

The truth about *Kids* hurts

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But this film contained too strong a moral for this to be true.

Certainly, not all kids act like the ones in this movie. But more and more do, and not just in inner cities. Sure, moral corruption has always been rampant, even among children. The difference is that the kids portrayed in this movie don't even try to appear upright, mature or civilized. They do not even pretend to have manners or respect anyone or anything.

On the other hand, Clark may have been trying to shock our society into raising more socially responsible children.

This may have been true to an extent, but I think Clark's real purpose was to make money while redeeming himself by teaching a moral lesson on the side. The *Kids* World Wide Web page, itself a monument to merchandising, contains an interesting response that Clark made to some of his critics. "They don't want to believe that kids have sex, that kids have fun, that kids can be out on their own," he said.

In other words, see this movie! It's fun! It has sex in it! Then, once he

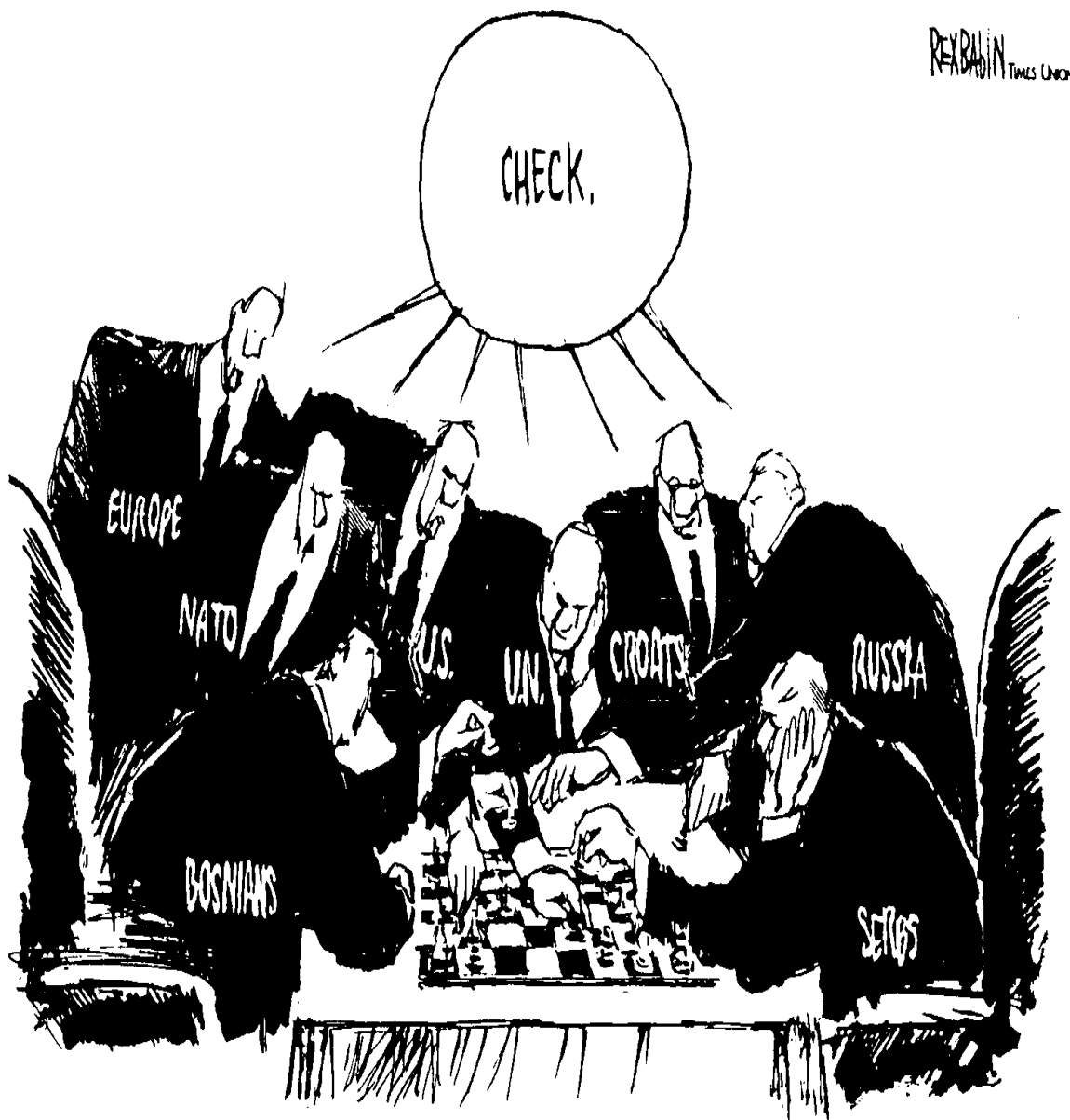
crams the eager viewers into the theater, he shows them the sex — but it's too raw; the audience can't react as it would to, say, *Basic Instinct*. The fact that the sex shocks rather than arouses the audience makes it perfectly acceptable to show it to them.

The sex is also too real. Certainly, not all kids act like the ones in this movie. But more and more do and not just those in inner cities. Sure, moral corruption has always been rampant, even among children. The difference is that the kids portrayed in this movie don't even try to appear upright, mature or civilized. They do not even pretend to have manners or respect anyone or anything.

But it is little wonder that many kids act this way. After all, modern society derides people who fake their way through life, who appear upstanding but in fact are not. It is even okay to be amoral these days — as long as you're honest about it.

Clark himself will doubtless be branded a hypocrite for trying to make money from sex while appearing to teach moral lessons. But by at least trying to appear moral, Clark upholds civilization where the less hypocritical kids in his film do not.

Half the inhabitants of a city cannot decide to be animals without tearing apart the half that are civilized. *Kids* and its director show that to uphold civility, there must be public pressure on everyone at least to appear to adopt a standard of morality.



Farrakhan's message needed to unify black community

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Louis Farrakhan is a feared man. In one sense, he inspires fierce loyalty and reverence among his supporters. Conversely, his opponents reel at his commanding presence and forceful proclamations.

Yet all who are familiar with him must respect his position. It is impossible to ignore the head of the Nation of Islam, for he is truly a powerful personality. Not only has he cut an intimidating public figure, but he has presented the most coherent and strategic leadership for the black community since Martin Luther King Jr.

After rising through the ranks of the Nation of Islam, Farrakhan has now assumed the position as the foremost and most visible spokesman of the black community.

But his ascension has been marked by resistance and turmoil. Whites feel alienated by his absolute declarations and authoritative presence. He has made several highly publicized claims that were without any proper basis. First among these are his wild descriptions of Judaism, which have been dangerously anti-Semitic.

His insistent public foundation of this is extremely unfortunate because at the core of his efforts is a doctrine which could prove to be very beneficial and unifying for the black community.

These principles were revealed by last month's Million Man March in Washington. The rally, led by Farrakhan and attended by several other black leaders like Ben Chavis and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, constantly reinforced the central themes of personal accountability and the need to take full control of the black community in order to strengthen it socially and economically. Most importantly, though, this was all to be done by black people.

The leaders of the March stood firm in the conviction that if any substantial social progress is to come about for blacks, then it must be brought about by the efforts of black people themselves. This conviction has since been labeled as destructive, divisive and unproductive.

Furthermore, many whites feel that this belief is driven by Farrakhan's hate and question why this man feels the need to place a barrier between races.

Unfortunately, this is a misunderstanding of the motives of Farrakhan and the Million Man March. Farrakhan's apparently divisive "rhetoric" is not generated by hate; rather, it is generated by necessity. He does not drive barriers between the races but instead highlights, occasionally in an unnecessary fashion, barriers that have always existed.

His message is needed because black communities are fed up with the failure of politicians to deliver on their promises to the communities. The Million Man March was not an attempt at subversion nor was it to promote division. It was the demand of a dissatisfied people to be recognized and heard.

Black people do not feel that trusting those outside their community has gained justice or equality. What Farrakhan aims to do is reverse a history of naive whereby blacks have put their trust in white politicians who cared more about getting votes than understanding or sympathizing with the problems or concerns of the black community.

Therefore, he suggests that the black community look inward to those who share similar feelings and sentiments; in other words, work to elect blacks who would better represent their issues.

The black community needs the strength, solidarity and cohesiveness that Farrakhan's ideas offer. Hopefully, he will begin to consider his inflammatory remarks more carefully before wildly espousing them. As a true leader, he should not let unsubstantiated claims stand in the way of ideas that have so much to offer to Black people.

Finally, his ideas and the convictions behind the Million Man March are not capricious expressions of hate and distrust. Instead they are a mobilization of black political strength motivated by the necessity of social and economic changes critical to the advancement of black communities.

Unifying the black community politically, as Farrakhan hopes, will be crucial for ensuring that the social and economic inequality they still confront is properly extinguished.



Don't limit free speech because of Rabin's assassination

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But the danger is that in a desperate attempt to avenge the victims of terrorism and to make sure such acts "never happen again," we will go too far in limiting freedoms. That would not only exacerbate the situations that lead people to commit terrorist acts but also would threaten the very precepts upon which liberal democracy is founded.

For example, the far-right in America contend that the federal government is usurping their Constitutional liberties. So if the government began telling these people exactly how they could express their political views, would not their fear of tyranny have been proven true? Would not new restrictions of their freedoms provoke some of them to commit still more violent acts?

Likewise, most extremist Israelis are so convinced of their religious views that limiting speech would have little positive effect. Coercive measures may silence these fanatics, but they will not prevent them from committing violence in the future any more than Israeli forces stopped the Palestinians from protesting Israeli rule.

Fortunately, we already possess perhaps the most powerful weapon against violent

extremists — free speech. Unlike authoritarian governments, whose power depends upon the use of brute force, democracies allow their citizens to engage in political dialogue. So it's our duty as citizens to denounce terrorist acts like the Rabin assassination. We also must criticize leaders who may incite violence with hate-filled rhetoric.

But our responsibilities do not end there.

If nothing else, however, the example of slavery should remind us that sometimes we are wrong about the extremists, even the violent ones. And perhaps that is the best reason to protect the freedom of speech.

It's no exaggeration to say that if these groups are on the fringe of society, we share some guilt for pushing them there. Therefore, we also have a duty to share our opinions with extremists and to persuade them to adopt peaceful means of expression. We cannot arrogantly dismiss them as simpletons whose ideas are unworthy of our attention.

Don't mistake my idealism for naiveté: Not all political differences can be worked out

into neat compromises. I also realize that terrorism may always remain a threat, especially in a free society. That is why we need a military, police institutions and legal systems that can work to prevent and punish terrorism.

Unfortunately, these means sometimes tragically fail. But at least they do not jeopardize the democratic ideals that we consider to be so in need of protection.

Upon reflection, the logic behind the arguments in favor of limiting free speech almost always rest on gross simplifications. In the past few days, for example, Rabin has been remembered as a man of peace.

But he was first a soldier of war who was prepared to die and to kill for his homeland. As prime minister, Rabin also used the power of the military to enforce Israeli policies in the territories. Of course, Rabin worked within the framework of Israeli politics and international law. Ultimately, he wisely pursued peace over war. At least in one respect, however, a difference between Rabin and his assassin was that Rabin enjoyed the support of popular opinion among the Jewish people in Israel and many leaders in the West.

For Palestinians, however, the democratic consensus among the Jewish people of Israel was a disaster for many years. What could be more violent and extremist for Palestinians than the half century since Israel was estab-

lished as the Jewish homeland?

Of course, we are free to decide that extremist rhetoric and violent acts are justifiable only if they agree with popular opinion or at least with our own personal opinion. To make that leap without any moral or ethical qualifications, however, we must also realize that we are questioning the way in which many of the progressive changes in history have occurred.

The American antislavery movement, for example, is a particularly salient example. When the movement first began, it consisted largely of "radical" Christians like the Quakers. Some of the movement's most compelling spokesmen, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, were also considered by many to hold extreme religious views. Moreover, the struggle to end slavery often turned violent, whether it was slave revolts, John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, Va., or the Civil War itself. Brown, who some consider to be a martyr for the antislavery cause, also committed violence in the name of God.

None of this is to suggest that the ideas of most fringe groups are as meritorious as the antislavery movement. If nothing else, however, the example of slavery should remind us that sometimes we are wrong about the extremists, even the violent ones. And perhaps that is the best reason to protect the freedom of speech.