

# Gift cards are cop-outs, not presents: hint, hint, Mom



CHelsea  
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Are gift cards gifts? We've all opened that one disastrous gift that left us questioning the sanity of the giver and haunting our holiday dreams to come.

With "going-out-of-business" signs decorating the doors and shop windows of the malls this holiday season, all of us are looking for the biggest bang for our buck, while avoiding at all costs the terrible discomfort of the gift that no one would want. With the crazy lives that we all live, finding time in between work, sports, extra-curriculars and school is tough, and finding a perfectly matched present is even harder. So we are left to question the option of the gift card as a quick fix for our gift-giving needs.

Opening a heartfelt gift from a friend and finding an item that is just what you wanted without even realizing it always makes you

happy, but the chances are good that much time and energy was put into finding that perfect gift. Unfortunately, shopping for hours and spending too much hard earned cash isn't something that all of us are willing to do. I love gift cards. Sure, they may be a bit cold and really don't say much about me or my personal preferences, but I love the freedom that a gift certificate grants me.

Miss Manners dismisses gift cards as "a pathetic compromise convenient to people who do not trust their judgment about selecting the right present for those whose tastes they ought to know." But I am a particular person, and I would much rather pick out my own books, movies, clothes etc. than feel pressured to use an item I really don't even like. According to MSN Money, I'm not alone. Consumers will spend \$26.3 billion on gift cards this year, the NRF estimates, up from \$24.8 billion last year.

Gift cards are so versatile. And like Freeman sophomore Kim Cook points out,

the best part about them is they are good for unlocking doors once they're used up! And yet, with our economy slowly going down the toilet, extra cautions should be exercised when buying gift cards this year. Although incredibly convenient, gift cards too can become a hassle when the hidden fees rear their ugly heads in your bill. Some cards come with many fees and some bank cards charge to use the card to begin with. Also, many mall cards deduct a monthly fee if not used within a certain time frame, so it's important to use them right away. Making sure the store that you're endorsing isn't going to declare bankruptcy in the near future is especially important this holiday season.

Let's be honest, we all love presents. You can say it's better to give than to receive, but receiving is fun too. I think we all would agree that unwrapping a pretty gift box is better than peeling open an envelope, but it's the thought that counts right? And besides, that little plastic card may have saved you from an awkward trip to the mall dressed in flamboyant Mexican style, or try-



Jaein Yoo/Shadle Park

## Out with the old and in with the Obama

It's hard not to recognize the implications of this election. We've all seen it on the news, read it in the paper, and heard it from our parents and teachers for the past two years: a black president in the White House is a huge step towards realizing true racial equality and opportunity, even if that step is long overdue. But in a generation where racial issues aren't anywhere near as strained as those of our parents and grandparents, we need to recognize the full breadth of meaning that an Obama administration implies. The election has a different meaning to our younger generation: it's politics, precedent and pop culture rolled all into one.

We have an icon for our time. Politicians have already theorized that decades from now, politics will be classified as either pre- or post-Obama. Regardless of whether or not Obama's upcoming presidency is completely faultless, American history has been changed forever.

American history didn't have the same memorable oomph until George Washington was elected the first president of our nation, until Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, until FDR pulled a struggling nation out of incomprehensible economic decay, until John F. Kennedy's Civil Rights Bill, and (for the generation coming-of-age in 2008) until America voted Barack Obama into the White House.

### Editorial

Every iconic American leader has made mistakes both personal and private, but their legacies of putting a person at the center of the changing times endure.

We are the Obama generation. He is - as so many thousands of people have said before - our symbol of change, and that goes for more than just two-party politics. Whether or not you supported McCain or Obama during the election-frenzy, right now it's all about the O. Put bipartisan quibbles aside and put pride in a national milestone.

### Letters to the editor

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It is a big issue in the world that violence in video games is making teens aggressive. Are these facts true or not? One game that these arguments are focused on is the Grand Theft Auto series, which feature sex, murder, theft, drug use, profanity, and in some cases nudity. Other games include World of Warcraft, Mortal Combat, Doom, Mass Effect, and for some of the older readers 1996's Death Race.

One serious example of the arguments against violence in video games is what happened at Columbine High School. It is known by the people who knew the killers that they were fans of first-person shooter games. They blame this love for that genre of game for what happened at the school. But it is known that many cases of high school shootings are because of the fact that the students are bullied.

Mothers Against Videogame Addiction and Violence (MAVAV) have filed complaints about Wendy's promotion of the Nintendo Wii because it appears to be the console of choice for gamers awaiting Manhunt 2 which is a murder simulation. This is only one game and to put the entire console on trial is wrong. They also were worried about players of the MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role-playing game) World

of Warcraft as it is as addicting as it is fun. They used the case of French gamer who achieved the level 70 after 28 hours of the release of the expansion Burning Crusade.

While the worst thing in World of Warcraft is being able to go around and slaughter innocent little bunnies, squirrels, and cute little kittens, the game is very addicting and it is easy to lose 12 hours while playing. It is both the choice of the person and (if the person is underage) the choice of the parent to let themselves or their child play a game that long.

To sum up, the fact that violence in video games is destroying society is not only ridiculous, it is arrogant to assume that after playing a video game I would want to run around in my neighborhood to disembowel its residents with a chainsaw. In reality violence in play has been around long before video games were created, games like Cops and Robbers. This child's game involves children to pretend to commit criminal activities while the "cops" fire at them with plastic guns. Would you rather I shoot off hordes of zombies with a shotgun in the virtual universe or blow away those closest to me with said shotgun? Personally I would prefer the former.

### Guest Column: Video game violence issue is too exaggerated

JOSH SIMMONS  
West Valley

## Pop, rock and drop pop music like it's hot

There's something mysterious about pop music. While so many young people subject themselves to it regularly, it fails to both sound pleasing and edify its listeners. From coarse rap songs to obnoxious glorification of sensual lust, tunes from pop music tend to have a recurring theme: vulgarity. Of course, I do not speak apropos all forms of pop music but rather only those which society generally deems to be inappropriate or explicit. Pop music spans across a diverse array of sub genres, some of which do not warrant my criticism as much as others; thus, my argument addresses certain forms of pop music in particular, including rap and any form of music filled with attitudes of hate or wanton lust. Thanks to some degree of cultural awareness, I have no need to state how offending many songs in these pop music genres have become in both their lyrics and music videos.

As most of us know, the human mind is a responsive entity insofar as its perceptions and rationalizations are determined in part by the framework given by cultural exposure. Hence it has become almost mundane to draw connections between the mind and the principle of GIGO, garbage-in-garbage-out, yet the analogy, although cliché, rarely falters in explaining human psychological tendencies. In applying this psychological principle to the effect pop music has had on the young generation, evidence shows that indeed the ubiquitous presence of sexually themed music in pop culture does influence behavior. A study published in the August 2006 edition of Pediatrics magazine found that teens who listened to music rife with degrading sexual content were twice as likely to start sexual activity as teens who did not listen to such music.

This is more than statistically significant: it is egregious. This type of music naturalizes sex to young people, delivering it from the ether of abstraction to the level of practical reality; by framing men as sex-driven pimps and women as sex objects, it inevitably teaches promiscuity as the norm. In emphasizing themes of sex, drugs, and money, pop music induces its listeners to embrace a philosophy of raw hedonism. First made formal by Epicurus in the 300s B.C., hedonism states that humans should find their lives on the pursuit of pleasure.

In abstract, this is not always a bad thing, for the prospect of increasing one's personal pleasure or the pleasure of others can motivate people to do great things. The problem lies in the distinction between the intellectual type of hedonism available only to humans and the animal hedonism that froths from atavistic desires stimulated by such media as pop music. John Stuart Mill first hinted toward this dichotomy in his book called Utilitarianism. As a quick and relevant background, utilitarianism is a moral philosophy which states that at a fundamental level, pleasure is good and pain is bad; thus, it condones actions which increase the net pleasure of society and condemns those that inflict net pain. Up until Mill, many utilitarian philosophers evaluated the net pleasure via a method of "calculation," meaning that they in a sense tallied all the pleasurable and painful out-



comes of an action. It was a rather mathematical approach. Mill took utilitarian ethics in a new direction by distinguishing between different fundamental types of emotions, arguing that we can qualitatively value some forms of pleasure over others because people who have experienced both simple and intellectual pleasures tend to prefer the latter.

Overall, then, by acting human we gain the most pleasure as humans. Pop music, as shown earlier, obviously works counter to this end. But even if we dismiss the distinction between types of pleasures, utilitarianism in its vanilla form still denounces pop music. Assuming a person evaluated pop music's degree of morality based on the "utilitarian calculus," one would find that it once again fails to make itself culturally palatable.

While it may supply shallow and temporary pleasure while people listen to it, it causes people to commit acts which society has always known to be damaging, like promiscuous sex and other activities that often ruin lives and wreak the worst vices of cultural chaos. To go even further, if one attempts to examine the morality of these rash actions in the widest philosophical frame, he or she will find that many religious codes also forbid them.

Of course, history has taught us that society does not appreciate someone who comes along tearing up ideas or cultural symbols without suggesting some form of alternative. Thus, having already promoted the pursuit of intellectual pleasures, I encourage the American youth to dive into the world of minimalist music. Some believe that minimalist music only has the ability to drive its listeners crazy with "repetitious patterns of sonic inanity." These people are quite mistaken. Sure, minimalist music by definition exhibits some degree of repetitious structures, but this form of musical organization often serves intellectual ends.

For example, minimalist music expands our cultural horizons by employing a non-Western musical philosophy. Philip Glass, probably the most prominent minimalist composer, once said that his exposures to music from other parts of the world inspired him to see rhythm as an additive entity, leading him to utilize repetitive structures as a way to fluidly paint one large big picture.

The ambiguous, wavelike structures of minimalist music remind us that reality is not as intuitive as we might prefer, and thus I contend that this form of intellectual engagement provides a qualitatively better and more edifying source of pleasure than pop music.

Overall, humans only become animals when conditioned. By appealing to visceral impulses in the human psyche, pop music acts as a catalyst to bring people to commit actions that our society wishes to avoid as per almost any moral standard. We may find other forms of music, particularly minimalism, more conducive to our societal welfare.

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Michael Nave/Lewis and Clark