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The right-to-life movement is at a crossroads. Ten years ago, pro-lifers were on a roll, with Ronald Reagan in the White House, momentum in the Congress and the prospect of a pro-life Supreme Court on the horizon. The Republican Party was openly championing a right-to-life platform, while the Democrats were crippled with their militant abortion-on-demand agenda.

What a difference a decade makes. Today, Bill Clinton heads, without question, the most pro-abortion administration in history. Congress has relegated abortion protesters to outlaw status: The Supreme Court has a pro-abortion litmus test for membership. And the leadership of the Republican Party is running from its own platform.

What happened these past 10 years? In a word, while the pro-life movement was focusing on things political and judicial, the pro-abortion machine made an all-out effort to win the hearts and minds of America. Realizing their pro-abortion message would never fly, the abortion lobby became — presto — pro-choice. (In time, and with renewed confidence, this too would change to "abortion rights advocates" — abortionists would become "abortion providers.") With a new, palatable message — choice — they turned to the industry that could best present their message to America: Hollywood.

In Hollywood, the pro-abortion lobby enjoys virtually unanimous support. A 1981 study survey documented that 97 percent of the show-business elite supported abortion. But what good could Hollywood do the pro-abortion movement? For starters, it could reach millions of Americans through entertainment television.

Hollywood has done that in a big way these past two years, especially after the Supreme Court's 1989 Webster decision. On series such as "Mancuso FBI," "Cagney & Lacey," "Law and Order" and "The Trials of Rosie O'Neill," right-to-lifers were depicted as fanatics, zealots, terrorists — pro-choicers were the victims. Other series, including "thirtysomething," "Picket Fences" and "Melrose Place" presented pro-abortion story lines, likewise TV movies such as "Roe v. Wade," "A Private Matter," "Absolute Strangers" and HBO's teen-targeted "The Becky Bell Story." Not one program on entertainment television ever championed the right-to-life position until this past season when, incredibly, a pro-life message was finally introduced.

Louis Harris took a survey a few years ago to ask youngsters to identify their heroes. Parents didn't register. Neither did the clergy. Neither did teachers. Two out of three respondents chose celebrities, by far the highest margin. Who better to serve as the abortion lobby's messenger to the culture?

Pro-abortion Hollywood celebrities were recruited, mobilized and let loose. On the talk shows, luminaries like comedian Sandra Bernhard would ask how we could "go back to those really ridiculous, contrived times when women had

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no right to make their own decision" about abortion. Singer Neneh Cherry would assert, "Pro-life is pro-fascist. You can commit a bigger crime giving birth to a child when you ain't ready."

Roseanne Arnold, probably the best-known celebrity on television today, would state on an HBO comedy special, "You know who else I can't stand is them people that are anti-abortion. . . . I hate them. . . . They're hideous people. They're ugly, old, geeky, hideous men. . . . They just don't want nobody to have an abortion 'cause they want you to keep spittin' out kids so they

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can . . . molest them."

This past May, a slew of celebrities took to the telephone and the fax machine to lobby lawmakers for inclusion of abortion services in any health-care reform package. Among those involved were: Jill Eikenberry, Robert Guillaume, Sarah Jessica Parker, Sidney Poitier, Mary Steenburgen, Marlo Thomas and Lily Tomlin.

The left has been aware of the power of television for years. No one was more adroit in this regard than Bill Clinton, whose 1992 campaign raced from MTV to the "Arsenio Hall Show." The Republicans chortled and snickered — all the way to the unemployment lines.

This, sadly, has been the same attitude exhibited by many in the right-to-life movement. They see entertainment television as mindless junk, and it may be that, but it is also the greatest shaper of our culture, whether we like it or not.

If the right-to-life movement is to regain its momentum, it must confront Hollywood on its own turf. There are many staunch right-to-life advocates in the entertainment industry — Susan Howard, Brooke Shields and Mel Gibson, to name a few — who have courageously taken a stand against abortion. These stars, and the many potential pro-life advocates in the entertainment industry, must be recruited and mobilized by the right-to-life movement. If motivated, these messengers to the popular culture can return America to its pro-life roots in 10 years.

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