

Tuesday, March 11. 2008

Have love songs made everyone love one another?

Following are some Frank Zappa quotes relevant to this blog entry: There are more love songs than anything else. If songs could make you do something we'd all love one another. Frank Zappa responding to Tipper Gore's and friends' notion that explicit music lyrics would poison the nation's children. I wrote a song about dental floss but did anyone's teeth get cleaner? - Frank Zappa responding to the same notion about the correlation between music lyrics and individuals' behavior. (See Zappa's timeless Montana/Dennil Floss). The more boring a child is, the more the parents, when showing off the child, receive adulation for being good parents "because they have a tame child-creature in their house. I never set out to be weird. It was always other people who called me weird." In 1985, the late Frank Zappa (who passed away from prostate cancer when he was only eight years older than I am now) implored Congress to reject censoring music and pressuring the music industry to impose ratings systems. His live testimony is transcribed here and his submitted written comments start at the bottom of the page here. (I do regret Zappa's emphasis on the gender of Tipper Gore and other Congressional spouses of the Parents Resource Music Center (PCRM) pushing for music ratings; if he wanted to emphasize any impropriety or conflict of interest involved with Congressional spouses pushing for action by the same committee on which Tipper Gore's husband Al Gore sat, for instance, he could have just referred to "spouses" and their names.) Curiously, Zappa's testimony indicates no opposition to a government requirement to reveal music lyrics in printed form, so long as they could be on a separate sheet (e.g., so as not to take away from the album/CD cover art and design) possibly printed at government expense. Curiously, the "Filthy Fifteen" songs list that was apparently trumpeted by PCRM as a prelude to the group's Congressional testimony, included plenty of titles that sound particularly tame today. The above 1986 video of Frank Zappa on Crossfire shows his true dedication to the First Amendment and individual liberties. He does a good job of distilling the whole matter as boiling down to words, and the stupidity and oppressiveness of censoring those words. In the process, he responds to John Lofton's inquiry about why Zappa is not smiling with "Why should I smile when I'm sitting here with you?" The music video shown near the beginning of this Crossfire episode looks and sounds so mild as to not be of much or any strength for those seeking music ratings and more onerous censorship than that. Now, over two decades later, we find warning labels on music and video games. We find Hillary Clinton just two years ago pushing for a ban on selling minors video games rated mature, adults-only, or rating pending, and hiring a company to review the effectiveness of industry efforts to arrive at such ratings. See Hillary Clinton's video plea here, the bill here, and CBS's William Vitka's response here, asking "Where is our Zappa?". Fortunately, Hillary Clinton's proposed video censorship law died, but Clinton now seeks to return to the White House, and who knows what she would do there with the First Amendment? In the 1990's, Bill Clinton -- who undoubtedly will wield substantial influence in a Hillary Clinton administration -- signed into law the censorious Child Online Protection Act (1996) and Children's Internet Protection Act (1999). Addressing the remaining presidential candidate front runners, John McCain's hands already are dirtied when it comes to the First Amendment. For instance, he introduced the Children's Internet Protection Act, and he was not too concerned about First Amendment rights in pushing for campaign reform. As to Barack Obama, I am still trying to make sense of the harm and good he has done and will do for the First Amendment. Considering the foregoing efforts to censor music and video games, what comes next? Censoring books? (What am I saying? Books have been banned for decades and long before that.) I miss Frank Zappa. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in First Amendment at 00:00

Re your statement, "Curiously, Zappa's testimony indicates no opposition to a government requirement to reveal music lyrics in printed form, so long as they could be on a separate sheet (e.g., so as not to take away from the album/CD cover art and design) possibly printed at government expense." Yes. People who own lyrics and other such copyrighted material should not be forced to publish just as MacDonalds should not be forced to make hamburgers free. The idea was that the lyrics could be available (and curiously, most of FZ's are printed on his actual albums) in record stores at the government's expense if necessary, but certainly, the copyright owners should be paid for the publishing. I would also like to point out some of the other points you missed as to the reasons why the wives were listed - being members, unlike their husbands (who, not curiously, were on the Senate committee charged with hearing the bill for the special blank tape tax - eventually passed for the special benefit of the private industry known as Record Companies and brought to you by the U.S. government), of the PMRC for one.

Anonymous on Mar 12 2008, 23:56