

# EDITORIAL

## Simpson coverage lacks news value

Avoiding the O.J. fiasco has been the law in *Emerald* country this year. Without exception we have banned stories about "the trial of the century." On occasion one has slipped in without the knowledge or approval of the editor, but for the most part the *Emerald* has gone without the juice.

Now that things are moving along at a pace just a tad bit faster than a snail's we think the time has finally come for us to confront the mockery of justice this trial has become.

Actually, we don't want to editorialize on O.J.'s guilt or innocence, because we are among the few people left on Earth who still believe the courts should decide that one. We would like to talk about some quirky things that are allowing this trial to compete with the president's State of the Union Address for ratings.

From all outward appearances everything about this trial has news value. The press is reporting on everything from Marcia Clark's change in hairstyle to the new IBM computer on Judge Lance Ito's desk. They are even reporting about other reporters. There are so many satellite trucks outside the courthouse that if you threw a raw chicken up in the air it would be cooked before it hits the ground.

People touring Beverly Hills are making O.J.'s mansion and Nicole Brown Simpson's townhouse a tourist attraction. Everyone who ever met the couple is writing a book about his or her experiences with them. And all of them are gaining instant celebrity for it. Even O.J.'s neighbor's cleaning lady is getting in on the action. It's like those people on Oprah who say "I knew (insert mass murderer's name here) when he was young. He bought M&Ms and I put it together. You know; M&M, mass murderer."

And what's up with the defense? If we were paying those legal bills we would at least insist that they play nice with each other. We know a few two-year-olds who act more civilized toward each other than F. Lee Bailey and Robert Shapiro.

What we can't seem to figure out is why this is still garnering so damn much of the public's attention. Is there actually someone, besides O.J. and Nicole Brown Simpson's friends and relatives, who reads every darn one these articles? Will watching this trial make us better people? The answer to both of these questions is probably no.

But it does give us a release from our daily grind. And that is what this trial has become, a fantasy, and escape. What no one seems to grasp is that this is not a football game. O.J. is not going to emerge from this a hero regardless of the verdict. And neither will we as a society remain unscathed.

Even in earnest jest we are harming ourselves by making jokes about this or by ignoring the real societal issues that this case seems to be bringing up.



### ■ OPINION

## Single mothers attacked, vilified

Every generation is plagued with social problems. From decade to decade, certain problems explode, larger than life, and capture the national attention, only to be upstaged by another "new" social dilemma.

The nature of these problems remains relatively the same. What changes from year to year is the scapegoat: It's because of the illegal immigrants, it's because of women's lib, it's because of the Irish, it's because of the Jews.

The newest national scapegoat is a surprising one to find on the receiving end of the wrath of many a politician, preacher and American citizen.

The war is on against the single mother. Crime, poverty, illiteracy, drugs, unemployment: It's all the single mother's fault. The single mom, sucking up the welfare, is single-handedly responsible for destroying American family values. She is sending this country into a spiral of shame.

Whether this idea has been perpetuated by media, politicians or public sentiment, the new right political movement (and plenty of those officially not on the right) is targeting the single welfare mother for legislative punishment.

Newt Gingrich seeks to cut off aid to poor single mothers and put their kids in orphanages. In Oregon, Rep. Kevin Mannix, D-Salem, smelling the nation's thirst for single mother blood, has proposed a preposterous bill to the Oregon Legislature that would deny single women the right to be artificially inseminated.

I doubt either of these misguided plans will ever make it to fruition, but the politicians are showboating to the public; showing them that they mean business in this new war on the enemy of family values, and the public agrees. Punish the single mother — both socially and financially — to halt her solo reproduction.

Single motherhood — when you're talking about the 15-year-old girl in the ghetto or in some small rural town working on her second child — is an enormous problem. It puts the life of both



Gayle Forman

parent and child in jeopardy. It's probable that neither will receive a good education or get a decent, well-paying job, which in turn makes both of them likely candidates for government aide, or in the worst case-scenario, a grizzly government statistic.

And certainly something needs to be done. But nothing will work until we realize that single motherhood is one symptom of a lot of huge problems: lack of education, poverty, institutionalized racism and self-esteem.

While politicians are racing to penalize single moms for leaning on the welfare system, no one is looking at the reasons why 14-year-olds are having kids, and why many of these young mothers and their kids become public assistant-addicts.

The young welfare mom lives in poverty. She probably hasn't finished school, and now that she has a child, she probably never will, as there aren't too many programs that allow her to take her kid to school, and she certainly can't afford day care. Her child grows up in poverty and falls into the same cycle.

Maybe if at school, this 15-year-old mother had learned about birth-control, or had been offered free birth-control and easy access to it, she never would have got pregnant. Few impoverished teenagers get pregnant on purpose.

But politicians, while trying to eliminate young, single mothers, are shooting themselves in the foot by blocking birth control education and distribution in middle and high schools. And teenagers continue to get themselves pregnant.

Some young women have babies so that they can have something to love, someone who

will love them back. It's a pathetic reason to have a child, but not nearly as pathetic as the state of the self-esteem of these young women who have a baby because they have nothing else to do with their lives.

We have to look at the reasons why in our society, when a 15-year-old boy dreams about his future, he dreams of playing basketball or being a pilot or a cop, but when his female counterpart dreams of her future, she can't see past her birth canal.

It's very easy to vilify these young women. To think that they are having more kids just to collect more benefits. Anyone who thinks that has never spent a day with a baby — chasing, fussing, feeding and worrying. It's easier to blame these people, who at the lowest rung of the political ladder have little means to fight back than it is to try to fix the real problems at the root of society's ills.

The government will continue to bully single moms, and try to legislate the lives and bodies of all women. Single moms will continue to receive the blame, though last time I checked, it takes an egg and a sperm to make a baby. But the enemy is Single Mother, not Absent Father.

I haven't heard much out of any politician's mouth about the problem of Absent Dads, the missing half to the single parent equations. The deadbeat-dad legislation targets fathers who are legal custodians of their children.

And I'm pretty sure missing fathers will never be a part of this equation, nor will they be taking the blame for the death of family values.

Plenty of people in Congress, and elsewhere in this country, are perfectly happy to have a reason to castigate women. All those people, who were opposed to that 1960s, counter-culture thing called women's lib, are now getting some revenge.

Today's scapegoat is the single mom. Tomorrow's scapegoat may be the liberated woman.

Gayle Forman is a columnist for the *Emerald*.

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