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Separation of Sex and State?

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Carol Platt Liebau thinks that if “religious” messages are to be censored in public because they offend secularists, then sexual messages should be curtailed as well. Writing in the Sunday edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, she argues that enough is enough.

From her article, “[Separation of Sex and State](#)” in the December 11, 2005 edition of the paper:

Americans are bombarded with sexual images year-round. In October, Victoria’s Secret introduced mall floor displays, titled “Backstage Sexy,” featuring bare-bottomed mannequins in provocative poses and suggestions of bondage. Billboards advertising sex shops, strip shows and “gentlemen’s clubs” appear alongside highways. Women’s magazines at checkout counters offer graphic sex tips. Television is rife with innuendo and more. The FM airwaves are saturated with musical paeans to lust. When it comes to sex in the public square, envelope-pushing is the order of the day. The graphic images, sights and sounds offend many religious, cultural or social conservative Americans. Some even voice outrage, but to little lasting effect.

That’s because American “tastemakers” — elites in the media and the courts — have shaped a libertarian social consensus. That an advertising campaign, television program or song transgresses traditionalist values is irrelevant. Americans have decided, for better or worse, that one group’s sensitivities cannot govern what is available to others. The traditionalists must avert their eyes from what offends them lest their sensibilities infringe on others’ freedom of expression. Contrast the treatment of sex in the public square with that of religion. A 2003 Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll found that 96% of Americans celebrate Christmas. About 90% recognize Christmas as the birthday of Jesus Christ, according to a 2000 Gallup poll. These are substantial majorities, larger than the number of citizens who feel proud to be American (84%), higher than support for the war on terror only five months after Sept. 11, 2001 (93%), and greater than the percentage of Americans who believed that Elvis Presley was dead as of 2002 (88%).

She makes a good argument. It’s not going to get very far in the public debate, of course. But she’s right.

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