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To US students Beethoven's a dog, Michelangelo a virus

WASHINGTON: Most young Americans entering university this year can't write in cursive, think email is too slow, that Beethoven's a dog and Michelangelo a computer virus, according to an annual list compiled by two academics at a US college.

To students who will get their bachelor's degrees in 2014, Czechoslovakia has never existed, Fergie is a pop singer, not a duchess; Clint Eastwood is a sensitive movie director, not Dirty Harry; and John McEnroe stars in TV ads, not on the tennis court, Beloit College's "Mindset" list says.

The Mindset list was first compiled in 1998, for the class of 2002, by Beloit humanities professor Tom McBride and former public affairs director Ron Nief.

It was intended as a reminder to faculty at the university that references quickly become dated, but quickly evolved to become a hugely popular annual list that gives a snapshot of how things have changed, and chronicles key cultural and political events that have shaped a generation.

In the first Mindset list, McBride and Nief found that youngsters born in 1980 had ever known only one pope - Polish-born John Paul II, who was elected to the papacy in 1978 and died in 2008.

For the class of 2003 — born in 1981 and featured on the 1999 Mindset list Yugoslavia never existed and they were puzzled why Solidarity was sometimes spelled with a capital S.

Solidarity with a capital S was the first and only independent trade union in the Soviet bloc. It was created in 1980 and went on to negotiate in 1989 a peaceful end to communism in Poland, making the country the first to escape Moscow's grip.

Nief and McBride take a year to put the list together, gathering outside contributions and poring over journals, literary works, and the popular media from the year of the incoming university students' birth.

"Then we present the ideas to every 18-year-old whose attention we can get and we wait for the 'mindset moment'—the blank stare that comes back at you that makes you realise they have no idea what you're talking about," Nief told AFP.

Those moments make it onto the list, alongside interesting historical snippets

like the fact that since the class of 2004 was born in 1982, all but one national election in the United States has had a candidate in it named George Bush.

The list also chronicles geopolitical changes, and sometimes depressingly highlights how little progress has been made on key issues, such as the fight against AIDS.

The class of 2004, for instance, "never referred to Russia and China as 'the Reds'", and in the year they were born, 1982, "AIDS was found to have killed 164 people and finding a cure for the new disease was designated a 'top priority' for government-sponsored research."

The class of 2005 — born in 1983 —

thought of Sarajevo as a war zone, not an Olympic host, and had no idea what carbon paper was.

Apartheid never existed in South Africa for the class of 2006, and for the class of 2007, "Banana Republic has always been a store, not a puppet government in Latin America."

The list is a mirror of how rapidly perceptions can change: to the class of 2013, boxer Mike Tyson was "always a felon" but to students who graduated five years earlier, Tyson was "always a contender."

The list makes some people feel old, like those who remember what Michael Jackson looked like when he was singing in the Jackson Five or recall the days when there were only a handful of channels on television.

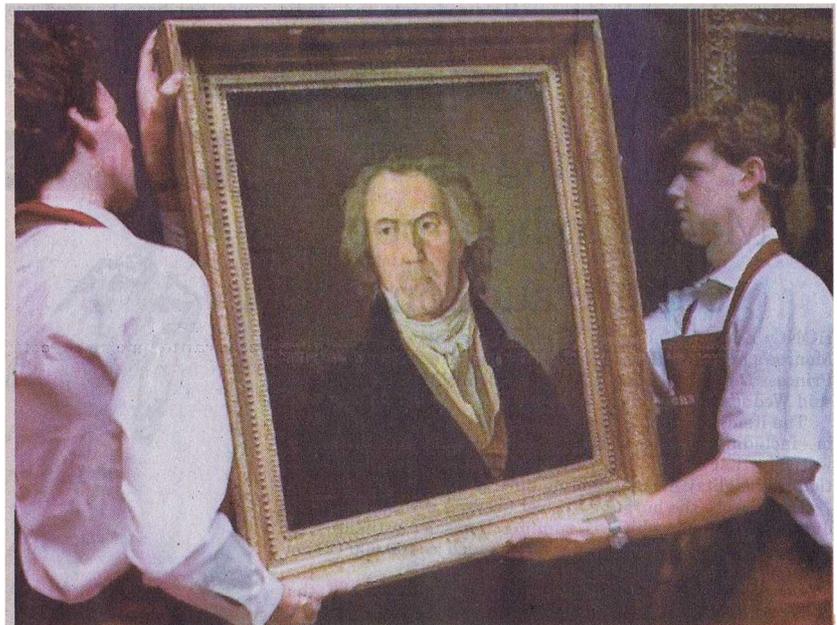
But they're not the only ones who get the blues over the list.

"There are 25- and 26-year-olds that tell us they feel old when they read the list," Nief said.

"Just two years ago, there were some students who learned to type on a typewriter," but others in the graduating class of 2012 didn't know that IBM had ever made typewriters, said Nief.

Few students in the class of 2009 knew how to tie a tie and most thought Iran and Iraq had never been at war with each other.

And for US students who got their bachelor's degrees this year, Germany was never divided, professional athletes have always competed in the Olympics, there have always been reality shows on television and smoking has never been allowed on US airlines. — AFP



MOST young Americans entering university in 2010 think Beethoven is a film star dog, according to an annual list.