

Monday • December 1, 1997

The decline of western civilization

Death of cartoon icons Beavis, Butthead represent upward swing in morality

While the Thanksgiving break offered an opportunity to be thankful for this country's blessings, Americans had another reason to be thankful. Texas in this extra blessing was the first so-timely deaths of cultural icons, Beavis and



JOHN LEMONS
columnist

Butthead. Although their passing did not make the obituary pages of Saturday newspapers across the country, Beavis and Butthead are dead. The last episode of MTV's dreadful television series aired last Friday.

One might expect that they would meet their end from sniffing glue, eating paint chips or being strangled by the likes of Jesse Helms. Beavis and Butthead, however, succumbed to the same phenomenon that claimed the careers of countless other pop icons, including Spuds Mackenzie, Alice Cooper and Anson Williams — they ran out of shock value.

Americans no longer seem surprised or amused by the antics of its two favorite juvenile delinquents. Perhaps, jokes about flatulence, trashy women and thrash music videos are out of style. But, seeing as Beavis and Butthead will always be funny, it is more likely that cartoon people are just sick of Beavis and Butthead. Since their love affair with Beavis and Butthead is over, what is the legacy of their tenure as comedy kings?

Well, first Beavis and Butthead have made it chic to be stupid. They, more so than any other show in television history, have contributed to the dumbing down of American television. Watching an episode of "Beavis and Butthead" is a very Pavlovian experience. Thirty minutes of watching the pair's antics will reduce even the most brilliant mind into a giggling, slobbering fool.

Actually, dumbing down television was not the show's intention. The show was meant to satirize MTV's own viewers.

In an interview with the Austin American Statesman, Mike Judge, the show's creator said, "It [Beavis and Butthead] was my response to the dumbing down of television. That's what it was a satire about."

Whether or not, Beavis and Butthead's viewers ever got the joke, though, is unclear.

Another part of Beavis and Butthead's legacy is that they've made using the word "sucks" more acceptable. Obviously, the duo did not invent the word, as vacuum cleaners and math classes have always sucked, but their frequent use of the word made it popular. Sometime during the show's four year tenure, "sucks" moved from the being a semi-bad word to becoming an acceptable description of an object or event's status.

For example, in Beavis and Butthead's jargon, one might say that the Clinton administration sucks. Prior to Beavis and Butthead, one would never have described the Bush, Reagan or other previous administration as sucking.

However, the worst part of Beavis and Butthead's legacy is that they left us with that one guy who thinks the boys are so funny that he has to emulate them, constantly. Everybody, knows this at least one of these guys. Some of you are unlucky enough to have him as your roommate. These are the young men, who in their best Beavis voice will walk around muttering things like, "cool, cool!" and "I am Comholio, I need T.P. for my bungalow." These are also the intolerable young men who eventually find themselves unable to communicate without taking on their Beavis and Butthead alter ego. May God have mercy on their souls.

For all of the damage Beavis and Butthead have done to American culture, they have accomplished at least one good thing — they have given Mike Judge a ca-



reer. Judge, whose first "Beavis and Butthead" animation appeared on MTV in 1992 has proven that he is a very funny man. His current project "King of the Hill" is both funny and clever. Apparently, Judge has decided to create a cartoon with some redeeming social value.

Making Mike Judge famous, however, is not enough to negate all the harm Beavis and Butthead have wrought. Fortunately, they are out of the cartoon gene pool. If Americans are lucky, Beavis and Butthead's descendants and copycats will never see

the light of day. As it is, it will take airing two hours worth of Julie Andrews' movies for every episode of "Beavis and Butthead" ever shown to repair the cultural damage done by the show.

As for all of the "Beavis and Butthead" fans out there, sitting in a pool of your own drool, it is obvious what you are thinking — "Huh, huh, this column sucks."

John Lemons is an electrical engineering graduate student.

Engineering competition displays student creativity

Anyone who wanted to enter into G. Rollie White Nov. 15 might suspect they had stumbled into an unscheduled sporting event. It couldn't be an Aggie basketball game since Texas A&M students have never been that excited about basketball. No, the shrieks, the crowded stands and the painted butcher paper draped around the coliseum were more reminiscent of a high school game than any recent college event.



DAVE JOHNSTON
columnist

Indeed, the stands were filled with high school students who traveled from around the state for this day-long event. Their enthusiasm was so thick it poured into the foyer, intoxicating any innocent bystanders. Students blew air horns, painted their faces and shouted cheers in support of their teams competing below.

Despite all the clues, this was not a basketball game or any athletic event, but rather an engineering competition. The competition is a great program to motivate high school students, build their creativity and help them learn.

The Texas Boosting Engineering, Science and Technology (Texas BEST) Robotics Competi-

tion pits teams from different high schools against each other as their remote controlled robots try to achieve a specific goal. Teams build their robots from a kit of parts to meet a certain objective. The robots compete at regional competitions, then the winners attend the state competition held on the A&M campus.

This year's contest called for teams to design a robot which could pick up sticks (representing dangerous dynamite), carry them up a ramp and drop them in a bucket. The team whose bucket weighed the most at the end of two minutes won the match.

The contest allowed for plenty of creativity. A wide variety of robots competed. Some were mechanical and utilitarian, but some were loudly decorated. One show-stealer dubbed "Defuser" had been embellished with cartoon eyes, and waved at the audience with his hinged "mouth" after a victorious match. Each robot was unique, as was the strategy each school used to try to win. While some competitors simply tried to get the most weight into their bucket, others tried to block the opposing robot from reaching its goal or attempted to lift their opponent's bucket out of reach.

Part pep rally and part UIL meet, the event was both exciting and encouraging to watch.

Spectators could not help but be excited by the charged atmosphere as pairs of students

controlled their robots in head-to-head duels. Yet it was also encouraging and refreshing to see young people who had investing themselves in such a positive undertaking.

Students develop team-working and problem-solving skills, design experience, engineering knowledge and have plenty of fun.

Too often students are bored by school. Standardized tests, crowded classes and stretched budgets make it difficult for students to emerge from the school system still excited about learning. The BEST competition, however, encourages creative thinking and shows students a practical application for their education.

This competition presents students with a wonderful learning opportunity, and more programs like this would benefit young people.

The Texas BEST program is continuing to expand throughout the state, and instructors are trying to create similar competitions in other states. Creative teaching tools like this not only help students to learn, but give them more lasting and positive memories. Sure, competition was fierce and a few students were disappointed with the results, but none of the contestants seemed to regret the trip they made or the work they put in for their project.

Dave Johnston is a senior mathematics major.



MAIL CALL Mom Camp shows beneficial intentions

In response to Kendall Kelly's Nov. 25 "The Crying Game" column:

While I do not agree with Kelly's criticisms of Aggie Moms' Fish Camp, there is one particular criticism I must strongly protest. Kelly wrote, "I thought that the parents who got satisfaction through their kids' accomplishments were a thing left back in high school, but apparently not." Kelly, the end-all, be-all of human existence is to raise your children properly and see them succeed. Thus, your own success certainly does depend on your children's successes.

As a relatively new parent (I have a 2-year-old), I must tell you that pride in every one of your child's accomplishments is overwhelming. I have no doubt this will not end when my child turns 10, 18, 24 or 36. If parents were not concerned 100 percent with their children's successes in life,

they would not raise them with the tools to succeed. This concern cannot shut off on the day their kid goes off to college.

I am sure when you become a parent you will look back at this statement and blush. If not, I worry for your children. I do not believe you should criticize mothers for taking pride in their children, or whatever else you wish to say about the moms taking a weekend off to get to know each other. Besides this one major misconception, I would say Kelly needs to get beyond her rebellious teenage years.

I have said since my days at Texas A&M that college was 40 percent school and 60 percent life. Learning to fall on your face and pick yourself up without Mom and Dad around certainly is a major part of college life.

On the other hand, there is absolutely nothing wrong with a mother and father being interested in everything that is Texas A&M. I did not have the advantage of an Aggie Dad or Aggie Mom.

When I was going through my fanatical year as a fish and driving my family nuts with A&M this and A&M that on holidays, my mother took the time out to get together with some other fish moms she met through the Lubbock Aggie Moms Club. She came to understand all of the fish were just as fanatical. She also learned more about why I was so fanatical.

Instead of the intolerance other family members displayed toward me, my mother understood and let my nutty behavior slide. Kelly, there is a difference between being "involved" and being "interested."

I feel sorry for you if your own parents are not interested enough in your college experiences to take every opportunity open to them to understand more about A&M. On the other hand, if they have been interested and your problem is you feel you have not escaped your parents, I am positive later on you will appreciate your parents' attention. Being close to your parents once you have become one, even if they are across the country from you, is extremely satisfying.

Monte Turner
Class of '91

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class, and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call
013 Reed McDonald
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX
77843-1111

Campus Mail: 1111
Fax: (409) 845-2647
E-mail: Batt@tamv1.tamu.edu

For more details on letter policy, please call 845-3313 and direct your question to the opinion editor.

Child protection proves gender bias, backward thinking in today's society

One of the most common and consistent themes running through the rhetoric of presidential campaigns and policies in recent years is the need to protect the children of this nation. The past months and years have seen a number of crimes against children which show the need for this sentiment.

The most recent is the case of the elementary school teacher who confessed and was convicted of sexually assaulting her 11-year-old student. For this heinous crime, she received a paltry six-month prison sentence and three years in a "rehabilitation center."

This is foolish. Not only does she not want to be rehabilitated, but she does not even think she has done anything wrong. She walked from a press interview in which she said she and the victim still loved each other into a courtroom where she told the court through her tears she was sorry and it would never happen again. One can only hope she never falls in love with a serial killer, or she will justify those crimes as well.

For the boy's part, he defends the "relationship," saying he had been the initiator and "all that matters is that we love each other." Two things are instantly and painfully apparent from this statement. The first is society has managed to distort reality so children can be deluded into believing they are emotionally capable of initi-

ating and understanding sexual relationships.

But more relevant today is the fact a 35-year-old woman betrayed her husband and children to engage in what she had to have known to be an illegal and unhealthy relationship with an immature, underaged boy. What is even worse than all this is the court seemed to accept her story and her justification for her inexcusable behavior.

Another possibility exists. Could it be her gender played a part in this time of equality? It is fairly certain if a male school teacher were to get an 11-year-old girl pregnant, he would not get off with a six-month sentence simply by saying he still loves her. He would be, and should be, prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

He would be branded forever a child molester, even if he was truly repentant, his career and reputation ruined. If he had children, he would likely never see them unsupervised again. Police would alert the residents of any new neighborhood to which he moved to try to get a new start.

The pathetic sentence given this predator is a poignant indicator of the difference between the rhetoric of the leaders of this nation and the actions taken by its people.

What is truly disturbing is when this verdict was handed down, there was neither outcry from the people of the nation nor the leaders who make it their business to do all they can to protect children. It seems, despite the talk, little is actually being done.

Robby Ray is a senior speech communications major.



ROBBY RAY
columnist

