

OPINION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. - The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Satire: an American tradition

by Patrick Webster
assistant managing editor
paw175@psu.edu

American satire has come a long way since Washington Irving, Thomas Nast and Ambrose Bierce, and the revolution into the Information Age has made the art of ironic social commentary as mainstream as it has ever been.

Whether you enjoy it in the written or televised forms, it's a great time to be a satire and social commentary enthusiast.

Columnists and authors like Dave Barry, Al Franken and P.J. O'Rourke have been pointed observations about the state of the American society for the current generations of American citizens. They've been doing a heck of a job, even if they don't have nicknames like "Brownie."

However, the satire that is making the biggest ripple in mainstream American culture is the previously unconquered land of television. Taking cues from predecessors like the Johnny Carson Show and the original Saturday Night Live "Weekend Update," shows like "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" and "The Colbert Report" have made the

medium of satire both popular and a mainstream facet of American society.

Satire has long been used to bring issues to the limelight that should be recognized by everyone. But for some reason, the issues are taboo or taken for granted.

Strange as it may seem, this is how programs like "The Daily Show" win awards for news coverage. Their whole concept is to make fun of actual news topics in a way that brings issues to people's attention that otherwise wouldn't be brought up. Because it's

funny, people tune in and pay attention, and a wider audience becomes informed about current issues that affect the status and future of their country.

The advent of the internet has made the practice of political and social satire open to the general public for widespread dissemination. These days, anyone can start a blog and share the fruits of his or her natural wit and sarcasm with anyone who cares to read it. If this person is popular

enough, he or she can even make a living out of it. This is easy. Politicians, for as long as they exist, will be a constant source of humorous and satirical inspiration for many generations to come.

The more people sharing their humorous insight, the better. This leads to an endless well of issues to be discussed and addressed.

What we don't need is politicians making self-deprecating, satirical jokes about themselves in order to make issues into non-issues. Such as George W. Bush making a joke about not being able to find weapons of mass destruction at a fundraiser or White House spin doctors spinning one-liners about shooting people after the Vice President blasts his best friend in the face with a shotgun. There's nothing wrong with telling light-hearted jokes as a member of the government, but using humor to try to sweep important issues under the rug is a cheap tactic designed to expediently minimize issues that are not politically convenient to their targets.

Let's keep satire in its proper place: as a weapon against secretive politicians, not as a shield that they can use to deflect criticism.

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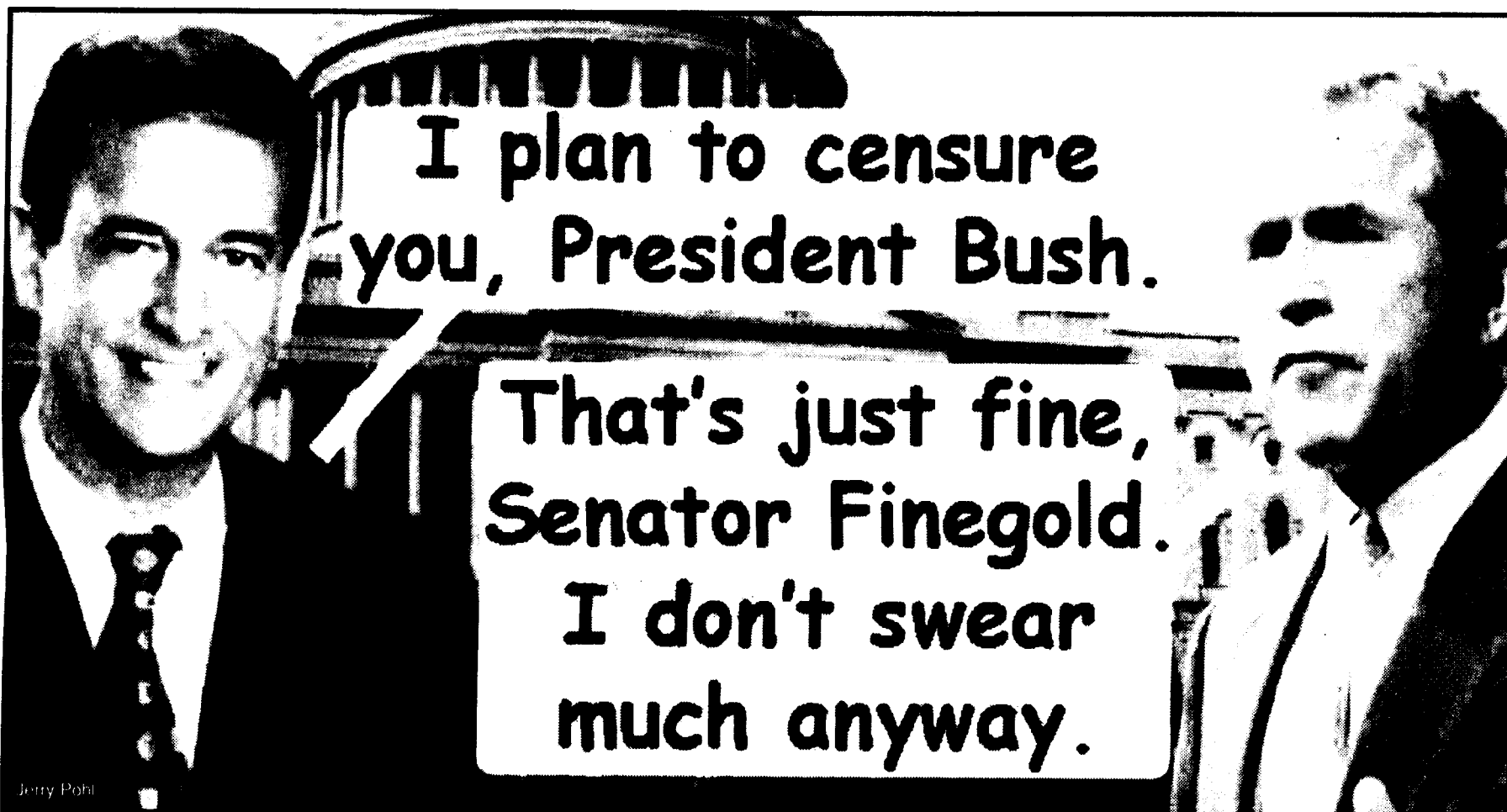
Submission Guidelines

The Beacon welcomes readers to share their views on this page. Letters and commentary pieces can be submitted by email to opinion@psu.edu or directly to the Beacon office, located in the Reed Building.

Letters should be limited to 350 words and commentaries should be limited to 700 words. The more concise the submission, the less we will be forced to edit it for space concerns and the more likely we are to run the submission.

All submissions must include the writer's year in school, major and name as The Beacon does not publish anonymous letters. Deadline for any submission is 5 p.m. Tuesday afternoon for inclusion in the Friday issue. All submissions are considered, but because of space limitations, some may not be published.

All submissions must include consent to be edited before they can be edited for publication.



Quote of the Week

"Life would be infinitely happier if we could only be born at the age of eighty and gradually approach eighteen."

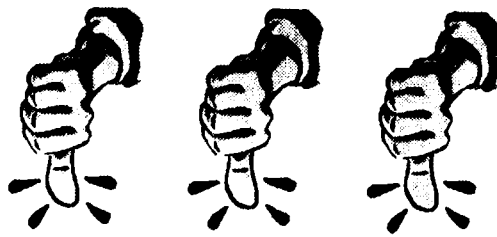
~ Mark Twain

Beacon Thumbs Up



- St. Patrick's Day
- Late Night Players and Murder Mystery Dinner theatre.
- Semesteris over half-way done
- New Super Man movie
- March Madness
- Behrend Track and Field team
- Blue Gatorade

Beacon Thumbs Down



- Spring Break's over
- Graduation being held at Tullio Arena
- Plastic ware in Bruno's
- Students taking bikes in the elevator
- PS3 Delayed until November 2006
- Disney's Aladdin, Lion King, and Little Mermaid

Have a "Thumbs Up" or "Thumbs Down"?



Send Suggestions to opinion@psu.edu

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Penn State Erie,
The Behrend College
First Floor, The J. Elmer Reed Union Building
Station Road, Erie, PA 16563
Contact the Beacon at:
Telephone: (814) 898-6488
Fax: (814) 898-6019