

# Don't Mess With the Folks

It is simply astounding that some people are spinning this Reagan movie controversy as a censorship issue. The usual left-wing suspects are screaming the "conservatives" forced CBS to abandon the project.

The New York Times editorialized, "It should have come as no surprise that conservatives, protective of Mr. Reagan's image at all times, would launch on the fierce assaults that have become so familiar whenever the right wants to scare the media... "

And Barbra Streisand, an increasingly amusing presence, says, "This is censorship, pure and simple." One wonders if The Times and Streisand would react the same way if Bill Clinton, on his deathbed, was mocked in a network docu-drama starring Pamela Anderson as Monica Lewinsky.

The truth is that the Reagan movie demeans a dying President and the wife who is caring for him. Ten years from now, this Reagan film could run all day long, and most of the public wouldn't really care.

Certainly, the Kennedy family has been worked over by the TV movie czars. But Americans are not big on cruelty when it can be associated with current tragedy. Nancy Reagan, herself, called the movie cruel and many Americans see it that way.

CBS, wisely, does not want to be in the "cruelty business," as they say in the bistros of Beverly Hills. But there are two questions in play here. First, how could a hokey, over-the-top film like this get greenlighted in the first place, and second, what about Dr. Laura?

Let's take Laura Schlessinger first. You'll remember the radio advice-giver tried to launch a syndicated TV program but was picketed by gay rights activists. They objected to her

Biblical take on the morality of homosexuality. They threatened to boycott sponsors and implored Paramount to cancel Laura. Her show went down in flames.

Maybe I missed the New York Times editorial deploring “politically correct” censorship in this case. As for Babs? Well, the silence was deafening.

So could this be a case of selective outrage over perceived right-wing “censorship?” Or are we dealing with outright hypocrisy here? You make the call.

I have often stated that the media is not looking out for you, because it doesn’t understand you, nor does it care about you. The “folks” are seen as ratings points—dollar signs.

You might think that a movie about the Reagans written by a liberal, produced by two liberals, directed by a left-winger, and starring the husband of Barbra Streisand might have raised a red flag or two. But not in the hallways of CBS Entertainment. That kind of roster is common in show business, so why would anyone question it?

And even when the film was screened, few at CBS understood the brewing perfect storm. They simply don’t know how much of the country thinks.

But there’s something else. Do you think CBS would have financed a movie about the Gores written by Rush Limbaugh? Of course not. Anyone pitching that would have been mocked and scorned. But it’s okay to carve up the Reagans? More hypocrisy?

In the end, this is another victory for the folks, not for the political ideologues. CBS could not care less if a few million conservative zealots object to a program.

But when the wind shifts and the fire of indignation starts taking hold in the minds of everyday Americans who value

fairness, then CBS and every other media outfit must care.

For if they ignore those alarms, they will surely go down in flames.