

2025 Silicon Flatirons debate

1. 2025 debate

RESOLVED: Children under 16 should be banned from the Internet

2. My scripts

2.1. Opening

2.1.1. The internet is terrible

- The underlying business model is broken
- Everywhere you look, it's precarity and misery and division
- We visit some of the worst of this on our children

2.1.2. The internet is wonderful

- A ban on the internet is
 - a ban on Zoom calls with grandmothers
 - a ban on connecting classrooms to others around the world
 - a ban on wikipedia and sesame street and khan academy
 - a ban on self-exploration and self-learning and self-improvement

2.1.3. The internet is everything

- The other problem is that the internet is everything
 - I raised my kids back when we still had ipods and dvd players
 - Tools for offline viewing and listening are harder to find and finickier to use.

2.1.4. Let's fix the internet for kids rather than ban them outright

- But this is a classic case of throwing the baby—literally—out with the bathwater
- There are ten thousand things I'd like to fix about the internet and how it works
 - It'll take time, and in the meantime, we'll need to be vigilant
- We need to reclaim the internet

2.2. Q&A—my questions

2.2.1. On equity

- What do you say to a single mother on a fixed income who just needs to park her child in front of YouTube after a hard day of work?

2.2.2. On fifteen year olds

- I understand why you might want to ban the internet for toddlers and maybe even elementary school kids, but highschoolers? There are Juniors in high school who would not be allowed to visit college websites under your proposal!

2.3. Closing

- It's about to become a magical time to be a child
 - In 1995, Sci-Fi author Neal Stephenson published "The Diamond Age"
 - On one level, it feels dystopic
 - The world has been splintered into small tribes that police their boundaries through literal safety nets of hovering nanobots that keep strangers and their germs out
 - There are corporate overlords who crush the lives of poor people living in slums
 - But the beating heart of the book is a young girl, Nell
 - Born in poverty and all alone, she is kept company by an amazing tool, the Young Lady's Illustrated Primer, an immersive and dynamic storybook that tells the story of Princess Nell and her friends.
 - I remember being captivated by the way Stephenson somehow managed to give Nell entertainment but also a captivating education.
 - Nell enjoys the kind of education reserved for the wealthiest daughters of the realm, and she learns philosophy and poetry and combat and strategy.
- What I marvel about most is that today's large language models have provided the biggest step toward the Illustrated Primer I have ever seen.
 - What felt so fantastical and far-off in 1995—the idea that a young child could have a magic book that generated endless stories to entertain and educate—is basically here.
 - There are a bunch of ways we can screw it up. But there is the possibility of something truly, breathtakingly wonderful.

- So let's work together to have our cake and eat it too.

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