

**PRESS & TELEVISION**

*Do the Media  
Miss the Message?*

"Press Coverage of the Supreme Court: A Troubling Question" by William R. Dahms, in *Intellect* (Feb. 1978), Society for the Advancement of Education, 1860 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023.

Meeting press deadlines and translating "arcane legal language into newspaper prose" are two problems endemic to media coverage of Supreme Court decisions. In the case of the Court's April 1977 ruling on *Ingraham v. Wright*, involving corporal punishment of school children, these two problems proved insurmountable, says Dahms, a University of Michigan consultant.

In *Ingraham v. Wright*, the Court decided, five to four, that corporal punishment of school children—no matter how severe—does not violate the Constitution. The *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Atlanta Constitution*, and *Ann Arbor News*—to name a few—made erroneous assumptions about the case and consequently led the public to believe that the Court was "opening up a dramatic, new era in terms of the way corporal punishment was going to be administered." Dahms says the decision was actually "quite the opposite."

The issues were whether school children are protected by the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits "cruel and unusual punishment" (and traditionally has been reserved for punishment inflicted for violation of criminal statutes), and whether "due process" is required before punishment. The Court said no to both these questions.

Most newspapers failed to report that legal remedies exist on the state level for students who think they have been treated unjustly. Editorial writers, in particular, thought the Court was choosing between allowing corporal punishment or banning it totally as a violation of the Constitution. Even if the minority opinion had prevailed, says Dahms, "only those punishments which were excessively severe would have been prohibited."

While there is no evidence to suggest that press coverage of *Ingraham* was typical, it indicates, he concludes, "that the press would do well to examine, in a fundamental way, the procedures employed in covering future decisions."

*Covering  
Swine Flu*

"Swine Influenza and the News Media" by David M. Rubin and Val Hendy, in *Annals of Internal Medicine* (Dec. 1977), 4200 Pine St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104.

The press, which has been variously blamed for America's "loss of nerve" in Vietnam and for the public's low regard for politicians, has also been widely criticized for turning the 1976-77 federal swine flu inoculation program into a \$135 million fiasco.

The press was accused by some critics of sensationalizing the swine