

# The View

'IN THIS CASE, POPULAR OPINION MAKES A DIFFERENCE—POTENTIALLY A LIFE-AND-DEATH ONE.' —PAGE 25



New controversies threaten to erase *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *The Cosby Show* from our culture



TUNED IN

## Dump the Confederate flag. Dump Cosby. But don't dump the reruns

By James Poniewozik

FIRST THE WAR IS LOST, THEN THE icons are pulled down. After June's racist church massacre in Charleston, the Confederate flag finally came down from the South Carolina statehouse. And after the release of a 2005 deposition in which Bill Cosby—accused of drugging and raping dozens of women—admitted getting quaaludes to give to “young women [he] wanted to have sex with,” Disney removed his bronze bust from a theme park, like the statue of a dictator toppled in a public square.

So it was for *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *The Cosby Show*. The rejection of Confederate iconography proved too great a leap to clear for the General Lee—the *Hazzard* car emblazoned with the flag—and the reruns were yanked by TV Land. After the Cosby

revelations, Bounce TV and Centric, the last two cable channels rerunning *The Cosby Show*, pulled it off air.

No one was making much money anymore off two '80s series near the end of their syndication life. But we, the audience, lost something all the same. Good or bad, comfortable or awkward, our stories are part of who we are. And every time we bury the ones that make us cringe, we know our own history a little bit worse.

To be clear: I'm not defending the Confederate flag, which is the banner of a nation that fought for slavery and not just an innocuous symbol of “pride.” And I'm not declaring Cosby innocent: I'm not a judge or jury, but the chillingly similar testimony from around 40 women, over a span of years, is unignorable.

Nor am I saying you're obligated to "separate the art from the artist." That's a personal call, and especially tough to do with Cosby, who so deliberately conflated himself with his character on *The Cosby Show*. Cliff Huxtable liked what Cosby liked—from jazz to giant hoagies. He felt what Cosby felt and argued what Cosby argued. Cosby published the best-selling book *Fatherhood* while still on the air as America's favorite dad. According to Cosby's biographer Mark Whitaker, the actor would sometimes slip and refer to his character as "Bill." If he couldn't separate them, you can hardly insist that his viewers do.

But if you believe that pop culture matters, then it matters even when it's uncomfortable (and sometimes for the very reasons it's uncomfortable). *The Cosby Show* remains a landmark piece of American history. It advanced the representation of black families and culture on TV and—however awkward the irony now—showed a generation of kids an African-American dad as a wise, successful father figure. It didn't fix America (as the Charleston shooting proves), but in its way it changed America.

*The Dukes of Hazzard*—well, it's not exactly the same artistic milestone, but even the cheesiest TV is a document of its time. *Hazzard*, launched in 1979, was—beyond the stunt driving and cutoff shorts—a prescient example of conservatism re-branding itself, post-Watergate and pre-Reagan. In the proud, rebellious Duke Boys, it gave us good-ol'-boy traditionalism (family, folkways and that flag) while borrowing from the counterculture the populist, anti-Establishment posture ("fightin' the system") the Tea Party still embraces today.


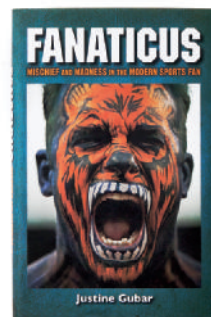
Of course, most fans probably watch it for the muscle cars and Daisy Duke. That's fine; no one can control the ideas other people take from TV. But believing in pop culture and the intelligence of its audience means making it accessible, not sealed off like the last test tube of smallpox virus, to be studied only by hazmat-suited critics lest it contaminate the masses. The worst tool for understanding history is the eraser.

Fortunately, *The Cosby Show* is still available to stream on Hulu, and *The Dukes of Hazzard* on Amazon. Maybe the idea of opting in to the shows is less provocative than their being pushed to your cable box. Or maybe the more mainstream cord cutting becomes, the more of a target streaming controversial programs will eventually be.

Allowing discomfiting TV shows in our cultural library—just like *Gone With the Wind* or *The Birth of a Nation*—is the right thing for a society that believes in ideas. We should repudiate racism, and we should listen to the victims of rape. But TV, like it or not, is part of our history. And those who avoid learning from history are doomed to rerun it.

**VERBATIM**  
 'Once you get to a certain place, people will hire you. They just want you to be in the movie, so they don't care.'

JENNIFER LAWRENCE, on why established actors don't face the same body-image pressures as ones "who have not made it to a certain place"

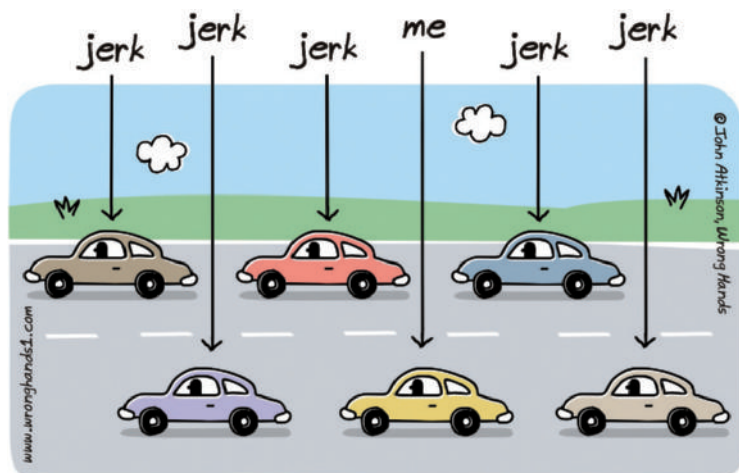



**THE NUTSHELL**  
**Fanaticus**

WHAT DRIVES "NORMAL" PEOPLE TO loot, fight and even kill in the name of their favorite team? ESPN producer Justine Gubar spent years trying to find out, interviewing experts and researching some of the sports world's deadliest protests and celebrations. Her conclusion: it's a potent mix of alcohol (which flows freely at stadiums), adrenaline (after watching violent combat), perceived anonymity (it's easy to blend into a crowd wearing the same team jerseys) and psychology (studies suggest fans who commit riotous acts are more likely to have rooted their identities in their sports teams). The simplest trigger, however, might be loyalty. After all, the term *fan* derives from the Latin *fanaticus*, denoting deep religious devotion.

—SARAH BEGLELY

**CHARTOON**  
**Designating drivers**



JOHN ATKINSON, WRONG HANDS

LAWRENCE: GETTY IMAGES; TOUR TRIANGLE ARTIST'S RENDERING: HERZOG & DE MEIJON; ILLUSTRATION BY MARTIN GEE FOR TIME

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