

MTV turns 20



CHARLTON WIMBERLY

MTV, pioneer of the music video and the enemy of parents everywhere, celebrated its 20th birthday this month. Mark Goodman, one of the five MTV VJs who debuted with the network in 1981, demonstrated that he now numbers himself among those parents who do not allow their children to watch MTV when he told ABC News, "My kids are not allowed to watch MTV. Have you seen what they put on that channel?"

MTV certainly has evolved since Goodman's days at the network. President Judy McGrath said, "We completely turn over [our programming] about every two-and-a-half years." And with each turnover, the new programs stretch the boundaries of acceptability just a little further.

The cable television juggernaut — which currently is received by 350 million homes in 83 countries — promotes increasingly lax attitudes toward sex, violence and morality in general. Because its programming is becoming more provocative, each year those teens reaching adulthood have been exposed to more explicit sexual and violent behavior than the ones who have gone before them. MTV is helping to mold its more impressionable viewers in a direction that should not be encouraged. The cable channel prides itself in pushing the envelope with its programming.

Recently, it ran a special on breast implants that showed nude females preparing for surgery — ostensibly because showing nudity in medical context makes it easier to show nudity in other ways. The network used this same

strategy last year when it ran a program titled "Scared Straight," showing juvenile offenders being taken to prison to interact with inmates. The goal was to dissuade them from participating in criminal activity. The program contained extensive profanity not previously heard on the network. One can only assume that the profanity was deemed acceptable because it was in the context of a public service program.

However, once the network got away with broadcasting these profanities, it paved the way for the use of those same words in any context. This proved true when Fred Durst repeatedly used the word "f—k" on MTV during the prime time airing of its 20th anniversary celebration.

As the boundaries of acceptability continue to expand, society slowly is accepting behavior that at one time would have been intolerable. Today's teenagers, MTV's targeted audience, accept the behavior they are exposed to on MTV as normal, although this same behavior may have seemed unacceptable to the teens that preceded them. And as the next group of kids enter their teens, they will be exposed to new and even more explicit programming, but they will consider it the norm because they have nothing with which to compare it. This downward trend can perpetuate itself indefinitely.

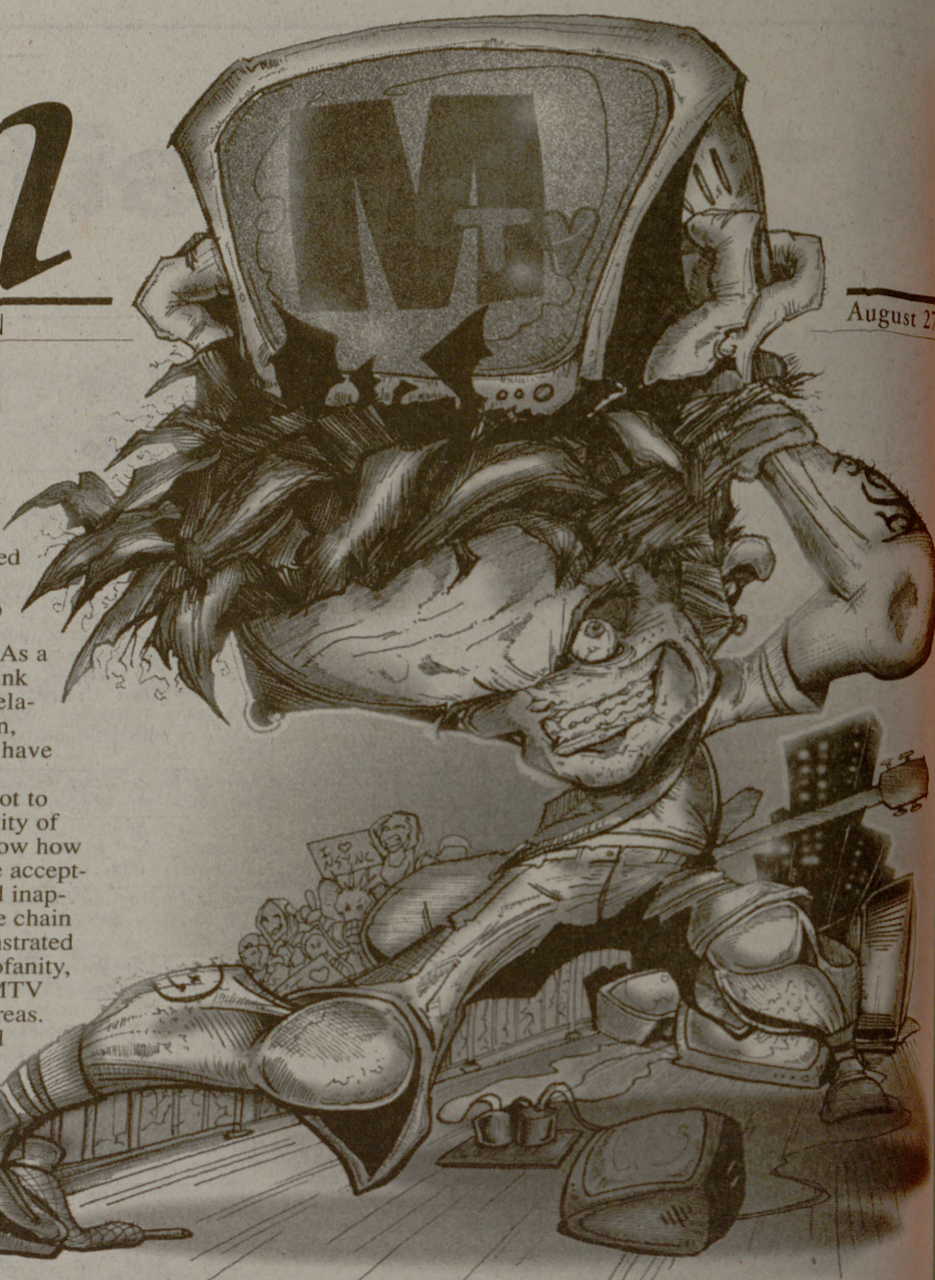
For example, look at societal views on homosexuality. Before the 1990s, homosexuality was viewed by much of America as a deviant lifestyle and largely was absent from television programming. Teenagers who grew up with the MTV of the 1990s were the first to see a gay couple kiss on television, and they regularly were bombarded with the issue on shows such as "The Real World," "Sex in the 1990s" and "Undressed."

The rest of the media followed MTV's lead, with homosexual characters soon playing a variety of roles both on network television and in mainstream movies. As a result, kids growing up today think nothing of seeing homosexual relationships portrayed on television, whereas a decade ago, it would have been extremely risqué.

The point of this example is not to make a statement about the validity of homosexuality. It is simply to show how MTV set the stage for wide-scale acceptance of behavior once considered inappropriate for television. The same chain of events could have been demonstrated with programming promoting profanity, violence or sexual promiscuity. MTV pushes the limits in all of these areas.

In a 1995 study titled "Sex and the Mass Media," performed for the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute, researchers asked: "Does the talk about and images of love, sex and relationships promote irresponsible sexual behavior? Do they encourage unplanned and unwanted pregnancy? Is popular entertainment partly responsible for teenagers having sex earlier, more frequently and outside of marriage?" The researchers concluded that the answer to all of these questions is a qualified yes.

This study only confirms what common sense would expect. Former New York University professor Irving Kristol said that if you believe that no one was



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active at even earlier ages. A more explicit media will have an increasingly negative effect on society. MTV is certainly not acting to define down our nation's morality, but has been a major contributor to the effort for 20 years. The influence of the entertainment industry and MTV in particular is large. It is best to simply ignore them.

It is evident simply from watching the evening news that kids are becoming more violent and more sexually

active at even earlier ages. A more explicit media will have an increasingly negative effect on society. MTV is certainly not acting to define down our nation's morality, but has been a major contributor to the effort for 20 years. The influence of the entertainment industry and MTV in particular is large. It is best to simply ignore them.

Charlton Wimberly is an accounting graduate student.

Battalion editor in chief welcomes Aggies to Fall '01

Unbelievable, isn't it? Our summer vacation has come and gone, and here we are in Aggieland again: traveling the trodden, and sometimes-mundane, path of academia. But, like our OI



BRADY CREEL

Army predecessors, we will persevere. We must: There are tests to take and Aggie football games to win. To the Class of 2005: Howdy and welcome. I am certain I need not tell you that you have made a wise decision by choosing Texas A&M. My advice to you, in its simplest form, is this: Don't worry. Details really are inconsequential. Your starched wardrobe and incessant primping will not last long. Ramen noodles and flannel pajama pants soon will become your staples, while mid-term exams and Friday-morning hangovers will become the bane of your existence. Good luck.

As the Fall 2001 editor in chief of *The Battalion*, please allow me to welcome everyone back to Aggieland and another semester of *The Battalion*. This semester, the newspaper has undertaken a revolution. The editors and I have made many changes, including the addition of a new section: Politics. We are working toward a contemporary design theme that I hope you will enjoy. But new design and stunning artwork are secondary to the number-one item on my agenda. I hope to further establish for *The Battalion* a reputation of credibility and integrity within the A&M community.

No one needs to tell me that *The Battalion* is sometimes unpopular on campus. Seldom does a day pass that I fail to hear someone express their disdain for *The Battalion* and its staff. But we are Aggies, too. We come from among your rank and file, and our job is not easy. Newspapers do not just appear on the racks. The staff is a hard-working group of people, and they spend countless hours in the newsroom working for you.

Trust me, we are not the enemy. Rather, we are on your side, dedicated to maintaining a stronghold on all fronts, protecting the interests of the students, faculty and staff. Our task is simple: report news fairly and accurately. The Constitution guarantees us that right — a charge I take very seriously. We fight the fights that can be fought by no one else.

Contrary to public belief, we are not the bloodsucking parasites many of you would believe; nor are we the pinky Commie liberals that you imagine —

not all of us, at least (the Uncartoonist notwithstanding). We are not perfect either, nor do we purport to be. In our business, accuracy is the name of the game. We take great strides to avoid mistakes, but we make them, just like everyone else.

Objective journalism is essential to democracy. This newspaper is not, and — God help us — shall never be, a puppet of the administration. Nor are we a campus bulletin board. Our duty is more important. As third-person observers, we often must set aside our Aggie pride and sense of kinship to the University so we can take a bird's-eye view and fairly report the news. For us, there are no strings attached, and we owe nothing to anyone, except the truth. I am not prepared to sugarcoat anything — I can promise little more, and you should accept nothing less.

My philosophy is not to print "all the news that's fit to print." Instead, we print the news. Period. Like it or not, Aggieland is far removed from the Utopian bubble many believe we live in, and when news happens, we will report it.

The readership of *The Battalion* has a right to the truth, something I plan to provide relentlessly. And the truth should evoke thought, regardless of your opinion about the matter at hand. *The Battalion* will be the match behind the flame of intellectual debate and contemplation at A&M. If it is not, then I have failed (and I am sure someone will tell me so).

If, at some point this semester, you see or read something in this newspaper that angers you, take a moment to think of the flip side. Consider its potential benefit before you outright condemn us.

My pledge to you is one of fairness and integrity. The staff and I are at your service, because we are, indeed, working for you. If you have questions or ideas, I welcome your feedback. And when you think we have erred, you should question us. I ask only that you do so professionally and fairly. Mark Twain once said, "Never pick fights with people who buy ink by the barrel." Of course, he also said, "I never let schooling interfere with my education." Yes, the truth really will set you free. Friday night will not be here soon enough.

Again, welcome to another semester with *The Battalion*. Let the party known as Aggieland begin (and unleash the officers from the College Station Police Department). I hope you enjoy your newspaper, and Gig 'Em Aggies.

Brady Creel is a junior journalism and management major.

Social Security woes

As Boomers retire, new options are necessary

As an increasing number of the nation's 77 million baby boomers approach retirement age, America is finding itself faced with a momentous Social Security problem. The increase in Social Security benefit recipients means an increase in governmental payouts.

The resulting dispute is where the money needed to back these payouts is going to come from. The answer lies in individual-investment accounts.

In July, President George W. Bush's Commission to Strengthen Social Security issued a report concluding that Social Security benefits could be supplemented by the creation of individual-investment accounts. Though this approach to Social Security reform is often criticized by some members of Congress, it presents the only feasible solution to an ever-expanding problem.

The creation of these investment accounts, or partial privatization of Social Security, is more than just the best of some bad options. First, according to the Bush Commission, payouts for Social Security will begin to exceed Social Security tax revenue in 2016. By 2038, the country's Social Security surplus will be depleted, possibly leading to many elderly poor who depend only on those benefits to survive.

Faced with such a future, Social Security reform is a must. The eligibility age for Social Security collection could be raised from 65, resulting in older retirees. But no one wants to retire and start claiming Social Security at 75. This is above the average life expectancy for Americans.

Another option is to increase taxes to make up for the deficit, but that is also not very likely. In its report, Bush's commission described a potential tax increase as "painful," and the American public certainly would be hesitant to support "painful" tax increases.

Since increasing the eligibility age and raising taxes will likely not work, why not try cutting recipient's benefits? Unless living in poverty sounds enticing, this is not a realistic alternative either. Today, Social Security pays some 53 percent of a low-income worker's pre-retirement revenue, leaving many of today's elderly below the poverty line. According to Social Security analyst Andrew Biggs, if benefits were cut to a



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more governmentally feasible level by 2035, this same worker would be receiving just 41 percent of what he earned before retiring.

If all of these approaches fail, the only other solution is borrowing the needed money. Unfortunately, the United States has already borrowed several billion dollars for Social Security deficits. At this rate, by the 2020s, this number is projected to be in the trillions. Even if the money is borrowed, it is unlikely that this money could be paid back any time soon.

The best option is to privatize Social Security partially and let people choose how to invest their own money. How would it work? For example, a worker could choose how to invest roughly a sixth of his Social Security taxes into financial markets, like the Dow Jones and NASDAQ. Then, based on the success of the stock market, that worker would reap the gains or losses of his investments upon retiring.

Critics of Social Security privatization say the problem is here. They believe privatization efforts to be much too risky because its effectiveness depends on the success of the stock market.

In all fairness, the only risk is in not taking advantage of the stock market now, while there is still time to make the needed improvements. When compared to a Social Security system that is on the road to bankruptcy, the stock market is not all that risky. Besides, it is people's own money, let them do with it what they will. In the long run, despite economic setbacks, a person will see a higher return on their investment than the government could ever provide.

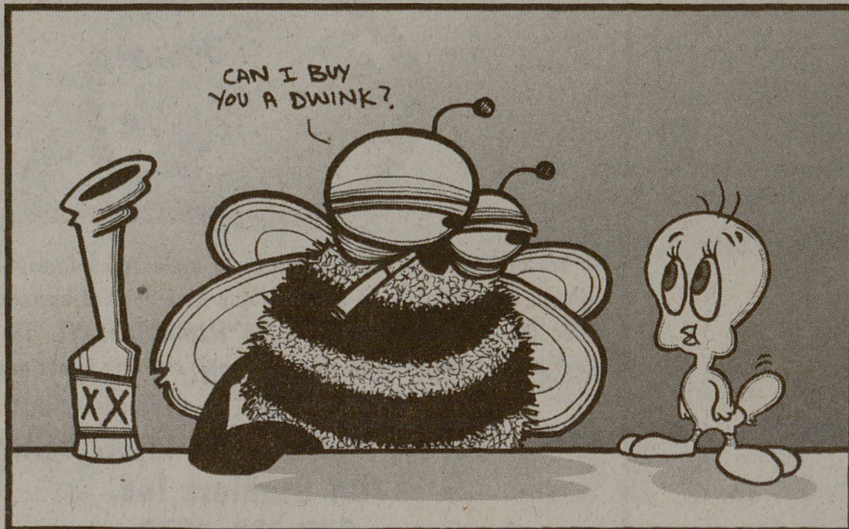
Consider that a person may work and pay Social Security taxes for roughly 45 years of his life, and there has never been a 45-year period in which the stock market has failed to gain money. In fact, the stock market has about a 7 percent return for a 20-year period. Not only would this approach help to fix the nation's Social Security woes, but it would prove to be more economically rewarding than the current system.

This country is in dire need of Social Security reform. To not utilize the stock market is to close a window of opportunity. Americans can provide better for their retirement than a government program about to go broke.

George Deutsch is a junior journalism major.

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CARTOON OF THE DAY



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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 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to:

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