

Society should demand higher talk TV standard

OUR OPINION: America needs socially responsible talk TV, producers should be accountable

Thank you for joining us today. On the program this afternoon we have the tragic story of a bald man whose pet sloth was raped by a rabid wombat in a Seattle, Wash. mall. We will hear his incredible account and learn how Elmo Rogers and his pet sloth Cecil are coping with this horrible event. As soon as Cecil's emotional scars heal, he and Elmo plan to get married. But first up, you will witness first-hand, the effects of one woman's losing battle with putrid, debilitating body odor. She is suing a clothes manufacturer for selling clothes that make her sweat profusely. She says it has ruined her love life. That and more right here on the Wally Show; stay where you are, we'll be right back.

Until recently it seemed no one was seriously willing to take a stand against all the garbage spewing out from TV talk shows.

No one has been able to make a serious dent in trash TV's armor — that was before the big guns rolled in.

Former Education Secretary William Bennett and Senator Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., representing a gutsy group of social reformers, kicked off a campaign last Thursday to try and bring the producers, hosts and viewers of Talk television to a new level of social responsibility. Citing what he called a "pollution" of the human environment" by daytime talk shows, Bennett's group launched its offensive to pressure the industry into cleaning up its act.

Go get 'em guys. It's a pathetic indictment of a society gone shallow when shows like *Sally Jessy*

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What do you think about race relations on campus? Please submit your letter to the Emerald offices at Suite 300 in the EMU or send us your thoughts via e-mail at ode@oregon.uoregon.edu. Letters on this issue will be published Nov. 6.

Raphael, Maury Povich, Jerry Springer, Ricki Lake, Jenny Jones, Gerald and Montel Williams serve up a regular menu of slop TV and actually make money doing so. The sad fact is, American society seems all-too-eager-to-consume the stuff on a daily basis.

Remember *Donahue*? His show used to be among the worst examples of the circus-like "Freak of the Week" stuff found on Talk TV.

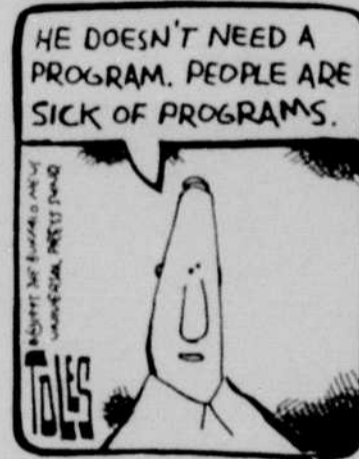
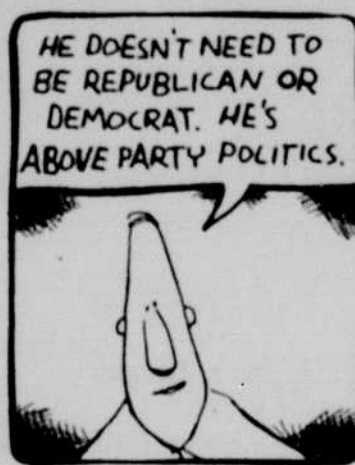
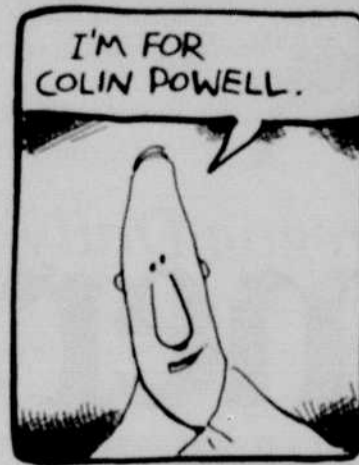
Donahue, ever the trend setter, can now be found on an obscure channel at an even more obscure late-night (early morning) time slot. He has changed his subject matter from the gross and cheesy to open-forum discussions over Medicare and the like.

Of course, this new format probably won't break any viewership records, but at least *Donahue* is trying to elevate himself above the swill.

Top-rated Oprah Winfrey used to produce muck just as yucky as any of her competitors — until she had a change of heart and decided to make shows that actually offers solutions to some of society's ills. Winfrey has also said she will no longer do "victim" shows.

We hope others follow her example.

Unfortunately, due to the popularity and fiscal success of the "other" kind of programming (and the public's appetite for it), the garbage isn't likely to stop stinking up our nation any time too soon.



You can believe everything you read

If you want to see a writer flinch, just whisper the word "censorship." If you want to baffle a writer about what censorship is, introduce them to Noam Chomsky.

Chomsky became a renegade critic of the mass media and American politics while working for a Massachusetts Institute of Technology think tank in the 1960s.

His platform complaint: What we read is lies, damn lies — sort of. According to Chomsky, the image of the world that reaches us through the media is skewed by somebody or something, somewhere. Most of our "news" is ideological junk disguised as verifiable facts.

But Chomsky evidently makes a distinction between popular media and student media. Student media doesn't attract the attention of big time censors because their role in constructing reality is negligible.

Chomsky's visit to Corvallis last week reminded me of an episode from his video *Manufacturing Consent*, in which he was approached by the editor of a student paper. The young man was full of piss and vinegar. He had probably taken some media-theory classes with instructors who thought Chomsky was a crank.

The student asserted that no one controlled what his paper printed because it had absolute editorial autonomy from the university. First Amendment all the way. He was confident that he could fill his paper to the flag with political dissidence or spark the fires of popular revolt with never a nay say from the dean.

Maybe he lived in one of the six states that has legislation protecting student journalists from school censorship. Oregon isn't one of them.

Chomsky's reply was brief. He simply pointed out that student papers have relative freedom precisely because they never print anything that could possibly spark the fires of popular revolt. Student papers aren't policy makers. Student papers don't construct reality. Student papers don't count.

Which means?

It means student papers are hasty products, written by not-yet-professionals with midterm worries. Student media have few network links to the people who are the policy makers and who do shape the news outside the university. And that means that when you shake everything down, most of what anyone reads in student papers is superficial, stereotypical or dull, and this column is no exception.

This will come as no surprise to readers, but it has one important implication for student journalists: abundant freedom to print more of the same.

Which means I and my fellow media concu-

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bines can write whatever we want because the chances of one of us writing anything "dangerous" are slim. Researchers will not be citing the *Emerald* in their reports, nor will our words be quoted in larger articles in better publications. Clinton won't cry if the *Emerald* doesn't like him.

Maybe if we imitated the Kent State riots and got shot by police, or if we did something comparable with the 1968 student rebellions in Europe, our actions would become part of the social construction of reality that orders the political conscious. But until the University comes up with its own Ninja Turtle political agenda, the *Emerald* will be scrutiny-free.

I find that heartening. Who's to say the First Amendment should be used to say anything important?

A couple of years ago, the Marquette University paper shut down because of disputes between the staff and the Catholic school officials. The problems between the student journalists and the school were mostly allegorical — the staff once used the headline "This is Hell" for an article about the campus. A similar controversy would never befall the secular *Emerald*. Hell, the *Marquette Tribune's* former business manager now works for the *Emerald*.

Nearly 1,000 college publications operate in the United States. But for all of them, the issue of censorship comes up rarely.

Whether editors are unconsciously obeying the unvoiced laws of information production, or whether college news just isn't a big enough deal to interest the world, the result is the same: No new tales to tell.

Chomsky warns us to worry about the news that isn't being told. His favorite example is the brutal annexation of East Timor by Indonesia. This "non-news", says Chomsky, is the most important information in (or conspicuously not in) the media.

I'd argue that none of this "non-news" is in the *Emerald*.

So when Chomsky warns the public to beware of biased media messages or to be on guard for what the media aren't saying, he is not referring to student papers.

Which means it's perfectly safe to believe everything you read in the *Emerald*. Enjoy!

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