?

Some of the most creative minds exist in young people. Einstein, Mozart ... they were both prodigies at a young age. They were lucky that they lived in a time when younger people were not so looked down upon and restricted as today. If they were around now, adults would just smile down at them and say “that’s nice”, dismissing their ideas and works as things sprung from an idle mind.

Children are forced to learn a smorgasbord of theories, ideas, and facts that adults have determined are what they need to

know to survive. What about Benjamin Franklin, then? he never made it past the seventh grade, yet he discovered electricity. How can people then say that if you do not learn what they think you need to, you will not survive?

“Minor” is used to describe people in a bad light. “You can’t stand there after 10 PM, you’re a minor.” “You can’t smoke yet, you’re a minor.” “Don’t try to vote, you’re a minor.” They are assumed incompetent—a notion that could quickly disappear if adults would just take the time to talk to their children about politics. And why should age even matter in those situations where they are not hurting anyone, or hurting only themselves? or doing only what is legally permitted for adults to do?

The word “minor” in those situations is un-needed. It is just used as a pointer, as a reason to deny people of a certain age the rights that they *should* be able to have as citizens of the United States of America. The Constitution has always limited governmental power over the people of the United States, but nowhere does it mention the power of the adults of the United States over the “minors” that exist in this land.

You have black people’s right to vote given after a long war, the Civil War. Women gained it through suffrage, but the “minors” are still ignored, all because of their age and perceived lack of ability to understand or make competent decisions about important matters.

## Perspective

Steven Merrick  
ASFAR Member

Yet, how can young adults be judged when they were never given the chance to make such decisions in the first place? How can they be told that they are too immature to do anything when nobody has given them a chance to prove themselves in those situations?

Shall we begin assuming adults are too immature for their own good and make laws that restrict their freedoms to assemble, speak, or vote as given in the Constitution of the United States? If we shan’t, then why would we do that for the “minors” of the United States, who—as “immature” as they are perceived to be—are still citizens of the United States?

There’s a line in the U. S. Constitution that states, “All persons.” Perhaps that should now be amended to read “All persons over the age of twenty-one,” because that is how it is now, and unless a drastic change occurs, it is how it will forever be.

“Minor” will forever be a term used to insult and slander someone who is disagreed with just on account of their age. Never will they be judged on the quality of their person, or the validity of their ideas ... nay, they will just be judged on their age and age alone. No other insult is allowed to be used so freely, or in laws, so why is this one? Why indeed.

## News Links

### Children Rescued After Years of Isolation

In New Jersey, two seven-year-old boys and their four-year-old brother who had spent virtually their entire lives locked in basements or closets were finally discovered—one dead—in the first week of January. Parts of their story appear at <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/Northeast/01/08/starved.children/>, <http://www.nj.com/news/ledger/index.ssf?base/news-6/1042355644231210.xml> and [http://news.findlaw.com/ap\\_stories/other/1110/1-7-2003/20030107070011\\_067.html](http://news.findlaw.com/ap_stories/other/1110/1-7-2003/20030107070011_067.html).

# News Links

## “Kids” Defined By New Domain

Having a sex- and violence-free “zone” on the Internet is a fine idea, but did they *have* to call it “dot kids”? According to <[http://www.townonline.com/tewksbury/news/local\\_regional/tew\\_buswimarkey\\_p1118\\_20021.htm](http://www.townonline.com/tewksbury/news/local_regional/tew_buswimarkey_p1118_20021.htm)>, the domain—and its name—became official when President Bush signed it into law on December 18.

## Homeschoolers Breathe Easier

The U.S. Department of Education fixed a mistake in its financial aid handbook that caused headaches for younger home-schooled college applicants, and sent a letter to all universities to help clear up the mess. As an item at <<http://www.hslda.org/docs/news/hslda/200301/200301020.asp>> explains, the error made colleges believe they would lose federal funding by enrolling home-schooled applicants younger than their state’s compulsory school attendance age.

One day i was crying  
as a young man came by walking  
“come with me to a land that’s free,  
where you don’t need to be eighteen  
to say cigarettes please  
in the place called Libertopia”

In the place called Libertopia  
the government keeps life free  
it’s not an ageist regime  
oppressing all my brothers and me

In the place called Libertopia  
ageism is a crime  
with much more shit attached to it  
than just a heavy fine

In the place called Libertopia  
school exists to teach  
not to subject the youth  
to what the government wants to preach

In the place called Libertopia  
you can make your own money  
you don’t have two monkeys on your back  
saying “now stay in school honey”

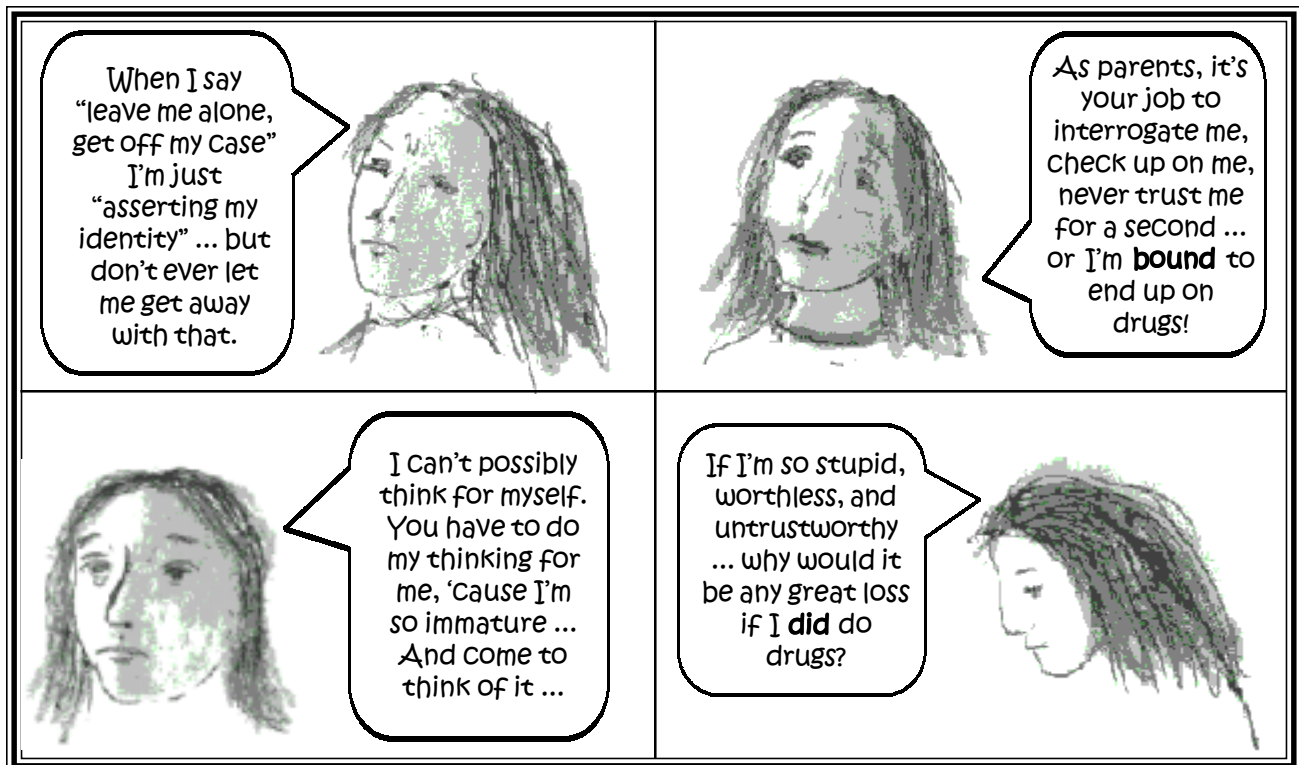
In the place called Libertopia  
in your own thoughts you may revel  
and you don’t have conform  
with the evil gray haired devils

In the place called Libertopia  
you are judged by your soul and your mind  
not on simply how far back  
you can look behind

# Poem

Scott Davidson  
ASFAR Member

# Toon



Jones, Gerard. *Killing monsters : why children NEED fantasy, super heroes, and make-believe violence*. New York : Basic Books, 2002.

## Sue's Review

Susan Wishnetsky  
Treasurer, ASFAR  
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"The first casualty of any war" writes Gerard Jones, "is truth." In this country, we love to portray every social issue as a "war on" something or other. These ideological wars usually seem to turn out badly for everyone, but the damage is seldom laid out for all to see. The truth is drowned out by the drumbeats.

In July 2000, officers of six prominent medical associations crafted their "Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children," subsequently endorsed by both houses of Congress, which read in part

The conclusion of the public health community, based on over thirty years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values, and behavior, particularly in children.

The politically-correct attitude was thus codified by a small group of physicians and a host of politicians eager to jump on the bandwagon. Although many members of these medical associations disagreed with the joint statement, and there was plenty of research supporting the opposite view, it wasn't surprising that politicians and prominent psychologists would now shy away from criticizing the "war" on media violence. Even those who know better—who know the truth—realize that it's safer to stay on the side of "political correctness." In a war, as our president has said, "If you're not with us, you're against us." That is why it took a former action cartoonist to search out the truths that would otherwise have remained unspoken.

Jones has indeed done his homework, bringing together a wealth of information which severs the supposed link between violent entertainment and violent behavior. He interviews parents, kids, and experts on the role violent fantasies play in our lives. He sheds light upon the misleading facts and statistics that are bandied about in the news. He investigates the histories of kids believed to have been made violent by the movies they watched, the music they listened to, the games they played.

But the strongest argument in *Killing Monsters* is that of simple common sense. One parent who had denied toy weapons to her son describes how the clarity of common sense suddenly broke through all the propaganda she had accepted for years:

"All of a sudden," said Gina, "it hit me that all this time I had been confusing fantasy and reality! This is a little boy with a plastic sword, and I'm telling him, 'This might make you into a violent person.' Think how confusing

that must be when you're little. Instead of hearing a parent say, that's a toy, that's fantasy, there's no *real* danger in it, you have complete power over it, he's hearing you say, that scares me, that's more powerful than you are, that's going to turn *you* into a killer!"

Violent play, when accepted by adults, can give kids a sense of control over lives which are largely out of their control. Jones interviews kids who tell how violent lyrics and images let them know that they weren't the only ones who felt angry or violent, as they did, making them feel less outcast and alone with their feelings. One psychologist who wasn't afraid to speak out, Dr. Helen Smith, maintains that perhaps kids aren't exposed to *enough* fantasy violence:

"Teachers and parents say, sit still, be nice, cooperate, and they don't give kids any opportunity to play with the aggressive feelings that come up for them .... With all the emphasis in our schools now on getting kids in touch with their feelings, the scary feelings like anger are just kind of wished away. A kid says, 'I feel like I love you' and we say 'Awww.' He says, 'I feel like I want to kill you' and we say 'No you don't!' So a kid runs into some real conflict in life and he feels this rage coming up in him and he doesn't know what to do with it."

Not only do children learn to suppress their true feelings, they learn that they're bad and wicked for having those feelings at all.

The book focuses on kids; adult fans of fantasy violence are rarely mentioned. So now I'm curious about adults' enjoyment of violent entertainment, whether adults get the same benefits from it as children do. Adults, too, experience infuriating situations in life, but they have much more control over their lives—and therefore much greater ability to deal with and eliminate the causes of their anger—than children currently do. Jones has great sympathy for the powerlessness of kids and understanding of the rage and frustration they feel because of it, but the idea that giving kids more actual power—more rights and freedom, more opportunities and choices—would reduce the frustration and anger they feel ... well, that idea was outside the scope of this book, I suppose.

The book is well-written; its research is well-documented. For a lone voice of dissent against this "war" on media violence, author Gerard Jones has done an excellent job.

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# News Links

## **Right to Vote At Retirement?**

New Zealand's Electoral Reform Commission has received a proposal from politician Winston Peters to raise that nation's voting age to 65. According to <<http://www.worldsworstweb.com/1202/peters.htm>>, Peters is tired of "fickle minority groups, such as Professionals, Workers, Women, Greenies, and Students," and believes that raising the age will correct "this imbalance in the electoral system."

## **Identity Theft By Parents**

More on the irresponsibility of those Baby Boomer parents: <<http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,56570,00.html>> reports on grownups who try to get out of their own financial holes by using their children's names to apply for credit cards.

## **What Would Jesus Spank With?**

Reverend Arthur Allen Jr. of Athens, Georgia is now in jail. Rev. Allen encouraged parents in his congregation to bring their disobedient children to church, where they would be restrained by two men and beaten with a belt by the pastor. Rev. Allen was previously warned to use only an open hand to hit children, but <[http://www.onlineathens.com/stories/102202/new\\_20021022039.shtml](http://www.onlineathens.com/stories/102202/new_20021022039.shtml)> quotes the pastor as saying, "I can't maintain discipline ... by just hand-spanking our children."

## **Christmas—A Time For Families**

On Christmas Day, a six-year-old Chicago girl was beaten to death trying to break up a fight between her mother and her mother's boyfriend, says the story at <<http://www.tv7-4.com/Global/story.asp?S=1061793>>. Also that day in the Chicago area, a depressed mother shot her husband and two daughters before turning the gun on herself; according to <<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-021226aurora,0,7906758.story?coll=chi-news-hed>>, the husband died at the scene.

## **High School "Singles Only"?**

A story at <<http://www.wkrn.com/Global/story.asp?S=898137&nav=1ugBAicm>> describes the struggle of 15-year-old Leanne Murphy of Tennessee to return to high school after she got married.

## **Florida's Foster Felons**

An article at <<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/4844235.htm>> suggests that inadequate background checks and screening of foster care applicants "may have contributed to the deaths of at least 100 children since 1998." The reporters found 168 Florida foster parents had felony records for crimes including armed robbery, welfare fraud, racketeering, and child endangerment, many with convictions in the past ten years.

## **Child Found Injured, Intoxicated on New Year's Eve**

With a blood-alcohol level of .17 and internal bleeding from apparent "shaken baby syndrome", a 3-year-old Albuquerque, New Mexico boy was admitted to the hospital in critical condition on New Year's eve; the story at <[http://www.abqtrib.com/archives/news02/123102\\_news\\_baby.shtml](http://www.abqtrib.com/archives/news02/123102_news_baby.shtml)> says that the boy's mother and her boyfriend have been arrested.

## **Honesty Not Against School's Policy**

A Florida school official apologized to angry parents for the "poor judgment" shown by a kindergarten teacher, but, says <<http://www.news-journalonline.com/2002/Dec/14/NOTE1.htm>>, insisted that the school could not discipline or fire the teacher merely for truthfully answering questions about the existence of Santa Claus.

## **Prozac Approved for Pre-Teens**

Psychiatrists have been prescribing Prozac to kids for years, but as of January 3—for patients at least eight years old—they can do it with official approval and guidelines from the Food and Drug Administration. The article at <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/news/archive/2003/01/03/national1726EST0661.DTL>> mentions that, besides other possible side effects, children may experience decreased growth.

## **Four-Day Week Saves Schools Money**

More than 100 rural school districts in seven states have made school days longer in order to give students—and employees—Fridays off. Items at <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A37906-2002Dec25.html>> and <[http://www.projo.com/kids/content/projo\\_20030106\\_friday.c011e.html](http://www.projo.com/kids/content/projo_20030106_friday.c011e.html)> describe some of the perceived pros and cons of the plan.

## **Parent Sues New York City Schools**

The star and crescent of Islam were okay, and the Jewish menorah, too, but no nativity scenes; Christian displays in New York public schools were to consist of Christmas trees only. One mother, according to <<http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewCulture.asp?Page=/Culture/archive/200212/CUL20021211b.html>>, calls that policy "religious discrimination," since the Supreme Court has ruled in the past that a menorah is a religious symbol, but a Christmas tree is a "secular" one.

## **Family Fraud**

The good news for 7-year-old Hannah Milbrandt of Urbana, Illinois: she doesn't have leukemia and she's not going to die. The bad news: her parents and her grandmother have been arrested for defrauding well-wishers out of about \$10,000. According to <<http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/Midwest/01/15/faked.cancer.ap>>, Hannah's mother shaved her head, bandaged her arm to cover an imaginary chemotherapy "port", gave her sleeping pills, and took her to counseling to prepare for death.

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## Doctored Documents

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and the Environmental Protection Agency deleted chemical plant information. While all those incidents were worried about and argued about, they were certainly *understandable*—to protect national security. Maybe the government overreacted, but most of us wanted to ensure that anything that might aid terrorists would be kept from them.

In the past few months, however, users of government web sites have noticed new changes in the documents available, changes with **no** connections to national security, but with **big** connections to the ideology of the current administration.

The first report of such information-tampering came in a September 18, 2002 article in *Education Week*, viewable at <<http://www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=03web.h22>>. John P. Bailey, the Department of Education's newly-appointed Director of Education Technology, had issued a directive to senior staff members on May 31 to remove "outdated" material. All material posted before February 2001, according to the article, was to be removed unless "needed for legal reasons or it supports the 'No Child Left Behind Act' of 2001—the president's key education measure—or other administration initiatives."

On October 21, Rep. Henry Waxman sent a letter, co-signed by 11 other House members, to Department of Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson about the disappearance of information from the web site of the Centers for Disease Control. The letter, viewable at Rep. Waxman's site at <[http://www.house.gov/reform/min/inves\\_admin/admin\\_hhs\\_info.htm](http://www.house.gov/reform/min/inves_admin/admin_hhs_info.htm)>, expressed concern about the disappearance of a CDC online document on educational programs proven to reduce risky behavior among adolescents, as well as a fact sheet on the effectiveness of condoms in preventing sexually transmitted diseases. It also noted that information debunking the myth that abortion increases the risk of breast cancer had been removed from the site of the National Cancer Institute, a National Institutes of Health program.

At least two of the three documents listed above have since returned to their original locations, but in greatly altered forms. On the National Cancer Institute web site, the revised document "Early Reproductive Events and Breast Cancer" (formerly called "Abortion and Breast Cancer") now states that studies on this topic have yielded "inconsistent" results (the original document clearly stated that induced abortions did *not* increase a woman's risk of breast cancer). The fact sheet on condoms reappeared without its illustrations and explanations of correct condom use. The new fact sheet *omits* the (formerly-included) findings

that sex education doesn't encourage people to have sex sooner, but *adds* a new paragraph emphasizing that abstinence is the only reliable method of birth control and sexually-transmitted disease prevention.

"This goes on all the time in science," responded William Pierce, a Department of Health and Human Services spokesman. "Our goal is to ... reflect the most up-to-date scientific thinking." But in fact, this is a new phenomenon. Availability of documents online has become widespread only in the past decade or so. Before that, links to documents were too unreliable to be considered viable alternatives to paper by libraries or researchers. And in the past, if certain texts were considered outdated or found to contain errors, the solution was not to alter or destroy the old texts, but to add *new* ones which presented arguments against these supposedly discredited beliefs. In America, when we encounter speech with which we disagree, the appropriate response is *more* speech ... not censorship!



The original and revised versions of the two documents mentioned above can be viewed at Rep. Henry Waxman's site. But what about *other* alterations or deletions of documents that may not have been noticed yet?

A non-profit organization called "Internet Archive"—<<http://www.archive.org/>>—maintains a database of old versions of web pages. By entering a URL in what they call their "Wayback Machine," you can view a web page as it looked on various dates in the past. The URL of the fact sheet on condoms, <<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts/condoms.htm>>, does reveal the difference in the document as it was originally posted and as it appears today. If there are any particular documents you suspect of being altered, you can try testing your theory with this database. But the "Internet Archive" program will remove pages from its database upon request by the web site's owner, and government sites are not excluded from this policy. One can argue that the "owners" of government web sites are the people of the United States, but those who run the program may not take that view. So the continued reliability of this method of proving tampering remains to be seen.

A special task force has been formed by the American Library Association's Government Documents Round Table (GODORT), to try to keep tabs on the disappearance or alteration of government documents online. If you do find any clear cases of changed or missing documents, e-mail Sherry DeDecker at

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## Doctored Documents

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<dedecker@library.ucsb.edu>, or any of the other GODORT task force members listed at <<http://www2.library.unr.edu/dept/bgic/Duncan/RAGI.html>>. (This page also includes a list of links to articles on this topic.)

But, you may be asking, what makes this an important issue for youth rights? The policies expressed by government agencies, in *any* recent administration, have been so hostile to the idea of youth rights in every form that any *new* policies or ideologies on the subject could hardly be much worse! We've seen punitive zero tolerance policies, forced medication of more (and younger) kids, loss of free speech rights, new laws restricting driving and access to video games ... not to mention the practice of allowing kids, with *none* of the rights of adults, to be *tried* as adults if they are accused of certain crimes, and even to be sentenced to death! It would seem that *any* alteration to the public record, in a land that treats its youth so badly, would *have* to be an improvement.

Obviously, if this trend were to continue, it would have implications for many groups and sections of society far beyond the youth rights movement. But much of the suppressed and altered material mentioned above does seem to have a connection with youth policies: education, sexual activity, risk behaviors. And we might turn out to be very wrong to think that our nation's policies toward youth couldn't possibly get any more repressive!

It's true that the youth rights movement generally has little use for government documents that express official policies or draw conclusions from data. We do refer to court decisions that have been favorable to our cause ... but the disappearance or alteration of court documents seems highly unlikely.

The greatest loss for us would be the disappearance of source data, statistics gathered and compiled by government bodies, data we can examine, and about which we can come to our own conclusions. This type of data has been used in previous issues of *Youth Truth*; for example, data from *National Vital Statistics Reports* and the *CDC Fact Book* was cited in our article "Why Children Die" two years ago, and the Department of Labor's *Report on the Youth Labor Force* was cited in last year's *Youth Truth* article "Child Labor Laws : For Whose Benefit?" Author and youth rights advocate Mike Males uses such sources even more extensively in his books and articles.

There's some evidence that this type of data is also at risk. An article at <<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2003/01/03/MN120712.DTL>> reports that one such data source, the Mass Layoffs Statistics Program of the U.S. Labor Department, was discontinued at the end of 2002, reportedly due to lack of funding. The article speculates that the funding was withdrawn largely because the data collected by the program made the economy look too bleak! (For November 2002, the program's final month of data collection, it reported 2150 mass layoffs affecting 240,028 workers.)

This lost data probably had little or no relationship to youth issues, but again, if this is how our government deals with numbers that make administration's policies look bad, we shouldn't be surprised to see other data-gathering programs discontinued as well. Perhaps an Environmental Protection Agency program monitoring the effect of industrial pollutants on children's health will suddenly disappear. Maybe it will be data on rates of unintended pregnancies or sexually-transmitted diseases. Maybe it will be statistics on children living in poverty, or without health insurance.

Maybe new data will be subjected to "prior restraint"—if information seems as if it *could* be used against the administration's agenda, it may be ordered to remain unpublished. There's evidence that this, too, may already be happening: a Sept. issue of *OMB Watcher* at <<http://www.ombwatch.org/article/articleview/1061/1/150>> revealed that a government report on children's health had been routed to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget for "review" prior to publication—an unprecedented action for this agency.

"Vanishing Act : the U.S. Government's Disappearing Data," an article at <<http://searchenginewatch.com/searchday/02/sd1219-vanish.html>> quotes Gary Bass of OMB Watch: "We are moving from a right-to-know to a need-to-know society." The article's author, Marylaine Block responds, "It's OUR information, and we can't let them get away with deleting it. We paid for it, and we need it, if we're to have any hope of knowing what our government is doing." And the previously-mentioned article in *Education Week* quotes Gary Ruskin, director of the Congressional Accountability Project, as saying that to see government agencies using their web sites as "propaganda vehicles .... would make George Orwell smile."



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