

The belief in and aftermath of mistruth, yesterday and today



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Movies an extension of Camus and Goethe

The explosion that sends credit card company buildings toppling down in the final scenes of David Fincher's "Fight Club" or Lester Burnham's death at the end of "American Beauty" still reverberate through the minds of young men and women across America. At midnight or later when we're alone, maybe sitting on a front porch or a balcony and doing some vice like smoking a cigarette, drinking a glass of wine or a mug of beer or coffee. These films won't leave us and won't for some time. Maybe because the were creative starbursts, experimental films with

big names that compel the audience to believe every kernel of mistruth.

Wait, start over. Right now I can think of eight things I'll tell my kids about some day:

- 1) The World Trade Center
- 2) The War on Terrorism
- 3) Clinton's blow job
- 4) Michael Jackson's slow but immanent disintegration
- 5) O.J. Simpson
- 6) Bush's election in 2000
- 7) Fight Club
- 8) The Sumatran tiger when the last one dies

I'll tell them how, after I'd seen the film five times, I tried to watch "Fight Club" again with my father. He watched ten minutes and said it was boring him to death and went to his room to talk online. Proof that this film is pertinent to our generation alone. And again, when my father watched "American Beauty" on video by himself one night he said "Where did all the sane people go?"

And I'll add "American Beauty" directed by Sam Medes and written by Alan Ball, who also writes

the HBO series "Six Feet Under." Here we find a similar, more suburbanized version of Fight Club with even bigger actors like Kevin Spacey who warn us against "the evils of materialism."

How many people do we know who've started their own underground boxing rings since watching this film, relatively intelligent people Edward Norton has unwittingly convinced through voice overs taken verbatim from Chuck Pahlaniuk's novel. These people, who toss two hundred years of social evolution to the wind, form a new wave of existentialists. And not just the average "I care nothing about anything" existentialist like a similar seemingly anonymous narrator in Albert Camus' Nobel Prize-winning novel "The Stranger." We're talking ultra-existentialist, like the computer animated penguin who waddles up to Norton in the film's beginning and tells him to "slide," despite the fact this penguin's own species is on the brink of extinction.

For those of you who aren't familiar with Albert Camus, here's

a short history lesson: Camus died in 1960 (does his birthday really matter in this light?) after writing a lot. "The Stranger," concerns a young man who falls victim to a surrealist French society who executes him for not crying at his mother's funeral. Forget about the Arab he shot five times, especially since we're talking 1942, when Algeria was under France's thumb. The point is that everyone, the authorities, the prosecutor and the shoddy defense knows the murder was in self-defense. The point, then, is that they want someone to punish for the decadence of their youth; they could not allow one person to not care, to embrace the cynicism of the world and then let it "slide."

"Fight Club" and "The Stranger" seem to offer up a flawed young man as a role model for the masses. The truth is "The Stranger" was a critical success but it didn't bust the box office wide open, considering France had more important concerns in 1942 like Hitler and his Nazis. Camus never led thou-

sands of young men to follow in the protagonist's bloodstained footsteps.

"The Sorrows of Young Werther" by Goethe, on the other hand, did inspire thousands of teenagers in Germany and Austria in 1772 to buy yellow coats like Werther and blow their brains out. And I'm asking myself why, since the novel wasn't entitled "The Enlightenment of Young Werther."

What these avid yet suicidal readers failed to realize was that Werther has no job and no interests to keep him from fixating on the woman who drives him insane. Goethe was in essence an 18th century slacker whose tragic flaw was sloth. Another misunderstood message compelling the youth to shape up or ship out.

Camus said, "If there is a sin against life, it consists perhaps not so much in despairing of life as in hoping for another life and in eluding the implacable grandeur of this life," and that "if we knew ourselves perfectly, we should die."

This of course refers to calling

yourself a rebel or referring to yourself as "so enlightened" because you've shunned materialism. If you think you're perfect, maybe you really should die because you're probably pissing off a lot of people.

Pahlaniuk, director David Fincher, screen writer Jim Uhls and the screenwriter of "American Beauty," Alan Ball, have carried a torch passed down for hundreds of years, almost. I don't think anyone who lives a generally wholesome and fulfilling life, has a job and does realize humans are the essence of imperfection, see these movies as glimpses at our own nature. We should laugh, cry and be momentarily frightened by them.

We should take them down from the reel or pop them out of the VCR or DVD player when we're done, dust it off and put it on the shelf and admire them, but we shouldn't worship them.

Brian Ray is a fourth-year English student.

President Bush pursues bad, contradictory foreign policy



LISA FLICK

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North Korea poses more of a threat and Liberia exhibits more need

The United States of America is a great nation. Our leaders constantly praise our states for being powerful, rich and strong. We influence other countries globally, not just in political stability but in economic

development as well. Our nation has often been run by great thinkers. However, at times, America's thought processes seem, well... contradictory.

So is the case recently, when American forces invaded Iraq, which was seen as a giant threat, but continue to neglect the far greater threat of North Korea.

Also, global dissent over the pre-emptive invasion of Iraq cost the United States support when it came time to aid Liberia, a country that begged us for help.

In Iraq, America was gung-ho. We wasted no time in disregarding a compromise with other nations.

We quickly moved in troops and within weeks, our military forces were done with the major battles, or so President Bush told us.

But we dragged our feet with Liberia and continue to ignore North Korea. Why the difference? Because strategic purposes dictate a different way of handling these very different countries.

Iraq has always posed special strategic interests. They are the number two oil-producing country in the world. Having control of their oil would bring big bucks to the United States as they sell to other big oil consumers such as India.

Iraq is also known as not a generally progressive nation, but as one that suffers from inequality, lack of education and high poverty.

These conditions are mostly due to U.S. imposed sanctions beginning in 1991. Fixing up Iraq would make Iraq a good

example for other Arab states and it would also serve as a strategic area of influence for America economically and politically.

Liberia, on the other hand, theoretically doesn't offer much to the United States in terms of strategic interests.

As Bush stated in 2000, Africa simply doesn't matter. It doesn't serve as a centerpiece for our "national strategic interests."

Liberia does offer, however, an opportunity for U.S. forces to quell terrorism, which doesn't just breed in the Middle East.

Liberia would be a good starting point for political stability and help American interests in combating terrorism throughout the African continent, where much of it festers.

North Korea, too, serves little

to our interests. Their economy is stagnant and sinking. It would do the United States good, however, if it tried to offer a negotiation package to quell the situation, since an unstable North Korea affects allies such as Japan, China and Russia.

So what is the point of all of this ranting? The United States is contradictory because it picks and chooses whom to police.

Invade Iraq? Absolutely! Negotiation with North Korea? Nah. Aid Liberia? Well... maybe just a bit.

U.S. military actions are too often founded upon strategic interests. We only meddle in other people's affairs if in some way it will benefit us.

Humanitarian intervention, while better left to the experts like the United Nations, should

not follow strategic interests for conflict. The United States should absolutely not intervene in every humanitarian problem. However, it is unfair, greedy, selfish and despicable to only render assistance where our interests are involved.

After all, one of the principle reasons for making war with Iraq was because Saddam was a brutal and tortuous dictator to his people. So is Charles Taylor in Liberia. So is Kim Jong-Il in North Korea.

If the United States sets an example in warring with Iraq because it has a brutal dictator, is the United States not being contradictory in ignoring the need to help others?

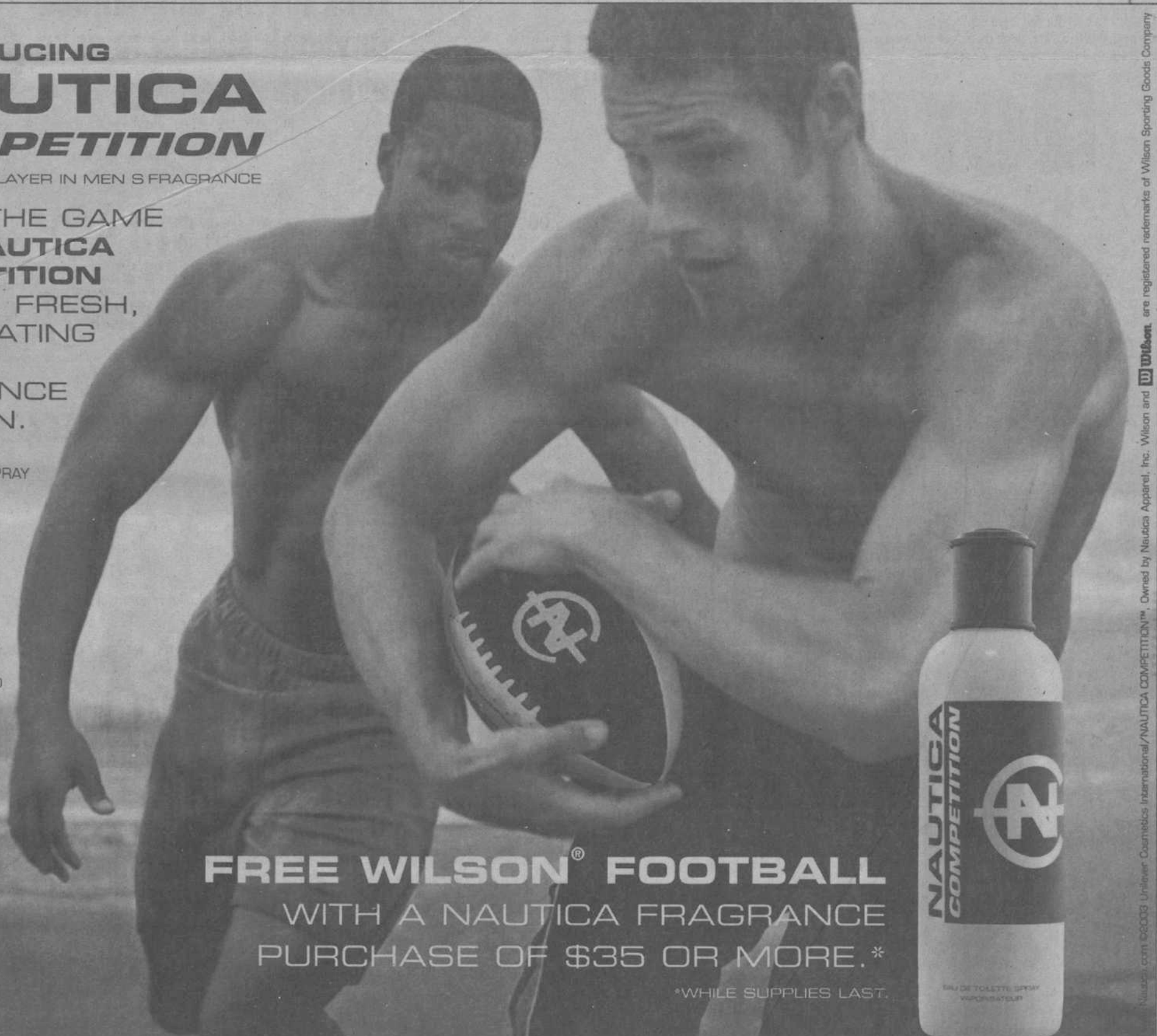
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