

Television: fact or fiction

Television shows reflect viewer needs, wants

Should television be what Americans want to see or what they need to see? Viewers' wants and needs are directly related. Sex, violence and profanity are all reflections of this reality. They may not reflect "realistic" reality, but rather a warped sense of TV reality that cannot easily be surpassed by other media.



CHRISTIAN ROBBINS

Radio, magazines and books all have their place in popular culture, which is the view of reality presented by mainstream media. However, nothing comes close to the power of television. There is an ongoing debate in America over which shows are appropriate for television and which shows are unacceptable. Many men drool over the voluptuous Baywatch Babes, while women point out that real women do not look like these silicone dolls and that all-naked women have no place on television.

Based on the popularity of shows like "Matlock," "Friends" and "Dawson's Creek," no one wants to see "real" reality on TV, people want to see "TV" reality. TV reality is filled with gorgeous women, sexy men, strange coincidences and happy endings. They want crimes that can be solved in one hour by finding the "missing" piece of evidence, heroes who escape to save the day and couples who meet, fall in love, have sex, and live happily ever after.

Viewers want gut-busting comedy that exaggerates quirky aspects of reality and violence without victims being permanently injured, unless they are villains. The success of the "Jerry Springer Show" is a prime example. Viewers get to see guests get body-slammed, pimp-slapped, kicked and spit on while being crude yet hilarious insults at one another. The flying chairs and audience insults add to the comedic value. Viewers love violence. World Wrestling Federation and World Championship Wrestling took the top seven spots in the Nielsen cable ratings.

The main question has not been answered: should television be what viewers want to see or what viewers need to see? Television will always reflect the wants of the people as long as money is the primary source of influence for television programming and it could be. Why is this?

Television, very simply reflects the wants of the viewers. The wants of the viewers reflect their needs. Viewers need to see violence and sex on TV because it is a reflection of reality. Some people have a friend who was a little over sheltered by their parents and he little out of touch with reality. The reality of violence and sex on TV saves many Americas from



ROBERT HYNCEK/THE BATTALION

Of course, Jerry Springer may not be the best example of this need for reality but shows like "ER," "The Practice," and the evening news demonstrate beneficial TV reality. Viewers want and need comedy. Over 50 percent of the shows in the Nielsen top 20 are comedies. After a hard day of work or school, the average Joe deserves to sit and laugh. He needs to laugh

as a release whether he chooses to laugh at a rerun of "Seinfeld" or a chair being hurled at a transvestite on Jerry. By the same token, Joe deserves to be able to watch and fantasize about the Baywatch Babes and Jane should be able to fantasize about meeting and marrying Tyrese as she watches an MTV special. Television has become the book of the 20th century

and when a person does not like a book, she puts it down. The television makes this easier, if a show is too funny, or violent or has too much sexual content, a viewer can simply turn it off.

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Historical reality should not be ignored, revised for patriotism

In December 1998, the Dallas Morning News reported the gift of a controversial diary to the University of Texas at Austin.



CALEB MCDANIEL

The journal was written by a Mexican soldier who fought in the War for Texas Independence.

According to the Morning News, the lengthy diary has great historical interest. Contrary to legendary accounts of Davy Crockett's heroic fall at the battle of the Alamo, the journal corroborates numerous other documents in reporting the Tennessee volunteer did not die in battle. Instead, the diary reported he and several other soldiers were captured by the Mexican army and executed after the fall of the Alamo.

The 1975 publication of the soldier's diary, which was so at odds with the mythical image of Davy Crockett as a Texan icon and Hollywood hero, sparked much contention over the authenticity of the soldier's version of Crockett's demise. Some thought the diary was accurate; others believed it was a forgery.

The ensuing debate over the different versions of Crockett's fate spotlights the danger of allowing history to be dictated by the loud voices of patriotism and romance. No matter what the cost may be to Americans' sacred images of their nation's heritage, modern historians cannot allow the preconceptions of the present to manipulate our understanding of the past.

Too often, depictions of American history have been guided by what Americans want to remember rather than by what really happened.

These textbooks and others often unabashedly present American history as a tool for patriotic education. Rather than merely presenting the facts of the country's long past — which has been checked with at least as much dishonor as honor — history books can often devolve into hero worship.

Davy Crockett's coonskin hat and George Washington's apple tree eclipse the sorry segments of America's past. As a result, the real struggles and shortcomings of our ancestors are lost in empty legends.

In other words, shoddy scholarship can sometimes make history out of histrionics. The difficulty with such an approach to the past, according to W.E.B. DuBois, "is that history loses its value as an incentive and example; it paints perfect men and no-

ble nations, but it does not tell the truth."

Unfortunately, the truth has often been low on the list of historical priorities. In the process, the under-represented peoples and dishonorable practices of America's past have been largely excised from the big picture of where the nation came from.

Texts that tout America as a triumph can unabashedly stack the deck in favor of the country's forefathers. Unfortunately, such hero-making often pushes minorities to the margins and conveniently overlooks the flaws of national icons. This kind of superhero history is neither honest nor helpful.

However, at the same time that such icons need to be reevaluated, iconoclasts must beware of fashioning historical idols of their own. Those who would revise the unfair presentation of America's past as a pageant of white Anglo-Saxon protestants cannot rewrite history as a pageant of minorities.

While minorities have certainly been unfairly absent in some of our textbooks, it would be equally unfair to shove marginal minority figures into the spotlight just for the sake of having a minority representative at every landmark in American history.

Arthur Schelesinger Jr., in the *The Disuniting of America*, wrote, "History as a weapon is an abuse of history."

Neither established majorities nor disenfran-

chised minorities can use history as an instrument to solve political and social problems in the present. The past must speak for itself.

"The high purpose of history is not the presentation of self nor the vindication of identity," Schelesinger said but the recognition of complexity and the search for knowledge."

That "high purpose" is in need of restoration, because it often has been all but lost in the contest between two extremes: a flag-waving history that excludes minorities entirely and a fist-waving history that includes minorities inaccurately. Both kinds of history are motivated more by special interest than by a genuine search for the fact of the matter.

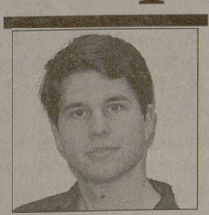
The aim of history is not to push a certain view of the way things should have been. "Propaganda," as defined by historian Nicholas Henshall, "is a genre historians should study but not write."

This means documents like the one given to the University of Texas must be accepted for what they are instead of resisted for what they are not. History will only be valuable when it is stripped of all normative evaluations and left in all of its raw power, truth and consequence.

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Buchanan plays pesky mouse to Republican Party's poor elephant

Once upon a time there was a great organization that stood for free enterprise, individual liberty and limited government known as the Republican Party.



BRENDAN GUY

The American people respected and trusted this party because they knew it would lower taxes, imprison criminals and shoot Communists for them and everyone was happy.

Then the dark times came and a strange and dangerous force infected this great party, corrupting it from within and alienating it from the American people. The name of that force was Patrick Buchanan.

Buchanan, who was not content with having ruined the GOP's chances in the 1992 and 1996 elections, has recently announced that he will seek the Republican presidential nomination once again. Short of another Clinton impeachment hearing, this is hard to think of a single thing that could do more damage to Republicans.

Admittedly, Buchanan has no chance of actually winning the nomination, but his corrosive influence will be felt just by his presence in the race. Buchanan and his stooges are perfectly willing to publicly embarrass the GOP by obsessing about issues like abortion and gay rights and they give little concern to how their extremist views make the entire party look.

Buchanan's 1992 convention speech, in which he unleashed rants about homosexuals, abortions, feminism and personal attacks on both the Clintons, was a national disgrace; fortunately the Republican leadership wised up after that humiliation and did not let Buchanan speak at the '96 convention.

His behavior has not significantly improved since then and with his colorful personality and extremists views, he has the potential through sheer force of personality to dominate any debate between Republican candidates. The price of Buchanan's theatrics is all Republicans will be viewed as borderline fascists and the party will lose the election.

Buchanan's divisive diatribes are already driving important constituencies

away from the Republican Party. A quick check of the Constitution, specifically the 19th Amendment, would reveal why alienating women is not a good idea. Nevertheless Buchanan still works to require an anti-abortion stance in both the party platform and for any Republican presidential nominee — despite the fact that in the 1996 campaign, polls showed that six out of 10 Republican voters were against a platform plank calling for a constitutional ban on abortion.

Buchanan's rhetoric discredits the entire pro-life movement and gives the GOP an unfair reputation for misogyny. Amazingly enough, it is kind of hard to win elections if half the population hates your political party.

But Buchanan is not content with just turning women away from conservatism, he also wants to give the entire Hispanic vote to the Democrats. Buchanan is not satisfied with merely advocating strict controls on immigration and an end to bilingual education, he is actually willing to place the National Guard on our southern border if nothing else will stop illegal im-

migration. This is probably not a platform that is going to appeal to most Hispanic voters, being the fastest growing minority group in this country, might be kind of important in the next century to any party that wants to win.

Buchanan does not even represent the core values the Republican Party was founded on. His economic views are essentially populist since he is openly hostile to large corporations (which should give any proper Republican an attack of apoplexy) and opposed to free trade. His views on abortion and gay rights clearly show he has no respect for individual liberty.

And while Buchanan tries to sound conservative and talk about getting government out of people's lives, he is also calling for all out cultural war with his claims that, "Divorce, dirty language, adultery, blasphemy, euthanasia, abortion, pornography, homosexuality, cohabitation and so on were not unknown in 1960. But today, they permeate our lives."

To do anything about these things would require the most intrusive government in American history, invading all as-

pects of people's personal lives. So Buchanan is either a hypocrite about wanting to fight his precious cultural war (which he has compared to the Cold War in terms of importance) or he is a hypocrite about wanting to get the government out of our lives.

Pat Buchanan is nothing more than a common demagogue. He appeals to emotion not reason and his ludicrous posturing and divisive fear-mongering have all but crippled the party of Lincoln.

It is time for Republicans to make a choice. They can either continue to allow Pat Buchanan to dominate every campaign season, which means Republicans will continue to lose every presidential election, or they can tell Buchanan to go do immoral things to himself and, freed from his toxic influence, actually have a chance of winning a presidential election.

Deep-sixed Buchanan will be hard but it is necessary if the GOP wants to live happily ever after.

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