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## ■ In my opinion

# Perpetuating the stereotype

I feel sorry for middle-class white guys. They get no respect. They must be feeling pretty cheated right about now, too. If I didn't know so many personally, I would think they were all fat, stupid, lazy and helpless.

Why? Because that very image is what I am inundated with on a daily basis in all forms of media. Morning radio shows showcase Idiot Every-Dudes obsessed with sex and bodily functions. Print ads offer a slight variation on this theme: young men with unachievable-for-most physiques, but still addicted to sex and dumb as rocks. But television, the most pervasive of all media, is the greatest culprit in the "guy as stupid/fat/lazy/helpless" campaign.

The joke is as old as the situation comedy, starting with fat Jackie Gleason and thin Audrey Meadows in "The Honeymooners" back in 1955. But while Gleason's threatening, ready-to-punch "to the moon, Alice!" gesturing has long been outmoded by women who give as good as they get, the physical stereotypes have far from disappeared, actually being promoted to new heights in recent years.

The standard sitcom formula seems to be the aforementioned portly male, coupled with a thin, smart, sexy, young woman. The examples of this on network television are many. FOX has "Family Guy," "King of the Hill," "Quintuplets" and "The Simpsons." ABC: "George Lopez" and "According to Jim" (albeit the former is about a stupid Mexican-American



ANNEMARIE KNEPPER  
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male, but the formula remains the same). But the all-time greatest contributor to this myth of the stupid white male by far is CBS, with its arsenal of "The King of Queens," "Still Standing," "Listen Up" and "Everybody Loves Raymond."

For the formula at its best, observe the genuinely funny Kevin James as Doug in "Queens." To his fit, witty, sassy wife, Carrie (played by fit, witty, sassy Leah Remini), he often quips, "I'm fat, but you're mean." Their believable chemistry and the juxtaposition of her non-physical flaws make the relationship somewhat plausible. However, the show's theme (Doug gets himself into trouble, Carrie fixes it; Doug irritates Carrie with his stupidity, Carrie gets over it because Doug is so gosh darn lovable) feeds into the disturbingly prominent ideology that a woman can be a bitch as long as she's thin and a man can be fat as long as he's an idiot and, therefore, no real threat to anyone.

But "Queens" is where the comedy goodness ends for CBS. For the formula at its worst, see any of the

above-listed shows. For our purposes, "Listen Up" offends greatest with its pairing of everyone's favorite stocky guy, Jason Alexander, with wispy, mostly unknown (unless you remember "Sister Act 2" very well) Wendy Makkena, as Tony and Dana Kleinman. What made Alexander so believable in his "Seinfeld" days was his character's uncanny ability to repel women.

One episode of Alexander's new series ("Tony Whine-Man," episode 1.17) was deemed "so bad it baffles science" by one Internet Movie Database user. In this episode, Dana dresses in a slutty, age-inappropriate outfit to show Tony's old summer camp buddies that the once slouchy, bespectacled Jew married a "fox." She proceeds to prance around in hooker heels, coming on to his "friends" and embarrassing all who watch the show and hopefully all who had hand in creating it.

People watch television for several reasons: to escape, to be entertained, but mostly to identify with other humans. They want to see themselves on the screen and know that others, even pre-constructed, exaggerated, false others, are going through the same trials and tribulations that make up our American life.

Just whose American life are we watching?

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## ■ Guest commentary

# U.S. leaders need to actively, proudly, passionately stop massacres in Sudan

As a citizen of the United States, I am completely outraged by our foreign policy regarding Sudan. It is a sad day for all American citizens when we (President Bush, Colin Powell) openly admit to the ongoing atrocities afflicting Sudan's Darfur region, referring to the continuous massacres with one word that should immediately instigate action, "genocide," but as of yet have effectively accomplished nothing to stop it. Even while the United Nations denies the act of genocide in Sudan, the U.N. Security Council admits that terrible acts against humanity are occurring regularly in that region. And yet again, the United Nations has effectively done nothing to stop these terrible acts of violence.

Have we actually reached a time in history in which the only way to stop the brutal killings of hundreds of thousands of people is to follow laws laid down in conventions and act only when certain terms are used? Using terms such as "genocide" and following guidelines laid down in human rights conventions are important but must not be the sole purpose behind action. It seems

that we are ignoring or have lost the value of the most important thing on earth: living, breathing, human beings.

It's not that we are ignorant on the issue but that we have consciously stepped aside, accepting the role of a spectator. We have watched the torturing and killing of loving wives, mothers, husbands and fathers. We have witnessed the countless slaughter of brothers, sisters, sons and daughters by the hands of their heartless enemies. Worst of all, and what is truly unjustifiable, we have seen the innocence of a child stripped away by the simple movement of a finger. The finger attached to men of true evil.

Must we be reminded that the families of those who are maliciously slain love their families to the full extent that we love ours? That they feel the same anguish when their beloved dies? That they, like us, are filled with the ugliest feeling in the world when death is involved? Understanding that state of sorrow, do we really wish that ugliness upon someone else? Are we actually conditioned in such a way to only help people not because

they need help, but because we have our self-interests in mind? Do we only act when we will become the beneficiaries, not the people in dire need?

I could not feel this passionate about the issue if we as a nation were incapable or unaware. But we are both fully capable and aware of our options to act. The only question we consider is should we act, are we willing to act. Thus far, it is clear that we are simply unwilling.

As a plea from an American citizen to the elected leaders of the most powerful nation in the world, I urge a flaunt of power. If only those leaders can muster up the strength and courage to act as leaders in this desperate time of crisis, others will follow. We have not gotten to where we are as a nation by playing a minor role in world affairs.

Although it is a heavy burden, it's one that we have taken on in the past, and I urge this nation's leaders to take the initiative in actively, passionately and proudly stopping the massacres perpetrated against the Sudanese people.

William Hathaway, Eugene

## ■ Editorial

# PATRIOT Act hinders U.S. rights, not terrorists

Take a moment and consider that we are living in the year 2005. Almost four years have passed since the infamous and devastating Sept. 11 attacks, and much has changed in our nation during that span of time. Along the lines of instigating a preemptive war and imprisoning Saddam Hussein, the United States government has made terrorism the defining force in both national and international policy, and the USA PATRIOT Act is a prime example of this new national agenda.

Since its passage on Oct. 26, 2001 the PATRIOT Act has been hotly contested by both liberal and conservative groups, the most vocal of those being the American Civil Liberties Union. The act was, and still is, touted by supporters as an important mechanism in fighting terrorism because it grants U.S. government and federal officials powers specific to an international tone of terrorism. The right of federal investigators to search and seize electronic information without a warrant, for instance, could be key to swiftly understanding and stopping a future terrorist attack. Yet many deem the act an infringement on constitutional rights. The Emerald stands as one of those many.

Now, three-and-a-half years later, 15 sections of the PATRIOT Act will expire if Congress does not renew them at the end of 2005. Among others, those provisions being considered for renewal, and heavily discussed this week in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee, include: Section 505, which allows the FBI to seize records without a specific or concrete subpoena; Section 214, which allows investigators to watch and record the numbers of all incoming calls to a particular phone line; and Section 207, which gives federal officials the right to monitor any individual communications, through a wiretap or other means.

This means that were you, a university student, fingered as a potential terrorist by a federal investigator, it is legal for him or her to listen in on your phone calls, analyze your text messages and read your e-mail — without your knowledge. Shall we play a game of Are You Nervous?

The provisions within the PATRIOT Act as a whole are still largely unnecessary. Sept. 11 did not occur because the FBI didn't have time to get a warrant and go through someone's library records. The attacks occurred primarily because of a government that chose to ignore both the world community at large and the warning signs that members of that community were preparing a massive act of vengeance. Unwarranted seizure of documents can hardly make up for the terrorists' belief that the United States is inherently evil and deserving of violence.

It is important to remember that guarantees of liberty found within the U.S. Constitution were not designed to be applicable in only times of peace. Rather, provisions such as the fourth amendment right to privacy, or the guarantee of a fair trial by jury, were created so that even in times of country-wide turmoil, the needs and rights of the individual could be ever-present.

The U.S. Congress should remember the values that this country was built on, as it failed to do at the original passage of this act, and begin a disintegration of the PATRIOT Act this year by rejecting the renewal of any provisions.

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