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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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Simpson vs. Clinton

OUR OPINION:
The O.J. trial's win last week in the battle over public attention was far from profound

With President Clinton's State of the Union address and the announcement of the verdict in the O.J. Simpson civil trial, Feb. 4 was indeed a strange day. At no other time in recent history had two national events of such contrast collided with such velocity and unique results.

Because the verdict and speech passed within minutes of one another, the media and the public they serve had their own respective reactions.

The media, from the networks to the newspapers, were obviously confused by the turn in events. The speech and the verdict would clearly be the top story in any other day. But this was no normal day.

Most print media struck a compromise between the two stories. The Oregonian, for example, ran the stories side by side on top of the front page. And the Register-Guard ran the speech on top, but the O.J. verdict below had a much larger headline. Determining prominence was no easy task.

The public, on the other hand, had no such trouble. After repeated delays in the verdict announcement, it soon became clear that the speech and the verdict would overlap in some way.

As Clinton began his speech (after much pomp and circumstance), the public was indeed tuned in, despite the impending verdict. The elegance and apparent importance of the event made it hard to ignore.

But as Clinton's lengthy lecture moved on, the public began to tune out. The president and his 60-minute speech had worn out their welcome. By the time Clinton came to a much-needed close, one could almost hear the chants of "O.J. O.J.!" coming from the House chamber. And those chants were even more audible in living rooms across the country.

The television networks knew this and cut away to the Santa Monica, Calif. courthouse as soon as Clinton received his last waves of applause. No boring post-speech commentary, no real reflection — the verdict was in.

This whole sequence of events, while fascinat-



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

ing, isn't really surprising. The fact that the public was more interested in the O.J. trial than a annual oration by the president is almost expected — given the circumstances.

Is it all a big comment on our society, how we care more about a civil trial than the fate of our nation? Well, not really. It's a bit more simple than that.

The 1997 State of the Union address was ultimately a great bore. The annual speech outlining the president's views on the present (and future) state of the nation is only interesting if the country is at war or is in some other state of distress (i.e. FDR after Pearl Harbor).

Despite some arguments to the contrary, the United States is far from disaster. The country is actually doing quite well. And Clinton's plans for his new term had already been widely publicized. Before the speech, any citizen could predict its major themes — bipartisanship, cooperation and

balancing the budget, among others. With the exception of some education goals, Clinton's speech was sorely lacking in surprises. And the public recognized this.

The O.J. Simpson civil trial verdict, in stark contrast, had the element of suspense as almost its only drawing card. The sheer fact that the outcome of the trial was so up in the air was what attracted the public in the first place. O.J. fever was alive and well for one night and citizens' "right to know" was stronger than ever.

The public's decision between a rambling political diatribe and the final decision on a national figure's liability in two murders was really a no-brainer. Citizens weren't making a grand statement against government or exposing their deepest, darkest desires. They just wanted to see something exciting.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

Winners

President Clinton

Since his State of the Union address, the president is enjoying a 61 percent approval rating, almost ten points up from election time.



Peter Jennings

The ABC anchorman is getting married — again. Jennings will be going through his fourth marriage, this time with Kayce Freed, a producer of ABC's "20/20."



Beck

Alternative favorite Beck is riding a wave of popularity all the way to the Grammys, after being nominated for three awards.



Glen Rice

The forward from Charlotte scored a record 20 points in the third quarter of Sunday's NBA All-Star Game, in being named the game's MVP.



The Middle Class

Under the President's new proposed budget, middle-class families have a lot to gain. From college benefits to cuts in the capital gains tax, middle-class families could be the biggest winners of 1997.

Losers

Gordon Smith

The freshman senator was fined \$7,500 for the late reporting of a \$100,000 loan he made in his first Senate campaign. Not a great start for the new lawmaker.



Frugal Gourmet

Jeff Smith, the "Frugal Gourmet," was accused by three separate men of sexual assault. Smith hosts a popular cooking show and is an ordained Methodist minister.



Martin

The Fox television show, "Martin," was one of eight shows criticized by the NAACP for being demeaning toward African Americans.



Michael Jackson

In the face of criminal charges of plagiarism, Jackson continued to deny copying music and lyrics in his 1991 song "Will You Be There," on his album, "Dangerous."



Sandy H.S.

With teachers and administrators bickering over a new contract, the real losers are the students. Besides the distractions of the strike, they have to deal with a threat of replacement teachers.

Correction

In the Feb. 10 article on the Programs Finance Committee budget increases, the increases in funding for the Multicultural Center and the Office of Student Advocacy were falsely recorded in the graphics box. The correct increases should have been 7 percent for the Multicultural Center and 4 percent for the Office of Student Advocacy. The Emerald regrets the error.