

Stan Lee: Letter on Censorship

2:40 min.

Context: As the Supreme Court approaches the Schwarzenegger v. EMA/ Entertainment Software Association case which will rule whether the Californian law banning sale of certain games to under 18s is unconstitutional, the activist Video Game Voters Network have gained a public vote of confidence: Stan Lee himself. The letter below draws some astute lines between what happened to comics in the 50s and what's happening now.

Dear Video Game Voters Network,

I'm writing to urge gamers everywhere to take a stand and defend both the First Amendment and the rights of computer and video game artists by joining the Video Game Voters Network (VGVN). My memory has always been lousy and it's not improving with age. But it's good enough to remember a time when the government was trying to do to comic books what some politicians now want to do with video games: censor them and prohibit their sales. It was a bad idea half a century ago and it's just as bad an idea now. And you can do something about it.

I created Spider-Man, Iron Man and the Hulk, the virtual ancestors of the characters in today's games. In the 1950s, there was a national hysteria about the so-called "dangerous effect" comic books were having on our nation's youth.

Comic books, it was said, contributed to "juvenile delinquency." A Senate subcommittee investigated and decided the U.S. could not "afford the calculated risk involved in feeding its children, through comic books, a concentrated diet of crime, horror and violence." Comic books were burned. The State of Washington made it a crime to sell comic books without a license. And Los Angeles passed a law that said it was a crime to sell "crime comic books." Looking back, the outcry was — forgive the expression — comical.

The more things change, as they say, the more they stay the same. Substitute video games for comic books and you've got a 21st century replay of the craziness of the 1950s. States have passed laws restricting the sale of video games and later this year, the Supreme Court will hear a case about one of those laws, this one passed in California. Why does this matter? Because if you restrict sales of video games, you're chipping away at our First Amendment rights to free speech and opening the door to restrictions on books and movies.

The Supreme Court should find the law unconstitutional, as lower courts have. But politicians will keep looking for ways to restrict the rights of gamers and computer and video game artists because it makes for good headlines to say they're "protecting the children," even if they're doing no such thing. They do so despite the fact that the industry has a remarkable rating system in place already and all

new consoles have parental controls — both of which help parents ensure parents are in control of what their children play. But you can help fight the battle against politicians.

The VGVN was created so gamers can express their views and tell our political leaders that it's as ridiculous to worry about video games today as it was to worry about comic books then. Far from being dangerous, video games are increasingly powerful contributors to our nation's entertainment, economy, education, and society.

By joining the VGVN, you'll be telling our political leaders that you care enough about the games you play to use your voice and your vote to help those who recognize the realities and benefits of gaming and punish those who try to restrict both your access to games and your rights. Please join and participate. It'll be good for your constitution.

Thanks.

Stan Lee