

Editorial

Nation's media cannot revive dying campaign

America's media have created a sticky situation for themselves. Early in the presidential campaign, they portrayed Democratic challenger Walter Mondale as a perennial wimp. A loser from start to finish. They may have been right. But now, faced with the prospect of having to generate interesting stories, the media are trying to generate a race where there isn't one.

Ronald Reagan will defeat Walter Mondale on Nov. 6, and he will win easily. In the words of Joe Namath, "I guarantee it."

One glance at the local and national newspapers and broadcast media and you'd swear Walter Mondale is about to pass a sagging and aging president.

First, Mondale outdebated the Great Communicator in a one-shot affair Oct. 7 in Louisville. A CBS News/New York Times poll taken right after the debate showed that the American public thought Mondale had barely edged the president, 43 to 34 percent. Another poll had Mondale winning by 1 percent.

The next day, the national media showed pictures of Mondale marching triumphantly through New York City as if he had just taken Troy. They described his victory as "astounding" and "overwhelming."

Reagan was pictured at a speech with a bumbling balloonist in the background. Commentary framing his speech used words like "floundering" and "defensive."

Nobody judged the debate that way except the media. The CBS News/New York Times poll said Reagan's margin before the debate was 59 to 33 percent. After the debate, it was 58 to 38. Mondale gained, but Reagan didn't lose much. Only 4 percent of those polled were undecided.

"But the president is old, really old," the media whines to us every day. Sure, the man is probably incapable of making coherent decisions as to what to eat today, let alone about the future of this country.



But it isn't the president who attracts today's self-centered yuppies and college students; it's his economic policies. And those economic policies won't change whether the president can tie his shoes or not.

As long as there is a Republican in the White House, the suburban upper middle class will prosper. They won't vote for Mondale just because Reagan played the senile old fool on television Oct. 7.

By the time the media were through butchering the results of the first debate, Americans, by a 66 to 17 percent margin, thought Mondale had won the debate. Those figures are a far cry from the public's first instincts.

Still, Reagan has a lead in every state, a wide lead in most states. The lead will be more than solidified by the time the second debate ends Sunday evening in Kansas City, Mo.

In Kansas City, Reagan will be the reassuring grandpa we've come to know and loathe or love. He'll chuckle here and chortle there and all doubts about him will vanish into the Missouri air.

Should Reagan lose the debate, though, no matter what the media says, the American public will vote for him.

Jeff Browne
Daily Nebraskan Senior Editor



Letters

Spanish translation deplored

In view of increased restrictions on the bringing of alcoholic beverages into Memorial Stadium, we were surprised to see the scoreboard promoting wine to Big Red fans at last Saturday's football game. "Go Beeg Rioja" read the scoreboard during half time.

A pitiful attempt at Spanish, to say the least. "Beeg" is obviously intended to imitate a Spanish-speaking person's pronunciation of the English "big." Perhaps that writer still is "Rioja," which is not the Spanish word for "red." Rioja, in

fact, is the name of a red wine produced in the region of Spain also called Rioja. While we enjoyed the Spanish music provided by the band during the half time show, we believe that the next time an attempt is made to put something on the scoreboard in a language other than English, it would be wise to consult someone with adequate knowledge of that language. "Adelante Gran Rojo!"

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Trivia will stunt growth

'Useless facts' test TV viewing time, not IQ

Call me egghead, but I like to tap into the national conscience now and again. I tapped in the other day by watching a TV show and reading my evening newspaper. Friends, I've got to tell you, I've got this uneasy feeling that we know more than we should know for our own good.



James A. Fussell

Not about presidential candidates, the economy or anything that matters. We don't seem to know the first thing about that. But we can answer the tough questions, the ones that burn deep in the back of our minds — you know — which of the Allman brothers did Cher walk down the aisle with? What kid sister did Mattel give Barbie Doll? Who are the five Marx brothers?

After two years of Trivial Pursuit, decades with the Guinness Book of World Records, countless call-in contests, and a gaggle of game shows, our minds are awash in useless facts. But we love it. All hail the trivial generation.

We've even got a trivial president. Doesn't know beans about foreign policy, but I'll bet my left ear that he can name the five Marx brothers — six, if he included Karl. But, still, Walter Mondale rage at him about what he's going to do about the deficit. C'mon Wally, get in the game, this man knows the entire starting infield of the 1949 Cubs; what more could you want from a president?

Americans have certainly got

ten into the game. I admit I've tried a little Trivial Pursuit myself — out of intellectual curiosity, of course. If you try it, remember that this game tests our trivia IQ only, not our actual IQ. The two are light years apart.

After missing three straight questions from a sample of the Baby Boomer edition pulled from a woman's magazine, my wife, Susan, got a little down in the mouth. "I can't play this game," she declared in disgust. I assured her that not knowing the name of the actor who played Ozzie and Harriet's next-door neighbor, or what intergalactic high school Supergirl attended had no bearing whatsoever on her intelligence. In fact, I said, I might begin to wonder about her if she did know the answers. These questions don't test your IQ; they test how much television you watch.

And that's the hidden attraction of these games. Eight-year-old Tommie is on an equal footing with mom and dad on some of the questions. After all, dad may know who Konrad Adenauer is, but Tommie's got it all over him when the questions turn into something like "Describe the Thompson Twins," or "What's the color of Cyndi Lauper's hair?"

These are the kinds of things we do today. If it's important, skip it; if it's significant, we don't want to hear it; if it's interesting, we'll listen, but only if it can be shaped into a trivia question.

It's even creeping into our newspapers, perish the thought. I've thoughtfully lifted some of the little gems that are filling our newspapers today.

• Dinosaurs died off at the end of the Cretaceous period, about

135 million years ago, because the Earth's climate changed. Whew! I wondered why I hadn't seen any pterodactyls lately.

• "A slow drip can waste up to 15 to 20 gallons a day, and a toilet can leak up to 100 gallons daily." Now this kind of information loosed on an innocent American public could lead to some pretty ridiculous conversations at your local cocktail party.

• "Big Ben, known as a huge clock in London's Westminster Palace, is a name that actually refers to the bell in the tower, named for Sir Benjamin Hall, the commissioner of works when the bell was installed in 1856." Now that's interesting.

• "The University of Al Azhar was founded in Cairo, Egypt, in the year 972 and confers degrees in areas such as Islamic Law, business and medicine." That's ridiculous. But here's my favorite.

• "According to Saffire's Political Dictionary, the more recent term for egghead, which refers to an intellectual, is effete snob." Saffire is entitled to his opinion, of course, but who can picture a junior high schooler nudging his buddy and saying "Hey, get a load of Myron, the effete snob?"

And yet, this is the kind of news we get in our newspapers every day. Trivial stuff.

Are we a nation of thinking men and women, or are we trivialized memory machines, ready to burp out the correct answer whenever someone pushes our button? This trivia mania is a national disgrace. It'll stunt our growth, give us bad breath and bring on the antibiotic...

Oh, by the way: Groucho, Harpo, Chico, Gummo and Zappa.

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