

MARK BALDRIDGE

No shame in being male, white

I'm a man. What's more, I'm a white man. So to hear some people tell it, that makes me some kind of ogre.

Or is it victim?
Or have I simply gone out of fashion?

No single group has come under more scrutiny in recent years than the white male. And though no one agrees just what he is, everyone wants to get a good look at him before he vanishes entirely.

Not that his numbers are decreasing—I have no figures on that. There certainly seem to be plenty of white men around.

But some of them have gone underground. They've begun to develop a kind of protective coloring—trying to blend in more, not stick out, keep a low profile.

"I'm a white man," they seem to be saying, "feel my shame."

Even writing about being a white man, a fact of my life that is obvious to all, could make me something of a target.

I may have come too far out of the closet.

But I was raised to believe that racial prejudice was dead. As a small child, I knew that some people had once preached the superiority of one race over others. But I figured everyone knew better than that these days.

I was disillusioned later, but the sense that people should be smarter than that stayed with me for a long time.

It made me angry to see people around me persist in the notion that the Jews or the blacks or the Mexicans—I grew up in West Texas—were shiftless and crooked and stupid and cunning—somehow, all at once.

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If you're dealing with a group as small and cohesive as the Old Order



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Amish, maybe. I mean, they wear dark colors, they apparently don't suffer from schizophrenia, and they tend to save money.

But a whole race?
How many millions of people do you have to lump together before you end up simply with "humanity?"

If white men have committed atrocities, they did not do so in a vacuum but in the context of societies made up of men, women and—increasingly, in modern times—other races as well.

But I believe white men have been responsible for a good deal more than atrocities.

White men have been artists, musicians, scientists, physicians, statesmen, philosophers, mathematicians and humanitarians.

They have explored the surface of the moon, founded democracies and built bridges, dams and foundries.

Some of them have known what it was to be oppressed—the Irish immigrants to the United States of a century back, for instance.

They have suffered hardship and formed labor unions. They have overcome enormous odds to find peaceful ways to serve justice.

If one may feel pride in the accomplishments of a group whose membership is only an accident of birth, one may feel pride at this.

The history of white men is not unlike the history of men everywhere. But what is a white man?

Obviously, no one can say. Asking any white man, no matter how prominent, to answer for white men in general is like asking Spike Lee or

Michael Jackson to answer for the life choices of black men.

But somehow the large population of white men is supposed to be homogenous enough that talk about its "privilege" makes sense.

Recently I related a story among friends about a period of my life when I was extremely poor. I didn't have enough to eat.

Someone responded that I was never in any danger of starving. I always had an "escape route" and that if I was hungry it was because I chose to be.

Of course he was right.

I could have joined the army, gone to prison or stood in bread lines. I was in no danger of starving to death as long as I didn't mind facing one of those alternatives.

But I doubt seriously he, or anyone present, would have pointed out the same fact to a black woman who told the same story.

Somehow my poverty lacked the nobility that hers would possess.

And when a woman recently told me my writing was very obviously from a male perspective, she felt she had to qualify that assessment somehow.

"I hope you don't think that was a slam," she said.

Of course I didn't. I'm a man, my writing is written by a man.

That means something to me. I'm glad I'm a man. I'm happy just like God—or whomever—made me.

And what's more, I'm white.

Baldridge is a senior English major, a Daily Nebraskan arts & entertainment senior reporter and a columnist.

SAM KEPFIELD

Freedom of speech includes TV

The current debate over television violence and the Fairness Doctrine on radio has once again demonstrated that, confronted with a tough moral dilemma, liberalism invariably takes the quick, feel-good route. It ought to chill the blood of anyone in the journalism business.

The Reagan administration scrapped the Fairness Doctrine, a nettlesome leftover from radio's early days, in 1987. The doctrine had been abused by both the Kennedy and Nixon administrations to harass and silence opponents. If a radio station wasn't providing enough equal time for other sides of issues, anyone could, with minimal effort, challenge the station's license renewal. It cost the station greatly, and the doctrine acted as a negative reinforcement on controversial issues.

With the Fairness Doctrine gone, talk radio exploded in popularity and numbers. It rapidly became the bane of the liberal media and government establishment, presenting sides to issues often ignored or covered up. Last year, talk radio led the major media with coverage of the presidential campaign and Rush Limbaugh's constant hammering of Congress for the House Bank Scandal.

No less an organ than the Wall Street Journal dubbed the attempt to reinstitute the Fairness Doctrine the "Hush Rush Bill." Limbaugh's brand of common-sense conservative populism has made him a genuine threat to the media establishment, with good reason.

People listen to talk radio not because they are conservative cranks, but because the traditional media has failed them. The major networks, the major news magazines and most newspapers all carry the same ideological stamp, that of a socialist utopianism fostered by the 1960s.

There are, to be sure, exceptions, such as Ted Koppel's "Nightline,"



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but by and large people are disgusted with the manner in which the media portray traditional American values and roles. Witness the flap over Vice-President Dan Quayle's criticism of Murphy Brown last year. Now, of course, people are beginning to think he was right.

Which, of course, brings us to our next attempt at the creation of a ministry of truth. The sight of Attorney General Janet Reno telling the Congress and broadcasters they better clean up television from violence and sex or else the government would do it was truly astonishing. I don't suppose the First Amendment ever crossed the mind of the Waco Kid when she made this threat.

"Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." All speech is protected, except pornography and clear and present dangers to public safety, even when it's in bad taste, be it violence or sex.

The theory behind this assault on the First Amendment is that upon viewing violent TV shows, impressionable youth will at once go out with AK-47s and waste the nearest McDonald's.

The censors have it backward. TV violence is not causing the youth violence and general mayhem, but is reflective of a general societal breakdown and decay in America today. Look at the plots of most programs that premiered this season. Hardly an intact family among them, and single

mothers abound. The lack of fathers fairly reflects the breakdown in the family in society, as well as a welfare system that discourages marriage and divorce laws that allow dissolution of a marriage for any reason, or no reason at all.

Letting the government decide content guidelines for TV shows is the worst possible answer. It's the gutless cop-out, creating another monstrous bureaucracy and making the problem worse. It demonstrates liberalism's nasty bent toward paternalism, assuming people to be too incompetent to do things for themselves, and that government knows better how to run their lives than they do.

TV is an appliance, and parents better learn on their own to shut it off. The battle to control the violence reflected in TV will be won in living rooms, not in Congress.

Underlying the drive for government control over the public airwaves is the ridiculous notion that a person has the right not to be offended.

Wrong. There is no such right, only the responsibility for tolerance of speech, no matter how offensive. This is the glue that holds society together. No government that truly calls itself free can be in the business of deciding what is acceptable for public consumption without enslaving us all.

Kepfield is a graduate student in history and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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