

# Kids don't know how to blush anymore

Here is a question that might cause you to blush: What causes you to blush?

When considering the campaign against "porn rock" — vulgar and obscene lyrics in rock music — consider that question, and this one: Would you want to live in a world in which no one, not even the young, blushed?



George Will

Various parents' groups are putting wholesome pressure on recording companies, radio stations and the makers of rock videos to exercise discretion and self-restraint. Approximately one-third of the nation's radio stations have rock formats, and many are behaving responsibly. But the sort of people who profit from aggressively marketing porn rock have the morals of the marketplace, and the marketplace is the place to get their attention. In addition, putting labels on records with vulgar lyrics is going to help parents exercise supervision.

Rock music has become a plague of messages about sexual promiscuity, bisexuality, incest, sado-masochism, satanism, drug use, alcohol abuse and, constantly, misogyny. The lyrics regarding these things are celebratory, encouraging or at least desensitizing. By making these subjects the common

currency of popular entertainment, the lyrics drain the subjects of their power to shock — their power to make people blush. The concern is less that children will emulate the frenzied behavior described in porn rock than that they will succumb to the lassitude of the demoralized — literally, the demoralized.

As people become older they become less given to blushing. This is, in part, because they lose that sweet softness of youthful character that is called innocence and makes one's sensibilities subject to shock. People blush for various reasons. Sometimes it is because we suddenly have embarrassing attention called to ourselves. Sometimes we blush when utterly alone, when we think of something about ourselves that is shaming — such as the fact that almost nothing causes us to blush.

Often people blush because they are exposed to something that should be private or is shameful. This may be an endangered species of blushing, thanks to omnipresent vulgarities like porn rock making even the vilest things somehow banal.

Walter Berns, the political philosopher, asks: What if, contrary to Freud and such conventional wisdom, shame is natural to man and shamelessness is acquired? If so, the acquisition of shamelessness through the shedding of "hang-ups" is an important political event. There is a connection between self-restraint and shame. An individual incapable of shame and embarrassment is probably incapable of the governance of the self. A public incapable of shame and embarrassment about public vulgarity is unsuited to self-govern-

ment. There is an upward ratchet effect in the coarsening of populations. Today's 12-year-olds can not enjoy — can hardly sit still for — the kind of 1950s Westerns that enthralled their fathers. Today's 12-year-olds are so addicted (that is not too strong a word) to the slam-bang nonstop roar of Steven Spielberg movies, their attention is not held by, say, John Wayne in "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon."

The social atmosphere is heavily dosed with sexuality, from the selling of blue jeans to the entertaining of prime-time television audiences. Thus it is perhaps reasonable to have feelings of fatalism. Perhaps societies, like rivers, run naturally downhill. Perhaps the coarsening of a public is irreversible, especially when the coarsening concerns a powerful and pleasurable appetite such as sex. But it is demonstrably not true that societies can not move away from coarseness toward delicacy of feeling.

In the first half of the 18th century, the dawn of the Age of Reason, a form of English merriment on Guy Fawkes nights was to burn an effigy of the Pope. The belly of the effigy was filled with cats whose howls of agony in the flames were supposed to represent the voice of the devil emanating from the Catholic Church.

That kind of cruelty to animals is, by today's standards, obscene. Sensibilities can change for the better. So fatalism is wrong and the porn rock fight is worth fighting.

Mass culture, and especially music, matters. Nothing is more striking to a young parent than the pull of popular culture on even 3- and 4-year-olds. And perhaps good music can make good values more adhesive to children.

People can reasonably argue about what is the second finest work of music — a Mozart concerto, a Beethoven

symphony, this or that Bach tune. But everyone knows that the acme of the art of music is the currently popular song that says, "Put me in coach, I'm ready to play. . . . Look at me, I can be centerfield." The Republic has a fighting chance as long as the popularity of porn rock can be rivaled by the popularity of its moral opposite, baseball rock.

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Will is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and contributing editor for Newsweek magazine

## Many reasons fail as justifications for violence

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This rule is no different for the state than for the individual. Morally, the state is little more than a congregation of individuals. However, this claim does not deny that congregations act differently than individuals and, thus, are justly permitted to act differently. Consequently, civil government must obey constraints upon just action similar to those upon the individual or small institutions.

Emory law professor Roger Pilon distinguished between reasons and warrants for actions as they affect civil policy: "(T)o have a reason for wanting to control someone or something is not the same as having a warrant or justification for doing so. . . . A gunman surely has reasons for taking his victim's wallet, but no justification for doing so.

"But to have a justification for doing something, especially when others are affected by that action, is ordinarily to have more than a mere reason for doing it. It is to have a warrant or a right to undertake the action. And this warrant or right is not simply an evaluative but a normative notion, rooted not in connotation alone but in the faculty of reason and hence in the theory of justification."

The moral basis of conservatism does not lie in some simplistic vision of static governmental size — for where justified, the conservative's viewpoint leads to the embracing of a more than minimal state. However, rightful state action is justly employed only in response to threats. In contrast the liberal employs the intrinsic violence of the state for any one of a veritable plethora of mere reasons — from mat-

ters of taste to the supposed civil claims of altruism (although it can be readily doubted that any altruism exists when violence is employed to prod the activity of "charity").

The liberal state is the dehumanizing state: Human beings are treated as resources to be used for some greater human good. This vision of humanity stands in sharp contrast to the conservative vision, which holds that unless the individual engages in criminal violence, society is not justified in aggressing against him for any reason.

Only upon this conservative vision can a truly just and human culture be reconstructed. The alienation and dehumanization of "modern" and secular Western states are a cruel joke played upon the human spirit by minds convinced of their own brilliance, minds which that culture cannot progress without their "enlightened" meddling.

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