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Civilization on the Brink

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Consider the announcement by Playboy magazine that it will be offering galleries of photographs for display on digital media players such as the new version of Apple's famed iPod. The magazine will produce galleries of both nude and non-nude models and will package the pornographic products under the name "iBod."

John D. Thomas, editor of Playboy.com, told CNN, "The overwhelming response we have received for this feature supports our theory that iPod Photo users are a technologically advanced group with a significant interest in enjoying beautiful Playboy images." Users will be required to sign up for the service at Playboy's "Cyber Club," and will be charged a monthly fee.

The iPod has become one of the most popular technological developments of recent years. A total of over ten million units are now in use, and almost 4.5 million were sold just this past Christmas season.

The iPod allows users to record hundreds of CD's onto the little unit's memory drive and then access the music through the iPod's sophisticated interface. It is a model of user-friendly technology that offers a truly advanced digital music experience. My iPod travels with me virtually everywhere I go, allowing me access to hundreds of recordings. Nothing like it has ever existed before, and its many imitators have failed thus far to put a dent in the iPod's sales.

This new development from Playboy serves as an important reminder that technology comes with tremendous opportunity for good and for evil. This is true of the computer and the Internet on a global scale, and it is true for all those iPod users who can now transform their digital music device into a visual bank of pornographic images.

On another front, pornography is now being marketed across middle America at X-rated "superstores" conveniently located at interstate exits. This trend has been documented in a major report from the Los Angeles Times that traces the development of these pornography mega-centers across rural America.

As the paper explains, these new porn superstores are "brightly lighted, clean, as well organized and well-stocked as a Wal-Mart."

Interestingly, many of these stores are located along interstates and placed at exits that provide access to extremely small villages and towns. As the paper documents, these X-rated businesses now appear in hamlets such as Quaker City, Ohio (pop. 563), and Nelson, Missouri (pop. 212), as well as Perry, Michigan, and Montrose, Illinois.

While some suspect that the stores cater largely to truck drivers and other professionals, sources inside the industry indicate that the placement of these stores along major interstates allows individuals seeking pornography to leave their home areas and go where they can presumably purchase X-rated wares with anonymity.

Year by year, the pornography industry finds new ways to extend its reach into the culture. One recent trend is evident in the mainstreaming of pornography through major titles released by the country's largest publishers. As CBS News recently reported, "Sex and porn are hot, and the more real and hardcore, the better."

Publisher Judith Regan explains, "Pornography is a big business. I think it should be written about. I think it should be talked about." Regan is well known for releasing bestsellers by authors such as Rush Limbaugh and Michael Moore. Now, she has decided to exploit the mainstreaming of pornography.

"I believe that there is a porno-ization of the culture," she says. "What that means is that if you watch every single thing that's going on out there in the popular culture you will see females scantily clad, implanted, dressed up like hookers, porn stars and so on. And that this is very acceptable."

On another front, homecoming just isn't what it used to be. The New York Times recently reported that homosexual students are forcing a revision of homecoming traditions. Both high schools and colleges are under pressure to accept gay candidates for homecoming king and queen, with mixed results.

According to the paper, Vanderbilt University's homecoming last fall became controversial when a gay student ran for homecoming queen and later took his place on the court, dressed in drag. Similarly, St. Cloud State University in Minnesota's student body elected its first male homecoming "queen" in October.

Some greet this development with enthusiasm. "We always get Mr. Heterosexual Vanderbilt and Ms. Heterosexual Vanderbilt to be the perfect king and queen," commented Everett Moran, a gay senior at Vanderbilt and a candidate for homecoming queen. Mr. Moran appeared at the homecoming football game as a part of the royal court wearing what the Times described as "a black dress with an Empire waist and elbow-length red gloves, accentuated by the yellow sash draped over each of the 11 homecoming court students."

While some high schools now offer separate homosexual homecoming festivities, others have allowed homosexual students to run for homecoming honors. At Sweetwater High School in National City, California, a lesbian was elected homecoming queen in 2001, wearing a tuxedo to the celebration.

The gay students pushing this agenda claim that equality in homecoming festivities is necessary in order to affirm gay students in their lifestyle. Like Mr. Moran, many admit that homecoming is largely a heterosexual ritual—but one they intend to revolutionize.

In recent years, the schools have become battlegrounds in the culture war, but whereas most early battles focused on the curriculum and the content of teaching, extracurricular activities are now often flashpoints of controversy and conflict.

In addition, special emphasis weeks are also pushing new limits, as well as radical agendas. Columnist David Limbaugh reported that Newton North High School in Newtonville, Massachusetts, recently held a "Transgender, Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Awareness Day" [known as "To BGLAD Day"] in December. Students were encouraged to skip classes in order to attend workshops and special sessions at which speakers would "make students feel good about homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism."

According to Limbaugh, parents were not informed about this event in advance, and many were mortified to know that this was an official school activity.

Under the guise of "education," homosexual activists presented programs and activities that featured titles such as this: "Little Theatre: Life Outside the Gender Norm, What Happens When One's Gender Identity Does Not Match Their Sex?" According to the agenda, participants in that session would learn about gay persons' "experiences with gender identity and expression." Others were invited to participate in "Out at the Old Ballgame: Athletes and Coaches Discuss What It's Like to Be GLBT in the Gym, on the Field, and on the Road." Will parents accept this as a legitimate educational program? What about the ideological agenda being force-fed to Newtonville's teenagers?

David Limbaugh pointed to the inconsistency of the cultural left in allowing and sponsoring such blatantly ideological programs. "Can you imagine what would happen if a public school affirmatively endorsed a workshop in which homosexuality was described as sinful?" Limbaugh documented a 2002 case in which a high school student in Ann

Arbor, Michigan wasn't even allowed to participate in a discussion on homosexuality because she announced her intention to voice disapproval of homosexual behavior. "We're not talking about the school endorsing her opinion, mind you," Limbaugh insisted, "but just allowing her to speak her mind." The school refused to allow the girl to speak, all in the name of tolerance and diversity, of course.

What makes our current reality so frightening is the realization that these are not isolated events and miscellaneous anecdotes taken from the margins of the culture. Stories like these now pop up all across the American landscape, in cities big and small and in both "red" and "blue" states across the nation. America is becoming so desensitized to pornography that we no longer notice its existence along our interstates, in our best selling books, and on our neighbor's iPod. Confusion over sexuality and gender is now so commonplace that gay homecoming "queens" no longer shock.

A culture quickly becomes what it tolerates. These troubling developments should be sufficient to warn us that the unimaginable can quickly become the norm.

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