

# PERSPECTIVES

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## Consume every **Byte** with a grain of salt

### SCRIBBLES OF SANITY

JAYNA BERGERSON

**W**e are living in the Misinformation Age. Information is everywhere. Internet, television, newspapers, magazines, radio, billboards – the list goes on and on. Even if you wanted to avoid it, you couldn't.

On the whole, information isn't that bad. It tells you where to buy a car, how to get from point A to point B and who won the World Series. But improving technology allows nearly anyone to say or write anything they want.

Which is great, right? That way, we can truly express ourselves freely. The marketplace of ideas.

Yeah, that's all good, as long as you are expressing an opinion. But what about passing free expression off as fact?

The Internet shows how easy it is to release information to the public. Anyone can construct a Web page explaining how the U.S. government has developed a top secret genetic device that allows the CIA to read people's thoughts. You can add "blueprints" and a document "signed" by President Clinton to the page with "TOP SECRET" boldly inscribed at the top, just to convince any skeptics. And voila, you have information.

Not everyone would be convinced, but you might be surprised at how many would. In general, people believe that if it looks like information, it must be

TRUE information.

Negative. Misinformation happens frequently. It may even have happened to you, and you may not even know it.

However, misinformation requires that the author of the information is deliberately misleading the audience to believe something other than the truth. A good example of misinformation is when salespeople try to convince you to buy something.

But you almost expect that from a salesperson.

So, in order to avoid being misinformed, you must only accept information that comes from a reliable source. Wait a minute.

What about the picture of O.J. Simpson on the covers of Newsweek and Time magazine? These are considered reputable sources, but it was obvious that the pictures were doctored.

You could tell because it was the exact same picture, except one was darkened to give him an intense, shadowy countenance and the other was lightened, making him look wide-eyed and innocent. Again, misinformation. No one knew the truth about O.J., and yet both magazines were trying to portray guilt or innocence rather than just his face.

Even reliable sources screw up. There is also the obvious fiction in supermarket tabloids. They try to convince us that UFOs landed in Texas and that a woman gave birth to a monkey in New York. This is misinformation at its peak. But anyone who believes that tabloids have an ounce of truth in them has my sympathy.

And let's not forget the ever-

popular, quick-advice magazines. Who hasn't waited in the grocery line to buy that 10-pound package of ramen noodles and turned to read "Tips on How to Have Great Sex!" "Lose 20 pounds in 6 days without dieting!" And the ever-popular, "10 Great Makeup Tips!"

The truth is, if you want great sex you have to work at it, again and again and again. To lose

weight, stop eating cold pizza for breakfast. Get a free makeover at Nordstrom's; as the professional works on your face, keep notes and repeat the technique at home. Wow! All that advice and I haven't read one of those magazines. My secret? Common sense.

The moral of the story — take what you see, hear and read with a grain of salt. Be cautious consumers of information; don't gob-

ble down every bit as if it is all the same. There is a difference between digesting a Double Deluxe Hamburger and shoe leather. If you take in everything, you may get indigestion.

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Bryan Dixon Emerald

## Slay the two-headed monster: finding the 'radical center'



### SAINTS AND PROFITS

ERIC PFEIFFER

**O**nce again, it's time to unleash the dogs.

Before we get started, I would like to thank those of you who have responded through e-mail to my columns. I enjoy cutting through the rhetoric with all of you and forming some solid views on politics. You may not always like what you read, but I can guarantee that it comes spin-free, with no hidden agenda.

Based on my first column, some of you might have been misled into believing that I'm a Bush-hating, Al Gore apologist. Far from it!

Truth be told, I prefer a concept known as the "radical center." The radical center believes that great change can take place, but that it must be done on an incremental level. From this perspective, the special-interest lobby is to blame for most of the problems in Washington and the mainstream media today.

Powerful lobbies, representing hungry constituencies, are each fighting for their own piece of the American pie. It sounds like both democracy and the market interwoven in beautiful synergy, but it just isn't so. Instead, federal bureaucrats become street hustlers, peddling out the goods to power junkies. This idea mainly offends liberals, but pertains to conservatives as well.

We've had three historic leaders over the past 20 years who have attempted drastic reform in government: Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton

and Newt Gingrich. Each one marched into Washington promising to end big government, reform the system and return integrity to politics. Sadly, each one failed more dramatically than the last.

The end result is what Ralph Nader calls, "The merging of parties into one giant corporation with two heads." Unfortunately, Mr. Nader cannot claim innocence in this matter. He's the godfather of the special interest. He makes a valid point, but that doesn't change the often negative effects of his approach. Make no mistake, if Mr. Nader were elected, his platform of instant gratification would be just as harmful to our society as that of Pat Buchanan. You can't do it all by yourself, and you can't do it all at once. Our founding fathers constructed a system to prevent hasty decisions, and it's a good thing they did.

As a result of pandering to the

special interests, Democrats have lost touch with what once made them a liberal party. I'm not a liberal, but I used to admire the Democrats for standing their ground on economic and social policy. They helped change the world. Now, they stand for getting elected at any cost. Of course, I can't quite call myself a Republican, either. I'm not a country club racist who wants the government out of my wallet and inside your bedroom.

If the Democrats had some integrity, or the Republicans stopped using J.C. Watts and cast extras from El Mariachi for their modern-day minstrel show, I'd gladly join either side.

The solution for a radically centrist government lies in compassionate conservatism. Unfortunately, it's not the exact vision espoused by Gov. Bush. He's got the right idea, but like Reagan and

Clinton discovered, you can't shove it down America's throat.

Now, when I'm not writing this column, I tend to be a positive guy.

In spite of my love for '80s post-apocalyptic science-fiction movies, I do believe the world is going to be OK. People surprise me every day with their sincerity, kindness and love for those around them. It's the people running the show who scare me.

Next week, instead of pointing fingers, I'll talk about some solutions to this problem of the parasitic economy. Until then, keep those love letters and death threats on the go-go.

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