

SARAH WEST

Victims are robbed of humanity

Tonya Harding, the queen of all figure skating machismo, had rival skater Nancy Kerrigan (otherwise known as Little Miss Perfect) bopped on the knee to keep her out of the Olympics; Michael Fay, American teenager and suspected vandal, had his butt caned in Singapore (pictures will be forthcoming, I'm sure); and Nicole Simpson, 35, was stabbed to death by her husband on June 12, 1994. No, we don't know that for sure. No, he hasn't been tried and convicted. Unfortunately, the minds of most people can move faster than the criminal justice system.



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Normally, I am a civil libertarian's civil libertarian. That is, I am usually the one who is making the argument that the right of the accused to a fair trial is the most important thing to consider in a criminal case. I attest that, when cases are "tried in the media," it makes it very difficult for a defendant to get a fair trial. I debate that capital punishment is cruel and serves no purpose other than to offer revenge to the family of a murder victim. I assert that evidence obtained through an illegal search shouldn't be admissible in court because it encourages police to do more illegal searches. Blah, blah, blah.

You'll have to excuse my brief abdication of these concepts that I normally hold in high esteem. You see, I'm a little bit tired of hearing about previously unheard of and especially heinous rapes, murders, mutilations, and other crap of this kind. It's scary to think about, but stronger than fear is a feeling of outrage at the way in which these crimes are covered in the media and talked about on the streets. When crimes are committed, even murder, it's "okay" to the public and the press as long as the murderer seemed to have a good reason (Elly Nessler, the woman who killed her son's molester in a California courtroom), if the murderer has a good sob story and/or movie star looks (Lyle and Erik Menendez), or simply has a good public image. The O.J. Simpson case is a prime example of this. The

public is now heavily heaping sympathy on "the Juice." Nevermind the man is suspected of murdering his own wife and apparently terrorized her from the day he married her. People actually feel sorry for him because he got caught. People cheered him as he drove down the L.A. freeway, a fugitive, dismissing his heinous deeds and conveniently ignoring the victims. They held up crude signs saying "The Juice" or "We love the Juice" as his white Bronco drove past, helicopter blades cut through the air, and cameras flashed.

A more common occurrence than the above scenario is that the press waits at least a few weeks before they totally forget a victim of a murder, or simply replace the victim with a cliched martyr image. The victim is usually portrayed as an angel that can do no wrong. However, if the victim doesn't fit the image—as Nicole Brown Simpson may not—the victim's memory isn't cherished as much or considered as valuable. After this martyr image is created, the media spends its time revolting at the actions and image of the offender.

We all know what happened to Candace Harms. She found herself in the wrong place at the wrong time and paid for it with her life. To those of us who didn't know her, the idea that she was a real person seems foreign. She has become a martyr. She will forever be remembered to us as young Candace Harms, murder victim. And now, instead of a sweet-faced girl of eighteen who was close to the beginning of her life, we remember the martyr who was close to the end and get angry when we

see the smirking faces of the revolting men that killed her. But at least people remember that much of her—so far, Nicole Brown Simpson isn't so fortunate.

What do we know of Nicole Simpson? Well, I suppose we know several things. We know that she was murdered, of course. We know that she had two children by O.J. Simpson. We know that she was a battered wife. These are inconsequential facts that are spewed forth by the media every time Headline News goes "around the world in thirty minutes."

These are mere footnotes to the saga of O.J. Simpson. And the pictures that the networks toss up of a smiling yellow-haired woman as the anchor informs us that her throat was cut and she was found in a fetal position are nice complements to the tale. This is how the media recognizes and pays homage to the victim.

Unfortunately, while gore, minor details and false images may make nice copy, they don't do very much to memorialize the victims. It's hard to know exactly what could properly carry out this task. However, it is virtually guaranteed that the answer won't be found in creating the best or most complete news story. Nor will it be found in informing us in "updates" concerning the crime that O.J. allegedly committed or in getting the tightest close-up shots of Nicole Simpson's family at the court proceedings. Perhaps a suitable memory is just that: to remember, that's all.

Sarah West is a freshman Political Science major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fireworks vs. homelessness

Brian Sharp's editorial ("July 4th more than fireworks," DN 6/30/94) fails to ask a most interesting question of Doug the Homeless: Why is he without a home? In my opinion this inquiry is relevant and relative as to how sorry we should feel for him. Allow me to explain. Perhaps Doug is one of those lazy (I prefer the term "uninspired") folks who would rather complain and go hungry than find a job, as Sharp speculates that "a lot of people blindly" believe. Or is Doug a victim of undiagnosed mental illness; a victim of physical and mental abuse, addicted to drugs, homeless via an act of nature, and/or jobless due to economic reasons beyond his control? All of these situations may result in being homeless, but how a person gets to that point is important to this discussion.

In reference to last year's fireworks display where Sharp "watched all of that money that could have been put to

other uses, better uses, turn the dark sky overhead into a smoky haze,"—what does that have to do with homelessness? Let me see if I got his reasoning straight. If we don't shoot off over \$20,000 in fireworks, Lincoln's homeless could be helped because "the People's City Mission receives \$30,000 in city funds for an entire year of operation."

If I apply this logic to other situations. If Nebraska didn't put money into its parks and tourist sites, we could apply that money to the homeless in our state. And what if Hollywood stopped making just a couple of multi-million dollar films, we could probably eliminate homelessness in a few months! "Somewhere our priorities have gone wrong. This isn't the way it's supposed to be." BOOM!

If we don't allow ourselves any pleasures in life (fireworks, vacations, entertainment) until everyone (the homeless) has everything they need (food, jobs, shelter), we are all going to be quite miserable. Since the beginning of time, there have been people that have more than you or me. And,

get ready for this one, there will always be people that will have less. It's called life. Our consumed pleasures validate jobs and those who created them. These jobs stimulate the economy and we consume more. An active economy produces more jobs and more consumption. If I consider something a priority and it also happens to bring me pleasure, I'll buy it. If I can't afford it, I'll have to work harder for my wants and needs.

Our Declaration of Independence mentions the "pursuit" of happiness, not a "guarantee" of happiness. If there are reasons beyond Doug's control that he can't get a job to provide a source of income for a home, then he needs to take advantage of the opportunities and assistance that are available in this great country of ours. However, if Doug is homeless due to his own lack of inspiration, attempting to make us feel guilty because we watch things go boom on the Fourth of July isn't going to solve anything.

K. R. Theesen
Staff, Densistry

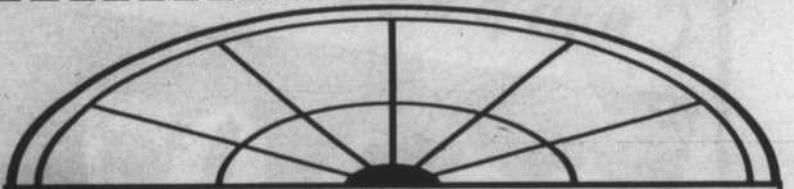
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