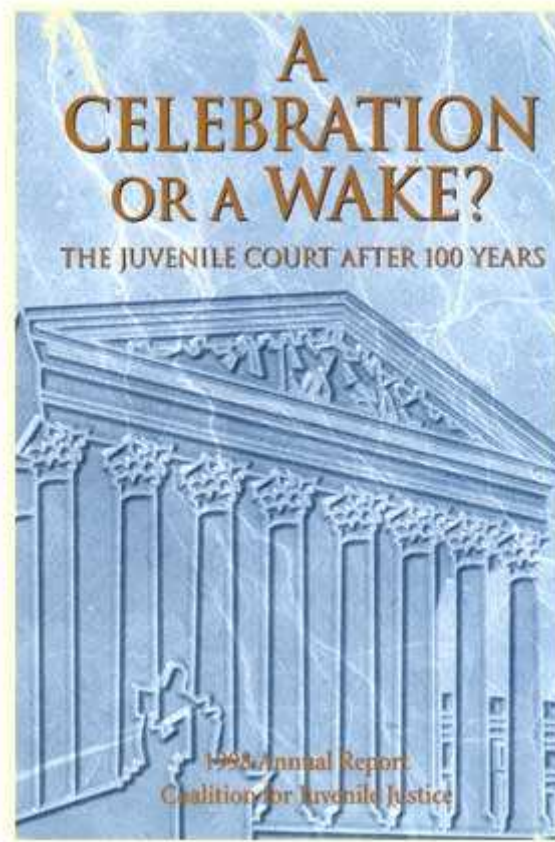


A Celebration Or A Wake?
The Juvenile Court After 100 Years
Coalition for Juvenile Justice 1998 Annual Report



A Celebration or a Wake? traces the creation and evolution of the juvenile court. The CJJ report summarizes key U.S. Supreme Court decisions, state trends and societal shifts that have affected how young offenders are treated.

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1998 Annual Report Excerpt (page 43-44)

Children and youth are deemed less responsible and mature than adults in many areas of everyday life. They must attend school pursuant to compulsory attendance laws, and they are protected from the harmful actions of their custodians by abuse and neglect laws. Child labor laws acknowledge their vulnerability in the work place, and movie and television rating systems likewise recognize their susceptibility to immoral or violent influences. We still take children and youth to pediatricians instead of internists, and we accept that their nutritional and other health needs are quite different from adults. They are held less accountable for their actions in many other areas of the law they can't hold property in their own names, or make wills, or enter into enforceable contracts, or enter the military on their own, or vote. Why should we expect them to be fully accountable as though they were fully formed and developed adults for their irresponsible acts in the juvenile or criminal arenas?

The Mission and Philosophy of the Court

The mission of the juvenile or family court in addressing delinquency should be defined by

balancing competing, yet complementary goals. Since youth are developmentally different from each other, and from adults, we believe that the correction of juvenile delinquents through services that are expressly designed to treat their behaviors and problems in an individualized fashion is best capable of preventing future offending. Because juveniles are developmentally and socially different from adults, research shows they are more likely to be rehabilitated by carefully designed and tested treatment programs than by a purely punishment-based sanction system.

We also believe that young people who break the law must be held accountable for the consequences of their illegal behavior, because this accountability is an integral part of rehabilitation and is absolutely crucial to the protection of the larger society. Juveniles need to know that criminal conduct has consequences and that these consequences are swiftly and fairly delivered. Any fair system of justice must also be sensitive to the rights and needs of the victims of crime. Thus, illegal behavior by juveniles should be addressed by a legal system that balances the protection of the community, the developmentally appropriate correction of juveniles who violate the law, and the protection of the legitimate rights of the victims of juvenile crime.
