Censorship Essay, Research Paper

Censorship in Television

The government is correct in trying to censor what is seen on television. Censorship does not violate the first amendment and it prevents the harmful effects of graphic television. Many people are in favor of censorship and it may be accomplished without violating the rights of broadcasters or any other individuals. Censorship “refers to suppression of information, ideas, or artistic expression by anyone, whether government officials, church authorities, private pressure groups, or speakers, writers, and artists themselves” (Grolier, Inc.). Censorship can be a bad thing, and can also be positive. For television use, it is there to protect the people, namely children. There is a fear that the expression if not curtailed will do harm to individuals in its audiences or to society as a whole. “Obscene material is attacked because of the fear that it will corrupt personal morality” (Grolier, Inc.). The first amendment states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. In no way does censorship violate the first amendment. Censorship prevents broadcasters from infringing on the rights of the viewers. Censorship has really been limited to obscenity and gratuitous violence or nudity because people in the media have policed themselves pretty harshly. The most prominent law established due to censorship is the Children s Television Act of 1990. It was established to “remind broadcasters that there is indeed a common ground outside their narrow interests, a responsibility beyond profiteering, a common civic well where national purposes may coalesce” (http://www.cep.org/vchip.html). This law, like many others was put into place to protect the public. Many people throughout the United States feel very strongly about the issue of censorship. A firm supporter of censorship, United States Senator Earnest F. Hollings, from South Carolina stated that “Television should be a way to entertain, educate, and teach our kids how to grow, not a way to teach them how to shoot to kill”(Congressional Digest). Another Senator, Bryan L. Dorgan, from North Dakota described his anger when, while playing with his two small children with the television on in the background, the words “Son of a Bitch” were spoken. “That word has no place on at 8:45 in the evening”(Congressional Quarterly report). Things like that situation should not happen. Young viewers should not be subjected to such obscenities and TV violence. Broadcasters argue that censorship violates their first amendment rights, but it does not. Violence and obscene language violate viewers rights. The benefits of censorship are simple. Less violence and graphic scenes will result in a better society. Many people believe that TV violence encourages youths to act the same way and that censorship will help to get rid of this problem. Broadcasters feel that parents should monitor what their children watch. However, many parents are not always home and this is a very difficult task. Each day, children are subjected to violence through television. “If you came home and you found a strange man teaching your kids to punch each other, or trying to sell them all kinds of products, you d kick him right out of the house,” says Yale psychology professor Jerome Singer. “But here you are; you come in and the RV is on and you don t think twice about it” (Abandoned in the Wasteland). TV violence is one of the culprits of adolescent criminal behavior. Violent programs may have a negative influence on those individuals who are already violence-prone or children who are living through vulnerable periods of their development. Controlling what children view on television is the responsibility of the government in order to decrease violence in the real world. Adult violent offenders ten to have shown certain personality features as children. “One being they tended to have viewed violence on television” (Congressional Digest) The amounts of violence on television continue to grow. A typical child watched eight thousand murders and one hundred thousand acts of violence before finishing elementary school. The National Institute of Mental Health and the Centers for Disease Control say that violence on television breeds violent behavior. “Children are uniquely influenced by what they see on television” (Congressional Digest). There are a few proposed solutions that are under consideration right now. They both employ the use of new technology. Technology is going to have a major bearing on the issue of censorship. The first of the two major propositions is the V-chip. The V-chip puts the power of censorship in the parents hands. The chip is inserted in the TV and then the parent can program into the TV what can and can not be viewed. The V-chip was introduced in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 by President Clinton and the broadcasters were very happy with it because it allowed them more slack with their programming content. The down side to the V-chip is that it makes parents the “bad guys” and children want to see the blocked programming even more, so they find other ways to do so. The second major proposal under consideration is the rating system. The v-chip provision requires television broadcasters and cable companies to voluntarily develop a rating system on violence (which also includes sex and obscenity) just like the rating system now employed by the Motion Picture. This rating system would allow parents to see the rating of a program and then use their discretion as to whether or not to block the show. The government has established the Federal Communication Committee which is in charge of regulating what is said on TV and radio. They can not tell broadcasters what to say an what not to say. Only “Obscene, indecent, and profane language may be kept off the air” (Tune in Tune Out). The United States Supreme Court had affirmed the rights of the states and municipalities to censor. They will take advantage of that and monitor what is expressed on television. Many more propositions will be made and compromised on before broadcasters can come to terms with the public on censorship. The government is correct in trying to censor what is seen on television. The government serves to act in the best interest of the people. The protection of the development of minors in society is a very important issue. The topic of censorship has become such a prevalent issue because of its huge importance to many people. The public has made this an issue that the government and media must deal with in order to make both the broadcasters and the general public happy. It has been proven that violence on television, as well as sex and obscene language has an ill effect on society and it is the governments job to do something about it. Through the use of technology, great advances have been made, but there is still a lot to be done. Devices such as the V-chip and the rating system are small steps in a large gray area of politics. There has to be a “middle of the road” on which everyone can agree, but the government is responsible for laying the groundwork for compromise.