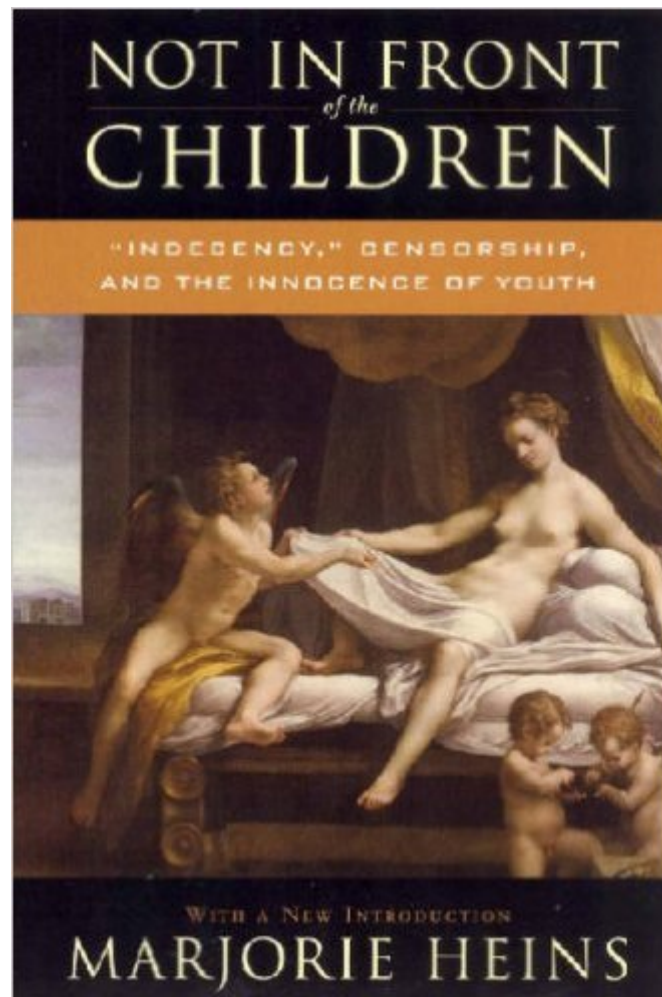


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Not In Front Of The Children: 'Indecency,' Censorship, And The Innocence Of Youth



Synopsis

From Huckleberry Finn to Harry Potter, from Internet filters to the v-chip, censorship exercised on behalf of children and adolescents is often based on the assumption that they must be protected from "indecent" information that might harm their development—whether in art, in literature, or on a Web site. But where does this assumption come from, and is it true? In *Not in Front of the Children*, Marjorie Heins explores the fascinating history of "indecent" laws and other restrictions aimed at protecting youth. From Plato's argument for rigid censorship, through Victorian laws aimed at repressing libidinous thoughts, to contemporary battles over sex education in public schools and violence in the media, Heins guides us through what became, and remains, an ideological minefield. With fascinating examples drawn from around the globe, she suggests that the "harm to minors" argument rests on shaky foundations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a responsible and important study of how we rationalize censorship policies to "protect" children. The interests at stake here are as obvious as they are important. The freedom of expression has long been considered the touchstone of individual liberty and, in turn, democracy. Legally, we have enacted many safeguards to protect this essential aspect of our society, and continue to give mouth service to its importance. But, even as we tout the importance of such personal freedoms, both overseas and on American soil, we are sadly failing in one critical respect: we are not instilling these values in our children. Instead, we are showing them that an authoritative regime may censor and punish unpopular or offensive speech in the name of safety and conformity.

We lecture students over the values of the freedom of speech while allowing schools inappropriately broad latitude in declaring student behavior inappropriate or dangerous if it even references violent or sexual themes. Anything considered "sexual" in nature is censored from school life entirely, and even sexual education classes suffer in their ability to inform and protect students. What are teenagers learning about the importance of personal freedom when they see their peers suspended, expelled, and even imprisoned, for their artistic expressions? Students can legitimately complain that many primary and secondary schools unnecessarily subject them to enforced orthodoxy and repressive strictures, particularly in regards to sexual and violent imagery. I agree with the author that this paternalistic censorship harms children in many ways, and her discussion of the "modeling effects" and the teaching of authoritarianism should not be dismissed lightly.

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