

Editorial

The Opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect those of the staff of this production, or of the Student Union.

Pity our poor, beleaguered neighbours in the U.S.A., folks. This has not been a banner year for our American cousins, as they've been forced to contend with everything from devastating race riots in Los Angeles to not one, but two unbelievably destructive hurricanes in their country. On top of all that there's even a third mass of hot air plaguing the States, but it's no hurricane. The U.S.A., God help it, is currently in the grip of a Presidential election campaign. Elections in any country can be divisive, hotly contested affairs, but in a country where people like to do things in a big way, elections in the United States are immensely theatrical spectacles where issues are almost invariably obscured by image, as the two sides each try to paint themselves as the good guys and have few qualms about casting their opponents as the bad guys. For some reason, politicians and the media in America are often willing to ignore political issues (not to mention professional courtesy) and reduce electoral debates to a personal level, concentrating on the morality and private life of a candidate rather than his or her skills or policies. In this election year, American politicians have taken this trend to a new low by devoting much of the debate to the nebulous and largely irrelevant issue of "Family Values," championing the ideal family unit of the working father and the stay-at-home mother who manages the household and kids.

This campaign has seen considerable time and news coverage devoted to the alleged extra-marital affairs of the two main candidates, Bill Clinton and good ol' George Bush himself. Certainly such things may tell us something about their character, but it distracts the electorate from more relevant issues like their political records (George Bush, for instance, has yet to disentangle himself from the web of questions surrounding the arms-for-hostages scandal that he was probably involved in). The question seems even more ridiculous when you consider that many past successful presidents, including the near-worshipped John F. Kennedy, were consistently unfaithful to their wives. This "issue of character" is hypocritical irrelevancy in choosing a political leader, but is unfortunately a popular tactic in U.S. politics.

The "Family Values" debate sparked by the Republicans has gone even further this time, though, in that it is not only the candidates who are under scrutiny. The Republicans especially have tried to build themselves up as the champions of family values by tearing down people or things that they label as being against family values. In waging this campaign of self-superior intolerance they have unintentionally shot themselves in the foot, as "unconventional" family heads like working and single mothers turn away from the party in anger. The most infamous and hilarious example of

this was, of course, the hapless Vice President Dan Quayle's scathing criticism of TV character Murphy Brown as a bad example for having a baby out of wedlock. Quayle later tried to patch things up by sending the show a stuffed elephant as a "gift" for Brown's baby, but the damage was done and the show reacted predictably in its return this Fall, ridiculing Quayle as the program's ratings skyrocketed. This fiasco has probably cemented Quayle's reputation as a witless chowderhead for all time, as women across the country expressed outrage at this holier-than-thou posturing by the V.P. One wonders why Quayle singled Murphy Brown out, what with the proliferation of infinitely sleazier characters on television lately (the popular Simpsons and Married With Children shows often present rather subversive views of family values, for instance). If single mothers bother Quayle, there's a lot of other characters he could take shots at too, ranging from Kate & Allie to Winnie the Pooh's Kanga, who has been raising her baby Roo by herself for years now. Let's see Dan Quayle take a swing at that!

All this makes one smugly comfortable in being a Canadian. For whatever reasons, our media is seldom preoccupied with focusing public attention on personal matters, and our politicians usually avoid using opponent's personal lives as ammunition in campaigns. One hopes our politics will always remain relevant and objective debates in our country, and the Republicans are learning the hard way that it may be safer, as well as more responsible, to stick to the issues instead of getting personal. After all, as Dan Quayle now knows, Murphy Brown will get you if you don't watch out.

Sean McQuaid
Single Editor

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