

# Going Down to *South Park*: Reporting the News on Television's Most Politically and Socially Irreverent Animated Series

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## Abstract

The image of the journalist on *South Park* is not one to be proud of. Journalists appear on more than half of the episodes in the show's first nine seasons, but they are mostly purveyors of news that is opinionated, baseless, soft, sentimental, naïve, late-breaking and/or sensationalistic. Behind all of this shallow reporting is a quest by news media for ratings: the profit motive distorts news. The fact that almost all *South Park* journalism is broadcast news, which naturally tends to focus on sound bites rather than in-depth analysis, only enhances this effect. Whether the image of the journalist on *South Park* is a reflection of the modern American media, or vice versa, is left unsettled and to the eye of the beholder.

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“A Sexy Action News Team Special Report: ‘Cough Medicine Abuse in School’ with the Sexy Action School News Team. It’s the report you can’t afford to miss.”<sup>1</sup>

*-- Announcer setting up the boys’ final attempt to grab high ratings for their elementary school news show*

While this Sexy Action News Team special report could actually be seen as investigative journalism, it only comes about after more sensationalistic methods for becoming the number

one South Park Elementary School news show fail. In other words, the serious, investigative content of the show is only incidental to the profit motive. Live, late-breaking special reports by eyewitness news teams are the real king of *South Park* journalism.

The episode in which the Sexy Action News Team is featured, “Quest for Ratings,” draws back the curtain on tabloid journalism. In at least 70 other episodes of *South Park* in which journalists play at least some part – more than half of the 139 aired over the first nine seasons – the themes mentioned in “Quest for Ratings” are merely fleshed out in various forms.

Throughout, the image of *South Park* journalists is mostly negative. They chase late-breaking news, often misunderstanding what is really going on. Anchors and reporters alike lash out in anger at subjects of stories, foregoing any concern for objectivity. Sensationalism, sentimentality and exaggeration are commonplace. Interviews don’t get to the point. Naiveté is in abundance.

Some or all of those reportorial flaws are almost always part of *South Park* journalism. In fact, about the only positive thing that might be said about the depiction of the media on the show is that journalists sometimes seem to be trying to do the best they can to report important news stories. It’s just that some or all of the above-mentioned negatives are almost always part of that reporting.

The show’s creators, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, have been so skewering the media since the show first aired in 1997. Their work garnered *South Park* the award for Outstanding Animated Program at the 2005 Emmys and a Peabody Award in 2006.<sup>2</sup> While “Quest for Ratings” is the only episode focusing exclusively on journalism, news reports are part of the milieu of this fictional Colorado town.

Those reports are delivered locally by HBC News 4 team, led by the ubiquitous broadcast anchor Tom and supported by a bevy of journalistically interchangeable, always male, field

reporters. Tom's last name appears to be Statzel, although that is almost never announced on HBC broadcasts.<sup>3</sup> When Tom isn't on location, two or three HBC field reporters appear more regularly than others. Some reporters are referred to by name, such as Jeff Arrando,<sup>4</sup> Don Akawa<sup>5</sup> or Creamy Goodness.<sup>6</sup> Others are less well-defined.

These include "a normal-looking guy with a funny name,"<sup>7</sup> but also "a 34-year-old Asian man who looks strikingly similar to Ricardo Montalban,"<sup>8</sup> "a Hispanic man with gravy stains on his lapel"<sup>9</sup> and "a quadriplegic Swissman on a pony."<sup>10</sup>

HBC is possibly based outside city limits, with its reporters sometimes leading off by stating they are in South Park, Colorado.<sup>11</sup> The main characters on the show, elementary school students Eric Theodore Cartman, Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, Kenny McCormick, and, later (sometimes replacing Kenny), Leopold "Butters" Stotch, (hereafter, "the boys") seem to always catch HBC's television reports and somehow get mixed up in their stories.

For example, in one episode the boys are watching anchor Tom report that Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives agents have surrounded the very home they are in. The ATF mistakenly thinks their parents, partying in another room, are members of a dangerous cult that must be brought to heel.

Stan stares out the window, only to hear a field reporter say:

"We just received a photo from the recon team of the action inside the house showing evidence that there are indeed innocent children trapped inside. Those sick, cult, fanatic bastards."<sup>12</sup>

The picture is actually of Stan staring out the window. The boys spend the rest of the episode filming their own report that nothing is going on inside the house and trying to deliver it to the HBC field reporter.

**Opinionated, If Not Crazy, Journalists**

In *South Park*, the boys sure wouldn't think to deliver a written report to the local newspaper. No such entity is ever mentioned in any episode. In fact, print journalists are virtually absent from the *South Park* scene, only rarely making cameo appearances at news conferences. The most widely seen print reporter is instantly recognizable from his oft-employed fedora hat, reinforcing the feeling that his breed is an anachronism.

So is fair-mindedness. Tom's comments about the ATF are not an anomaly. Such excess is also amply demonstrated in another episode where five grade-school-age Romanian circus performers are temporarily staying at Stan's home.

"Yes, these Romanian quintuplets no longer have to live in Romania, the asshole of the world," the HBC reporter tells those tuning in. "Back to you, Tom." <sup>13</sup>

Another instance of this kind of editorializing comes in the episode where Kyle's dad, a lawyer named Gerald Broflovski, sues the local school system for sexual harassment after Stan hits Eric.

"So whatever the outcome, things look very bright for Kyle's dad," the HBC reporter tells Tom midway through his report. "Personally, I think Kyle's dad is just a whore, taking advantage of everyone in town..."<sup>14</sup>

Some might say this type of personal attack journalism is reminiscent of Dan Aykroyd's classic line on a Point-Counterpoint parody. After Jane Curtin made her Point, Aykroyd would begin his Counterpoint by saying, "Jane, you ignorant slut."<sup>15</sup>

Yet, the editorializing by reporters in *South Park* goes beyond the personal. They are ready and willing to comment on the merits of the story itself. In no episode is this more evident than one dealing with a group trying to save the rainforest. In "Rainforest, Schmainforest," the boys

have been recruited for the cause, joining a group of students called “Getting Gay with Kids” and traveling to San Jose, Costa Rica. A non-HBC reporter is unimpressed.

“Everyone is here so they can feel good about themselves and act like they aren’t the ones responsible for the rainforest’s peril.”<sup>16</sup> In the end, the message about the rainforest is ambiguous. However, such statements about liberal causes have led some to believe the show is conservative in nature.

In fact, one recent book by Brian Anderson is called *South Park Republicans*. “The South Park Conservative is ... opposed to political correctness and more likely to ridicule than observe the guidelines of the new sensitivity concerning race, ethnicity, minorities, women, the handicapped, obesity, homosexuality, ugliness, religion, childhood, and much, much else.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet, it is at the very least unclear whether such treatment of these disparate groups is meant more to ridicule them or show a kind of inclusiveness because they can be made fun of just like anyone else. This exchange took place between Parker and Stone on the subject when asked if they get greater enjoyment out of making fun of conservatives or liberals:

Parker: Liberals are more fun to...

Stone: Literally, liberals, because they just – they – when someone – when you stick it to someone and they laugh or they’re expecting it, but liberals are – it’s more fun now because liberals just get ...

Parker: Liberals get so mad...<sup>18</sup>

Whatever their political persuasion, non-HBC reporters in the rainforest story are part of a diverse *South Park* media universe. Other area reporters exist and are sometimes heard from, such as those from Channels 7 and 11. Out-of-town reporters are not routine on *South Park*, but they are by no means rare, either. Reporters from a fictional Channel 8,<sup>19</sup> Nebraska News<sup>20</sup> and SNN<sup>21</sup> make appearances. So do journalists from the extant FOX News,<sup>22</sup> CNN,<sup>23</sup> Nightline,<sup>24</sup>

MTV,<sup>25</sup> PBS,<sup>26</sup> The Larry King Show,<sup>27</sup> The O'Reilly Factor,<sup>28</sup> The News Hour With Jim Lehrer (on a South Park public access channel),<sup>29</sup> Trial TV<sup>30</sup> and VH1.<sup>31</sup>

Although journalists from the national news shows are generally portrayed as more dignified and objective than their local news brethren, exceptions do occur. For example, MTV reporter Kurt Loder gives a report that reflects classic *South Park*-brand journalism.

“Why am I still doing this?” Loder begins. “I’ve got to be the oldest person on this network by about 40 years.”<sup>32</sup>

Or try an SNN anchor, opining on a report that Saddam Hussein is building missile silos in heaven:

“SNN question of the day: Now that Americans believe in heaven, should we bomb it?” the anchor asks. “The polls right now show 51% of Americans think Saddam has to be dealt with, while 49% are wimpy, tree-hugging pussies!”<sup>33</sup>

### **Trivial, Soft News Highlighted**

This SNN anchor not only takes editorial liberties, but also something else common in *South Park*: a bite at poll-driven stories. These stories are plentiful and exhibit the journalist as purveyor of meaningless trivia.

For example, in one episode a clash between pro-Iraqi war demonstrators and anti-war demonstrators breaks down into a battle about musical tastes. An HBC field reporter follows right along:

“Tom, I’m standing in the town square, where the war rally has been going on for an incredible 87 hours,” the reporter begins. “The crowd still appears to be split right down the middle, half support country music and the other rock n’ roll. Let’s listen in...”<sup>34</sup>

Or take this reassuring report of epic importance to the community by Tom:

“Last night, the daring and bold new show, Cop Drama, broke new ground by saying ‘shit’ on television, making shit officially OK to say around the country.”<sup>35</sup>

The situation is perhaps summed up by the HBC field reporter covering another trivial story:

“Tom, we’re now entering the second day of the rock band Moop’s refusal to play and the second day of absolutely no other news to report on,” the reporter states. “In a recent poll, we asked people if Moop’s refusal to play would stop them from downloading music off the Internet. One percent said yes, two percent said no, and ninety-seven percent said, ‘Who the hell is Moop?’”<sup>36</sup>

### **Bizarre, Meaningless Interviews**

Interviews that go nowhere and mean nothing are another penchant of the *South Park* journalist. These interviews seem to take place because they fit into some kind of formula rather than for their importance to the story. As a result, what is said by interviewees seems trivial.

This meaningless content is exemplified by the answers an HBC reporter gets when asking South Park residents whether the KKK should be allowed to hold a rally:

Man: “Well, I think they are racist, but I do think freedom of speech is important.”

Second Man: “Well, I for one believe in free speech. But, then again, I think they are racist.”

Third Man: “Well, I believe they are racist. But I do believe...”

At this point a supporting, black character named Jerome “Chef” McElroy cuts in.

Chef: “Oh, to heck with all you indecisive bastards!”<sup>37</sup>

As for the bizarre part, how about Tom’s interview of Satan and Jesus before their boxing match? Satan informs Tom that he will crush Jesus like a little bug, but does not get to answer another reporter’s question about his involvement in the Gulf War when Don King strong-arms the focus back on the fight.<sup>38</sup> As Marvel comics’ creator Stan Lee would say, “Nuf said.”

### **Sentimentality and Melodrama**

The cloying cousin of triviality on *South Park* news is sentimentality. Sugary sentiments come out of the same reporters' mouths that spout angry asides and ask questions yielding meaningless answers. This schizophrenic tendency of the *South Park* journalist may reflect an opportunistic quality: whatever emotion will grab the most viewers at a particular moment gets played to the hilt in order to build drama.

For example, in one episode the boys begin building a ladder to heaven in order to get a winning ticket last held by their dead friend Kenny that will allow for a five-minute candy-grabbing spree. An HBC field reporter thinks the boys just want to see their friend again and puts things in this melodramatic way:

“But now, that little boy’s three closest friends miss their friend so much that they are building a ladder to heaven in order to ... (begins crying) ... a ladder to heaven in order to try to see him again,” he reports. “It’s so sad and yet so beautiful.”<sup>39</sup>

This tendency toward sentimentality and melodrama is mirrored by the townspeople of South Park, who are equally taken in. In fact, adults in South Park are generally portrayed as less aware and more gullible than the children.

### **Oblivious to a Situation’s Seriousness**

As also depicted in the episode about the ladder to heaven, reporters in *South Park* are also not as aware as they might be. When they do report on stories of actual importance, they often fail to see what’s really going on.

For example, a reporter’s conclusion about the meaning of an important event is a bit off the mark:



“Once again, this does mark the end of communism in Cuba,” the reporter begins. “Cuban dictator Fidel Castro claims he was finally convinced by a young boy’s letter. Now the country is again open to American tourism. Plans can finally resume for Knotts Berry Farm Cuba.”<sup>40</sup>

Another example:

“It appears this town and this reporter are done for,” an HBC reporter states before instantly perking up. “Coming up next, choosing the right hair conditioner. What you don’t know about hair care products could be costing you a bundle.”<sup>41</sup>

And in a story about Romanian quintuplet circus performers taking refuge in South Park, the reporter somehow misses the big picture:

“If you’d like to come down and see the little quintuplets, admission is only \$5, and for a few dollars more you can feed them fish sticks,” he confides.<sup>42</sup>

### **Naively Trying to Do Their Best**

While some may see the report on the quintuplets as solely symptomatic of the profit motive, others might be justified in suspecting a misguided attempt to do some serious news reporting. In fact, *South Park* journalists seem to make such attempts in more than one episode.

For example, when the world is wracked by disaster after kids from around the country all play their recorders at the same time during an event in South Park, an HBC reporter soberly concludes by admitting “the big question that remains (is), how did this happen?”<sup>43</sup>

Such fictional reportorial confusion is not so far from reality. For example, in March 2006 the media reported that a 12-year-old Buena Park girl was raped in her school’s bathroom by a green-eyed, blond-haired man with a one-inch scar on his face and a silver tooth. The girl confessed a few days later that she made it all up.<sup>44</sup>

So perhaps *South Park*'s reporters can be forgiven for being completely snowed by Butters' parents after they made up a story that he had been abducted by "some Puerto Rican guy." Further details are elicited at the press conference covered by HBC, other stations and our print journalist stand-in with the fedora hat: "He was ... average Puerto Rican height. Please, just bring our baby back to me."<sup>45</sup>

But the award-winning *South Park* episode for best portrayal of naiveté in journalism has to go to the one in which a field reporter first begins to catch on that the ATF is acting with suspiciously Waco-like undertones.

"Excuse me, but what proof do you have that those people inside are religious fanatics?" the reporter questions the ATF agent with encouraging incisiveness. But as soon as the agent realizes the reporter can't be persuaded of the mission's righteousness, he turns to Plan B.

"Look, you see this, you see this?" the agent says to the reporter, holding a pink doggie toy with a bell sound. "Yes, you see it, go get it, go get it."<sup>46</sup> The reporter dutifully trots off after the agent throws the toy like a boy tossing a stick for Fido, his insightful question lost in the dust.

### **Baseless Reporting or Shameless Exaggeration for Dramatic Effect**

The opposite of *South Park* reporters naively trying to do their best hard news reporting may be their intentionally making up or exaggerating facts for dramatic effect. J. Jonah Jameson, the editor of Spider-Man alter ego Peter Parker, rants about this type of reporting:

"We're reporters!" Jameson says. "Which means it's up to the Daily Bugle to get the story – the real story ... It means we do research, we separate fact from fiction!"<sup>47</sup>

No episode of *South Park* more succinctly sums up the image of the journalist as purveyor of baseless hysteria than "Two Days Before the Day After Tomorrow." Loosely based on the media's uncritical reporting of New Orleans' mayor Ray Nagin's inflated estimates of the death

toll from Hurricane Katrina, the HBC News 4 team outdoes itself in creating unwarranted body counts in this episode.

An HBC reporter initially states he is 10 miles outside of Beaverton, Colorado because it is impossible to get into the town due to flooding. But the show must go on, so the reporter simply carries speculation to an at best exaggerated extreme.

“We do not have any reports of fatalities yet, but we believe the death toll may be in the hundreds of millions,” the reporter asserts. “Beaverton has only a population of about 8,000, Tom, so this would be quite devastating.”

Continuing in the same vein, the reporter tops things off by saying:

“We’re not sure what exactly is going on inside the town of Beaverton, Tom, but we’re reporting that there’s lusting, raping and, yes, even acts of cannibalism.”<sup>48</sup>

Another example of such unwarranted dramatic effect comes in “Cartman’s Silly Hate Crime,” an episode parodying the murder trial of football legend O.J. Simpson in 1995. These parodies highlight the question of whether the image of the *South Park* journalist helps create people’s perception of real-life journalists or simply reflects the media’s actual inclinations.

The O. J. Simpson parody is labeled by a Trial TV reporter as the “hate crime trial of the century.”<sup>49</sup> Although not as egregiously off-base a report as the one related to flooding in Beaverton, it exhibits the same sort of heightened exaggeration.

### **Breaking News and Sensationalism**

Reports heavy on speculation and low on substance make for sensationalistic breaking news. From the 1931 movie *Five Star Final* to *South Park* at the turn of the 21st century, sensational depictions of superficial breaking news stories are at the heart of much movie and television reporting.<sup>50</sup>

Desperate for circulation gains, the journalists in *Five Star Final* expose “a long-forgotten 20-year-old murder case ... the woman, now respectable, can’t stand the shame and poisons herself. When her husband discovers the body, he also kills himself.” The managing editor eventually resigns, shouting “You thought up the murder and I committed it. But I did it for smaller profit, for wages. You did it for circulation.”<sup>51</sup>

A more recent, and light-hearted, example of the journalist as purveyor of sensationalism is seen in *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgandy*. The big breaking news story throughout much of the movie concerns a pregnant panda.

To find sensationalistic reporting in the world of animated cartoons, one need look no further than *South Park*’s animated predecessor, *The Simpsons*. “Live shots and unconfirmed breaking news undermine the anchor and his profession,” according to a paper on the depiction of journalists in the series.<sup>52</sup> *Family Guy*, another animated contemporary, “often is sensationalized, with over-the-top headlines and stories flooding the news.”<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, supers stating the reporter is “Live,” with “Breaking News,” an imminent “News Flash” or an upcoming “Special Report” are common on *South Park*. Almost all of the news on the show is of this variety.

HBC’s live reports look at out-of-control “giant snake” fireworks<sup>54</sup> or musical recorders causing worldwide damage.<sup>55</sup> Other breaking news stories by the fictional network involve the escape of career criminal Charles Manson,<sup>56</sup> the explosion of a volcano near South Park<sup>57</sup> and South Park residents hurling themselves into the side of a building to protest the airing of a certain show.<sup>58</sup>

And on it goes. From the discovery of a prehistoric ice man<sup>59</sup> to the kidnapping of a little boy<sup>60</sup> to an out-of-control wheelchair<sup>61</sup> to the ATF surrounding the home of suspected cultists,<sup>62</sup> *South Park* journalists' bread and butter is often sensationalistic and breaking.

But is this image of the journalist one that leads people to think of reporters as the media equivalent of ambulance-chasing lawyers? Or is it the other way around? The question arises again as to whether the depiction of journalists on *South Park* only reflects what people already see and believe by watching local (and sometimes national) newscasts.

The answer may lean toward the latter explanation. For example, a 1998 survey by the *Rocky Mountain Media Watch* states that the “news is seriously and consistently out of balance on most stations, with a heavy emphasis on crime, disaster, hype, triviality and commercials.”<sup>63</sup>

A similar analysis can be found in *The News About the News*, by two senior *Washington Post* journalists. Americans “get a distorted caricature of their communities, a daily drama of crime, accidents, traffic tie-ups, stormy weather and other calamities, leavened by cheerful video of photogenic events like parades, charity walks and country fairs,” according to the book's authors.<sup>64</sup>

Consumer advocate Ralph Nader may have summed it up when he said news is “something that jerks your head up every ten seconds, whether that is shootings, robberies, sports showdowns, or dramatic weather forecasts.”<sup>65</sup>

Such sensationalistic reporting is boiled down to its essence in the aforementioned *South Park* episode, “Quest for Ratings.” That episode shows the boys' “Super School News” team first attempting to do an admittedly dry and dull policy-oriented show.

But with low ratings and the threat of cancellation looming, the second show becomes a sensationalistic broadcast that would make the sleaziest local news team proud. To ramp up the

ratings, the “Eyewitness Sexy Action School News” comes into being and goes into high gear right from the get-go.

“Is South Park Elementary about to explode from a methane gas leak?” anchor Eric “Rick” Cartman booms out after flashy graphics and melodramatic sound is used to announce the start of the broadcast. “More on that later. But first, Stan Marsh has a look at some new outfits for the raisin girls.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Corporate Influence Behind the Curtain: *South Park* Reporting a Quest for Ratings**

Yet this emphasis on sensationalism and breaking news didn’t come out of thin air. It is a product of our capitalistic system. Decisions made when television was in its infancy led to the profit motive becoming king.<sup>67</sup>

“(The main concern of the media giants is to make journalism directly profitable,” Robert McChesney writes in *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*. One of the ways to do this is to “concentrate upon stories that are inexpensive and easy to cover, like celebrity lifestyle pieces, court cases, plane crashes, crime stories, and shootouts.”<sup>68</sup>

In *The Media Monopoly*, Ben Bagdikian writes that these action-oriented stories maximized profits by being intellectually comatose. “Far more than in print, TV presentations – in regular entertainment, public affairs, news, or commercials – could not dwell long on any one subject, and they could not be socially or politically controversial,” Bagdikian writes. “Television found the answer early in its history. It was the twin sovereigns of attention-getting in history – sex and violence.”<sup>69</sup>

The end result is skewed, substanceless reporting, according to the *Rocky Mountain Media Watch* report. To get more public policy-oriented, public service-oriented stories on local television news, “Owners and advertisers must see beyond their bottom-line mentality.”<sup>70</sup>

And they can, if they have but the will: “The news media have the power to stop the cycle of sleaze, but the pressure to maximize profits by appealing to the lowest common denominator means that is not likely to happen soon.”<sup>71</sup>

In other words, a “Quest for Ratings” mentality should and can end, but not necessarily will end. On the *South Park* episode with that title, the bottom line, profit-oriented forces making for much of the off-kilter reporting in other episodes cannot be resisted.

Once again, at first the boys try to do some serious, public policy-oriented reporting. Their adviser is unimpressed, saying he is going to cancel the show because it is only getting a “4” rating (four viewers.) That leads to Super School News becoming Eyewitness Sexy Action School News in name and deed. The “Sexy Action” report is about not only speculative methane gas leaks, but also non-existent tornadoes on the horizon, a girl stuffing her bra, a boy with one testicle and a “panda bear madness minute.”<sup>72</sup> Panda bear madness minute may be a take on *Ron Burgundy*’s pregnant panda fixation.<sup>73</sup>

One of the reporters, a disabled boy named Jimmy Vulmer<sup>74</sup> is not pleased with the new format and tries to inject some serious news back into the program. Anchor Eric “Rick” Cartman stops him cold:

Jimmy: “The Park County School Board has approved a bigger budget for the  
computer lab ...

Eric: (cutting Jimmy off) “Oooh, hang on Jimmy....Kyle has the latest on the school  
bathroom habits. Kyle?”<sup>75</sup>

Despite the profit-motivated changes, the boys’ adviser does not have good news. He tells the boys that they beat the previous competition, “Close-up Animals with a Wide Angle Lens,” by three viewers. However, changes need to be made to get better ratings than the updated show,

“Close-up Animals with a Wide Angle Lens Wearing Hats.” The advisor says the boys all get F’s for AV class to teach them how important ratings are.

It is at this point that the only serious investigative report in the entire *South Park* series comes into being. The “kids on cough medicine” story comes to life not because social reform is of great concern to the boys. Instead, it is simply a last resort to get top ratings. And it works. Reports on *PrimeTime Live*, *20/20* and [less often] *60 Minutes* come to mind when watching this third and final news report of the episode.

Reports produced for selfish ends also bring to mind some of the work of fictional television and film journalists. “The most indelible image may be of the journalist as scoundrel, as evil, as the worst of villains because these journalists use the precious commodity of public confidence in the press for their own selfish ends,” according to Joe Saltzman, professor of journalism at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California and the director of the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture.<sup>76</sup> While the boys’ final investigative effort does not show them to be the worst of the worst because they do end up contributing to the public good, their work is certainly done for selfish ends.

So, finally, is the image of the journalist on *South Park* a reflection of reality or the other way around? Perhaps the answer is best left to the eye of the beholder. Whatever the case, Jimmy sums up the state of *South Park* local news best in the midst of the “Sexy News” sensationalistic broadcast:

“This isn’t local news,” he says. “This is a travesty.”<sup>77</sup>



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**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Episode 122: “Quest for Ratings,” *South Park*. First aired November 17, 2004. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>2</sup> [www.thefutoncritic.com](http://www.thefutoncritic.com), September 19, 2005; <http://entertainment.msn.com/tv/article>, April 5, 2006.
- <sup>3</sup> Episode 88: “Free Hat,” *South Park*. First aired July 10, 2002. Directed by Toni Nugnes. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>4</sup> Episode 76: “The Entity (a.k.a. The Ginger Device,)” *South Park*. First aired November 21, 2001. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>5</sup> Episode 49: “The Tooth Fairy TATS,” *South Park*. First aired April 5, 2000. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker, Matt Stone and Nancy Pimental.
- <sup>6</sup> Episode 21: “Summer Sucks,” *South Park*. First aired June 24, 1998. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker and Nancy Pimental.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Episode 24: “Roger Ebert Should Lay Off the Fatty Foods,” *South Park*. First aired September 2, 1998. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker and David Goodman.
- <sup>9</sup> Episode 76: “The Entity,” *South Park*.
- <sup>10</sup> Episode 12: “Mecha-Streisand,” *South Park*. First aired February 18, 1998. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker, Matt Stone and Philip Stark. For more examples of weird reporter names not mentioned in the body of this paper, see the entry for Episode 7 in the appendix.
- <sup>11</sup> Episode 105: “Christian Rock Hard,” *South Park*. First aired October 29, 2003. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>12</sup> Episode 39: “Two Naked Guys in a Hottub a.k.a. Melvins,” *South Park*. First aired July 21, 1999. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker, Matt Stone and David Goodman.
- <sup>13</sup> Episode 52: “Quintuplets,” *South Park*. First aired April 26, 2000. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>14</sup> Episode 36: “Sexual Harassment Panda,” *South Park*. First aired July 7, 1999. Directed by Eric Stough. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>15</sup> <http://snltranscripts.jt.org/78/78ouupdate.phtml>
- <sup>16</sup> Episode 32: “Rainforest Schmainforest,” *South Park*. First aired April 7, 1999. Directed by Trey Parker and Eric Stough. Written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone.
- <sup>17</sup> Skinner, David, *The Weekly Standard*, Daily Standard Section, Jan. 14, 2005,

- 
- <sup>18</sup> CBS News Transcripts, CBS Worldwide Inc., December 4, 2005
- <sup>19</sup> Episode 1: “Cartman Gets an Anal Probe,” *South Park*. First aired August 13, 1997. Directed by: Uncredited. Written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone.
- <sup>20</sup> Episode 29: “Merry Christmas, Charlie Manson,” *South Park*. First aired December 9, 1998. Directed by Eric Stough. Written by Trey Parker and Nancy Pimental.
- <sup>21</sup> “Episode 74: “Osama Bin Laden Has Farty Pants,” *South Park*. First aired November 7, 2001. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>22</sup> Episode 133: “Two Days Before the Day After Tomorrow,” *South Park*. First aired October 19, 2005. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker. ”
- <sup>23</sup> Episode 14: “Terrance & Phillip in: Not Without My Anus,” *South Park*. First aired April 1, 1998. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker and Trisha Nixon.
- <sup>24</sup> Episode 88: “Free Hat,” *South Park*.
- <sup>25</sup> Episode 51: “Timmy!” *South Park*. First aired April 19, 2000. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Episode 98: “Krazy Kripples,” *South Park*. First aired March 26, 2003. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>28</sup> Episode 118: “Goobacks,” *South Park*. First aired April 28, 2004. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>29</sup> Episode 119: “Douche and Turd,” *South Park*. First aired October 27, 2004. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>30</sup> Episode 50: “Cartman’s Silly Hate Crime,” *South Park*. First aired April 12, 2000. Directed by Trey Parker and Eric Stough. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>31</sup> Episode 51: “Timmy!” *South Park*.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid. For more examples of opinionated, if not crazy, reporting not mentioned in the body of this paper, see the entries for Episodes 4, 22, 33 and 80 in the appendix.
- <sup>33</sup> Episode 91: “A Ladder to Heaven,” *South Park*. First aired November 6, 2002. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker. For more examples of meaningless polls not mentioned in the body of this paper, see the entry for Episode 31 in the appendix.
- <sup>34</sup> Episode 100: “I’m a Little Bit Country,” *South Park*. First aired April 9, 2003. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>35</sup> Episode 66: “It Hits the Fan,” *South Park*. First aired June 20, 2001. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.

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<sup>36</sup> Episode 105: “Christian Rock Hard,” *South Park*. For more examples of trivial, soft news reports not mentioned in the body of this paper, see the entries for Episodes 83 and 87 in the appendix.

<sup>37</sup> Episode 55: “Chef Goes Nanners,” *South Park*. First aired July 5, 2000. Directed by Trey Parker and Eric Stough. Written by Trey Parker.

<sup>38</sup> Episode 10: “Damien,” *South Park*. First aired February 4, 1998. Directed by: Uncredited. Written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone.

<sup>39</sup> Episode 91: “A Ladder to Heaven,” *South Park*. For more examples of sentimental and melodramatic reporting not mentioned in the body of this paper, see the entries for Episodes 20 and 59 in the appendix.

<sup>40</sup> Episode 64: “The Wacky Molestation Adventure,” *South Park*. First aired December 13, 2000. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.

<sup>41</sup> Episode 103: “Red Man’s Greed,” *South Park*. First aired April 30, 2003. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.

<sup>42</sup> Episode 52: “Quintuplets,” *South Park*. For more examples of reporters oblivious to the seriousness of a situation not mentioned in the body of this paper, see the entries for Episode 67 in the appendix.

<sup>43</sup> Episode 48: “World Wide Recorder Concert (a.k.a. The Brown Noise),” *South Park*. First aired January 12, 2000. Directed by Eric Stough. Written by Trey Parker.

<sup>44</sup> [www.ocreger.com/ocreger/news/atoz/article\\_1046262.php](http://www.ocreger.com/ocreger/news/atoz/article_1046262.php)

<sup>45</sup> Episode 79: “Butters’ Very Own Episode,” *South Park*. First aired December 12, 2001. Directed by Eric Stough. Written by Trey Parker. For another example of reporters naively trying to do their best not mentioned in the body of this paper, see the entry for Episode 90 in the appendix.

<sup>46</sup> Episode 39: “Two Naked Guys in a Hottub,” *South Park*.

<sup>47</sup> Henderson, Tom, *Everything I Need To Know About Journalism, I Learned From Superman (And Other Comic Books)*, Section F, p. 4, The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Resources, [www.ijpc.org/comicbooks](http://www.ijpc.org/comicbooks).

<sup>48</sup> Episode 133: “Two Days Before the Day After Tomorrow,” *South Park*.

<sup>49</sup> Episode 50: “Cartman’s Silly Hate Crime,” *South Park*.

<sup>50</sup> Ghiglione, Loren and Saltzman, Joe, *Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News*, pp. 21-23, [www.ijpc.org](http://www.ijpc.org)

<sup>51</sup> Ghiglione, Loren and Saltzman, Joe. *Fact or Fiction: Hollywood Looks at the News*, p. 21, [www.ijpc.org](http://www.ijpc.org).

<sup>52</sup> Woo, Stephanie. *The Scoop on the Simpsons: Journalism in U.S. Television’s Longest Running Prime-Time Animated Series*, p. 7, [www.ijpc.org](http://www.ijpc.org).

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- <sup>53</sup> Ryan, Matt. *Quite Frankly Family Guy: The Image of the Journalist in Fox's Popular Animated Series*, p. 15.
- <sup>54</sup> Episode 21: "Summer Sucks," *South Park*.
- <sup>55</sup> Episode 48: "World Wide Recorder Concert (a.k.a. The Brown Noise.)" *South Park*.
- <sup>56</sup> Episode 29: Merry Christmas, Charlie Manson, *South Park*.
- <sup>57</sup> Episode 2: "Volcano," *South Park*. First aired August 8, 1997. Directed by: Uncredited. Written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone.
- <sup>58</sup> Episode 6: "Death," *South Park*. First aired September 17, 1997. Directed by: Uncredited. Written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone.
- <sup>59</sup> Episode 31: "Prehistoric Ice Man," *South Park*. First aired January 20, 1999. Directed by Eric Stough. Written by Trey Parker and Nancy Pimental.
- <sup>60</sup> Episode 79: "Butters' Very Own Episode," *South Park*.
- <sup>61</sup> Episode 59: "4th Grade," *South Park*. First aired November 8, 2000. Directed by Trey Parker. Written by Trey Parker.
- <sup>62</sup> Episode 133: "Two Days Before the Day After Tomorrow," *South Park*.
- <sup>63</sup> Press Release, *Survey Examines Excesses and Improvement in Local TV Newscasts Across the U.S.*, Rocky Mountain Media Watch Texts & Press Releases #5, Aug. 8, 1998, p. 3., [www.bigmedia.org](http://www.bigmedia.org).
- <sup>64</sup> Downie Jr., Leonard and Kaiser, Robert G., *The News About the News* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002) p. 172.
- <sup>65</sup> Fallows, James, *Breaking the News* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 201.
- <sup>66</sup> Episode 122: "Quest for Ratings," *South Park*. For another example of sensationalistic, breaking news reporting not mentioned in the body of this paper, see the entry for Episode 59 in the appendix.
- <sup>67</sup> McChesney, Robert W., *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* (Urbana and Chicago, Illinois.: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 194.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 54.
- <sup>69</sup> Bagdikian, Ben, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 182.
- <sup>70</sup> Rocky Mountain Media Watch survey, p. 10.
- <sup>71</sup> Rowse, Arthur E., *Drive-By Journalism* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1993), p. 209.
- <sup>72</sup> Episode 122: "Quest For Ratings," *South Park*.
- <sup>73</sup> [www.tv.com](http://www.tv.com).

<sup>74</sup> Formerly Swanson.

<sup>75</sup> Episode 122: “Quest For Ratings,” *South Park*.

<sup>76</sup> Saltzman, Joe, *Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film* (Los Angeles: An Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Publication, 2002), p. 146.

<sup>77</sup> Episode 122: “Quest for Ratings,” *South Park*. For another example of ratings-driven, corporate-influenced reporting not mentioned in the body of this paper, see the entry for Episode 3 in the appendix.