

"USA TODAY hopes to serve as a forum for better understanding and unity to help make the USA truly one nation."

—Allen H. Neuharth, Founder, Sept. 15, 1982

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Today's debate: TV programs' content

Vulgar content on TV rises, despite industry vows, V-chip

Our view:

Broadcasters fail to get word out about screening technology.

Two years ago, broadcasters were touting a sliver of silicon circuitry as the answer to parents' outrage over television sex and violence. To hear them tell it, the revolutionary V-chip — implanted in TVs and combined with new program ratings — would give parents a tool to block undesirable programs.

But neither the V-chip nor the broadcasters have lived up to that promise.

And a flurry of studies released in recent days underscores just how far the system has fallen from its goals. And just how shallow is the broadcasters' commitment to family-friendly programming.

The V-chip is designed to be used with broadcast content ratings — such as "V" to designate violence or "S" for sex — to allow parents to block unwanted programs. But while it has been mandated on most new TV sets since Jan. 1, the V-chip is still little-known and little-owned despite all of the political chatter. Less than 10% of parents with children age 2 to 17 own a set equipped with the chip; 39% have never heard of it, according to a survey in March by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Given the chance to promote the V-chip's use with public service spots, three major networks have failed to do even that. Since Jan. 1, ABC, NBC and Fox combined have shown the spots only five times, according to Federal Communications Commissioner Gloria Tristani, who called the effort "plainly insufficient."

The National Association of Broadcasters defends itself by pointing to the V-chip's newness, saying a "learning curve" is required for broader use.

True. Consumers don't buy new TV sets each year, and it will take time for the V-chip to filter into homes.

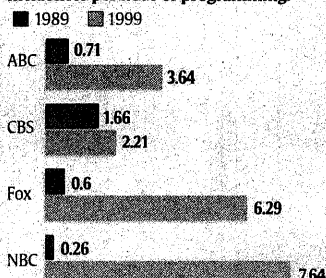
Yet there's fresh evidence that broadcasters haven't been willing to wait before ratcheting up the raunchiness of their programs. In fact, a recent study shows evening television programming has become far racier in the past decade.

The Parents Television Council (PTC),

Trash TV

The use of foul language on network programming has skyrocketed over the past decade.

Incidences per hour of programming:



Source: Parents Television Council

By Quin Tian, USA TODAY

which looked at four weeks of programming last fall in the 8 p.m.-11 p.m. time slot, totaled up 1,173 vulgarities — nearly five per hour on six networks. The rate is five times higher than in 1989, the study found. Sexual references increased, too, to about 3.5 an hour.

The PTC may seem a bit prudish in its choice of foul language — for instance, "hell" and "damn" are counted. But the group also found prime-time examples of "bastard," "bitch" and other language that once were not staples of family viewing.

And while violence decreased slightly since 1989, the PTC found it more sexual and graphic: a blood-smeared subway disaster on *Once and Again*, a bedroom scene in *Angel* in which a demon rises from a woman's chest and burrows into a naked man's back.

Those networks that would discuss the study questioned the PTC's "methodology."

Such nit-picking is beside the point. The industry bought into the rating and V-chip system, even promising the FCC that it would help "educate the public." Instead, broadcasters have turned up the dial on sex and foul language.

Ratings and the V-chip were a good compromise that fended off restrictions on TV content — an alarming prospect for free speech. But bawdy programs and broken pledges are no way to make it work or keep tougher restrictions at bay.

on history shows or by the Three Stooges or Bugs Bunny.

There's little point in scolding broadcasters for not trying to reform the viewing preferences of their audiences — children or adults. And no reason these viewers should be denied choices.

What's more, different parents will have different views on how these shows affect

We need options not V-chips

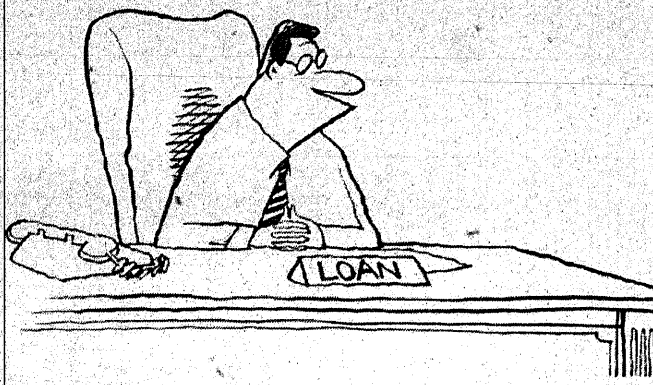
Opposing view:

Government mandate won't cater to preferences of all parents.

By Solveig Singleton

No one should be surprised that the V-chip is not catching on. The real surprise will

STAHLE 2000



Letters

Where is dishonor in re

I was astounded that letter writer John Toler suggested that it would be a dishonor to remove the flag of the Confederacy from the South Carolina Capitol ("Honor in Confederacy," Letters, Monday).

Would Toler also have considered it a "dishonor" to remove the Nazi flag from the walls of Berlin?

A history lesson to keep in mind: The Confederacy lost the war, defending a style of existence based on human bondage and suffering.

This existence was and is personified in

the flag of the Confederacy.

As American citizens it is our constitutional right to advocate any point of

But we must remember one thing because the Union won that war that only Toler but also millions of black Americans in this country have that right.

No one should feel shame for the sins of their great-grandfathers; but we should be ashamed for failing to learn anything from those same sins.

Jake Str
Astoria

Don't count out boomer activists

The article by USA TODAY's Deirdre Donahue does an excellent job overviewing the growing grassroots movement to counter efforts by U.S. corporations to globalize the consumer economy of the United States ("And now a few words about those sponsors: Sick of advertising everywhere, young America counterattacks U.S. companies' 'global culture,'" Life, April 4).

As a charter member of the baby boom generation, my only disagreement with Donahue is that she gives virtually all of the credit for this movement to our Generation X kids.

Many of our generation, while perhaps not yet as vocal as the youngsters, are equally concerned:

► We are downsizing, de-cluttering, simplifying and leaving corporate America early — by choice.

► We are writing books and articles, teaching classes and supporting organizations, several of which were noted in Donahue's article.

What is truly wonderful about all of this is that, unlike the 1960s, concerns for such issues as the environment, economic justice and destruction of community are uniting generations.

Don't count the boomers out.

Many of us have been down the road to "Affluenzaville" and found it leads to nowhere.

Before we pass the torch, I think many



Top honor: Kevin Spacey, in a scene for his performance.

'American' sto

So what is the great rage a *American Beauty*? It is one of the sardonic, dark pictures that I remember ("Second wind for 'Beauty'; third for Julia," Life, April 3).

Consider the story line. Spacey, a disenfranchised 40-ish male, hates his cheating wife, his kids, his