

Since spring is upon us, and Spring is traditionally a time of new beginnings, this

seems like an appropriate time to briefly revisit an old topic from a few years ago. "Name the '90s" was the subject, but even those who bothered to address the topic didn't come up with anything compelling to call this wacky (whacked out), fun-filled (gun-filled) decade. You may remember that, by this time in 1986, Time Magazine had declared the Eighties to be the "We Decade." I guess they were still high on the whole We Are The World thing.

Now, it's 1996, junk bonds are apparently back in vogue among cash-hungry corporations, and Mike Millken is a high-paid financial analyst. In the same ill-advised spirit as Time's gushing "We Decade" article, I've decided that the Nineties are the Decade of the Stupid Name.

Don't deny it. If you didn't suspect before, now you *must* know, because Hootie and The Blowfish have sold 3 million records.

An isolated occurrence?

The Inside Story!

DO NOT
CIRCULATE

Smashing Pumpkins just released a wildly successful double album, following on the heels of their last wildly successful album. Five years ago, people *laughed* at me when I told them about a new band called Smashing Pumpkins. "Man, that's a dumb name." I agreed, despairing that a band this cool wouldn't get enough exposure because their name was just too stupid. Shows what I know. I stopped listening after the first album, and now millions of people love them.

While it's easy to say that this is just a case of a good band overcoming a bad name, I'm telling you, Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch still command a loyal following. Ugly Kid Joe was no exception.

I shouldn't be surprised. Underground music has long been obsessed with the aesthetics of ugly. Stupid names abound in college radio: Camper Van Beethoven is as godawful a name as you could hope to pin on a band. The Jesus Lizard is another name that springs to mind. But what has me thinking about this is the fact that dumbness has crept off the well manicured lawns of academia and into the mainstream.

I first ran across Hootie and The Blowfish at

Jabberwock

the college station. "Jesus, what a terrible name." After listening to a few of the bland,

innocuous songs on the album, I chalked Hootie and Co. off as another band doomed to obscurity or trivia, sort of like The Charging Tyrannosaurus Rex of Despair.

Then again, I thought much the same of Toad the Wet Sprocket back in 1989. They were early riders of the stupid name-wave, taking their moniker from a Monty Python skit about the record industry. Now, TTWS, as they are abbreviated, are big on the alternative charts, and they just released a compilation of b-sides.

I don't believe that the '90s is the start of the lame name trend. The Strawberry Alarm Clock, and Country Joe and The Fish are constant reminders of that. We'll skip right over the seventies and just lightly mention Wham!, Wang Chung and Sigue Sigue Sputnik in the '80s.

But today is different. And not just because of Snoop Doggy Dogg. Aggressive stupidity is in vogue: witness Beavis and Butthead, or Rush Limbaugh.

The spread of suburban gangstas is mute testimony to our recent downward trend in common sense. Other, less malevolent signs point up the encroaching mediocrity: Automobiles have really gone downhill in the name department. Used to be, a good car was named after a good beast, in a pure act of animism. The car had the fire of a Mustang, or the speed of an Impala. Today, cars are named "Aspire" or worse, tagged with phony non-words like "Achieva", "Accura" or "Lumina". Then again, the automotive industry has shown a consistent record of stupidity for years now, so they probably don't count.

I think we're embracing stupidity and ugliness because that's what we are becoming. As always, popular culture is just the unconscious mirror of the real culture. As a nation, we don't want to know how ugly and stupid we actually are.

The festering American psyche is close to the surface in these days of Pat Buchanan and chic paranoia, and there's no knife big enough to lance the boil. If you don't want to be covered in hot pus when it erupts, you should start looking for ways to keep your head down.

This is Pookie Mo-Dee signing off, and remember to Color Me Badd.

Someday, with the help of this man, I'm going to sell bridges and swamps.

Go on kid, why spend your time looking over this old colophon, when you could be outside, frolicking in the Warm Spring Sun? Hey, no pressure, it's your funeral. This is NoSuchPress publication 23 Or thereabouts. E-mail jwesley@wizard.com