

She wore an itsy, bitsy, teeny, weeny ...

Miss America Pageant promotes growing fascination with bellybuttons

Perhaps one of the most perplexing theological questions ever pondered is whether or not Adam and Eve had bellybuttons. After all, the original sinners were created, not born. Thus, they would not need an umbilicus, the piece of flesh leftover from the time all people spend attached to their mothers by an umbilical chord.

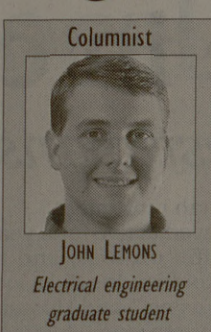
But, questioning the imponderable question of whether Eve had aninnie or anoutie is a fruitless exercise. A more pertinent fact is that all Americans have bellybuttons. This year, the Miss America Pageant has taken upon itself the job of proving this fact. The pageant recently announced it will allow its contestants to bear their navels in all of their glory by wearing bikinis in the event's swimsuit competition. The move, however, is a cheap attempt to boost ratings by appealing to Americans' fascination with navels.

Throughout its 77-year history, the pageant provided identical one-piece swimsuits to all of its contestants for the swimsuit competition. This year's pageant is allowing its contestants to emphasize their individuality in the swimsuit competition.

Leonard Horn, the Miss America Organization's CEO, said this year's telecast will focus on contestant's individual traits and talents.

"The swimsuit competition was the only element in which we retained control over what would and could not be worn," Horn said, "but not anymore." "If a contestant would wear a one-piece swimsuit at home, then, by all means, she should wear one here. The pageant isn't about restrictions — it's about choice, individuality and allowing 17 to 24-year-old women to be who they really are, stage or no stage."

While promoting individuality is admirable, the Miss America pageants of the past seemed more about allowing 17 to 24-year-old women to be living Barbie dolls than allowing them to be who they really are. The swimsuit competition has long been accused of exploiting women by



Columnist
JOHN LEMONS
Electrical engineering graduate student

treating them as sex objects. This move certainly promotes the idea of Miss America contestants being slabs of meat, waiting to be ogled by everyone who watches the pageant.

The real motive behind this change in philosophy is that Americans want to see skin. This is the reason bikinis, once scandalous bathing attire, are mainstream. It is also the reason the swimsuit issue sells umpteen million subscriptions of Sports Illustrated magazine a year. Showing more skin on the Miss America Pageant makes it more marketable.

Plus, Americans have a healthy fascination with bellybuttons. As proof, just consider the growing popularity of bellybutton piercing. Here on campus, it is easy to spot young ladies at the Student Recreational Center with a shiny piece of jewelry protruding from their navels.

If Americans can find a good way to expose themselves, they will. Fortunately, the United States is on the cutting edge of piercing technology. It is possible to have every nook and cranny of one's body pierced for all to see if one is willing to live with the pain. As of late, the most popular nook to pierce is the navel.

Van Brauer works at Tattoo Consortium, which offers tattooing and body piercing among its services. Brauer said Tattoo Consortium does 25 to 30 bellybutton piercings a week.

"The bellybutton has always been just kind of there; it's never been a pretty part of the body, it's always just been there," Brauer said. "You put a piece of shiny jewelry there, [and] it accents the bellybutton; it makes it pretty."

Indeed, bellybutton piercing is unorthodox, rebellious and even a little tacky. The same was once true about bikinis. Tastes, however, change. Bikinis are now mainstream enough to make their mark in that stronghold of Americana, the Miss America Pageant.

Crowning Miss America is no small task. After all, Miss America represents the ideal of American womanhood. If Americans, however, are vain

enough to believe beauty pageants expose the best women have to offer, then navels may as well be a criteria for true beauty.

The real dilemma now, is whether or not Miss America should wear a bellybutton ring with her bikini.



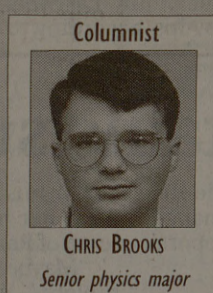
GRAPHIC: Brad Graeber

Hate-speech Internet sites deserve their place on Web

Booker T. Washington once said, "I shall never permit myself to stoop so low as to hate any man." This is a wonderful sentiment, and the world would be a much better place if everyone possessed this attitude. Sadly, the world is full of people who hate other human beings for some reason or another — man can always find a reason to hate. These hateful people have always tried to spread their messages.

In the information age, it has become easier than ever for bigots to poison others — especially young minds — with their hateful speech. Many civic-minded Americans want to stop this; they want to outlaw hate sites on the World Wide Web. As nice as the idea sounds, it simply cannot be allowed. If freedom of speech is to mean anything in this country, the bigots among us must be allowed to preach their filth.

The Web is touted as the common person's printing press. Anyone can get a page on the Web, and anyone can put whatever he or she wants on that page. This has been used to publish fictional works, scientific papers, meeting agendas and paintings. It was only a matter



Columnist
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of time before people decided to put their propaganda out where anyone with a Web browser and too much time on his or her hands could see it. This allows children, and other people with impressionable minds, to be introduced to world views that they easily could have done without.

In 1969, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Brandenburg v. Ohio* that advocating violence against a group of people cannot be prohibited by law. But Supreme Court decisions can be overturned — and many would like to see just that happen to this one. However, the same idea that was used in the *Brandenburg* decision holds true here: Freedom of speech means freedom for everyone, and no matter how repulsive or ignorant these Web sites are, they must be allowed.

Saying that the government should not outlaw hate sites on the Web is not the end of the discussion. The government has never been good at stepping into the private sector — Prohibition and the price controls of the '70s are excellent examples — so keeping government out of this situation is only natural, even without the Constitution. There are things that people can do,

however, to combat this menace. Floyd Cochran, a former member of the Aryan Nation, says that Internet service providers should voluntarily ban hate speech sites from their servers. This is a wonderful, private-sector answer to a difficult situation. If these providers do not seem inclined to take this action, their customers can "encourage" them by using the power of the almighty dollar and take their business elsewhere.

The best answer might be to simply let the hate sites stay where they are. If a person who is inclined to surf the Web runs a search on some of the more popular racial epithets, he or she will find a few sites devoted to disparaging human beings based solely on their physical characteristics.

This surfer will also find that anti-racism Web pages outnumber the racist sites on those same keywords. Because of this, any young "skull full of mush" who is inclined to read a hate group's collection of fictitious reasons why some race is inferior will also find a barrage of reasons why the hate group in question is wrong and populated by the truly inferior.

The best way to deal with hate sites on the Internet is not to silence them but to shout them.



MAIL CALL

Students should respect PTTS rules

In response to Christopher Figat's July 30 Mail Call:

My fellow Aggies, once again I see that some of us have a little too much time on our hands.

In Figat states that PTTS should "just try to give people a bit of a break." I for one am tired of people crying to The Battalion about parking, how they were wrongly ticketed and how PTTS officers are mean people.

Well, boo hoo hoo. Figat states that he once was ticketed, and that he "probably deserved it." Well Chris, you either did or didn't deserve that ticket, so don't go off whining about the competence level of PTTS.

Figat also wants PTTS officers to "smile once in a while." If I worked for PTTS (which I don't), and people referred to me as a parking Nazi, I would probably walk around with a less than pleased look on my face too.

Figat also said that the officers should look the other way when students park their cars in front of a building for a couple of minutes.

What do you think would happen if you did that in downtown Houston? I don't think that the Houston Police Department would just look the other way.

As far as PTTS not knowing the whereabouts of Figat's girlfriend's car, I also have known someone that had his vehicle towed; he was completely in the wrong.

Somehow PTTS was able to tell him where his truck was located. I would think that being a product of Texas A&M University, Figat would be a little more mature about rules and regulations of a major university.

But I see that with a diploma, common sense does not come as a package deal.

William Morgan
Class of '98

Kyle Field expansion should be questioned

I never would have expected money to be more important than

tradition at Texas A&M University, but apparently it is.

Our mascot, Reveille, is more than just a dog. She is the highest-ranking member of the Corps of Cadets, and upon her passing, receives a full military burial in a location specially selected so that she always can see the field, the Fight-in' Texas Aggie Football Team and most importantly, the scoreboard.

I would expect this at a money grubbing school such as the University of Texas, where they have turned their football games into gigantic commercials, with the feel of a rookie league baseball game, all for the sake of the almighty dollar.

Even at Notre Dame, its stadium expansion was designed to preserve the view of one of its sacred football traditions, Touch-down Jesus.

If Notre Dame can do it, why can't A&M, with our top-notch engineering school? We can build a "first class" facility and still preserve our traditions, but it is simply a matter of where our heart is ... money or A&M?

Randall Walton
Class of '96
Jennifer Hollingsworth
Class of '97

Aggies must show pride, not criticism

In response to Amy Turner and Tonya Lee's July 30 Mail Call:

If you were half as smart as you think you are (therefore being smarter than the two "half-brains" on this end), then you, in your adept intelligence would realize that our letter was purely satirical.

To begin with, it was a response to an absurd Mail Call letter written by two t-sips.

However, since you have completely overlooked this fact, we must point it out to you.

Do you honestly believe that we are so near-sighted and naive to believe that these two t-sips represented the student body of the University of Texas? Give us a break.

Furthermore, do you really believe that we think that no one who has gone to UT has ever served our country in the military?

Your logic just keeps getting better and better. You must admit the cheap shots at the football team were pretty funny, especially the one about the "clown suits."

Seriously, we really do understand that "war extends outside the bounds of school rivalry."

If you would have examined our letter a little bit closer, then you would have seen that my uncle died during the Pearl Harbor

sneak attack by the Japanese.

My uncle never went to Texas A&M, UT or any other university. He learned everything he knew from experience and from his elders.

We were just making an allusion to the fact that A&M honors its deceased mascots with the same dignity shown to dead soldiers.

You should be proud of this. What other university can you think of that has Silver Taps or Muster to honor fallen students and alumni?

We sure as hell can't think of any. We were attempting to belittle these two t-sips, not start a major debate about school spirit.

Don't you guys have anything better to do than attack fellow Aggies? One would think that you have studies to attend to, albeit we appreciate your inept response.

Todd C. Dixon
Class of '95
Ross M. Hinman
Class of '96

Crack, cocaine law not just for minorities

In response to Mandy Cater's July 31 column:

The notion that the enforcement of the current laws are racially biased is incorrect. The truth is that the enforcement of crack cocaine possession laws (or any other, for that matter) are economically biased.

If race were the only basis, then laws directed at junk-bond trading would also be invalid, solely because a disproportionate number of those convicted are (rich) white males. The laws apply uniformly to all citizens (in theory). I am in favor of legalizing drug usage.

The elements of society who need to indulge in drugs have already imprisoned themselves mentally, so why should we foot the bill for their accommodations in a physical prison?

Of course, I am in favor of prosecuting them for any ancillary crimes committed related to their usage (as we currently do for alcohol). Legalization, I hope, would reduce those ancillary crimes associated with drug use by driving the price down.

The current harsh laws have had no significant effect on the number of users. Those who want to use (and abuse) drugs will continue to do so regardless of legality.

Our jails are filled with people whose only crime is the use of a controlled substance. We need to worry about incarcerating people who are a danger to society, and not just to themselves.

Bradley Peikert
Graduate Student

