

"Pied-Pipers-In-Charge Are Damaging Our Children"

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by William Niggemeyer

David Carlin Jr., a former state senator from Rhode Island, has stated that, "It is absurd to believe we can elevate the quality of American education by improving schools while ignoring the cultural environment in which our children live and move and have their being."

He believes that we must engage in a critique - in a radical critique of prevailing American culture. Without an in-depth evaluation of contemporary culture and its impact on our children, we might just as well try to improve the lungs of children by having them do breathing exercises while leaving the surrounding air filled with toxic pollutants.

Who are the shapers of the American mind and culture today? A radical shift of historic dimensions occurred when the television age dawned in America. The social roots of our society - the church, the family, the school and civil authority - slowly and unknowingly have given way to television, the friendly living room sales agent for a booming business culture.

Television has become the third parent: our children's new soulmate. The direction that we have taken as a culture has been determined more by the decisions of corporate managers who practice a tyranny of remoteness. They are removed from the consequences resulting from the types of programs being fed into our homes.

Their slick programming seductively impregnates our children with the values of consumerism. They pander to human weakness to "sell" their self-serving concept of the good life. Violence and sexual innuendo make up a good portion of the common fare being fed to our nation and its children.

Among the invisible shapers of our consumer culture there is a widespread loss of civic consciousness, a loss of a sense of responsibility for the well-being of the nation's children as well as their fellow citizens. Today, many of the nation's power brokers have removed themselves from contact with the concerns of ordinary citizens - by withdrawing from the wider society into guarded, gated residential enclaves and secure ultramodern offices. For many, no higher allegiance binds them to a reality larger than themselves and the bottom line. Indifference of the heart is casually accepted as an appropriate adaptation to the necessary realities of market relations. The sense of a social covenant with fellow citizens from the "common good" is seldom recognized as a priority.

It is time for a change. We adults must engage in the cultural battle that is being waged for the minds and hearts of our most precious possession - our children. The media culture is producing young people who are short on respect and long on self-centeredness.

The true pedagogues of today are extremely well paid script writers and public relations people who create the images and scripts that television, advertising, movies, politics and the celebrities depend on.

Some observers of the American scene say that our nation is experiencing a Culture of Life and a Culture of Death: a culture that elevates the human spirit and culture that deadens, or at least neutralizes, the human spirit. We need a cultural climate that portrays the wonder and magnificence of life in all its forms, a cultural climate that helps people fulfill their humanity - to live a meaningful life, not just make a living.

What kind of legacy are we leaving for those who come after us?

What is the state of a society that cares too little for the well-being of its own children?

Are we not the evildoers because we have denied them their true birthright?

The battle of good against evil always begins with one small voice raised in the crowd proclaiming that the king has no clothes, that the new gods are hollow plaster, that the new masters in the land are predators and charlatans.

Until that voice is raised, the tyranny will continue. Our children will be the victims.

William Niggemeyer is a retired public school teacher and a grandparent.