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CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Immediately after the 1980 elections, a campaign began by the liberal media elite to warn President Reagan and Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker to stay away from the so-called "social issues." That's a rather unsatisfactory term which has become jargon to describe issues that relate to moral and family values.

This evasion of an important cluster of issues certainly was not dictated by pragmatic politics. The evidence was overwhelming that the people who care about the "social issues" made up an essential portion of the majority that elected Ronald Reagan.

The American language has thus far been inadequate to describe the identity of the group that has a consensus on social issues, but the term "Middle Americans" comes the closest. This constituency has no boundaries of geography, economic class, social status, political party, race, religion, sex, or educational attainment. That's why the Reagan majority proved so elusive to the pollsters before the election and to the pundits afterwards.

The Middle Americans have a shared scale of values. Their moral strictness has probably eroded somewhat in recent years, but despite that attrition, this constituency still holds to such old fashioned fundamentals as the Ten Commandments, honesty is the best policy, the traditional family unit, community maintenance of law and order, neighborhood schools that teach the basics, and the work and thrift ethic.

To Middle Americans, for example, the sex-exploitation of children would rank as a crime so heinous as to have no reasoned defense. Yet in recent years, thousands of children have been destroyed -- physiologically, emotionally and mentally -- by sex fiends, operating both covertly and openly.

The sickness of a society is not measured by the extremes of its crimes, or even by its numbers of criminals. History teaches that every society has its criminals, and that sadism is not a 20th century invention.

Rather, the sickness of a society is measured by the influence and respectability of those who condone and even defend sin and crimes. Unhappily, in recent years, intellectual defenders of immorality have been legion.

The crime defenders have sought to disguise their departure from traditional norms by blurring the lines between good and evil, by denying the existence of sin, and by mocking the right and strait-jacketing the ability of society to protect itself and its individuals against criminals.

When confronted by the facts of a horrifying proliferation of the crime of exploiting and abusing children to induce them to perform all kinds of sexual acts while being filmed for the perverted enjoyment and financial profits of their exploiters, 37 states passed a law prohibiting the distribution of such materials.

That's when the malaise of our society revealed itself. The so-called intellectual self-proclaimed "civil libertarians" rushed to the rescue of those dregs of humanity who deliberately lead children into lives of sin and depravity. The intellectuals minimized and trivialized the horror of the crime by labeling it merely "kiddie porn." The liberal lawyers wove a web of "freedom of press" and "civil liberties" slogans under which the children were exposed naked to the commercial cameras filming their private little parts and private unnatural acts, while their exploiters were clothed in the sacred mantle of the First Amendment.

So successful were these perverters of the First Amendment that their arguments prevailed even in the highest court of the state which witnessed the worst excesses of this crime, namely, New York. The sexual abuse of children on the streets at Times Square has been shamelessly open.

But this essay has a happy ending. Just when it might have appeared that the sexploiters masquerading as civil libertarians had completely rent the sanity of our governmental apparatus, the U.S. Supreme Court rode to our rescue with a unanimous decision that, indeed, "the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of children constitutes a governmental objective of surpassing importance."

And that's not all. Furthermore, the Court said, all those artificial tests of obscenity which the courts have erected to shield smut peddlers from prosecution are

henceforth irrelevant to our right to protect children from sexual abuse.

The New York law was one of 20 state laws that prohibit child pornography regardless of whether or not it meets those artificial, court-invented tests of obscenity. The laws of 17 other states plus the Federal Government are much weaker.

Congress and those 17 states, plus the other 15 states which have not yet confronted the problem, should act quickly to pass legislation which is as effective as the New York law that we know is constitutional.

The Supreme Court was not afraid to deal with one of the major "social issues" of our time, child pornography. It has forcefully made clear that the promoters of sexual "liberation" and "permissive" morality have gone too far. Maybe the Supreme Court reads the election returns more accurately and rapidly than Congress does.