

civil rights and compassion, advocacy groups . . . defend these people's rights to continue their disruptive behavior."

In October 1989, police and transit authorities launched an effort to get subway vagrants under control. Homeless advocates immediately objected that "'nooks and crannies' should be available for the homeless to do as they pleased, that is, to live in, and that passive panhandling

should be allowed." In January 1990, a federal judge ruled that subway panhandling was a First Amendment right. The decision was later overturned, but the battle over disorder in the subways goes on. If it is lost, Kelling writes, "The ultimate victims will be the working classes and the poor—bereft of [transportation] options, but then even more vulnerable to the predations of hoodlums and thugs."

PRESS & TELEVISION

*A Kind Word
For TV*

"The Impact of Television Viewing on Mental Aptitude and Achievement: A Longitudinal Study" by Steven L. Gortmaker, Charles A. Salter, Deborah K. Walker, and William H. Dietz, Jr., in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Winter 1990), Inst. for Social Research, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48016.

Many parents are sure that TV is rotting their children's minds. The average American youngster spends more than 15 hours a week in front of the TV set, so that would mean a lot of wasted brainpower. Not to worry, say Gortmaker, acting chairman of the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Harvard's School of Public Health, and his colleagues.

The researchers scrutinized National Health Examination Survey data on 1,745 children who were studied twice: in 1963-65, when they were ages 6-11, and then again in 1966-70, when they were 12-17. In the earlier years, the youngsters watched an average of about two hours of television a day; by the late '60s, they were watching nearly three hours a day.

At first glance, the amount of TV viewed *did* seem to be having a malign effect. Among the children 12 and older, the more TV the youths watched, the lower

were their scores on intelligence, reading, and arithmetic tests. However, the causal connection turned out to be an illusion. When the children's test scores from the earlier years were taken into account, it seemed that the children who were *already* scoring low then simply tended to watch more television later. And when other pertinent factors, such as parents' socioeconomic status, were taken into account, the connection between extensive TV viewing and lowered cognitive abilities all but completely vanished.

This finding agrees with that of an extensive 1986 study of U.S. teenagers. (Other studies, which lent some support to popular fears, suffered from various shortcomings, according to Gortmaker and colleagues.) Of course, while youngsters who watch a great deal of TV may not be *losing* their minds, that doesn't rule out the possibility that they are filling them with junk.

*All the Fluff
That Fits*

"When Readers Design the News" by Carl Sessions Stepp, in *Washington Journalism Review* (Apr. 1991), 4716 Pontiac St., College Park, Md. 20740-2493.

Newspapers are in trouble. Only 24 percent of Americans under 35 read yesterday's paper, according to a 1990 Times Mirror survey, compared with 67 percent

in 1965. "Declining penetration [of the market] and declining profits are giving editors and publishers a jolt," said Seymour Topping, director of editorial devel-

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