



Once upon a time, I had a really good friend named Brandon. Brandon Coe — I wonder what ever happened to him? We lost touch after his 8th grade year, my 7th. Anyway, I'd cheer Brandon on any day, in any endeavor. It's not a rare name, Brandon isn't, so how many times each week, each day, do you suppose the words "Let's go, Brandon!" get shouted out at baseball fields and basketball courts around the country? A lot, I'd think. And yet, despite the commonness of the name and the phrase, somehow there's still a Supreme Court case going on over a school that punished two young brothers just for wearing sweatshirts with those three words on them: "Let's go Brandon." Odd, no?

The school claims the shirts, and thus the brothers, exhibited "vulgar speech".

But... where is the vulgarity? Is it in the name "Brandon"? (My old friend would be tickled to learn his name is a curse!) Or is it the "let's go" part?

Oh, wait, right... I get it. It's in the three words together. It's the phrase that's vulgar. Got it. Or... do I?

- "Let's go, Brandon!" (Hit a home run out of the park!) Vulgarity?
- "Let's go, Brandon!" (Sink that 3-point shot for the win!) Vulgarity?
- "Let's go, Brandon!" (Do me like a bad doggy who needs discipline!) Vulgar? Well, ok, maybe a little vulgar, but only in some very specific context, like the fevered imagination of my lonely 7th grade self. But "Let's go Brandon", sitting silently in two-inch tall letters printed on the front of a sweatshirt? Nah, not vulgar.

So, let's be honest, just for a moment (please — I promise it won't sting). These are not obscene words, not separately and not strung together. Yes, I do know the origin story here; I fully understand what this was "code" for in 2022. So what? Code is code (and "code" is also an awfully suspicious choice of word to stand in for irony). As the censoring school district's own experienced lawyer points out herself: "The number of lewd and vulgar code words is shockingly expansive and ever-changing." So true! But that doesn't make the argument she thinks it does — such volatile expansiveness hardly justifies giving blank checks to schools to censor and punish any speech they deem offensive at any time. Quite the opposite, actually.

Think of it this way: Should schools have banned kids from bringing eggplants into their lunchrooms after emojis hypersexualized the vegetable a decade ago on Snapchat? Should students get suspended when they say the word "frickin"? Because those are "vulgar code" too,

and I know what they mean, and so do you, and... no one cares.

There's no doubt about it, some people in 2022 clearly intended the phrase "Let's go Brandon" to imply the word "fuck". But "fuck" itself is a very versatile word; one of the most flexible words in the English language. It denotes a sexual act, for sure, but it also conveys a universe of common feelings, including surprise, anger, joy, and disappointment. Maybe most commonly of all, "fuck" expresses one's disdain and derision for literally any person, place, or thing you can image, concrete or abstract. For example, you can: "Fuck the police." You can also: "Fuck censorship". You can even "Fuck yo couch, nigga!" But none of those fucks are sexual; they just express strong personal ideas and opinions, things like saying "Fuck Donald Trump. Or, possibly, "Fuck Joe Biden." So yes, some people definitely meant for "Let's go Brandon" to conjure the word "Fuck", and the two Michigander brothers were probably among them, but I guarantee you this — not one person in America ever said "Let's go Brandon" to suggest having sex with President Biden (except maybe Jill). No one. Most certainly not those two adolescent middle school boys, who of course as we all know are still just asexual little cherubs who've never even had a passing thought about anyone fucking anything, ever.

So back to that honesty thing: "Let's go Brandon" is clearly a political expression, derisive and derisive but one with zero sexual connotation. That's undisputed. However, the 1986 Supreme Court case the censorship school relies on, Bethel School District, focusses entirely on the strong sexual innuendos of a student's school assembly speech. In that case, it wasn't the f-word that got a high-schooler suspended, because he never said it; it was his obvious references to actual f-ing that did it.

As our old buddy Joe Biden himself might tell us: Look. Here's the deal, guys. I don't like that phrase either. It's crude. It's not nice. But look how many times I've used it right here alone, and I bet no one's fainted yet.

The extreme coarsening of America's political discourse since 2016 is unfortunate, it probably shouldn't be happening, but here we are, and if we start censoring the merely crude expressions of middle-schoolers in a country that supposedly values free speech, then what will we do next? Create a super-funded national goon squad and start deporting natural born citizens? It's a slippery slope in both directions, folks.

(But hey, Brandon Coe, if you're out there somewhere, reading this...)
let's go, buddy! 😊