

The Vulgar State Of America

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Time was, in America, when we did not accept crude language, gestures, or behavior in polite society—certainly not in mixed company—and never during prime-time television. Offensive words and actions, those that transgressed decency, were reserved for “adult-only” entertainment venues, back alleys, and the proverbial locker room.

Alas, that is no longer the case. Public discourse and what passes for entertainment are now coarser than ever. Vulgarity has gone mainstream, and few, if any, seem to care.

Nine years ago, Dr. R. Albert Mohler, as president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, penned an article decrying the growth of vulgarity in America. In it, he proclaimed:

The collapse of the barrier between popular culture and decadence has released a toxic mudslide of vulgarity into the nation's family rooms—and just about everywhere else. There is almost no remote corner of this culture that is not marked by the toleration of vulgarity, or the outright celebration of depravity.

Movie theaters and strip clubs used to be the only venues for viewing live-action, graphic sexuality. With the advent of the video cassette player/recorder, such base forms of “entertainment” entered the American living room. Today, the advancement of technology continues to play a significant role in mainstreaming our cultural vulgarity.

Pointing out technology's unfortunate impact on our culture, American writer and cultural critic Lee Seigel authored a much-read article entitled “America the Vulgar” for the *Wall Street Journal* in December 2013. Seigel opined:

Today, our cultural norms are driven in large part by technology, which in turn is often shaped by the lowest impulses in the culture. Behind the Internet's success in making obscene images commonplace is the dirty little fact that it was the pornography industry that revolutionized the technology of the Internet. Streaming video, technology like Flash, [and] sites that confirm the validity of credit cards were all innovations of the porn business.

Indeed, as technology advanced, especially in the realm of the Internet, pornography and all its vile and destructive heritage became more ubiquitous, less stigmatized, and highly monetized.

As streaming platforms take over home television viewing, the most popular programming—not surprisingly—is steeped in indecency. The glorification of graphic violence, nudity, and X-rated language dominates most newer offerings. As a result, the legacy networks (like CBS, ABC, Fox, NBC) strive to compete by producing “edgier” material rife with coarser language, subject matter, and even blurred or pixelated nudity.

Even our politicians are getting in on the act. A recent trend reveals popular politicians peppering their speeches with crass, off-color language, fueling acrimony, loathing, and malice toward their opponents. And the conservative right wing of the Republican Party resorts to a rallying cry of “Let's go, Brandon!” with its euphemistic, vulgar meaning.

Following the battles in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s to keep rock and pop music as “PG” as possible, especially on the radio, the over-the-top vulgarity of Rap and Hip Hop now confronts the popular music industry. Sadly, we are witnessing much less struggle and much more acceptance and compliance throughout the industry, media, and buying public for these genres. There is still censorship and “bleeping” of the most noxious language on the radio. Still, the music available for easy purchase and streaming by most anyone is depressingly repulsive. It promotes degenerate and debased sexual behavior, drug use, and violence, making celebrities out of shallow-minded women, gangsters, and thugs.

Each year, millions of American and international viewers look eagerly to the National Football League's Super Bowl halftime entertainment show, typically performed by a popular musical artist, band, or collection of them. Often seen as a barometer of American culture, this year's troubling offering was certainly no exception.

The NFL, responsible for selecting the talent and managing the show, chose an infamous collection of Rap and Hip Hop "artists" to perform a tribute to the repugnant genres. For fifteen minutes, the massive Super Bowl audience, replete with young children, was subjected to a glorification and celebration of the Hip Hop culture—a culture awash with hypersexuality, overt drug use, gang violence, and a general assault on civil society.

Rap and Hip Hop are each over 30 years old, so few were surprised at the profane content performed. However, what was surprising was the nearly unanimous acclaim the show received from the media, politicians, cultural observers, and the viewing audience. The few conservative spokespersons that dared to criticize were immediately shouted down, vilified, and shamed on all forms of media.

Author and columnist Steven Kalas, writing for the *Sparks Tribune*, declared in his 2017 article, "Vulgarity Won't Make America Great": "The wholesale surrender to vulgarity has consequences. It has an echo effect. It sets loose dark energies, ping-ponging a siren seduction of fear and anger."

Sadly, Americans remain blinded by their Creator to these tragic consequences (Deuteronomy 28:28-29). Their wholesale acceptance of vulgarity is heartbreaking and portends a grim future. As Christians, we must remain wary about a society that celebrates openly unwholesome thoughts, speech, and activities, focusing instead on words and actions that uplift and edify everyone (Ephesians 4:29-32; 5:3-4; Galatians 5:19-22).