

slaves from Senegambia, Richardson notes. “For centuries before contact by sea with Europeans, Senegambia was an important source for the trans-Saharan slave trade as well as for the trade in the desert.” There was also a substantial local demand for slaves.

Most of the slaves shipped to America from Senegambia had been captured in warfare or by slave raiders, usually employed by Muslim states in the far interior or by “warrior states” near the coast. Historians have tended to think that most slaves shipped to America from Senegambia in the 18th century came from the far interior. As the American demand grew after 1750, slavers probably worked the coastal areas more intensively, instead of moving inland, as they did elsewhere in Africa.

That, Richardson says, may well have contributed to a breakdown in political order. It, in turn, may have led to more warrior regimes and perhaps to a new willingness among the Africans there to sell previously protected domestic slaves



Shipboard revolts helped depress the 18th-century slave trade.

and other persons to the Europeans. The explosive end result, now newly visible in the amassed shipping records: more attacks on ships and more shipboard revolts.

Thinking the Unthinkable

“Let Them Drop Out” by Jackson Toby, in *The Weekly Standard* (Apr. 9, 2001), 1150 17th St., N.W., Ste. 505, Washington, D.C. 20036-4617.

Why has the rash of school mass murders afflicted stereotypically “good” suburban schools, such as Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, rather than wretched inner-city high schools? In the answer, argues Toby, a Rutgers University sociologist, lies a practical way to prevent some of the massacres.

The disruptive students responsible for the everyday (but usually less lethal) violence in inner-city schools are able to escape, he says, before their frustration with being

trapped in the classroom “reaches a flash-point.” They become chronic truants or actual dropouts; schoolwork does not enjoy sufficient parental or peer group support to keep them in class. But for kids in excellent suburban schools, Toby says, dropping out is unthinkable: “Their parents would be horrified. Their friends would be bewildered. Their teachers would be shocked.” Though students in such schools can feel trapped and miserable for what adults would consider trivial reasons—“the teasing

of classmates, a poor body-image, athletic or romantic failures, unpopularity”—the consequences of their feelings sometimes can be explosive.

Let the troubled youths go, urges Toby. If they are too young to leave school, then get

them into alternative schools. If they are old enough, let them drop out. McDonald's may succeed where the high school failed. The dropouts can always finish high school later. "Formal education is not the only path to responsible adulthood," Toby notes.

Gender on the Bench

"Gender and Judicial Decisions: Do Female Judges Decide Cases Differently than Male Judges?" by Phyllis Coontz, in *Gender Issues* (Fall 2000), Transaction Periodicals Consortium, Rutgers Univ., 35 Berrue Cir., Piscataway, N.J. 08854-8042.

If men and women approach moral problems in different ways, as "difference" feminists maintain, then do male and female judges decide court decisions differently? Coontz, a sociologist at the University of Pittsburgh, conducted a survey of state trial judges in Pennsylvania to find out.

The state has 366 trial court judges, of whom 28 are women. All 28, along with 167 male jurists, answered Coontz's questions about how they would decide hypothetical cases involving self-defense homicide, personal injury, divorce, and assault. Coontz found significant male-female differences in almost half of the judges' hypothetical decisions.

In the homicide case, a female defendant claimed to have been abused by her boyfriend and to have killed him in self-defense. Twenty-seven percent of the female judges found her guilty, compared with 13 percent of the male judges. In the personal injury case, a plaintiff was left paralyzed from the waist down by an auto accident. The female judges awarded an average sum that was less than half that awarded by their male counterparts. But a woman being

divorced by her husband fared slightly better before the female judges. All of them awarded her alimony, while three percent of the male judges did not.

Both male and female jurists were more likely to find a male defendant guilty of assault, in a scuffle growing out of a basketball game bet, than they were a female defendant. But that inclination was stronger in the women on the bench. The female judges also were more likely to impose a longer sentence in such an assault case and to award higher damages (\$955, compared with \$353). The male jurists were twice as likely (22 percent, compared with 11 percent) to award civil damages.

Coontz concludes that the women on the bench in Pennsylvania do indeed speak with "a different voice" from their male counterparts. This may be because of their different "lived experiences," she says. "We, of course, expect judges to set aside personal viewpoints when deciding cases, yet beneath the robe of justice is an individual whose perceptions of the world have been influenced by [his or her] experiences in it."

PRESS & MEDIA

News You Can Lose

"Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News and Critical Journalism Are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy—And What News Outlets Can Do about It" by Thomas E. Patterson, in a Shorenstein Center Report (Dec. 2000), Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard Univ., 79 John F. Kennedy St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Struggling against increased competition for readers and viewers, news organizations have been steadily substituting entertaining "soft" news for reporting on public affairs. The

remaining coverage of politics and government has grown relentlessly more critical. In the long run, this approach may only drive more people away, argues Patterson, a