



The NEWS LEADER

"A newspaper for and about Decatur County"

2007 NA 06

Vol. 82, No. 27

Wednesday, July 4, 2007

50 Cents

Judges Forgot Families with Foul Ruling

By Kelli Turner

Last week, two judges in New York City made a ruling that will make my life as a parent in Nashville much more difficult.

The judges decided that it is permissible for broadcast networks to air offensive expletives when my daughter and millions of other children are in the viewing audience.

By expletives, I mean four-letter words starting with "F" and "s," words that are not fit to be printed in such a public forum as this newspaper but these judges would have us believe are now perfectly acceptable to be broadcast on television.

In case you missed it, the judges decided that these expletives used by Cher and Nicole Richie while on stage at the Billboard Music Awards in 2002 and again in 2003 are fully appropriate because they were "fleeting."

Do these judges not realize that their decision affects more than the broadcast networks? They have forgotten the millions of families who have to deal with the ugly consequences.

No parent I know thinks that it's ok for their children to use offensive expletives at the dinner table, at school, or anywhere else for that matter. No one in their right mind thinks that it is acceptable for offensive words – fleeting or not – to be aired during hours when children are watching television. Yet these judges have essentially slapped all parents in the face with their decision.

I just do not see why it is so hard for the networks to obey the law, and thereby keep my daughter and other children safe from graphic content on television. The networks have implemented time delay tactics with live shows before, and there's no reason why this cannot be done in the future.

Television networks can be responsible when they want to. Consider how quickly Imus was pulled off the air for his offensive comments.

Yet the industry evades responsibility for its product, the public airwaves which it uses for free, by passing the buck to parents. Countless times I hear how parents should just hit the "off" button on their television in order to avoid graphic content. Too many times I hear how parents should rely on blocking technologies.

Because of television's pervasiveness and persuasiveness, opting out is an entirely inadequate response. When the networks produce increasingly violent and sexually-graphic shows, parents are left with few places to turn for family viewing. By remaining silent, parents would have to cede their television sets – and the public airwaves they own – to lowest common-denominator programming.

In addition, research has shown that parents cannot rely on blocking technologies because the existing ratings system is inaccurate and unreliable. A recent program on CBS, NCIS, showed a horrifically violent drug scene during the 8 pm hour when children are most often found in the viewing audience. Not only did this air at the earliest hour of primetime, but the episode did not carry the proper television rating descriptors to warn parents about the gruesome material or to allow them to block the program using V-chip technology.

This episode was rated TV-14, with no content descriptors. Based on the graphic violence, the "V" descriptor should have been used, and due to the foul language, the "L" descriptor should have been employed as well.

Yes, the networks rate their own programs, and refuse to do so accurately because they cannot suffer financial consequences that full disclosure to advertisers would bring.

So how am I supposed to watch television with my daughter when the system is clearly failing us?

My hope is that other parents will see the absurdity in the court's decision and swiftly speak out to their congressional representatives and to call on the FCC to appeal this decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. Congress already answered the people's call last year when it overwhelmingly passed a bill that increases fines to broadcasters who break the indecency law.

Community decency standards should not be decided by two judges in New York. Shame on the judges, and shame on the networks for putting their interests above the families who they're supposed to be serving.

Kelli Turner is a mother and a chapter director for the Parents Television Council. She resides in Nashville