

IDEOLOGICAL BLINDERS

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

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It is not easy to be objective, but it is not impossible. Judges in the courtroom, along with Olympic judges in diving and ice skating events, generally do a good job. While departures from objectivity can be expected, the expectation that professionals who sit in judgment ought to be held to standards of objectivity is entirely reasonable. Problems emerge when the departures become routine, and this is unfortunately a common condition among the chattering class: too often, ideology rules.

Let me give you two recent examples. Two months after our victory against the Smithsonian, the leading art critic for the New York Times, Michael Kimmelman, wrote an article comparing the reaction of Americans who find some artwork offensive to their European counterparts. Guess who came off the worst? This was due, in no small part, to us (he even dug up our 1999 protest against the "Sensation" exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art). But a close read of what he said undermines his conclusion.

According to Kimmelman, the Europeans reacted with "mildly appalled bafflement" to Catholic League objections to the ants-on-the-crucifix video. "It all seems inexplicable to them," he said. That's because "Cultural free expression and independence of public arts institutions...are taken for granted across modern Europe." As opposed, of course, to those Neanderthals in the U.S., led by the Catholic League. Well, not so fast.

Kimmelman says that when the "Sensation" exhibition opened in England in 1997, they weren't at all upset with the portrait of Our Blessed Mother adorned with elephant dung and

pornographic cutouts. He takes this as a good sign. I don't. No matter, the Brits did get angry about another "Sensation" exhibit, the portrait of Myra Hindley, a convicted child murderer.

So far, so good. We were angry with the Virgin Mary portrait, and the Brits were angry with the Myra Hindley one. But unlike the Catholic League, which organized a non-violent demonstration outside the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Brits, according to Kimmelman, "splattered ink and raw egg on the canvas."

So we acted civilly, and they resorted to vandalism. Yet we're the ones lacking in respect for "cultural free expression." Didn't Kimmelman see this? To top things off, the venue which hosted the art we objected to was publicly funded; the art the Brits objected to was in a private gallery.

Here's another recent example, also taken from the New York Times. On February 4, there was a story on why 41 percent of all the pregnancies in New York City result in abortion (blacks lead with a 74 percent rate). The reporters cited four reasons, two of which made sense: easy abortion laws in New York, and ambivalence on the part of poor girls on whether to have the baby. But there were two that were totally implausible: "the absence of mandatory sex education in New York City public schools," and "the ignorance of people, especially young ones, about where to get affordable birth control."

They mention a 17-year-old who came back for her second abortion. "The girl said she sometimes used condoms," they wrote. Is it safe to say she is not suffering from ignorance? "But I wasn't using them when I got pregnant," she told them. Here's the best: "I might use them more now, but I don't know." It should be obvious, but sadly it is not, that no amount of education is going to change this girl's behavior.

Then we are introduced to a 20-year-old, also a repeat offender; she had her first abortion when she was 16. She explains what happened: "It was an accident. I used a condom every time, but I already have a kid, and I'm not ready for another one." Condoms that don't work? What a shocker! Or maybe she and her partner failed to follow all the steps that are required for proper condom use as approved by the Centers for Disease Control—there are more than a dozen!

If ignorance about where to get affordable birth control is a problem, then how could it possibly be that these same reporters end their article by saying the following: "The health department distributes a pocket-size guide to clinics where teenagers can get medical care and low-cost or free contraception (information that is also available through the city's 311 hot line)." More than that, they write that "Condoms are distributed through health offices at every public high school."

What Kimmelman and these reporters have in common is this: they arrived at their conclusions before they did their story. In fairness, it would be wrong to say they are dishonest: if they were, they wouldn't offer evidence that is contrary to their conclusions. No, their problem is deeper—they are blinded by ideology.

This is what we're up against all the time. We provide evidence of Catholic bashing, but all the data, logic and reason mean nothing to those whose ideology has literally blinded them to reality. The only good news is that most Americans can be persuaded by the empirical evidence, and it is they—not the cultural elites—whom we seek to convince.