

Newsroom: (541) 346-5511
Suite 300, Erb Memorial Union
P.O. Box 3159, Eugene, OR 97403
E-mail: editor@dailyemerald.com
Online: www.dailyemerald.com

COMMENTARY

Editor in Chief:
Brad Schmidt
Managing Editor:
Jan Tobias Montry
Editorial Editor:
Travis Willse

Tuesday, November 18, 2003

EDITORIAL

Smart, Lynch latest victims of exploitation

The American television industry's great tradition of capitalizing on tragedy has been a thriving business of late. Why, just last month, viewers were treated to the epic instant classic "D.C. Sniper: 23 Days of Fear," based on last year's two-man rampage through the Washington, D.C., area with a sniper rifle, killing 10 people.

Thanks to the USA network, those who don't live on the East Coast — and thus were not terrorized in person — could catch it on the tube after dinner. Bring the kids, too, we don't think they've seen enough horror yet.

But this month brought a menu of other tragedy and, dare we say, propaganda, straight from reality to the television.

The story of Elizabeth Smart, whom CNN affectionately refers to simply as "Elizabeth," was exploited nationally this month on CBS. Smart, who was 15 years old at the time, was abducted from her Utah home at knifepoint, paraded around in a veil and threatened for months before she was found walking with her abductors in Salt Lake City.

Sounds pretty traumatizing. But what's traumatizing to one little girl is naturally television fodder for the rest of America, where a tear in the eye of the average Joe is enough for corporate executives to showcase just about anything. The media pounced on Smart's story like a stuffed tiger on a tuna sandwich, and after months of intense coverage and controversy, it almost seemed like young white girls from Utah were the only people who ever get kidnapped in America.

After all, in the months after her rescue, American consumers were able to immerse themselves in the story. There were the Elizabeth Smart talk show spots (Oprah, NBC Today Show), the Elizabeth Smart news coverage, the Elizabeth Smart book, the Elizabeth Smart tabloid headlines, the Elizabeth Smart media battle and even the Elizabeth Smart polls debating whether she's been on television too much (50 percent of Utah citizens said 'yes'). Somewhere in this mess of ratings people forgot that Smart endured a harrowing experience, and despite the media blitz, nobody seemed to ask why.

The story of Jessica Lynch is another example of media exploitation of late, and unless any Americans locked themselves in a bomb shelter this past year, chances are they've heard about it. Lynch, a supply clerk with the 507th Maintenance Battalion, was captured by Iraqi forces and taken to a local hospital during the recent campaign to topple Saddam Hussein's government. Her daring rescue from the nearly empty hospital, conveniently caught on tape and disseminated to media outlets, served as an allegory to give viewers that warm feeling inside during wartime and, arguably, distract them from keeping track of the war's progress.

But people are captured and rescued all the time in war, so why did Lynch become such a media darling?

Lynch's story, which has been ripe with controversy (Did her gun jam or did she go down shooting? Was she raped or was she treated well by doctors? Was she heavily guarded or had her captors long since fled?) was beamed to millions this month in NBC's "Saving Jessica Lynch."

Again, the brouhaha over what really happened did a disservice to Lynch. Instead of being honored for her service, she was centered around pointing fingers and heated arguments about just how much she was hurt and whether she is really the American hero. By the way, if the movie and news coverage and tabloids and the official Jessica Lynch Web site didn't give you enough, the book is out, too.

Even more aggravating were the news stories following the premier of both made-for-television movies about which was more popular. Now we've got media coverage on which tragedy garnered the most viewership.

But despite the frenzy, we remain confident that the television networks are hard at work with movies about myriad other young girls and POWs who have faced similar situations in the past. We'll be waiting patiently in front of the TV.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Brad Schmidt Editor in Chief	Aimee Rudin Freelance Editor
Jan Tobias Montry Managing Editor	Ayisha Yahya News Editor
Travis Willse Editorial Editor	



Steve Baggs Illustration

DEAR BRITNEY,

Oops, I did it again. I've fallen in love. With you.

So your new album comes out today, and in honor of that event, you're touring the world, you're appearing on television more often than Ronnie of Ronnie's Stereo and you're on more magazine covers than President Bush.

In honor of your new album, I'm exerting a little less effort but will feel far more pain. I'm declaring my love for you, Britney. I may never be able to look a buddy in the eye again but, dang it, I can't deny my feelings! While many a "respectable" columnist would decry your overtly sexual image, I think I speak for a lot of males in this country when I say, "Keep on truckin'! We love you!"

How do I love you, Britney? Let me count the ways. Reason No. 1 is your innocence. Any guy who tells you he doesn't love the innocence of Britney is just plain lying. Through his gums. I mean, this is a girl who posed for a photo shoot with Esquire magazine with no pants on. Inside, she found her pants (well, bikini bottoms, anyway) but somehow lost her shirt. It must have shrunk in the wash. In the same breath, she told the magazine she doesn't see herself as a sexual icon.

"That's strange, and I don't think about things like that," she said. "Why should I? I don't have to deal with those people. I'm concerned with the kids out there. I'm concerned with the next generation."

She's oblivious! I love it! She's a guilt-free pleasure. Like a Krispy Kreme donut with no calories but all of the taste. Only Britney could pose for a semi-nude photo shoot and still come across as innocent as Bambi.



Peter Hockaday
Today is Hockaday

Britney, I hate to break this to you, but it's not about the music. It never really has been, since the day the "Hit Me Baby, One More Time" video landed on MTV. Your new song with Madonna is called "Me Against the Music." Well, in a fight against the music, Britney, you're winning. You're killing the music. The music is dying. The people in the "Save the Music" campaign should stop focusing on Napster and start focusing on Britney.

But that's OK, because in the video for "Me Against the Music," you almost kiss Madonna. At the MTV Video Music Awards earlier this year, you DID kiss Madonna. And that, not the music, is why I love you. Madonna also kissed Christina Aguilera, right after she kissed you, but does anybody remember the Christina kiss? Heck, no!

Secretly, we all know Christina's done it before. She's dirrrty. But when you kissed Madonna it was scandal! Headlines! Low morals! I don't know where I was going with that. I guess I just wanted to rip on Christina. She's so dirrrty.

The worst part of that VMA kiss was when they kept cutting back to damn Justin Timberlake, scowling like a schoolboy who just lost his ice cream cone.

Britney, I want you to know that if I ever meet Justin on the street, I'll judo-chop him on the neck and draw a mustache on his face with permanent marker when he's out cold. Ha ha. Shaved-head sucker.

But enough with the negativity. Back to the things I love about you. Just one more thing. I love this whole "I'm a grown-up now, so I don't care what I do, and I don't care what you think about it" thing. Britney's hitting the clubs, partying it up, drinking. She's not a girl, but she is a woman now.

When "...Baby One More Time" came out, Britney was 18 but looked 15. It was a little wrong to like her so much. But now, she's 21! She can go to bars, and she does! Theoretically, I could buy Britney a vodka-tonic and she could ignore me for the rest of the night! Theoretically.

Seriously, Britney, as you blossom, so does your fan base. Don't listen to the critics who say you're a bad role model for kids. Forget the people who say you're too scandalous. You just "feel comfortable in my own skin," as you told ABC's Diane Sawyer. "I think it's OK to express yourself and be the way you want to be."

Just keep expressing yourself, Britney. I feel like I've expressed myself, even if it means I'll have to wear a ski mask around campus so people don't recognize me. It's OK. It was worth it.

Now, just don't expect me to go out and buy the new CD.

Contact the columnist at peterhockaday@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.