

Lackadaisical

Laziness plagues everyone, even a president

I almost didn't write this column. You see, I have a 10 a.m. Monday deadline, and that requires a little thought and planning over the weekend and hey, I had important stuff to do.

Things like the National Broomball Championships on ESPN or attempting to knit a sweater out of discarded lint wads from the dorm dryers. My weekends are full of essential things (like figuring out exactly what those "Slushes" points were redeemable for), and writing a column just didn't fit into my schedule.

OK, so maybe I almost didn't write this column because I was busy reorganizing my sock drawer by cottons, polyesters and cotton/polyester blends.

Maybe I almost didn't do it because I was lazy.

Yet I'm not the only one. We're living in a society of people who are aimless, uncaring, shiftless and a whole bunch of other "lazy" adjectives I'm too lazy to type out.

Take for example a true-life incident in Cadiz, Kentucky, in which a robber made off with \$170 from a grocery store — only to discover that he had locked the keys in the getaway car. This forced him to kick in the back window and inflict enough damage that \$170 probably wouldn't pay for it. He managed to drive only 21 miles before he was apprehended.

This is laziness to the utmost degree. Here we have a guy who in all likelihood carefully planned how he was going to do the robbery and paid attention to such things as the proximity of the nearest highway and whether the supermarket had any surveillance cameras.

He probably made out a list of things to bring for the robbery, you know, gun, pantyhose (for his head you sickos!!!), a road map and a bogus driver's license. I'm also sure that "car keys" were somewhere on this detailed list. He was probably too lazy to pay any attention to the list before getting out of the car.



Kasey Kerber

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Or maybe he was too lazy to make a list, and that bought him a trip to Kentucky's finest jailhouse.

Regardless, this is just one example of how laziness can play a part in small matters such as writing a column or trying to get into your car before Rosco P. Coltrane and the entire police squad from the "Dukes of Hazzard" come to get you.

Maybe you think that this laziness thing only happens to white trash robbers and weekendless columnists. Well, it also happens to cross-dressers disguised as leaders of the FBI.

Yes, there is a vivid, true-life, but little known incident of laziness that dealt with Herbert Hoover.

One day Hoover looked over a letter typed by his secretary and noticed that she had typed fairly far into the right-hand margin. He wrote the words "watch the borders" on the letter in red ink and told her bluntly, the words: "Correct and send."

Hoover's secretary thought he had meant that the letter was

"correct" and went ahead and "sent" it. Within two days, FBI agents were heavily patrolling the Canadian and Mexican "borders."

Now in this instance, who's to say who was lazy. Maybe it was Hoover for not being more descriptive in the way he told his secretary that the letter needed to be corrected. Maybe it was the secretary for wondering if that was a part of a dress sticking out from the closet door instead of paying attention to what her boss was saying.

Or maybe the secretary was too lazy to stay within the margins, Hoover was too lazy to tell her how to correct the letter and she was too lazy to make the corrections anyway.

The point is, we're lazy too. This might not seem as if it's all that bad, but often, laziness can be our downfall.

How? Well, let's just look at the examples mentioned earlier. What if the cops had gotten to the robber before he had a chance to break the back window and take off? What if there had been a shoot-out, and he had been the guy shot? All because he was lazy enough not to remember his keys ...

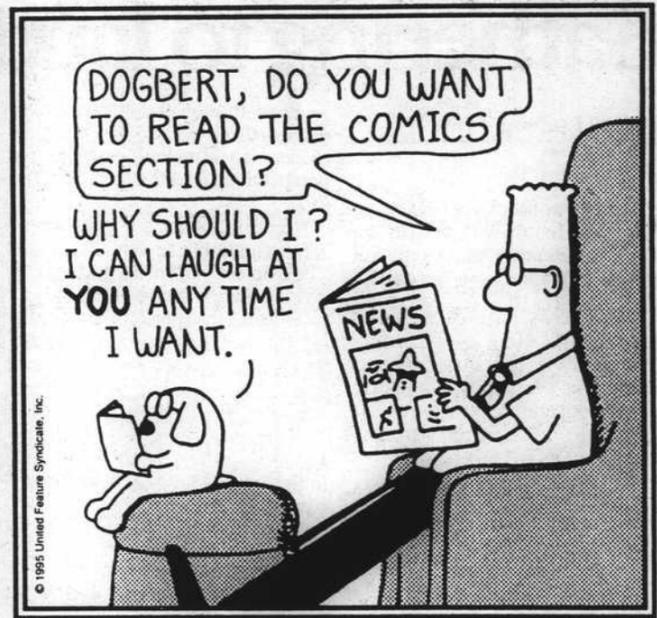
Or, what if the FBI agents closely roaming the borders had accidentally begun an international incident (as I'm sure many of our "secret" branches of service have almost done) all because Hoover and his secretary were too lazy to communicate.

Or closer to home — what if you're too lazy to study for your exams, fail them, fail your courses and end up robbing a grocery store of \$170, only to lock your keys in the getaway car?

One can only wonder how I could make such an intricate analysis of a robbery-gone-wrong and link it to our college lives. It certainly wasn't because I was inspired, determined and tireless to be creative ...

After all — I've got the Miniature Golf Championships to watch.

Kerber is a freshman news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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Public ignorance

Voters confused about who's who in politics

Almost 60 percent of Americans believe that poverty is on the rise among the elderly, and half of those believe the federal government has contributed to the problem. Fifty-eight percent think we spend more on foreign aid than on Medicare, and the same number said "no" when asked whether the House of Representatives had passed a plan to balance the budget.

These are some of the findings of a Washington Post, Harvard University, Kaiser Family Foundation survey of the American electorate.

In fact, poverty has been falling among the elderly for many years, in part a result of federal programs like Medicare and Social Security. We spend between 12 and 13 times as much on Medicare as we do on foreign aid — and the trajectory of future spending for foreign aid is flat whereas that for Medicare is so steep that it threatens to bankrupt all of us. As for the balanced budget — after the government shutdown and weeks and weeks of the standoff with President Clinton.

But then, 40 percent do not even know that Republicans now control Congress, and fully half think the Democrats are the more conservative of the two parties or aren't sure. Only 24 percent could correctly name both U.S. senators from their states, and only a third could name their member of Congress.

There is simply no way to put a cheerful face on these results. For a self-governing nation, this level of ignorance and misinformation is chilling. Ignorant people are vulnerable people — vulnerable to manipulation and demagoguery. And ignorant people are superstitious people, easily persuaded to seek scapegoats for their troubles.



Mona Charen

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Ignorance has led to a kind of false sophistication among voters. Misunderstanding the nature of debates between Democrats and Republicans, they dismiss genuine policy differences as "just politics" or as "childish bickering." The recently completed Oregon Senate race pitted a strong conservative against a true-blue liberal, yet a voter interviewed by The Washington Post dismissed the race as "confusing nonsense, like two little kids on a school yard."

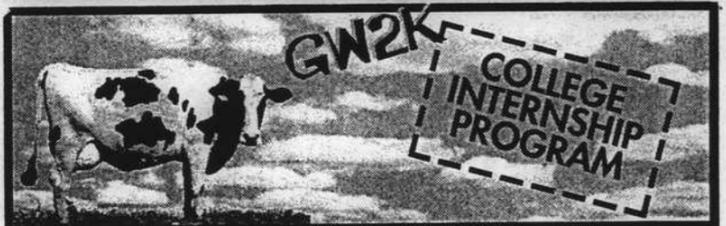
The survey found that Americans are skeptical to the point of mistrust

about their government — but that they expect great things of it at the same time. In 1964, 75 percent of Americans trusted the government to do the right thing all or most of the time. Today, only 25 percent feel that way. Eighty percent say the government spends tax dollars on the wrong things, and 55 percent think taxes are too high. Yet a majority also blames government for failing to create more jobs and for permitting jobs to be "exported" overseas. The mixed message of those data are: The government can't be trusted, but why doesn't it provide me with a job?

Republicans as well as Democrats are guilty of stimulating unrealistic expectations about the capacities of government. Democrats have consistently promised generous programs paid for by the "rich," and Republicans have sometimes taken too much credit for economic growth that was merely the result of getting government out of the way.

But what lurks beneath the statistics of mistrust goes far beyond government. Americans don't trust one another anymore either. They think people will cheat them or steal from them if given an opportunity. They are even afraid of their neighbors. It is that fear, spurred by the crime rate, that lies at the heart of the discontent, the survey discovered. Americans, after more than 40 years of overpromising by government, are practically programmed to blame their discontent on government. But what they are really concerned about is the breakdown of civil society — of close-knit families, stable communities and safe streets.

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