POINTS OF VIEW

Censorship won't correct the world's evils

GUEST COLUMNIST

RICHARD ROTHROCK

My friend Lisa wants to ban "Beavis And Butthead," the latest pop phenomenon to rattle the cages of America's cultural guardians.

Now don't get me wrong. I don't like "Beavis And Butthead" either. I have watched bits and pieces on several occasions and, well, frankly, I just don't get it. I don't laugh. I don't even crack a smile. I'm not even sure what lines or antics I'm supposed to laugh at.

One time I managed to watch a whole five minutes before I found my finger slipping unconsciously to the remote, my mind already wanting to seek out The Discovery Channel.

It's not that I don't have a funny bone. Ernie Kovacs, Monty Python and the original "Saturday Night Live" were the triangular cornerstones of my comedic upbringing.

Even today, my wife and I chortle weekly with "The Simpsons," now tied with "Northern Exposure" as our favorite show on television.

But what I expect lies at the heart of the great "B&B" controversy is that we, the baby boomers, have passed unnoticed into the older generation. Yeah, that's right. We're now the pigs, the establishment, that awful thing we spent most of our youth rebelling against.

Same old arguments

All I have to do is listen to the impassioned arguments coming from my contemporaries' mouths ("It's not funny." "It's just stupid." "It's immoral." "It teaches disrespect for authority."), then back up a few decades.

That's right. We are espousing the same arguments our parents made against rock 'n' roll, "Laugh-In," "Saturday Night Live," et al. The point is "Beavis And Butthead" are not necessarily stupid. They just don't speak to our now-older generation.

But they do speak to today's teenage one like George Carlin and Steve Martin did to ours. And I suspect "B&B's" viewers will come through and make fine contributions to society just like we did despite our prolonged exposure to the *Beatles, the Grateful Dead* and Timothy Leary.

I also find myself unable to take seriously the roasting the show has received from media columnists, parent groups, advertisers and Congress. Why? Because the arguments are the same tripe the same groups spouted a few years ago against "The Simpsons."

America's still here

Remember, that show was going to destroy America, too. Well, it's three years later, America is still here, "The Simpsons" haven't changed.

The only difference is that the media circus orchestrated by these same cultural guardians has rushed on to the next media threat to society: "Beavis And Butthead."

But, Rich, you say, what about the kids in Ohio who set a fire after watching "Beavis And Butthead" or the students killed while copying the nocturnal highway lay-down in the recent movie, "The Program"?

About responsibility

First off, stupid people will always be with us. The trend I disagree with is the complete lack of personal responsibility our legal system has ingrained into our culture.

We, as private citizens, are no longer expected to make judgments for ourselves. We are now only victims of television shows and advertising which "coerce" us into performing awful acts. It is never our fault. It is the company or the TV show or the unmarked beer bottle, which has forced us to act as we do.

When children see adults setting this type of example on a daily basis, why should they feel compelled to behave?

If we set a fire, it's the TV show's fault. If we crash our car, it's the bottle of beer's fault for lack of labeling. If we lie on a highway, it's a movie's fault for showing us such a stunt is possible.

But somewhere between the show's portrayal and the specific act, a person made a conscious choice to copy such behavior. That's a personal action and a personal responsibility.

Parents, get involved

Finally, arguments can be made that younger children may not necessarily have the developed common sense to know not to copy behavior viewed on the television.

That probably is true. But, that's where parental supervision should come in, taking the time to monitor your child's programming then discussing it when what appears on the screen deviates from acceptable behavior.

If we are now blessed with a generation that blows away tourists or kills for sneakers or a piece of pizza, it is because we, the new older generation, have abdicated the raising of our children to the television.

We do not monitor what they watch or discuss it when they are troubled. The world they learn through television reflects back at them all aspects of life: good and bad.

Is it a violent world? Yes. Is it a harsh world? Yes. Will getting "Beavis and Butthead" off the air change that? No. Will removing all the violence and sex from our TV change that? No.

Unfortunately, in our present cultural state of mind, campaigning to get "Beavis And Butthead" off the air is a lot easier than facing up to how we raise our children and how, maybe, our examples as adults have come up lacking.

Go figure.

Richard Rothrock, a freelance writer and Farmington Hills resident, is employed by the Farmington Public Schools.

Hey ideologues, follow Flat Earth Society, quit

TIM RICHARD

Politicians are more realistic to deal with than ideologues.

When a politician like George Bush or Jim Blanchard is defeated, he doesn't call out the army or the national guard to keep him in office. He graciously cleans off his desk and turns over the great seal to his successor.

Among ideologues, the Flat Earth Society was a rarity. When photos from U.S. space capsules showed the world indeed was round, the Flat Earth Society disbanded.

Most ideologues, however, refuse to quit. Take Lawrence Reed, president of the Mackinac Center, the Midland group that tried to peddle vouchers, charter schools, schools of "choice," and a variety of union busting schemes under the guise of reform.

Gov. John Engler swallowed much of that ideology. Our state legislators rejected everything but a modified version of charter schools (public educational institutions only; a majority of certified teachers on the board).

"Michigan's 'education revolution' was hijacked . . . a majority of the Legislature flunked the test," said Reed, as if the Mackinac Center had some God-given right to administer tests.

Tom Bray, editorial page editor of The Detroit News, says "it would be too soon to write off choice, politically, economically or philsophically. The lesson of California (where voters rejected choice 3 to 1) and Michigan is not that choice is dead, but that it needs a lot more thinking and explaining" because public debate "is only just beginning."

So why did the extreme form of charter schools, "choice," parental vetoes of curriculum, alleged cost containment and various union clipping notions favored by the ideologues get beaten?

I offer these explanations:

- Parents know kids learn from teachers, not from abstractions like the "free market" and "competition."
- The ideologues were at war with public schools, using code words like "vouchers" and "choice" to conceal the fact that nonpublic schools are prone to "cherry picking" or "creaming" — skimming off the bright kids who are easiest and cheapest to educate, and leaving the cabbage heads behind for the public schools to deal with. Legislators and the public weren't fooled by the code words.
- The ideologues, while targeting public schools, used the Michigan Education Association, with its warts and pimples, as a dummy target. For all its institutional faults, MEA is composed of many respected and respectable teachers.

Michigan's educational traditions are 156 years old: Free public education is a right of all kids. Funding public schools is the Legislature's duty; supervising public schools is Lansing's job, delegated since 1908 to the State Board of Education. Private schools have a right to exist and are protected, but never can expect to share in tax dollars — never.

The Reeds, Englers, DeVoses, Brays and other ideology peddlers should follow the lead of the Flat Earth Society: Quit.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. His touchtone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1881.

Money, media, not ability, doom politicos like Pursell

PHILIP POWER

■ To mount campaigns for nomination and election to the U.S. Senate in a big state like Michigan, you've got to figure on raising something like $6 million.

Carl Pursell, the former congressman from Plymouth, announced last week he was withdrawing from the race for the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate.

I've known and admired Carl for more than 20 years. As a county commissioner, state senator and then U.S. representative, he was diligent, sensible, committed and honest. That's more than you can say about a lot of politicians who went as far as Carl did.

And his departure from the race speaks volumes about what has become of our political system.

First, the corrosive infestation of big money.

To mount campaigns for nomination and election to the U.S. Senate in a big state like Michigan, you've got to figure on raising something like $6 million.

Here's what that means in practical terms. If you start two years in advance, you have to raise $57,692.30 each and every week to reach the $6 million goal. Try it; it isn't easy.

Carl tried. But he told me over the weekend: "As I got more and more involved in the race, I found I had to spend so much of my time asking for money, and very little time discussing the substantive issues."

Not only that, but the reality of today's political giving is that a candidate has to travel around the country sucking up to the special interest groups and the political action committees. "I observed that legislators were traveling the country to raise millions of dollars for their races. Raising money all over the country is not my way of representing the people of Michigan."

How many times do ambitious politicians have to sell their souls to the devil in quest of the money to run? I don't know and you don't know exactly, but the majority of the American public who view the political system with distaste and cynicism has good grounds for suspicion.

Second, the vital importance of early media coverage that dubs a candidate as either a frontrunner or somehow exciting.

If only because he's not particularly charismatic and certainly not a candidate for a centerfold in Playgirl, Carl got hurt by the media. Bill Ballenger, in his Inside Michigan Politics newsletter, called him "a garrulous frump." Hugh McDiarmid, in the Detroit Free Press, ended his column on Carl with a "zzzzz."

That's too bad because Carl doesn't deserve the rap. He's bright as blazes, so much so that he was the author of one of the only plans to cut the federal deficit that had any chance of succeeding.

And he has his values in the right place; he came home every weekend to live the life of an ordinary citizen who happens to be part of the political system. "Most congressmen live year-round in Washington and return for a fund-raiser or ribbon-cutting ceremony. This system is wrong," Carl said.

And because the system is the way it is, those who want to vote in the Republican primary will be denied the chance to vote for a candidate with strong credentials and a solid background of public service. That's too bad — for Republicans, for Michigan voters and for our country.

When will we ever learn that our political system is so tainted that it threatens to destroy both the officeholders who persistently refuse to reform it and, in the bargain, the country which needs good governing and gets money-grabbers for cover boys?

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. You can leave a message for him at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1880.

JUST SHOP IT.©
SIDEWALK SALE AND CLEARANCE
Thursday, January 13 — Monday, January 17
NORTH LAND