

Where Is The Shame?

Imagine if you agreed to allow your 16 or 17-year-old high school age son to sleep over at a friend's house with the understanding that the parents would be home. How would you react when you learn later that the host father hired the services of prostitutes to entertain your son and the other boys, and the host gave these boys condoms? When you confront the host who promoted this activity, would you expect him to be embarrassed, show remorse, be humiliated, Feel shame?

Shame is a painful feeling of humiliation or distress that you have because you know you have done something wrong. Humiliation, embarrassment, guilt, and remorse are synonyms while pride is an antonym. Perry R. Brannon, M. D. observed that shame is one of the three pillars of civilization, joining religion, and the laws and customs of the community, to support a civil society. Dr. Brannon concludes, rightfully so, that when "any of these pillars are weakened, the structure of civilization ... is weakened."¹

Dr. Brannon observes that shame is "most dependent on the internal structure of the personality," but at one time, other people would apply external scorn to point out shameful conduct. This scorn would have come from family members, friends, neighbors, and our leaders (teachers, professionals, societal role models, and elected officials). Today, shamelessness marks the spectrum of our society:

- From conservative hypocrites to bleeding-heart liberals;
- From members of the learned professions to the role models that now litter professional sports;
- From parents and other close relatives to our neighbors and friends.

The loss of shame is a tragic development for our culture.

If we doubt the premise, we can find that observers and commentators across the culture have documented the loss of shame and its impact on America.² However, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we do not need these renowned authors to tell us.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/shrinkwrapped/201103/shame-third-pillar-civilization>

² Here are some examples from the last 10 years.

Perry R. Brannon, M. D., Shame: A Third Pillar of Civilization, March 10, 2011. Id.

Cal Thomas, Loss of a sense of shame, Washington Times, December 1, 2009, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/dec/15/loss-of-a-sense-of-shame/>

Challies.com, The Death of Shame, <https://www.challies.com/the-death-of-shame/>

James F. Burns, Loss of shame is to the detriment of society, May 23, 2017, http://www.lockportjournal.com/opinion/loss-of-shame-is-to-the-detriment-of-society/article_4063bfb8-a9e8-55c0-9bd9-52b505a151f3.html

Pastoral Meanderings Blog, A loss of shame ..., August 28, 2016, <http://pastoralmeanderings.blogspot.com/2016/08/a-loss-of-shame.html>

The loss of shame is not limited to the individual. The loss of shame has progressed to affect groups. Republicans do not shun their friends who are shameful, and to be sure, neither do democrats. Members of fan bases do not shun those within their ranks who have acted shamefully. This has never been more evident than it is today.

As an example, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill family has circled its wagons and have offered endless excuses for decades of academic fraud that allowed its athletes to remain “eligible” to win championships and bring fame, glory and money to their program, players, and coaches. This pattern has played out around so many college and professional sports programs in recent years that it is nearly impossible to cite them all. I believe all readers (except those affiliated with North Carolina) understand the point I am making. Without exception, fans of other programs, including but not limited to NC State, Duke, Kansas, Kentucky, and Louisville have expressed their personal outrage about the North Carolina transgressions.

Yet, when the spot light shines through some of those glass houses to expose other transgressions, the immediate reaction is to close the blinds, close the curtains, and rally our “family” to circle its own wagons to defend at all cost. First, we hear “There is no evidence.” Then, we hear, “What’s the big deal? Everybody does it.” Finally, we hear, “Those who have exposed me are the ones who are to blame. They should be embarrassed, or they have been unfair.”

This litany describes the events that have occurred over the last several years at the University of Louisville, events that culminated yesterday with the release of the NCAA’s sanctions. Back to the opening paragraph, is this not a fair summary of what the Louisville basketball program did to boys, some of whom were 16 years old? Where is the shame? I do not see even a hint of shame from Coach Pitino, AD Jurich, former President Ramsey, or Interim President Postel. Each of these leaders claim they had no knowledge of the activities that have stained their program, yet not one of them have expressed or acted in a manner that shows the shame they should be feeling.

To be sure, this is but a recent home grown example of the loss of shame in our nation. It does not exist as an example that only defines Louisville basketball, but shines a light on our entire society which has learned to be without shame.

Shame on us all!