

February 19, 1990.

Dr. Judith Miller Jones
Director
National Health Policy Forum
Suite 200
2011 I Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Judy:

Your "Notes from the Director" (January 1990) prompts this letter. I am responding to your mention of Forum emphases -- old and new.

I believe (and I think you agree) that the mass-cultural frontier is the new frontier of health promotion and disease prevention. Our ongoing Cultural Indicators project has a unique and comprehensive data base (cumulative since 1967) that yields information relevant to that frontier.

The enclosures will provide information about Cultural Indicators and our health-related interests. The latter include aging, mental illness and other disabilities, health and medicine in general, and drugs. (A long chapter on drugs and the media will appear in a forthcoming publication of the Public Health Service; will send if interested.)

I believe that information about mainstream cultural trends on how media (especially television) deals with these and related issues, and what the consequences of long-term exposure might be, is essential to any effort in these areas. We can and want to make that contribution. Please let me know how we might collaborate toward that goal.

Any news on other fronts?

With best regards.

George Gerbner
Professor of Communications
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Received: (from user FLG) by ASC.upenn.edu; 13 Feb 90 22:23:30 EDT

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Date: 13 Feb 90 22:23:30 EDT

OK, but it's Jane Gaines (vs Seth Geiger). Glad you're accommodating, cause you'll get 10:30 or 11:00 on Friday Feb 23rd. i'll let you know which as soon as I hear from others.

Larry



THE
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Judy Miller

National Health Policy Forum
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2011 I Street, N.W.
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January 10, 1991

George Gerbner, Ph.D.
Dean
Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear George:

Please forgive me for not making the meeting. I got so blitzed that I called Leslie's office to say it would be impossible, not realizing you had decided on the Aspen office instead. What an indication of the frazzle we were in that day!

The Christmas holiday was a blend of a bad cold and the good days spent proposal writing -- this time for the Kaiser Family Foundation. It's not done yet, but close. At this point, I think I'm giving up on MacArthur so this one is really important to us.

My husband passed along the enclosed materials from Sen. Byrd, thinking we might make use of them somehow. I do hope so. I'm out of commission until after January 22 when we have our annual meeting, spending this week with the Kellogg Foundation and next on a site visit to the Twin Cities.

I look forward to a more quiet moment when we can talk and again apologize for not being able to join you. I hope it went well.

Sincerely,

Judy
Judith Miller Jones
Director

Enclosure
JMJ/ddf

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

December 4, 1990

Rev. Robert K. Judge
St. Agnes Parish
P.O. Box 1603
Shepherdstown, West Virginia 25443

Dear Father Judge:

Some weeks ago on the floor of the United States Senate, I made a speech concerning the declining quality and deteriorating moral tone of television programming and content.

Subsequently, USA Today carried a concise summary of my remarks on one of its opinion pages, and I have received letters appreciative of my speech and concurring with my opinion.

As a father and grandfather, as well as a U.S. Senator, I have long been concerned about the often prurient, sometimes degrading, and always gratuitous exploitation of sex, vulgarity, violence, and profanity that has characterized so much television programming in recent years.

Knowing that you are a central figure in shaping the values in your community, and believing that you share my concern for the moral climate of our state and country, I have enclosed a copy of my Senate remarks for your information. If you agree with the concerns that I have outlined in my speech, I hope that you will feel free to share these concerns with others in your church and community.

My aim is not to impose arbitrary standards of programming and content on television, but to give voice to a growing uneasiness toward a perceived willingness by some in the entertainment industry to debase our cultural and spiritual atmosphere for the sake of increased audience shares and increased profits--this with no apparent thought or qualms about the damage that such debasement and vulgarization will wreak upon our national moral fiber and sensitivity, or upon the values and maturation of our children and youth.

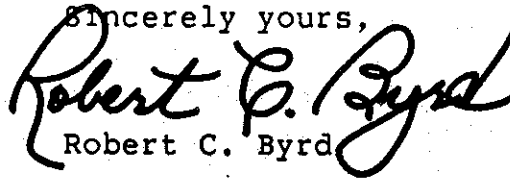
Ultimately, however, my aim is to encourage sufficient public indignation and reaction to initiate a reversal of the questionable trends in television to which I refer in my Senate speech. I am convinced that such a reversal can best begin through the mobilization of opinion in our churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship.

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I hope that my remarks will prove of interest to you, and I appreciate this opportunity to share with you these subjects of vital concern to me.

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely yours,


Robert C. Byrd

RCB:jrr
Enclosure

Television is indeed a marvel, and because of television's extraordinary nature and potential, I am particularly disturbed by the mediocrity of so much of popular television's program content, by the corrupting quality of so much of television's dialog and story lines, and by the failure of television programming executives at both the major networks and local stations to consider the sensibilities of wide segments of their audience in judging the content of so many of their programs.

I am referring particularly to the omnipresent profanity of speech, sensationalized violence, and semipornographic visualization of so much that is being broadcast over the airways for public consumption.

On most given nights, with a flick of a remote-control device, the living rooms of average American families can be treated to a melange of foul-mouthed brats uttering language for which any stranger entering those same living rooms and uttering that same language would probably be immediately thrown out bodily, and the use of which in any polite company would earn its user a reputation as a boor and a lout.

Likewise, apparently to titillate viewers, action programs, dramas, comedies, and even cartoon shows aimed at preschoolers obviously resort to gratuitous violence as a continuing staple. The scriptwriters of Hollywood seem to think that the American people are slaving to watch automobiles explode in billows of flame; to see men and women pushed to their deaths from high-rise balconies or mountain cliffs; to witness people cut down in the score by semiautomatic assault weapons; and to watch the mayhem of stabbings, muggings,

rapes, assaults, gang fights, and murders.

Those who tune in daily to the soap operas will be served up a movable feast of adultery, explicit sex, white-collar crime, and the glamorization of villains, so generous as to make Mickey Spillain look like Mother Goose.

And has anybody caught the new breed of "standup comics" now so popular on much cable programming and increasingly appearing on network programs?

On the occasion of a recent public celebration of his 83d birthday, comedian Milton Berle was apparently treated to samples of contemporary comics that he found embarrassing to the point of chagrin. Berle commented, "In my day, we knew where to draw the line!"

Much of today's scourge of drug abuse can probably be laid squarely at the feet of television programming.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's popular television comedy and variety shows regularly treated drug use as an inside joke and teased their audiences with drug-touting innuendoes and thinly veiled drug-glorifying anecdotes. The result was to underscore drug abuse as the sophisticated, hip, avant-garde "thing to do." And, in part at least, the ultimate harvest of that scenario is the crop of AIDS babies being born to intravenous drug users, the addiction of thousands of men and women to crack and cocaine, the death of promising athletes like Len Bias from drug overdosing, and the virtual war that we are now conducting against drug kingpin here and abroad.

Television is probably the most powerful and effective means of influencing and swaying public opinion ever

DRAWING A LINE FOR DECENCY AND TASTE

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, like most men and women of my generation, I am not too jaded to marvel still at the miracle of television.

As a young boy growing up in southern West Virginia, I can yet remember listening on an old Atwater-Kent radio to the crackling sound of a long-distant radio program broadcast and considering that in itself to be a wonder.

Never did I imagine that I would witness in my own home clear, brilliant-colored pictures that were being almost instantaneously generated thousands of miles away—pictures and words coming directly through the air from London, Moscow, Beijing, Tokyo, or Berlin.

discovered and developed by the mind of man.

Through the power of television, millions upon millions of people are persuaded to buy this automobile or that automobile, this or that deodorant, or this or that political candidate.

Are we so naive, then, as to assume that millions of viewers are not being swayed by this constant diet of foul language, debased behavior, outrageous violence, and sexual promiscuity?

In fact, the television audience is like that man who would become immune to the effects of arsenic or snake venom by gradually and continuously ingesting those poisons over a long span of time. With each dose of vulgarity, profanity, pornography, promiscuity, assault, murder, and other violence, we become less and less uncomfortable with those crimes and vices, until at last our consciences lose the ability to object to them—in others or even in our own behavior.

Should we be surprised to hear 6-year-old children who can swear like the vilest Barbary pirate? Should we be astonished if teenaged boys and girls murder their own mothers and fathers in cold blood? Should we be shocked if bright and promising young men and women in our own neighborhoods wind up as drug abusers and alcoholics, if we learn that the class valedictorian overdosed on cocaine at his graduation party, or that some 16-year-old youngster took a slasher program seriously and butchered his own girl friend while high on drugs?

Again and again, night after night, week after week, models for such behavior and the possibility of these crimes are attractively and seductively presented on the commercial channels on our television dials.

And too often, these hypothetical possibilities are becoming our daily experience or the subject of the stories in our newspapers or on the 6 o'clock news.

In each case, those young people have been programmed—literally and figuratively—by a constant feeding since babyhood on such possibilities. And if the glamorous, sophisticated, polished actors and stars who have been regular visitors in their homes over the years can indulge in these vices with no negative results and no objections from society, then those vices must be acceptable and even desirable practices, right?

Here is one Senator who is today calling the television industry to account for this ongoing corruption of our Nation's cultural and social wells of value and taste.

Some may recall that a generation ago, television programmers were sensitive to the values of their viewers. At one time, criminals were not glamorized on our television screens, cursing and profanity were never uttered over the air, and four-letter-words were never "in." Such themes as drug abuse, homosexuality, and adultery

were beyond the pale of family programming.

In the early sixties, Jack Paar's utterance of the letter "W.C." in an anecdote blacked out television screens nationwide in an instant.

Certainly, I am not calling for that degree of self-policing, but I do commend the sensitivity that gave rise to that preemptive action by the network.

My concern in this matter is not the promotion of prudery or the promulgation of ironclad censorship.

My concern is, however, for the future tone of public civility and tastefulness in this country. The crudeness, cursing, profanity, vice, and violence that we tolerate today on our television screens from beautiful actresses, handsome actors, and cute juveniles will be the crudeness, cursing, profanity, vice, and violence that we will be forced to endure in our real lives in the years ahead. By the current tolerance of this diminution of taste and values on television, we are teaching our children that the basest level of human behavior is the norm of life, not an aberration.

Mr. President, I am raising the alarm of disgust with this continued outpouring of trash and junk and villainess from the television industry.

If people want to pay their admission and expose themselves to trash at a movie theater, that is their privilege. If Americans want to buy filth at their neighborhood video stores, that is their prerogative. Indeed, if people want to subscribe to a cable service whose programming is full to overflowing with filth and perversion, that, too, is their privilege.

But the airwaves over which network and local television broadcasting are beamed belong to me and millions of people like me who object to being assaulted by language and depictions of behavior that I would never countenance in my home in the real world.

I appeal, therefore, to the television industry to realize that broadcasting presumes a public trust, and that the poison being regularly spewed out in so much current programming is a violation of the terms of that public trust.

I appeal to producers of television programming in Los Angeles and New York and wherever else to remember that they are shaping public taste and public distaste by their programs. I appeal to the producers of television programming to take responsibility for the society that their choices are subtly but relentlessly nurturing.

And I appeal to the sponsors of television programming to remember that their public images and reputations are attached to the programs that they pay for, and that they, too, have a responsibility for the impact on society of the pictures and words for which they are shelling out millions of dollars annually.

Mr. President, I may be crying my message in the wilderness, but I believe that we in this Chamber have a responsibility to call attention to those matters in our country that need attention, and I hope that someone will heed my outrage before the medium of television itself is beyond self reform and self correction.

I yield the floor.

*Write
Benjamin
Morgan*

**THE ANNENBERG SCHOOL OF
COMMUNICATIONS**
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Judith Miller Jones, Director
National Health Policy Forum
The George Washington University
1011 I Street, N.W., Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Judy:

The time seems right to convene a conference of media-oriented educational, parents', health - related and other professional and grass - roots citizens groups in the United States. The conference would explore perspectives of the different groups and develop a platform of shared concerns as a basis for common and coordinated action.

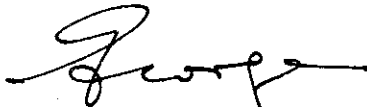
The objective would be to build a broad national (and in some respects international) organizational constituency to support, lobby for, and generally represent a movement for media education, enabling (not restrictive) legislation, and for the long - range consideration of national and, in light of U.S. cultural exports, inevitably also international cultural policy. I call this a new environmental movement concerned with health-related behaviors supported by the increasingly mass-produced cultural environment. It would come not as a censor but as a movement for liberation from the also increasingly fierce sales and bottom-line pressures that now constrain creative people in the media.

I would like to work with you and others you suggest, plus a few of my own principal organizational contacts, to develop the plan for such a conference perhaps for a year from now. We may also want to consider a print symposium of research and action studies to be published in the Journal of Communication (a scholarly quarterly of which I am executive editor) to accompany the conference.

Please supplement and use this statement as you see fit, and let me know where you think we go from here.

With best regards.

Sincerely,



George Gerbner
Professor of Communications