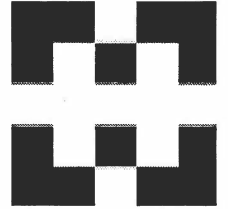




The Challenger



A Publication of:
William Rainey Harper College Honors Program

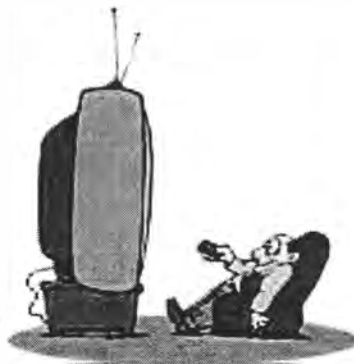
Media, Society, & You

by: Kristin Kowynia

Have you ever thought about why you wear the clothes you do? Have you considered why you style your hair a certain way, patronize a particular store or restaurant, or vote for one politician over another? Usually the response is "because I like it" or "because I want to." But why do you like it? Why do you want to? Is it your personal preferences or the preferences and opinions of others?

Today the media is everywhere in our lives, influencing most everything we think and do in some way or another. Stop and think about it. Why do so many

insist on wearing Abercrombie & Fitch clothing and making sure to get that daily Starbucks? Is it be-



cause they really think their products are superior to others, or because they are trying to meet the current

trends the media has added to our lives?

The American Psychological Association (APA) reports that the average American spends over three hours watching television every day in addition to listening to the radio, surfing the web, and reading printed media materials. Such media exposure must significantly influence our personal preferences and decisions (not to mention the APA thinks media is making America fatter everyday).

Trends and fads exist, and they exist for a reason, because someone somewhere wants them

(Continued on page 4)

TV Game Shows

by: Laurie Boncimino

As often as possible, when I was younger, I made it a point to hear the infamous phrase, "Come on down!! You're the next contestant on The Price is Right!!" belted out by Rod Roddy right before the studio audience would go crazy as Bob Barker came out from behind the walls of *The Price is Right* set. Even today, as a 20-year-old college student, I still make it a point to try and flip on CBS around 10 am to watch the contestants spin the big wheel. There is something intriguing and almost addicting about watching

(Continued on page 5)

Below the Threshold of Consciousness

by: Chrystine Hanus



Aoccdrnig to a rscheearch stduy at Cmabrigde Uinerv-tisy, it deosn't mttaar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod appaar. The olny ipromoetnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be at the rghit pelae. The rset of the wrod can be all msseed up and you can siltl raed it wouthit a por-belm. The huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe.

Amzanig How Our Barins Wrok!

The word subliminal means "below the threshold of consciousness." James Vicary created a new household term—subliminal messages—in the 1950s when he announced that he designed a subliminal ma-

(Continued on page 6)

February
2005

Editor:
Kristin Kowynia

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WEB!

http://www.
harpercollege.edu/
cluborgs/honors



There is a Bias by: Scot Laudenbach

People are influenced every-day in many ways to buy a certain product, to go to a certain place while on vacation, to join the popular gym. Most of this influence is peddled through the advertisements that we see and are very aware of when we make our decisions. Politicians try to persuade us as well, with speeches given to show what they would do if elected how they could make our lives better. But hidden agendas come at us from every angle, even from the nightly news and daily papers. Media outlets have become a large authority in our lives.

Politics in America have many influences, but the largest influence is from the media. A study done by the American Journal of Political Science in 1996 found widespread ignorance and lack of public awareness when it comes to politics. Many people just vote for the name that they like the most or have heard the most from media outlets. This means that the media's role is no longer that of public informer. The media has taken on the task of inventing public opinion and then promot-

ing it.

Studies have shown that this bias has existed for years, even though this bias has been largely ignored in the reporting of any major news outlet. According to the Center for Public Integrity, 64% of the reporters, editors, and general managers of news agencies admit to their stories being biased to the "left-leaning" Democrats. Most of the people polled also admitted that they also vote Democrat. This means that the stories we read in the newspaper or see on television have a bias. This bias has been the subject of much debate, but by the editor's own admission, this bias exists. Yet when people talk about the media having a bias it is almost always ignored or belittled.

The media often puts its money where its mouth is. As a whole the media outspends many other groups. The Center for Public Integrity also found that mass media has spent 1.1 billion dollars to affect the outcome of elections since 1998. This is the money directly donated to the campaigns from media outlets; it does not include the press junkets or luncheons that are paid for, or other

"fringe benefits." This is the money spent directly to elect officials. Of these donations, 56.19% are spent on the Democrats. Even the "fair and balanced" Fox News contributed more money to the Democratic Party than to the Republican. Only 43.81% of the money that media outlets donated went to the Republicans and other groups such as the Green and Reform parties. The money that is spent shows that the media is trying to manipulate the outcome of elections. This also means that the media is trying to create and control the topics that they cover.

Media does have an affect on the political system. From the stories that they print to the dollars that they spend, the media is trying to influence politics. Is this what the founding fathers meant by freedom of the press, that the media should be allowed to levy an opinion and force it on the public? People should be aware that these biases exist and not rely on just one source for their news. Of course they should also become more involved in politics, as it affects all of their lives. Maybe we cannot stop the media's attempt to influence our politics, but surely we can multiply our sources of information.



After an Exhausting Day at the Office

by: Laurie Boncimino

After an exhausting day in the office, at school, running errands, or simply taking care of mundane everyday tasks, doesn't it sound nice to think of curling up on the couch in front of the TV to watch your favorite shows hour after hour? Of course it sounds nice, and you and I are not the only people to feel that way. The av-

erage American watches more than three hours of television every single day. But apart from the episode of *Friends* that you've been dying to see, or the breakthrough news report from which you cannot turn away, what else are we all watching when we sit and watch television for hours on end? You guessed it! Commercial ad-

vertisements.

Without even realizing it, you are watching hundreds of advertisements that are trying to communicate some form of message. When you sit down to watch a 30-minute TV show, you are also sitting down to watch at least seven or eight min-

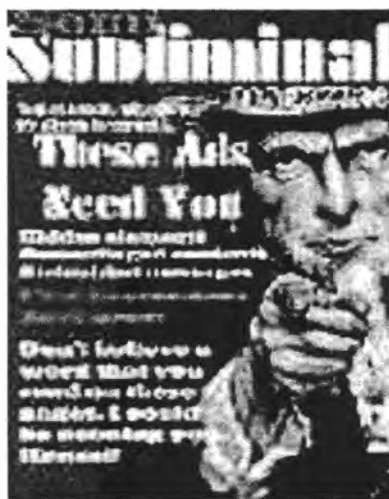
(Continued on page 7)



These Ads Need You by: Christine Hanus

“Kill the rat, kill the cat,
kill the dirty Democrat.”

—Schoolyard chant heard in Norwalk, Conn., during the presidential election in 1956



A variety of passengers have jumped on the subliminal bandwagon, either willingly or unwillingly:

In 2000, a Republican commercial ridiculing Al Gore's prescription drug plan flashed the word "RATS" on the screen for one-thirtieth of a second, right after the phrase "Bureaucrats Decide." Alex Castellanos, who created the commercial, told the Associated Press it was coincidental and designed to create visual interest because "People get bored watching TV."

The movie, *The Exorcist* is based on a best-selling novel by William Blatty, a former CIA operative who worked undercover and served as pol-



In this screen shot from "The Lion King" in the sky above the word "SEX" can be read. The mind is capable of registering this unconsciously and creating a happy feeling within while watching the movie.

icy chief of the Psychological Warfare Division of the U.S. Air Force. Subliminal stimuli of death masks, rotting skulls and contorted screaming faces appear in the film. A spokesperson for Warner Bros. acknowledged the subliminal messages saying, "We thought everyone knew."

Author Wilson Bryan Key claims subliminal sexual symbols or objects are used to entice consumers to buy and use various products and services. One of Key's most famous claims is the word 'sex' is often embedded in products and advertisements. Key claims the word 'sex' is printed on Ritz crackers.

Spelling the word 'sex' in ice cubes is common in ads for adult beverages.

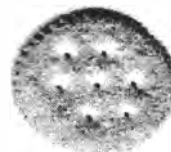
On the other end of the spectrum, in a scene from the Disney film, "The Lion King," leaves and

dust are being blown into the air; but if you look closely the word 'sex' can be made out.

In another Disney film, "The Rescuers Down Under," two characters are flying in a tin of sardines; but what is on the building behind them is a picture of a topless woman.

With the ex-

ception of the Ritz cracker, the above ads are considered "partial subliminals" because you can make out a hidden word if you look closely. True subliminal messages are embedded and you cannot see the object or word without technological assistance.



Key claims the word 'sex' is printed on Ritz crackers

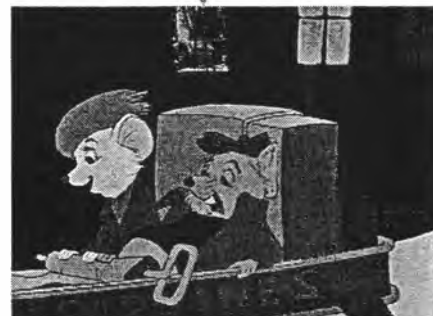
Even though there is a lack of scientific evidence to support the notion that subliminal messages

work, there is evidence everywhere in support of the media's fascination with the topic. The thought that one can be influenced unconsciously is intriguing; stories of conspiracies make exciting stories for journalists. And until the scientific community disproves the use of subliminal messages, expect to (not) see more.



Notice the ice cubes in the glass on the right, the word "SEX" can be clearly read, but can go unnoticed.

If you look closely below at the wall hanging in the room, the arrow is indicating the image of a naked woman.





Media, Society, and You

(Continued from page 1)

to. Because of these fads there are stockpiles of beanie babies stuffed in bins in closets and menus filled with "Atkin's Approved" meals, not to mention the newest fad of "Live Strong" bracelets and their associated copycats.

In America, we receive most of our information from someone other than the original source. Surely each reader can recall a situation in his/her own life when s/he personally witnessed an event later reported in the media, only to discover something reported was wrong or was twisted from the truth. The media is now focused on how to make money and is, in turn, neglecting reliability, safety, quality, and truthfulness.

It is widely known that the media carefully selects and edits everything we see to fit to its liking. Take, for instance, reality shows such as *Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, and the menagerie of MTV's *The Real*



World / Road Rules programming. Each of these programs includes a wide variety of advertisements, whether they be stated outright, suggested, or simply viewed by our eyes. Each of these programs has sponsors about which it regularly comments, showcasing their products. However, because they are 'reality', they also are filled with fuzzy areas, blurring out the names and appearances of items they do not want advertised to you.

Survivor even has its own clothing line its contestants wear that is sold to the public!

This exposure slowly forms us into liking or disliking anything from flooring, cookies, movies, to politicians... whatever the media desires.

Each person has his or her own personality and physical characteristics. Our personalities are what make us individuals. It is something that we grow and form

from birth through experience.

Our appearance, on the other hand, tends to follow trends. Fashion is much more a part of our lives than we would like to think. Every year, conferences meet about all aspects of fashion, deciding what we will wear on our backs, faces, and in our hair.

In society today, it is a fight to avoid influences of the media world. One has to ask, "How much of me is really me, and how much is what others have formed me into?"

To find out how individual you really are, walk through your house and look around at all of your possessions. Don't forget to take a gaze in your bathroom mirror. How much of what you see follows the trends and the ads, and how much is what you chose all by yourself?

It has come to a point where each of us must ask, "Who am I? Can I possibly find myself somewhere within the ads and trends?"

To this, the answer is yes; but, you must first realize what is affecting your personal decisions in order to make those decisions truly personal.

Really a Beauty?

by: Scot Laudenbach

Reality television is exploding. It is possible to find a reality television show every night of the week if that is what you want to watch. A person can watch someone else go through the trials and tribulations of having to deal with a bad boss or a bad haircut, or maybe a bad roommate. Maybe the person on the television is fighting to survive on an island, in the boardroom, or in a singing contest. If the viewer is lucky

s/he can watch a person go from ugly or fat into a beautiful human being to whom others would be willing to give a rose. This is how television has deteriorated.

MTV had the first reality television program, not including the evening news. *Real World* came on the air in 1992 from an apartment in New York City. From that day forward television has never been the same. Those original seven cast members did not do much. They

lived together, but did not vote anyone out; they were not the best looking people, but were not in it for a face lift, just face time. They were people who wanted to get discovered and have a career in television and music. Those seven were the beginning of a television revolution, but did not know it at the time.

Since that MTV hit show there have been literally hundreds of reality shows. Some of these



(Continued on page 6)



Personal Image

by: Kristin Kowynia

Society today is filled with diet crazes: Atkin's, Slim Fast, South Beach, Weight Watchers, and so forth. In addition to diets, nutritional supplements are a growing market, particularly with the male population, while dieting is more common with females. The retail supplement industry is responsible for more than \$17.8 billion in annual sales according to General Nutrition Corporation, the leader in the supplement industry, but this number does not include the diet industry or the income of gyms and other workout facilities nationwide.



These industries' profits are a result of differences between the actual sizes of American men and women compared to the men and women that are seen in the media everyday.

One of the most common New Year's resolutions is to lose weight or diet. This reflects a common misconception in the United States that weight represents our overall health. We aim for a certain "target weight" that we feel is healthy. That target may not be a safe and healthy weight for you, even if it is a healthy weight for a friend. A more accurate and reliable meas-



ure is your Body Mass Index (BMI). This is a measure of your total body fat. Immediately we hear the word fat and get scared, but yes, we all are designed to have fat on our bodies! It is healthy in appropriate amounts. Your BMI score is calculated using your height and weight. The resulting number places you in one of four categories: underweight BMI (<18.5), normal weight BMI (18.5-24.9), overweight BMI (25-29.9), and obese (>30). ** To learn more and calculate your BMI, visit www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/.

According to a recent U.S. Center for Disease Control and Pre-

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TV Game Shows

(Continued from page 1)

people, whom you don't even know, try their best at winning money, cars, or vacation getaways. I'm not the only one who feels this way. Millions of Americans — and maybe you're one of them — sit in front of their TV sets every day to catch even a half-hour of one of their favorite TV game shows. Whether viewers are watching a contestant try to pick the "Final Answer" for a million dollars or they're observing families feuding for what the "survey says," there is always a sense of anticipation and suspense that keeps the viewers sitting on the edge of their seats, waiting for the commercial break to end. In my opinion, TV game shows in the United States are constantly telling viewers that money, cars, big prizes, and expensive trips are what deliver us happiness. The influence of TV game shows has been strong across the country for decades.

According to CBS, in 1972, Bob Barker hosted the premiere of *The Price is Right*. Thirty three seasons

later, in 2005, he has committed to his 34th season of broadcasting the show which makes it the longest-running game show in television history — making Barker the longest-running game show host. In fact, March 1, 2005 marks episode 6,000, which also means that Barker has given away close to half a billion (yep billion...not million) dollars in prizes to 52,000 contestants. Almost two million people have been welcomed to the studio for tapings, and college students often make up a third of the audience. These are college students, much like you and I, who love the idea of possibly being chosen to win a shot at something big.

Something big like the \$2,522,700 that Ken Jennings recently won after remaining the 'returning champion' on *Jeopardy!* for 75 games in a row. According to TVGameShow.net he is the only man who has ever won more than \$2.5 million in demonstrating his knowledge and experience. Jennings began

to make Americans think that he would never lose. Day after day, Alex Trebek continued to tape the show as normal but for half a year "the remaining champion" did in fact remain the champion. Finally, 148 opponents later, Jennings lost his spot as the champion and helped remind us that he, too, is human and he makes mistakes. Although he certainly showed our country that his capacity for knowledge and information is huge, he also showed us that nobody is, or can be, perfect.

Too often it is easy for us to get wrapped up in mundane or temporary things that we feel can bring us happiness. TV game shows have been a part of our society for decades, and they continue to bring hope and excitement to people about possibly winning money or a car that would make their lives easier or happier. It's our responsibility to make sure that we aren't allowing ourselves to get so wrapped up in money or things as the only means of happiness, but to remain open-minded and remember that money won't always get you everywhere.





Really a Beauty?

(Continued from page 4)

shows incorporate celebrities in them to gain ratings and restart the celebrities' careers. Some of the worst have involved a marriage arranged with a total stranger on the basis of looks, or the search for a birth parent out of a group of strangers. Women can get a complete make-over including plastic surgery and several months of therapy just to compete against others that have done the same in a beauty pageant.

One of these shows is called *The Biggest Loser*, in which over-

weight contestants compete to lose the most weight. How this can possibly accomplish the task its sets for itself of improving the winning contestant's life? That person will get to go home to his/her family and mother and get to say "Hey, mom! You raised the biggest loser. But don't worry, t.v. made it all better!"

Can any of this be good for the nation as a whole? Maybe television really has gone downhill since the days of our parents? Can the viewer really be hoping the girl receives the rose because the guy genuinely likes her, not because she, and not another, gets to prolong her stay for one more week? When does the

American public get fed up with this type of television? There is no end in sight. The public will always want to see what happens to other people as long as it does not really affect them. The pain and suffering of others will always be a hit; it will always draw a crowd. The masses do not want to see the winner succeed; they would rather see the losers crash and burn. It is a morbid fascination that the public has always had. They would rather see the wreck than the race.

What ever happened to the sitcoms like *All in the Family*? That was television that everyone—liberals, conservatives, young, old—could enjoy.

Below the Threshold of Consciousness

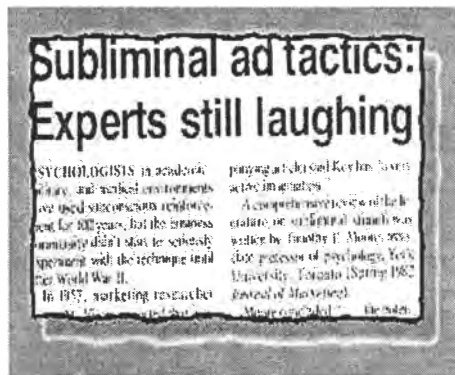
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chine, a tachistoscope, capable of projecting unnoticeable messages within big-screen movies. Vicary said the messages "Eat Popcorn" and "Drink Coke" flashed on the screen every five seconds, but appeared so briefly the movie viewers were not conscious of seeing them. Vicary claimed these subliminal messages increased popcorn sales 58 percent, and cola sales by 18 percent. Vicary did not offer evidence of these statistics, but the idea of subliminal messages affecting one's thinking and actions spread swifter than you can say "urban legend." Vicary later admitted his statements were a "gimmick" to increase sales for his business. Forty years after Vicary's hoax, subliminal messaging remains a household phrase.

You Can't Fool Me

But how do you know you're not being fooled? Subliminal messages can be embedded in any picture, video or noise. You could be receiving one right now. Research on

subliminal advertising suggests little or no influence on thoughts or behavior. Yet in contrast, cognitive and social psychologists at Cornell University are learning that stimuli pre-



sented subliminally can have a considerable influence on a variety of cognitive processes, possibly on behavior. (Perhaps the actual results of the subliminal advertising experiments contained pro-subliminal advertising messages.)

Oh C'mon, I Don't See Anything

People with blind sight have damage to the primary visual cortex

and have a restricted visual field (similar to the blind spot you experience while driving a car). They may be unaware of perceiving stimuli in their restricted visual area but they often are able to guess the size and shape of the stimuli. Visual subliminal messages are presented in a similar way. The next time you look up from your computer and have a thought completely different from your current focus, think about what got you from thought A to thought B. Is it Real, or Embedded Memory?

Whether or not subliminal messaging works, fear of this urban legend is alive and flashing. The Federal Communications Commission recognizes this concern and has taken steps to prevent the use of subliminal messages by revoking a company's broadcast license if the use of subliminal messages is proven, and the National Association of Broadcasters has banned its use. This sounds good on paper, but proving something that is below the threshold of consciousness is, in itself, a radical suggestion.



After an Exhausting Day at the Office

(Continued from page 2)

utes of advertisements. Everyone hates to sit through the boredom of another commercial advertising anything from Coca-Cola to Ivory Soap to a Mercedes Benz to Campbell's Soup or even McDonalds. Commercials can be repetitive, boring, disturbing or simply just a waste of your time. That is why most people don't like commercials. Have you ever stopped to realize how much you are actually influenced by those commercials? The influences of these advertisements can be both positive and negative, as well as very powerful and effective.

Think about it. How many commercial advertisements have you memorized because the advertisers have been so effective in trying to sell their ideas to you? Without com-



mercials would you even know that these ideas exist? Almost all of the cars we drive, clothes we wear, presidents we elect, places we go, food we eat, products we purchase, and opinions that we hear are advertised to us

through the use of television commercials. As much as we would like to get rid of ads altogether, we should probably realize that they do affect us and play a role in our lives.

After all, what would Super Bowl Sunday be without the endless but always entertaining string of commercials during the breaks in the game? Would we know anything about Empire Carpet? Would we have the phone number memorized? 800-588-2300 EMPIRE. Would Kellogg's Frosted

Flakes really be so great if we never heard Tony the Tiger telling us how "GGRREEAAAAAATTTTT" they really are? Would Apple Computers be booming in sales right now if we had never seen the creative iPod commercials that left everyone saying, "I want one of those for Christmas"?

We are shaped by the commercial advertisements that we view on television. It is our choice, as observers, to choose how we want to receive the advertisements. Instead of always getting annoyed because it's time for a commercial, you should try actually watching the advertisements and take note of the ways you, yes **YOU**, are influenced by what you are watching. You might be quite fascinated.



Personal Image

(Continued from page 5)

vention (CDC) Survey, the following statistics were found:

Average Female Physical Dimensions:

Height: 5'4"
Weight: 162.9 lbs
BMI*: 28.1

Average Male Physical Dimensions:

Height: 5'9 1/2"
Weight: 189.8 lbs
BMI*: 27.8

These figures indicate that Americans are, in fact, overweight, with BMIs falling between 25 and 29.9.

According to an American Academy of Pediatrics study entitled *Exposure to the Mass Media and Weight Concerns Among Girls*, 69

percent of teenage girls reported that the appearance of models in magazines influenced their image of a perfect female body, and 47 percent desired to lose weight because of the magazine pictures.

The differences between the average American and the people we see on TV not only encourage men and women across the country to diet, but they also can cause severe problems in an individual's life. Even a physically fit person can suffer from low self-esteem and a poor self-image because of how the media portrays the social norm. These seemingly innocent problems can often avalanche into serious psychological and/or medical conditions, such as depression, anorexia, bulimia, and others that require medical

attention and even hospitalization. Sometimes individuals reach such extremes that death by malnutrition or suicide occurs.

The American Medical Association (AMA) believes that, "part of the explanation may also be the messages that the media in modern, economically developed nations send to young people, particularly females. These messages are that excessive thinness is attractive. To be as thin as some teen idols and models requires some people to achieve and maintain a weight that's not healthy." Females between the ages of 12 to 25 are in the highest risk category for eating disorders.

Males are also prone to these disorders; however, they are

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Personal Image

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less common. More often, the male reaction is an excessive “get fit” attitude rather than drastic changes in eating patterns. Even though they are often the most in-shape athletes, men too, are susceptible to eating disorders. Athletes particularly at risk, according to the AMA, are those involved in gymnastics, track, and figure skating.

The American media greatly influences our perceptions of weight, and usually not in a healthy respect. Looking like those we see in the media is not best for us; we must maintain a personal health standard for ourselves. Please contact your doctor or a nutritionist for help determining this for yourself.

*BMI calculated using average weight and height

**Note: Athletes, children, and elderly do not fit this scale, according to the CDC.

Editor's Note

The American culture finds itself very interested in media, from news, talk shows, magazines, newspapers, even movies and TV programs. Each of these presents its own value system, opinions of life, and products. In this issue we have been able to show the various areas of media that effect our lives, lifestyles, and decisions from day to day and year to year. It is important to be liberal and open-minded and be who you are: an individual with your own personal thoughts, opinions and ideas.

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Fakin' It The Bush Inauguration

by: Kristin Kowynia

The Red Carpet — one of America's favorite places to rave about who's wearing who. It's a favorite American tradition. Plop down on the couch and watch the menagerie of glitz march along. We love to drool over the beautiful outfits costing upward of several thousand dollars a piece. But who knew the President's Inauguration would be full of the same?

For President Bush's first Inauguration his wife and daughters donned simple gowns and accompanying glitz from little known Texas designers. The girls appeared as though they were off to their freshman homecoming. Little did they know what a big fashion boo-boo they had just made. That mistake has followed them and helped to form public opinion.

This time around the women have planned ahead to

avoid such a mistake and have chosen major red carpet fashion designers to design custom gowns for each of the women and chosen or



Laura Bush's Inaugural Gown, designed by Oscar de la Renta for 2005.

designed accessories to match. First Lady Laura Bush wore a silver and blue Oscar de la Renta gown and matching coat to the inaugural ball while her twin daughters donned Badgley Mischka.

Jenna wore a green silk and leather gown, while Barbara wore a pale aquamarine silk and chiffon gown. In the festivities the twins will also

wear designs from Lela Rose, Derek Lam and Oscar de la Renta.

This time around the women were Fakin' It. Instead of being themselves and dressing as they feel comfortable, they have fallen prey to the red carpet media world and are spending the money to match that idea. The media sure taught them a lesson!

Honors Program Announcements

- Spring Graduates—Please let Dr. Wilson know before March 15th
- Inspiration Café — Saturday, March 12
- Cultural Event — Thursday, May 5 — Navy Pier for dinner and *Romeo & Juliet* at the Shakespeare Theatre, transportation included
- Adopt-A-Highway — Dates are still TBA, but please sign up if you are interested

- Upcoming Discussion Topics:
- 2/16 — Does history exist? Fact or Fiction?
 - 2/23 — Job training vs. Liberal Arts in College
 - 3/2 — Is marriage necessary? Should we marry?
 - 3/9 — Euthanasia
 - 3/16 — Pizza with a Professor—Dr. Sean Noonan
 - 3/23 — Pizza with a Professor...again! Professor to be announced

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