

Changes in society's perception of corporal punishment:

The turn of the 20th century

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Introduction

Corporal punishment, or using physical pain as a response to bad behavior, is often seen as cruel in modern society, especially when it comes from a parent or other authority figure. Historians have discovered, however, that this perspective was not always held; in fact, corporal punishment dates back thousands of years. It was used by civilizations as a kind of punishment in several judicial systems for anyone who broke the law. Parents and school administrators also used physical harm to reprimand children, and they still use it in many areas of the world in similar circumstances. Today, many people believe that using physical punishment on children is both wrong and harmful. However, historical texts indicate that children were disciplined using a variety of methods that appear harsh, if not barbaric, to us now. My purpose in this paper is to argue, first, that the use of this type of punishment has a long history that has persisted for centuries despite changing social expectations, and second, that parents who harm their children often do so because they feel social pressure to do so, and finally, that it remains important to resist the use of corporal punishment upon children.

While still introducing themes, and as a teaser for what I describe in the body of this paper, the following paragraphs offer two brief examples from the long history of child punishment. In the sixteenth century, for instance, parents of Aztec children used to beat their children with sticks and cactus spines and make them breathe in chili smoke if they misbehaved.

¹ Even in seventeenth-century America, leaders of religious communities called upon parents to beat the foolishness out of their children. “Parents, teachers, and ministers chanted in solemn and unceasing chorus, “foolishness is bound up in the hearts of a child,” and they believe the only

¹ James Alan Marten, *Children in Colonial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007). page 15.

cure for that foolishness was in stern repression and sharp correction—above all in the rod."²

Schools played a crucial role in aiding this method of control, and as time progressed, additional control methods were developed to maintain a sense of order and justification for teachers and parents. Childhood discipline has evolved, but social scientists do themselves a disservice by overlooking the reasons for these changes. This research examines materials that document or comment on the practice of corporal punishment.

In the first portion of this paper, I provide historical context for the practice of corporal punishment. Noting that "corporal punishment" applies to all types of physical discipline, not simply those administered to children. Numerous historical instances subjected adults—both men and women—to comparable forms of punishment, and this may give a context for how society saw violence as "normal." These forms of punishment were used to set boundaries and maintain power in society. Religion also played a role in the practice of corporal punishment in terms of atonement and the doctrine of original sin. Religions' mythologies bolstered the basis for physical discipline via the development of an education system, which persisted until quite recently in the majority of nations. This study will examine principles that foster control through the use of violence, since physical punishment is generally employed to preserve authority. Finding all the information on the topic of corporal punishment is challenging, and it's certainly beyond the capabilities of a tiny person like myself to provide a full account of the topic. I'll share some bits and pieces as a scattershot model to try to give you, the reader, a sense of the advancements in this sort of sacred violence. Using information gathered from various historical periods throughout the previous three centuries, I want to get some type of serious grasp of the

² Alice Morse Earle, *Child Life in Colonial Days* (New York ; London: The Macmillan Company ; Macmillan & Co., Ltd, 1899). page 191. Sources reflect upon opinions of Pilgrim preacher, John Robinson, who thought it best to break down the natural pride of a child "so the foundation of their education being laid in humilitie and tractableness other virtues may in their time be built thereon".

history of corporal punishment; nevertheless, this will not compete with the prospective comprehension of this topic.

To better comprehend the rate of change since 1900, I shall continue my research with the idea of childhood in the 20th century. The study of children and the evolution of child psychology have led to a change in perspective on how we should interact with and care for children. Every class or culture on our globe did not believe in this same sentiment, but the majority of the twentieth century was marked by an anti-corporal punishment campaign that resulted in the elimination of corporal punishment in many schools, towns, states, and countries. As previously said, it is difficult to record every development within this century, but I will attempt to provide as much detail as possible on the most significant shifts in society's perspectives. Also preparing you to realize that even in today's world, we have much to learn about how to best raise tomorrow's children. I will conclude my remarks with a brief discussion of the current controversies surrounding the school and home discipline of children. This work is significant because it explores the possibility of communicating the traumatic experience of physical punishment. A lengthy acknowledgement that examines historical processes in order to convey them to you, the reader, in a manner that will hopefully encourage more discussion on this issue.

Violent Normailities

The influence of society on parents, teachers, and others to utilize physical punishment is substantial. Similar to other social structures, physical punishment appears subject to change. Historically, despite its association with harsh parenting or the schoolmaster, physical punishment played a role in society as a whole. The way that people perceived pain in the eighteenth century would seem terrifying to us today. Throughout this time period, using pain as punishment was the norm. Consider the pillory, which served as London's center point in the eighteenth century.

The punishment of the pillory featured an audience of common people who observed a man or woman being physically abused for a variety of reasons. "It was an upright board, hinged or divisible in twain, with a hole in which the head was set fast, and unusual with two openings also for the hands." "Often the ears were nailed to the wood on either side of the head-hole."

³ Robert Shoemaker, author of *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England*, explains, "In this world, where the detection and prosecution of crime was the part of the business of the citizen, punishment, whether by the pillory, whipping at a cart's tail, or hanging at Tyburn, was public and endorsed by crowds." ⁴ This attracted a great deal of attention, and ordinary citizens felt invited to participate by hurling their own spoiled or undesirable food at the guilty. In the eighteenth century, men were frequently criticized for a wide range of crimes. For crimes as varied as treason, lying, cheating, and intoxication, men found themselves at odds when confronted with this fate. Moreover, depending on the day, the entire crowd could act as a lethal force.

³ Alice Morse Earle, *Curious Punishments of Bygone Days* (Herbert S. Stone & Co., 1896), page 46.

⁴ Robert Brink Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007).

Humiliation and pain constituted essential elements of punishment. Women too experienced physical punishment in a variety of methods, such as the whipping post, which saw them "taken in huge cages" and "tied to the post with bare backs, where thirty or forty lashes were bestowed among the screams of the culprit and the uproar of the mob." ⁵ In the eighteenth century, public punishment remained severe and tightly enforced; for example, theft of "anything in value over a shilling." frequently resulted in public execution. ⁶ Why did a society need such violence, and what made it so common? In the eighteenth century, physical punishment was used for one reason: control.

The capacity for violence in the eighteenth century allowed society to continue to function even though the state seemed fragile. As the days continued, however, the people began to reject the constant link with suffering and rage. In his book *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault asserts that prisons first formed in the late eighteenth century in response to protests against public executions and confrontations between pre-existing social theorists. ⁷ While England and the American colonies had prisons in the past, they largely served as holding cells before trials and the application of corporal punishment. Since control remained intact through more sophisticated techniques, it no longer appears essential to employ harsh public sanctions. The necessity to preserve authority behind closed doors prompted the establishment of prisons, postponing the elimination of physical punishment for criminals until far later in history. ⁸ Some people believed that because it could be done more quickly and would

⁵ Earle, page 82.

⁶ Earle, page 85.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

⁸ Katie Thorsteinson, "19th Century Prison Reform Collection | Cornell University Library Digital Collections," Cornell.edu, 2017, <https://digital.library.cornell.edu/collections/prison-reform>. Thoresteinson discusses Auburn Prison in New York State and the reforms made with the support of leaders like James Madison.

shield the child from exposure to bad role models, caning or birching a child seemed preferable to locking them up. For fear of corruption, children were kept out of criminal court and instead subjected to corporal punishment for generations.

Multiple strategies existed for preserving social order. One of these strategies, as outlined by British anthropologist Mary Douglas, involved boundary setting. In her 1966 book, *Purity and Danger*, Douglas outlines how symbolic borders separate the good from the evil and the insider from the outsider.⁹ According to Douglas, pollution is a dirty external source that must be avoided. Misconduct, disobedience, and contempt are instances of pollution, which Douglas defines as things that violate these imaginary boundaries. All kids have experienced these pollutants at some point in their lives. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, youngsters misbehaved, and officials devised a system of punishments to control boundary transgressions in an effort to curb their filth. But where do these imaginary boundaries originate from? For the answer to that, we must look to historian Yuval Noah Harari.

In *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Yuval Noah Harari examines how humans began to believe in law, money, gods, governments, and human rights and how these beliefs developed into what he calls "imagined orders."¹⁰ According to Harari, it wasn't until after the Agricultural Revolution that food availability and other technological advances facilitated the establishment of villages, towns, cities, and eventually kingdoms. These new civilizations, however, appeared certain to devolve into chaos unless humans devised a method of population control. Myths such as Hammurabi's Code and the Declaration of Independence, according to

The whip was banned as a form of punishment in women's prisons in 1830 and in men's prisons in 1849.

⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger : An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

¹⁰ Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens : A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011).

Harari were created for the purpose of control. You can draw the conclusion that natural rights don't exist from reading his work.

These imagined orders evolved into robust belief systems that functioned inside a communication network, making them intersubjective and exceedingly difficult to dismantle. Harari writes, "Even if by some superhuman effort I succeed in freeing my personal desires from the grip of the imagined order, I am just one person." "In order to change the imagined order, I must convince millions of strangers to cooperate with me." The "imagined order is not a subjective order existing in my own imagination; it is rather an inter-subjective order existing in the shared imagination of thousands and millions of people." ¹¹

These notions have formed civilizations and provided justification for harsh punishment of individuals who have disobeyed societal norms. For the purpose of enforcing the perceived laws of society, new means of control have been developed over time. As previously mentioned, however, children are still prone to corporal punishment for any unwanted or destructive behavior. By continuing to use sacred violence against border crossers, even their own children, society upheld the sanctified borders built by their civilizations. The Christian faith fostered the ideas used to justify the horrific practice of corporal punishment of children.

¹¹ Harari, page 109.

Original Sin

On July 23, 1860, Thomas Hopley, a former schoolmaster in Eastbourne, London, was found guilty of manslaughter for the death of his 15-year-old student, Reginald Cancellor.

According to the London Times,

*“The boy's legs and arms were of a dark livid color and swollen from extravasated blood. There were two holes in the right leg about the size of a six-pence and an inch deep, which appeared to have been made by jobbing a thick stick into the flesh. The appearance of that of a human creature who had been mangled by an infuriated and merciless assailant.”*¹²

This case, dubbed the "Eastbound Manslaughter,"¹³ captured the public's attention. Hopley had no regrets about what he had done, and he actually thought it okay to punish his students so severely. Hopley immediately published a pamphlet titled *Facts Bearing on the Death of Reginald Channell Cancellor*,¹⁴ in which he described his version of what happened and why. Hopley obtained authorization from Chandler's father to apply "severe punishment," which resulted in Chancellor's death, according to his own claims.¹⁵ His Christian beliefs based on the concept of "original sin" led him to believe that he was without guilt or wrongdoing. A concept

¹² Sulaiman, Tosin. "Brutal death that horrified Victorians." *Times*, July 5, 2004, 4. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed November 1, 2022).

<https://link-gale-com.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/apps/doc/IF0502683934/TTDA?u=newpaltz&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=f89e430a>.

¹³ Jacob Middleton, "Thomas Hopley and Mid-Victorian Attitudes to Corporal Punishment," *History of Education* 34, no. 6 (November 2005): p599-615. 17p., <https://doi.org/10.1080/00467600500313898>.

¹⁴ Thomas Hopley, *Facts Bearing on the Death of Reginald Channell Cancellor: With a Supplement and a Sequel* (London: Werthem, Macintosh, & Hunt, 1860), 32.

¹⁵ Middleton, page 601.

accepted by parents who expected, and indeed, in many instances, demanded, that corporal punishment be inflicted on their offspring.¹⁶

Religious teachings, as they have done so frequently throughout history, provide explanations for societal behaviors. In the Christian religion, for example, the concept of hell has been taught and used to support the concept of physical punishment. As Lucy Bending, author of *The Representation of Bodily Suffering in Late Nineteenth-Century English Culture*, notes, if God inflicts pain on individuals, then an authoritarian ruler inflicting pain on his people is entirely justified.¹⁷ When we study this notion, we can verify that the motivations for corporal punishment, at least in a Christian society, might be founded on a need to judge and punish, much as God does on sinful humanity. Civilization brought a more nuanced understanding of punishment; the burden for its ordering and inflection was transferred from God to society, making it acceptable for humans to inflict suffering on those beneath them. This cruelty extended not only to men but also to women and children.

The idea of "original sin" in Christianity dates back to St. Paul's assertions in his writings to the Romans. According to Alan Jacobs' *Original Sin: A Cultural History*, when Adam and Eve chose to bite the apple in the Garden of Eden, they did not buy death for themselves alone; rather, Adam's action brought death to all men and all of his descendants.¹⁸ Jacob goes on to mention Augustine of Hippo and his acceptance of Paul's ideas. Augustine ponders Genesis' writings, notably the explanation of the signs of the covenant, particularly circumcision, and God's warning to any uncircumcised men, speaking of a breach of the holy covenant when a newborn is not circumcised. But how can an infant be held accountable for something out of

¹⁶ Middletown, page 602.

¹⁷ Lucy Bending, *The Representation of Bodily Pain in Late Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 2000).

¹⁸ Alan Jacobs, *Original Sin: A Cultural History* (Harper One, 2008), page x.

their control? According to Augustine, this demonstrates that even children are born sinners, not because of their own actions, but because of Adam's "primordial fatherhood." ¹⁹

Augustine's theory developed into what we can now understand as a myth and spread to the teachings of other like minded individuals. Many Christians believe, even today, that humans arrived in this world predisposed to evil. Therefore, children are not innocent but corrupt and worthy of condemnation. Of course, a large number of people opposed the idea of original sin on the grounds that it dishonored God. One such example is the "tabula rasa" concept, originally put out by the philosopher John Lock in the 17th century. In his 1689 essay *Concerning Human Understanding*, Lock argues that a child is born with a tabula rasa, or "blank slate," that has the capacity to learn ideas through experiencing the world using our five senses. In his essay *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke came to the conclusion that punishing students physically is bad practice and ineffective as a teaching tool. Additionally, he thought that only "extreme obstinacy on the part of the pupil" called for the use of corporal punishment. ²⁰

As mentioned, Christian ideology has adopted the myth of original sin, and for centuries, the notion has played a significant role in the education of children. Because of the widespread belief that a child is born with an inherent sin, the first signs of concern for the raising of children, according to Lawrence Stone, were the ideas of treating them harshly in order to break their strong wills. Stone admits that a revival of the theory of original sin around 1800 resulted in a return to harsher treatment for children in the nineteenth century, prior to the unparalleled period of permissiveness of the twentieth century. ²¹

¹⁹ Jacobs, page x.

²⁰ Middleton, page 603.

²¹ Theodore Rabb and Robert Rotberg, *The New History: The 1980s and Beyond* (Princeton University Press, 1982).

Even though many enlightened intellectuals held a new view, religious and theological ideas were still the basis for parenting advice, including advice on punishment. Parenting, for Calvinists and others who share that view, seems like a battle of wills between the parent and the child, both of whom are evil at heart. Not until the middle of the 1800s did well-known Protestant pastors tell parents to believe that young children could be gently guided toward good behavior. ²²

According to author D.P. Leinster MacKay, the use of corporal punishment to correct a child's vices has a "longstanding tradition" within the educational system. The education system may have borrowed the concept of corporal punishment from the Bible, but it was the latter that popularized the practice in the modern era. Many of Hopley's parents defended him, saying he did nothing wrong. They too believed in the concept of original sin, a notion that dates back centuries.

There is evidence that teachers were using physical punishment on their students as early as the colonial era. Europeans brought the practice of corporal punishment into American schools, and Puritan religious beliefs backed it. John Calvin's ideas about "original sin" and "natural sinfulness" had a big impact on how teachers thought about children and how they used physical punishment. Four major biblical proverbs were cited in support of the pastors, all of which deal with the use of the rod of discipline. Many of the first Americans thought that children were bad because they were sinful. They also thought that physical punishment was necessary to stop bad behavior and that God required it. After children were required to go to school, the concept of corporal punishment spread quickly through the school system. For centuries there after corporal punishment would be used on children as a form of control. Until

²² Philip Greven, *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse*. (New York: Knopf, 1990).

society had an opportunity to learn for themselves what negative effects this violent control mechanism could have. The next section will explore the efforts made to stop corporal punishment on children.

Campaigns Against Corporal Punishment

A variety of historical circumstances in the eighteenth century led to the development of child raising advice books in the British American colonies. The rise of this written literature illustrates how families became more mobile and dispersed geographically, making it impossible to rely on conventional family values. The prevalence of expert viewpoints increased, and some socioeconomic circumstances prompted parents to mistrust their own instincts and seek professional advice.²³ Physicians were the first to publish advice books, followed by pastors and others who expanded the advice to include moral and character concerns. According to Julia Grant, William Cadogan's *Essay on Nursing* was one of the earliest instruction books written in the American colonies when it was published in 1749. In addition to providing medical advice, physicians were increasingly concentrating on the care of children, with a particular emphasis on how youngsters learned to use the bathroom, cried, slept, felt frustrated, developed independence, and ate.²⁴

The majority of these physicians wrote from an Enlightenment perspective in which they viewed children as innocent creations comparable to John Locke's tabula rasa. Not immediately, but gradually, these publications would attract the attention of the public, and society would begin to rethink the use of corporal punishment. However, these instruction manuals would continue to justify the use of corporal punishment as a method of discipline for another two centuries. In the same way that *Regina v. Hopley* legitimized the use of corporal punishment so long as it was reasonable and justifiable, mid-nineteenth-century society remained secure in its

²³ Ilene Philipson, "Child Rearing Literature and Capitalist Industrialization," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 26 (1981): 57–73.

²⁴ See Julia Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book: The Education of American Mothers*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

application of the system of control. Not until the late nineteenth century would there be a revival of anti-corporal punishment views.

Since the nation's establishment, historians think there have been three waves of anti-school corporal punishment movements in the United States.²⁵ As mentioned earlier, the first wave occurred between 1820 and the middle of the 1850s, when John Locke's writings played a significant role in the transmission of ideas and perspectives. Influential periodicals and countless New York and Boston newspapers denounced the practice of corporal punishment as barbaric throughout this time period. A New York Daily Globe editorial from 1847 claimed that the rule of kindness was a more compassionate and efficient method of punishment than the "birch ferrule."²⁶ In the northeast of the United States, there was a major push against physical punishment. Many condemned not just the usage on minors, but also the corporal punishment of sailors, slaves, and criminals. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the widespread suffering of men under the whip, which fueled the expansion of initiatives to eliminate naval flogging, in addition to antebellum debates concerning the inhumane treatment of slaves. By placing these problems in a larger context, they contributed to the growth of movements against the school rod and ushered in a profound alteration of American society.²⁷ Unfortunately, schoolroom opposition waned towards the middle of the 1850s due to the nation's growing preoccupation with slavery and the possibility of DE unionization.²⁸

²⁵ Bernadette J Saunders, Pernilla Leviner, and Bronwyn Glynis Naylor, *Corporal Punishment of Children: Comparative Legal and Social Developments towards Prohibition and Beyond* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2019): 295.

²⁶ Glenn, 396.

²⁷ Myra C Glenn, *Campaigns against Corporal Punishment : Prisoners, Sailors, Women, and Children in Antebellum America* (Albany: State University Of New York Press, 1984).

²⁸ Glenn, Myra C. "School Discipline and Punishment in Antebellum America." *Journal of the Early Republic* 1, no. 4 (1981): 395–408. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3122828>: page 396.

In 1865, New Jersey became the first state to ban corporal punishment in schools.²⁹ This may have encouraged the revival of the second wave of movements between 1870 and 1920 to outlaw corporal punishment in schools. Similarly, we might examine the 1874 case of Mary Ellen Wilson in New York City. Her abuse and neglect prompted the foundation of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, an institution that would begin the emergence of similar organizations and societies devoted to the prevention of child abuse.

In the eighteenth century, as scientific thought began to replace religious direction, emphasis shifted from punishment and threat to encouragement and the child's personal growth as an active member of society. Authors of guidance manuals began to emphasize a child-centered approach as physical punishment became less prevalent. Horace Mann, a prominent educator, was the first to publicly oppose the use of corporal punishment for students in the early 20th century, when this view first emerged.³⁰ Due to the fact that experts writing in the eighteenth century viewed the family as a small element of society, what children learned about human relationships at home was vital for their future interactions as adults in a community. Negative emotions were seen as counterproductive in social situations, and parents were urged to assist their children in gaining emotional control.

Despite a rise in the use of corporal punishment in schools throughout the late nineteenth century, there was an increase in the popularity of child-rearing resources in the form of books and periodicals during the same time period.³¹ It's important to keep in mind that the authors of these works aren't religious, but rather ordinary people who care deeply about communicating certain concepts related to child rearing. The parents and their duty to instill social norms were

²⁹ Saunders, 298.

³⁰ Saunders, 296.

³¹ Philipson, 62.

also the target of much harsher criticism in this literature.³² This new literature attempted to re-educate the parents themselves by redefining their parental responsibilities.

By the 1890s, the topic of corporal punishment had risen to the forefront of the educational community's debate, and the writings of several educators and social critics lent credence to the child-centered perspective. New York, Chicago, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Louisville were just some of the cities in the United States that had banned corporal punishment by the turn of the century. Concern for the psychological development of children became pervasive, hastening the decline of religiously-based instruction manuals in favor of those claiming to be scientific.³³ Child psychology emerged in the early 20th century, generating a new type of parenting expert. During this time, there was also a change in how children were perceived. Children were no longer viewed as resilient, but as vulnerable.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the child study movement arose with the belief that scientific principles might be applied to the study of children in an effort to bring about transformation. The child study movement emphasized the lack of knowledge about children and pursued a goal that fosters child development and happiness.³⁴ This initiative drew participation from physicians, child psychologists, and the federal government. In 1912, the United States established the Children's Bureau, which published books and pamphlets with the most recent scientific information about children's health, safety, and well-being. Despite the contribution made by these social advancements, the second wave of anti-corporal punishment feelings would again be brought to a close by another significant historical event. By the late 1920s, due to the economy and the Great Depression, interest in school disciplinary

³² Philipson, 62.

³³ John A Glover and Royce R Ronning, *Historical Foundations of Educational Psychology* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2013).

³⁴ See Peter Stearns, *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Childrearing in America*. (New York: New York UP, 2003).

improvements would wane, and according to studies, another wave would not occur until the 1970s.³⁵

My historical research refutes the statements of those who assert that there were only three waves of anti-school physical punishment in the United States, the second of which may have petered out at the onset of the Great Depression. However, in 1938, the Home Office of the United States created a Special Committee to investigate the potential of outlawing the birch rod and the cat o'nine-tails as tools of judicial punishment.³⁶ In his book *History of Corporal Punishment: A Survey of Flagellation in its Historical, Anthropological, and Sociological Aspects*, George Riley Scott examines the physiological and psychological effects of birching on children and discusses whether or not parents and teachers should use corporal discipline. Despite this data, the use of corporal punishment on children persisted.

The proliferation of media in the United States between 1920 and 1970 led to an increase in depictions that defended the use of physical punishment. During this time, it was common to belt or spank a child. As a result of its widespread use, jokes developed about the time-tested effectiveness of corporal punishment. Similar jokes were used on *The Andy Griffin Show*, which ran for 249 episodes in the 1960s and is widely regarded as one of the most influential and enduring American television comedians.³⁷ In an effort to codify the normalcy of physical punishment with this American society, television shows, comic books (such as *Dennis the Menace*), and children's literature all feature cliched scenes of discipline.

³⁵ Saunders, 299.

³⁶ George Ryley Scott, *The History of Corporal Punishment* (1886; repr., Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1974).

³⁷ In this example from the "Andy Griffith Show," which ran from October 1960 to September 1968, sheriff Andy suggests to Mr. Winkler that he can take his son Arnold to the woodshed outback for a spanking. "A little 'old school' discipline in the woodshed," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH6d5fUJ4rQ> (accessed on October 16, 2022).

Thoughts and debates continued over the fifty years that separated the second and third waves. However, the publication of Dr. Henry Kempe's study on the "battered child syndrome" in the early 1960s reignited interest in child abuse and spawned a nationwide anti-corporal punishment campaign.³⁸ Possibly, Kempe's article was not the only impetus for this third wave of campaigning. In his 1972 book, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Neil Postman asserts that Philip Aries's 1962 publication, *Centuries of Childhood*, inaugurated the field and sparked a flurry of interest in childhood history.³⁹ Since the 1960s, the study of childhood history has surged in popularity, as he claims.

As societal knowledge has historically affected large-scale social change, maybe the most significant expert of the 1960s would be Dr. Benjamin Spock. Dr. Spock would become one of the twentieth century's most recognized sources of parenting advice. Spock sought to encourage a more flexible outlook that values the individuality of each child. As physicians, psychiatrists, and others vied for a broader audience, bookshops began stocking vast quantities of Spock's writings. When Spock died in 1998, his book had sold over 50 million copies.⁴⁰ When it came to the use of corporal punishment, however, Dr. Spock did not necessarily hold the same views throughout his career.

Dr. Spock began his career in the 1940s as an advocate for the use of corporal punishment, believing that a mother spanking her child benefits both the mother and the child since it is a swift kind of discipline as opposed to a lengthy parental event. In the 1946 edition of

³⁸ Saunders, 299.

³⁹ Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York, N.Y.: Vintage, 1972).

⁴⁰ In his lifetime, Dr. Spock has authored more than twenty books. Here are a couple that I've provided for your reference: See Benjamin Spock, *Problems of Parents*. (Houghton Mifflin, 1962). See Benjamin Spock, *Raising Children in a Difficult Time: A Philosophy of Parental Leadership and High Ideals*. (Pocket Books, 1976).

The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, Dr. Benjamin Spock stated, "I'm not particularly advocating spanking, but I think it is less poisonous than lengthy disapproval, because it clears the air, for parents and child."⁴¹ However, in the 1960s, Dr. Spock publications argued that physical punishment was not only detrimental to the child's psyche, but also promoted a violent disposition in the average civilian.

While physicians and specialists argue amongst themselves, states continued to choose for themselves the most effective technique of child rearing. The 1970 Supreme Court case *Ingraham v. Wright* supported corporal punishment in public schools with the belief that American society would establish a balance between authoritarian control and human nature. They insist, however, that corporal punishment is effective if used appropriately and for the right reasons.⁴² In order for an action to violate substantive due process rights, it must be deeply painful or humiliating. In *Neal v. Fulton County* in 2000, a coach used a metal lock to dislodge a student's eye from its socket.⁴³ The severity of the student's injuries compromised his substantive due process rights, as determined.

The National Education Association's Task Force on Corporal Punishment was an important early development of the third wave, despite the fact that the Supreme Court's decision upholds the practice.⁴⁴ Their 1972 research advocated for the eradication of corporal punishment in American schools and the use of other forms of discipline. In the 1980s and 1990s, recorded disciplinary incidents were much lower than they were in the 1970s, demonstrating success in

⁴¹ Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York, NY: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946).

⁴² Piele, Philip K. *Neither Corporal Punishment Cruel nor Due Process Due: The United States Supreme Court's Decision in "Ingraham V. Wright."* *Neither Corporal Punishment Cruel nor Due Process Due: The United States Supreme Court's Decision in "Ingraham V. Wright."*, 1977.

⁴³ McCarthy, Martha M. "Corporal Punishment in Public Schools: Is the United States Out of Step?" *Educational Horizons* 83, no. 4 (June 15, 2005): 235–40.

⁴⁴ Saunders, 299.

the effort to eliminate school corporal punishment. During the 1980s and 1990s, 21 states passed legislation banning corporal punishment in public schools. By 2019, 31 states had abolished all forms of corporal punishment in public schools. However, the debate continues, and while historians have recorded the conclusions of the first and second waves of anti-corporal punishment attitudes, the future may reveal the conclusions of the third. Perhaps, as I shall argue in the next sections, the debate will experience a resurgence in our modern society and once again provide a challenge to these anti-corporal-punishment campaigns.

Today's Continuing Debate

As the internet developed quickly during the 1990s and 2000s, parents had access to a greater range of resources to assist them in parenting. There are countless online resources aimed at educating and empowering parents on matters relating to their children's well-being and growth. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok have made it easier than ever for parents to know how to effectively punish their children. In addition, social media has become a forum where numerous individuals may discuss their experiences with physical punishment. Similar to the past, opinions are prevalent in contemporary culture. Nonetheless, the use of corporal punishment is still a topic of discussion in modern society, despite the efforts of activists in previous decades. Especially as cultural distinctions in a diverse United States become more apparent.

Immigrant parents have recently begun to see U.S. parents as being too lenient with their children. As Emma Henderson, a mother of three who was raised in Dominica, says, "The first thing a child learns here" is to say, "If you spank me, I'll call 911."⁴⁵ Between 1970 and 2000, the number of immigrants living in the United States increased by more than threefold, from 9.6 million to 28.4 million.⁴⁶ With the surge of individuals migrating to the United States, they bring with them practices from their own countries. These cultural distinctions can be observed in the manners in which parents discipline children; there is sometimes a cultural unwillingness to spare the rod. The immigrant parents think that stricter is better. They would smack a child in the mouth, spank a child who was disrespectful, or beat a child who attempted to lie or miss school.

⁴⁵ Celia W. Dugger, "A Cultural Reluctance to Spare the Rod: Newcomers Say Americans Spoil Children Cultural Reluctance to Spare the Rod: A Clash of Cultures for Women Who Baby-Sit." New York Times (1923-), Feb 29, 1996.

<https://libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/cultural-reluctance-spare-rod/docview/109576970/se-2>.

⁴⁶ Steven A. Camarota, "Immigrants in the United States, 2000," cis.org, January 1, 2001, <https://cis.org/Report/Immigrants-United-States-2000>.

⁴⁷ And while immigrant parents attempt to raise their children in the United States as they would in their home country, they encounter a child welfare system meant to safeguard children. As I have outlined in this paper, this system was formed after decades of campaigning against cruel and harmful punishments of children.

Today's societal expectations for disciplining children encourage the development of effective parenting techniques that do not include physical punishment. Parents, schools, and therapists utilize tactics like Howard Glasser's Nurtured Heart Approach.⁴⁸ This method is aimed at disregarding children's misbehavior and rewarding their positive behavior abundantly. The Nourished Heart strategy, like many others, focuses more on managing the parents' reactions to the children's behavior rather than the children themselves. It is safe to say that the United States and England have become a better informed society that no longer uses religion to justify the use of corporal punishment. However, the delegitimization of the practice does not imply that all parents believe in positive parenting techniques or that all schools have stopped utilizing physical punishment in the classroom.

Similar to the immigrant parents we've examined, many Christian parents in the United States believe in using physical punishment. These cultures are especially prevalent in the South of the United States, where corporal punishment in schools continues to exist because parents are reluctant to go beyond their Christian religious beliefs, so they dismiss everything society says about what violence creates. Nineteen of the fifty states that make up the United States of America do not have laws prohibiting the use of corporal punishment, allowing schools that previously complied with societal norms to start using it again. Just as the Cassville School

⁴⁷ Camarota, paragraph 2.

⁴⁸ Howard Glasser and Jennifer Easley, *Transforming the Difficult Child : The Nurtured Heart Approach* (Great Britain: Worth, 2007).

District in Missouri revived paddling to discipline students as recently as August 2022.⁴⁹ Their decision to reinstate this form of disciplinary action in school stems from requests from parents. The school's use of physical force as a method of correcting students' behavior will come as a last resort and will need to be authorized by parents prior to giving the punishment. Some parents, however, are not pleased and believe that this reinforcement of a policy is a way in which conservatives feel as if they are going back to the good old days without considering the harm being done. Taking a step back from the detailed situations of debate today on corporal punishment, we can look at the debate one final time on a large scale.

Today, countries such as Sweden, New Zealand, Germany, and Israel, as well as select countries in Africa, have banned the use of corporal punishment on children. These countries have their own reasoning, as in the case of Israel's non-christian state. Having no influence of the Christian idea of original sin, they believe in human rights. Israel's society, along with the remaining countries with bans I have mentioned, are more inclined towards collectivism, rather than individualism, by comparison with the U.S. The value of human dignity is better suited to a collectivistic worldview of mutual responsibility and inherent trust in government than the value of liberty, which is better suited to the individualistic worldview underlying common law.⁵⁰ This individualistic worldview is seen in the cultures of the U.S. and Canada. There are two major countries that hold no formal ban on the use of corporal punishment on children, despite centuries of study and knowledge.

Is it possible to predict the form that our culture will take in the centuries to come? Is the return of the paddle inevitable, given the revival of Christian beliefs in the political agenda of the United States, as seen by the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*? Time will tell, but it is imperative that

⁴⁹ Paúl, María L. "Missouri School District Revives Paddling to Discipline Students." WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post.

⁵⁰ Saunders, 241.

specialists continue their efforts to protect children from corporal punishment. History demonstrates that the practice of corporal punishment has its origins in Christianity, which has sustained its prevalence among parents and authority figures. In an effort to highlight the quick shift in public opinion during the 20th century, this study has presented the waves of campaigning, emphasizing that we are now in the midst of the third wave and are unaware of our future opinions on the use of corporal punishment on children. Despite this, I do not believe that after all of the progress achieved in child psychology research and the acquired knowledge of the impacts of corporal punishment use, the U.S. will ever return to what society formerly considered normal. As indicated in the introduction, it is challenging to capture every change that has occurred in this century, but I have endeavored to provide information on the most significant shifts in society's perspectives. This should be significant to you since the next generation holds the future of humanity in their hands. The upbringing of these children should remain a top priority on our global agenda.

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