

# Commentary: Of cyberporn and democracy

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The U.S. is guilty of imperial hubris, say Bush administration detractors at home and abroad. Which means a blend of high-and-mightiness and high-hattedness. And the practitioners of this school of geopolitics are firmly convinced the U.S. holds the moral high ground, which justifies geopolitical hoity-toitiness.

As one surveys domestic airwaves, the high ground quickly gives way to a swamp. Howard Stern and Jerry Springer, the uncrowned kings of unadulterated smut, have shared some of the highest ratings in television history. One can now purchase a one-night stand on the World Wide Web, which provides 24,395 women, with their nude pictures, in the Washington region alone.

The Ten Commandments are now multiple choice. And late night comedians have suggested that if Moses were to come down from Mount Sinai today, he would probably have a hard time finding a publisher.

Lecturing the rest of the world on the virtues of democracy is somewhat at odds with the deification of Stern and his elevation to the electronic pantheon of a recent 20-minute segment on "60 Minutes." Mainstream media honor him with the title of "shock jock." But he would be more accurately described as the plug-ugly epitome of scatological sex schlock. The man who can get women to bare their breasts or behinds on the air, and nudge wannabe porn queens into explaining likes and dislikes with scores of casual sex partners, has been competing for media attention with the Iraqi insurgency.

In one recent week, Stern made it on to NBC's "Today" show; Larry King's global interview program on CNN; David Letterman's comedy hour; FOX's O'Reilly hour; and on the cover of New York magazine, along with a flattering, seven-page story. Media critic Howard Kurtz said all this adulation "gives news organizations license to walk on the smutty side while pretending to hold their collective noses."

With Stern, anything goes. The more intimate and embarrassing and tormenting, the better. He has been earning \$25 million a year with foul language and wind-breaking noises on the air. But he got tired of paying fines (only \$2 million so far) to the watchdogs of the Federal Communications Commission, or so he said, and switched to a five-year, \$500 million contract with Sirius satellite radio, where 2.5 million of his 10 million fans have already agreed to pay \$14 a month where he will be seen and heard on "iN Demand Networks."

The adult adulation of Stern coincided with the announcement Heidi Fleiss, the notorious Los Angeles madam, was opening the world's first brothel for women 80 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

The American promoters of democracy in the Middle East are blissfully ignorant about cyberporn sites in the United States - 1.8 million Web sites that offer several hundred million pornographic web pages, a 20-fold increase in just five years. In August 2005 alone, some 70 million voyeurs dropped in to assist the cybersex industry generate some \$5 billion a year.

There is also a steady growth in child pornography that now number several thousand sites. Babies and toddlers are appearing on the net with alarming frequency. Typical age is between 6 and 12. More than 20,000 new images of child pornography are posted on the Internet every week.

One in five children who uses computer chat rooms has been approached over the Internet by pedophiles, according to Britain's Detective Superintendent Keith Akerman, quoted in the Daily Telegraph. Almost 90 percent of sexual solicitations were made either in chat rooms or with Instant Messages (used by some 20 million youth).

Adult content on mobile phones are expected to hit \$1 billion in worldwide revenues in 2005, according to the market research firm Juniper Research ("Adult to Mobile: Personal Services"). Pornography

has moved in quick progression from desktop computer to cell phones and now iPods.

The adult film industry keeps getting bigger from year to year. Some 6,000 porn movies a year are filmed, most of them in or near Los Angeles, grossing several billion dollars a year.

Computer-users, including children, can download hardcore sex acts, bestiality, bondage and domination, sadomasochism (including the torture and mutilation of women for sexual gratification) and child pornography. Many of the women used are trafficked from former communist countries and forced into porn and prostitution by the smugglers. Another \$10 billion is made from the illicit smuggling of some 200,000 girls and young women per year to strip clubs and brothels (legal in some countries).

The administration talks about launching a broad assault on the porn-pushers from Hollywood producers to hotels that advertise X-rated features on television. But the skin-flick porn biz - under the name of "Free Speech Coalition" - is fighting back to defend smut in all its horrendous forms under the First Amendment.

Pity poor Karen Hughes, the undersecretary of state for Public Diplomacy. Her job is to persuade the rest of the world, particularly the Arab countries, that the lack of democracy and First Amendment rights, is keeping them from joining the modern world. The recent HBO series "Rome" was a timely reminder how amorality, decadence and indolence gnawed at the foundations of the world's then most powerful empire.

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