



COURTESY RCN

## Brand X

This striking image was not found blowing through Tiananmen Square, nor is it the cover of Francis Fukuyama's next book. It is an ad for Starpower, a company offering phone, cable, and Internet service in the Washington, D.C., area, and is one of a series of posters plastered throughout that city.

The power of the image—Lenin both overthrown symbolically and hanged in effigy—intentionally evokes the pictures of communism's symbolic annihilation throughout Eastern Europe in 1989–1990. But the Starpower ad does some notable annihilating of its own: It reduces communism—and its history of complete failure—to the role of consumer mistake. Lenin lives, this time as the rhetorical equivalent of corn flakes that get soggy and detergent that leaves a ring around the collar. He's the ultimate Brand X.

Starpower's campaign is almost too pure: No reference is made to any of Starpower's competitors, nor does the company make any claims at all for itself. The sparse copy about late repairmen suggests only that uncompetitive institutions cannot survive. This poster sells only choice.

In an age of statuary, the torso of Ozymandias, king of kings, was carted off as scrap for re-use. In an age of information, the same thing happens to his picture.

—Charles Paul Freund

## Devil Music

By Brian Doherty

**M**arilyn Manson, rock's notorious "antichrist superstar," whose onstage antics include shredding bibles and simulating animal sacrifices, might soon have a couple of new outrages under his belt: proposed laws in Michigan and South Carolina that would place ratings on live music concerts and prohibit minors from attending certain shows unless they're accompanied by an adult guardian.

The two Republican state legislators pushing such bills—South Carolina Rep. Daniel Tripp and Michigan Sen. Dale Shugars—both credit public outcry over Manson as inspiration. Tripp drove Manson out of South Carolina last year—but with his claws full of cash. Tripp pushed through a joint resolution banning Manson from performing in state-owned

facilities, and the University of South Carolina's Carolina Coliseum—which had contracted with Manson for a performance—paid him not to play.

Though he's been talking about it to the press, Tripp won't introduce his bill until next year's legislative session. He says it would apply only to state-operated concert venues. "I've been playing around with the language," he says. "My bottom line is trying to make a difference, to let the public make an informed choice about what their kids see. That isn't accomplished if I introduce a bill with no chance of passing, or that's unconstitutional." Tripp sheepishly admits that the joint resolution forbidding a Manson show probably wouldn't stand up to constitutional scrutiny. He envisions a bill requiring bands, in their contracts with venues, to promise no obscene elements

in their performance to avoid an X rating.

The Michigan bill is out of committee, but Shugars spokesman Mark Michaelson says proponents are temporarily delaying a floor vote "to see if venues and Ticketmaster can come up with counterproposals that would achieve the same end but work better for them."

The proposals are catching flak from some industry reps, including Recording Industry Association of America President Hilary Rosen. Rosen wrote to a Michigan senator that the bill "actually stifles expression before it happens.... Conditioning expression on government's review of that expression empowers the government to control what its citizens can and cannot hear." Both Tripp and Shugars say their bills are not prohibitive but merely informative—and constitutionally in line with existing obscenity laws.

Michigan legislative aide Michaelson says recent events demand immediate action. "What's really distressing the senator and myself is the fact that guys who have been involved in shooting rampages in Oregon and Pennsylvania are Marilyn Manson fans," Michaelson says. "There are some concerts where impressionable kids who can take the lyrics of shock rock a little too seriously just shouldn't be."

## Paying for Parks

By Michael W. Lynch

**I**t may appear that the federal government, which for years has been criticized for ignoring the fundamentals of economics, has thwarted the law of demand. In 1997, the National Park Service increased fees at 100 parks, recreation areas, and historic sites yet experienced no drop in visits. Overall, more than ►

## BRICKBATS

◆ **Businesses must go to some pretty ridiculous lengths to protect themselves from frivolous lawsuits these days, and the Massachusetts Civil Justice Reform Alliance held a contest to find out how ridiculous. It picked the most absurd warning labels that firms place on their products. Among the winners: a warning on a can of pepper spray that the user shouldn't spray it in his own eyes; a cigarette lighter cautioning users to point the torch away from the face when igniting; and a bottle of drain cleaner with a warning not to reuse the bottle to store beverages.**

◆ **Speaking of offensive lawsuits, here's one from Norway. A University of Oslo student is going to court to defend his right to reek. The man was barred from classes because his strong smell and tattered clothes drew complaints from staff and fellow students. The man claims that avoiding soap gives him a better understanding of astrophysics. (That's what he was studying.) He says his expulsion violates his "right to a private life" and "right to an education."**

◆ **You may not have to worry about your dirty laundry being aired in Lawrence, Massachusetts, but airing your just-washed laundry is another matter. The city has made it illegal to hang laundry anywhere but on a backyard clothesline. The city council member who introduced the law said she was tired of seeing people's shorts and socks hanging from fences and from railings in their front yards.**

Henry Payne



277 million people visited NPS-managed sites in 1997, a jump of roughly 3.6 percent over 1996. Attendance at the 100 parks that instituted new fees rose by 3.5 percent.

The Park Service hasn't really violated any fundamental economic principles; instead it's allowing its managers to take advantage of their localized knowledge while giving them incentives to improve their facilities. The new fees are a product of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program, a three-year experiment Congress authorized in 1995.

It allows the National Park Service either to increase old fees or implement new ones at selected sites. The new program allows each park to keep 80 percent of the additional rev-

enue it collects, alleviating the need to petition Congress or Park Service headquarters for a piece of a shared pie. Prior to this, all park fees went directly to the federal treasury, where they were spent on everything from cruise missiles to food stamps.

In its first year, the program raised \$53 million more than the roughly \$80 million that pre-existing fees brought

in. While this is still less than 5 percent of the NPS's \$1.6 billion budget, it is big bucks for particular parks. Acadia National Park in Maine, for instance, plans to use the \$2 million it will collect in fees in 1997 and

1998 to restore a popular hiking trail and historic vistas. Denali National Park in Alaska will make major improvements to its campgrounds with its extra \$2 million in fees.

So well received was the program that Congress will allow all fees, not just those increased under the program, to remain at the facilities where they are collected in 1998 and 1999. This pleases park managers and patrons alike. Park managers like it, says NPS spokesperson Dave Barna, because it removes some managerial decisions from "the political context" of annual appropriations. As for patrons, a Park Service survey found widespread support for the program, with eight in 10 parkgoers finding the new fees acceptable. Says Gary Machlis, chief social scientist at the NPS, "If the fees are fair, easy to understand, and the money goes back to the parks, a large majority of the American people accept and support them."

