



JOURNAL TRIBUNE

Public school students being tracked continually

By Nat Hentoff
September 17, 2013

This is the first in a series on our youth learning they, too, are under surveillance.

Born in 1925, I started at Boston Latin School – both the first U.S. public school, founded in 1635, and also our oldest school – in the late 1930s for middle school. The teachers were called – and addressed as – “masters,” and discipline was tight, with a large percentage of expulsions.

But our disciplinary data was not shared with the police or the FBI (which got its name in 1935).

During these days, however, as constitutional attorney and head of the Rutherford Institute, John Whitehead, writes in “America’s Schools: Breeding Grounds for Compliant Citizens” (rutherford.org, Oct. 12, 2012):

“Once looked upon as the starting place for imparting principles of freedom and democracy (in our government) to future citizens, America’s classrooms are becoming little more than breeding grounds for compliant citizens.

“The moment young people walk into school, they increasingly find themselves under constant surveillance; they are photographed, fingerprinted, scanned, X-rayed, sniffed and snooped on.

“Between metal detectors at the entrances, drug-sniffing dogs in the hallways (during police raids) and surveillance cameras in the classrooms and elsewhere, many of America’s schools look more like prisons than learning facilities.”

When I was a kid in Boston, where Samuel Adams (a Boston Latin School alumnus) and the Sons of Liberty helped ignite the revolution, any of the foregoing privacy invasions (even without our present ever-advancing spying technology) would have led to sharp parent protests.

But today’s parents, thoroughly conditioned to their own loss of privacy by the National Security

Agency, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and Barack Obama, are largely silent about the chronic databasing of their children.

And for most of the kids themselves, this Orwellian education (though they probably haven't yet read George Orwell) is part of growing up American.

John Whitehead, whom the Sons of Liberty would have made an honorary member, has reported on a new privacy-disintegrating invention that allows schools to be with their students wherever they go:

“‘Smart’ identification cards containing Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags ... allow school officials to track every step students take. So small that they are barely detectable to the human eye.”

And dig this if you have children in public – or, for that matter, in any school: “RFID tags produce a radio signal by which the wearer’s precise movements can be constantly monitored.”

Last year, as part of a pilot program in “school safety” in San Antonio, Texas, students at John Jay High School and Anson Jones Middle School, Whitehead reports, must carry “an RFID tracking chip (embedded in an RFID ‘smart’ card), which will actively broadcast a signal at all times.”

Sure, these schools already have a combined 290 surveillance cameras (I kid you not). But once authorities are addicted to tracking, there is no limit to their hunting. Students at these two particular schools are aware that whatever they’re doing or planning on doing will be immediately known to their spying educators.

“School officials,” Whitehead added, “hope to expand the program to all 112 schools in the Northside School District.

“(This) will cost \$500,000 (but) school administrators are hoping that if the school district is able to increase attendance by tracking the students’ whereabouts, they will be rewarded with up to \$1.7 million from the state government.”

And maybe later share the data with local police and the NSA.

Enter a dissenting student: High school sophomore Andrea Hernandez, objecting on the constitutional grounds of religious freedom. She is, Whitehead tells us, refusing to wear an RFID card. The result: “Students who refuse to take part in the ID program won’t be able to access essential services like the cafeteria and library ...

“According to Hernandez, teachers are even requiring students to wear the IDs when they want to use the bathroom.”

Has Obama thought of that?

“School officials reportedly have offered to quietly remove the tracking chip from Andrea’s card if the sophomore would agree to (just) wear the new ID, stop criticizing the program and publicly support the initiative.

“Hernandez refused the offer.”

Later, filing in District Court “for a temporary restraining order and declarative of relief” (her lawyers, supplied without charge, as usual, by John Whitehead), Hernandez explained why she would not betray her principles.

A minor, she had filed through her father, Steve Hernandez, and they told the court she was acting on “Scriptures found in the Book of Revelation.”

According to them, an individual cannot accept a certain code and pass “from a secular ruling authority conferring certain privileges ... that is a form of idolatry or submission to a false god.”

OK, said school officials, they’d remove the radio chip from her RFID badge, but she “would still be required to wear the badge around her neck as an outward symbol of her participation in the project.”

Has the state of Texas seceded from the United States’ religious freedom without my knowing it?

Because of her religious beliefs, Andrea Hernandez was expelled – yes, expelled from John Jay High School in January 2013!

Next week: Victory! Andrea Hernandez has been readmitted to that school and, because she would not abandon her American right to religious freedom, that school district has stopped using the RFID badges tracking program. I will delightedly show you how all this happened, setting a legal precedent that other American students wielding the Constitution may follow.

In view of John Whitehead’s continuous teaching of what the Constitution actually says, I wish he were running for president in 2016.