

# Comment, cartoons show materialism malaise

An unusual confluence of editorial and op-ed comment, letters-to-the-editor and cartoons in recent Daily News issues can help us understand what must finally be recognized as the national "malaise" that President Carter so foolishly mentioned out loud.

We can begin with the Toles and Horsely cartoons (on Oct. 8 and 9) depicting (accurately) a nation that values sports, TV, new cars, shopping and listening to the latest musical fad over anything resembling education.

Nevertheless, your Oct. 9 editorial lamenting the low level of cultural awareness in today's college seniors misses the point by recommending the same worthy curricula that our youth have already rejected. Our children have simply internalized what we, as parents, do (gratify our desires ASAP), rather than what we say: "Study hard, and deprive yourself today for the sake of a better future."

Next, we can see in Sandy Grady's column on the manipulation of the fearful, the gullible and the isolated by slick televangelists (Op-ed, Oct. 9), an analogy of the same hucksterism by which millions of average Americans are willingly persuaded that their own personal salvation lies in the purchase of more goodies.

Let us continue with Amitai Etzioni's repudiation of the Democratic Party (also on the Oct. 9 Op-ed page), because that party no longer seems to represent the average American. Unfortunately, Etzioni seems not to understand that the average American has spoken, saying that no problem we face can justify any reduction in our purchasing power (through increased taxes for prenatal care for the poor, let's say; or profit-sapping requirements for pollution controls on industry's smokestacks).

Finally, we have Paul Wasserman's severely punitive drug plan (Public Forum, Oct. 1) in answer to escalating drug-related violence resulting from the hopelessness of the poor, followed by Ernest Ghermann's prescient warning that such an unimaginative program could be implemented only through official terror (Oct. 9).

There is a word for this malaise — materialism (none dare call it greed). Those are innocent indeed who cannot see that our present condition is the logical outcome of a national ethic of instant gratification and the acquisition of material things above all else. The seamless web of social and environmental decay that we have woven around ourselves will be our undoing if we do not break its myriad strands. Only through a willingness to give up some of our toys can we make a beginning.

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