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WIFE-BEATING REMEDIES

Recent surveys of women imprisoned on homicide charges show th:at a high percentage had been repeatedly battered by the men they finally killed. Most of the killings happenedin a fit of passion and were not premeditated.

In the Cook County (Chicago) jail, forty percent of the women charged with homicide had been beaten over an extended period of time. Almost none of the battered women was convicted of murde Most had been given light seritences.

What prompted these surveys was the recent acquittal of a woman whose defense for killing her husband was that he had repeatedly.beaten her over a period of years.

Law an-::! morality justify killing for self-defense. However, neither law nor norality justifies killing anyone because he harmed or threatened you last week, last month, or last year.

You are morally justified in taking another:s life only if the threat is imminent. Even then, your self-defense must be commensurate with the threat.

A fatal gunshot wound is not a morally or legally acceptable response to a slap.

Since wife-beating has become a much talked-about crime in recent months, statistics have escalated so rapidly that we are told that 28 million wives have been beaten by their husbands. That could result in a lot of dead husbands if the recent acquittal proves to be catching.

Some groups are urging our society to solve the problem of wi-fe-beating by persuading Congress and state legislatures to appropriate funds to establish a center, or rest home, in every community where beaten homes can go and bind up their physical and emotional wounds at the taxpayers• expense.

This plan would cost plenty of money, depending on how many wife-beaters

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there actually are, but it would not solve the problem. It might even make it worse. After the wife returns from her Rand R, the husband would probably beat her again with impunity, knowing that the taxpayers, not he, would foot the bill for the damage.

A letter I received from a college professor may have the solution to the problem of wife-beating. He said that back in 1936 he witnessed how the state of Delaware punished a man who had been convicted of beating his wife, blackening both her eyes, and breaking her ribs when he kicked her.

The court-ordered punishment was thirteen lashes on his bare back while his hands were tied to a post in the courthouse square. This public whipping was a rare occurrence because the threat of it had made Delaware one of the most crime-free states in the country. Wife-beating, child abuse, and mugging were then almost unknown.

According to my correspondent, a reporter wrote a lurid news story describing the event. There was an uproar, and the legislature then abolished whipping. Today there are no more public whippings, but there is plenty of crime.

Ask yourself the question: Do you think a husband would be more deterred from beating his wife by the knowledge that he would be punished by a public whipping in the town square, or by the knowledge that his wife would be rewarded with a vacation at the taxpayers' expense?

Some husbands would no doubt claim that whipping is "cruel and unusual punishment" prohibited by the Eighth Amendment of our Constitution. But since the U.S. Supreme Court last year ruled that whipping school children for disciplinary purposes is not forbidden by the Constitution, even if severe and physically damaging, the same rule could be applied to husbands who get their kicks out of kicking their wives.

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