



Update on the FLDS Child Kidnapping

The New American reported on this mass kidnapping, including memorable pictures of the mothers in their long pastel-colored "prairie dresses" and of government officials justifying the state action. The victimized families were part of a religious group called the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS), who lived on a large tract of land called the Yearning For Zion Ranch (YFZ), near Eldorado, Texas.



Some leaders in the group approve of marriages by teen girls at a young age, although they claim that they have not broken the law involving underage marriage. Texas law allows its citizens to marry at age 16, or at a younger age with court approval.

Quoting from our earlier article:

The Texas DFPS first got involved with the families at the Yearning For Zion Ranch when a woman from Colorado phoned a report to the Texas child abuse hotline on March 29, 2008. This woman, Rozita Swinton, age 33, falsely identified herself as a 16 year old named "Sarah", from the YFZ Ranch, and stated that she had an eight month old child, and was pregnant again by her 50 year old husband. This Colorado call originated from a person known to be a serial false reporter with a criminal record for making false reports. However, the Agency used it to seize on the opportunity that they apparently had been waiting for — a plausible excuse to raid this ranch.

Despite that issue being the core accusation by the Texas child protection agency against FLDS, it removed all of the children on April 3, 2008, even the newborn babies. At least half of the children were under the age of five. Following removal of the children from their homes, the state conducted a two-day trial on April 17 and 18, during which no credible evidence of abuse to any specific child was adduced. Nonetheless, the trial judge ordered that all of the hundreds of children remain in state custody, after which they were fanned out to various foster homes all over the state.

Some parents appealed the decision to the Texas Appeals Court, which stated bluntly that "there was no evidence of any physical abuse or harm to any other child," and ordered that the children be returned to their parents. The Texas Supreme Court affirmed that finding.

The DFPS kept the cases open for investigation and contrived a cumbersome procedure for returning the children, some from hundreds of miles away. In order to reclaim their children, parents were required to sign statements agreeing that they had, in essence, abused their children, and agreeing to undergo psychological evaluations and parenting classes. Most of the children were slowly returned to their parents over the next several weeks and months.

Over the summer, the agency then attempted to re-remove six girls and four boys, ages 5 through 17, from four homes at the YFZ property. The fate of these children was considered in an early September



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court hearing presided over by the same judge as the April trial, Barbara Walther. It was characterized by lawyers quoted in a *San Angelo Standard-Times* article, as "the most bizarre thing they had seen in a court." The outcome was not determined.

Also during the summer, local prosecutors indicted eight men associated with the FLDS organization, including former FLDS leader Warren Jeffs, who has since been convicted in Utah of "rape as an accomplice," for having presided over a marriage between a man and an underaged girl, and is serving a long sentence in prison. Jeffs had resigned as president of the church in November of 2007, and had no part in the Texas events.

The agency has now sought dismissal of over 400 of the cases, which are now believed to have involved 439 children rather than 468 as initially reported. The agency has admitted that 26 of the female victims were actually adults and not minors subject to their jurisdiction. The end of this matter is still not in sight.

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