

KIRBY MOSS

# White trash ignored by society

**P**overty. Visualize the word. What, or better yet, who do you see?

More than likely it's shades of brown people living in the heart of America's cities amid crime and misery. Peculiar how the image of poverty is chained to race.

How about white trash or poor white trash—ever heard these terms?

A white dude I know said this to me recently:

"Will you look at that white trash," he said about a family he saw in a grocery store.

"What in the hell does that mean!" I asked, puzzled and slightly angry.

"You know," he said. "Dirty, poor white people. They're a disgrace."

What did he mean by that last part of his already elitist remark? A disgrace? Ah! I get it now. America's truly invisible citizens. Poor and down-trodden white folks.

Are they invisible because America's image of itself is a facade of affluence and proper moral etiquette?

White America is well-off. Other America is not. White America is intelligent and rational. Other America is destined for hapless emotion and ignorance.

In reality, however, a profile of American poverty looks like this: In 1990 there were about 34 million poor people in America, according to the federal definition of poverty which is based on family size and income.

Two-thirds of America's poor are white.

A disgrace, he called them. A disgrace to whom?

As if he were saying poverty is a disgrace to the white race, but it's OK for people of color to be poor and hopeless because that's just the way they are.

Or, as one of my friends said so eloquently: "It's an elitist remark. It's



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like saying our trash is equal to everyone else's normal existence or lifestyle."

Consequently, mainstream America disposes of this trash in obvious ways. Seldom do we see images of white poverty in mainstream magazines or on the popular television shows.

In the media and among the conversations of life, there's an absence of "those kind of people" — white people, only a different social and economic flavor of white people.

Even though people of color are typecast and stereotyped in the media, unfortunately they are visible. But the white ones, many who are often poorer than the poor people of color are, where are they?

Closer to our own lives, on this campus. Look around. Where are they? They aren't. The way they dress, the way they talk and the way they think disallows them to enter this enlightened institution.

They don't fit in. Can you believe it—saying a white person in America does not fit in?

So what that dude said, uncon-

sciously, was that it's not enough just to have white skin in America. In addition, you have to either be toiling hard in the dirty jobs that cement the nation's foundation or you have to be well-off, working hard mentally at thankless jobs. And on top of all of that, you have to know the narrow social rules.

Oooops. I've gotten this far and forgot myself. How dare I say something so Marxist as that America is a class-based society. A society where by design the most "accepting" class is the middle because it doesn't have to compete socially or economically with the underclass and can't compete with the upper class.

All the while, the upper class is largely oblivious to the other classes, which leaves the underclass to bicker and harbor hate for each other. The poor "minorities."

They are all in the same line waiting for acceptance into their own society. And while they wait, bicker and cheat each other about who's to go first, the other higher classes are already inside going about their business.

If you look at America's tiered white society, you'll find that symbolically it ends at the respectable white working class, the laborers. Not quite.

If you look deep, you'll see that one level below are the white women who use food stamps to feed their families. Or the white families who live in tattered trailer homes with no heat and little food. Two-thirds of America's poor.

They are the pliant ones who have failed to live up to the ideal of themselves. Their punishment: invisibility. Larger society hides its shame.

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GARY YOUNG

# Learn from Magic's mistake

**W**ho could forget the 1982 NBA finals, when Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was benched with an injury, Earvin Johnson — normally a point guard — stepped in to play center and, in the greatest individual performance in the history of basketball, led the Lakers to a comeback victory.

Just a few years earlier this wonder-kid with a flashy smile and a catchy nickname single-handedly made basketball a TV sport, saving the NBA from financial ruin. He was larger than life — a good-guy giant right out of an American fairy tale.

Perhaps most tragic, then, was that fateful press conference about a year ago when Magic announced his retirement. Very few of us could really hope that he might champion his most formidable foe, AIDS. He had saved the Lakers; he had saved the NBA. But who could believe that this 32-year-old miracle worker could save himself?

All good stories have a moral, and in the wake of the announcement that Magic had AIDS, there has been heartfelt and fearful concern over how to deal with this awful menace. Are we at risk? How do we protect ourselves?

There have been essentially two responses to the protection question, both with powerful advocates. Magic began to spread the word about "safe sex." On the other hand, Bill Cosby followed him up voicing less common advice: abstinence.

Many within the media and educational elite have long presented the first option, while the second has been advocated by the more marginalized voices in our culture, including the church. On talk shows, in advice columns, on radio and TV, interviews with the so-called experts without fail urge that abstinence is too unrealistic.

But reflect for just a moment on the abstinence argument and its weight. Simply put: If you don't have AIDS and you don't have sex or use intravenous drugs, you will not contract HIV. Period.



**Freedom as license has already cost us our most valuable basketball player. Surely our culture has the good sense to learn the moral of the story of Magic Johnson.**

In the face of such a powerful threat, it is striking that some do not have the courage to even speak the option that everyone — conservative or liberal — admits is the most effective way of preventing the spread of the disease.

In a culture that rightly advises and enforces abstinence from cigarettes and alcohol until a certain age, it seems odd that we cannot make similar exhortations against youthful sex. Certainly we would all think it strange to find that, in the face of escalating youth gun use, our public school teachers would resign to saying, "Well, they're going to do it anyway" and begin teaching handgun safety.

Expecting high schoolers, collegiates and other unmarrieds to abstain from intercourse may in fact be unrealistic. Casual sex apparently goes without saying. But the two factors in this equation — young people and unbridled sexuality — do not necessarily connect.

There must be a hidden premise. Recognizing it forces us into some uncomfortable reckoning with a seri-

ous flaw in the emerging American character.

We increasingly cannot resist our impulses. Our appetites reign. Restraint and self-control are more and more, as one "Nightline" pundit put it, almost triumphantly, fictions of our Victorian past.

But with the benefits of that past well in hand, America has taken to redrawing traditional notions of "freedom" in favor of "freedom to." We have ignored the importance of "freedom from." Dynamic freedom has given way to simple license.

Ironically, we find that by satisfying our appetites continually through exercising our "freedom to," we unwittingly increase our threshold for satisfaction. Not unlike the poor soul addicted to drugs, our flesh craves more.

Life according to appetite is increasingly impoverished. Looking back up the slope of increasing demands, we find that while we claim freedom, we are evermore enslaved.

Liberty — rightly understood — is only valuable within boundaries. Lawlessness is no panacea against restraint. If we liberate ourselves from tyranny, our new autonomy risks a more insidious oppression from within.

As First Things magazine editor Richard John Neuhaus has written: "Autonomy alone, thought of the unqualified fulfillment of the self, is a new oppression. Beyond autonomy is the free acknowledgement of that by which we are bound. . . . And we are bound to be free in the sense that our freedom is only actualized in the free acceptance of that which authoritatively claims our assent and obedience."

Freedom as license has already cost us our most valuable basketball player. Surely our culture has the good sense to learn the moral of the story of Magic Johnson. More doubtful is our courage to act on it.

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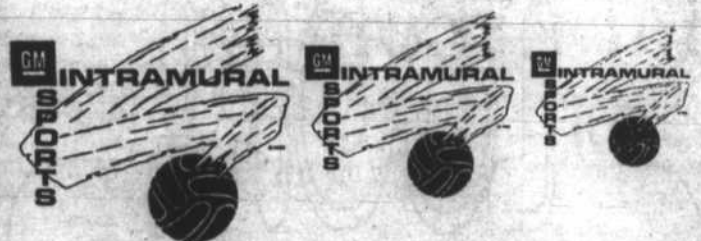
The Computing Resource Center is offering free microcomputer seminars to UNL students. The seminars will feature an introduction to Microsoft Word for the Macintosh and WordPerfect for IBM machines. No reservations are required.

Lab Location	Dates	Times
<b>Introduction to Microsoft Word for Macintosh</b>		
Andrews	Tuesday, March 9	4:00 - 5:00 p.m.
<b>Advanced Microsoft Word for the Macintosh</b>		
Andrews	Tuesday, March 16	4:00 - 5:00 p.m.
<b>Introduction to WordPerfect 5.1 for IBM</b>		
Sandoz (IBM)	Wednesday, March 10	3:00 - 4:30 p.m.
<b>Advanced WordPerfect 5.1 for IBM</b>		
Sandoz (IBM)	Wednesday, March 17	3:00 - 4:30 p.m.

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