

OPINION

Thursday, June 22, 1995

Page 4

Daily
Nebraskan
Editorial Board
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Joel Strauch Editor, 472-1766
Gerry Beltz Features Editor
Jennifer Miratsky Copy Desk Chief

EDITORIAL

Unplaced blame

Reason for Renteria's death unanswered

A jury acquitted Lincoln Police Officer Luke Wilke of assaulting Francisco Renteria during the publicized Sept. 30 struggle.

Wilke and Police Chief Tom Casady breathed their sighs of relief and are prepared to put the whole incident behind them.

But what about the Renterias? The family was not there during the reading of the verdict. They could be found in their church praying — maybe praying for answers to why their loved one died.

Some blame police racism and some blame Renteria. The need to blame is there, and that need is going unsatisfied.

One pathologist testified Renteria's death was caused by a phenomenon termed "sudden death syndrome." Other pathologists testified that Renteria suffered from lack of oxygen to the brain and cardiac arrest caused by compression of the neck.

Renteria's neck was deeply bruised during the struggle, but Wilke testified his neckhold was not excessive. Maybe Wilke did not know his own strength. Maybe he never considered the pain and damage his grip was inflicting. Maybe he was just doing his job.

Renteria was approached because he was thought to be a man the police were searching for. Renteria did not resemble the man in dress, but Renteria was Hispanic and therefore a "suspect."

He was told to stop but Renteria did not understand English. The police did use "body language" to try and make him stop, but Renteria did not want to stop. The police felt he was dangerous and took actions to restrain him.

Not one of the police officers suffered any injury during the arrest. Renteria died.

Why did Renteria resist? One can only guess, but when you are discriminated against you do not trust authority and when you are innocent you do not expect to be, or like to be, arrested.

The incident has united the Hispanic community in picket lines demanding answers of why Renteria died.

But according to the courts, no one is to blame. Not the woman that mistook him for a suspect, not the police chief that is ultimately responsible for his officers and not the man that placed his arm around Renteria's neck.

Life will go on for Officer Wilke as he returns to full duties and the Lincoln police department can feel a little better about Renteria's death. But the Renteria family will continue to feel the painful, helpless sting of injustice.



Society craves moment of fame

In this grand country of ours we have the distinct opportunity and misfortune of being obsessed with a great many things.

Our lives are driven by this desire to obtain things that we as a society classify as successful, meaningful and that which has purpose. Wealth, fame, beauty — these are the things that Americans wish for.

We are a tribe of fools stumbling about, exercising our intelligence for short-term gains. We think in immediate fractions of time, discarding the novel of experience and permanence for the soundbite of provisional, transient knowledge.

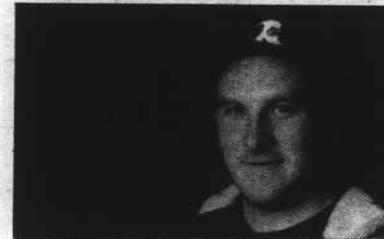
We crave injections of fragmented inspiration and information; digestion and interpretation take too long. Give us the answers. Analyzing something takes too much time and effort. Besides, chances are we don't fully understand the question.

The obsession with fame has engulfed our society beyond the limits that our collective health can endure. More energy is spent tracking the exploits of celebrities than issues that ultimately effect our lives.

If we bothered to learn about homelessness, hunger and unemployment as diligently as we investigate which dress Vanna will wear, the sex life of Tom Cruise and the plot lines of daytime soaps, we would be, as a nation, without lacerations covered with band-aids.

The myriad of famous identities forced upon us through various forms of the media include athletes as well as actors, directors, musicians, etc. We memorize names, statistics, styles of play, titles and awards achieved.

Magazines, television shows, radio interviews, even newspapers spew worthless and silly information which would leave us no less rounded if we



Michael Justice

"Instead of a trial to determine a man's life, it has mutated into the second coming of P.T. Barnum's circus."

hadn't been forced to choke on it.

The O.J. trial is a prime example of how easily we're influenced. Cable stations have coverage of the trial throughout the day, followed by recaps during the local and national news.

Besides the fact that this trial is maddening in its absurdity, it is a complete farce and a slap in the face of our legal system, which has been labeled questionable at best in recent years.

Instead of a trial to determine a man's life, it has mutated into the second coming of P.T. Barnum's circus.

Fame has gripped feeble minds with promises of immortality, individuality and relevance.

Kato has built an entire existence on this trial and several jury members are attempting to do the same. Even the attorneys are focusing their attention on the cameras, taking every opportunity to cheat the clock of more than a simple 15 minutes.

We all want to be on camera, we all want the fame and the money and the adoration. But that is simply the surface of it. Human desires are easy to understand when the cover is removed.

What we want, or more appropriately, need, is not fame but what it brings us. We equate fame with respect (usually), importance and a reason for being. We want to feel like we're necessary, as if the human machine would suddenly stop moving without our presence.

We want to be heard, to have our opinions respected like scripture and not have them fall into the void of talk radio where the last caller is nothing more than a piece of tape on a reel.

The need to be needed stretches beyond our lives to our deaths. The Golden Gate Bridge is nearing the ominous milestone of 1,000 suicides committed from its rust-orange rails. In 1973, 14 people tried to become number 500 before a woman took her place in history by leaping to her end. There should be quite a turnout to be the magical 1,000th.

We think temporary, yet dream of being permanent. We work hard trying to justify ourselves when in fact the act of being is justification in itself. But that's not good enough.

We want to be like them, the celebrities, the stars, the people who count, who are worth millions. Their lives have more meaning than ours because we listen to them, adore them and follow them like sheep.

We'll continue to listen to Rush for knowledge, watch the talk shows for truth and look up to celebrities for inspiration. They are unqualified heroes to a nation of insecure and sadly misguided dreamers.

Justice is a senior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Daily Nebraskan

Editor Joel Strauch, 472-1766
Features Editor Gerry Beltz
Copy Desk Editors Jennifer Miratsky
Courtney Mathieson
Tanna Kinnaman
James Mehlsing
Daniel Shattil
Katherine Policky
Amy Struthers
Laura Wilson
Photo Chief Tim Hedegaard, 472-2588
Art Director Don Walton, 473-7301
General Manager
Production Manager
Advertising Manager
Asst. Advertising Manager
Publications Board Chairman
Professional Adviser

The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., P.O. Box 880448, Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448, weekdays during the academic year (except holidays); weekly during the summer session.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by phoning 472-1763 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The public also has access to the Publications Board. For information, contact Tim Hedegaard, 472-2588.

Subscription price is \$50 for one year.
Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, NE.
ALL MATERIAL COPYRIGHT 1995 DAILY NEBRASKAN