

Commercial X-mas has hidden benefits

'Tis the season.

Correspondingly, we've begun to be inundated with the inevitable complaint that Christmas has become "too commercialized."

It's become a Christmas tradition unto itself. Complaining about the "business aspects" of the holiday has become almost as intractable a fixture in Christmastime conversations as discussions about "When are we going to get the tree?" and "How much 'nog' did you put in the eggnog?"

Columnists wax nostalgic about the Christmas days of yore; moms and dads grumble in checkout lanes; and clergymen and women fret about their parishioners' forgetting the "true meaning of Christmas."

Nowhere does anyone take the time to talk about the benefits of a Commercial Christmas.

First of all, there's the fact that we celebrate Christmas at all. There are a variety of religious holidays that, partially because they aren't commercially viable, aren't celebrated at all, outside of religious circles. Ash Wednesday, anyone?

The retail community salivates at the thought of all of the millions of gifts that will be exchanged this year. Toymakers and greeting card companies practically depend on it. Federal Express and UPS surely aren't complaining, either. A good Christmas season can spark an upswing in the nation's economy and creates innumerable jobs in the process. Without all of this Christmas hype to make consumers loosen their belts, the economic largess of a recession would only get more bleak during the winter months.

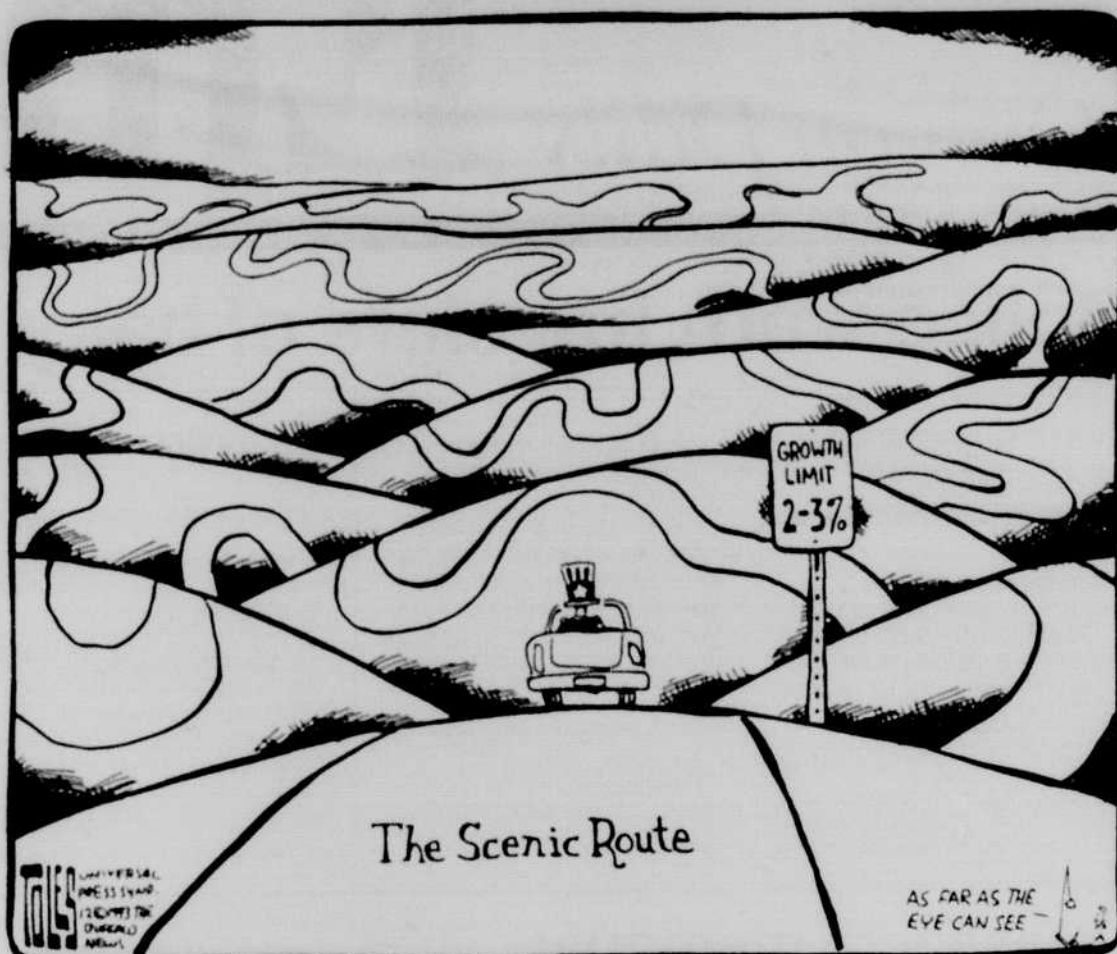
And let's not forget the music. Sure, the real oldies like "Silent Night" and "Jingle Bells" are more or less part of the public domain, but many of the Christmas classics — "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "Silver Bells," "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire..." — these were all recorded with the profit motive securely in mind. In commercial-free Christmasland, these tunes might very well not exist.

The movies might not be around, either. Frank Capra didn't make *It's a Wonderful Life* for free. What about *Scrooged* or *Miracle on 34th Street* or even *Home Alone*? Money-makers all. What would Christmas be without them?

But perhaps the most worthwhile benefit of a Commercial Christmas is its accessibility. By commercializing it, we've also secularized it. Now you don't have to be a Christian to celebrate Christmas; it's available to all.

Go into any K mart and ask the customer service lady which sells more, nativity sets or Santa Claus figurines? The answer will shed some light on how "Christian" the modern Commercial Christmas has become.

Many people see this as precisely what's wrong with commercializing the holiday. "People forget the true meaning," they say. But it doesn't have to be that way. It doesn't have to be a zero-sum game. Just because Christmas is about buying and selling doesn't mean it can't be about anything else as well — for those people who want it to be.



OPINION

Check facts before pointing fingers



MARTIN FISHER

"Positive, adj.: Mistaken at the top of one's voice."

— Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Thud. Ouch. Let me begin by stating that, yes, I realize I am banging my head against a wall here. But it's my head, so here I go. (Thud. Ouch.)

As you may or may not be aware, a couple of Mondays ago the Black Student Union had a news conference to publicly denounce the *Emerald* as being racist. The story was covered by all of the local media, made the Associated Press wire and even appeared in *USA Today*. (Thud. Ouch.) Give the BSU credit for holding perhaps the most widely covered news conference in recent University history.

Unfortunately, that's where the kudos end. The BSU claimed it wanted to help the *Emerald* achieve higher standards of journalistic responsibility. (Thud. Ouch.) One of the basic tenets of journalistic responsibility is that before you level allegations against someone, you at least make an effort to check your facts, which the BSU apparently didn't bother to do.

The BSU was unhappy about the printing of photos of the University of Washington students who were arrested in Eugene for allegedly sexually assaulting a University student in the University Inn.

The BSU called the photos "hideous" and basically unflattering. That is true. But that tends to be the norm for police

mug shots. (Thud. Ouch.) The three men look angry in the photos. This could be attributed to the fact that, when the photos were taken, they were in jail and probably wearing handcuffs. This can ruin your day. There's a reason you don't see mug shots included as the sample when you buy picture frames.

But the group's real complaint was not the lack of aesthetics in the photos but rather that the *Emerald* routinely differs in its treatment of minorities, particularly African-Americans, in regards to sexual offense stories.

One of the examples presented was a story about a graduate student recently charged with raping a woman at the Westmoreland family housing complex. The suspect's photo was not published with the story, though his name was given. Unfortunately, an important fact was cut from the story — the suspect was not arrested. No arrest equals no mug shot. Why didn't the BSU ask why there was no photo? (Thud. Ouch.) Did the group even care?

It was curious that, in its statement, the BSU said the rape suspect's name suggested he was of "other than African descent." Actually, his name suggested he is Asian (which he is). The "other than African descent" language appeared intended to suggest the suspect might be white, and thus his photo was not printed. (Thud. Ouch.)

The BSU knew better, but it couldn't keep a straight face and criticize the *Emerald* for not running a photo of a student of color charged with a sex crime while criticizing the *Emerald* for running photos of students of color charged with sex crimes. (Thud. Ouch.)

If the BSU wants to rail against institutional racism, perhaps it should look to a legal system that allows a man charged with first-degree rape (a rather serious offense, methinks)

God forbid a question might expose a weakness in the BSU's complaint.

to merely receive a citation to appear in court, while jailing three other men of a different race who are charged with lesser crimes. Of course, it's not as much fun to criticize the legal system as it is the *Emerald*. (Thud. Ouch.)

Yet another example included the *Emerald's* failure to run a photo of a fraternity pledge accused of rape last year. I discussed this in my previous column on this issue, but obviously some people didn't get it. I'll try again. (Thud. Ouch.)

The *Emerald* didn't run the pledge's photo for two reasons: First, he was charged under the University conduct code, not the criminal justice system, and thus he remained anonymous. Even the victim, who went very public, refused to disclose the pledge's identity to the *Emerald*.

Second, the story had nothing to do with the rape or the pledge. Rather, it had to do with the victim's accusation that the fraternity had not fulfilled its promise to have rape awareness seminars. Her beef was with the fraternity, not the pledge, whom she believed the University had dealt with to her satisfaction. This is all perfectly clear if you take the time to read the story (*ODE*, Nov. 24, 1992). (Thud. Ouch.)

Perhaps some of these issues may have come out at the news conference, but when a reporter from KMTR-TV began asking hard questions (his was the second question of the day), the news conference was terminat-

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