

## Young offenders need old-fashioned cures

The Tlingit tribe in Alaska seems to have the problem of juvenile violence in hand — they've packed two young offenders off to cold, uninhabited islands where they can spend the year in solitude, reflecting on their misdeeds.

When two adolescent tribe members brutally beat and robbed a Seattle pizza delivery man, the tribe told the juvenile justice system, in effect, that the status quo method of reforming young offenders doesn't work — and the justice system agreed, turning the youths over to tribal leadership for punishment.

The Tlingit leadership's action struck a responsive chord with the American people, who from coast to coast, are calling for a firmer hand to curb youth violence. Unfortunately, there aren't enough cold, remote islands to rehabilitate even Eugene's juvenile delinquents.

Nationwide, the crime rate hasn't increased significantly in the past 30 years. But crimes are becoming increasingly violent — and criminals are increasingly younger, often no older than 12 or 13.

"Spare the rod and spoil the child." "an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure" and other of the no-nonsense aphorisms touted by grandparents are on the comeback. Many of the same educators who, in the late 1960s and 1970s, promoted softer, less coercive "child-centered" education are now calling for the disciplinarian techniques that they demonized just a few years ago.

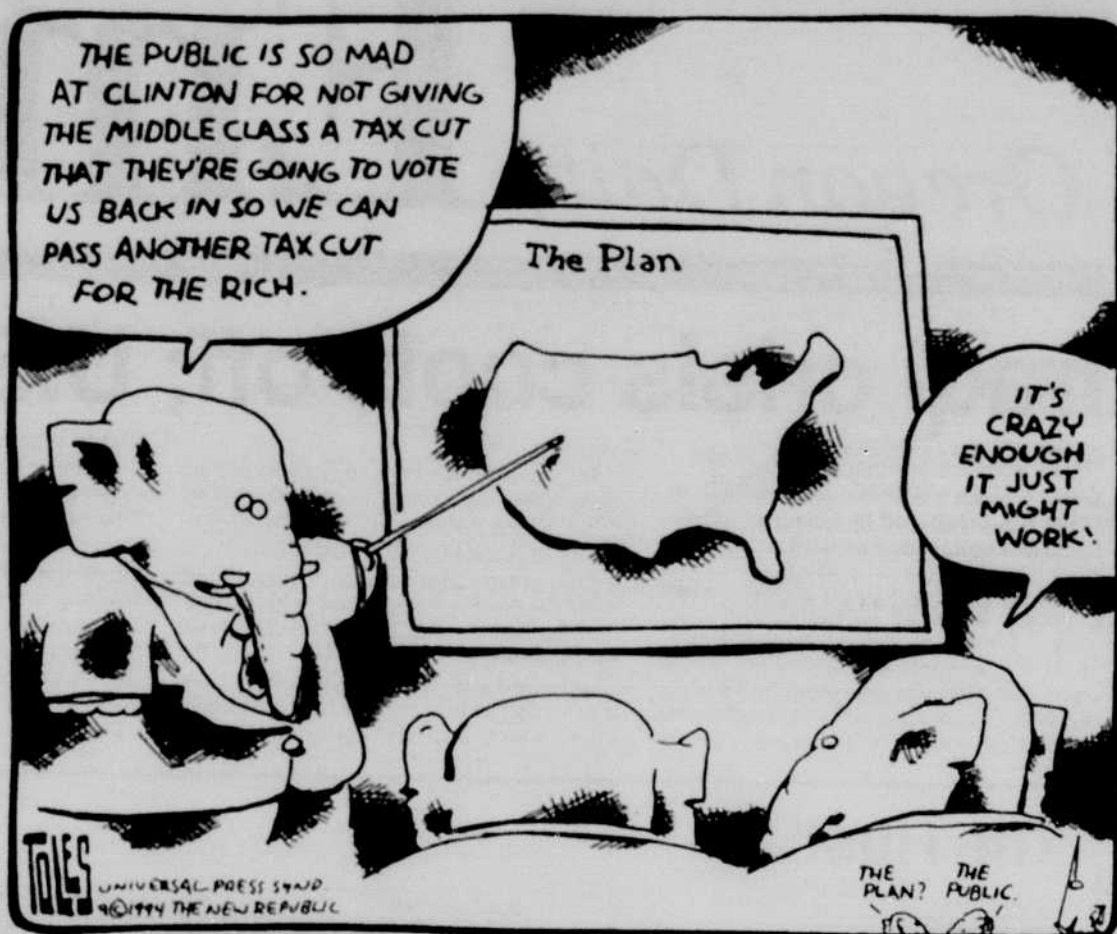
Grandma and grandpa would be proud of the school dress codes, municipal curfews, boot-camp style detention centers and court-ordered paddlings — and even the Tlingits' temporary exile — that have resulted from this strict mood. Without a doubt, as Don Bishoff wrote in *The Register Guard*, the "permissiveness" in dealing with young miscreants has led to the "impermissible situation" that spawns gun-toting, 15-year-old gang rapists.

If setting hard-and-fast boundaries and meting out stern punishments improves the quality of young lives, then all the better. But caution is in order, lest the baby go out with the bath water.

The past three decades have seen drastic changes in the way America raises its youth. The recent concern over teen-aged violence, however, should not overshadow the great strides this culture has made toward tolerance and diversity since the middle of the century. What grandma perceived as morally upstanding in her day now is recognized to be, in some instances, biased, exclusive and destructive to the creativity and plurality that make American society so vibrant.

Americans stand at a crossroads. It's time to sift through the various social experiments that took root in the 1960s, carrying forward the successes and weeding out the failures.

While sparing the rod may indeed spoil the child, its indiscriminant application will stifle imagination and fan the flames of social iniquity. So educators and lawmakers should apply some of that old-fashioned discipline, but in so doing, shouldn't overlook the many successes of progressive education.



### OPINION

## Survey questions taint study



PAUL VAN SICKLE

A survey on sex in America has just been published. It took all of seven years, and it would seem our perceptions of our own sexuality have much to learn from reality.

I know, we can blame the media, saying they have (yet again) warped our perceptions and we shouldn't believe anything we see or read in any form of media. Life is just not as clear-cut as that. Neither is this sex report.

The big hype is that Americans are not as sexual as we all thought we were. Based on what I have read, we shouldn't take the findings for granted. People have always been hesitant to talk about sex in our culture.

We hide behind our little curtains of purity, deny feelings we might have, flow with the current of conformity and/or shy away from things controversial. Whether these feelings affect the responses of those taking research for surveys is still in debate, but what's known is results derived from such surveys may not be as conclusive as reported.

What particularly bothers me is the study's figures concerning homosexuals.

They claim there are far fewer homosexuals in this country than the 10 percent previously found by the landmark Kinsey study of the 1940s. The new survey found that the number of homosexuals in America is somewhere around 2.8 percent of men and 1.7 percent of women.

Isn't it hard to believe that

there are eight percent fewer homosexuals in this country now compared with the much more conservative 1940s?

The categories in which homosexuals are placed according to the survey are part of the problem.

"Same Gender Sex Since Age 18" shows only five percent and four percent for men and women, respectively. Homosexuals I have spoken to seem to convey the idea that many gay people do not realize they were gay until after, or somewhat later than, age 18. This means they might have been having heterosexual sex, and therefore would not have met the survey's requirements.

However, another category, "Same Gender Desire, Attraction, Appeal" rates very high at 8 percent for both men and women.

This number is very similar to Kinsey's findings, and appears to be more of a measure of sexual orientation. It wouldn't be necessarily whether one had sex with someone of the same gender, but more that they were simply attracted to them. For example, I would consider myself heterosexual even if I had never had sex with a woman, because I would still be attracted to them.

Conversely, the category "Homosexual/Bisexual Identity" figures quite low at three percent for men and one percent for women. This figure stands very much in question in my mind.

The overwhelming tide of discriminatory feelings currently circulating against homosexuals would be scary, and might influence survey subjects' responses.

The problem one might have with assigning oneself with one group or another is difficult, especially if one is not absolutely sure. Also, definitions of these groups are not altogether definitive. Is being gay only calling oneself gay? Or is it having

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sex with the same gender?

A previous report was criticized for asking too much sensitive information about the homosexual subjects. They asked "Have you had sex exclusively with one gender? What is your name and address?"

This kind of information scared a lot of gay people from answering truthfully, and slanted the results severely, finding that an extremely low number of homosexuals live in this country. This survey supplied a lot of weaponry to gay opposition groups, just as it was expected to do.

Overall, I find it disconcerting that this kind of information is going to be used to allocate resources for public services and to decide social policy. People shouldn't be lumped into groups according to their sexual activity, especially if it would affect their access to services. This is scary as well, particularly if the facts aren't entirely conclusive.

As with all surveys of this kind, caution is necessary because social programs' resources get allocated based on these figures. Sexuality is especially touchy in this area, because activity varies widely among individuals.

People identify differently depending on that activity. It is for these reasons that surveys on sex are difficult to take literally, because of the myriad of lifestyles, orientations, and behaviors.

Paul Van Sickle is a columnist for the Emerald.

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