
Youth Truth



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Scapegoating of Youth

Alex Koroknay-Palicz

Throughout history dominant majorities have redirected public attention away from the majorities' problems and onto an artificially created scapegoat. Many countries have used a variety of scapegoats throughout time; this practice leads to persecution and anger towards the selected minority. Today in North American society a new scapegoat is being fabricated; this scapegoat is our youth. Due to powerful advocacy and protection organizations, scapegoating of other minorities is on the decline and the one remaining minority with no voice or say in society is our nation's youth. A highly visible manifestation of this scapegoating is evident in society's treatment of youth violence. By exaggerating the extent of youth violence, the media and politicians seek to promote their own personal agendas at the expense of the generation under the age of majority. Currently the public is being fed the idea of a plague of youth violence in society that will only get worse. The often proclaimed "epidemic of youth violence" is used by media, doctors and politicians to increase their ratings and profile in the nation.

In today's society, forms of mass media such as newspapers, television, and radio exert tremendous influence over the nation. Mass media streams into the homes of millions of people everyday. This broad audience gives the media the tremendous ability to shape the discussion around certain issues. Within a political framework, the media is referred to as "the great mentioner" due to its ability to feature or

ignore politicians' campaigns and political issues. Through the years, journalism integrity codes of impartiality have helped to ensure that this power would not be misused, but these safeguards are crumbling. In a competitive market news media must compete for an audience just like any other form of entertainment.

The search for ratings leads the media to sensationalize news and put slants on news that will sell advertisements and increase circulation. "The media pump fear in two ways. Because it's a business and needs to attract attention, it goes for what's shocking," says Naneen Karraker, a Bay Area criminologist. "And by trying to get something zingy in a small space, the media simplify something that's complex and often distort the facts" (Farr, "Fear Reigns"). According to *Newskit: A Consumers Guide to News Media*, there are eight journalistic techniques that bias news reporting; these include: bias through selection and omission; bias through placement; bias by headline; bias by photos, captions and camera angles; bias through use of names and titles; bias through statistics and crowd counts; bias by source control; and through word choice and tone (Media-Awareness Network).

Selection and omission is a dangerous tactic that is used very effectively in the

negative portrayal of youth as violent predators. "A 1996 report by the Berkeley Media Studies Group found that more than half of local news stories on youth involved violence, and more than two-thirds of the violence stories concerned young people under age 25 (*American Journal of Public Health*, 8/97) ... Eighty percent is committed by adults over 18" (Templeton). Clearly, the press is taking full advantage of its power to omit and is harming youth in the process.

The second technique involves the placement of stories in a newspaper or on a television broadcast. Stories on the front page or early in the show receive the most attention and the most emphasis. In the Thursday March 2, 2000 edition of the *Washington Post*, it was decided to place a shooting by a six-year-old gunman in which one person died on the front page, while placing a much more deadly shooting involving a 39-year-old man later in the paper. Although the shooting in a Pennsylvania McDonald's resulted in the deaths of two people, critically injuring three others, it was deemed less important than the crime committed by a youth (Slevin and Sanderson; Claiborne).

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— THE PUBLIC
IS BEING FED THE IDEA
OF A PLAGUE OF YOUTH VIOLENCE —

Obituary

Letters

Joshua Gilbert, founder and President of the Canadian Youth Rights Association (CYRA) and President of ASFAR in 1997, died on April 24, 2001. Two letters remembering Josh and what his life meant to the cause of youth rights are printed below.

I just heard about Josh he will definitely be missed in the YR community. Josh was one of the first people I met when I got involved in youth rights a few years ago. I never met him in person, but I spoke to him frequently, and this is definitely a sad day for youth rights.
Jason Gerber

...I was shocked to learn about Josh Gilbert's death. Although I never knew him personally, I have talked with him online before I wrote this sorta as a tribute to the great YR ally and friend we have lost—may he live on in our hearts, memories and in the cause that we fight for. Josh was once President of ASFAR, from what I've gathered. Most notably, he founded and led CYRA, bringing organized youth rights to Canada. From my knowledge, he and CYRA have been pretty successful in the past ... YR internationally has lost one of its greatest allies and friends—and Canada has lost a great rights activist. I'm sorry that this is a tad long, but I leave you with this:

In Memory of a Great Ally Against Oppression

Throughout history
tears have filled our eyes
people have come
in hope of freedom
yet they go
some without goodbyes.
They die for us to live
and we've lived to see their fate
they've died fighting the good cause
to win it, it's never too late.

Many only think of
Abraham, Martin, and John
but now we must add onto the list.
Unfortunately another's arrived at Heaven
hopefully greeted with angelic bliss
but down here on Earth we mourn
for our cause is temporarily torn
as the undertaker updates the list.
Abraham, Martin, John, and Josh
four fighters for rights
that we shall surely miss.

Bob J. Mayberry

Diversionsary Tactics

So long as adults rule, they will make sure they rule by covering up things like parental abuse and talking instead about school shootings and things of that nature. It makes society think that something is being done But I think there'd be a lot less unrest if there weren't so many parents using their kids as pawns or punching bags. "diviana"

Diversionsary Tactics (Response)

Classic scapegoating.

No one likes to squirm adults (particularly Baby Boomers) will do anything they can to take the spotlight off of their generation. They can focus on a few exceptionally rare events like school shootings and use one teenager on one day in one school of 2900+ to represent all teens everywhere everyday. For that grossly inaccurate comparison to be fair, we would have to use Ted Bundy, Jeff Dahmer, Tim McVeigh, and Charles Manson as representative of all adults.

Teen pregnancy is really mostly **adult w/ teen** pregnancy, but that "adult" part always gets conveniently left out. After all, adults can do no wrong. "PedroP"

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Editorial and Publishing Staff

Editor in Chief: Justin Mallone <editor@asfar.org>
Electronic Edition Production: Justin Mallone <editor@asfar.org>
Research Coordinator: Brendan Perez
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.

News Links

Psychotherapy Proves Fatal

On April 17, Colorado Governor Bill Owens banned the use of “rebirthing” therapy in his state in response to the death of 10-year-old Candace Newmaker, who died while undergoing the therapy <<http://www.cnn.com/2001/LAW/04/17/rebirthing.ban/index.html>>. However, reports suggest that the technique is usually carried out safely. In this case, the young patient did not consent to the treatment, and her requests to stop the session were ignored. The two Colorado therapists and Candace’s adoptive mother, who had flown the girl from North Carolina for the treatment, were all charged with child abuse <<http://www.cnn.com/2001/LAW/04/05/rebirthing.trial/index.html>>. More information on this story appears at <<http://www.msnbc.com/local/RMN/DRMN247886.asp?cp1=1>>.

Media Misleads in Crime Coverage

A new study called “Off Balance: Youth, Race and Crime in the News” demonstrates that the news media unduly portrays youth and minorities as perpetrators of violence. Homicide coverage on network news increased 473% from 1990 to 1998, the study finds, while actual homicides decreased 32.9% in the same period. In California, in a year in which youth were responsible for 14% of all arrests for violent offenses, about 70% of the local news stories on violence involved youth. The report appears at <<http://www.buildingblocksforyouth.org/media/>>.

Six-Year-Old Taken Seriously

A New Mexico kindergarten student was suspended from school for nine days for shouting at a classmate that he was going to kill her. A hearing was scheduled to consider the possibility of a full year’s suspension for the threat. See <<http://www.lasvegassun.com/sunbin/stories/nat-gen/2001/apr/06/040606435.html>>.

Two Less Curfew Laws

The ACLU has had some recent success with curfew cases; two news releases at <<http://www.aclu.org/news/2001/n032201c.html>> and <<http://www.aclu.org/news/2001/n032301a.html>> report that a curfew law in Anchorage, Alaska was struck down by a court on March 22, and a ruling which found a West New York, New Jersey curfew ordinance unconstitutional was upheld by a state appeals court on March 23.

Victims Billed for Abuser’s Treatment

After serving his eight-year jail sentence for the aggravated sexual assault of his two children, Nelden McMickle was moved to a psychiatric facility, as permitted by a 1993 New Jersey law allowing the state to commit sex offenders who may continue to pose a threat. But a 1918 state law holds relatives partly responsible for court-ordered psychiatric care, so McMickle’s two grown children are now required to submit their tax returns to the state’s Department of Human Services, to determine how much of their father’s annual \$90,000 bill they will be required to pay. The siblings, according to the story at <http://www.apbnews.com/newscenter/breakingnews/2001/03/26/story_sexually_abused_children.html>, have refused to comply and are pursuing legal action.

Informant Sued for Following Rules

Kristina Tapia, a high school student in Lancaster, California, reported to school authorities a death threat she overheard a fellow student make; her family is now being sued by that student’s family for slander and defamation of character, as reported at <<http://www.cnn.com/2001/fyi/teachers.ednews/03/26/school.whistleblower/>>. A court ruled that the school district did not have to help with the Tapias’ \$40,000 legal bill.

More Girls Going to Jail

To keep juvenile detention centers full in this period of declining youth crime, law enforcement agencies are making up the difference by arresting more girls, who, according to an American Bar Association report, are generally detained for less serious offenses than boys. A brief article appears at <<http://www.lasvegassun.com/sunbin/stories/news/2001/apr/30/043009351.html>>.

Connecticut Fails to Report Abuse

The *Hartford Courant* reports that while Connecticut’s Department of Children and Families had clear evidence of serious physical abuse taking place at one of its juvenile institutions in 1999, they did not report the case to the State’s Attorney for investigation or prosecution, as required by state law. Since the abuses documented took place in 1998 and 1999, many of the cases cannot be prosecuted, due to a one-year statute of limitations on assaults. Further details are given at <<http://www.ctnow.com/scripts/editorial.dll?eetype=Article&eid=4322580&render=y&Table=&ck=&ver=2.5>>.

Behavior Study Reports the Obvious

A North Carolina study found that high schoolers who frequently watched wrestling on TV were more likely to get into fights, carry weapons, and use alcohol or chewing tobacco. Completely forgetting the difference between correlation and causation, the researchers concluded that viewing wrestling on television was the cause of the other behaviors. The organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving considered this story worthy of note; it appears at <http://jtodirect.madd.org/plugin.jhtml?siteID=MADD&p=2&Tab=News&Object_ID=267333>.

The President's Pen

George Justin Mallone
President, ASFAR
<president@asfar.org>

In past editions of *Youth Truth* you've heard about the horrors currently taking place in our educational system. The drugging-up, dumbing-down, and brain-washing of youth, and the police state-like atmosphere to which they are subjected, rightfully shock and terrify us all. But are these things just a sign of our society's virulently anti-youth attitude at this moment, a mere sign of the times? Or are they more than just an aberration—are they the inevitable result flowing from the fundamental premises and structure of what most people consider an education?

Traditional schooling is textbook-based and teacher-led. Any deviation is at the discretion of the teacher (who often is far too disinterested to make any worthwhile attempt at deviating from the dull lesson plan). The students must comply with the instructions of the teacher and the demands of the lesson plan or take the risk of their parents receiving a call (and given that we live in a culture that sanctions the physical abuse of young people by their parents, it's easy to understand the reasoning of those young people who cry uncle when confronted with this threat). And as the years go by, and the intensity level is raised, we find ourselves with a most curious situation: young people put in the pressure-cooker of worrying about their future (for which their educational experience often ill-prepares them), and at the same time undergoing a high-intensity course in boredom.

On a personal level, it never ceases to amaze me how school can make a fascinating subject like history seem dull to so many people. But when the past is ripped from its context, from the human passions and ideals and dramas that made it happen, and is reduced to a series of dates

to be correlated with particular events, well, how could it not seem boring? Treating history as just a bunch of events and dates, and nothing more, makes it seem as exciting as the prospect of opening a dictionary and memorizing the definition of a random word (in fact, the latter seems possibly more appealing). This is just one example.

I offer the theory that the problem with education is systemic, and not merely with regard to the lack of respect for children's rights (though this *is* certainly a part of the problem). No, I want to suggest that even in an ASFARian world, where all arbitrary age-based restrictions were repealed, we would still be functioning sub-optimally if we continued on with our authoritarian model of schooling. For an ASFAR kind of world, or to help build one, one needs a school based on the premise that young people are individuals, with rights, and a school that respects that fact to the utmost.

Enter Sudbury

Sudbury Valley School, based in Framingham, Massachusetts, was founded in 1968, and was, to my knowledge, the first of the "democratic" schools. Sometimes it's simpler just to let what you're talking about speak for itself, so here I quote from the Sudbury home page <<http://www.sudval.org/>>:



The Other Path

Sudbury Valley School is a place where people decide for themselves how to spend their days. Here, students of all ages determine what they will do, as well as when, how, and where they will do it. This freedom is at the heart of the school; it belongs to the students as their right, not to be violated. The fundamental premises of the school are simple: that all people are curious by nature; that the most efficient, long-lasting, and profound learning takes place when started and pursued by the learner; that all people are creative if they are allowed to develop their unique talents; that age-mixing among students promotes growth in all members of the group; and that freedom is essential to the development of personal responsibility.

In practice, this translates into no classes, no formal organized "structure", and a democratic style of organization, with the students being active, voting members on the Assembly that runs the school and decides everything from selection of staff to enforcement of rules and regulations.

One of the concerns frequently voiced about this method of education is the worry that, if youth are not *forced* to learn a certain minimum amount in certain subjects, a "base of knowledge" if you will, they will be incapable of functioning in our society. Ignored is the fact that, if there *is* a certain minimum base of knowledge necessary, people left to pursue knowledge on their own will tend towards learning it, on their *own*. This is affirmed by the fact that, despite the lack of coercion, of structure, of all the "rigors" we associate with traditional education, **not one child has ever left Sudbury without knowing how to read.** This may seem unconvincing in the context of our information economy, with its dependence on specialized knowledge that goes above and beyond the "basics", but when one considers the fact that traditional high schools cannot claim anywhere near the same 100% literacy rate for their graduates (in fact, I've seen statistics that say anywhere from 10% to 20% of high school graduates cannot read

New Drug Law Is Attack on College Students

Today in the United States, college students are denied student loans if they have been convicted of any state or federal drug offenses. This is in accordance with Section 484, subsection 'r' of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1998, which went into effect this past July. According to the Department of Education, an estimated 8,100 students have lost some or all of their federal aid in the 2000-2001 school year.

This bill clearly does more harm than good. By increasing the number of students who are denied loans, it in turn becomes a very harsh penalty on students from low income families. One would think that the government would want to encourage

The Other Path

continued

their diplomas), and when one considers that reading is the essential gateway to the library of a knowledge economy, and when one considers the fact that if young people can learn to read in a democratic school much more proficiently than their "normal school" counterparts, and that logic dictates they must be able to learn various other things with greater proficiency as well ... not only has one done a lot of considering, but one must conclude that perhaps there is something to this whole "learn in freedom" thing after all.

While this form of education has taken root across the country over the years, there remains a lack of sufficient democratic schools around the country. What a travesty it is that even in my home town, New York City, one of the most cosmopolitan and purportedly open-minded cities in the world, one can look high and low for a democratic school and come up with nothing. But perhaps the time is ripe for a change in direction. One looks at the growing popularity of homeschooling, and wonders: maybe America is ready for new perspectives on education?

people to seek higher education. But now, those who were struggling to make it through college in the first place now have to drop out of school.

Even the Department of Education has spoken out against the student loan provision of the HEA, reminding lawmakers that judges already have the power to take away student aid if they feel it is appropriate punishment. Judges were able to use their own discretion, on a case-by-case basis. Now, these particular students will lose their federal aid no matter how minor the charges may be.

For anyone who is a proponent of this bill, it should be noted that there are no similar laws for rapists, murderers, robbers, or those convicted on assault. Why is there a different standard for drug use? One who has smoked pot on occasion will lose their financial aid before a murderer would, according to this legislation. It is baffling that the government would punish a drug user more harshly than they would a murderer or rapist. Drug users are far less dangerous to society, compared to such violent offenders. In fact, people today are beginning to realize that drug users are not directly a threat to society, but rather only threatening their own well-being. Keppie Keppel, high school junior, agrees with this, saying, "I do not support this law. Just because someone is a drug user, that isn't something that should determine whether they receive financial aid."



Perspective

Larissa Price

Vice-President, ASFAR

<larissa84@rocketmail.com>

Representative Barney Frank (D-MA), has introduced a bill to repeal this federal provision. Frank says, "Someone who commits murder or armed robbery is not automatically barred from financial aid eligibility, but if you have even one non-violent drug conviction, you can't get aid for a year. Authorities previously had the discretion to bar aid to people based on the severity of their crimes and whether they are taking the steps to rehabilitate themselves. My bill would simply restore that discretion." Frank's bill is co-sponsored by Maxine Waters (D-CA), Connie Morella (R-MD), and Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-DC), among twenty-three other representatives. Over seventy civil liberties and national educational groups including the NAACP, ACLU, and NORML have also endorsed the bill that would repeal those previous provisions.

This bill is an attack on the youth of America. Young people wishing to make something of themselves may be stopped from receiving higher education because of this law. Even if a student tried smoking pot only once and were caught, he or she would lose financial aid. In a society where it is deemed necessary to receive a college education in order to become successful, the government should make all opportunities open to those who do not pose a direct threat to society.

Many students are convicted on minor, non-violent charges, but are still denied aid. Kate Wetzel, high school junior, states, "I don't think it should rule out your chance at financial aid because people make mistakes." With the support of lawmakers and civil rights organizations, this law will be repealed and eligibility restored to students convicted of minor charges who are clearly worthy of receiving financial aid.

Sue's Review

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

Movie makers know how to keep an audience riveted. Without a villain or a threat of disaster, there's no story. Let the audience know who or what the evil entity is, before the intended victims know. If the impending doom appears in a harmless guise, someone or something the victims see every day, it's all the more exciting.

Like film makers, news reporters and politicians also have stories to sell, stories that have to be scary and entertaining. And they've got to keep their audience for longer than two hours; they need that fever pitch of excitement to keep the audience coming back for days or weeks or months (or, in the case of politicians, until election day). But since they are selling their stories as truth, not fiction, they must either make sure that their facts are undeniable or they must choose a villain they think is incapable of fighting back. Without the right to vote and with few means to defend themselves as a group, youth have been chosen to play the role of the perfect villain.

This scapegoating of youth is the topic at the heart of *"Kids and Guns,"* 90 pages of valuable facts, examples, and references which set the record straight on youth crime. Author Mike Males points out that there is less justification for speaking of "tendencies" or "trends" of violence among youth than there would be to call "middle-agers" or "senior citizens" especially violent. Kids commit fewer crimes, violent and otherwise, than almost any group one can name! Yet no other group is so frequently represented in the media by their few

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worst-behaving members (although postal employees might have an understanding of the scapegoating process). Males explains the press tactics:

While it's not surprising that the press focuses on hyping rare crimes by youths, the problem is that reporters are not content to portray them factually as extremely uncommon, isolated events. Instead, reporters artificially aggrandize their stories by attaching larger significance to them. An isolated incident is linked with another isolated incident months and thousands of miles away to manufacture the image of "an alarming new trend" that is "sweeping the young" The result is that each rare event now becomes super-news-worthy by means of representing it as commonplace—a pattern, a trend, an "epidemic". This unethical media tactic is reserved for the purpose of demonizing powerless, unpopular groups the media do not link more common mass shootings by middle-agers into a "spate" [of crime] sweeping midlifers; older adults are a powerful group and therefore not subject to demonization.

Politicians benefit from and use this method as well. Males cites the portrayals of youth by former California Governor Pete Wilson and other backers of California's recent ballot proposal, Proposition 21, the "Gang Violence and Juvenile Crime Prevention Act":

Wilson and Prop 21's backers faced a clear dilemma: they were pushing a lock'em-up initiative state fiscal analysts estimated would [cost] ... "at least hundreds of millions of dollars annually" Yet, most inconveniently, youth violence was way down, as it has been throughout the 1990s youth homicide fell by 42% in 1999 to 77% below its 1990 level. Violent crimes by youths dropped 6% in 1999 and stood at 25% lower than the early '90s. Juvenile crime declines, which include a 47% drop in felony arrest rates over the last 25 years, were far larger than occurred among adults.

News Links

Three Heroin Deaths, None Teenagers

The *Reno Gazette-Journal* of May 1, 2001 reported overdose deaths of three adults in three days; two were in their 40s (the other person's age was not mentioned). The tiny news item at <<http://www.rgj.com/news2/stories/news/988784777.html>> did not speculate on a new "wave" of heroin abuse among adults, but simply warned of "bad heroin" going around.

Mental Declines Start Early

In an article we overlooked last November, researchers found that deterioration in short-term memory and mental agility do not begin in old age, as commonly believed. Tests indicate that people in their 20s are already going downhill, with the declines continuing at a constant rate throughout the life span. Performance on tests for these skills indicates that "decreases of almost 1 percent per year are found in samples of healthy adults", according to a Georgia Institute of Technology psychologist. The full article may be found at <http://www.freep.com/news/health/think17_20001117.htm>.

Males, Mike A. *"Kids and Guns" : How Politicians, Experts, and the Press Fabricate Fear of Youth*. Monroe, Maine : Common Courage Press, [2001].

Wilson and initiative backers didn't mention that, of course. Instead, he warned of a "31% increase" in serious violent crime" by juveniles in southern Orange County from 1997 to 1998. The juvenile crime leap he cited occurred. It amounted to a whopping 30 more arrests in the south county's ... 600,000 people—97 youths arrested for violent offenses in 1997, 127 in 1998. For perspective, these same cities reported 2,300 cases of domestic violence, 1,600 involving weapons, in 1998.

But Governor Wilson's scare tactics worked—Proposition 21 passed with 69% of the vote in Orange County and 62% statewide. Males describes a focus group of ordinary citizens of Orange County, who believed that people under 18 were responsible for most crimes:

I asked the two dozen average countians who they pictured as the typical violent criminal lurking to prey on innocent folks The

citizenry, polite before, erupted. "A 12-year-old gang member who has no conscience about life and death," a Costa Mesa clerk spat. "A high-schooler or gang member—no value on human life," shrilled a Santa Ana mother. An African-American grandmother snapped that gangs of "eight-, nine-, ten-year-olds are killing people" in her Westminster neighborhood I asked what proportion of the county's violent crimes the focus group believed was committed by youths—which I specified as "persons under 18 years old". A junior college student guessed 40%. "At least 80%," trumped a dapper Anaheim Hills whitehair. On average, the group believed kids committed two-thirds of the county's murders, rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults.

(Truth break: county law enforcement records show youths account for 14% of the county's violent crime arrests and probably less than 10% of its total violent offenses.

In the last two decades, a total of one 12-year-old, one 11-year-old, and zero children younger than 11 were arrested for homicide—and none during the 1990s).

Whoa, I thought, these focus-group folks must have taken heavy casualties from brutal gangbangers to harbor such fury. Turned out NONE of them had been victimized personally by a violent juvenile or knew anyone who had been So, if none had been brutalized by pistol packing cherubs, where did these good citizens get their paralyzing fear of youth crime? From newspapers, broadcast news, and police, the group agreed ...

Males' research is meticulous. Some of his arguments, especially those including tables and figures, are difficult to follow with a casual reading, and require close attention and rereading (at least for me). But even a quick skim yields a wealth of useful information.

The greatest feature of *"Kids and Guns"* is that it is **free!** Common Courage Press, the publisher of Males' earlier books, has made this one available in pdf format on its web site at <www.commoncouragepress.com>. All you need is a computer with web access and Acrobat software (which can be downloaded for free by following a link on the site). If you don't have all these things, drop me a note at the P.O. box address (see page 2 of this issue) or my e-mail address (above); maybe I can send you a disk or printout. It's well worth reading.

News Links

Impetuous Adults Unsafe Riders

According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration statistics, the average age of motorcycle accident fatalities rose from 29.3 to 36.5 in the past decade. From 1994 to 1999, as deaths among bikers younger than 35 dropped 22%, they increased 59% among bikers 35 and older. The story appears at <<http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/20010325/t000025852.html>>.

Hotheaded Adults Unsafe Spectators

From the May 6 *New York Times* (although it seems like old news): reports from the National Alliance for Youth Sports indicate that physical or verbal abuse by parents or coaches occurs in about 15% of youth games. A survey by the National Association of Sports Officials (which recently began offering assault insurance to its members) found that 90 percent of high schools reported problems with a shortage of referees. I found this story free online via <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/06/sports/06SPOR.html?ex=990417600&en=109abf6403900470&ei=5004&partner=NETZERO>>.

Editorial

Editor's note: Opinions expressed may not represent the views of ASFAR.

... Of Legal Age?

Chris Tapia

America: land of the free. However, every freedom has some sort of rules, a kind of discipline, some form of order. One of these rules is that no American can legally drink any alcoholic beverage, or anything containing alcohol, for that matter, until the age of 21. Another, in my town, is that no one can legally be outside of their home or someone else's home after 11 P.M. until they reach the age of 17. But as we all know, some rules are unfair, unjust, or just do not make sense at all. These laws do have a purpose—a very good one in fact—but they should be changed if this country continues to pride itself on being free. This country may be free, but only if you're an adult, and that's a problem that needs to be fixed.

One of the reasons that some laws are unjust is because of the way the world is viewed by the people who run it. Instead of trying to make things the way they should be, they make things the way that will bring them more money, or more votes.

The legal drinking age of 21 is one law that needs rethinking. Believe it or not, the vast majority of underage drinkers have more sense than any adult would ever think. The point is we are not hurting anybody by just having a good time with a couple of drinks, yet even if we never leave the house, it is still a crime. What is the reason for this, do you ask? So the police have another reason to give out tickets and make you give them more money. Call it injustice, call it capitalism, call it greed, call it what you wish, but ultimately it's wrong, and it goes against what this country was based on: freedom.

The next law born from ignorance is the all-too-controversial curfew law. This law states simply that no minor may be out in public without adult supervision. This law is no less ridiculous than requiring a walking license. Under this law, I can be ticketed for sitting on my front porch at midnight, unless my mother is out there

with me. That is, until the day I turn 17. I admit that I almost never follow the curfew law If me and my friends get hungry at 11:30 at night, we should have the right to go get some food without having to wake up our parents. Another example is this: I've been to about seven local concerts, each of which costs me close to \$10. Out of those seven shows, I've only actually seen the band play twice, and those two times were only because my band was also playing that show (my band playing counts as a job, so I'm immune to curfew on those nights only).

Studies have shown that curfew laws do not lower the percentage of teen crime, nor do they lower the rate of teen deaths. Curfew laws have done nothing to benefit the community. The real crime is in a person's actions, not in how late they stay out. Not only that, but curfew laws are unconstitutional. Some have already been found to be unconstitutional by the courts. If it's unconstitutional in one city, it should be unconstitutional throughout the entire country. The curfew laws have created more problems than they have solved (which would be none), and they also violate the contract signed by our founding fathers from which this country was built. So who has the authority to break that agreement? Nobody, because none of those people are still alive to give their consent, so what is on paper should remain forever. A contract that important should never be considered null and void. However, this country has been violating every rule ever set in place for years, and they are continuing this with these unconstitutional curfew laws.

Finally, another mindless restriction is the legal working age of 16. It shouldn't be considered child labor if the child is willing to work (rather than forced). Take me, for example. I've been in a band since

I was in fifth grade, and being in a band costs a lot of money. You have to pay for equipment, amplifiers, microphones, P.A. systems, studio time, etc. All that stuff costs a lot of money—a lot of money that our parents couldn't always provide. So ever since I was 11, I've had to make do with the \$90 amplifier and \$200 guitar that my parents could barely afford, as opposed to the \$1,650 amplifier and the \$900 guitar I've bought myself since I turned 16. We could never afford studio time until about a year ago (normally studio time is \$45 an hour, and one song can take up to 3 hours to finish). So because of these labor laws, we're just now coming out with our CD that should've come out years ago.

Job choice should also be about who can do the job better. At the age of 12, I was more responsible than a lot of 18 year olds I know now, and I'm sure I could learn to flip a burger or sweep a floor just as easily as they could, if not easier. Young people should have the same right to work and make money as anyone else.

The point of this essay is to persuade whoever reads it to join with those who seek unity, in any form. Whether you want to believe it or not, age restrictions are another form of prejudice, no different from racism, sexism, or homophobia. Saying that a minor cannot be out past 11 o'clock at night is just as wrong as, say, restricting women from watching R-rated movies. I know that this essay will probably be ignored or discarded, just like everything else that doesn't agree with other people's beliefs, but I feel it's my duty as a minor to share the thoughts that everyone under 21 thinks but is afraid to express.

Six Killed Doing Court-Ordered Work

Last year, six Nevada teenagers diverted by their county's Family & Youth Services Department into a work program for non-violent offenders (in lieu of juvenile detention or fines) were struck by a car as they picked up trash along an interstate highway. One of the victims was in the work program because she couldn't afford to pay the fine for a curfew violation. A commentary at <http://www.lvrj.com/lvrj_home/2000/Mar-22-Wed-2000/opinion/13215737.html> questions whether child labor laws even permit teens to perform this type of work, in such close proximity to high-speed traffic. A state assembly bill has been introduced to stop these teen "chain gangs" <<http://www.leg.state.nv.us/71st/Reports/history.cfm?ID=3410>>; it is expected to pass.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration web site <<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>> lists driving-related bills introduced around the nation. Here are just a **few** of the recent ones:

Connecticut

Bill Number: SB 956 Active
Requires newly-licensed drivers to place "new driver" plates on vehicles to reduce likelihood of receiving road rage. Sen. Biagio Ciotto (D) Jan 19, 2001: Referred to Joint Transportation Comm. Thu, Feb 8, 2001.

Iowa

Bill Number: HB 168 Active
Prohibits minors with instruction permit or intermediate license from using cell phone while driving (except 911 calls). Rep. Janet Petersen (D) et al. Feb 5, 2001: Introduced. Feb 6, 2001: House Comm. on Transportation, subcommittee assignment. Fri, Feb 16, 2001.

Maine

Bill Number: HB 34 Active
Provides 10% insurance discount to drivers over 55 completing safe driving course. Rep. Arthur Mayo (R) 1/9/01 - Introduced. Fri, Feb 9, 2001.

New Jersey

Bill Number: SB 1885 Active
Driver's license suspension until age 21 for students causing disruption in school. Sen. Anthony Bucco (R) 11/13/00 - Referred to Education Comm. Fri, Feb 9, 2001.

Illinois "Youth Drug Law" Under Fire

A 1987 law requiring automatic transfer to adult court of minors charged with drug offenses "within 1000 feet of a school or public housing project" finally got some vigorous opposition at a May 4 protest outside the Chicago office of the Cook County State's Attorney (see <http://www.buildingblocksforyouth.org/advisory_0509.html> for the announcement). The group's press release points out that of the 259 Cook County youth transferred to adult court under the law last year, 258 were minorities. The discriminatory nature of the law is described in a report found at <<http://www.buildingblocksforyouth.org/illinois/illinois.html>>.

Tennessee

Bill Number: HB 1231 Active
Prohibits driver under 18 from operating vehicle while using hand-held cellular or car phone. Rep. Maddox (D) Assigned to subcommittee on Transportation and Safety Planning of Transportation Comm. Feb 14, 2001. (Companion bill introduced in Senate.)

Virginia

Bill Number: HB 2381 Active
Prohibits driver under 18 licensed for less than one year from driving between sunset and sunrise or using cellphone while vehicle in motion. Del. Anne Rhodes (R) 1/10/01 - Referred to Transportation Comm. Fri, Feb 9, 2001.

Bill Number: HB 2811 Active

Requires minors applying for drivers license to have had at least 25 hours of driving experience, at least 5 hours at night; increases minimum age for learner's permits. Rep. Thomas Bolvin (R) 1/19/01 - Introduced and referred to Transportation Comm. 2/2/01 - Pass from Committee. Fri, Mar, 09, 2001.

Bill Number: HB 2766 Active

Licenses of drivers under 21 to be suspended if found in possession of alcohol. Rep. James Almand (D) 1/19/01 - Referred to Comm. on Courts of Justice. 2/4/01 - Tabled. Fri, Mar 9, 2001.

News Links

Tried As Adult; Treated As Child

A Florida 14-year old will face a first degree murder charge after his parents rejected a plea offer on his behalf. This article clearly states twice that the *parents* were the ones who rejected the plea—see <<http://www.cnn.com/2001/LAW/04/17/teacher.shooting.plea.02/index.html>>. Our source for this story also points out that if a minor being tried as an adult obtained bail, the court would probably only allow his release to the "custody of his parents"—the "maturity" that the minor supposedly possesses to commit an adult crime does not entitle that minor to the rights of an adult.

Trends

Bill Number: HB 2475 Active

Allows school boards request that DMV suspend license of minor driver not meeting compulsory attendance requirements. Dep. W.B. Keister (D) 1/19/01 - Referred to Transportation Comm. 2/2/01 - Tabled. Fri, Mar 9, 2001.

Bill Number: SB 1131 Active

Increases minimum age for learner's permit from 15 to 16; increases minimum age for driver's license from 16 to 17. Sen. Henry Marsh III (D) 1/10/01 - Referred to Transportation Comm. Fri, Feb 9, 2001.

Bill Number: SB 1329 Active

Establishes additional restrictions (curfew, passengers, 40 hours supervised driving) for minors. Sen. William Mims (R) 1/12/01 - Referred to Transportation Comm. 1/29/01 - Engrossed by Senate. 1/30/01 - Passed Senate to the House. Fri, Feb 9, 2001.

Bill Number: HB 1575 Active

Two year license suspension for minor making bomb threat. Del. Robert Orrock (R) 1/16/01 - Engrossed by House. 1/17/01 - Passed House, sent to Senate. 1/19/01 - Referred to Senate Comm. on Courts of Justice. Fri, Feb 9, 2001. (Companion bill introduced in Senate.)

Scapegoating of Youth

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The wording of headlines chosen is another common way to create bias in media; headlines are the most frequently read element of a newspaper (Media Awareness Network), so by slanting them newspapers can affect the impressions of even more people. The headline on the front page of the March 1 *Washington Post* was “1st-Grader Shoots Classmate to Death” (Slevin and Claiborne). The next day’s headline regarding the Pennsylvania shooting simply read “Pa. Hostage-Taker Surrenders After Fatal Shootings.” The headline describing the adult shooting is much less dramatic and not as inflammatory as the youth shooting headline (Slevin and Sanderson).

Also, different imagery included in the articles is a source of bias. Certain photo angles and pictures can capture different messages about the subject in them. Another source of media bias can be found in the way that mass media uses names and titles to describe the persons involved in crime. A paper could describe someone as an “ex-con” or as someone who “served time for a minor offense”; while these statements could describe the same person, they clearly give a different slant to the reporting. (Media Awareness Network) The inflation of statistics and other numerical data is common practice among the press. Many people put more faith in statistics because they believe that they are harder to twist. For that reason they are more easily tricked when those statistics turn out to be biased.

Source control is a method used to misrepresent quotes and other facts in a news story. Using quotes from less reputable sources alongside professionals is an example of this. A hasty reader would fail to realize the bias in presenting conflicting views by two unequal speakers. Word choice and tone is one very effective method of creating a bias; minute differences in the meanings of words can convey subtle biases in the text of articles.

The biases listed here are all applied to the anti-youth hysteria that dominates mass media sources. While fundamentally no different than adult crime, youth crime results in disastrous stereotyping and scapegoating of our younger generation. The stereotyping of youth as violent predatory criminals is felt in the everyday lives of youth in this country and others. “Media spokespersons have uncorked their own fury at adolescents, revealing that anti-youth media distortions may not stem from poor journalism alone, but a large dose of personal hostility” (Males, *Scapegoat Generation* 27).

Most indicative of this youth scapegoating and labeling is the theory of the oncoming “super-predator” described by John DiIulio, a professor of politics and



public affairs at Princeton University, in a 1995 article in the conservative *Weekly Standard* magazine. Based on demographic information that predicts a surge in the youth population around the year 2010, DiIulio concludes that a new breed of “high-rate juvenile offenders [will be] coming at us in waves over the next several decades” (Farr, “Getting Tough”). Based on the conclusion that the number of criminals within a demographic group is a constant percentage, DiIulio argues that a projected increase in youth population will create a dramatic increase in the number of juvenile offenders. However, Franklin E. Zimring, a professor of law at the University of California at Berkeley, states that “the only proper inference to be drawn from knowing that an extra million teenagers will be present at some future time is that there will be a larger group of teenagers” (Zimring 63).

This over-hyped concept of “super-predators” has been used extensively by the media to induce fear in the populace. “TV news has been guilty of fanning the flames of fear” says Larry Perret, news director for KCBS-TV (channel 2) in Los Angeles (qtd. in Farr, “Fear Reigns”). The media has been highly successful in “fanning the flames of fear” and have created a massive public misconception about youth crime. In a recent Gallup poll adults were asked about youth crime rates, “The adults polled estimated that youth were responsible for 43 percent of violent crimes. The truth? FBI statistics show that juveniles are responsible for 13 percent of violent crime, less than a third of what the adults polled thought” (Bervera, Cyril and Yarborough). A direct result of this national misconception of youth is the recent trend in “cracking down” upon youth crime. Currently youth sentences are “60 percent longer than adult sentences for the same crime” (Bervera, Cyril and Yarborough). Certainly this media-induced fear is guilty of propagating the image of youth as violent predatory criminals, and is eliciting heavy-handed and harmful responses against youth across the nation.

One victim of this “anti-youth hysteria” is current American University freshman Carrie Rainen. In high school, Carrie and her friends were labeled as different by the rest of the school. After the Columbine tragedy, Carrie and her friends came into conflict with the authorities. “Ryan was probably the sweetest kid on earth, who would lay down his life for any of his friends. He was a shy, quiet boy, who often retreated into his artwork, music, or video games. He and his best friend Matt were also black clad, free thinkers. As the year went by, Ryan and Matt adopted a very gothic style. They wore long black trench coats and spike bracelets. Ryan also had an incredibly big spike necklace and he let his long hair grow out, shaved underneath and dyed it bright red. Though on the outside, Ryan looked weird, he was still a sweetheart. His style

was just his way of expressing his artistic talent and interests. After Columbine, however, the school cracked on us 'weirdos'—I had to stop wearing my biker jacket and my bike chain bracelet; Eric had to leave his spikes at home. But no one was more affected than Matt, and especially Ryan. At one point, one of the assistant principals yanked his necklace off. Guidance all of a sudden took an interest in them. Their parents were called. And they were not allowed to wear their trench coats to school anymore. This upset me a lot, because no one ever took the time to talk to us. They saw that we were different, and by sad coincidence, shared some interests with the Columbine killers. That was no reason to all of a sudden take away our rights of self-expression ... had my school even had a hint of a dress code, maybe then I would understand, but nothing was forbidden to wear at my high school ... after Columbine, the killers were held up as models for the insane outcast killer."

Clearly, measures taken in response to the media's creation of anti-youth fear have had a disastrous effect on innocent youth across the nation. The fear that is being created towards youth can be compared to the red scare of the nineteen-fifties. Yet the stories of the innocent youth who lose their freedoms from restrictive new rules never make the headlines.

Media bias is the first step; once they have made the agenda, the politicians respond to their constituents' misinformed beliefs. Constituents get their fear from the "6 o'clock news—it's all crime reporting," says Robert Presley, former California state senator and now chairman of the Sacramento-based Youthful Offender Parole Board. "The public fears violent crime. And the Legislature and Congress respond to the public fears" (Farr, "Fear Reigns"). From local school boards to state governments to the President himself, all officials feel the need to appear to be solving the "youth problem," though often their programs have little effect in

solving the real problems. In pursuit of re-election, politicians create programs that affect youth. Therefore, they are tackling a problem that concerns all of society, but only negatively affecting non-voters.

Recently President Clinton wrote a report titled, "The President's Anti-Gang and Youth Violence Strategy," which contains much anti-youth bias and stereotypes. The first paragraph of the overview to this report states, "While overall crime rates are dropping, young people are increasingly the perpetrators and victims of some of society's most violent crimes. Indeed, until recently, the rate of youth violence has climbed dramatically. For example, between 1984 and 1993, the rate of homicides committed by juveniles skyrocketed 169%"



(Clinton). This report was written in 1997, after four years of declining youth crime. Yet Clinton uses older statistics to fabricate a need for his new programs. Clinton's methods are indicative of what politicians in all areas and from both parties do to use the public's focus on youth crime to make themselves appear to be helping the problem.

Clinton highlights policy initiatives such as curfews, school uniforms, and drug testing as positive actions that should be implemented to solve the youth violence problem. These programs take away constitutionally protected liberties from youth. However, since youth do not vote, they cannot object. These false solutions appear beneficial to an adult voting age population who are unaffected by these policies, but in fact do little to solve the problem of youth violence. Mike A. Males, a sociologist and author, wrote a paper

discussing the effectiveness of youth curfews. In this report he says, "A major underlying assumption of curfews is that they reduce risk by removing juveniles from public space. However, there is no systematic study of the effects of curfew" (Males and Macallair, *Analysis of Curfew*). Males argues that media images of the effectiveness of youth curfews are based on scattered anecdotal evidence. "Claims to date that curfews affect crime and youth behavior represent little more than unsupported assertions" (Males and Macallair, *Analysis of Curfew*).

Curfew laws are unproven solutions to complex problems, yet they are seen as good public policy. Politicians are eager to support vote-getting initiatives like curfews and other laws purported to solve youth violence. A knowledgeable Senate source said in 1984 that another anti-youth issue was "now seen as good public policy, one you can't lose on, and this is an election year" (Feaver). This type of thinking permeates our body of elected officials.

Politicians and the media frequently make use of scientific studies and doctors' research regarding the physical and emotional state of adolescents. Labeling youth as a class of people full of "storm and stress" contributes to the notion that they cannot become full members of our society and deserve special behavioral restrictions unheard of in the adult world. Modern perceptions of unstable youth hark back to the age of "genetic determinism," a pseudo-science prominent at the turn of the 20th century. These scientists conducted highly bigoted and biased studies meant to prove that non-white races and women were genetically inferior to white males and therefore required fewer rights and privileges. "The respected *American Medicine* of 1907 editorialized against expanding rights for blacks who, being 'without brains,' could not comprehend the implications of their actions" (Males, *Scapegoat Generation* 32). This form of racist science formed the basis of southern arguments in favor of white supremacy.

Scapegoating of Youth

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Today these racist theories have been wholly discarded, and their error and bigotry have been realized. Unfortunately, new bigotry has arisen towards the new scapegoat in society—adolescents. The *New Physician* reported the following on teen suicide: “Adolescence is a time of turbulence marked by rapid, physical, sexual, social and emotional development. It is a time of confusion and rebellion” (qtd. in Males *Scapegoat Generation* 33). If women or non-whites were referred to as “confused or rebellious,” the author of the article would be shunned from

the medical community. Yet, society is inundated with studies and comments such as these, and use them to form public policy.

While youth violence is a terrible problem in our nation, current efforts to combat it are based on stereotyping and scapegoating of youth as “predatory animals” and have proven to cause more harm than good. Powerful national forces such as the media, politicians and the medical community perpetuate the idea of youth as an inferior class of

people responsible for society’s ills and deserving of harsh penalties. This negative view has had a disastrous effect on youth, and the situation is only getting worse. Every day, more restrictive laws are passed, and more biased stories hit the airwaves. Adult crime and violence is proportionally ignored compared to youth violence. Yet adult violence is a much greater problem than violence committed by youth. In spite of dangerous levels of adult violence, youth are the scapegoat which society has chosen to bear the burden of blame.

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