

Helmsley won't ever forget April 15 again

On a day when millions of Americans were rushing to the post office to send in their 1040 forms, Leona Helmsley wished she could. And had.

The former hotel queen, diva of Manhattan, arrived Wednesday at the minimum-security Federal Medical Center in Lexington, Ky. Helmsley, who once intoned in her hotel advertisements, "I won't be treated like another room number," is now known as No. 15113-054.

It was hysterically ironic the 71-year-old Helmsley was ordered to start her four-year sentence on April 15. Apparently somebody in the Department of Justice has a sense of humor.

Very few people enter the clink with as much fanfare and pomposity as did Helmsley. She took the company's Boeing 727 to Kentucky and a limo to Lexington. Her husband, in tribute, shut off the decorative lights on the Helmsley-managed Empire State Building.

Helmsley could theoretically be out on parole in 16 months, but the saga of the woman who once said only little people pay taxes is over.

Helmsley, who once intoned in her hotel advertisements, "I won't be treated like another room number," is now known as No. 15113-054.

Nearly three years ago, Helmsley was convicted of avoiding tax payments of more than \$1.7 million. Her 83-year-old husband was also indicted, but was found to be incompetent to stand trial. Beside her prison sentence, Helmsley also paid out more than \$8 million in fines and restitution.

She is but one of many celebrities to get nailed on tax evasion. Federal agents, unable to pin any other substantive crime on him, pinned the "unpaid taxes" label on gangster Al Capone, who once listed his vocation as "second-hand furniture salesman." Baseball's all-time leader in hits, Pete Rose, also did time for skipping out on his income tax. So did country/western singer Willie Nelson (no jail sentence, the IRS just took everything he owned).

A unique and heady list, to be sure.

Those who skimp on their taxes sometimes get favorable sympathy from the public. After all, who among us likes to pay the IRS? The answer is nobody. But Helmsley never got that sympathy. Her abrasive personality, not to mention her "little people" comment, endeared her to no one.

Ciao, Leona.

LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.

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COMMENTARY

Real issues trivialized by media

By Ron Gregg

Predictably, another complex issue is reduced to the simplest black and white spectrum. In "Gays angry with movie portrayals" (*ODE*, April 8), *Emerald* reporter Tammy Batey should be commended for trying to educate the University campus about the portrayal of gays, lesbians and bisexuals in Hollywood films.

Yet, being one of the "soundbites" included in her article, I feel reduced to a stereotype — an "angry" voice — while my conversation with Batey was more complex and inconclusive.

This black and white reduction is emphasized by the first letter in response to this article by Bryan Westby on April 13. Besides being "angry," I am now "hate[ful]" (of a discipline that I want to devote my professional life to) and have been "expose[d]" for my "ignorance and racism."

Lord knows what all parties involved will be labeled by the end of this discourse, including Westby, and I couldn't blame most students for turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the relevant issues when the discourse is reduced to two sides name-calling across a fence.

I'm not sure what needs to be addressed most in a 1,000-word response: 1) The journalistic reduction of voices to the same soundbites? 2) The real homophobia in Hollywood, attested to by the fact that a recent board, Hollywood Supports, was formed by insiders to fight homophobia in the Hollywood industry? 3) A balanced discussion of positive and negative gay, lesbian and bisexual portrayals in U.S. films? 4) The different, complex reactions to such films as *Silence of the Lambs* and *Basic Instinct* in the gay, lesbian and bisexual community? 5) A sincere discussion on how gay, lesbian and bisexual issues connect to other subordinate groups, such as women and people of color? 6) The fact that this paragraph doesn't fit the simplified, "stereotyped" length of a newspaper article?, and so forth.

Unless we begin to learn, understand and accept the presently unsolvable, complex reac-

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tions to homophobia and other "moral" issues, and the "normalness" of difference, I personally fear the unleashed hate, repression and violence within our communities.

What I tried, apparently unsuccessfully, to explain to Batey is that after the OCA makes gays, lesbians and bisexuals disappear, the next step is to insure that women are re-feminized and men are re-masculinized and the patriarchal, black and white power structures of gender and sexuality are re-established. In my dissertation, the topic is not solely the historical homophobia within the U.S. film industry, but the unrealistic, iconographic images of masculinity and femininity that homophobia has helped to create and entrench.

I am no doubt ignorant at times, but I am continually learning the necessity of openly discussing and displaying my ignorance to eliminate it. Often, when I speak, it is from a self-reflexive search for meaning in a complex world with complex inputs that need to be heard, such as now. Instead of asserting an opinionated answer and position for everything, I wish more of us talked from a position of ignorance in an expanding search for truth and understanding.

Ignorance can be frustrating and embarrassing, but better those reactions than the verbal violence and superiority of name-calling and sarcasm.

For the record, let me state that *Silence of the Lambs* was an intense, complex film experience for me. I did feel that the serial killer was tagged with an easily identifiable stereotyped gayness, and the violence upon women by this character was disturbing. Yet, for me, Jodie Foster's character and performance revealed astonishing depth and strength in terms of female representation in a Hollywood film.

As far as *Basic Instinct*, I believed the film was somewhat misjudged by Queer Nation and other protesters. The film steals from *Vertigo* and asserts a more misogynist stance than solely an anti-lesbian, anti-bisexual bias and should be criticized from that standpoint. Interestingly, the only time I empathized with any of the characters was the lesbian, Roxy.

I have not seen *Prince of Tides* or *Fried Green Tomatoes* because I cannot afford to go to every film that passes through the community and therefore, I do not feel qualified to comment on those films.

The truth of the matter, I evaluated the above films in a similar manner to Batey. I also praised the positive portrayals of gays and lesbians in the films *Paris is Burning*, *My Own Private Idaho* and *The Virgin Machine*. However, it should be noted that these films were not distributed as widely in the United States as *Basic Instinct* or *Silence of the Lambs*.

The point of rehashing this territory is to emphasize that all voices can't and shouldn't be reduced to a pro or a con. Yes, I'd like to see more mainstream positive portrayals of gays, lesbians and bisexuals, but I also would include groups subordinated because of gender, class and race. Surely, if nothing else, college teaches us about the diversity of voices crying to be heard, recognized and legitimized. I know I'm naive, but I still don't see why all voices cannot be fostered and heard.

The other important point here is to note the irony that an article on stereotyping reduced five voices to the same "angry" gay, lesbian and bisexual stereotype, followed by the first "angry" letter by Westby that reduces Dockstader, Wolf and myself to hating, ignorant, racist homophiles. The letters that take Westby to task will reduce him to a foaming, mad dog homophobe. Meanwhile, the two reports I received last week about two AIDS related deaths and the reasons for these deaths are trivialized and forgotten. That's what I'm angry about.

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