Prior to passage of the IDEA, children with disabilities were routinely placed in academically inferior programs or denied an education altogether. In addition, “special education” programs often functioned as a way for newly desegregated schools to establish internal segregation on the basis of race, categorizing minority students as mentally deficient. Several lawsuits in the 1970s drew attention to the improper assessment of children for placement in special education programs.

Implementation of the IDEA has proved controversial. Many disability rights advocates emphasize the requirement of “least restrictive setting,” while some opponents argue that “appropriate education” means that spending should be commensurate with a child’s potential productivity. The least restrictive setting stipulation, coupled with the act’s mandate to give each child an appropriate education, gives parents the right to demand mainstreaming of their children in regular classes. The degree of inclusion would be based on a student’s “individual education plan.” Resistant school districts argue that costs are prohibitive and that the needs of disabled students are best met in settings other than the mainstream classes. Parents are generally divided on the issue. Some complain that the presence of disabled children in classrooms is disruptive; others are concerned that school districts look for excuses to retain educational segregation.

Because Congress provided no enforcement mechanism other than individual lawsuits, parents have had to turn to the courts to seek redress under the IDEA. Disability rights proponents decry the reliance on individual lawsuits. Many of the cases are narrow in scope, affecting only the child for whom the case is brought. Moreover, only parents with the resources, education, and determination to pursue litigation are able to challenge local administrators. As no class-action suits have been brought, courts have not ordered any changes to the education system. Furthermore, enormous variations in the rulings of the several federal courts have left parents and school districts without clear guidelines.

Critics also charge that the IDEA unfairly diverts educational resources from average students to “special needs” children. As more children have been diagnosed with learning and developmental disabilities, charges have been levied that parents have sought out unfounded diagnoses in order to demand special services from the public schools. Opponents of the IDEA also point out that the act is an unfunded federal mandate. Controversy surrounding the IDEA stems in part from the failure of Congress to fully underwrite the costs of implementation.

Laura Hague

See also: Brown v. Board of Education (1954); Civil Rights Movement.

Further Reading

Intelligent Design
See Creationism and Intelligent Design.

Internet
The Internet is a global system of distributed computer networks that use “packet switch” technologies for the exchange of information and service exchange. It provides numerous communication services such as e-mail, text and video chat, bulletin boards, file sharing and transmission, streaming audio and video, and hyperlinked World Wide Web documents. The size, speed, and scalability of the Internet have made it the most important n communication technology of the past several decades. It has also become a major arena of the culture wars.

The Internet’s infrastructure was developed by a loose-knit group of American academic and private-sector computer scientists interested in networking technology and it was primarily funded by the U.S. military. The idea for the system appeared in a series of memos written by J.C.R. Licklider in 1962, which envisioned “Galactic Network” of interconnected computers that would advance human reasoning through “man-computer symbiosis.” After Licklider became the head of the Defense Department’s computer research program, he was instrumental in securing funds for a team of computer scientists to construct his vision. The first node was installed at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1969, split into military and academic sides in 1989 and opened to commercial use in 1991.

The Mosaic commercial Web browser gave the general public a user-friendly interface that contributed to the Internet’s ubiquity. By the mid-1990s, “Internet” and “Web” were part of the popular cultural lexicon. In the partisan battles of the 2000 presidential election campaign, right-wing pundits assailed the Democrat candidate, Vice President Al Gore, for allegedly claiming to have “invented the Internet.” Gore, whose name was soon synonymous with the Internet, was in fact an early supporter of the technology. As a U.S. senator (D-TN) in the 1980s and early 1990s, Gore sponsored legislation that supported linking universities and libraries through the system, as well as using the Internet for commerce.
The Internet has also been drawn into the culture wars over the issue of users’ privacy. Legislation has attempted to curtail the flow of online activity by law enforcement and employers, specifying how sensitive personal and financial information can be collected, curated, "spied" or junk mail, and prosecuted identity theft. Privacy and access sales have become especially worrisome in the post-9/11 era, particularly after the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act expanded the U.S. government’s ability to conduct Internet surveillance and data mining.

The Internet has become a focal point of controversies concerning both access and content. As communication technologies have become a central feature of the “information economy,” a “digital divide” separates those who have the access and skills to use the Internet effectively and those who do not, which has exacerbated social inequalities. Other controversies involve attempts to restrict content, particularly material on sex, violence, or dangerousness for national security, such as bomb recipes and恐怖ist recruitment. Attempts to regulate obscenity have proved contentious and constitutionally problematic. The 1996 Communications Decency Act and the 1998 Child Online Protection Act were mostly dismantled by the U.S. Supreme Court because of First Amendment concerns. Only the 2000 Child Online Protection Act survives constitutional challenge; its relatively modest provisions regulate obscenity at federally funded schools and libraries.

Internet pornography illustrates why content regulation can be difficult. In the United States, the Supreme Court ruling in Miller v. California (1973) relies on local or community standards for determining obscenity. Free-speech proponents suggest that this is too fluid for the cultural standards of a small, conservative community to determine what is obscene in cities like Las Vegas. Nonetheless, several Internet pornography providers have been convicted for importing child pornography (thus, an admiralty prosecution under the Bram Act) for distribution on the Internet.

The roots of the scandal lay in a series of U.S. foreign policy setbacks, including the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and the Russian sponsorship of terrorist groups affiliated with the Murathan. Computer hacking and the leak of internal documents have led to legal action. In 1994, when North ran unsuccessfully for the Senate in Virginia, he accused an loops (when he said Reagan "knew everything" from the beginning about the diversion of funds to the Contras."

Philipp R. Girard

Further Reading


Irvin, Reed

The founder of the watchdog group Accuracy in Media (AIM) in 1969, former economist Reed Irvine devoted himself to exposing what he claimed was a liberal bias in the news media, targeting The New York Times, The Washington Post, the major television networks, National Public Radio, and Newsweek. In 1997, Irvine was indicted for the so-called "Libya letter" pact that疏通 the Wall Street Journal, and the syndicated columnist Jack Anderson, among others. "Journalists," he charged, "are blurring the line between reporting and advocacy."

Reed, John Irvine

John Irvine was born on September 29, 1922, in Salt Lake City, Utah. After graduating from the University of Utah (BS, 1942), serving in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II, and completing his education at Oxford University (MA, economics, 1951), Irvine worked as an economist for the Federal Reserve Board (1951–1977). He died on November 16, 2004, in Rockville, Maryland. Irvine founded AIM in reaction to the 1968 Demo
cratic Convention in Chicago (which he felt was covered by journalists who were overly sympathetic with the demonstrators and the Tet offensive) and the increasing influence of the American media had exaggerated, giving a political boost to the Vietcong. A regular attendee of the "McDowell luncheon" — named for Arthur McDowell, the founder of the Council Against Communist Aggres
sion — Irvine was inspired to form AIM after one such meeting in which the group discussed the "problem" of the news media. That discussion led to a national debate initiated by Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, who had publicly scorned the press corps as "nattering nabobs of negativism."

Irvine’s research on the press corps and television and radio networks for accuracy and fairness in news programming. Irvine produced a bimonthly newsletter (The AIM Report), a daily radio program (Media Monitor), and a weekly col
umn (syndicated in 100 newspapers). He also wrote letters to the editor and published advertisements in offending newspapers in order to "correct" their news reports. He sought involvements editors, as well as the release of media corporatism and raising issues during stockholder meetings. Top media executives occasionally met with him to hear his concerns. AIM was at the height of its power and influence during the Reagan era in the 1980s, with reportedly 40,000 paid members and an operating budget of $1.5 million.

Irvine and his supporters felt that the mainstream news media was more critical of capitalism than com
munism and tended to be hostile toward the American military and its national security organizations. With that in mind, Irvine wrote the preface to James L. Tyson’s Target America: The Influence of Communist Propaganda on U.S. Media (1981), a polemical book heavily promoted by AIM. Irvine frequently accused the news media of being too "soft" on the authoritarian left, criticizing the U.S. government for ignoring its right-wing dictatorships such as Chile than on abuses by communist governments. He was especially critical of_o_reports on the lasting effects of Agent Orange, the chemical herbicide used by the U.S. military during the