

A Self-Righteous Tract

Porn Generation: How Social Liberalism Is Corrupting Our Future by Ben Shapiro

Reviewed by Chaim I. Waxman

Does one need an entire book, with much graphic and minute detail, to make the case that there is much in the media and other parts of the public culture that is base and perverse? Does anyone doubt that the standards of decency in the media dropped significantly during the second half of the twentieth century?

One does not have to be an Orthodox Jew - as Ben Shapiro keeps reminding us that he is - to feel that something is wrong with the content of much of what is available on television, in the movies, and especially on the Internet. Notwithstanding that Shapiro seems to think he is the final arbiter on such matters, there is rather broad agreement in American society on what constitutes decency in certain regards. It seems that only few do not object to gangsta rap or public fornication. Presumably, almost all parents of young children wish they would not be exposed to much of what has become standard fare in the popular media.

Indeed, the United States is a much more decent society than Shapiro, who has no monopoly on religiosity and religious observance, suggests. Both are very prevalent in American society, certainly far more than in any other Western country. Shapiro, however, portrays an American society that is the nadir of unprecedented immorality and well on its way to self-destruction. Of course, the Bible itself describes a number of societies that hardly seem less prurient.

Shapiro's minutely detailed tirade raises, unfortunately, the question of whether reading, viewing, and writing about pornography is something he does not rather enjoy. In reiterating the implication that pornography was what drove the serial killer Ted Bundy and, by extension, will have similar consequences for many Americans, Shapiro's spuriousness destroys what credibility he has left. There is no basis for claiming a causal relationship between pornography and Bundy's crimes.

The most constructive part of the book is in the all-too-short last chapter, which contains a roundtable discussion with others - even if they are all political conservatives - about methods for dealing with the problem. There seems little reason to trust government censors, any more than to trust the rating board of the motion picture industry, which at least does not wield legal powers. Greater parental involvement and responsibility seems a much better solution. Indeed, the problem Shapiro discusses is part of much broader societal issues, including the role of the family and leisure time.

A much more effective approach would have been to offer a brief chapter indicating the rapid spread of pornography followed by a well-grounded, broad-based strategy for dealing with it. Instead, rather than a meaningful analysis, the book is little more than an unsuccessful attempt to be both self-righteous and titillating.

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