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# PERSPECTIVES

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## The princess & THE PROFIT MARGIN

By selling to Diana's grave, the Spencer family is fueling the absurd spectacle of celebrity



Forget about Walt Disney World and Dollywood; for a cool \$16.50 each you and the whole family can take a gander at Princess Diana's grave.

That's right. In one of those weird cosmic twists that one can usually only find in an episode of the Simpsons, the Spencer family

OPINION



Kameron Cole

announced on Monday they will open their home to the public and sell tickets to view Diana's grave site.

I mean, one would think that Diana's family, of all

people, would think she deserved more than to have her final resting place become a stop on a package tour. But then why should they? After all, Elvis' family turned his home into a mecca for slack-jawed tourists. And they have a gift shop.

The Spencers say the money raised will go to Diana's favorite charities, which, in all fairness to

them, is probably true. But come on, Diana mania is still in its prime. There are any number of ways to raise money without resorting to such dubious measures. So let's strip away the nonsense and be honest. The reason Princess Diana's family is turning her grave site into the Graceland of Great Britain is a very simple one: because they can.

Skeptical? Within 20 minutes of opening phone lines, more than 10,000 ticket requests from around the world overwhelmed the 221 phone lines set up by the Spencers. No doubt about it, The Di Death Tour will be the hottest ticket in town.

I feel the need to pause here and offer a few words of explanation. I made a firm resolution to make the Princess Diana affair my own personal Titanic — to sink it and banish it to the bottom of a figurative ocean. But there are some things that just won't stay

down, that are so mind-boggling

that to not comment on them would be unthinkable. This is one of those things.

This latest chapter in this sometimes sordid, always twisted tale begs myriad questions, not the least of which is whether the British are now officially as crazy as Americans. But at the heart of this issue is a deeper, more pressing question: Has the collective fascination with celebrity finally overwhelmed all common sense?

How far are we willing to go to get a piece of a celebrity? Are we really willing to pay good money to hover like ghouls over a grave? And if we are, why?

As usual, the media is part of the problem. By engaging in a

symbiotic relationship with movie studios, record labels and anyone else out to hype a product, the news media have all but erased the line between themselves and the entertainment media.

By deifying people, we elevate them to a position in society that they are often ill-suited for. We assign labels like "voice of a generation" or "role model" to people based on criteria like wealth and recognizability rather than actual contributions to society. In doing so, we are setting a trap for future generations that they may not be able to extricate themselves from.

Consider this: Studies done on how children and young adults perceive celebrities have concluded they often equate media exposure with respectability. In other words, kids find strangers more deserving of their respect and admiration than people whom they interact with every

day, such as teachers, by virtue of nothing more than the number of times they appear in magazines or on television.

Aside from being profoundly sad, this phenomenon manifests itself in more insidious ways.

Nowadays, anyone can be a celebrity. Actual talent is no longer a prerequisite. If you break enough rules, kill enough people or appear on Jerry Springer enough times, you too can become a cultural phenomenon.

There's nothing wrong with admiring a celebrity. There's nothing wrong with being a celebrity. The problem lies in how we as a society respond to them. Celebrity status does not make someone an inherently superior person. The most important thing is that we not let our admiration override our dignity.

*Kameron Cole is a columnist for the Emerald. Her work appears on alternate Wednesdays. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Donations help corporations

Some important information was lacking from the Emerald article, "Rally targets corporate donors," (ODE, Dec. 4).

The increased corporate donations to the University are part of a broader and systematic pattern of strategic corporate philanthropy that is directed at universities. Since 1980, corporate investments in universities have tripled from \$235 million to \$1.2 billion. Two major laws, Small Business Patent Procedures (P.L. 96-517) and the Recovery Tax Act (P.L. 97-34) facilitated the intensity of corporate investments in universities. The small business act and the 1983 executive order allowed universities to sell patent rights derived from research to corporations. In addition, the new law and the executive order allowed for increased corporate tax deductions for any contribution made to universities (Lawrence Soley, "Leasing the Ivory

Tower"). Therefore, the general pattern of increased corporate donations must be understood in this context. These donations provide massive benefits in the form of technology transfers for corporations. As James O'Connor has pointed out in the "Fiscal Crisis of the State," corporations may socialize their costs by having the public (taxpayers and students) pay for the research and development costs. In the specific case of the Nike investment (combined donations from Penelope and Phil Knight, the Knight family, Nike Inc. and Nissho Iwai American Corp., a company for which Nike has acquired all marketing rights), the return is development of a "new field of study," sports marketing that the Oregon Foundation proudly advertises in its glossy publication ("Celebrating Achievement: The Oregon Campaign"). As James Warsaw, former president of Sports Specialties Corp., points out, he created the endowment for the Warsaw

Sports Marketing Center because "he knows the industry can benefit from the application of university-level research and education" (bizuoregon.edu/sports-mark/jimwarsaw.html). In 1993, Sports Specialties was acquired by Nike. This is a point that the Emerald "infomercial" (ODE, Dec. 8) failed to mention. Phil Knight knows the importance of cheap university research because "a local design student at Portland State University" received a mere \$35 to develop Nike's swoosh logo (Forbes, "You are what you wear," Oct. 13, 1996). According to Nike's 1996 Annual Report, image is extremely important and accounts for \$1.3 to \$1.7 billion of Nike's assets. The University's marketing will contribute to this image. As Steadman Upham, vice provost for research and the dean of the University Graduate School, points out, "outreach is not just a word in our mission statement; it is the tangible result of aggressive tech-

nology-transfer programs. ... The University of Oregon reaches out across space and time to the very frontiers of knowledge," and "it involves blazing a trail across the interface of athletics and capitalism" ("Special Advertising Supplement to the Business Journal: Gold Behind the Glitz and Glory," Inquiry, www.uoregon.edu/~uocomm/inquiry).

As Soley points out, corporate funding in universities is siphoned away from education and channeled back into the research and development for corporations and into the funding bureaucracy of the fund-raising institutions. One of the most recent marketing developments that has come from the Warsaw Sports Marketing Center is a registered trade market — The Sports Executive Retreat (FastBreak, Fall 1997). Do you think the students and the public will benefit from this retreat?

Julia Fox  
 Sociology instructor