

OPINION PACKAGES

Our VIEW

Scoopin' dirt

Media's coverage of tragedies inappropriate

Have we no shame? First it was the bizarre death of JonBenet Ramsey in Boulder, Colo. — a tragic loss of young life. Rather than mourning the little girl's death and showing compassion toward those who loved her, the media and its scandal-hungry followers went in for the kill, so to speak.

Immediately after the tiny beauty queen's death, there was speculation: Why did her parents refuse to give the investigators an interview? Why did they feel the need to seek counsel? Why did the little girl spend her short life being paraded around and coddled for her appearance?

The Ramseys were not seen as two loving people experiencing every parent's nightmare. They were seen as suspects.

Then when it was revealed that JonBenet might have been sexually assaulted and that the killer had to have been familiar with the home, the theories grew even more lurid — and the depictions grew even colder and disconnected.

Newsweek magazine ran a feature on the murder case with a headline that referred to JonBenet as a "Body in the Basement." Worse yet, two tabloid journalists cut a deal to get ahold of crime-scene photos of the little girl's corpse and published the gory images against all human decency, though a court order kept that edition of the tabloid from being widely distributed.

More recently, Ennis Cosby, son of comic and famed family man Bill Cosby, was shot and killed in what has been reported as a random act of violence. But the news of his death has been overshadowed in the media by allegations that Bill Cosby fathered an illegitimate child during a short love affair early in his marriage.

As newsworthy as it may be that the funnyman who authored "Fatherhood" fell to infidelity, the media have acted less than appropriately in dealing with the (unfortunate) coinciding stories.

The "societal concern" over respect for life is now being matched by an apparent lack of respect for death. No one with any sort of celebrity status is allowed to rest in peace for even a moment.

Even before the burial is complete, the media are busy digging up dirt.

"Responsible journalism" should not cross the line into complete disregard for human dignity.

The "big scoops" should be covered, but with a little consideration of the consequences.

A little girl died a violent death the day after Christmas. A man in the prime of his life was gunned down while innocently changing a tire on his car.

Scandalous or not, that's what we know. The celebrity status of the victims doesn't change that. The rest is only speculation for now.

Mehsling's VIEW

MEHSLING © 97 DAILY NEBRASKAN



DN LETTERS

Inexcusable

In regards to the article about the Sigma Chi fraternity and its cross-burning skit (DN, Tuesday), I would like to say the organization's ignorance of hate groups and white supremacy is short for an excuse. It is very disturbing how the university and the press are passing the cross burning as a "harmless" ritual that has been going on since the end of the Civil War.

For Sigma Chi and alumni to say they didn't realize the ritual is racist, I wonder if they deny this country is racist? And why is the university coming to their defense with an immediate press release claiming "we must help sensitize people ..."?

The university claims it "offers diversity education ..." I sincerely hope the university has no misconceptions about fixing the problem with a few forums. I personally feel the university doesn't, for I can imagine they wouldn't want to lose any donations from Sigma Chi's alumni.

Chris Mills
Lincoln

Hard Lesson

I was intrigued by the reaction of local clergy leaders, most of whom were dismayed by what they perceived to be an inadequate response by the university administration. They "condemned" the university for its failure to "condemn" Sigma Chi for its actions, which they clearly interpreted to be a judgment on African-Americans. But are condemnations, judgments, blame and finger-pointing effective strategies for dealing with this problem, or any other problem for that matter?

Negative strategies like this have a very poor track record. It's certainly not the type of thinking Martin Luther King employed. So let's backtrack and ask ourselves what it is we really want with regard to this matter.

For most of us, it's a community free of bigotry and hatred. How can



MATT HANEY/DN

we best achieve that? By using condemnations in an attempt to cause the perpetrators to feel bad about themselves and their actions?

Spokesmen for the Sigma Chi fraternity have publicly apologized and stated that the ritual was not intended to be "racist". Are they lying, or perhaps misleading us as to the true meaning of the event? I don't know, and each of us will come to our own conclusion. But in the end, people are free to hold racist opinions if they choose, although my experience is that people who do are quite unhappy, angry people.

And even if the sole purpose of the ritual was to send a hateful message, don't we understand by now that statements of this kind say EVERYTHING about the holders of such beliefs and NOTHING about the intended targets. For myself, I'm willing to accept Sigma Chi's explanation. Shouldn't the fraternity members have at least known that such an event would probably be misinterpreted by most of the public as racist in nature? Perhaps, but that's where learning comes in. And learning is only impeded by the kind of finger-pointing and negative judgments which seem to be dominating the discussion of this issue.

Tom Marley
associate professor
mathematics and statistics

Valued diversity

I am greatly disturbed by the reports of the burning of a cross combined with the display of the Confederate flag and battle uniforms over the weekend in connection with a fraternity pre-initiation activity. These actions are contrary to the spirit of our Student Code of Conduct and they violate our basic values as an institution.

Since becoming chancellor, I have spoken often about the need to instill character and values in our students. It is not our role or responsibility as a public institution to dictate those values, but to assist our students in coming to terms with their own inner ethical core as they form their own value systems.

At the same time, we have values as an institution. One of those values is diversity. Not just a tolerance of diversity, but a real celebration of the differences in culture, national origin and gender that make up our world. From all that I have been able to learn about the incident, the fraternity and its pre-initiation activities, I do not believe there was a deliberate racist intent. However, lack of intent does not absolve the fraternity from the fact that a burning cross is most often interpreted as a racist symbol, used repeatedly by the Ku Klux Klan as a sign of intimidation and oppression.

To assert that these symbols should not be interpreted as racist is incredibly naive.

We condemn racism in all its forms. We condemn the symbols of racism. We will work with this fraternity and other members of the Greek community on campus to eliminate such negative symbols from their rituals and rites.

Finally, I hope that as a result of this unfortunate incident, we may bring together the leaders of our fraternities and sororities with leaders of the Lincoln and university communities, that together we may work for better understanding among all peoples, the campus and the city.

James Moeser
chancellor

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