

SAM KEPFIELD

Media flood real disaster

The 40 days and 40 nights of rain here on the Great Plains long ago wore thin. Any sane person, starved for honest, unadulterated sunlight, is by now searching for livestock or virgins to sacrifice to the Sun God.

Perhaps more pestilential than the torrential downpours themselves is the news coverage of their side effects. The Flood of '93 is now an Official Disaster, complete with its own little logo for the evening news stories. It's the first time since the Gulf War and the Election that they have so graced such an event.

What's wrong with the media coverage of the flood? The same thing that's wrong with media coverage of any natural disaster. I don't even need to see the first five minutes of the news to tell you what format it will follow.

Headline: Floods in the Midwest (fade to logo). Cut to: Map of central U.S., with Mississippi River highlighted and shown as being half as wide as Iowa. Stock footage of a levee breaking, water rushing through. More stock footage of housetops poking through rushing water, with a street sign or two thrown in for good measure. Still more stock footage of people using boats to get from place to place (and if it's ABC, throw in Peter Jennings, outfitted like Bogart in "The African Queen"). Cut to: Meat puppet anchor with serious intonation looking appropriately concerned.

And, of course, the most offensive part, the segments that really gall me, are the "human interest/suffering" bites. News crews go to a submerged town, find the most miserable-looking human there, and shove a camera in their tear-streaked face. "Well, you've lost everything, your house is a sodden mess, all the treasures of a lifetime — baby pictures, wedding pictures, heirlooms — ruined, your crops are under six feet of water, your machinery is a loss, the livestock drowned. HOW DO YOU FEEL, HUH? WON'T YOU PLEASE TELL OUR AUDIENCE HOW MISER-



When the flood waters recede, and the news crews go back to their natural habitats in New York, and the tearful hinterlanders are left to recover in anonymity, I will be thankful that I no longer have to suffer the emotional vampirism of network news, feeding off my native region.

ABLE YOU FEEL AT THIS VERY MOMENT?"

Were it me, I'd reply "not as miserable as the orifice I insert that minicam into will if you don't get it out of my face right now." But, inevitably, people respond to this, out of some sick, twisted desire for fame. There are three set types of answers, to be used in rotation every day.

The first is numb shock and disbelief, surveying the flooded field or home. The second is the tearful "we've lost EVERYTHING" shot. Finally, there's the resolute "Well, we just have to trust in the Good Lord" spiel, delivered in a horrendous accent.

Anyone on the coasts watching this will get an interesting and distorted picture of the interior of the country. To them, it must seem like Brigadoon, which slumbers peacefully until a natural disaster (flood, drought, tornado, take your pick) wakes the townspeople. Whereupon

waking, the natives are reduced to near-mutes, a big bunch of crybabies who can't take a little property damage, or a pack of credulous bumpkins straight out of "Elmer Gantry," the kind who cheered Frederick March in "Inherit the Wind," sitting around waiting for the Good Lord to deliver them with an Ark.

I reserve my worst commentary for the treatment of the President's three, count 'em, three journeys to Iowa and Missouri. Bedecked in cowboy boots and golf shirt, ready for the cover of GQ, Bill Clinton made stops there to and from his summit in Tokyo, and ventured there last week. I guess he cares three times more than Bush did about Hurricane Andrew victims, cavalierly powerboating with the knowledge of terrible suffering. Clinton cut short his Hawaii vacation by a whole 12 hours, after nearly two days of hints that the press would roast him as surely as it did Bush if he didn't go to the Midwest and show that he cared.

And for what? A couple of photo ops filling sandbags. Listening to pathetic tales of woe in Des Moines, putting him in Full Empathy Mode, biting his lower lip and sobbing "hang in there." He can have his pygmy Labor Secretary pass out checks for a couple million each at a Flood Summit. Two million? Hmm. Ought to cover the overtime pay for emergency workers in St. Louis.

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No, I can watch coverage of some poor slob in a hellhole like Bosnia, Somalia or Los Angeles, and feel grateful that at least I don't live there.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rush Limbaugh column gets mixed reviews

According to your latest whimsical and utterly goofy column ("Limbaugh craze will soon fade" — DN, 7/15/93), you need one more history lesson, Jeremy. Ahem.

The unprecedented popularity of Rush Limbaugh has little to do with Rush, and has much to do with his message. That message is not "poverty is funny." Indeed, it's much the opposite. He simply, if outrageously, recognizes the key to alleviating poverty and despair; the maximization of everyone's potential under a free enterprise system, higher standards of excellence, stronger traditional values and a public trust in the historically American ideals of lower taxes and limited government.

Yet you try painfully hard to be

"cool, hip, cutting edge," pretending in vain that conservatives are some passing fancy, just a temporary nuisance preventing your backward heroes (Bill, Hillary, Marx, etc.) from doing the business of "reinventing America" in the image of all those sadly ruined moments to "fairness" in Eastern Europe. But for all your silly caricaturing, you end up being unable to disguise the mind-numbing dullness of your message: bigger, fatter, costlier government, packaged as an antidote to a multi-media phenomenon.

Rush Limbaugh is not the fad you wish he was. He is a high-profile, intelligent, often funny spokesman of the largest movement in American politics: the rebirth of a conservatism

born in revolution a scant 217 years ago. No slapdash splatter of left-wing propaganda by talentless liberals can counter such a wonderful force.

But keep trying. You make it that much easier to prove the point.

Boyd Johnston
sophomore
political science
President
Students For America

I would like to voice my comments on Mr. Fitzpatrick's article on Rush on July 15, 1993: "marvelous!"

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EDITORIAL

Ban lifted?

President Clinton's policy pleases no one

After kicking off his presidency six months ago with a plan to lift the ban on homosexuals in the military, President Clinton's finalized policy seems to be a compromise that all can live with.

But the problem is that all sides are taking the 'glass is half empty' approach with Clinton's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, and for just cause.

The main concession in the policy from the military's previous ban on homosexuals, is that recruits will no longer be asked if they are gay. Military personnel would also be allowed to go to a gay bar or a gay-pride march without any action being taken against them.

So why are gay-rights advocates marching in San Francisco and Chicago protesting the president's new policy?

The main reason is because Clinton backed off of his initial pledge to get the ban removed completely, leaving some stipulations that has those favoring homosexuals in the military concerned.

Gays can still be discharged for open homosexual conduct, such as holding hands or kissing in public.

The new policy also creates a rebuttable assumption if a member of the military says "I am gay." The soldier who makes such a comment can rebut the assumption that he/she is engaging in homosexual conduct, by either lying or by taking a vow of celibacy for the duration of his/her term of service.

So how far have things really improved for gays under Clinton's 'revolutionary' new plan?

On the other side, military leaders who were concerned about having homosexuals in the armed services now must live with the fact that their will be gays under their command.

True, homosexual behavior will be under strict guidelines, but feeling from the military seemed to be an 'all-or-nothing' proposition, in that they were looking to keep the homosexual ban strong, as highlighted by previous comments made by high-ranking military officials.

So who ends up satisfied with the new policy? Probably only the president himself.

While Clinton has once again tried to satisfy everyone, he has ended up pleasing no one.

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