



Student questions campaign slogan

I am a first-year student at the UNL College of Law. While subject to the trials and travails for which the first year is famous, life has not become so monastic that I am divorced from events in the outside world. For example, by

reading the newspapers I understand there was a presidential election on Tuesday.

There are many aspects of this campaign that will be examined *ad nauseam* — the large registration of young voters for the Republicans, the possibility that this is a realigning election — but there is another subtle trend I sense, and it nags and worries at me like a persistent toothache.

During my rambling adventures as an undergraduate and graduate student of political science, as well as some points in between, I developed the frustrating habit of searching for the ultimate meaning of things. Looking for ultimate meanings in American politics is a quixotic task at best, but I cannot resist; and so, I wonder what is meant by the political slogan, "Are you better off than you were four years ago?"

It is a good campaign slogan, as far as campaign slogans go; but if used as the test by which American voters cast their ballots, it is crudely simplistic, shallow, and suggests that Americans are motivated in matters of public policy solely by selfishness. There is no arguing the point that economic stability has been a rarity over the past 10 years, and voters are duly concerned about their livelihood. One of my sharpest criticisms of the Democratic Party has been that it has forgotten, or taken for granted, those hard-working voters of the middle class who have paid most for the welfare state's obligations while receiving few of its benefits.

But there is a difference between the quest for long-term economic stability and growth, and the discreet sanctioning of greed the current administration seems to foster. The spirit of "outta-my-way-Jack-I-got-mine" seems to me to run contrary to all that is best in the American character. To express concern that economic prosperity may not last, that budget deficits of unprecedented magnitude may have created a structural weakness that will undermine long-term growth, is to be labeled a pessimist, a wimp, by the perennially optimistic Babbitts of this administration.

James Reston, in one of his recent columns for the New York Times, quoted the great American essayist Walter Lippmann, who was reflecting on the American electorate before the 1932 election. Lippmann wrote: "They are looking for new leaders, for men who are truthful and resolute and eloquent in the conviction that the American destiny is to be free and magnanimous, rather than complacent and acquisitive; they are looking for leaders who will not talk to them about two-car garages and a bonus, but about their duty and about the sacrifices they must make, and about the discipline they must impose upon themselves, and about their responsibility to the world and to posterity; about all those things which make a people self-respecting, serene and confident."

"May they not look in vain."
Frank Podony
College of Law

Apathy alarms UNL instructor

We live in strange times. Recently, the student body of the University of Colorado at Boulder was polled in order to find out if it wished to have cyanide capsules available to it in case of a nuclear war. Twenty percent of the student body responded to the poll. Of these, 2,322 opposed it; 1,689 favored it.

Recently, at UNL, a few hundred students spent some three days camped out from the Nebraska Union to the Coliseum, in order to be the first in line to buy Bruce Springsteen concert tickets, revealing a devotion the like of which hasn't been seen since Jesus rode an ass into Jerusalem — or the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh rode a Cadillac into his ashram near Antelope, Ore., last summer, for that matter. The students had three days of fun and games. Partying. Three days of no small energy expenditure.

I doubt that this student body has the desire or the inclination to devote the same amount of energy and time to any laudable political cause as it devoted to waiting for those concert tickets. (I realize, of course, that rock concerts are political in the sense that they promote the Peter Pan myth: eternal adolescence, perpetual play, youth forever, without responsibility and without care.) I doubt that this student body cares if, or when, an MX system is placed in Nebraska, for example, much less devote any time and energy to opposing it. Of course, it's likely that most of the students here favor such a thing, in which case camping out in order to get tickets to see "The Boss" is all one needs, or has, to do. War Is Peace, right — or is it Peace Through Strength? Something like that.

The most enthusiasm a typical student on this campus can generate, I've discovered, is toward rock concerts, drink and drown nights at Stooges, and low-priced personal computers. Then again, a number of my colleagues get quite enthused about the possibility of a low-cost personal computer. Thank God for the whoredom of Apple. The most pressing political issue for the typical student is the drinking age and the proposed city ordinance to ban two-fer specials.

It doesn't take much intuition to realize that most of the students on this campus are apathetic to an alarming degree, convinced of their powerlessness, obsequious to authority, and terrified of the future.

Ah, well. "Get all the Gusto..." and all that.

In all fairness, however, I must admit that I've discovered one thing the students here are quite

good at: playing "trivia" games. I'll conclude, then, by asking a (not so) trivial question. Complete the following phrase, found in a famous novel by the British author George Orwell: Ignorance Is

Sam Umland
instructor, UNL

Pornography slides watched with pity

Like most of my fellow students, I arrived at my first Free University class on "Women and Children in the Media and Pornography" not really knowing what to expect — but intrigued by the footnote to the official class description: "because of slide content participants must be 18." I soon realized the necessity of this warning for most of the class time was devoted to the showing of a graphic and lurid series of hard-core pornographic slides that the teacher, Margie Rine, had personally compiled from various magazine photographs and advertisements. Before showing them, she thoughtfully reminded us that a whole range of powerful and often unpleasant emotions were usually aroused in people that were viewing the slides for the first time. It was therefore with some trepidation that I leant forward in my chair when the lights went down...

To my surprise, when the ordeal was all over, my lingering impression was not so much the outrage that I felt at such explicit "dirty" and dehumanizing material nor my wholly justifiable surge of compassion for the female "models," but rather a feeling of pity (tinged with contempt) for the perpetrators and consumers of such atrocious garbage. Clearly, the dehumanization was not just one-dimensional. In retrospect, this point may seem an obvious one, but it struck me at that time, nevertheless, with the force of a revelation. After all, we rightly expect to feel a flood of overwhelming pity for the victims of sadistic sexual violence (and the stress is always heavily on the violence rather than on the sex), but I had been totally unprepared for my "empathizing," as it were, with their tormentors. This feeling of a diffused sadness, of a strange awareness of guilt by association, of complicity in rape at a distance, has remained with me ever since.

Why then had I not experienced such a feeling before? The answer lies, I think, in the simple but subtle fact that one deliberately shields oneself — in the interests of mental and emotional hygiene — from too close a contact with the debilitating and pernicious effects of such powerfully disturbing stimuli. Since pornography is ubiquitous in this commercial culture, and sex sells everything, it seems impossible to escape it entirely, but more or less successful strategy of selective and judicious filtering is possible — and this, I think, is precisely what we do all the time (albeit, perhaps, unconsciously). Small wonder then that, when the mind is suddenly confronted with a full, unadulterated exposure, an unfamiliar sense of disgust and angry amazement — rather than outright shock — is the outcome: "How on earth can anyone willingly even tolerate, let alone actually enjoy such putrid stuff?" is surely the sane reaction of a mind not already anesthetized and lobotomized beyond hope by overexposure. Yet that is exactly what millions of people do in America every single day — and to the tune of \$7 billion per year. They deserve our pity... "Hey wait a minute," I hear you say. "This is all very well, but what about the victims?" My point exactly...

Peter Tooth
Lincoln

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