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EDITORIAL

## Bless the Press

### Images reflect public self-deception

If the mainstream media is an adequate representation, journalism has reached its compost age, yet who is to blame if more people recognize Connie Chung than Charlayne Hunter-Gault?

While the President of the United States was in Europe negotiating a new North Atlantic Treaty Organization, national attention was focused on mega-dysfunctional Bobbitts.

While former President Jimmy Carter derailed escalating hostilities between the United States and North Korea, the press was on the L.A. freeway with O.J. Simpson. That's what America wanted to see; the man everyone thought they knew.

The man was a manifestation of America's desire for heroes. He was conceived by the eye of the camera, which distorted the reality of his life into a fairy tale. He needed help, and he needed it a long time ago, but it didn't fit the image.

If the truth about one man so blatantly contradicts his public image, then what can we possibly assume about our knowledge of the rest of the world?

The media's presentation of news generally reflects the public's demand for information. The public's demand for information reflects the time and energy people have to spend on news events, and to some extent it reflects the level of the nation's intellect.

Many people spend their days and weeks at jobs where they receive marginal satisfaction and salaries that just about maintain some form of the American dream. They go the bar for a round or two before going home to a dinner of mostly saturated fat.

Few people care to spend their free time speculating about international treaty negotiations or unstable foreign power structures. There probably weren't many workplace wagers placed on the outcome of Carter's trip. No one probably put together a NATO "dream team" league.

American lifestyles dictate that information be dispensed in quick, brief, visual packages. Those packages can be deceiving, providing an image that may only reflect public desire. Reality is a huge, complicated, gray area that requires time and effort to understand. When we've been deceived, it's no one's fault but our own.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Staff editorials represent the official policy of the Summer 1994 Daily Nebraskan. Policy is set by the Daily Nebraskan Editorial Board. Editorials do not necessarily reflect the views of the university, its employees, the students or the NU Board of Regents. Editorial columns represent the opinion of the author. The regents publish the Daily Nebraskan. They establish the UNL Publications Board to supervise the daily production of the paper. According to policy set by the regents, responsibility for the editorial content of the newspaper lies solely in the hands of its students.

LETTER POLICY

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor from all readers and interested others. Letters will be selected for publication on the basis of clarity, originality, timeliness and space available. The Daily Nebraskan retains the right to edit or reject all material submitted. Readers also are welcome to submit material as guest opinions. The editor decides whether material should run as a guest opinion. Letters and guest opinions sent to the newspaper become the property of the Daily Nebraskan and cannot be returned. Anonymous submissions will not be published. Letters should include the author's name, year in school, major and group affiliation, if any. Requests to withhold names will not be granted. Submit material to the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448.

SAM KEPFIELD

## Church faces new Inquisition

In the PC era, when it is unpardonable sin to speak ill of another based on race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., anti-religious bigotry is the last acceptable form of prejudice remaining.

Consider first the so-called "Religious Right," who has "taken over" the Republican parties in Minnesota, Iowa, Texas, and Virginia.

The hysteria over the "Religious Right" harkens back to the late '70s and early '80s, when the liberal elite in this country became terrified of the Moral Majority. The nerve of those people — to actually talk about religion and morality in public! Surely they had nothing less in mind than the creation of a religious dictatorship here in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Not quite. Most conservative Christians are not former shareholders in the Heritage USA theme park. They are, by and large, people with sincere convictions. They love America and are alarmed at how society has gone to hell in a handcart over the past thirty years. They are genuinely outraged at the excesses and abuses of a government that has ceased being "of the people, by the people, and for the people." All they want to do is restore some sense of decency, morality, virtue and responsibility to our citizenry. They wish to spare us from going the way of Rome, wallowing in our own decadence and destroying ourselves from within.

To accomplish this, they have not "taken over" any state GOP organization. Conservative Christians walk precincts, knock on doors, and hand out leaflets — standard procedure for any grassroots movement. The GOP leaders alarmed by this are generally the Eastern Establishment types who led the party to disaster before the Reagan Era. With their go-along-together-backslapping ways that have spent us into a deep pit, the Establishment types are properly terrified of being unmasked.

Catholic faithful around the world (especially in the United States) face a different dilemma. The Church is under increasing attack of late, the latest indignity being allegations of



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price-fixing in the publication of its new catechism. From Sinead ("fight the real enemy") O'Connor on down, everyone wants a dig at the Church and at John Paul II.

The Church isn't with it, they say John Paul II is too old-fashioned, this is the twentieth century, so for gosh sakes let's get rid of all these silly restrictions against birth control, ordaining women and gay marriages.

If that's not bad enough, the ever-declining population of priests is portrayed as a haven for child molesters, and where there's injury, there are packs of slaving lawyers. It's gotten so bad that the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has nearly been forced into bankruptcy by these suits.

Some problems do exist, but they are largely of administrative malpractice in handling the few problem priests, and this may be a signal to the Church hierarchy to be a bit more careful in the future. As for the doctrinal gripes, the Church is doing what it ought to — nothing. A few scattered protesters might be enough to make a spineless president change his policy on Haiti or gays in the military, but the Catholic Church is a different matter. When the Church talks about principle, it has an entirely different meaning — it is, literally, the word of the Lord. Not something you'd want to alter to fit the latest polls.

Class antagonism fuels a good part of the animosity against conservative Christians and the Catholic Church. Fundamentalists have always been seen as polyester-clad, snake-handling, tongue-speaking denizens of trailer parks, gullible cretins who send thousands to Jimmy Swaggart or Jim Bakker.

Catholicism has always been seen

as a bit foreign to American society, steeped as it is in mainstream Protestantism. Catholics with strange accents came to America, occupied the worst tenements and did the dirtiest jobs. In response, they stirred up nationalist sentiments that never died.

The most worrisome aspect of all this is that the federal government has now given its imprimatur to religious persecution. The EEOC recently sent out for comment a proposed addition to the Code of Federal Regulations defining and outlawing "religious harassment." Under this, a person could be sued for any sort of proselytizing. The only hopeful sign is that it received 39,000 comments, more than for any other regulation ever, and 95 percent were against it. The EEOC chairman claims that wearing a cross or displaying a Bible won't be covered, since reasonable people wouldn't construe that as harassment. The problem is that reasonable people rarely define these debates.

Sexual harassment got hijacked by the radical feminists, and the nation was treated to the circus at the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings. Under the law as it stands today, sexual harassment need not cause "serious psychological injury" in order for the harasser to collect damages. It doesn't take a legal genius to see where this is going when applied to "religious harassment."

That we should risk a new Inquisition against religion when we so desperately need its influence means that we are moving farther away from the belief that we are "One nation under God" — any God — and edging that much closer to barbarism.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Execution Solution

A Neil Spears column on the circus frenzy surrounding executions can be summed up in two words: RIGHT ON! I personally oppose capital punishment altogether, but if we're going to start putting inmates to death again in this state, I'd just as soon see it done without the despicable display of stupidity I saw on WGN the night Illinois executed mass murderer John Wayne Gacy.

Hundreds of idiots with obviously nothing better to do, gathered outside the state penitentiary in Joliet, Ill. Some of them were dressed in clown attire, while others sang "nah-nah-nah-hey-hey good-bye" and counted

down to 12:01 like it was New Year's Eve. To further illustrate this absurdity, a week after Gacy was executed, several paintings he did while in prison were sold at an auction. One Chicagoan bought two dozen of them for an estimated \$20,000, then burned them. He responded, "I wish we could have burned them all."

This coming June 25 marks the 35th anniversary of the execution of Charles Starkweather, the last person to die in Nebraska's electric chair. I for one would like to see this drought continue, but it appears our excuse for an Attorney General is soon going to get his way. If Harold Otey, John Joubert and the rest of the scum on death row finally meet the execution-

er, I hope Lincolnites have better sense than to start a pep rally of idiocy by gathering like a mob outside the penitentiary gates. The state might also try dumping that ridiculously inhumane, outdated chair in favor of lethal injection which produces the same result without all the sickening dramatics.

If these men must die, then let them die. No crowds, T-shirt vendors or tabloidish media orgies are necessary. The survivors of both the condemned and their victims will thank you in the long run.

Scott Carpenter  
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