

## **CHANNEL ONE: PERVERTING THE INTEGRITY OF EDUCATION**

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**In classrooms all across the greatest nation on earth, a captive audience of American children are forced to watch advertising along with a controversial MTV-style news program. Educators are promoting the manipulation of students in the classroom through psychological techniques employed by marketers to increase their profit margins. In doing so, they are allowing messages into the classroom that undermine parental values and authority. Schools have become partners in diminishing the integrity of education as they bestow their stamp of approval on Channel One promoted products and entertainment.**

**Dr. Wayne Teague, a strong opponent of Channel One and former Superintendent of Education for the State of Alabama, shared the following excerpts from a manual for in-school marketing, "When a young person is between 13 and 18 years old, you have the chance of a lifetime to transform a fickle consumer into a loyal customer. Especially for products that have special focus on teenagers. Where do you reach teenagers when peer power is at its peak, in the setting where peer influence is paramount. In school - your key to the \$78 billion teen market." This manual is used to encourage advertisers to explore the profitability of marketing to schools. Make no mistake -this is how our children are viewed by companies like Channel One.**

**Bill Honig, past California Superintendent of Public Instruction said in a 1991 Senate hearing, "We have no right legally or ethically to sell access to our students by converting the educational purpose of school to a commercial one." Since that hearing a long list of educational organizations have denounced Channel One for using sophisticated imagery and dialogue to deceive children. As the Alabama PTA stated, "Channel One is really a wolf in sheep's clothing...And selling classroom time is in the best interest of commercial sponsors, not children."**

**My personal experience with Channel One began in the fall of 1993. My son's sixth grade teacher said parents need to do something. She was upset by a newscast on teen pregnancy. I had no idea this program was being shown to both of my children. A few months later, my sixth grader informed me it would be a good idea for the United States to legalize drugs. My high schooler agreed. Their opinion was formed by the Channel One broadcast on then surgeon general, Jocelyn Elders. I wondered how many children who were contemplating using drugs would be tempted to do so because of Ms. Elders' message.**

**I researched Channel One for several months and was distressed to learn that the popular culture that I was battling on a daily basis was now being encouraged through our public school system. I was outraged that I was not asked to sign a parental consent form or even notified that this program was introduced into my children's lives via the classroom.**

I brought my research to the local school board and other concerned parents. Included in the material was a resolution from the Alabama State Board of Education pronouncing, "...television reception and distribution to a captive audience in a public school classroom for commercial purposes is exploitation and a violation of the public trust." Consequently, Channel One was removed from our city school system.

Unfortunately, Channel One continues to exploit children and undermine parental authority and values. Although I have had the opportunity to view just a small portion of Channel One tapes - what I have seen is alarming.

Sadly, violence has been made acceptable to many of our children by the entertainment industry and Channel One has done its part by promoting violent television programs, movies, and music in the classroom. Children were encouraged through their schools to watch "*New York Undercover*". According to the Center for Media Education, this is one of the most violent prime time series on broadcast television.

Our children had to view a graphic TV commercial for Stephen King's *The Shining*. In the classroom, children as young as ten watched as a father menaces his young son and wife with a mallet. The ad shows "MURDER" written in blood on a mirror. The terrorized wife is shown clutching a huge knife in self-defense; the child is shown shaking with fright. Ironically, there was a parental warning at the end of this commercial, but there were no parents present to read it.

Continuing their history of irresponsibility to children, as part of their "current events" segment, Channel One broadcast a story on the gangsta rapper, Tupac Shakur. They chose to feature his violent and drug-drenched style of music. In a later broadcast, Channel One informed children that "more and more parents are tolerant of the drug culture; in fact, many of them were once part of it .....and 46% of parents expect their teens to try illegal drugs." In a Birmingham News article this year, Channel One's producer, Andy Hill, claimed his network never broadcast this message to children. Our organization has the tape proving otherwise.

The lead-in music to the Channel One news segment includes artists such as shock rocker Marilyn Manson, whose CD entitled *Anti-Christ Superstar* is well known among teens, along with his philosophy that denigrates moral decency. Channel One executives claim they only played instrumentals of Marilyn Manson. They obviously do not have a grasp of what is taking place on their broadcasts. Obligation, Inc. has two tapes with Marilyn Manson lyrics being sung on Channel One.

The Washington based Family Research Council reports, "Channel One's exposure of Manson did not stop with its television broadcasts, but was included on its website, which is advertised during the classroom broadcasts and receives more than one million hits per day."

Marilyn Manson has been removed from Channel One's website and in-school program, but according to the FRC, "the question remains whether the motivation behind the network's initial promotion of Manson has changed." Manson was named "one of the most potent commercial forces of the 1990's." Channel One played a huge part in introducing and delivering a captive audience of schoolchildren to this self-proclaimed high priest in the Church of Satan.

In the Eagle Forum's December 1998 Education Reporter they noted that "The website's Playlist also features the rap group Bone, Thugs and Harmony, who sing about sex, rape and gun violence. It was the music of this group that, according to court testimony, obsessed the 13-year-old killer Mitchell Johnson prior to the Jonesboro, Arkansas school massacre."

Other subject matter Channel One reported to students included stories on HIV and AIDS. An AIDS story on Channel One's website linked students to web pages that offer information on how to use a condom and descriptions of sexual activities. One link, called "AIDS and Young People," dated July of last year, states: "AIDS has made sex more difficult. It is one more thing to think about. But AIDS is not something to be so frightened of that it puts you off from ever having sex." School boards that entered into an agreement for the in-school program never agreed to deliver their students to a website. This website was introduced to children in December of 1996 and is advertised daily on the in-school broadcast. This is yet another indication of the insidious manner in which Channel One conducts its business.

Another preposterous example of Channel One's recklessness is their website article providing students' tips on how to cheat on a book report as well as alerting them to the website, [cheater.com](http://cheater.com). To quote Channel One, "Cheating ain't easy".

In September of 1998, at a school board meeting in Shelby County, Alabama, the Executive Vice President of Education for the Channel One network, Mr. Paul Folkemer, pledged he would no longer allow objectionable or offensive programs to be advertised to schoolchildren. After his pledge, the sex-saturated *Dawsons Creek* was advertised at least seven times. When children tune into this program they can view episodes that feature plots including a 15 year-old having sex with his teacher and a 16 year-old discussing the titles of pornographic movies with his girl friend. The dialogue between these two teens gives the impression it is normal and expected for teens to regularly view pornographic movies. Channel One even promoted a contest that would allow students to have a role in an upcoming *Dawsons Creek* episode. This program is so objectionable that a juvenile court judge in Andalusia, Alabama filed an FCC complaint because of its obscene nature and negative impact on children.

Primedia, the parent company of Channel One, publishes *Seventeen* magazine and has advertised it frequently in the classroom. Its "Sex and Body" column follows a question and answer format. Most parents would be horrified to learn the content of this column. This is not the *Seventeen* magazine of yesteryear.

In addition, the sexually explicit movie "Never Been Kissed" was advertised as well as an extremely offensive movie entitled "The Waterboy". These are just a few of Channel One's transgressions in their long history of marketing a deleterious culture to our children. Barbara VanderVeen, a school board member in Allendale, Michigan predicted that Hollywood could not be trusted to have the best interests of children at heart when she said, "I feel we are opening up our children to whatever the media chooses to put in the classroom. I don't particularly care to have the media telling our kids about values."

In a letter to the editor of the Birmingham News, a Hueytown, Alabama teacher stated, "Working in the classroom, I have seen this news program run ads for PG-13 movies. These movies promoted guns, violence, sex, obscene or profane language and alcohol. These movie ads were shown to a captive audience of sixth, seven and eighth graders. These students were taught by the Jefferson County Student Code of Conduct that any of the above would be a Class I or Class II offense resulting in disciplinary action."

In addition to promoting the popular culture, Channel One has promoted an unhealthy lifestyle to our youngsters on a daily basis. In an America where obesity is a growing problem for our youth, many of the advertisements shown on Channel One contradict and weaken the school's positive messages. On the one hand, classes on nutrition advocate eating low-fat, low-salt and low-sugar foods while on the other Channel One ads for candy bars, snack foods and soft drinks promote the consumption of just the opposite. Indeed, the American Academy of Pediatrics in 1991 proposed that food ads aimed at children should be banned from television entirely because they promote profit-making rather than healthy eating. How much worse to have these messages delivered through the classroom.

It is well-established that we have a literacy problem in this nation. Why then don't our schools promote reading every morning - instead they allow Channel One to reinforce student's viewing of TV, movies and playing video games.

It is perplexing that a constant refrain from educators is that without Channel One their students would have no current events knowledge and, therefore, show little interest in current events as adults. This is absurd. As a matter of record, Education World magazine recently offered twenty-five alternatives to teach current events. None of them relied on TV, but on the printed word! In the Baby Boomer generation, students were required as part of their homework to bring in newspaper articles to the classroom for discussion. It is just plain common sense that an active participant in a classroom discussion will retain current events knowledge much better than a passive viewer. Several studies on Channel One have concluded that since the current events are not tied into the course of study, the students much more often remember jingles and commercials than they do the news. In fact, William Hoynes of Vassar College proclaimed Channel One is just "a slick twelve minute commercial."

As a parent who has tried to be responsible and diligent about the sights and sounds absorbed by my children, I am disheartened that an institution I once held in high regard has seen fit to promote vulgar, violent and sexually charged programming to vulnerable and impressionable children.

In his book, The Disappearance of Childhood, Neil Postman looked into a crystal ball and foretold the future when he said, "In due course, when all teachers and administrators are themselves the products of the Television Age, resistance to the culture will not only lose whatever strength it may have had, but its point will have been forgotten." Perhaps the acceptance of Channel One by some educators is evidence that we are fast-approaching that unfortunate time.