

OPINION PACKETS

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Our VIEW

So this is Christmas

Parents' materialism ruins season of giving

It's no wonder that Americans have a global reputation of indulgence and materialism. After converting the carrion turkey into a freezer full of potential sandwiches and Thanksgiving casseroles into a microwavable Tupperware form, we roll ourselves to the mall to celebrate our real holiday of excess: Christmas.

It's not news to anyone that the once-religious holiday of Christmas has become usurped by rampant materialism and intense marketing, and, most importantly, bad parenting. What was once celebrated through groups of carolers, Christmas plays and Nativity scenes is now played out among vying parents in the aisles of Sears.

Christmas seasons are no longer defined by family or religion, but by fads and ad campaigns. These fads are sponsored by eager and selfish parents who stop at nothing to buy the right gift. Christmas 1996 was Tickle Me Elmo; this year, Furby's and Beanie Babies. Christmas, like so many people, is becoming defined by objects rather than values.

Consumerism and marketing have taken the place of the family and church, not just during the holiday but year-round. The lesson that parents now are teaching children is the importance of gifts and objects, not the value of the holiday as a religious event.

Kids rapidly learn how important toys such as Furby's and Beanie Babies are when their parents are at the shopping mall at 6 a.m. rather than at home with them.

It is a sad irony that holidays and religious holy days reflect the erosion of our societal fabric instead of reinforcing our beliefs and values. For Christmas, happiness is guaranteed by the best gifts, the most gifts, the hottest gifts.

Although it's easy to point the finger at saturation advertising and exploitation of children, parents are the ones responsible for supplying meaning to holy days. Instead many parents feel it is easier to buy the spirit of Christmas than teach it.

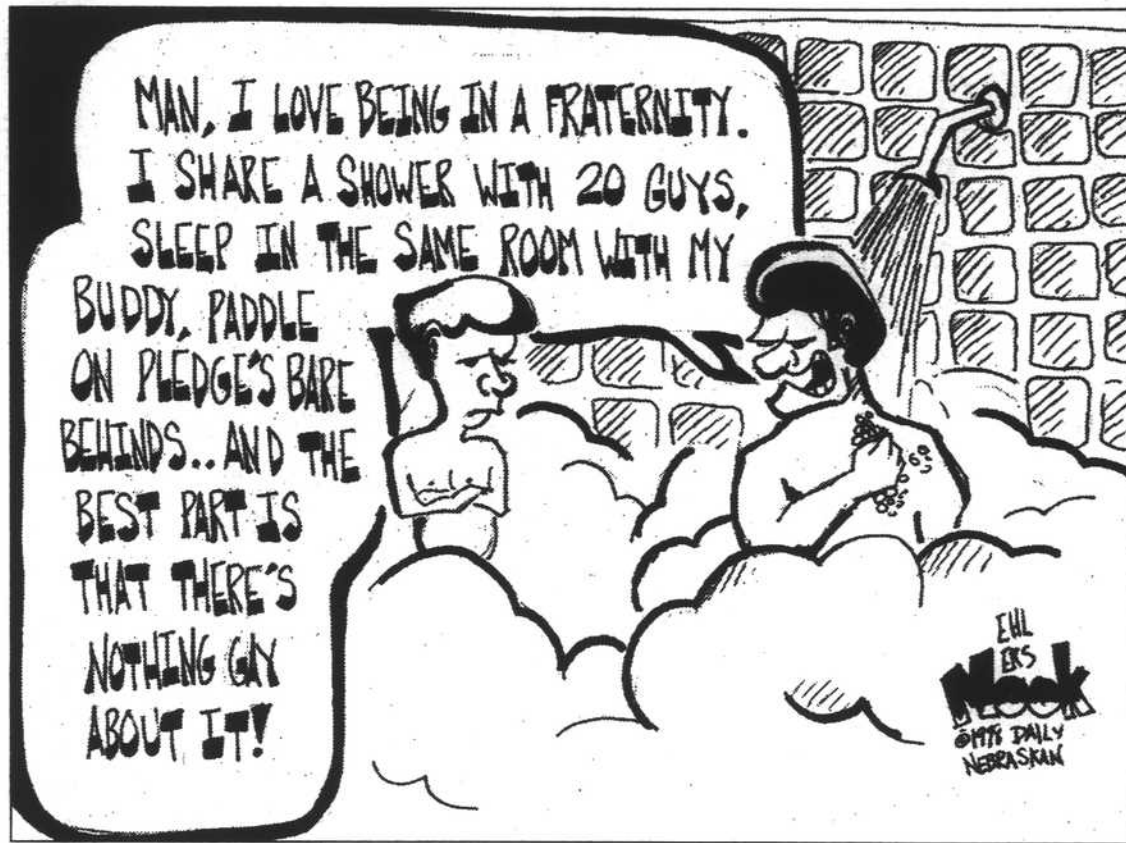
The fanaticism of the holiday indicates a general breakdown of parenting in the United States. Parents placate their children with gifts and give them attention through material means. It's much easier to buy Johnny a toy to play with on his own than to take him to the park day after day.

The Christmas toy craze is the parents' fault, not the advertisers'. Our culture is always in the hands of those who shape it, the people raising families and making decisions. Those are the people supplying meaning and tradition to holidays.

When those people buy into every Christmas craze and load piles of gifts under the Christmas tree, the children are not getting something. They are not getting the cause for celebration. They are not getting the values of gratitude and spiritual love.

Instead, they are getting a Furby.

Mook's VIEW



Don't censor me

Legislative action needed to ensure freedom of speech



TIM SULLIVAN is a third-year law student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

A Daily Nebraskan columnist who exercises his or her rights to freedom of speech or freedom of the press can live a dangerous life.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. U.S. Constitution Amendment I.

When I applied for, was offered and accepted this job as a DN columnist, I thought I would be free to write about pretty much anything I wanted.

As a law student, I knew I had certain First Amendment protections, and I felt comforted by that fact.

I thought that writing a column would give me an avenue through which I could put my opinions into the marketplace of ideas, stimulate thought and promote critical thinking regarding issues that impact us all.

Little did I know, however, that exercising one's freedom of speech could be so dangerous.

I hadn't really thought about it until after the weekly columnist meeting a couple of weeks ago. At the meeting, we meet with our editor, and, among other things, we talk about what we plan to write about for the week to come.

At that meeting, I talked about something I saw happening here on the streets of Lincoln. I indicated to the other columnists and to my editor what my opinion was regarding that activity.

I'm not going to tell you what I wanted to write about right now. What I will tell you is that my editor cautioned me about writing on it, out of fear that I may be putting myself in harm's way.

It was suggested to me that I might receive death threats or be assaulted by a person or persons unknown to me. These people might, I was told, feel so strongly about what I wanted to write about that they would cause me great bodily harm for the mere expression of

my ideas.

Hmmm. Let me see, now. I thought one of the most cherished cornerstones of the democratic society we live in was our much-coveted right to freedom of speech.

And in this context, freedom of the press.

So does our beloved Constitution protect me from would-be aggressors as I seek to vindicate my rights to freedom of speech, and of the press?

Not exactly.

You see, the Constitution protects me only from the government, not from private individuals.

My remedies against private individuals can be found only in the realms of criminal and civil law.

So if I decide to exercise my rights to freedom of speech and freedom of the press by publishing my opinions on controversial issues in the Daily Nebraskan, and some crazed lunatic harms me in some way for the expression of those views, I will have to rely on a county attorney to prosecute the individual criminally.

And you can rest assured that if I have suffered damages, I will bring a civil action in the realm of tort law, whether that action be one for assault, battery, intentional infliction of emotional distress or whatever other cause of action I can dream of which the facts of the particular case give rise to.

Now, why is it that the Constitution protects us only from governmental intrusions of our constitutionally protected rights, and not from intrusions by private individuals?

I think we need to enact laws that afford constitutional protections against private individuals as well as against the government.

I see much of the recently enacted "hate crime" legislation as an effort by state legislatures to remedy, or at least mollify, the effects of this constitutional deficit.

Nebraska is one state that has enacted such hate crime legislation.

A person in the State of Nebraska has the right to live free from violence, or intimidation by threat of violence, committed against his or her person or the destruction or vandalism of, or intimidation by threat of destruction or vandalism of, his or her property regardless of his or her race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability. Neb. Revised Statute § 28-110.

The above statute provides only for rights greater than those found in the Nebraska Constitution. It's captioned as a "Statement of Rights."

Many crimes of violence have enhanced penalties if the crime were committed because of: a person's race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability or because of a person's association with a person of a certain race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability.

Neb. Revised Statute § 28-111 provides for these enhanced penalties. It basically makes the penalty for a specific offense fall into the realm of penalties for the next highest level of offenses.

Turning back now to the subject of freedom of speech, I think amending our hate crime statutes would be a good place to start if we want to increase the protection of that constitutional right.

Here's my proposal to the 1999 Nebraska State Legislature to amend Neb. Revised Statute § 28-110: *A person in the State of Nebraska has the right to live free from violence, or intimidation by threat of violence, committed against his or her person or the destruction or vandalism of, or intimidation by threat of destruction or vandalism of, his or her property regardless of his or her race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability or his or her free expression of speech, or of the press.*

Naturally, Neb. Revised Statute § 28-111 would require corresponding amendment to provide for the enhanced penalties.

The law recognizes that not all speech is constitutionally protected. For example, you can't yell "fire" in a crowded theater.

But the most fundamental of our freedoms — freedom of speech and freedom of the press — deserve enhanced protection as against private individuals.

We need laws strong enough — with enough "bite" — to deter individuals from harassing, intimidating, threatening or in any way causing harm to anyone who engages in rights so fundamental as freedom of speech or of the press.

So what was it that I was going to write about that started me down this road of thought?

You'll find out next time. Because whether or not I feel adequate protections exist, I'm going to exercise my right to freedom of speech.

Those who would seek to harm me for the mere expression of my ideas are not worthy of the protections our constitution and our laws have to offer.

And I will seek to vindicate my rights against such individuals.