

Monday, November 24, 2003

EDITORIAL

Media circus may jeopardize Jackson's right to have fair trial

Battle lines have been drawn yet again in what is sure to be the (newest) trial of the century, set to begin on your television screens with around-the-clock news coverage starting in January. OK, so maybe the media blitzkrieg has begun, but any facts actually relevant to the case will most likely go unspoken for the next month, after which he's slated to be formally charged.

That's right, Michael Jackson (allegedly) did it again. This time: a young male cancer survivor, the intoxicating effects of wine and the infamous mystique of the Neverland ranch — allegedly. Oh, and the love letters.

On the eve of Jackson turning himself in for the latest (alleged) molestation charges, CNN spent hours replaying a clip of Jackson exiting his car and waving at nobody in particular. Another clip of what seemed to be Jackson's vehicle driving down the highway was also a popular shot. The OJ-like car scene — save the drama of the original 40-mile-per-hour chase, of course — coupled with Jackson's brother Jermaine spouting about the modern-day "lynching" of Michael by society or the media or whomever, made for a pleasant afternoon of media insanity (somewhere, Kobe Bryant is thanking his lucky stars).

The only aspect missing from the media-deemed open-and-shut-case was an expert interview of a comedian to figure out whether (alleged) child molestation is still funny or not. After all, it's only a matter of time before the jokes start flying and everybody forgets about what we're really talking about.

Then there was the mugshot. Finally, more fodder as commentators quickly switched focus from "Did he do it?!" to "Is he an alien?!" Admittedly, the Editorial Board has no formal medical training, but we're pretty sure his head isn't supposed to be (allegedly) offset on his neck like that.

The one thing the media's circus left out, amidst interviews with family members and legal consultants and that homeless guy who got Jackson's spare change, was whether Jackson should really be charged with corrupting America's fairy-tale view of the ever-innocent Peter Pan, who symbolizes every American's dream of never growing up. Jackson declared in a documentary last year that he is Peter Pan, shortly after admitting that he shares a bed with small children.

Suddenly, it all made sense. Jackson and his (alleged) obsession with "the lost boys" at the Neverland ranch. His insistence that he was really interested in "Wendy" the whole time, and no, it was not a media cover-up, and no, that kiss was not staged. And who can forget the formidable Captain Hook, now played by Tom Sneddon, the Santa Barbara district attorney who (allegedly) lives to beat Jackson in an epic clash between good and weird. The only discrepancy is that Jackson can't fly. Oh well.

In the end, we hope that despite his momentous media profile and constant television coverage, Jackson will — like any other American should expect — receive a fair trial and avoid an assumption of guilt. Despite how smart and prolific the broadcast industry thinks it can be, only two people know the truth, and that truth will be revealed in a courtroom — where it should be.

EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.



Eric Layton Illustration

The problem with Thanksgiving ...

Every year when the end of November rolls around, all opinion columnists face the same challenge: How can we write a witty and heartwarming article about Thanksgiving?

Inevitably, a few columnists this week will buckle under the pressure and resort to the clichéd "what I'm thankful for" article. The only thing I'm thankful for is that I wasn't around when the pilgrims first came to this country.

Other columnists will mix a cup of sappy with their cliché and tell the story of their most memorable Thanksgiving. It's a classic holiday recipe that, without fail, includes all or most of the following ingredients: a cooking mistake, an argument or misunderstanding, ensuing hijinks and family reconciliation at the dinner table.

Somebody please tell all those aspiring writers out there, "Enough with the stories about Thanksgiving already! Family is what really matters. We get it."

This brings us to the most popular subgenre of Thanksgiving-inspired columns: The anti-Thanksgiving columns. For some reason the holiday brings out the social critic in many columnists. Vegetarians (of whom I am one) write about the evils of turkey and the virtues of tofurkey, feminists write about the sexual politics of meat in our patriarchal society, animal

rights activists describe the terrible living conditions and stunted emotional life of caged birds, and environmentalists point out with disgust our orgiastic celebration of overconsumption.

The best of these articles are the ones that discuss hunger and philanthropy. This is especially relevant in Oregon, which is one of the hungriest states in the nation.



David Jagernauth
 Critical mass

A few social critics will use their columns to discuss the genocide committed against the Native Americans and question why we celebrate a holiday based solely on a completely fictionalized account of history.

Others will choose to discuss a current issue within the Native American community. The sport mascot debate is a

more obvious choice, especially when the Cowboys play the Redskins on television (which, as a Washington fan, is one of my favorite Thanksgiving traditions. I love listening to John Madden discuss his turducken).

Somebody should write about the outrage that is the Bureau of Indian Affairs and its horrendous mismanagement of tribal trust funds. I will write this article one day, but not on Thanksgiving.

That is the problem with all of the above article ideas. They have all been done before. Every year it is the same tired routine. Columnists and reporters use these holidays to make sweeping reference to minority issues and then think to themselves, "Well, I don't have to write about Native Americans till next year." Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Black History Month work the same way.

It seems clear to me that nothing meaningful can come from a Thanksgiving column. I bet somebody has even written this smart-alecky "there is nothing to write about" article before.

So I give up. I'm taking an early Thanksgiving break. Happy holidays.

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

ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the results of the previous week's poll and the coming week's poll question. Visit <http://www.dailyemerald.com> to vote.

Last question: What does the Civil War football game mean to you?

Results: 78 votes

- A chance to remind Beaver fans of the Ducks' obvious superiority: 46.1 percent or 36 votes
- A chance to watch some great football: 20.5 percent or 16 votes
- Football is meaningless to me, I'm here for an education: 12.8 percent or 10 votes
- A chance to party! 10.3 percent or 8 votes
- A chance to show some school spirit: 10.3 percent or 8 votes.

This week: What's on your Thanksgiving menu?

Choices: Turkey; Ham; Faux turkey or Tofurkey; Restaurant or bar food; other stuff.