

Fatherhood & T



The National Fatherhood Initiative March, 1999

What Does Prime Time Network Television Say About Fatherhood?

INTRODUCTION

America is a country desperately in need of one thing: Fathers.

Tonight, nearly 40 percent of America's children will go to sleep in a home where their biological father does not live – an estimated 24.7 million children. Children who grow up without a father are at greater risk for a myriad of educational, health, emotional, and psychological problems¹.

America's children desperately need every social institution to commit to one goal: Rebuilding the institution of fatherhood. At a time when so many children are growing up without their father, we must use every available lever to inspire men to be committed, loving, and responsible fathers.

America's most powerful cultural institution is, arguably, television. For far too many children, the only place they see a father in action is not inside their home, but emanating from their television set.

For far too many children, the fatherhood portrayals they see on television will serve as their primary means of understanding what a good father is and does.

Consequently, we thought it important to learn how television portrays fatherhood. How often does a father show up on prime time? How is he portrayed – as competent or confused, engaged or aloof, socially affirmed in his role or ridiculed? Are some networks more father-friendly than others?

The answers to these questions provide an interesting view into how popular culture treats fatherhood and offer a road map for creating entertaining television that promotes positive portrayals of “dear ol’ dad”, or “dear young dad”, or “dear divorced dad”, or “dear single dad”.

¹For a comprehensive review of the empirical literature on the consequences of fatherlessness see Horn, Wade F. *Father Facts, Third Edition*. Gaithersburg, MD: The National Fatherhood Initiative, 1998.

Rating Television's Images of Fatherhood

To answer these questions, the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) conducted a review of major network television (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, WB) during prime time over the course of five weeks, from mid-November through mid-December, 1998. We rated those shows that satisfied the

between the father and his children was a central defining feature of the show; and (3) the father's children were 18 years old or younger.

Given these criteria, shows which only occasionally portray one of its characters in a fatherly role were not rated. For example,

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Rating Television's Images of Fatherhood (continued)

were not included in our evaluation. Although fatherhood is occasionally portrayed on these shows, the relationship between the father character and his children is not a central, defining characteristic of the show.

In addition, given that this study was completed in November and December of 1998, some very recent television offerings, such as *Family Guy*, are not included in this study. Since the NFI intends to repeat these ratings at periodic intervals in the future, we will

capture the fatherhood portrayals in these show date.

Each show that satisfied our inclusion criteria independently evaluated by at least three different members of the National Fatherhood Initiative following five dimensions of fatherhood, glean research literature on the most important aspect involved, committed and responsible fatherhood

Five Dimensions of Fatherhood

Involvement: The father is involved with family activities such as eating dinner together, going to church, his children's sporting events, and interacting with his children's school.

Engagement: The father spends direct one-on-one time with his child.



Guidance: The father is a role model for his children and is concerned with the physical, spiritual, emotional, and developmental growth of his children. The father is also concerned with character development of his child.

Competence: The father is capable and competent.

Priority: The father places his family and role of father at the top of his priority list and makes sacrifices accordingly.

Each of these criteria was rated using the following 5-point scale:

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = neutral 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

Each show was individually, and independently, rated on each of the five dimensions of fatherhood with a 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest possible score. Each show's individual ratings were then summed to obtain a total rating for that show, with 25 points the highest possible rating.

² See, for example, Michael Lamb (ed.), *The Role of the Father in Child Development, Third Edition*. New York: John Wiley

Results of the Study

Where have all the fathers gone? Left on the cutting room floor, long time ago....

The first question we asked is: How frequently are fathers portrayed on television? The answer is: Not much.

Of the 102 shows (excluding news, sports, and local programming) on network prime time television, only 15, or 14.7%, feature a father as a recurring, central character. On one network, NBC, there is only one father on its entire prime time schedule, Paul Reiser's character on *Mad About You*.

Just as strikingly, during our rating period, there were no fathers to be found on *any* network during prime time on Saturday night. Thus, on the very night when families are most likely to be at home watching TV, network television is fatherless.

What types of fathers are portrayed on

The fathers who are portrayed on television are married or single, custodial fathers. There are no divorced or never-married, port network. Thus, while prime time television does represent reality that most fathers are married, it substantially represents single, custodial fathers and completely omits the reality of non-custodial fathers -- *nearly for today's fathers.*

When it comes to television, does fatherhood exist anymore?

Next we asked: When it portrays fatherhood well does television do at portraying dads? The answer is: With great variability. Although there are some

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fatherhood portrayals, there are also some very negative ones. Most fatherhood portrayals were mixed.

Of the 15 network television shows with a father as a central, recurring character, only four (27%) received a "positive" portrayal rating (a rating of 20 total points or above). An equal number received a "negative" rating (a rating of 15 or fewer points). The remaining seven network television shows portrayed a father who had some positive qualities, but who was significantly deficient in one or more aspect of fatherhood.

A closer examination of the individual ratings for each show (provided in Appendix A) finds that of all of the shows rated, *only 40 percent* portrayed competent fathers. Thus, the typical fatherhood portrayal is one of incompetence.

It is also interesting to note that where the fatherhood portrayal was not uniformly positive (i.e., where the show fell outside of the "positive" overall rating category), the more involved a father is the more likely he is to be portrayed as incompetent. For example, the worst rated shows, *Brother's Keeper*, *The Nanny*, *That 70s Show*, and *Dawson's Creek*, portray otherwise very competent men who are terribly uninvolved with their children. In contrast, shows such as *The Simpsons*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *Home Improvement*, and *The Hughleys* all depict involved fathers who are incompetent men. Television seems to be suggesting that the more competent the man, the less involved the father -- and vice versa.

FATHERHOOD PORTRAYALS			
Show	Type of Father	Network	A
7th Heaven	Married	WB	
Promised Land	Married	CBS	
Smart Guy	Single	WB	
Two of a Kind	Widowed	ABC	
The Hughleys	Married	ABC	
Mad About You	Married	NBC	
Holding the Baby	Single	Fox	
King of the Hill	Married	Fox	
Home Improvement	Married	ABC	
The Simpsons	Married	Fox	
Everybody Loves Raymond	Married	CBS	
Dawson's Creek	Married	WB	
That 70's Show	Married	Fox	
Brother's Keeper	Widowed	ABC	
The Nanny	Newly Married	CBS	

Positive Fatherhood Portrayal = 20 or more total rating points
 Mixed Fatherhood Portrayal = 16-19 total rating points
 Negative Fatherhood Portrayal = 15 or less total rating points

And the Winner is.....



To determine which network was the most father-friendly, we computed the average fatherhood rating score across television shows within each network which had a father as a recurring thematic character. The average fatherhood score for each network is shown in the following table:

Network	# of Shows with Father as Recurring Thematic Character	Percent of Network's Total Shows with Father as Recurring Thematic Character	Average Score
WB	3	20.0 %	21.0
NBC	1	4.0 %	18.0
ABC	4	20.0 %	17.0
CBS	3	13.6 %	16.0
Fox	4	20.0 %	15.0

And the winner is WB. It is interesting that WB, the network winning kudos for building it's audience by becoming place for teens to tune in, is also the most pro-fatherhood network. Could it be that teenagers understand what too adults seem to have forgotten: Fathers are important, on television as well as in life?

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CONCLUSION

Today, millions of American children are living without a dad. Of those that are living absent their fathers, 40% have not seen their fathers -- not for one second -- in over a year. An astounding 50% of children who don't live with their fathers have never stepped foot in their father's home.

It is, therefore, not an exaggeration to assert that for millions of America's children, the primary daily contact they have with the idea of a father is the time they spend watching a father on television. For millions of American boys, the only models of fatherhood available to them are on television. And for millions of American girls, the only models for future husbands and fathers that are available to them, are those portrayed on television.

Unfortunately, when prime time television portrays a dad at all, it is usually either as a competent man yet uninvolved father or as an involved father yet incompetent man. Only five television shows across all five major networks -- an average of only one per network -- portray a father as both competent and involved.

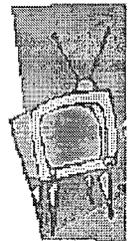
In fact, if you were to pick a television show at random, it is at least *fifteen times more likely* that you will be watching a show where sex between unmarried adults is the recurrent and central theme than a show where responsible fatherhood is the recurrent and central theme. This holds true even for the so-called "family hour" -- the hour when young children are the most likely to be watching television.

There was a time, perhaps, when television could afford to ignore the issue of responsible fatherhood. But not now. Not when 4 out of every 10 children are growing up absent their fathers. Now more than ever, it is critical that every socializing

institution in America provide positive messages to children about responsible fathers, both to inspire men to be better fathers and to educate children as to what good fatherhood is.

As we mentioned earlier, NBC has only one entire prime time schedule. When it comes to kids, the peacock has no reason to strut. How promising news at NBC. In a recent speech, S. President of NBC Entertainment, stated that he wanted NBC's television shows to portray less sex and more fathers in their lineup -- especially the cool, involved and loving kind.

It would be unrealistic, of course, for society to expect television alone to bear the responsibility for promoting responsible fatherhood. We recognize that television serves to entertain and even to provoke. But neither can television be absolved of responsibility, especially when it possesses so much power to socialize and when that power is being used to reinforce negative images and influences.



For millions of children, television is the only model of fatherhood.

If we want more children to grow up with involved, committed and responsible fathers, promoting responsible fatherhood must be an agenda of every social institution. Television should -- do its part. The future of fatherhood and the future of America's children depend on it.

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Appendix A: Average Show Scores by Category

Network/Show	Involvement	Engagement	Guidance	Competence	Priority	Total
WB/7th Heaven	5	5	5	5	5	25
WB/Smart Guy	5	4	5	5	5	24
WB/Dawson's Creek	3	3	2.5	4	2.5	15
NBC/Mad About You	4	4.3	3.7	2.3	4	18.3
ABC/Two of a Kind	4.5	4.5	5	4	5	23
ABC/The Hughleys	4.75	3.75	3.75	2.75	4	19
ABC/Home Improvement	4.25	4.5	2.5	2	3.5	16.7
ABC/Brother's Keeper	2.3	2.67	1.67	2.3	2	11
CBS/Promised Land	5	5	5	5	5	25
CBS/Everybody Loves Raymond	3.67	2.67	3	3.67	3	16
CBS/The Nanny	1	1	1.67	2.3	1.67	7.7
FOX/Holding the Baby	3	3.5	3	3.5	4.5	17.5



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With Dr. Wade Horn - As seen in:

The Washington Times

IRS, Welfare Discourages Low-Income Marriages

In many inner city communities, it seems, it's easier to find a vegetable garden than a responsible and involved father. Indeed, entire communities can rightly be termed fatherless.

Conventional wisdom provides a simple reason: men impregnating women, many of them young women, with little concern for the consequences. But new research recently presented at the 1999 National Summit on Urban Fathers in Washington, D.C., suggests a more complicated picture.

According to noted social scientist Sara McLanahan, at the time of the birth of a child to a low-income, unwed mother, 82% of the parents are romantically involved with each other. Fifty-three percent are cohabiting at the time of the birth.

Moreover, 86% of these fathers have their name on the birth certificate of the children. Seventy-eight percent helped the mother during pregnancy, and 86% have plan to continue helping in the future. Thus, contrary to conventional wisdom, the vast majority of these fathers are romantically involved with the mother of their child and, upon learning their partner is pregnant, very much want to and plan to be a good father. But most startling of all is this: When asked what the chances are that they will get married someday, 52% say "almost certain" or "a good chance." An additional 15% say "50/50." Hence, nearly two-thirds of these couples see marriage as not only desirable, but a likely outcome. Yet, we know that far fewer of these couples ever go on to get married. Why not?

One reason may be that we are afraid to bring up the topic. How many pro-marriage posters have you ever seen hanging on the wall of a welfare office? Or brochures describing the benefits of marriage prominently displayed in the waiting room of an inner city maternity hospital? How many urban schools teach the skills necessary to sustain a healthy and mutually satisfying marital relationship? The answer, of course, is very few.

The consequence of our reticence to talk about marriage, especially in low-income communities, is that young couples aren't encouraged to move towards marriage. Little wonder so few of them do.

But it gets even worse. Should these young couples decide to get married, Uncle Sam punishes them. While the marriage penalty in the tax code for two-earner couples is reasonably well-known, what is less commonly understood is the fact that low-income

couples face the most severe financial marriage penalties of all.

The biggest culprit is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). A wage supplement designed to encourage work, the EITC contains a horrific financial penalty for marriage. That's because the EITC is not adjusted for the number of adults in a household. Thus, in cases where both the mom and the dad are working, the EITC penalizes a typical low-income couple about \$1800 should they choose to get married.

But that's not all. Low-income couples who choose to get married also frequently stand to lose housing benefits, access to job placement and supportive employment services, even a slot in Head Start for their child. In fact, according to calculations by Eugene Steurele of the Urban Institute, should a single mother on welfare choose to marry a man working full-time at a minimum wage job and, in doing so, give her children a real live in-the-home dad instead of a child support check, the new family's combined earnings plus benefits would be \$3,862 less than if the couple did not marry and the woman stayed on welfare. And we wonder why marriage is disappearing in low-income communities.

All of this wouldn't matter if marriage didn't matter. But it does. And not just a little. It matters a lot.

Children fare much better when raised in a married, intact, two-parent household. In addition, research indicates that both married men and married women are happier, healthier, and wealthier than their unmarried counterparts. Furthermore, the best indicator of the violent crime rate in a community is not race, ethnicity or even income, but the prevalence of marriage.

And marriage is the glue that binds fathers to their children. Not a perfect glue, but a better glue than either cohabitation or child support enforcement. The simple fact is this: If we want children to grow up with loving, involved, committed fathers, we will have to figure out a way to resurrect marriage in our urban areas.

But, many shrug, its too late to do anything about all of this. The genie is out of the bottle. We just have to face the fact that fathers and marriage have largely disappeared from many urban areas and get on with adjusting to this "reality."

Not so fast. Here are some ideas discussed at the National Summit on Urban Fathers that Mayors can do to help restore fatherhood and marriage in our urban areas:

convene a city-wide summit on fatherhood, bringing together top leaders from the civic, business, religious, educational and social service sectors of the city, to publicly communicate the high personal priority he or she has placed on reversing father absence;

initiate a city-wide public education campaign to raise awareness of the importance of fathers and to help inspire men to be more involved fathers;

establish a Fatherhood Resource Center where fathers b- new and experienced b- can go for help, advice, or needed services;

conduct a city-wide program audit to determine what message the city's human service delivery system is communicating about the importance of fathers and marriage; and

use a portion of discretionary funds to provide seed grants to small but effective community-based support, outreach and skill building fatherhood programs.

Fatherlessness is connected to our most pressing social ills, especially in urban areas, including poverty, crime, educational failure, and substance abuse. And marriage is the most effective pathway to an involved father. Mayors -- and other elected officials -- cannot be expected to solve all our problems, but what they can start by asserting that fathers matter -- and so does marriage. Our nation desperately needs more of both.



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*Wade F. Horn, Ph.D., is the President of the National Fatherhood Initiative and the former United States Commissioner for Children, Youth and Families. For further information on the National Fatherhood Initiative or to obtain copies of any of the aforementioned materials, feel free to **contact** the NFI.*

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September 22, 1999

Movie, TV Violence Still Going Great Guns, New Study Shows

Lieberman Joins Watchdog Group in Releasing Report on "Merchandizing Mayhem"

WASHINGTON – A new study of popular entertainment released today finds that violence is consistently prevalent in movies, television series, and music videos, and consistently mislabeled by the TV and movie rating systems.

Senator Joe Lieberman joined the Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) in releasing the results of the study, "Merchandizing Mayhem," which was the most extensive evaluation ever conducted across different media. The CMPA reviewed a total of 573 different media products, including the 50 top grossing movies of 1998, 284 episodes of original television series, and 189 music videos shown on MTV.

The researchers documented 8,350 separate scenes of violence, more than half of which involved serious violence, including murder, rape, kidnapping, and assault with a weapon. They then found that movies, television series and music videos each averaged one scene of serious violence every four minutes.

After the ratings for the different products were analyzed, the study reports that a majority of the 10 most violent movies were rated PG-13 and the 10 most violent TV series TV-PG. "They might as well have been assigned by a coin toss," CMPA President Robert Lichter said.

What follows is the text of Senator Lieberman's statement on the report.

The CMPA analysis confirms statistically what most of us know intuitively, which is that the culture of violence is alive and killing in America today. It leaves little doubt that despite all the concerns parents and their advocates have raised over the last several years, despite all the evidence we have presented to demonstrate the substantial threat posed to children, and despite the outpouring of outrage over the recent string of horrific school shootings, Hollywood is still going great guns to mass market mass murder.

This is not news to most television and movie viewers. But what is new and particularly noteworthy about this analysis is the degree to which it shows how consistent and prevalent violent depictions are across different visual media. According to the CMPA, the 500-plus music videos, television series, and major motion pictures they evaluated averaged one scene of Media Violence Study serious violence every four minutes -- for a two hour movie, that amounts to an average of 30 murders, rapes and beatings. The context of the violence was disturbingly similar as well. Most of the depictions CMPA accounted for were glorified and sanitized, with little said or shown about the consequences for victims or perpetrators, which child development experts say is the worst and potentially most harmful signal to send to young viewers.

The gnawing question we have to ask today is whether the television and movie industry reaction to these findings will also be the same as it has been. If the past few months are any indication, I am not overly optimistic. There has been some progress in the wake of the massacre in Littleton and the public pleas for greater media responsibility, some reflection

of heightened sensitivities, a few moves to actually change program content. But sadly these responses amount to little more than window dressing, or in this case screen dressing, especially when compared to the volume of violence we've been swamped with over the last year, as documented in this study.

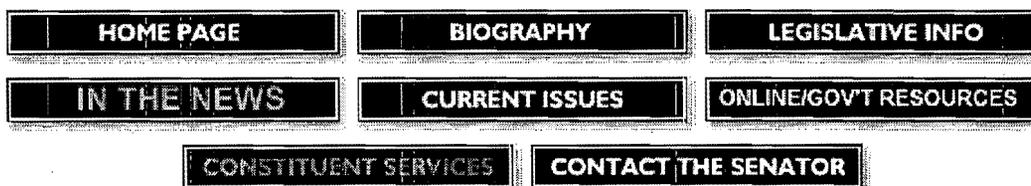
My pessimism about the entertainment industry's willingness to help was deepened by the reaction we received from industry leaders to the "Appeal to Hollywood" we issued in July, which calls on the various media to join parents in a new social compact to improve the cultural environment in which we raise our kids. In this appeal, Senator Brownback and I, along with a bipartisan group of distinguished public figures, asked the entertainment media to do nothing more than what they once did so well, to abide by a common code of conduct, and in doing so make a commitment to reduce the amount of gratuitous violence in its products.

To this industry leaders politely said no, if they said anything at all. We have received letters from the heads of the major trade associations representing the movie, television, and music industries, who indicated they were fully embracing their responsibilities simply by rating their products. That claim was disappointing on its face, but it is all the more so given the findings of the CMPA's study, which shows the movie and TV ratings routinely misrepresent the violence levels in their programs, movies and videos. Even worse, we have yet to receive any reply from the CEOs of the major media conglomerates we sent the appeal to, including Time Warner, Sony, Seagram, Disney, Viacom, and Fox.

So the challenge now falls to us as consumers, as parents, as grandparents, and as citizens of this democracy. If we want a safer, saner culture, we have to clearly and loudly ask the people who shape it how many more kids must be slaughtered before we wake up to our shared responsibilities to protect them from harmful influences, on screen and off. We have to ask them, particularly the companies making money from the public airwaves, how they are serving the public interest by flooding them with conscienceless killing and demeaning sleaze. We have to ask them how many more sadistic, blood-soaked video games will be marketed to teenage boys and how many more porn stars will be featured on MTV before someone draws the line. And we have to ask ourselves if we are feeding the degradation of our culture by silently tolerating our children's consumption of this mix of media garbage and poison.

The report we release today will aid in that cause, because it forces us to confront once again what happens when standards are abandoned and values are vitiated in the pursuit of profit. For ringing that alarm I thank Dr. Lichter and the staff at the Center, and I look forward to working with them in pursuit of more media responsibility.

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September 14, 1999

Bennett, Lieberman Dishonor Fox Television with Latest Silver Sewer Award

Network recognized for "tireless, tasteless, and ongoing efforts" to drag down TV standards

WASHINGTON – Former U.S. Secretary of Education William J. Bennett and Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT) today dishonored the Fox Television Network and its corporate CEO Rupert Murdoch with their latest Silver Sewer Award.

The Silver Sewer aims to identify the nation's worst cultural polluters and to put a specific name to a cultural disgrace. Previous award-winners were Seagram Inc. and CBS.

Fox was presented with a special "lifetime achievement" award for "its tireless, tasteless, and ongoing efforts to drag down network programming standards and for its cutting-edge contribution to the coarsening of our culture."

In particular, Bennett and Lieberman condemned Fox's new fall lineup, led by the lewd, obscenity-filled Hollywood satire "Action," for setting new lows in primetime network programming and accelerating television's race to the bottom.

"Through hard work, substantial financial investments, and critical editing decisions, Mr. Murdoch has led one of America's largest, most successful, most powerful television networks into the gutter," Bennett said. "He is now responsible for what is perhaps the worst -- the most crude, cynical, and insulting -- material ever to be broadcast to the American public over network television airwaves."

Among the lowlights of Fox's new shows:

- In "Manchester Prep," a drama aimed at teenagers, a high school girl sizes up the genitals of her step-brother as he is coming out of the shower and concludes, "Hmm. Not bad."
- In "Get Real," a so-called "family" drama, a mother finds her teenage son in bed with his girlfriend after they have spent the night together, and instead of getting angry jokingly asks, "Is this your idea of bed and breakfast?"
- In the premier of "Action," which airs this Thursday, a prostitute masturbates a movie star in a crowded movie theater, and a producer unleashes an obscenity-laced tirade at a kitchen worker, in which he suggests the proper way to gain revenge is to urinate in a cobb salad, which the worker later does.

"We have to ask what influence this will have on the other networks and their standards, on what is suitable to broadcast on the public airwaves, and in turn on our norms and our behaviors, which are shaped so much by the powerful and alluring messages of television," Lieberman said.

"We continue to hope that some in the television community will be embarrassed enough to say that is not how they want to make their living, how they honor their public trust, how they serve the public interest over the public airwaves."

► [Click here to view Senator Lieberman's speech.](#)

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An Appeal to Hollywood

American parents today are deeply worried about their children's exposure to an increasingly toxic popular culture. Events in Littleton, Colorado, are only the most recent reminder that something is deeply amiss in our media age. Violence and explicit sexual content in television, films, music, and video games have escalated sharply in recent years. Children of all ages are now being exposed to a barrage of images and words that threaten not only to rob them of normal childhood innocence, but also to distort their view of reality and even undermine their character growth.

These concerns know no political or partisan boundaries. According to a recent CNN-USA Today-Gallup poll, 76 percent of adults agree that TV, movies, and popular music are negative influences on children. Seventy-five percent report that they make efforts to protect children from such harmful influences. Nearly the same number--73 percent--say shielding children from the negative influences of today's media culture is "nearly impossible."

Moreover, there is a growing public appreciation of the link between our excessively violent and degrading entertainment culture and the horrifying new crimes we see emerging among our young: schoolchildren gunning down their teachers and fellow students en masse, killing sprees inspired by self-indulgently violent films, teenagers murdering their babies only to return to dance at the prom.

Clearly, there is no simple causation at work here. Many factors are contributing to the crisis engulfing many of our children--negligent parenting, ineffective schools, divorce and family disintegration, and the ready availability of firearms. All are important, and all should be a part of our national conversation on this problem. But surely no one can argue that our entertainment culture should be exempt from the discussion.

Among researchers, the proposition that entertainment violence adversely influences attitudes and behavior is no longer controversial; there is overwhelming evidence of its harmful effects. Numerous studies show that degrading images of violence and sex have a desensitizing effect. Nowhere is the threat greater than to our at-risk youth--youngsters whose broken homes or disadvantaged environments make them acutely susceptible to acting upon impulses shaped by violent and dehumanizing media imagery.

Many factors, including the drive for profit in an increasingly competitive media marketplace, are contributing to the downward spiral in entertainment and the disappearance of even minimum standards.

In the past, the entertainment industry was more conscious of its unique responsibility

for the health of our culture. For thirty years, television broadcasters lived by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) Television Code, which detailed broadcasters' responsibilities to the community, to children, and to society and prescribed specific standards. For many years this voluntary code set boundaries that enabled television to thrive as a creative medium without causing undue damage to the bedrock values of our society.

In recent years, several top entertainment executives have spoken out, laudably, on the need for minimum standards and, more recently, on the desirability of more family-friendly programming. But to effect real change, these individual expressions must be translated into a new, collective affirmation of social responsibility on the part of the media industry as a whole.

As parents all of us, too, have a major responsibility to supervise our children's access to the entertainment media--be it television, films, music, videos, video games, or the Internet. Allowing children unsupervised access to today's media is the moral equivalent of letting them go play on the freeway. Parents should limit TV viewing hours. They should know what programs their child is watching, what music he or she is listening to, what films he or she is attending, what videos he or she is renting, what video games he or she is playing, and what web sites he or she is surfing on the Internet.

While most parents are concerned about the media's influence, some, unfortunately, neglect these critical obligations. But today even the most conscientious parent cries out for help from an industry that too often abdicates its responsibility for its powerful impact on the young.

Therefore we, the undersigned, call upon executives of the media industry--as well as CEOs of companies that advertise in the electronic media--to join with us, and with America's parents, in a new social compact aimed at renewing our culture and making our media environment more healthy for our society and safer for our children.

We call upon industry leaders in all media--television, film, music, video, and electronic games--to band together to develop a new voluntary code of conduct, broadly modeled on the NAB code.

The code we envision would (1) affirm in clear terms the industry's vital responsibilities for the health of our culture; (2) establish certain minimum standards for violent, sexual, and degrading material for each medium, below which producers can be expected not to go; (3) commit the industry to an overall reduction in the level of entertainment violence; (4) ban the practice of targeting adult-oriented entertainment to youth markets; (5) provide for more accurate information to parents on media content while committing to the creation of "windows" or "safe havens" for family programming (including a revival of TV's "Family Hour"); and, finally, (6) pledge the industry to significantly greater creative efforts to develop good family-oriented entertainment.

We strongly urge parents to express their support for a new voluntary code of conduct directly to media executives and advertisers, whether through calls, letters, faxes, or e-mails, or **by becoming signers of this Appeal by filling out and submitting the form**

below. And we call upon all parents to fulfill their part of the compact by responsibly supervising their children's media exposure.

We are not advocating censorship or wholesale strictures on artistic creativity. We are not demanding that all entertainment be geared to young children. Finally, we are not asking government to police the media. Rather, we are asking the entertainment industry to assume a decent minimum of responsibility for its own actions and to take some modest steps of self-restraint. And we are asking parents to help in this task, not just by taking responsibility for shielding their own children, but also by making their concerns known to media executives and advertisers.

Hollywood has an enormous influence on America, particularly the young. By making a concerted effort to turn its energies to promoting decent, shared values and strengthening American families, the entertainment industry has it within its power to help make an America worthy of the Third Millennium. We, leaders from government, the religious community, the nonprofit world, and the private sector--and members of the entertainment community--challenge the entertainment industry to this great task. We appeal to those who are reaping great profits to give something back. We believe that by choosing to do good, the entertainment industry can also make good--and both the industry and our society will be richer and better as a result.

Signers

<p>Steve Allen</p> <p>William J. Bennett Co-Director Empower America</p> <p>David Blankenhorn President Institute for American Values</p> <p>Sissela Bok Distinguished Fellow Harvard Center for Population Studies</p> <p>Frederick Borsch Bishop Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles</p> <p>L. Brent Bozell III Chairman Parents Television Council</p> <p>Senator Sam Brownback</p> <p>Bill Bright Founder and President Campus Crusade for Christ</p>	<p>Norton Garfinkle Chairman Oxford Management Corporation</p> <p>Robert George McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence Princeton University</p> <p>George Gerbner Bell Atlantic Professor of Telecommunications Temple University Dean Emeritus Annenberg School, University of Pennsylvania</p> <p>Patrick Glynn Director Media Social Responsibility Project Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies George Washington University</p> <p>Os Guinness Senior Fellow The Trinity Forum</p> <p>Robert Hanley</p>	<p>Michael Medved Film Critic, Radio Host</p> <p>Thomas Monaghan President Ave Maria Foundation</p> <p>Richard John Neuhaus President Institute on Religion and Public Life</p> <p>Armand M. Nicholi, Jr., M.D. Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry Harvard Medical School</p> <p>Michael Novak George Frederick Jewett Scholar American Enterprise Institute</p> <p>Sam Nunn Former U.S. Senator</p> <p>Neil Postman Professor New York University</p> <p>Alvin Poussaint</p>
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Campus Crusade for Christ

Jimmy Carter**S. Truett Cathy**

CEO and Founder
Chick-Fil-A, Inc.

Lynne V. Cheney

Senior Fellow
American Enterprise Institute

Tim Collings

Assistant Professor
Technical University of British
Columbia
Inventor of the "V-Chip"

Senator Kent Conrad**Stephen R. Covey**

Co-Founder and Vice Chairman
Franklin Covey Company

Michael Cromartie

Vice President
Ethics and Public Policy Center

Mario Cuomo

Former Governor of New York

John J. DiIulio, Jr.

Fox Leadership Professor of
Politics
University of Pennsylvania

Don Eberly

Director
The Civil Society Project

Amitai Etzioni

University Professor
George Washington University

Vic Faraci

Senior Vice President
Warner Brothers Records

Gerald R. Ford**Elizabeth Fox-Genovese**

Eleonore Raoul Professor of
Humanities
Emory University

William Galston**Robert Hanley**

Actor, Writer, Director
Founder and President
Entertainment Fellowship

Stephen A. Hayner

President
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

Andy Hill

President of Programming
Channel One Network

Gertrude Himmelfarb

Professor Emeritus of History
Graduate School
City University of New York

Mark Honig

Executive Director
Parents Television Council

Wade F. Horn

President
National Fatherhood Initiative

James Davison Hunter

Kenan Professor of Sociology
and
Religious Studies
University of Virginia

**Senator Kay Bailey
Hutchison****Kathleen Hall Jamieson**

Dean and Professor of
Communications
Annenberg School for
Communications
University of Pennsylvania

Naomi Judd**Jack Kemp**

Co-Director
Empower America

Senator Jon Kyl**Rabbi Daniel Lapin**

President
Toward Tradition

Carol Lawrence**Alvin Poussaint**

Director, Media Center
Judge Baker Children's Center

General Colin Powell (ret.)**Eugene Rivers**

Co-Chair
National Ten Point Leadership
Foundation

Kevin Ryan

Professor and Director
Center for the Advancement of
Ethics and Character
Boston University

**General Norman
Schwarzkopf (ret.)****Glenn Tinder**

Professor of Political Science
Emeritus
University of Massachusetts at
Boston

C. DeLores Tucker

Chair and Convening Founder
The National Political Congress
of Black Women

Joan Van Ark

Actress, Producer, Director

Jim Wallis

Editor
Sojourners
Convener, Call to Renewal

David Walsh

President
National Institute on Media and
the Family

Pete Wehner

Executive Director of Policy
Empower America

Jerry M. Wiener, M.D.

Emeritus Professor Psychiatry
and Pediatrics
George Washington University

Elie Wiesel

Andrew Mellon Professor in the
Humanities

William Galston

Professor and Director
Institute for Philosophy
and Public Policy
School of Public Affairs
University of Maryland

Mandell Ganchrow, M.D.

President
Union of Orthodox Jewish
Congregations

Thomas Lickona

Professor of Education
State University of New York at
Cortland

Senator Joe Lieberman

Senator John McCain

E. Michael McCann

District Attorney
Milwaukee County, WI

Humanities

Boston University

James Q. Wilson

Emeritus Professor
University of California at Los
Angeles

Alan Wolfe

University Professor
Boston University

Daniel Yankelovich

President
The Public Agenda

Return to top of Appeal.

There have been over 5,000 additional signers of the Appeal since July 21.

For a list of additional signers, click [here](#).

Make a difference. Join us in supporting "An Appeal to Hollywood"

To become a signer of the Appeal, simply fill out the form below (first and last names, city and state required) and click the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form.

Signers will be listed on this site by FIRST and LAST NAMES, CITY, and STATE only. It may take a few days for your name(s) to appear on the signers list.

Alternatively, you can become a signer by writing to Media Appeal, Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies, George Washington University, 2130 H Street, NW, Suite 703, Washington, DC 20052 or by faxing the information to Media Appeal at (202) 994-1606.

Required fields are those marked with an asterisk (*). If you include your e-mail address, you will receive periodic updates on the progress of the Appeal.

(Please use normal capitalization, if possible, rather than all caps or all small letters. Thanks.)

First Name(s) (e.g., Mary or Mary & John)*	
Last Name*	
Street Address	
Apartment Number	
City*	
State*	- Choose State - <input type="button" value="v"/>
Zip Code	
Home Phone	() -
Work Phone	() -
E-mail Address	

To become a signer, after filling out form, click "Submit."

(Please use the above form if possible. But if you have difficulty using the form--for example, because your browser does not handle the form properly or because your residence is outside the United States--you can sign by sending First and Last Names, City & State (and Country if non-U.S.) to info@media-appeal.org. Also, if you have additional information to provide--for example, you are a superintendent of schools and wish to list your title--please sign by e-mail. If you include your e-mail address, you will receive periodic updates and other information. Thanks!)

For a list of additional signers since the release of the Appeal on July 21, [click here](#).

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Contact us at info@media-appeal.org

July 21, 1999

Lieberman , Leading Public Figures Issue "Appeal to Hollywood" for Higher Media Standards

Presidents Ford and Carter, Colin Powell, Mario Cuomo endorse call for entertainment industry code of conduct

WASHINGTON -- Senators Joe Lieberman (D-CT) and John McCain (R-AZ) and former Education Secretary William Bennett unveiled a signed public appeal today calling on the entertainment industry to set higher standards of responsibility.

The "Appeal to Hollywood" -- released at a Capitol Hill press conference and posted on the World Wide Web today -- carries signatures of more than 50 prominent Americans, including former Presidents Carter and Ford, Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel, Generals Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf, former Governor Mario Cuomo, former Senator Sam Nunn, five U.S. Senators, and leading clergy, academicians, business figures, and social activists.

Describing American parents as "deeply worried about their children's exposure to an increasingly toxic popular culture," the appeal acknowledges parents' "responsibility for shielding their own children" from harmful media exposure. But it argues that "even the most conscientious parent cries out for help" from an industry it says "too often abdicates its responsibility for its powerful impact on the young."

The statement urges entertainment industry executives "to band together to develop a new voluntary code of conduct, broadly modeled" on the old National Association of Broadcasters TV Code, which governed television programming until the early 1980s. It asks the industry to commit to an overall reduction of violence, ban marketing of adult-oriented materials to children, and establish minimum standards for each medium -- television, film, music, video, and electronic games -- "below which producers can be expected not to go."

"This is not an attack on Hollywood," Lieberman said. "It is an appeal to Hollywood to work with us as a national community in a joint effort to reduce the corrosive messages the media too often send our kids."

Organizers have posted the text of the appeal on the Internet at WWW.MEDIA-APPEAL.ORG and are inviting citizens to sign the statement on-line as part of what will be an ongoing grass-roots campaign. A petition will be presented to industry leaders toward the end of the year to demonstrate the breadth of concern about the entertainment culture's influence.

► [Click here to view Senator Lieberman's statement.](#)

June 4, 1999

Lieberman to Introduce New Bill Requiring Standard Warning Labels for Media Violence

WASHINGTON -- Senator Joe Lieberman announced today that he will join Senator John McCain (R-AZ) in introducing legislation next week to create a uniform rating system for all entertainment media violence. The "21st Century Media Responsibility Act" amends the Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act to apply that law's warning label requirements to violent media products.

"This is a common-sense, forward-looking response to the growing culture of violence surrounding America's children," Lieberman said. "It won't singlehandedly stop media standards from falling, or substitute for industry self-restraint. But it will help make ratings a more useful tool for parents who want to shield their kids from potentially harmful entertainment products -- particularly in the years ahead, as technologies converge and the bulk of our entertainment will be delivered through a single wire into the home. We're about to enter a radically different media universe, and it only makes sense to modernize the ratings concept to fit the new contours of the Information Age."

The McCain-Lieberman bill would give the various entertainment media industries six months to work together to develop a common rating system for motion pictures, television programs, interactive video games, and recorded music. The standard warning labels would have to reflect the nature, context, intensity of violent content, and age appropriateness of the media product. Retail outlets would be responsible for enforcing age restrictions in accordance with the new system.

The Federal Trade Commission would be given the authority to accept, reject, or modify the proposed industry rating system to reflect the intent of the law. To gain approval, the warning labels would have to include symbols, or icons, and written text, and accurately reflect the violent content, and age appropriateness of the product. Labels would have to be identical, regardless of product or service, and be conspicuously displayed. Responsibility for labeling would be placed on the manufacturer of the media product and enforced by the FTC.

This proposal is the latest in a series of initiatives Lieberman has pushed in recent weeks to reduce the threat of media violence to children. Last month, he cosponsored legislation that calls for a Federal investigation of the entertainment industry's marketing practices to determine to what extent that ultraviolent, adult-rated products are being targeted to kids. The bill would also encourage the various entertainment media to adopt stronger codes of conduct to help limit the access of children to potentially harmful products. The Senate unanimously approved this package as an amendment to the recently-passed juvenile justice bill, and it now awaits action by the House of Representatives.

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June 16, 1998

Lieberman Calls on Music Industry to Toughen Labeling System for Violent and Obscene Record Lyrics Senate hearing shows need to do more to restrict children's access to harmful music

WASHINGTON -- Senator Joe Lieberman issued the following statement in conjunction with the Senate Commerce Committee hearing today on the recording industry's labeling system for explicit lyrics.

"I want to express my appreciation to Chairman McCain and Senator Brownback for holding this hearing to explore an issue that is of concern to many American parents, and that is the easy access children have to hyperviolent, degrading and ultimately damaging rock and gangsta rap music.

"This is a problem that Senator Brownback and I initially raised last November at a hearing we held to examine the impact that this kind of music may have on children. As part our discussion, we heard compelling testimony from several experts indicating that repeated exposure to records that glamorize murder and mayhem, combined with all the other messages the popular culture sends telling kids that killing is cool, can have a harmful influence.

"It was also clear from this hearing, as well as from anecdotal evidence Bill Bennett and I have come across in our efforts to shame the corporations sponsoring such antisocial music, that the recording industry's warning labels are simply not working in deterring kids from getting their hands on these potentially harmful records.

"Unlike the rating systems employed by the television, movie and video game industries, the one-size-fits-all warning label the recording industry uses makes no distinction between the most perverse, obscenity-laden gangsta rap music (what might be considered X-rated) and records that contain a few intermittent expletives (what might be considered P.G.-rated). This lack of information leaves conscientious parents largely in the dark, and often means they don't know how graphic the lyrics are until after they or their children buy the record.

"But the problem goes much deeper than that. The reality is that most parents are unaware of the extremely graphic nature of some of the records that are being marketed to and bought by children. And the reality is that unlike video games, which generally cost upwards of \$50 and thus require the parent to be involved in the purchase, music CDs and cassettes today are well within the price range of millions of early adolescents and younger children.

"Some responsible retailers take steps on their own to limit kids from buying records with hyperviolent and obscene lyrics, but it seems most do not. One reason for that, we were told by representatives from the National Association of Recording Merchandisers, is the current warning label is too broad to identify those records that are clearly inappropriate for children.

"The testimony given at today's hearing reaffirms my belief that the Recording Industry Association of America needs to reevaluate its labeling system and consider expanding it to provide consumers and retailers with more information. In particular, the testimony of Debbie Pellet, who teaches at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, was quite striking, strongly suggesting that violent music may have played a significant role in the tragic

shooting at her school and reminding us of the gravity of the threat involved here.

"I am disappointed that neither the RIAA or any of the major corporate distributors chose to appear at today's hearing to hear these concerns firsthand and engage in an important and consequential dialogue. This is a message they need to hear, and I am committed to working with Senator Brownback and others to make sure they do.

"Ultimately, my hope is that we can convince the nation's major corporate producers and distributors -- Sony, Seagram, EMI, Time Warner -- to draw some lines and to stop profiting from music that is so repulsive that no newspaper in America would reprint the lyrics. But in the meantime, at a minimum, we should call on these companies and the RIAA to do their part to limit the access of kids to these kind of records."

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June 16, 1998, Tuesday

SECTION: CAPITOL HILL HEARING TESTIMONY

LENGTH: 3014 words

HEADLINE: TESTIMONY June 16, 1998 BARBARA P. WYATT PRESIDENT PARENTS' MUSIC RESOURCE CENTER SENATE COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION MUSIC LYRICS AND ADVISORY LABELS

BODY:

Statement prepared by Barbara P. Wyatt, President Parents' Music Resource Center on Music Lyrics before the United States Senate Commerce Committee June 16, 1998 I speak as President of the Parents' Music Resource Center which was founded in 1985. In 1996 I became president having been on the board since one year after its inception. As a music major I can speak with knowledge as to the effects of music. In 1985 four mothers, Susan Baker, Tipper Gore, Pam Hower, and Sally Nevius became aware of recordings purchased by their children. They were appalled by what they heard and decided to see if these messages were common. Much to their surprise and horror they discovered that many recordings on the market include profane, violent, and sexually explicit lines, plus some advocate drug and alcohol use, suicide and even necrophilia. Not only were the lyrics disgusting, enclosures and covers were bad or worse. In talking with other parents,, the mothers found that most were unaware of the contents of popular music. Parents would often voice their feelings with "turn that thing down, I don't want to hear it" or would make the firm statement, "Go in your room if you are going to listen to that!" They were unaware of the contents of their listening progeny. The women decided it was vital to launch an educational campaign. A board of concerned parents was created and the PMRC was born. Within months there were Senate hearings, not to promote legislation, but to alert the public as to the corrupt and blatant messages being sold to children. Subsequently they met with members of recording industry associations and after much discussion, an agreement was reached whereby companies producing the recordings would place parental advisory labels on their own releases which include violent or sexually explicit messages. One might consider this a current rendition of the fox guarding the hen house! Unfortunately the industry has used the label as a license to act even more irresponsibly. The problem is that many recordings which should be labeled are not and often the labels are not very obvious. In addition, the industry continues to contract with artists encouraging them to capitalize on the bizarre, obscene and corrupt messages that would be objectionable to most parents - IF the parents were aware of what their children were hearing. It is the responsibility of parents and adults supervising young people to know the content, but how can they be aware of the lyrics if the packages are wrapped and the lyrics inside? They cannot review the lyrics before purchase and the stores will not refund the money after the package is opened. Most adults want to act responsibly, but they need tools to help them make choices commensurate with their own values. There is legislation that indicates consumers have the right to know about any product they purchase. For instance, our food is labeled every ingredient. We know more what is in a

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jar of pickles than we know about the contents of the music being sold to our children! We recognize that the music industry is a business and the executives are responsible to stockholders for a return on investments. The greater the return the higher the salaries, the opportunity for acquisitions and more market share. We understand that. We also understand the musicians right of expression and know that many talented persons are using their talents to impact our young people in a negative way when they could have such a positive influence. The industry could promote music that would be uplifting rather than this overkill of the harmful. So many of our young people do not even know the wonderful music that abounds - with music eliminated in public schools, students have not been exposed to the many genre such as jazz, show tunes, classical and spirituals. They have not learned to read music nor to sing. All they know are the TOP FORTY. The industry does not show that it cares about our youth. They have two lines they promote - one is pushing the line of indecency to entice young people and the other is the bottom line called greed. The recording industry should have an interest in providing the best for our youth; however, they promote negative messages which are not only immoral, but which advocate illegal acts with results that can be devastating for our young people and society. There is evidence that people act out what they see and hear. When the music is put with imagery and words, the action on the part of the listener becomes active, not passive. The imagery becomes very real. People ask what is wrong with America? Unfortunately the entertainment industry has a great influence. Some in the music industry fight drugs, are involved with the homeless, the elderly, and the hungry and they are concerned about the violence, but they are talking out of both sides of their mouth. Their good works are overshadowed by the volume of recordings that are the antithesis of their good programs. Young people are listening to music for HOURS every day and they are watching MTV which puts imagery in their fertile minds. How do we know it has an impact? Just consider how Berlitz teaches a foreign language? They teach it by repetition. They bombard the brain with the same words over and over again. The brain receives ALL messages -it does not discriminate between retaining or discarding the good and the bad. What you put in the brain stays and if you feed the brain messages which are detrimental there will be an outcome that resembles the input. The more vulnerable the child, the greater the possibility that the negative messages will create problems. This does not say that every negative is going to corrupt every child, but continuous exposure does have an effect. Dr. Mark I. Singer of Case Western Reserve University completed a study on the Mental Health Consequences of Adolescents' Exposure to Violence in which he studied violent adolescents. 93.4% of the most-violent males and 95.8% females listen to music as their coping mechanism. Consider the music and one can imagine the results. The music industry is saturating the market with the messages which are hurting young people not only in America, but around the world. While in Greece last summer, I had the opportunity to talk with prominent people of that country. I was asked the question "why are you sending such violent music, television and movies to our country?" How can I answer that question other than to respond greed. Their philosopher Plato even indicated that music forms character and therefore plays an important role in determining social and political issues, he stated "When modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the states change with them." The labels were not advocated to provide a shield for the industry and the artists, (they view it as protection against law suits), but it was hoped that the industry would both comply with the labeling and stop contracting with performers who advocated actions which would be harmful. We understand that they the artists feel they are the reflection of society and not one of the causes of the problem, but since they are viewed as idols they do have an

influence on our youth. You in the Congress are concerned about smoking, but these lyrics are equally harmful we are talking about telling young people to take drugs, drink alcohol, and rape. The venom in some lyrics would not be allowed in most homes. The current idol, Marilyn Manson evokes shouts and cheers in his concerts when he advocates taking drugs and killing parents. Unfortunately many parents have no idea about these idols who have such an influence on their children. We receive calls from adults constantly who voice their concerns and express that they do not know how to combat this problem. They cannot identify music which is within their value system. Many of the recordings are not only violent, but much is verbal pornography! Do the labels work? NO! There are standardized labels, but no standards. Some companies label and others do not. Packages occasionally have enclosures which are offensive, but are not labeled. A child of any age can purchase recordings. When the Senate hearing on "The Impact of Violent Music " was held on November 6, 1998, Hillary Rosen, President of the Recording Industry Association of America stated the RIAA supports the restriction that no one under 17 can purchase recordings which are labeled. A boy who appears to be 12, but is 14, went unaccompanied into a store in Tennessee, at my request, last week and purchased a Marilyn Manson recording, no questions asked. An adult tried to return it, but the store would not accept the return. Stores often refuse to refund the cost of recordings which an adult finds objectionable. In fact, we have been told that there is a limit as to the number of recordings each store can return. Obviously that does not bode well for the concerned parent who wants to make a return and cannot as the store has reached its limit. The same young boy went into another store to make the same purchase and they would not allow him to buy the recording stating, -hew.as, .too young - that store should get ALL the business. Music executives state that movies and television have similar contents - that is true as young people are avid viewers, but our youth are constantly listening to music. They play it while walking; riding, exercising, eating, while in malls, at school events and doing homework. Music is very much a part of their everyday activity and it is a very powerful tool. Music is known to heal, to calm and to excite. Music with lyrics can have an even greater impact. While speaking at a conference called by the Lieutenant Governor of Alabama, a young girl asked if she could make a comment. She said, "you complain of the actions of youth, but who makes the movies, who sells the alcohol, who produces the television, who writes the advertising, who imports the drugs, who contracts with the artists, who use and abuse young people for sex - adults do and then you blame the young people and ask us why we act as we do? The truth hurts. The PMRC does not approve of censorship, but just as in everything we do, each must act responsibly and when we do not there are consequences. we are reaping the consequences of a society that has set aside values and civility. There are laws which have been enacted to protect children. We have seen many times how industry plays both sides of the street. They say they care, but look what they do. We implore the industry to address the needs of parents and communities and that the industry become the parent's friend. There need to be changes and we need to make them now. A more effective system would be to make the labels more specific as to content, similar to television ratings. The First Amendment was not written to provide license to corrupt children, and we are not asking for legislation, but we are asking for cooperation within the industry. We are all familiar with the words from the Bible which state "Bring up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." The industry is constantly capturing our next generation. Morality, civility and virtues have made civilizations prosper and have been the basis for noble leadership. Today that is lacking in America. We can either be the beacon

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on the hill for good or the Sodom and Gomorrah of the next century. Our youth will answer that question as they mature and we as adults are responsible for the result. We thank you, Senators, for your concern and for this hearing. In bringing this issue to the public you provide an excellent forum to address this vital subject. We who are on the front lines on a daily basis appreciate this opportunity.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: June 18, 1998