

# Expanding sexual freedoms

By Tom Teepen  
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In England, rocker/showman Elton John has publicly joined his longtime partner, filmmaker David Furnish, in a formal union. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that group-sex clubs are lawful if the participants are consenting adults. Orgy on. And many of Europe's topless beaches have long since gone bottomless as well.

None of this has loosed any broad rampage of wantonness, destroyed marriage, set off epidemics of sexually transmitted diseases or collapsed civilization, always assumed by conservatives to be a frail creature vulnerable to the wash from any passing fad when in fact it has proved itself hardy during centuries of such buffeting.

Matters are rather different hereabouts, as you have perhaps noticed.

Films that play in Europe without causing a stir have to be truncated to pass ratings muster here. Indeed, we don't even see the full versions of some of our own films.

The Bush administration blew \$130 million this year on abstinence-only education, although a recent study by Texas A&M University, confirming other soundings, found that abstinence education doesn't deter teens from becoming sexually active. The American Academy

of Pediatrics has noted, with some horror, that keeping teens in the dark about birth control, as abstinence-mongering requires, leaves many ignorant about how to protect themselves when they do begin sex.

And going beyond opposing any sex outside marriage and pushing to criminalize abortion, sexual reactionaries have now taken to harassing contracep-

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tion, with powerful allies in the anti-sex Republican Party. Ignoring the recommendations of its own scientific panels, President Bush's Food and Drug Administration has iced a proposal to permit over-the-counter sales of the morning-after pill.

The greatest sexual hysteria collects around homosexuality. The U.S. military remains intolerant of gays and lesbians, unlike numerous militaries abroad. Gay marriage is lawful only in Massachusetts — and there just by a thin political thread — and only Vermont and Connecticut allow civil unions.

No less than the President of the United States ran for re-elec-

tion last year by proposing to install a ban on gay marriage in the Constitution, where it would be a creepy hanger-on around such great principles as the right to vote, free speech, the rule of law, religious freedom and the exquisite checks and balances of governance.

(Please note that since he was re-elected in part by exciting the religious right with his anti-gay grandstanding, Bush has dumped the whole matter. They never learn.)

Britain's once harsh laws against homosexuality lapsed years ago, and the military was opened to gays and lesbians in 2000.

Now gay civil unions — marriage in all but name — grant couples full legal rights. France, Germany and Switzerland do the same, and Holland, Spain, Canada and Belgium have legalized same-sex marriage straightforwardly.

And to think that just 17 years ago, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party barred schools and local governments from in any way accommodating homosexuality.

There may be hope for us yet. We've always been slow learners in such matters.

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