

Edited4Television: Trash is dominating the networks

By WINSTON P. LLOYD
Staff Writer

About three weeks ago, Time magazine featured television as its cover story — specifically, the dwindling share of the audience captured by the three major networks. This week, it's Newsweek's turn to try to explain how the networks and their affiliates are attempting to lure the audience back from cable and pay TV.

The magazine tries to grab a reader by editorializing on the cover: "TRASH TV: From the Lurid To the Loud, Anything Goes" along with the television image of Geraldo Rivera and his broken nose.

A couple of weeks ago, a taping of "Geraldo" titled "Teen Hate-mongers" erupted into violence. What has been called "confrontainment" centered on an interview with John Metzger — a mostly articulate and seemingly intelligent, albeit racist, young man representing the White Aryan Resistance Youth — and black activist Roy Innis. The program centered on why the "Aryan" thinks the way he does, and it included a lot of name-calling. Metzger is a disgrace to this country, and he was often told that. He in turn insulted every ethnic group in the world, and upon referring to Jews as "kikes" and Innis as "Uncle Tom," he was attacked by the black activist.

Now, Rivera claimed he never expected violence. But if you'll remember, several months ago, Innis caused a scuffle with the Rev. Al Sharpton on the "Morton Downey Jr. Show." And when Innis walked over to Metzger, before starting to choke him, Rivera gave him a reassuring "go ahead," allowing Innis to stand in front of the seated racist. How irresponsible can Geraldo be?

Although during the argument everyone agreed with Innis that Metzger and company were

embarrassments to all thinking people, Innis was completely absolved of his violence. Sticks and stones? No. But the words hurt him, and he attacked the opposition in the argument. Irresponsible television and irresponsible journalism resulted in the stifling of the free speech of the racists. And Geraldo condoned the violence when he threw out the racists and continued the interview with the man who began the fight.

This just goes to show the scruples of a man who may be on the right side of an argument but the wrong side of a violent encounter. Rivera is the same man who studied satanism, complete with discussions of skinning babies, during the early 8 p.m. time period when children are watching. (Of course, part of the fault here lies also with NBC.) Geraldo may be the King of Tabloid TV but he's not the only one.

Phil Donahue began the format with the best of intentions. His show was once a forum for mainly political or social discussions, or often for in-depth interviews with celebrities. But now with his new competition, Oprah, Sally Jesse Raphael and Geraldo, Phil wrestles women dressed in lingerie on national television. Geraldo mud wrestles. What is this? Hulk Hogan meets "60 Minutes"?

Which brings me to another question: Isn't this sensationalism and trash simply an evolution of "60 Minutes"? The two even overlap. Newsweek cites Rivera's "titillating expose of sexual abuse by doctors" but you may recall "60 Minutes" discussing the same thing last season. And in the way Mike Wallace, et al, try to find someone and turn a story into an indictment, as with Audi or Gen. William Westmoreland, the current tabloid television shows openly make enemies out of some of their guests. In a way, Morton Downey Jr. seems more honest, by coming

right out and letting us know he thinks the guest is an idiot. But "60 Minutes" works under the guise of "objective" journalism.

The Fox network's "The Reporters" was one of the first to have an in-depth story on the Mike Tyson/Robin Givens problem. Tabloid TV? Later "20/20" had Barbara Walters interview the two, with admissions of Tyson being under the influence of certain prescription drugs. Responsible reporting? And the highly respected "Nightline" grabbed one of its highest ratings with an interview of Jim and Tammy Bakker. A pseudo-story at best.

Everyone does it. The respected and the openly cheap. From "60 Minutes" to "A Current Affair." The fact remains that if people will watch it, it will be aired.

For years there have been complaints about violence on television. "Miami Vice" is usually criticized more than "America's Most Wanted." But the latter shows real violence, or at least reenacted, and people know that it really happened. Isn't that much worse than a fictional Crockett shooting a fictional drug dealer? And even news footage of President Reagan getting shot, with James Brady on the ground, can be disturbing to children, but violence and emotional trauma are what we like to see. Remember the "Saturday Night Live" takeoff on "Nightline" when Buckwheat was shot? Constantly repeated were: "In case you haven't seen the videotape, let's take a look," and the advertiser's logo. "SNL," although often pushing the limits of taste itself, made an immensely correct comment on the state of television. We want disaster, and advertisers want to support what we will watch.

For instance, expect to see more on the death of John Kennedy than on his life now that we are reaching the 25th anniversary of



his assassination. We've already had Jack Anderson trying to prove a conspiracy, and "11/22/63: The Day the Nation Cried" centered more on the unfolding drama of Kennedy's death than on the man's life... or his presidency.

But since the viewer can get all the sex and violence he wants on Cinemax or MTV, the networks and their affiliates are pulling out all the stops. Whether it be satanic ritual killings, transsexuals or the growing use of "bitch" and "ass" in prime time, networks are getting less tame. Their Standards and Practices departments are nearly

gone, and producers of "LA. Law" or "St. Elsewhere" week after week try to see what they can get away with.

So "Geraldo" should come as no surprise in the desperation to raise that bottom line. Besides, his satanism special was the highest rated two-hour documentary in the history of television.



By CATHY MCHUGH
Omnibus Editor

Just what is in a name anyway? In a conversation with a friend of mine the other day, we started talking about words that are fun to say. She says she's going to name her children after four of her most favorite words: Bubbles, Pebbles, Bulge and Fart.

I'm not making this up. And I thought people who named their kids Irving, Myron, Cecil, Dirk, Marshall, Jerome, or Ima, Inez,

Ezmerelda, Prunella or Penelope were sadists.

One of my staff members believes that no one really likes their own name. (Of course, his name is Richard, and maybe he's gotten too many of those Dick jokes aimed at him.) My design editor was almost named Diana instead of Laura. Yes, Diana Ross could be designing these beautiful pages. Personally, I can think of worse alternatives to being named Catherine Mary McHugh. It's better than Virginia, which was almost my fate.

One of the editors knew a family who named their kids after planets. Yes, Mars and Saturn are happily living in Maryland, and, if their parents were to have another child, Venus

would soon follow. Maybe Moon Unit and Dweezil Zappa could join them.

Lucky for him his parents didn't do this to him, although Marshall was one of the possibilities. His mom wanted to name him Kyle, but his dad's name is Lyle and she pronounces it *Lau*. His dad said he didn't want her to call his son *Kau*. If he'd grown up with a weight problem, this could have been very psychologically damaging.

All of this blather leads me to some real news. There's a certain class (and I use that word loosely) of people who have truly creative names. Now just as a rose by any other name may smell as sweet, a man called "Big Man" who weighs 299 pounds probably

shouldn't be called anything else. At least not within his hearing range. It might surprise you to learn that this man is a competitor in the Triad's ninth annual "Toughman Contest."

I don't know where I've been since 1979, but I've never heard of it. But Greensboro Coliseum thoughtfully sent a press release to our thirsty-for-news office about this fine event (I think they termed it a "slug fest"), which is set for Friday and Saturday.

The release promises that this will be "a wild and wooly show with a good mix of old regulars." I'm sure they're a fun bunch of guys. Newcomers will include Kernersville's Porky Speakman.

See GRAFFITI page 8

La Résidence



Thanksgiving Dinner

seatings from 5 to 9
reservations recommended

967-2506
220 W. Rosemary St.
Chapel Hill