

Sound bites eat up pop culture

As society's attention span shrinks, 'important' loses out to 'outrageous'

America is an interesting place. Where else are there so many hundreds of Elvis impersonators? None really look much like their hero, but they all look like one another. This is only one unique aspect of our pop culture.

CHRIS S. COBB

Columnist



Beavis and Butthead - WHAT THE HELL IS THIS CRAP?, or THIS SUCKS, CHANGE IT!

It is true that eMpTyV is watched mostly by today's youths, but having a short attention span is not just a problem of the younger generation. Many older and more "sophisticated" people simply prefer their pop culture in the form of daytime talk shows. The subjects of these shows are outrageous.

They have to be - it's the only way viewers will stay tuned. Who wouldn't rather watch "Overweight gay Nazis for Christ on the next DonaOpraGeraldohue?"

Daytime talk shows aren't really all that much different from tabloid news shows like "A Current Affair" or "Hard Copy." The more sensational and juicy the topic, the more likely we are to watch the show instead of news reports on events that are truly important. Whether it's on television or in the newspaper, there are many other subjects that need our attention much more than the latest update on O.J. Simpson.

Reading has become a dying art. Pop culture is replacing the written word with exciting, no effort media like television, movies, Elvis impersonators ... Of the people who do read, their choice is more likely to be a pop novel than a literary classic. Society has replaced Edgar Allen Poe with Stephen King, Ernest Hemingway with Tom Clancy and William Shakespeare with Michael Crichton. Gone are the Thomas Hardys, Joyce Carys, William Blakes.

We would rather concentrate on this fluff than have our minds challenged. Fluff is much easier on our collective peace of mind. Who really wants to worry about the body count on the 10 o'clock news, even though it's an accurate account of the world and a valid reason for concern. Instead we would rather watch soap operas with plots that entail nothing more than who slept with who, who killed who, who got who pregnant and who died and appeared on another show. Our attention span has had dwindled and no one seems concerned.

Who cares, right? It's someone else's problem.

Chris S. Cobb is a senior English major



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EDITORIAL

THIRTY YEARS LATER

1964 Civil Rights Act did not end racism

The recent holiday weekend did not only mark the 218th birthday of American independence. July 2 was the 30th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which officially ended legal racial discrimination in the United States.

When President Lyndon Johnson signed the act into law on national television, he destroyed the last of the fundamental barriers to racial equality in this country - but only on paper.

Despite progress over the last three decades, the laws enacted in the greatest civil rights legislation since the Civil War have not eradicated either racism or discrimination. Every day Americans are reminded of the social and cultural shortcomings that still produce bigotry and tension.

The continuing projects to rebuild South Central Los Angeles stand out as an example of the contemporary product of racial unrest.

In some isolated, yet recent, instances, stores and restaurants still

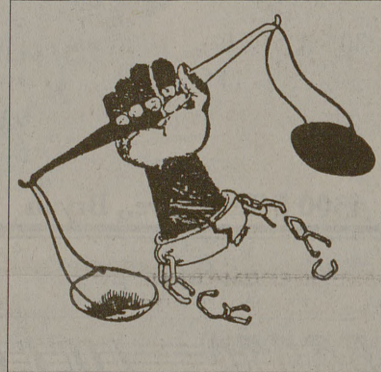
refuse to serve people because of their skin color or accent.

Hate crimes make the news every day. The centuries of slavery and discrimination in this country have an inertia that still has not run out.

Yet the Civil Rights Act of 1964 accomplished incredible things in this short time. Through-

out the South, including Texas, everything from trains and buses to public restrooms and water fountains was segregated between "White" and "Colored." Hotels, hospitals, restaurants, universities and public schools regularly excluded everyone who was not white. Most of today's college students were born only a decade

after this act came into being. Most have never seen any of the overt bigotry it outlawed. But as long as American society is not "colorblind" - and race plays any factor in determining the treatment any American receives from another - then the United States still has progress to make.

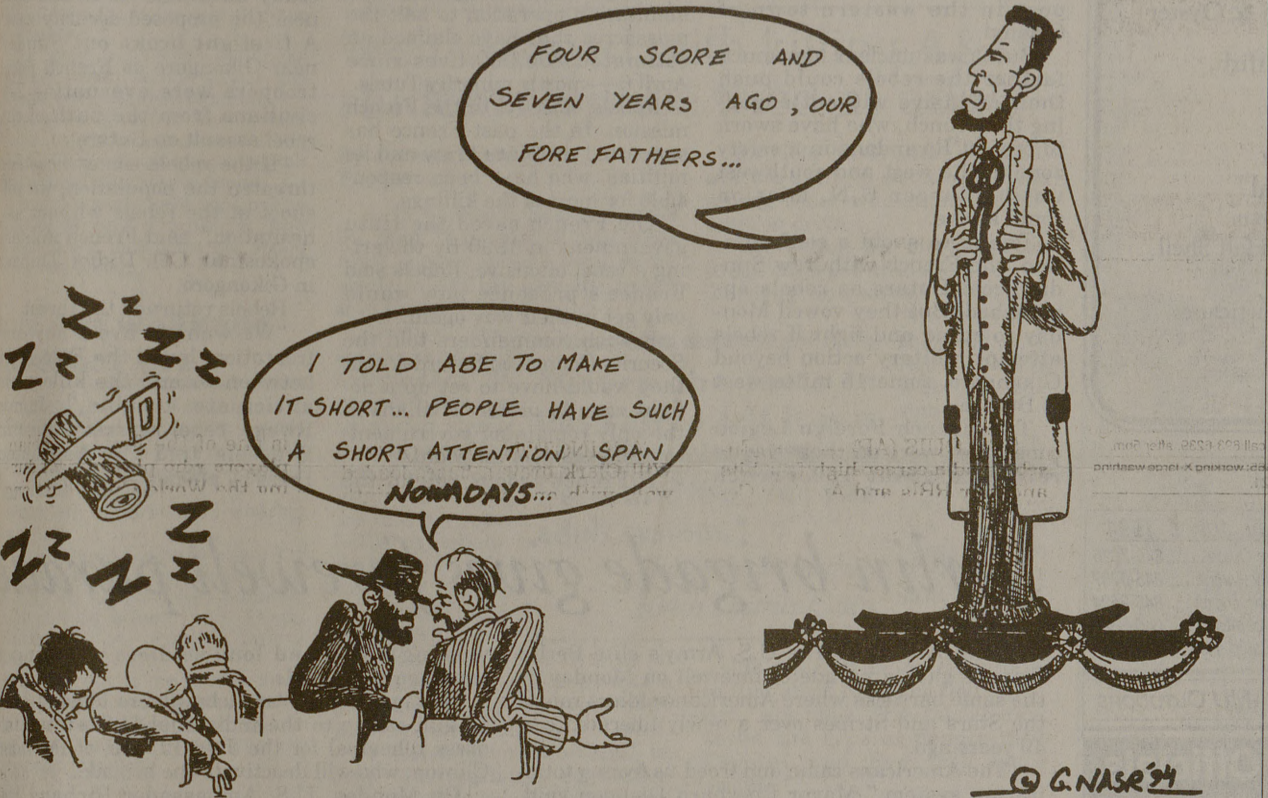


The messages Richards conveys aren't at issue here, but the way in which she said them is. People constantly are spoon-fed these ear-catching quotes. Many will easily accept them as truth and will not try to find out the other points-of-view simply because they are humorous and sound good.

The United States has become a country of sound bites. Why? Because, society cannot concentrate on anything longer than a couple of seconds. Our attention span has shrunk to almost nothing due to these aspects of our "pop" culture. A perfect example are the advertisements shown on eMpTyV. The words on the screen are busy and constantly move, or change so fast that they are hard to read. In videos and commercials, images are shuffled on and off the screen at such a quick pace that they can hardly be seen. This technical explosion keeps the audience's attention. Once the images slow down, grab the remote control - we channel surf. American society has become like

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'Stress check' could help prevent suicides, reduce tension

There is something wrong with our world. Way too many people want to kill themselves. I don't mean the old or terminally ill or those who want to end excruciating physical pain. I mean taking about people our age. Our friends, our brothers and sisters. Loved ones who feel they have no escape and turn to suicide to end their problems.

JULIA STAVENHAGEN

Columnist



shown up to mourn his passing. I sat down on the sidewalk with the rest of the onlookers to note the passing of another person whom no one could convince, "this too shall pass." It was again too late to make a difference in the world.

Is it that big of a deal? Not enough people kill themselves to make it a real epidemic, but that may be changing. A person sitting next to you if he or she has ever considered suicide. The chance is very good - too good - that the answer you get will be yes. Nearly everyone has had so bad a day that they want to escape the world. That's why we have Calgon and back rubs. The trouble with our society is that it places absolutely no priority on taking time to check the "stress meter." Everyone I know feels guilty about taking a nap during the day, even though studies prove that napping actually improves productivity and reduces stress. Why is it socially unacceptable? Other countries and cultures designate a time during the workday for relaxation.

Four out of my five friends have suffered some work-related mental or physical stress that could

be easily eliminated by more human-friendly work environments. The other one out of five has tried to murder herself several times because she could not get a job and felt worthless, among other reasons. Some paradox.

A constant, persistent level of stress in anyone's life will lead to drastic measures of escape. College students know best about unrelenting stress. It is vitally important that stress-reduction mechanisms are in place. Texas A&M is the only place in the world where I have

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forgotten to eat several times.

The television news and newspapers are a big source of depression. Watching other people killed or jailed is not my idea of entertainment. "Informative news" consists of tips to avoid rapes and murders or how to keep your money from being stolen. Of course the problems exist, but to

be reminded of them makes one only fear more, and in fearing, become more susceptible becoming a victim of crime. Frightened people make mistakes, suffer stress and sometimes descend into panic and paranoia. Suicide can be an escape from that fear.

Paths to sanity and calmness for people who already have stress-related ulcers and mental anguish usually lead to counseling or therapy. The cost for these sessions usually leads to more ulcers - and more costs.

Attempts at seeking retribution for some wrong, (for example, stolen money), leads usually to litigation, where your recovered money is spent on legal fees.

While these dilemmas are not always the rule, they are gleaned from actual life experiences in these United States. Our suicide rate is rising and these daily traumas are the cause. Like bean plants, we constantly strive for light and air. If we don't get that nourishment, we die. Sometimes by choice.

It is imperative to avoid "social acceptance" if it means following work practices which escalate blood pressure. I make it a rule to avoid the guilt trip that inevitably follows when I sleep during the day. If you consider the alternatives, I would much rather be guilty than dead.

Julia Stavenhagen is a graduate anthropology student



Houston, and I can assure you that my parents always pulled over to the side of the road when a funeral passed. I still do, as well (although I must admit, never during rush hour).

But then, my parents also taught me to step aside when elders were passing. I cannot tell you how many times I've almost been pushed aside as someone abruptly mutters "excuse me" in a tone of voice that sounds more like "get out of my way." I often wish to reply, "there is no excuse for you." But I realize that the individual was probably taught to say excuse me when you want to get past. However, the parents neglected to say that you wait for the person to step aside, and you would certainly never think of suggesting to your elders that they get out of your way.

You can have the joys of the small town in your own home - just instruct

your children in the proper way to conduct themselves. Who knows? Maybe it will catch on!

Linda Salitros

Campus flags need to be taken down at dusk

I would like to share a problem I have recently discovered with fellow Aggies, faculty, administrators and any patriotic citizen who happens to be reading today.

On Tuesday evening June 28, I came to campus to run at 8:45. I was upset to see the flags in front of the Administration Building still flying as dusk was upon us and even more upset when I was leaving campus at 9:20 and both the flagpole in the Academic plaza and the main

flagpole in front of the Administration Building still displayed the American flag in the dark, night air.

Now, during the fall and spring semesters, the Corps of Cadets is responsible for putting up the flags in the morning and taking them down each evening before dusk, which they do without fail. But at other times, the University Police Department has that honor.

I called the University Police dispatcher at 9:30 and he informed me that there were officers taking them down just then. When I asked if they were normally taken down this late I was told, "We do it whenever we can get to it."

That is not good enough. The flag is customarily taken down before any signs of darkness appear, and it never flies at night without a light shining on it. The following evening, the flags were left up until 10:15. The evening after

that they were left up until at least 9 p.m. If the University Police cannot take their responsibility more seriously and carry it out correctly, I suggest that lights be installed to shine on our campus flags so that this does not happen again. Until this is able to take place, I would be more than happy to take on the responsibility myself.

Andi Davis
Class of '94

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