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Synopsis Books:

Janet Jacksons infamous "wardrobe malfunction" at the 2004 Superbowl precipitated a nationwide controversy. To judge by the hysterical reaction, one would think that nothing so shocking had ever been seen on television. Yet, remarkably, during the conservative 1950s, similar breast-baring accidents on television (by Faye Emerson and Jayne Mansfield) raised barely a stir. Is America on the verge of another puritanical era? Is this new Puritanism the result of something more than just concerns for public decency?

First Amendment and emerging technology specialist Frederick S. Lane examines Americas changing attitudes toward decency and the politics of decency in this timely book. He takes a strong and unequivocal position that it is inappropriate and dangerous for the government to try to regulate morality. He accuses religious conservatives of starting "decency wars" for motives no more noble than profit and political gain. As Lane astutely points out, such controversies generate a flood of books, speeches, and syndicated radio and television programs. More importantly, they fill the coffers of conservative politicians and "non-profits."

Lane first sets the stage for the current controversy by reviewing the history of the decency debate from the invention of the camera as the catalyst for public decency concerns, through the mixing of morality and politics by the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, to the recent activist stance by the Federal Communications Commission against perceived indecency.

He spells out strategies for combating the rising influence of the Religious Rights puritanical ploys by emphasizing that decency standards are a private and personal responsibility, not a matter of law enforcement. He asserts that we must continuously educate the public regarding the ruinous effects of government censorship, watered-down textbooks, and homophobia. Moreover, he stresses the supreme importance of supporting existing and new organizations to counteract the propaganda from groups like the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family.

Detailing the degree to which Fundamentalist religion has pervaded current politics, entertainment, and society at large, this compelling book is essential reading for understanding one of the most fiercely debated social issues of our nation.

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