

## Blame yourselves, not media

It's only 12 days into the New Year and already people hate the media more than ever.

Want to know why? OK, just between you and ... ZZZZZZZZ.

Yeah, that's right. That whole Connie Chung-Ma Gingrich thing. The B-word incident may have strengthened the ratings of CBS' "Eye to Eye," but that is about it.

It certainly didn't help increase the public's opinion of the news media. But neither did 1994.

Last year the line between tabloid news and "legitimate" news became very blurry. Suddenly, it was hard to tell where Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings and Dan Rather ended and where "Hard Copy," "A Current Affair" and "Inside Edition" began. Recently, The New York Times even applauded the National Enquirer for its O.J. Simpson coverage.

The result of all this: Names like Gilooly, Bobbitt and Menendez became all-too-familiar to the American public.

The fact that an interview with the mother of the new Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives turned into "Did you hear what Newt Gingrich called the first lady?" is just the next step in this crazy progression.

So who is at fault for what many call the ever-falling standards of the media? It has become increasingly popular to blame "The Media" for not only this, but anything. The Media is the perfect whipping boy for the American public; it is a huge, omnipresent entity without a face. We can conveniently lay blame on The Media for what we want, and that almost seems to



**Matt Woody**

make it better.

The American public has relied on our government to solve societal problems like crime and poverty. Government gave a valiant effort, but failed. Some people are willing to try to make a difference by themselves, on an individual level. Those who are not willing find it much easier to blame something. Something like The Media.

Many of these people have complained in recent years that The Media is responsible for the problem of ever-increasing violence in our country. Apparently, kids growing up these days see a lot of violence on television. The supposedly logical conclusion is that these kids, in turn, kill and assault others because they saw one too many reruns of "T.J. Hooker."

The worst part of it is that somewhere, a group of sociologists is making a killing on the lecture circuit for putting two and two together and getting five.

Well, much like Tonya Harding and O.J. Simpson, the media is getting a bad rap. The real blame should be put on those who are pointing the finger — the American people.

They are the ones who, shocked

and aghast that Speaker Gingrich would use the B-word, watch in droves to see David Caruso's or Dennis Franz's bare butt on national television. They are the ones who have made "Married ... With Children" the longest-running sitcom still being produced. They are the ones who made Madonna's "Sex" book such a hot item when it was released.

Blame it on economics — the supply and demand kind. Like it or not, the media is in business to make money. Simply put, the media gives people what it wants, regardless of whether it is in good or bad taste.

Much like a child who knows he will get sick if he eats too many cookies, and then does so anyway, it seems that our society is unable to exert any self-control in its consumption of the media.

Last summer, it was vogue to bash the media for overkill on the O.J. Simpson story. Yet I never have seen so many people glued to the television as when Simpson was riding around Los Angeles in that white Ford Bronco. People discussed the case day and night before they began to tire of it. Had the case not moved into the ultra-scientific area of DNA, people might still be talking about Mezzaluna restaurant and Kato Kaelin.

As in any market, the consumer dictates what will be produced. The best way to change what we get from the media is to use this power. Gotta go. It's time for Oprah.

Woody is a senior news-editorial major and the Daily Nebraskan opinion editor.

## Congress saddled, fighting over ponies

**Ellen Goodman**

Maybe I'm feeling too mellow this morning, although not quite mellow enough to invite Mrs. Gingrich to tea. But from my post outside the infamous Beltway, the first sight of partisans spoiling for another fight is surprisingly unwelcome.

The Republicans are now behaving like insiders, the Democrats are behaving like outsiders. The majority is barreling down the policy highway — if this is Tuesday, it's time to amend the Constitution — and the minority is readying a counterattack.

In theory I should be pleased if things don't go smoothly. I am after all a registered non-fan of the Gingrich crowd. The only contract I would recommend anyone signing with Newt is a prenuptial one. Among the few joys of being a minority is that you get to bite the ankles of the party running over you.

But I can't help noticing how easy it is for opponents to forget or deny what they agree on. How easy it is to try and land a blow so the other guy won't look like the winner.

Two years ago when Democrats won the White House, the Republicans were outraged that Clinton had won on "their" issues, most notably crime, welfare reform and values. They went on a search-and-destroy mission.

Now the Republicans have won the Congress and the Democrats are appalled that Gingrich's folk have stolen "their" issues. Change, the middle class, welfare reform and, yes, values.

We're either going to get scorched-earth policy out of Washington or find some common ground. So in this mellow moment, I am reminded of the optimist who was given a room full of horse manure for Christmas and said excitedly, "Wow, there must be a pony in there somewhere."

Somewhere in the morass of political fights and policy wrangles, there are points that most of us in the non-partisan, bipartisan middle actually agree on — especially in the worry about kids, welfare and unwed mothers. Before we're blinded by partisanship, we should keep an eye out for the ponies.

Pony 1: Kids. OK, Gingrich bounced off the wall in fantasizing about orphanages for non-orphan, for the kids of teens he'd cut off the welfare rolls. You shouldn't lose your baby because you're poor.

What do we agree on here? That some families are irreparably broken down. That the kids should come first. That some young mothers living alone with their babies aren't happily independent; they're abandoned. That group living — call it a kibbutz, call it an extended family or a boarding school or whatever — for parents and their kids is worth encouraging.

Pony 2: Welfare reform. A tough Clinton plan balanced a two-year welfare deadline with the promise of training, day care and jobs. Now the Republicans want to show they're even tougher. They want to cut the funds, give the program over to the state and wipe their hands of it all.

What do we agree on? That promising a teenager money — a pittance but more than she's ever had — for having a baby isn't a great idea. That leaving her and the baby broke isn't, either.

Pony 3: Unwed teen-age mothers. Just because it's the Republicans, backed by a strong right-wing choir, chanting about the evils of unweddedness, doesn't mean that the Democrats should lose their voice again. Remember rolling your eyes at the glorification of unwed pregnant movie stars, groaning at the words of pregnant girls who can't plan for the weekend let alone for their children's future?

What do we agree on? Well, one side says abstinence. The other side says birth control. Most of us want, "Both, either, anything, something!"

Pony 4: Values. Here we go again. A core of Republicans is saying that poverty is a matter of morals or to be more precise, the lack of them. A core of Democrats is saying that poverty is a matter of jobs or the lack of them.

What do we agree on? That jobs make an enormous difference. That individual grit, gumption and willpower do too.

What else do we agree on?

Pony 5: The good ideas don't belong to one side or another. The real winners are going to be the ones who ride the common ground.

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## Student savors city's kindness

I can't believe it! It has been a year since I saw the Sower on top of the Capitol building, clearly illuminated in the night sky, out of my aircraft window. If I close my eyes, I can still even hear the captain's announcement that we were at our destination — Lincoln. It was about time. I had traveled literally halfway around the world, over 12 time zones in 36 hours, and endured tortuous layovers at countless airports.

Even though my sense of time was completely screwed up by then and my head felt like it was filled with wool, I was exhilarated. Even the sub-zero weather to which I was totally unaccustomed, having come from a place where the seasons vary from hot, hotter and hottest, could not dampen my enthusiasm. Nor did the fact that I knew not a soul in this strange country daunt me.

Well, maybe a little. But the fact was, I was excited. Wouldn't you be if you were about to start a brand-new phase in your life in a totally new country?

Contrary to this feeling of exhilaration upon arrival here in Lincoln, my mood before departure at home was very somber and mixed. It was New Year's Day, time to celebrate, be happy and look forward to the future. But I couldn't be happy, even though I had a lot to look forward to.

I was leaving. Leaving everyone that I loved and held dear — my family, my friends and an established social setup, a perfectly good job, most of my favorite clothes (THAT hurt bad!), everything that was familiar and most of all my home for 21 years — for a totally strange new place!

Somewhere along my long flight, I guess my grief turned to expectation. I started looking forward to seeing my new home for the next two years.

My first week here signified my first-ever sight of snow. It was such a beautiful sight. Everything



**Vennila Ramalingam**

looked just like some of the Christmas cards we exchanged with our Christian neighbors back at home in India. I wanted so badly to stop the snow-clearing workers as they were dirtying the beautiful snow!

I had to learn to adapt. Adapt to the weather and to the tempo of life here. Adapt to being greeted by smiling passers-by, instead of being surprised and taken aback. Nobody had any time nor heart to smile at strangers at home, a bustling city of 8 million. Smiling at strangers was no problem. In fact, it was a real sweet thing to adapt to.

But remembering to turn off the light to turn it on, to unlock the door to lock it, to spell "colour" without the "u," to not call a professor "sir" or "madam" or to call the letter "z" a "zee" and not a "zed," were just a few of my problems.

Even though I had known all along that Americans drove on the other side of the road, I always found myself going for the driver's door when I wanted to get to the passenger seat!

Seeing just about everything done opposite of the British norm, which has also been more or less adapted worldwide, I often times wonder if the United States hated the British so much!

That's beside the point. The point that I would really like to make is about the people here. People seem to be essentially nice and warm. I remember before I left for Lincoln, we as a family wondered about the people here. And it

definitely was a consoling factor to know that Lincoln is one of the safest cities of its size in the United States, especially to my mom, who wanted her little girl to be safe.

It has been a year since then. As the months went by, I remember becoming sensitized to the lack of diversity, and noticed how my friends (both American and international) often complained about the lack of fun things to do in Lincoln.

Questions such as "Do you have cars in India?", which initially were amusing, stopped being so in due time. I was tempted to say, "No! We always go elephant-back riding and the rich are those who can afford to keep their own tigers." Come on, we are talking about cars here, not the stealth bomber.

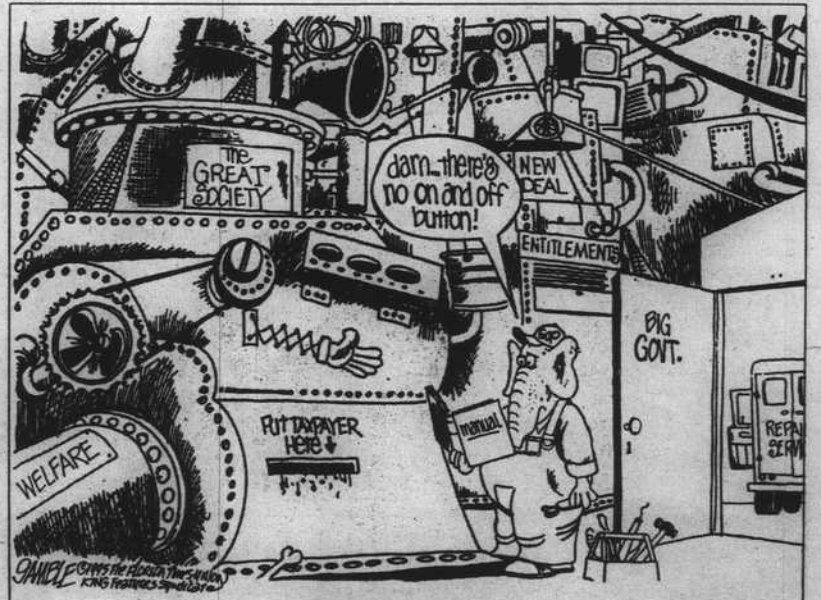
I heard about the Malaysian student who was assaulted at the Broyhill Fountain, and then there was the Renteria incident. I was totally disgusted.

The turn of the year has helped turn a new page. It reminded me of my initial days here exactly a year ago, and how I had found that the people of Lincoln were very kind, nice and hospitable.

That aspect of Lincoln has not changed. Only in the prolonged roller-coaster ride that was my life here in Lincoln had I forgotten about the essential niceness of the common people.

This accolade does not deny the lack of diversity and global awareness nor the lack of empathy for borderline groups. These drawbacks are there, just as the essential niceness. No place is Utopia. In getting passionately involved with these very topical issues, we are getting blinded to a very pleasant asset of this community — its warmth. And with that asset, there is promise. Promise for better understanding between people.

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**Ed Gamble**