

opinion

Cameras in court

Oregon has joined other states cautiously experimenting with cameras in the courtroom. It is termed an experiment because of the gross abuses committed by the media in the past provoked a ban. Already the experiment has hit a snag that may jeopardize it — but not because of the cameras.

Certainly one of the many instances that prompted the courtroom camera ban was the Sam Sheppard murder case in Cleveland in the 1950s. Sheppard, accused of murdering his wife, was all but tried, convicted and executed by an overzealous media. The case was heard in a courtroom lit by brilliant white lights, littered with tangles of thick cable and crowded with bulky television cameras. The courtroom became a circus in the best Roman tradition.

Although, in deference to broadcast journalism, it was the Cleveland newspapers that really prejudiced the Sheppard trial. The newspapers went so far as to have direct telephone lines to sequestered jurors, interviewing them during deliberations.

There was a long drought for the media seeking information concerning ongoing cases. Judges didn't trust the media and were openly antagonistic to journalists. All the while the media was chastising itself for past excesses. The media in Oregon was no different.

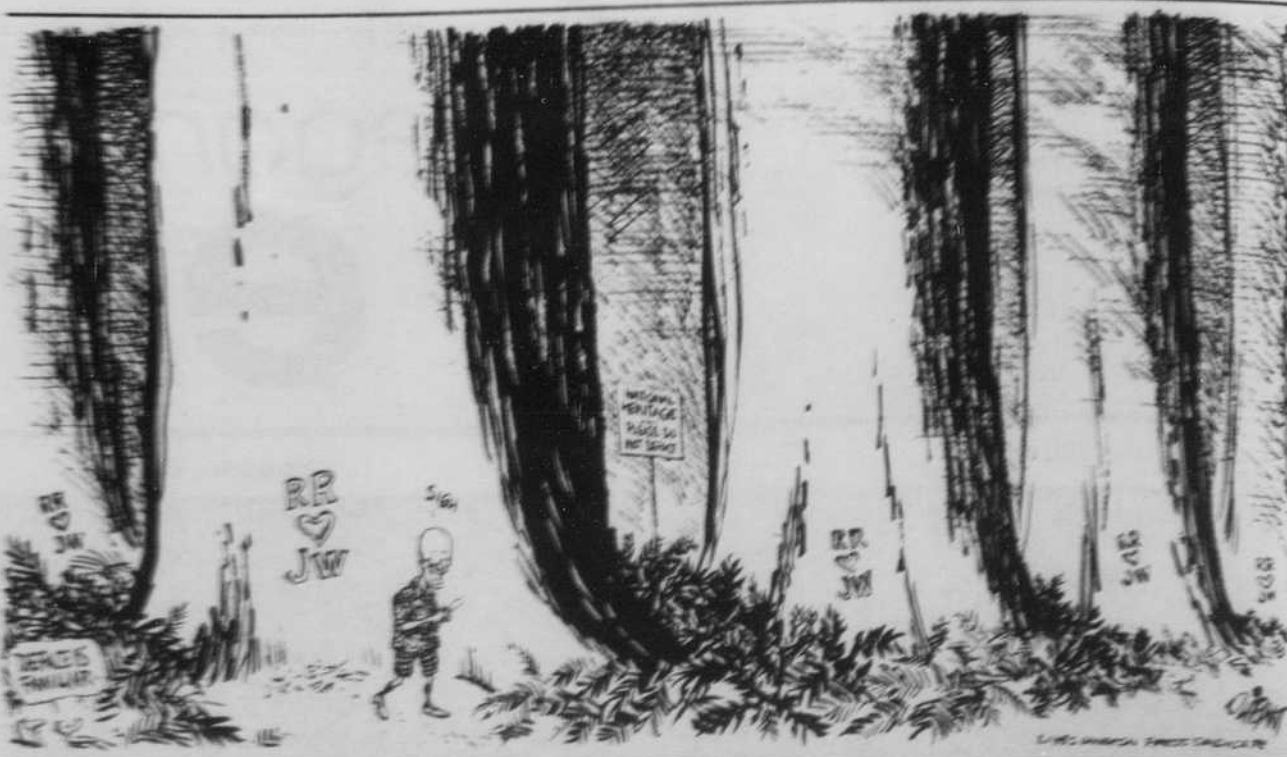
But the signs across the country were that cameras would someday be allowed back into the courtroom. A number of new courtrooms in Oregon and other states were built with unobtrusive portals for video cameras. In Florida a touch of irony was added to the Ronnie Zamora case. Zamora, accused of murder, said he was brainwashed into the act by the habitual viewing of the television show "Kojak." Much of the Zamora case was videotaped.

Oregon's experiment began a few weeks ago when the state's Supreme Court adopted rules that permit television and still cameras inside the Supreme Court Building courtrooms. The first session under the camera experiment was aptly enough the Court of Appeals. There are restrictions in the experiment. Only one television camera, still camera and recording device are permitted. The media will work from a pool. Supreme Court Justice Robert Jones said he expected the Supreme Court to allow cameras in trial courts if there were no hitches. "The whole thing rests on how well the media behaves," Jones said.

The media has behaved well so far — those on trial have not. On the second day cameras were allowed in a courtroom two members of the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade disrupted the appeal hearing of Nancy Whitley, convicted of arson in a 1981 political protest in the EMU Ballroom. The two were cited for contempt and fined \$100.

Speculation followed the incident that it was staged for the camera and that this might jeopardize the entire camera experiment. Chief Justice Berkeley Lent, who heard Whitley's appeal and issued the contempt citations, said that the two probably would have staged a protest of the hearing regardless of the presence of a television camera. Lent, though, admitted he was worried the incident might make other judges leery of cameras.

This leanness by judges would be unfortunate and a disservice to the public. Cameras in the courtroom are a valuable instrument to gathering information and reporting that information accurately to the public. The media has through much soul-searching achieved a self-discipline in reportage on court cases. Of course there are abuses, but more often than not the media ethically maintains restraint. There will be snags throughout this period of experimentation, yet in the end cameras in the courtroom will prove to be essential for the public and the law.



debbie howlett editor's note

Decisions, made by consensus, are strange things. People who normally shrink from the responsibilities of making hard-line decisions by themselves suddenly develop an aura of bravado, a false sense of invincibility.

Recently I was privy to a few year-end reports from campus committees. I began to wonder, could this be the way the University is run? In a flash of horror I realized that if there are well over 125 committees on campus, a lot of decisions are only a notice of motion away.

But what really gets my gavel is the way some relatively minor decisions are handled on such a grand scale.

How about this: "The Traffic Appeals Board?" This committee decides whether you deserved the ticket you received for parking two minutes over your allotted time.

By some strange fluke of nature, everyone I spoke with had a story about the traffic appeals board. "They didn't believe my meter wasn't working," moaned one of my friends, who is \$4 poorer. I didn't either.

In all truthfulness, is it necessary to have six people decide about \$4? That's about 66 cents a committee member.

"The Student Health Service Advisory," which advises the director of the health center on "policies and procedures" according to an official synopsis.

Who hired a department director who can't make decisions? Probably a search committee.

And then there's "The Committee on Patent Policies." Patent leather? C'mon... isn't

that the U.S. Patent Office's job?

How about the ROTC Advisory committee? They "advise the President, the faculty and the military department on the ROTC program," reads the handy description flyer on University committees — "well actually they advise the department about scholarships," says Kappy Eaton, the Bureau of Governmental Affairs librarian and a dedicated committee woman.

I nominate Chaney Ryan.

How about the "Campus Planning Committee?" The big decisions they make each year have to do with buildings, landscaping, parking and traffic. Each is given a golden shovel. It is rumored that several of the committee members travel around campus with leather bags full of pine seeds.

Some people will do anything for tenure.

With well over 130 committees on everything from academic advising to radiation safety, it's hard to decide which is my favorite. But I've managed to narrow it down to the one committee that exemplifies the spirit of shared decision making.

But it is somewhat of a secret.

It isn't mentioned in our handy committee description paper. Eaton — you remember, the dedicated committee woman — is on this one. It is the Committee on Committees. Has a nice ring, don't you think?

But before I take an editorial stand that the University should banish all committees, I have to talk to our Editorial Board, but damn it, seven people can never agree on anything.

letters

Inadequate

The New York Times front page story on Jan. 17, 1983 was "Berkeley Tops Scholars' Ranking of Graduate Schools' Reputations."

It is interesting to note that "quality of libraries at disposal of the educational institution" was part of the criteria for scholastic ranking. However, at the University, library

facilities are inadequate for undergraduate as well as graduate study. The physical condition of the obsolescent main library at the University is a deterrent to concentrated study. The outmoded heating system is adequate in winter but impossible to regulate in the comfort range the rest of the year. Ventilation is poor. Acoustics in the main study area are at least 20 years beyond the current state of the art. Ambient lighting is disastrous to the eyesight. There is a lack of facilities exacerbated by increasing theft of personal belongings in study areas. There are no coin-operated lockers for coats and umbrellas and bulky packages and bags, nor check room for a few hours storage. Copy machines are in constant disrepair. For researchers, there are no large size copy machines for large journal articles. No typing room to accommodate students and researchers (the two typing stalls available are always in use). The library collection is

inadequate and outdated — if you visit the "stacks" frequently.

Last summer I visited the University of Nevada and saw their new library facility, privately endowed. It is not only an architectural gem but provides a real incentive to study, in the environment of Reno. On the other hand, at the University there is no assurance for corporate and alumni benevolence beyond the range of athletic facilities.

Will the University ever meet minimum standards for university library facilities, for graduate students and undergraduates? The question is moot without funding — which we cannot expect from the present legislative session. However, at least priorities should be arranged to give any money for building rehabilitation to the library rather than Erb Memorial Union.

Helena Johnston
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