

SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

Vol. 1, No. 20

The Disappearance of Childhood....and More

One of sociologist Neil Postman's many provocative works was titled *The Disappearance of Childhood*. His thesis was that children are being robbed of their innocence, their naiveté, their ability to even *be* a child. He contended that in our world, we ask children to embrace mature issues, themes and experiences, long before they are ready. Postman argues that the very idea of childhood is that there is a time when a young person is sheltered from certain ideas, experiences, practices, expectations and knowledge. They are sheltered from adult secrets, particularly sexual ones. Certain facets of life - its mysteries, contradictions, tragedies, violence - are not considered suitable for children to know. Only as a child grows into adulthood are they revealed in ways that they can assimilate psychologically, emotionally and spiritually.

Postman's analysis, first offered in 1982, was prescient. Today, twelve and thirteen year-old girls are among the highest paid models in America, presented to us as knowing and sexually enticing adults. Children's literature no longer exists. The language of adults and children - including what they address in life - has become the same. It is virtually uncontested among sociologists that the behavior, language, attitudes and desires - even the physical appearance - of adults and children are becoming indistinguishable. Even the children on TV act like adults. They do not differ significantly in their interests, language, dress or sexuality from the adults on the show; making the same knowing wisecracks, and tossing out the same sexual innuendo.

As Postman writes, in having access to the previously hidden fruit of adult information, the child is expelled from the garden of childhood.

What Postman did not foresee was once expelled, they would also become orphaned.

In one of the most alarming rulings in recent years, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that certain parental rights stop once children enter their public school doors. Specifically, parents are no longer legally in charge of instructing their children about sex. The state, not the parents, has

the primary authority to teach children about sex. The November 2, 2005 ruling, *Fields v. Palmdale School District* (decided by the same judge who ruled against the Pledge of Allegiance), carried the following words:

We agree, and hold that there is no fundamental right of parents to be the exclusive provider of information regarding sexual matters to their children, either independent of their right to direct the upbringing and education of their children or encompassed by it.

Further, the judge - Stephen Reinhardt – added these words:

We also hold that parents have no due process or privacy right to over-ride the determinations of public school as to the information to which their children will be exposed while enrolled as students.

This ruling, which may serve as precedent for other jurisdiction to issue similar rulings, affects nine states: Washington, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona, Alaska, and Hawaii.

As alarming was the response from California citizens. Shortly after the 9th Circuit ruling, Californians rejected a ballot measure that would have required notification of parents when their minor daughters seek abortions. In essence, California's citizens have voted that parents have no legal right to know about the consequences of the sexual actions of their children.

As a Washington Times editorial suggested, the ballot measure rejection and the 9th Circuit ruling "may be harbingers of the formal recognition of a new right that has taken hold in many American communities...the right not to be inconvenienced...best enjoyed by eschewing all personal responsibility and expecting state actors to minimize any consequences."

So parents no longer have to be burdened by teaching their children about sex, for that will be cared for by public schools. And when their minor daughter gets pregnant, the state will step in again. Parents never need know, and as a result, never need be bothered.

It is often said, "As goes California, so goes the rest of the country."

If so, the disappearance of childhood is going to continue to lead to the disappearance of much, much more. First on the list appears to be the disappearance of parenthood.

James Emery White

Sources

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