

LETTERS

National media should be Challenger of NASA

To the editors:

Recent revelations by NASA regarding the fate of the Challenger astronauts recalled some statements made by William Shannon in columns published by the Boston Globe in April. Shannon then asserted: "It is now clear that there was no explosion (only a fast fire). The astronauts did not die instantly, never knowing what happened to them. Instant death in a huge, uncontrollable explosion is the fictitious picture that NASA officials chose to feed the public."

Shannon asked some troubling questions. "Why did NASA cut off

the transmission of pictures after 72 seconds? Why did it impound all the film . . . (and until recently) release only ten still pictures? If NASA officials had a good fix on where the shuttle splashed down, why did it take five weeks for them to begin bringing bodies to the surface?"

The obvious implication is that more than just poor pre-launch judgment was exercised by NASA, that NASA compounded those mistakes by engaging in a post-accident coverup. Cutting off the transmission of film and limiting the number of photos made public hid, for as long as possible, the fact that the Chal-

lenger emerged from the fire intact. This meant that the actual cause of death was much more likely to be from the impact of hitting the water. And the delay in recovery of the bodies would make it more difficult to determine the exact cause of death and reduce the chance of the voice recorders surviving so that we could hear what happened in those last few seconds.

Why isn't the public or the media demanding an investigation of the veracity of these charges? Shannon was on target on that issue as well. "Eventually the full truth of Challenger may emerge. But the NASA

officials will not worry so much then. They know that articles like this one can never undo in people's minds the picture they artfully contrived at the time of the disaster . . . The man-in-space program will proceed, complete with multi-billion dollar budgets, undisturbed by any public revulsion at the cost of human life."

Shannon might have added that with the passage of time, people's emotions and attention spans tend to wane. The result is that NASA faced a fraction of the outcry and criticism that it would have received, had all this material been known earlier. A

review of the manned space program in general might have been demanded instead of a redesign of the shuttle. And more serious consideration of safety escape mechanisms for future shuttle missions might have been given. Maybe it's too late for renewal of the investigation of the Challenger accident, but the American public should at least know that NASA apparently knew much more about the incident much sooner than we became aware of it.

Mitchell M. Pote
graduate
political science

Bob and Vanna: leading couple of popular culture

In the plush Summer Tar Heel offices, when our editors and writers aren't out doing hard-hitting investigative pieces, dashing off to cover late-breaking news events, or answering the never-ceasing phone lines, we have time to sit around and analyze the world at large. We've discussed subjects as diverse as the water shortage, Bo Jackson's somewhat pitiful baseball career, the Reagan administration's policy toward South Africa, puking in the car as kids, and which bar in town has the better juke box, Troll's or Henderson Street. But out of all these winningly provocative areas of thought, the phenomenon of the American game show has been the topic of more of our conversations than anything else. Over the months, we've formulated several observations and subsequent theories concerning these staples of daytime TV programming. For the interest of our readers, for posterity, and most importantly, for space filler, here they are:

• No audience is ever shown on the glitzy, highly unchallenging "Wheel of Fortune," although the show begins with an audience chorus of the show's title and

Jill Gerber
Co-editor

"oooooh's" and "aaaah's" are played whenever a prize is described. What group was enlisted to make this "oooooh's" and "aaaah's" track? Is there really an audience, and if so, is there an "oooooh's" and "aaaah's" prompter that lights up when needed?

• It's amazing how Vanna White, "Fortune's" toothy, peroxide-abusing co-hostess, has made a career out of spinning lighted boxes. Hers is a very specialized, and therefore unmarketable skill, not of high resume quality. What would Vanna do if the big wheel stopped spinning into our living rooms every morning? Maybe she could replace one of the three models on "The Price Is Right." Ol' Janet has to be pushing 40 — she's been motioning toward chrome and tinted glass aquariums and opening oven doors for as long as any of us can remember. Maybe it's time she packed up some Dentyne and Sue Bee Honey-left

over from the Grocery Game and cashed in her register for good. One can only have so many tummy tucks in one's lifetime.

• The prizes on the "Wheel of Fortune" are always impractical and extremely over-priced. They're supposed to be given away at retail value, which may be true, if the market is based on that of Mexico, a nation whose basic unit of currency is worth a paperclip. It must be really discouraging for a contestant to try out for the show, get accepted, fly to L.A., and win a set of bath towels for \$300 and a 450-dollar, hand-crafted statue of a pointing Irish setter.

• Bob Barker is incredibly condescending to those in the famed "contestants' row" of "The Price Is Right." "So tell us, Thelma, what do you do in Pigsknuckle, Ark.?" he intones slowly to an effervescent chosen one, smiling like a wealthy corporate head handing turkeys out to his factory workers at Christmas. What Bob really means is, "Can't you find any better way to while away the days of your moronic, colorless existence than to spend your amassed social security savings on a trip to Burbank in the desperate hope of

winning a few useless prizes?"

• Are game show contestants coached beforehand to make facial expressions of joy and wonderment whenever the announcer describes the prizes? This can especially be witnessed on the syndicated "Joker's Wild," in which the contestant contorts his face differently for the trip to Reno, the his-and-her dirtbikes and the under-the-counter can opener with its patented knife-sharpening feature. His mouth forms a perfect "O" of surprise, his eyes widen appreciatively, and he looks to the audience for his wife's approval. It seems unlikely that contestants are really ignorant of their potential prizes until the game is underway.

• Why does the "Price Is Right" select contestants of all ages, especially senior citizens, while other shows tend to concentrate on certain age groups. For example, "Scrabble" chooses yuppies; "Jeopardy!" selects baby-boomers. Isn't this discriminatory? Are there any laws on the books protecting the unwitting public from such injustices?

• Whatever happened to Carol Merrill, "Let's Make a Deal's" '70s version of Vanna? She's probably

selling real estate in Van Nuys, Calif., using the marketing skills absorbed from her days with Monty Hall, the man who could catapult entire audiences into frenzy by offering \$10 for a matchbook or flashlight. Maybe Vanna will follow Carol's path to obscurity.

No matter how much we ridicule them, game shows — like Hamburger Helper, the family station wagon and Kool-Aid — are clearly representative of American popular culture in all its uninhibited tackiness. As members of the television generation, we have been indoctrinated with the values expressed in these half-hour segments: greed; consumerism; the ostentatious, uninhibited display of wealth; competitive spirit; and the always-present desire for something bigger and better. If we're smart, we'll glean something positive out of them and reserve the rest for topics of mindlessly entertaining discussion.

Jill Gerber, a junior journalism major from Charlotte, does not watch much TV, although she has been known to catch a few "show-case showdowns."

SOMEWHERE IN WASHINGTON...

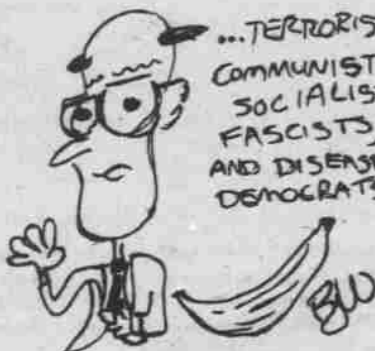
THE PRESIDENT IS PRK HTENED ABOUT BANANAS...



THEY COME FROM CENTRAL + SOUTH AMERICA + MAY CONTAIN...



...TERRORISTS, COMMUNISTS, SOCIALISTS, FASCISTS, AND DISEASED DEMOCRATS...



...SO IF YOU SEE A BANANA, SHOOT FIRST EAT LATER!



SOMEWHERE BELOW MEXICO...

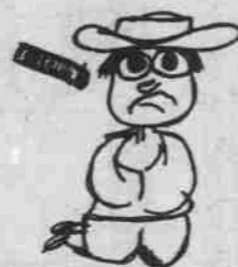
PRESIDENTE REAGAN, VERY SCARED OF EVIL BANANAS....



HE GIVE ME, GENERAL JUAN WIGO, \$50 MILLION DOLLARS TO STOP BANANA THREAT....



...SO, FIRST I SHOOT THE FARMER...



...THEN MY WIFE SHOOT THE FARMER'S BANANAS...



...THEN ME + MY WIFE BUY NEW CONVERTIBLE TO LOOK FOR MORE BANANAS...

