

CENSORSHIP IN MUSIC

Censorship in music is a topic that has brought about a lot of controversy in the past few decades. Some people believe that music should be censored so that it will not be offensive to anyone. Others feel that music should not ever be subject to censorship since it is an expression of artistic creativity. Still others fall somewhere in between, with the opinion that at least the most obscene and offensive material should be restricted in some way.

Whether or not a person finds a piece of music obscene depends largely on his or her moral or religious beliefs. These views change from generation to generation. Those people who believe that music should be censored feel that some of the language used by music artists is vulgar and crude. They further this opinion by pointing out that some of this music is played on the radio and on television and is therefore accessible to the public. Many parents do not wish for their children to hear foul language. Today, foul language heard on public radio broadcasts and on television is edited out in some way. Some artists make two versions of their songs: one uncensored for the album, and another censored for television and radio. Even cable television, which is paid for by the viewers monthly, is subject to this form of censorship, although pay-per-view channels are not.

Preventing or punishing speech is a clear violation of the First Amendment, which says: "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or of the press." Therefore, the First Amendment guarantees the right to freedom of speech.

Censorship violates this right, which is the complaint made by many musicians. Some artists express their feelings directly through their music, projecting their emotions for the world to hear. By censoring their true words and forcing them to modify their lyrics, censors are, in essence, limiting the artist's right to express himself or herself.

Does censoring music really solve the problem of exposing children to explicit language? Many children hear foul language from friends, older siblings, or parents at an early age. Just by walking down the street, they can encounter any number of colorful phrases, not to mention the obscene actions that they can witness. Children may revere someone who uses obscene language, but that person could just as easily be a parent or sibling and not necessarily a musician. Eventually, everyone will be exposed to language they do not find acceptable. It is not solely the music artists' responsibility to restrict

themselves for the sake of children. Censorship, in this case, is strongly biased and cannot compensate for the number of other places and people a child could come across to encounter this type of language.

The question is: Who should decide what you read or view – the church, the government . . . or you? The answer to that question is you. Censorship on television channels such as Nickelodeon® OR PBS® is understandable due to the fact that they mainly broadcast young children's programming. However, it is unnecessary to censor stations generally viewed (or listened to) by older audiences.

A few years ago, angry mothers and fathers sued artists and/or record companies for releasing albums that, without making note of the fact, contained explicit lyrics. They were concerned that their children might repeat these newly-learned words to teachers, principals, friends, and/or siblings.

By law, record companies are now required to put stickers on cassette tapes and compact discs that say: 'PARENTAL ADVISORY. EXPLICIT LYRICS.' Many parents complained that the art on many album covers and within the contents of the albums themselves was too vulgar. For example, the Black Crowes' *Amorica* album, after its release, was blasted by the media. The band chose to re-release the album with disputed sections of the cover blacked out completely.

If parents do not wish for their children to hear foul language, they should more closely supervise their children. While the government has taken an active role in this fight, it should not be expected to shoulder the full responsibility of limiting each child's access to adult themes and language. If a concerned parent is worried about his or her child's exposure to foul language and controversial music, it is not the artist's job to limit creative freedom. The parent can always screen the album before allowing her child to hear it. If he or she doesn't like the content, the album can always be returned or simply not purchased at all.

Many parents nowadays would rather have outside agencies limit their children than to take on the responsibility themselves. Unfortunately, this attitude leads to the restriction – and sometime the abolishment – of other people's freedoms. Under the First Amendment, we all have the right to express ourselves freely and openly. Censorship serves to kill that right and directly contradicts what it means to be an American.