

Journalism not to entertain

Stars are not automatically qualified to report news

Oh boy, ABC.

The network had a minor mess to clean up Tuesday, when president David Westin had to e-mail his staff that Leonardo DiCaprio was not, in fact, going to be the point man during the network's Earth Day coverage April 20.

Seems that ABC wanted His Leo-ness to be sole interviewer of President Clinton on all issues environmental. Westin denies the claim after The Washington Post reported such an interview would occur. But the White House affirmed that DiCaprio was going to play center stage.

Westin still intends to use the virile actor, the Post reported, but in a smaller role as a celebrity.

Part of us would have liked to have seen the move actually

pulled off, with DiCaprio, whose new movie "The Beach" was skewered by environmentalists for destroying natural resources, interviewing the one man who might have a looser libido.

But that's only a guilty pleasure. Thank the Post for saving us from a ratings winner, but a journalistic low.

More and more, serious coverage of network events is permeated by actors, models, musical artists and so on. More and more, serious journalists give up their objectivity by appearing in advertisements and various other forms of uselessness.

Consider the Larry King column in USA Today, which serves as nothing more than plugs and product endorsements. Here is a man who knows no more than anyone else about books or movies, as he is not a critic, but uses the forum to flex his proverbial muscles.

The same goes for so-called objective journalists who choose to appear on programs extrapolating their opinion on various political issues. Punditocracy (Jesse Jackson's word) is rampant, more than ever.

Of course, sports coverage, with its deluge of stars and washed-up retirees, is the worst example. A fine example existed a few years ago, when KLIN employed former Nebraska quarterback Tommie Frazier to say a few lines at each football game, hoping to increase ratings.

Leonardo DiCaprio just fits into this vernacular as the highest life form on the selling-out food chain. There comes a point when journalist and celebrity start blurring together.

We don't want to reach that point.

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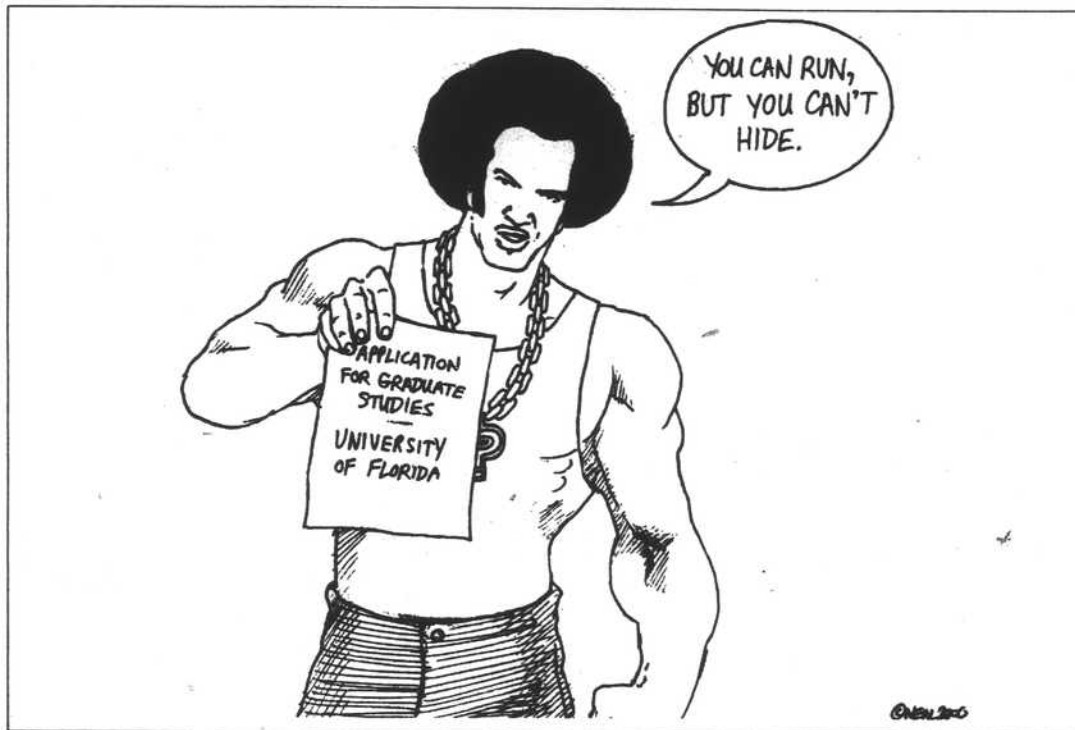
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Obermeyer's VIEW



Letters to the EDITOR

Resolving all issues

Recently a letter appeared in the DN that was in support of my work within the chemistry department at UNL. I am encouraged that students at this university are not apathetic about the quality of their education, and I am encouraged by that support on a daily basis. Some facts, however, need to be brought to light.

I was in discussions with the department about possibly extending my current contract, which extends through the next academic year. These discussions are sensitive and do require a bit of time to resolve.

I am very pleased that the department chair and vice chair were both open to discussion. In fact, they worked to resolve all issues, with support from the dean, in a professional manner that is beneficial to the department. I am personally happy that I will be continuing to contribute to both the research and teaching roles of the chemistry department.

Charles W. McLaughlin
professor of chemistry

Collegiate commodity

I agree completely with Lesley Owusu. There is a definite degree of difference between athletes and non-athletes. Let me offer you my opinion on why this is, mostly from a sarcastic point of view.

Look at the Athletic Department. You may see it as a subordinate of the university that coordinates UNL collegiate competition with the best interests of the citizens of Nebraska.

The Athletic Department has nothing (hypothetically) to do with the University of Nebraska. The Athletic Department may just as well be called the Nebraska Collegiate Athletic Corporation (let's call it NCAC).

The Athletic Department is no longer here to give students the chance to compete and instill pride in all of Nebraska. Face it, the NCAC is here to make money, to stay in the black and activate a never-ending search for ways to commercialize and market its product. (Ever hear of the Athletic Marketing Department?) To carry this out, it searches the globe over for prospective associates to carry out its mission.

Upon accepting a position, these

associates are given everything they need to compete. In addition to these tangible benefits, these associates are given a contract to the local university to receive a college education. What kind of person with the right talent would turn this down?

Ah, but there's a catch. You'll have no life. You'll have no friends, unless you're lucky enough to be compatible with your teammates, with whom you spend an immense amount of time. You might as well forget about your family. You will maintain a certain weight.

You'll miss so many classes from the school you're contracted to while on the road that you will be forced to study on buses, planes and in hotel rooms. If you don't study, the instructor may let it slide. You'll dress in a certain way (more of an unwritten rule) in order to advertise the company that provides your clothing. You are a walking commercial.

You want even more segregation? Try treating the regular students who try to support these teams like peons. Give them crappy seats at sporting events or no seats at all. These goods seats can be sold for more money to rich people who are too lazy to stand and cheer.

Face it, collegiate athletics are being transformed into a commodity nationwide. Any college that hasn't done this yet won't be able to afford facilities, staff or coaches (sound familiar?) for very much longer. It is really quite disgusting, but oh well, what can I do? I'm just a regular student. GO HUSKERS!!

David Franzen
senior
agribusiness

White identity

According to David Baker, white trash is a cultural space one can move in and out of freely, depending on the type of behavior one exhibits as a poor white. The determining behavior he names reads like a fairly comprehensive list of conventional stereotypes of white trash, including substance abuse, unhealthy dietary choices, poor personal hygiene and a sense (or lack) of decorum that deviates from the white middle-class norm.

More importantly, he adds that "white trash can be distinguished

from simply poor whites in their utter lack of work ethic and culture of failure." Several questions arise here. Who determines whether or not poor whites, whose poverty suggests they have failed thus far at achieving the middle-class dream, are white trash?

It seems Baker is suggesting that these poor whites have found some bootstraps with which to pull themselves up; in other words they have a "work ethic." Does this work ethic really prevent these hard-working whites from being labeled as white trash by upper- and middle-class whites who simply resent poor whites' inability to uphold the standards of mainstream middle-class white culture?

And I find it interesting that Baker opens his column with a racist quip about the existence of white trash: "Usually trash is dirty, but sometimes it comes out white." This is a very concise example of the racist and classist construction of white trash as a despised Other.

"Usually," the quote begins, "trash is dirty" - which in this case implies not white. White trash is a class of people, white people, who exhibit behavior and live in social situations that are associated (in the white middle-class imagination) with the lifestyles of poor people of color.

This is the unforgivable sin white trash commits. Their ultimate transgression is having so much in common with disempowered and colonized people of color. This undermines the notion that white privilege is indeed a norm and that people of color need to be "brought up to our level."

White trash threatens and disturbs the status quo because of this, and it is therefore vilified by middle-class white folks. The existence of white-trash forces thinking individuals to call into question the intersection of class and race, as well as their attendant privileges and disadvantages.

It is disappointing to see that the first opportunity to seriously discuss whiteness as a racial and social identity and institution was wasted on further demonization and trivialization of people identified as white trash.

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P.S. Write Back

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