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■ In my opinion

Informed for the Holidays



ARMY FETH
RHETORIC CHECK

This is going to be a great winter break. For some reason we appear to have four weeks off, as far as I can tell from the 17 times I checked. Political news, my bread and butter, usually tends to die down as Congress spends six weeks in recess during the time between Thanksgiving and mid-January. You can always count on our men and women of Congress to set the highest standard for time off.

Consumer driven infotainment will no doubt take over the media. It has already started, with massive attention paid to Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

Wow. A bunch of people started shopping for the holidays on the culturally determined "first days." I fail to see how that is news, seeing as it happens every year. People only feel the need to shop on those days because the media told them to in the first place. Then the media in turn reports on the fact that everyone listened to them.

Meanwhile, real things are happening every day, but the politicians who put the news into partisan sound bytes suitable to the 24 hour holy cow nature of cable news are taking a break, and the system suffers.

Luckily, we live in the wonderful age of new media. Besides catching up on all the books you neglected during school and renting whole seasons of premium cable shows on DVD, it is also a wonderful time to catch up on the Internet. Oh yes, the great time-waster can actually be quite informative. So over the break, when you just can't listen to Rita Cosby rasp one more pointless tabloid story, when you know the top 10 most-wanted-toys-list by heart, or just need a break from shopping online, take a look at these sites, and start a new trend: Informed for the holidays.

Wonkette: By far the best and most irreverent political blog out there. The

site is very D.C., a town that functions as its own universe, so a few things might fly over your head. (Butterstick is not the actual name of the baby panda at the National Zoo). But for straight politics, gossip and analysis, it can't be beat. Wonkette, edited by journalist Ana Marie Cox, will make you laugh as you learn just how sleazy our nation's capitol, and our leaders, can be. www.wonkette.com

The Raw Story: Somewhere between a blog and an online newspaper, The Raw Story has helped lead the media back to watchdog status. The site is regularly quoted by traditional media, and the reporting is really good. They also accept submissions, so if you are a budding journalist, it might be a good way to get started. www.rawstory.com

Media Matters for America: President and CEO, David Brock, is a fascinating character. He used to be a part of what he calls "the Republican noise machine," when he wrote for the ultra-conservative Washington Times. He is now an award-winning author with a mission. He wrote "Blinded by the Right: The Conscious of an Ex-Conservative" and has now devoted his career to pointing out bias in the media. If you still think we live in a land with a "liberal media," you have to check this site out. It is also a great source for audio and video clips. www.mediamatters.org

BBC: For those with a worldly taste for news, this is your outlet. Just imagine if the media was loyal to you,

the taxpayer, rather than the shareholders of their multinational corporate overlords. It's also great to just get an outsider's view America, kind of like overhearing a conversation about yourself. www.bbc.co.uk

Center for Media and Democracy: If you ever feel like the public relations filter is an omnipresent part of your life, or contrarily, you have never even thought about it, PR Watch and the Spin of the Day will have you gaping at your computer screen. About 50 percent of news is generated by PR. It is important to know what kind of filters the facts go through before they are disseminated to the masses. www.prwatch.org

Huffington Post: Author, columnist, and politico Arianna Huffington's online empire is a force to be reckoned with. Huffington is responsible for leading the successful campaign to keep the ethically challenged Judith Miller from becoming a well-respected martyr. Her blog has a terrific regular staff, as well as amazing contributors like John Cusack and Bill Moyers. HuffPo has all kinds of fun pulling biased, spoiled journalists off their newsprint pedestal. www.huffingtonpost.com

Wayne Madsen: If you want the story behind the story behind the story, you must go here. You will find the day's news and the kind of insider background on the key characters and plot developments that bring everything into colorful and crooked context. I wouldn't exactly call this site news, but Madsen doesn't really either: "This online publication tackles the 'politically incorrect' and 'politically embarrassing' stories and holds government officials accountable for their actions. This Web site extends a warm open invitation to whistleblowers and leakers." www.waynemadsenreport.com

Happy Holidays news hounds.

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■ Editorial

Now is the time to start learning from history

The year is 2025. Students at North Eugene High School are studying a modern history textbook that tells horrifying stories of the genocide that took place in Sudan at the beginning of the century. The young students are visibly upset when they hear stories of humans raping and killing other humans in massive numbers. The textbook has a scanned image of a column by Nicolas Kristof that ran in The New York Times on Nov. 29, 2005. The article tells the story of two sisters who belonged to the Fur tribe in Darfur. The girls watched a janjaweed commander behead their father when the father begged for the commander to let his daughters go.

One student asks, "Why do we have to learn about this? We can't do anything about it now — it already happened."

The teacher patiently explains that we must learn about history to avoid repeating it.

Another student asks, "But in the early 1990s, didn't the same thing happen in Rwanda?"

People are disheartened about the Sudanese genocide in 2025. There is a best-selling novel out that tells the story of one brave woman who was able to hide from the janjaweed militia and survive, and it makes people sad. The movie "Camp Darfur" recounts the story of heroic members of the African Union who risked their lives to protect women from being raped when they left the refugee camps to gather firewood, and it makes people sad, just as people were sad in 2004 after watching "Hotel Rwanda."

In 2005, people are shaking their heads and asking, "How could the U.S. government abandon the people in Rwanda? Didn't they see that there were people there who couldn't defend themselves?"

In 2025, people will shake their heads and ask, "How could the U.S. government abandon the people in Sudan? Didn't they see that there were people there who couldn't defend themselves?"

In 2025, college students in coffee shops ask each other hypothetical questions like, "If you were walking by a parking lot at night and saw a woman being raped, wouldn't you stop to help? How could you just walk by and do nothing? That's exactly what the United States did while women were being gang-raped in Sudan in 2005." The college students are glad that the United States has learned from history and won't let that sort of thing happen again.

In 2005, it's time to stop talking about learning from history. It's time to actually learn from it by working to prevent this hypothetical future — one where people are ashamed of the United States' apathetic attitude toward yet another case of genocide in a far away country.

Despite recent news reports that brutal violence in Darfur is worsening as peace talks deteriorate, the Bush administration has refused to label this crisis a genocide. If named a genocide, the United Nations and thus the U.S. would be bound to intervene.

Government negotiators from the United States and other countries on the ground in Sudan are growing frustrated while our government pays only lip service to this crisis. Real people with homes, families, hobbies, nicknames, favorite hangouts and photo albums are being raped, beaten, tortured, enslaved and murdered. We cannot avert our eyes anymore. It is time to declare this situation what it really is — a genocide.

Willow Baumann, University student