

Society has no middle ground

Moderation does not make prime time. The media have taken America by the scruff of the neck and proceeded to carve up its face, drawing lines in the dirt between factions in our culture by perpetuating the radical, freak show elements and extremist nature of groups trying to gain rights within our political framework.

The sheep all swallowed the hook so hard it flew out their backsides, leaving us a hostile and militant society with no room for a middle ground — a gaping, tar-filled chasm between the right and the left spectrum.

The 6 o'clock news de-evolved us into Hatfields and McCoys, pitbulls against each other to make copy between human interest stories.

We've bored ourselves into becoming hair triggers, ready to pop a cap into anyone who trespasses on the threshold of this week's cause celebre.

We retreat into our precious little corners, hoping to convince ourselves that we still hold stock in a decaying world. Desperation forces us to embrace pet crusades so tightly that we squeeze the air, blood and life right out — leaving only the moldy husk behind.

Scarecrow revolutions, smokescreens thrown up so we don't have to stare hopelessness right in the ass.

I spackle nihilistic jargon putty all over the holes in my logic; you pick up aluminum cans and kid yourself into thinking it matters.

"Think globally, act locally" — translated "sleep better at night and accomplish nothing."

I will not recycle! I will not become a pacifier to be suckled by the mouth of a viable and necessary movement.

I will not allow you to sleep the self-righteous sleep of angels. Put up your signs, give me your tired, your huddled, your dirty looks yearning to make me feel like a bastard.



Aaron McKain

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I will not give a dime store rainbow warrior the satisfaction of thinking my Zagnut bar wrapper is going to plug the hole in the sky.

You want to save the Earth? Firebomb one of the urban monsters puking crude oil and hypodermics into our drinking water, but don't come at me with a Whopper oozing out of your mouth and a big "Burger King Recycles" bag held up like a badge and expect not to be kicked in the teeth.

Piecemeal, quick fix solutions do nothing but co-opt the movement. Allowing people to think their trivial contributions make a difference prevents them from wanting to promote, or take, serious action.

We sidestep real issues and real answers by taking the cozy route that bears no inconvenience and still allows us to be the hippest revolutionaries on the block.

We sit content at the sidelines, the television laid out for us, chanting the slogans that have been slammed into our heads. Reducing issues to their amoebic beginnings to cater to a society looking for nothing more than the latest trend in bumper-sticker politics.

It's a hell of a lot easier to stand around a rally screaming, "Abortion Kills!" at the top of your lungs than to try to chant in staccato rhythm, "I don't feel that the fetus is a viable human being until the brain is formed late in the second trimester, and, therefore the rights of an undisputed individual (in this case the woman) should take precedence over the speculative rights of a potential entity."

If we can't turn it into a symbol and put it on a hat, it's out of sight, out of mind.

In contemporary cut-and-dried America, you've become a racist if you believe in equality for all people rather than blindly asserting supremacy for a previously discriminated against group.

I'm somehow a sexist because I agree that men and women are created equal, but I don't regurgitate the "Feminism will end world suffering" B.S. that my eyes have been smothered in. You're godless if you don't believe in their God.

The sky is falling, the sky is falling. Chicken Littles with bachelor's degrees in philosophy sell pocket calculators and prophesy the Armageddon. The society that cried wolf.

They make us swallow pills so large that they trivialize every movement. You never believe the kid who always claims to have the biggest toys.

Why do people smoke? Because they're told not to.

A person can only ingest so much propaganda before deciding everything causes the proverbial cancer anyway. A nation of dotting Nancy Reagans. "Smoking kills you, your family, your dog, and causes your testicles to implode." Screw it, give me a box of Reds.

The more they preach to us, the less we'll listen. And then one day, we'll be dozing off at shortstop and a pop fly will be hit right to us; a pop fly that hits like an atomic bomb and splits the Earth in half.

.... and all the poultry rights in the world aren't going to stop it.

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The N Stands For Knowledge

by James Zank



Is media beating a dead cat?

It doesn't take much to become a celebrity anymore.

Socks the Cat did it just by having famous owners who live in the White House.

It's hard to forget one of the first photographs taken after Bill Clinton was elected. The photo depicted not the newly chosen president, but his cat. Socks was inching along the ground as reporters and photographers swarmed around him, eager to record his every yowl for posterity.

So maybe a cat doesn't have much to say about its privacy rights. But what about the owners?

The Clintons have been on vacation in Wyoming this week. Struggling to maintain normalcy, they're camping in tents just outside Jackson Hole. Like every family, they're trying to have a normal vacation.

While no family vacation I've ever been on even comes close to normal, the Clintons have been stuck in Vacation Hell.

That means having their every move recorded by reporters and transmitted from the wilderness to the rest of the world. Only a few days ago, the Clintons finally wised up and asked the media to back off for the rest of their trip.

The media have obliged, but only with much whining. They constantly speculate that the Clintons might be toasting marshmallows or telling ghost stories. Apparently, even the time-honored S'more-making tradition is not sacred.

Lest we think this only happens to high-and-mighty government officials, let me point out an example in our own backyard.

Less than two weeks ago, a great tragedy occurred in Omaha. Police officer Jimmy Wilson Jr. died during what was supposed to be a routine traffic check. That we all know.

We also know what everyone



Krista Schwarting

"...what we don't have a right to know are the painful personal details. Just the facts, everyone."

said at his funeral, what his college professors thought of him, and what he liked to do during the weekend.

The regional media seized on the Wilson story as they haven't since the Nicole Brown Simpson/Ronald Goldman murders broke. The five o'clock news became all-Wilson, all the time as police searched for his killers, the community reacted, and his family mourned.

They mourned as Omaha and the rest of the Midwest watched and waited for more. But at no point during all this sympathy did I hear anyone wonder out loud what the media saturation might be doing to the people who loved Wilson.

Jimmy Wilson was, apparently, a good officer following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps. His lineage made him special, but did not necessitate his being the lead on the news for a solid week.

Wilson's family dealt well with all the coverage. His father began speaking directly to the media last week, and I have to wonder whether

he chose to break the silence rather than have reporters chase him down.

The funeral received coverage from every major news outlet in the area. Had any of the people who spoke there turned on their television or radio in the next 48 hours, chances are good they might have heard their own words coming back at them.

There are laws dealing with celebrities and public figures and how much privacy they should have. According to these, Clinton has no right to expect much privacy, and neither does O.J. Simpson. But I don't believe Jimmy Wilson's family gave up that right.

The public has a right to know. That's been the defense when newspapers and broadcasters have come forth with questionable material. But what we don't have a right to know are the painful personal details. Just the facts, everyone.

I don't know what to call the media handling of the murder. Not sensationalistic, because the truth never got stretched or distorted.

Disrespectful, maybe. There came a point when we should have turned off our tape recorders and cameras and said enough is enough.

Even this week, Wilson-related stories rank high in newscast offerings. And even though many of us see the stories and feel for his father, his sister, his fiancée, we cannot genuinely share their pain. What we see is just an image of it.

Until something concrete happens in the case, it's time to let both the stories and Officer Wilson rest in peace.

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