

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Dead On Survival

Faux misery of summer fad mesmerizes Americans

Charles Darwin would have been proud. Was the hit CBS summer show "Survivor" anything more than an entertaining manifestation of the theories of the father of evolution? Not really.

Consider the stunning revelations brought forth by the program that shamed any Wednesday night program daring to stand against it. *People actually fight*. And they backstab. And cheat and argue and berate. And, just to flash some ominous posturing, they make evil, phony threats to leave each other dying of thirst on a sandy beach.

Like the network thought we were born yesterday.

Well, for three months, being born yesterday might have been too high a standard to set for the American viewing culture. It's a week past, but "Survivor," in the ways that matter beyond ratings and shares, stunk.

It was reality, all right. The kind that shows how little we learned from William Golding's "Lord of the Flies." Only this time, no Piggys were allowed, just a bunch of Jacks. Somehow, this phenomenon doesn't reveal itself as one of the better moments in recent television history.

It's funny that the show came on the heels of another TV fad, the return of the high-priced game show, the very type of program that shattered America's innocence in 1959 with the quiz-show scandals.

As it was said often by excuse-ridden corporate suits back then: "You think it's the contestants? They just want to follow the money."

True, true. What would "Survivor" have been without the cool million at the end of the rainbow? Not much. The show, of course, used the money as bait, to the point where winning — indeed surviving in some strange way — actually became important to the American vernacular. And that's scary.

We can hear the legions of fitness freaks and athletic coaches scolding us now. But what's winning worth if it comes at the cost of individuals coming to hate one another as their disagreements are aired on national television, while Joe and Jane Viewer live vicariously through the anger on the tube?

Thankfully, the "Survivor" fad will remain just that. While a second show will air, it will need to bust new ground — like somebody dying or being seriously maimed — to achieve similar ratings. Viewers get jaded fast.

Survivalist instincts are just as fleeting as joy, contempt or sadness. Internet leaks, which nearly sunk the closing episodes of the last "Survivor," will become more rampant.

Along with it followed other reality shows, such as "Big Brother," which never caught on, simply because people had been filled to the brim with conflict, and "American High," a show about the most boring, self-absorbed group of humans that walk the planet — teen-agers. If anyone is listening: Dramatically faux misery and idealism in imperfect mates don't sell.

We know — just because the past has proven it — that a show like "Survivor" can only up its ante so far before it becomes blatant exploitation.

This summer it was simply hidden, writhing below the surface, waiting to be unearthed by the forthcoming articles by the equally exploitative entertainment magazines. Not that it's any better. Not that it's any less disconcerting that America followed so doggedly along with it.

Not that there won't be another fad just as shameful as "Survivor," arriving at a TV near you.

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Sarah Baker, Bradley Davis, Josh Funk, Matthew Hansen, Samuel McKewon, Dane Stickney, Kimberly Sweet

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Neal Obermeyer/DN

Slaves of TV can't claim individuality

TV is evil. The statement is more acerbic than it needs to be, but it gets to the point. The point is, ultimately, that TV is the driving engine behind a massive mechanism of business, politics and social movements of which you are little more than a ball bearing.



Jake Glazeski

Last summer, I sat down and logged more television hours in a shorter span of time than I have since I came to UNL four years ago, especially once my younger sister hooked me on anime. As the summer progressed, I charted the downward spiral of brain activity that occurs when you have unrestricted access to TV.

I have organized it into stages. Stage 1: You approach the television skeptically. When you see a show that you don't like, you turn it off. When a commercial comes on, you do something else. You get bored of TV. You think about other things. You get mild entertainment from quality programming.

Stage 2: Your standards have slackened slightly. You watch a show you don't particularly like because you like the one that came before, or the one coming after. You find entertainment in some commercials. You begin to notice how much time you've spent watching TV. You aren't really thinking about anything but the shows you're watching.

Stage 3: You have discovered that just about anything on television is watchable. You will watch a show you don't particularly like because it grows on you. You watch reality television. You recognize commercials. You forget your VCR has a built-in clock. You begin to role-play in the shows you see.

Stage 4 (critical): You turn on the TV whenever you are in the same room. When you eat. When you are bored. You watch FOX.

You role-play in shows while you are showering. You are engaged by news-casters.

Stage 5 (brain death): You are the TV. When you have reached stage five, you become a full-fledged, card-carrying member of the establishment. It's pointless to speak of any distinction between your own opinions and those of broadcasting conglomerates because, for all practical purposes, they are the same.

Commercialism informs you of your opinions and television shows provide you with an ethical model that you inevitably will lead your life by.

It doesn't matter if you're young or old because you are mindless. You don't even pause to think that there is more news than they cover in FOX's hour-long newscast (which is about three parts weather, two parts feel-good stories, one part local issues and one part global news). When "20/20" presents a story of a family that failed to take full advantage of a federal program, you react with sympathy to its pain, rather than with disgust at its sloth.

It is TV that makes the survival of commercial super-beings possible. AOL-Time Warner, Disney — these are real and thriving organisms. They depend on your subconscious subjugation to their ultimate goal of self-sustenance. They don't want you to think outside the box they have you in. Neither do you.

The classic symptom of your commercial assimilation is an addiction to sensory stimuli. Do you need to have the TV on at all times? Do you read cheap fiction? Do you choose food based primarily on taste and not on nutritional content? Do you ascribe to any political party? Do you like pop music?

If so, you are part of the complex socio-economic circle of life which sustains the commercial super-organisms of our day.

Some of you have recognized this. Do you sense something wrong with the world? Do you sense your personal liberties being siphoned off? Are you increasingly dissatisfied with a materialistic world?

The reason why this is happening is because people act more and more like focus groups and less like what they are — individuals. And the only way to stop this — the only way to poison the creatures that consume our lifetimes to further their own — is to claim our individuality.

Stop believing politicians. Stop accepting everything you hear. Stop eating those damn ding-dongs.

You need to think.

Think.

Unplug your television. Evaluate your financial expenses and figure out how much of your stuff you don't need. How much money do you spend just to experience a moment of drug-like stimulation? Chocolate, CDs, movies, clothes — it's all the same.

You feed a system that thrives off of your subservience. If you sense it too, it's time to fight back.

It is our liberty that is ultimately at stake.

Letters to the editor

Check ladies, unite!

I honestly can't believe that somebody (Karen Brown), who should be a mature intelligent adult, could write something so violent and selfish.

If she and all the other UNL undergraduate students would read and use their Undergraduate Bulletins, nothing about getting a Senior Check would have been any surprise.

It is stated under each college section. Advisers should also be aware of the "Senior Check." I'm always surprised by how many students say, "I didn't know," or "Nobody told me." Ha Ha!

To lash out at the "Senior Check" lady like that is ridiculous!! If she were observant, she would have noticed there are five "people" doing senior checks, and each has two colleges and hundreds of students to work with. They each do their job very well.

Chin up "Senior-Check" people!! This is just another case of somebody who doesn't want to take responsibility for themselves. You deserve congratulations on a job well done, not blamed for someone's inability to be responsible for themselves.

Tina Jahn-Neidecker
Graduate Admissions
(former "Senior-Check" secretary)

More than Echelon

Sorry Jeremy, ya 133t k3w1 d00d, but if you haven't been checking the scoreboard lately, we've been getting our asses kicked.

A multinational intelligence agency or even the FBI watching the net, however frightening that may be, is nothing compared to the infringement

Sean Zehtab
biology

'Survivor' not worth reliving

Throughout life, there are certain good experiences. This summer, I tried to relive some of them and indulge myself.

At home, in Kearney, I was a good journalist, student and family member. So this summer I decided to take classes at UNK, work at the Kearney Hub newspaper and live at home.

It really didn't work out.

Don't let anyone ever tell you UNK is better than UNL in anything. *Anything*. Likewise, the Kearney Hub, owned by the ultra-conservative Omaha World-Herald, was not willing to give me freedom to do avant-garde endeavors. And I think my parents and I have all reached ages where tolerating each other is not an easy task.

But there was one good thing that happened this summer; it happened on Wednesday nights. I'm a bit ashamed to say that it was the CBS hit "Survivor."

My mom, dad and I would make supper together. We'd gather around the TV with TV trays to see what the 16 Americans stranded on a desert island in the South China Sea would do next.

There was something about "Survivor." No one in my family has ever been much of a TV junkie, but each week we wondered and discussed who would get voted off.

My dad told us it was rigged. "All of these immunity challenges are predetermined," he'd say. "And that tribal council thing, it's straight out of 'Lord of the Flies.'"

But he got reeled in, joining my mom in support of the old Navy Seal, Rudy, whom they both contend "got the shaft" by not winning.

Those castaways made me forget about my isolation in Kearney. There was just something very intriguing about voting people off. Where else can you see a 40-something female truck driver tell a 20-something river guide that she would rather watch the river guide die than spare a drop of water?

When the time came to go back to school, my mom realized that I would miss two episodes. Her eyes teared up when she thought about me not being there to share the "Survivor" suspense.

Since I am a news editor at the Daily Nebraskan, I knew I'd be busy around 7 p.m. on Wednesdays, but I was determined not to have my sole joy from the summer slip away. So I bought a TV with one of those VCRs built into it.

The first week, I moved to school early and taped the show, which whittled the cast down to

four castaways. At the end of that episode, there were startling previews about the two-hour finale, which would reveal the \$1 million winner.

The sheer joy of watching that two-hour episode would be enough to make me forget about all of summer's obstacles, redesigning this paper and adjusting to new classes. With so many shallow peaks in life, smutty TV is easily elevated.

Or at least my trying summer made me think so. The night of the last episode finally came, and I was counting the minutes before I could leave the DN to get home and watch what I had taped.

I was going to be sure to avoid people who even looked like they watched the show out of fear of having the winner's name divulged.

As I was leaving the DN, the design chief told me the news section had too much open space, and I needed to get on the Associated Press Web site to copy wire stories for the paper. I was disappointed that I had to stay another 20 minutes. I decided to do my job quickly, so I could go home.

When I opened the Web site, I began to look at the headlines of the newest stories. There was a story about a plane crash in Bahrain and wildfires in Montana. None of those looked good. I scrolled down further.

Then it happened. My world came crumbling down.

"Rich Hatch Wins Survivor Contest."

I diverted my eyes and scrolled to the bottom of the page. I tried to forget what I saw. I couldn't.

"No!" I yelled, trying to shield my eyes from the horror of my only joy from the summer being destroyed. I hit the table with my hand, causing the whole news room to look at me. They didn't understand my pain.

As I left the DN offices to walk home, I walked past Opinion Editor Samuel McKewon and told him what had happened.

"It's ironic isn't it?" he said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, that work ruined your entire summer." He smirked back at me.

At that moment, I began to see a point in all of the criticism of "Survivor" and network TV. I still like the voyeuristic and competitive aspect of the show. It was a fun ride. But what I've realized is that you can't trust TV to salvage a summer.

I put my faith in something that gave me joy, no different than getting an STD from cheap sex or a nosebleed from hairspray huffing. I over-indulged and got burned.

Like I said, there are some things in your life that you want to experience again. The next season of "Survivor" will not be one of them.



Dane Stickney