

THE
WAR
ON CHILDREN

How Pop Culture and Public Schools
Put Our Kids at Risk

KAREN L. GUSHTA, Ph.D.



Fort Lauderdale, Florida

THE WAR ON CHILDREN:
How Pop Culture and Public Schools Put Our Kids at Risk
By Karen L. Gushta, Ph.D.

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1-800-988-7884
letters@coralridge.org
www.coralridge.org

For the generations to come.
May we faithfully tell them
“the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wonderful
works that He has done.”

Psalm 78:4

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FOREWORD

In *The Abolition of Man*, first published in the 1940s, C.S. Lewis takes modern educators to task for alienating youths from their own heritage. This leaves the children vulnerable to harmful ideologies.

If you disarm a child with sustained doses of skepticism toward all things—including parents—you can plant ideas that will blossom later into full-fledged rebellion. Then the child/adult can be manipulated into man-centered “progressive” ways of thinking and acting.

Modern public education fosters coolness toward traditional loyalties, Lewis says.

[Such teachers] see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda—they have learned from tradition that youth is sentimental—and they conclude that the very best thing they can do is to fortify the minds of young people against emotion. My own experience as a teacher tells an opposite tale. For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are those who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity.¹

How much more so is this evident after years of miseducation and coarse, soul-deadening “entertainment” in the decades following the publication of Lewis’s work? Who has not seen that hipper-than-thou, vacant look on groups of youths roaming the nation’s malls in search of thrills, or anything to fill the void in their hearts? Some wear T-shirts with profanities or the single word “Whatever!” The latter is a white flag to the gods of cynicism, and an unwitting cry for help, although they would never admit to anything so uncool.

But little do they know, many of these kids harbor ideas that will harden into certainties that will shape their later worldview, and not for the better. And it’s no accident.

“It is not a theory they put into his mind,” Lewis writes of a typically hapless public school pupil, “but an assumption, which ten years hence, its origin forgotten and its presence unconscious, will condition him to take one side in a controversy which he has never recognized as a controversy at all.”²²

In her far-reaching and well documented book, *The War on Children*, Dr. Karen Gushta sounds the alarm that Christian children are not immune from this insidious trend. Their hearts and minds are up for grabs, and if they are not instructed in biblical truth and showered with love from parents and their church family, she warns, their hearts will grow cold until ignited by a substitute. This, she notes, is what Dr. D. James Kennedy described as “the religion of humanity.”²³ Instead of a passion for Christ, and a love of America’s rich heritage, children will be steered into a global worldview in which the government knows best and the birth of each child is seen as a net loss for the environment.

Think of teens you’ve seen in supermarket aisles, admonishing parents for not buying explicitly “green” products, such as the “right” light bulbs. Or sternly lecturing them on “tolerance” while showing no such patience with their parents’ belief that marriage

should be the union of one man and one woman, or that large families are a blessing.

Since faith and knowledge are the keys to obtaining wisdom, and the Book of Proverbs tells us to prize wisdom beyond earthly gain, it helps to know what forces are at work in order to respond properly and effectively.

In chapter after chapter, Dr. Gushta traces the history of public education, the daunting cultural challenges currently facing parents, and the fast-evolving new threat of one-world schemes designed to take power out of parents' hands and give it to global bureaucrats. From the secularist theories of the Unitarian, Horace Mann, in the 19th Century to the coldly effective *Rules for Radicals* by Saul Alinsky, and little-known ambitions of the federal No Child Left Behind program, to the growing authority of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, Dr. Gushta's book is not for the faint-hearted. But then, neither is parenting, as Dr. James Dobson pointed out in one of his best-selling books. Nor is Christianity itself.

However, far from a hand-wringing tome that leaves the reader depressed, *The War on Children* returns again and again to the antidote: a renewed covenantal responsibility on the part of the larger church community to protect its children. Parents cannot do the job alone, Dr. Gushta writes, and to expect them to do so is not fair or biblical.

The most important education is that which shapes character. The Bible instructs parents to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). This message is not only for parents. In Chapter 10, Dr. Gushta lays out the simple, yet profoundly important task of the church community:

[Children] need the pure and powerful armature of the truth to protect them spiritually, mentally, and

emotionally from such assaults. Doing anything less is not feeding His lambs—it is sending them to the slaughter.

Dissecting curricula and educational trends, Dr. Gushta shows why Christian parents cannot rely on church youth groups and weekly worship to counter the daily flood of statist, secular teaching and materials commonly found in government-controlled schools. The overall thrust of public education, she argues, is not merely neutral, but effectively anti-Christian. She cites sobering statistics from the Barna polling group that show many Christian youth lose their faith in later years, a stark testimony to the impact of the one-two punch of government schools and a hostile popular culture.

Education happens every day, all around us, Karen notes, so we cannot cede ground to the enemy:

We cannot forsake any cultural arena. Wherever the battle rages between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan—that is where we must be raising the standard for Christ. Indeed, the battle rages through every social institution and in every part of culture and society because it rages in the human heart.

She aptly quotes Christian philosopher and theologian Cornelius Van Til, who once wrote,

He [the believer] knows that his cultural activity will not be in vain in the Lord. . . . He knows that he must fight the battle for a Christian culture first of all within himself and then with those

who seek to destroy his faith.

After making her case that the hour is late, the stakes are enormous, and that children represent not only our responsibility but our hope for the future of the church and the nation, she issues a challenge in the final chapter:

Will we, too, go forth, as did the disciples, in the power of the Holy Spirit to “conquer the world of culture for Christ?” Will we join together as a band of brothers and sisters in Christ, willing to give our utmost for His Highest?

Anyone reading *The War on Children* will be convicted to do more to pluck kids out of the hands of those who would harm them—and will be empowered to do so as well.

ROBERT H. KNIGHT
Senior Writer and Washington, D.C.
Correspondent for Coral Ridge Ministries

Chapter One

WHAT WAR?

American culture is on the attack against our children. This war on our nation's children has resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of babies killed by their own mothers while in the womb. But the attack has not just been physical. The mental and spiritual lives of children and youth in our country have been under assault for decades. The barriers that should protect them from devastation and death have been broken down by the very cultural institutions that should be guarding them from harm. The adults of our nation are like the ostrich God speaks of in Job 39:13-16:

The wings of the ostrich wave proudly,
 But are her wings and pinions like the
 kindly stork's?
 For she leaves her eggs on the ground,
 And warms them in the dust;
 She forgets that a foot may crush them,
 Or that a wild beast may break them.
 She treats her young harshly, as though they
 were not hers.

Indeed, it seems that we are now a generation that acts as if the young are not ours. Our culture is obsessed with "youth," yet parents do not know how to nurture their own children. They no longer give them the moral and spiritual guidance God expects them to.

There are endless facts supporting the claim that our children are under attack—this book will share many of them. But first let's think of who these young people are. They may be your own children, or your grandchildren, or your nephews and nieces, or even the children of friends and neighbors. I think of 19-year-old Gracie, of 15-year-old Eliot, of 12-year-old Haley, of 7-year-old

Genna, of 3-year-old Schuyler—the children of friends and relatives, of pastors and single moms. They are all the inspiration for this book. They are from a generation missing close to 50 million of their peers.

These are the children and youth who are now living under the full brunt of the war on children. They are living in a vulgar, coarse, and completely sexualized culture, where porn is so plentiful that 90 percent of them have viewed it online—most while doing their homework.¹

They have even been called the “porn generation” by one of their own. At age 21, Ben Shapiro described what’s happening to his generation in his book, *Porn Generation: How Social Liberalism Is Corrupting Our Future*. Ben started writing opinion columns at age 17, and when he was 20, he published his first book, *Brainwashed: How Universities Indoctrinate America’s Youth*. Truly a *wunderkind*, Ben entered UCLA at age 16 and went on to Harvard Law School upon graduation. “Young Ben,” as I would refer to him when reading another of his columns to my husband, writes with perceptiveness and wit. His commentaries on what’s happening to his generation reflect the devastation of the minds and morals that is taking place among them.

In July 2008, at age 24, Young Ben got married. For years Ben had been referred to on the Internet not with affection, as “Young Ben,” but with derision, as “Virgin Ben.” Ben had, as an Orthodox Jew, remained abstinent throughout college and law school and had frequently advocated for it. Consequently, he was mocked and derided. In his column, “I Got Married Last Week,” Ben wrote poignantly of his hope for the future—a hope that his children would grow up in a nation where families would be secure. For Young Ben, the question of who would lead America after November 2008 was “no longer a political question,” it was a personal question. “Who will protect my family? Who will protect the future of my children?” he

said, pondering the impending election.²

Who Is Protecting Our Children's Future?

As a childless Boomer myself, I do not think of the future in terms of what it will bring for my children or grandchildren, as do most of my friends. Attending the 30th reunion of my high-school graduating class, I had no stories to tell of what my children are doing, nor of the exploits of my grandchildren. My hope for the future is a vicarious one—something that I experience by noting the growth of my friends' children, or watching the young people from the 4th and 5th grade Sunday school class I taught move on into the church's youth group and choir.

When parents bring their babies forward for baptism in our church, the event does not spark a memory of my own children receiving the blessing of God's covenant. However, we are a part of this solemn ceremony nonetheless. When our pastor asks us as members of the congregation, "Do you promise before God to do everything you can to support these families, to model Christ, and to live the gospel in a way that honors God?" We respond with heartfelt affirmation. But I know that I will never fully appreciate what that family will experience as this young child grows to adulthood. I will not spend any sleepless nights caring for a sick one, or waiting up for one who has missed his curfew. I have no worries about what my child may be doing while on a sleepover at a friend's house. I have never faced the issue of whether to home school, or try to find the way to pay for my child to attend a Christian school; nor have I had to consider how I should deal with the perils of placing my child in a public school.

My point of view, therefore, in this book is not that of the concerned parent or grandparent who is aghast at what is happening to our children in the current culture. Nor am I speaking primarily as an educator—even though I was involved

in education for most of my professional life. The perspective I've taken is that of a member of the Church—Christ's body, which itself is under attack by the secular media, a sex-crazed culture, and in government-run schools which have tossed out prayer and Bible reading and taken out all references to the Christian founding of our nation.

Attacks on our children have been assaults on us adults as well. But the role of the elder generations to protect and to provide for the younger ones has too often been compromised and ignored.

Although many try to rationalize away the effects of divorce on children, we know that it has a devastating impact. Only 68 percent of children under 18 now live with two parents,³ and even at that, one parent could be a step-parent. Recent statistics show 60 percent of children under age 18 have experienced the breakup of their parents—some by divorce and some by the separation of cohabiting parents.⁴ With family splits—comes greater risk for children living in poverty. In 2006, 42 percent of children living in families with a female head and no husband present were living in poverty, compared to eight percent of children living in married couple families.⁵

Adults have been pursuing their own pleasures of consumption and self-fulfillment. During the past decade, while we've been worrying about the threat of terrorists crossing our borders, our children have been under attack by another threat—a predatory culture that is insidiously and persistently destroying their lives.

The Faces of the Predators

What are the faces of those who prey upon our children? One is the leering face of the sexual predator despoiling our young through pornography—20 percent of Internet porn involves children.⁶ An even more sinister form is the sexual assailant. Children are the most vulnerable victims of rape—60 percent of female and 69 percent of male victims report that they were first raped before age 18.⁷

In *Porn Generation*, Ben Shapiro unmask the faces of the media, the entertainment world, and popular culture. He shows that behind the seductive smile luring teens into thinking that sexual activity is not only exciting—but something they should engage in—is a truly tragic face.⁸ Magazines, movies, and popular music all create a fantasy world for teenagers—a world in which “hooking up” is the new norm. The dreadful result is that by the time they graduate from high school, 48 percent of our nation’s teens have had intercourse, and 15 percent of high school students have had four or more sex partners in their lives.⁹

Prior to 1960, there were only two common sexually transmitted diseases. Now there are more than 30, and teenagers and young adults are the ones most vulnerable to infection. Approximately 12 million Americans get infected with STDs every year—nearly three percent of the entire population. Of that group, 63 percent are younger than 25 years old.¹⁰ A study in 2008 found that one in four girls in high school is infected with a sexually transmitted disease—a finding that should truly alarm us all.¹¹ Those who have contracted a sexually transmitted disease—such as syphilis, chlamydia, or human papilloma virus (HPV)—may suffer the irreversible effects of these diseases: sterility, damage to the brain, heart, or blood vessels, or incurable genital warts.

Upon entering college, what may have been “exciting” can become threatening. Between 20 to 25 percent of women in college experience an attempted or completed rape.¹² We can assume that these figures would be vastly lower for Christian colleges. Yet, having firsthand knowledge of a young woman who was a victim of date rape while attending a Christian university, it is clear that these young women are also vulnerable.

The war on children is not only killing our children in the womb and infecting them with deadly STDs, it is murdering them outright. It should shock and stupefy us that homicide is the

second leading cause of death for young people 10 to 24 years of age.¹³ Furthermore, the heartbreaking fact is that of all juveniles murdered in 2007, 35 percent were under the age of five, with the most common method of murder being physical assault. At least 50 percent of the time, the murderers' weapons are their own hands and/or feet.¹⁴ In some cases, those attacking children are their own parents or members of their families. Twelve out of every 1,000 children under age 17 suffer physical, sexual, emotional abuse, or neglect from, in the majority of cases, family members or family friends.¹⁵

While the above list shows all the kinds of physical attacks that put our children in danger, they are in jeopardy in another way as well. Parents who are making every effort to protect their children from physical violence in their neighborhoods and schools, often find it much more difficult to protect their children from the violence against their minds. Especially for Christian parents, the challenge to nurture their children "in the training and admonition of the Lord" may seem like an almost hopeless cause in the context of today's polluted culture.

The Loss of Our Christian Heritage and Values

Our nation seems bent on jettisoning the public and governmental symbols of our Christian heritage and denying its role in our history. Even the new Capitol Visitor Center in Washington, D.C., initially misidentified our national motto as "*E Pluribus Unum*" rather than "In God We Trust." Our President is steering our nation away from its Christian mooring. He has declared, "We do not consider ourselves a Christian nation or a Jewish nation or a Muslim nation. We consider ourselves a nation of citizens who are bound by ideals and a set of values."¹⁶

For some time now the Christian roots of those "ideals and values" that the President spoke of have either been ignored or distorted by the textbooks and curriculum in our government-

controlled public schools. In some schools, not only are children told not to pray silently or to read their Bibles, they are forbidden to hold meetings for Christian clubs on campus, contrary to the freedom provided under The Equal Access Act passed in 1984 during the Reagan administration.¹⁷ These school policies and curriculums are only symptoms of the real disease, however. The root problem is the view that schooling should be dominated by a secular outlook on life. As Dr. Richard Lappert and Dr. Robert Simonds point out, this form of education, “while pretending to be neutral, actually opposes the reality of God and His truth, and thus is doomed to fail even at its well-intentioned purposes.”¹⁸

So, in addition to the malevolent and leering faces of sexual predators and pornographers, and the enticing face of sexual promiscuity, the other face we should fear is that of the benign, well-intentioned government policy maker or public school educators who fail to see that life is not “neutral.” They work alongside the well-meaning, but misguided politicians and government bureaucrats who fail to acknowledge that all problems, whether they be social, political, or cultural, come under the sovereign rule and claims of Jesus Christ as Lord of all the universe.

The faces of those who fail to recognize Christ’s claims as Lord of all may be benign, but their voices self-confidently proclaim that America’s culture *is* and *should be* secular. They state with all sincerity that our nation would be better off if the Christian worldview, Christian morality, and Christian religion were silenced, suppressed, or merely sidelined from the public square and cultural venues. But, as Dr. Albert Mohler, Jr., points out in *Culture Shift*, “There is no genuinely secular state, no secular argument, and no secular motivation, even among those who consider themselves secular. There is no neutrality.”¹⁹

This is the true foe that is destroying our children. Until we

return to the founding vision of a republic governed by a moral and religious people—until we experience the renewal of our culture through the efforts of citizens whose hearts have been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, the assault on our children—who are the future of our nation and the future of the church—will continue. As our culture becomes more vulgar, profane, and ungodly, children are its most vulnerable victims. They are always the first to suffer the attack, whether inside or outside the womb.

The Face of Revival—The Face of Youth?

Nevertheless, it is these children who may bring the revival that is our country's greatest need. There is evidence that the stirrings of the First Great Awakening, which preceded the American Revolution, "started among the young people in Jonathan Edwards' church at Northampton, Massachusetts, and then spread up and down the Connecticut River Valley in New England."²⁰ This was preceded by an earlier "Uprising of the Children" that started in the European region of Silesia along the Czech-Polish border. The historical account is written in "a 41 page tract published in London in 1708 with the long title (typical of the period), *Praise out of the Mouth of Babes, or, a Particular Account of Some Extraordinary Pious Motions and Devout Exercises, Observ'd of Late in Many Children in Silesia.*"²¹ These "Pious Motions" started, according to Dr. Bruce Hindmarsh, professor of spiritual theology at Regent College in Vancouver,

. . . when school-age children of Protestant parents were not willing, like their elders, to be silenced and marginalized by their Catholic rulers. The children at Sprottau . . . began to meet in the open fields outside the town at daybreak and two or three more times a day. They would form a circle and pray—sometimes lying prostrate—and then sing

Lutheran hymns, read Psalms and devotional texts, and close with a blessing. One Protestant father was so worried about the children doing this in defiance of the authorities that he tried to lock his son and daughter in their bedrooms. When he heard that they were going to climb out the window, he relented and let them go.²²

From this children's movement, Hindmarsh connects the dots all the way across the Atlantic to Jonathan Edwards' Massachusetts.²³ But what strikes me is the description of these children—"sometimes lying prostrate." I think of the account (of which I have since lost track) describing the thousands of young people who prostrated themselves on another field last November. They came to Qualcomm Stadium in San Diego on November 1, 2008, to be part of a 12-hour prayer vigil on behalf of the passage of Proposition 8, the California Amendment to uphold marriage between a man and a woman.²⁴ Their prayers were answered, the amendment passed and has since been upheld by the California Supreme Court—to the surprise of many.

Is it time to take heed of the example of our youth? Is it time to join with them and to prostrate ourselves before the Lord to plead for Him to bring revival to our nation—not for our sake, but for theirs?