Column/Eric S. Berman
Search for personal legacy

One of my favorite songs, albeit a bit dated, is the 'Jubilee' song, "What Do You Want From Life?" It's a good question: ask yourself what you're most concerned about during your lifetime. Better yet, imagine what you think other people want from life... say, like President Reagan or Donald Trump. The usual things spring to mind, like wealth or success; maybe even happiness. Not for me.

I'd like that elusive luxury known as a legacy. Not necessarily something with my name on it (like Sohn Hall or a grant in the Smithsonian), but something I can look back at in years to come with a feeling of ownership and pride.

The ability to transform your surroundings, to make your mark on some part of the world, is much more satisfying than being a name on your high school basketball team.

How do you grab something and make it your own? I can only guess: effort and creativity. MIT makes very good techniques, but it doesn't give you the spark that places you at the front of the pack.

Try to think of the last original thing you did; anything from artwork to an inventiveness approach to a problem you will do. Arrange something, if you will, to something you've seen elsewhere or something you've heard previously?

Think hard. Did you have trouble answering these questions?

Equity, in some respects, is a more permanent version of professional respect. Like good things, respect begins at home — learn to be proud of your efforts, step back and be able to step back from your work when you want to, wipe your hands off, and say "I did a damn good job of that.

Give it a once-over. Check for faults and room for improvements. Be as at home on your work as you are on others'. Admire your handiwork — you'd do it even better next time.

Don't be afraid of getting your hands dirty on the back — for many things you do, yours will be the only remake you get.

Carried out over time, professional respect becomes a reputation, which can be the stuff of legacy. Your methods get subtly embossed; it's taken for granted that your way is the right way to accomplish the task.

Imagine being the guy who invented the Day-Timer management system. If you're not familiar, a Day-Timer consists of a set of small calendar books, sections for today's appointments, expense record, and a record of what you accomplished, including the time it took to do the tasks.

Do you have any concept of how many people use these things? Imagine tying back in your face on a sunny Sunday morning and realizing that millions of people are carrying around a tool that reproduces your principles of time management in their daily lives.

What a thrill!

Mind you, I still like the creature comforts. I'm not going to trade in money, a fire-engine red trade-in, or real estate (none of which I really have) for my legacy.

I'm no fool. But someday I'd like to look down from the heavens or up from the depths and discern my stamp on the face of mankind, no matter how small. As long as it's there, I can be happy.

Feedback

An attack on pornography should be directed toward the merchants

To the Editor:

Eric S. Berman's column "View-er's rights," Jan. 30, totally missed the point of the porn-ography debate. Most of his argu-ments center on the impossibility of weeding out "riff people" and "patronizing a potential rapist" from viewing a pornographic film.

A potential rapist doesn't need any lessons in how attack and de-grade; all he needs is the hint that it might not be all that bad because "other people do it." I am not seriously concerned about sick people. It is pornography's effect on the rest of us, whom so-ciety and the law accept as nor-mal, that worries me.

Professional respect isn't an obvious sub-stance which, like cigarette smoke or caffeine, is hazardous to the quality of life. Since its ef-fect is mental (or spiritual) rather than measurable physically, the ex-tent of the damage is harder to show.

Think of Meek Kemp, the mayor of Yourtowntoday. The Thunderbolts, Georgia's white supremacist newspaper. After viewing such material you are diminished, less of a person than you were before: you have wasted your time on a fantasy that is, unlike Flann O'Brien or The Mague or King Lear, not life-affirming.

The best objection to pornography the feminists have made is that you do you think would ensue if blacks or Jews or Orientals were the specific targets of pornogra-phy? How long do you think someone could peddle "entertain-ment" supporting the ideology that members of a particular hu-man subgroup are inherently masochistic, made to give plea-sure and wildly deviant in terms of their physical appear-ance and performance in the bed-room?

I'm not terribly flattered by the contrasting one-dimensionality of males in pornography, either.

Such a merchant would be sub-ject to demarcation, reparation, sanctions. In an age when porn merchants are able to thrive to the tune of billions a year be-cause their product is perceived as still within the bounds of nor-mality, if not good taste.

Mr. Berman is concerned about "exploitation of innocent peo-ple's privacy." What he must un-derstand is that it is the merchants who are the real exploiters, who create a lawless environment.

In a society which still does not extend equal economic opportu-nity and reward to women, "star-ring" in a porn film is not too far removed from slavery. I submit that fewer women would be interested in easy money in porn acting if they had access to secure and fulfilling employment.

I'm not for censoring any-thing. I don't see this as a First Amendment or civil rights issue. What we need to kill is the mar-ket for it. If the money supply dried up, the merchants would become other profitable ventures, like dealing drugs or shipping guns.

I would like people to choose freely not to patronize porn, by the way. Infringement on privacy is to keep making noise about how stupid, pointless, and boring it is. My little brother thinks people should be required to watch pornographic films, which would destroy the mystery and utilization so we could get along with the business of living.

We need a public sector to ask you why MIT students would wish to screen or see such a film. Curious-ity? Go to the West End Palace Theatre. The thrill of forbidden knowledge is not a substitute for an open mind and a normal interest in women and men.

David J. Lofran

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