

The Behrend Beacon

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"Professionalism with a Personality"

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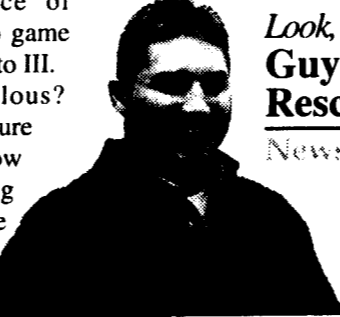
GIVE ME ONE SHRED OF EVIDENCE THAT THIS COUNTRY NEEDS CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM!



Oh no, stop the violence!!! The controversy over Grand Theft Auto III

The year is 2005. All major U.S. cities are in shambles. Plagued by a wave of carjackers and frequent drive bys the core of our civilization has crumbled. The cause for this mess, this decadence of society: a 2002 video game named Grand Theft Auto III.

think these people are a little confused. Here's how it is, despite what some may say, violent TV and violent video games do not affect the actions of levelheaded kids and young adults.



Look, here's how it is
Guy Reschenthaler
NewsWire editor

Is this ridiculous? Absolutely yes! I am sure everyone has heard how there is talk over banning the new video game GTAIII. Critics of the game cite its violent content. They feel the gang/mafia related missions of the game are condoning these illegal crime rings. They feel the ability to do drive bys in the game and the frequent car highjackings encourage the same type of behavior in real life.

All my friends played violent video games when we were kids (and we all play GTAIII now). All watched action movies now and then. And to date I have never, ever, seen one of my buddies commit a carjacking, shoot someone, or engage in any other type of violent acts comparable to ones in movies and video games. I don't know, maybe we are just oddballs?

Sure, and we all went out and joined the Mafia when "Good Fellas" and "The Godfather" hit the screen. These critics make me sick, just sick. I honestly do not know what their beef is. Do they really believe the American public is unable to draw a line between fantasy video games and real life? Is it that, when they were kids, they shot their little buddies with bows and arrows after watching westerns and they want to prevent us from their mistakes? Are they jealous because they did not have sweet video games when they were kids and had to play games like leapfrog or Patty-cake? Or do they feel it is their responsibility to save society from violent video games that may encourage violence? I

Let's take a look at why these games are on the market and why they are played. Here one simple reason why the game is produced, marketed, and on store shelves: It sells. I know, that is a big surprise. Capitalism is such a big mystery. If the public did not buy violent games similar to GTAIII it would not be made. Grand Theft Auto III was produced because of the success of Grand Theft Auto I, Grand Theft Auto II, and the success of other related games. If it sells, it will be made.

Now why are games like these a success? People like action games. I have yet to see one of my buddies playing a game in which they have to

go to class, do homework, write a paper, take a test, and so on. Why? Because we call that game, "Life." We play games to have fun, get away from schoolwork for a few minutes. I've never seen a James Bond movie where he did paper work. Perhaps I missed one?

Now, why the violence? It is simple and not a great thing to say, but here's an axiom of human nature: People like violence. I was never there, but I heard public hangings and executions were a big thing back in the 1500s, 1600s, 1700s, and even in 2002 in some Middle Eastern nations. I hear the Coliseum was packed for gladiator games. Take a look at "The Sopranos," filled with violence, but boy, oh, boy is it exciting. We all get a big kick when someone gets whacked don't we?

So to all the people who feel GTAIII is too violent, I advise them to go and change human nature so that we are less attracted to violent video games. Good luck, you'll need it.

OK, so now we've examined why the game is made and sold and why people like it. Now where does that leave us? That's right, should it be banned or not. Your humble columnist would say, "No." Why ban it? If the public likes it then it should have it. If it makes money then it should continue to make money. And what business does anyone have to ban anything? Who is to say what can and cannot be sold? As long as the product does not directly harm the public and is making some bucks it should be on the market. It is a form of our First Amendment right to freedom of

speech. So who is calling for the banning of this game? I am not sure of the make-up but I know they are all people who in some way feel banning material from the public, playing the decency police, and taking video games away from people will make a difference. They are probably either those in the politically correct camp or those in the far-right moral majority camp. Or, it is more likely that it is a combination of the two.

Well, here's a message to you folks: Develop a hobby. Get out there and do something with your time that does not involve fighting dumb little battles over video games. If you want to help the public do not try to ban a video game. Volunteer at a shelter; raise money for charity, or something of the like. Just do not sit there on your rocking chair and gripe over a harmless game. Stop trying to shove your values down someone else's throat. And for those politically correct police: Lighten up, I mean really, lighten up.

So I guess this is the spot in my column where I use my column title. Look, here's how it is: This game does absolutely no harm whatsoever. It should be banned for only one reason and that is because I play it too much and I should be doing schoolwork. That's the only reason of which I can think. And the world does not bend to my needs so let's keep Grand Theft Auto III on the market. Have fun, dudes.

Reschenthaler's column appears every three weeks.

The view from the lighthouse

The reality of reality TV

"Temptation Island 2," "Survivor 3," "Big Brother," and MTV's "The Real World Season 5,047" are just a few examples of reality shows that are quickly filling prime-time TV air today. They're filled with controversy, adventures, and more raw video footage than a Blair Witch movie. But, in reality, have these shows gone too far?

First, let's look at the very genre that has been assigned to these shows. "Reality TV" is almost a mislabel. Shows like "Cops" or "America's Most Wanted" are about reality, not a group of selected teenagers who live in a penthouse suite and shower with each other. "Temptation Island" is reminiscent of the Discovery Channel in a way; instead of putting a bunch of lab rats in a box and observing how long it takes them to reproduce, television producers have found that a group of teens will do the same experiment and yield results faster and in more interesting ways.

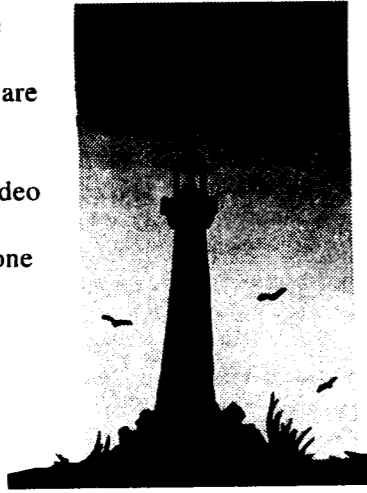
Admittedly, there is a hint of shadenfreud occurring when someone can watch another person's relationship or physical well-being deteriorate and not worry that their own is at risk. TV provides that escape - the "what ifs" all acted out by someone else at their expense. The original "Temptation Island" had a happy ending for the most part, but the second season is very much more risqué and extreme. There are hotter women, more gorgeous hunks, and more challenges to overcome.

The point to this, however, is that although the people in a majority of these shows are not professional actors and indeed just "regular people," the scenarios they encounter are planned out by someone else. This isn't how reality works. There are no clues to read and follow to figure out the group's next destination, and there are no bonfires to watch a video and examine how badly one's significant other has cheated on him or her. It seems at times, these shows resemble no more than life-size lab experiments.

But, is this what we asked for? It seems what was a fantasy of yesterday has become a reality of today. Ordinary soap operas don't cut it anymore. Our society craves "the real thing." The 1987 Arnold Schwarzenegger movie "The Running Man," was based around something of a "survivor" plot - except it was prisoners who were trapped in a labyrinth struggle to survive by any means possible for the glory of freedom. The flick probably seemed a little far-fetched and grotesque at the time. Granted, the most action-packed game shows during the 80's were "Family Double Dare" and "America's Funniest Home Videos;" but what seemed unreal just a decade or so ago is "reality TV" today.

The only thing left to see now is a show involving cars. Maybe a cross-country or cross-continental trek to see who has the car with the most guts. Ironically, there is actually a movie called "Death Race 2000." It was made in the late 70's or early 80's and was one of Sylvester Stallone's first movies. Basically, in the year 2000, six or seven people race their customized cars across the country, scoring points for damages done to other vehicles and innocent pedestrians. Whoever made it to the end of the race first, alive, and with the most points became the new president of the United States.

Unfortunately, when it comes to ratings, people's lives and feelings are not part of the equation.



A scandal so good it hurts

by John Balzar
Los Angeles Times

"This just keeps getting better and better," Lisa sputters. By that, my wife means worse and worse. Which is what we're all thinking, isn't it?

Before dawn, we are up and tearing into the newspapers at my household. This is terrific, heart-racing stuff. "Look, Enron paid no income taxes four out of five years!"

"Forget Enron, Andersen is being paid by the Justice Department to reorganize the FBI!"

"Get this: Enron had 881 offshore subsidiaries!"

"Wow, a professor who became a New York Times editorial columnist was paid \$50,000 as an Enron adviser!"

We're trying not to talk over each other. I'm scribbling notes all over the paper and Liisa is warning me not to make the story illegible. We subscribe to four newspapers. Suddenly it's not enough.

This is the juiciest scandal of our lifetime.

Why? Because this is not about personal indiscretion, not about sleazy partisan politics, not about runaway foreign policy, not about "gotcha."

This rotten barrel of apples is all en-

compassing. Down at the bottom, in the really contaminated slime, Enron/Andersen/et al. is about what we have allowed our nation to become.

It's about us. It's about winning at any price; not just winning but trouncing; about seeing what you can get away with. It's about greed and the glorification of greed. It's also the football player who deliberately tries to injure his opponent. It's about parents who beat each other up at their kids' sports matches. It's about the hand-to-hand combat of getting your children into the best colleges so they will be the dog that eats instead of the dog that gets eaten. It's about the ugly edge that has crept into our language, so that words such as "intimidation" become virtuous and "honor" a quaint laughingstock. It's about the blue-ribbon professor-cum-economics columnist who acknowledges taking \$50,000 from Enron for serving on "a panel that had no function that I was aware of."

Awhile back, we lost sight of the principle that hard work, diligence and some luck made the man.

Inexplicably, we veered from the root ideal of civil in civilization. We took what we could and called it ours. We created the lottery for the instant chance at more. We demanded that every busi-

ness "grow" rather than serve, which sounds a lot less benign than it became, as we watched ourselves transformed into jackals feeding from our own wounds. We watched as our political system was co-opted for pennies by wheeler-dealers who hollowed out the laws with fancy regulations and hidden legislative favors until our vaunted democracy became the instrument of our own oppression.

We saw simple and honest things devalued. Like the passbook savings account. And employee loyalty - or loyalty of any kind, for that matter.

You could wish you were high-minded in this age, but weren't you looking for 25 percent gains on your retirement holdings too? It didn't matter if a company made something, only if it made something happen. It mattered less whether a deed was right than whether you were "in" or "out."

Where is the smoking gun? It's in our hands.

Yes, George W. Bush is culpable: This freight train crashed on his watch. These were his back-slapping buddies. These are the people he entrusted with government. This is the way-of-life philosophy he championed.

Let's not forget that just a few weeks ago he denounced Democrats for stall-

ing on a multimillion-dollar, retroactive tax break for Enron and other giant companies.

Let's remember that his top economics adviser, a former Enron retainer, views the collapse of the company as "a triumph for capitalism." Let's not overlook that his Treasury secretary sees Enron as evidence of the "genius of capitalism." Let's not overlook that his choice to run the GOP has decided to stay on the payroll of a law firm retained by Enron and reserves the right to moonlight as a strategic adviser for the company.

But Bush didn't create the scandal. It has been in the works for years. He's no more guilty than the people who voted for him, or for those many millions who were suckered into this vision of a cut-throat America where values - that shopworn word - mean nothing at all when measured against the bottom line.

Perhaps all boats float on a rising tide. But reach down. Tastes like sewer water now, doesn't it?

I can hardly wait for tomorrow's papers. This is a terrific time. Maybe, finally, at long bloody last, things will get bad enough to make them right.