

The PMRC and Rating of Music Releases ©

By Connie J. Schlosberg

Using a rating guide to label record albums is not a form of censorship. Censorship is the removal or suppression of what is considered morally, politically or otherwise objectionable. Record companies adhering warning labels to albums that may be considered offensive or not suitable for children is no different than the Motion Picture Association rating the movies being shown. These labels – nicknamed the Tipper Sticker – were suggested by the Parent Music Resource Center in an attempt to deter the sale of suggestive music to children.

The Parent Music Resource Center (PMRC) was formed in 1985 by the Tipper Gore, Susan Baker, Pam Howar, and Sally Nevius – dubbed the “Washington wives.” The goal of the PMRC was to educate and inform parents about musical lyrics that were sexually explicit, excessively violent and glorified drugs and alcohol. Their mission was to enact a rating system to records. The PMRC claimed that these said lyrics were responsible for the increase in violence, rape, teen pregnancy, and teen suicide. The committee received opposition from the music community. However, 19 record companies did agree to put “Parental Guidance: Explicit Lyrics” labels on albums to warn of explicit lyrics contained on certain records. Before the labels were put into place, the senate held a hearing on the subject. The outcome was that the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) agreed to put warning labels at their discretion on selected releases.

Parents have the right to monitor what music their underage children are listening to. It should be the parents’ choosing if they want to purchase the record or not. These labels are in no way interfering with artists’ expressions because the labels are not prohibiting **the sale of these products.**

Artists have the right and should certainly retain those rights to create and produce whatever their hearts desire. However, that right does not guarantee them the sale of their works. It also does not ensure that their work will be sold at every establishment. Private entities have the right to choose what products they want to sell. Public institutions have to appeal to wide audience so offensive material may not get exhibited or played. The artist owns the responsibility to showcase his/her work. If the choice is to create something provocative then the artist needs to understand the limited possibilities.