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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial

Media casualties

*Though important issues have been raised,
media coverage of the Simpson case needs to be taken to task*

by Rupert Kinnard

As an African American gay man, I have come to resent the danger I seem to represent in our society, and in the media, merely because of my gender and skin color. But I have learned that the irritation I experience, feeling forced to cross the street and remain visible from a distance, when walking behind a woman who becomes obviously nervous with my presence is slight compared to her fear of me. I understand that this fear is based on very real and frightening recurring abominations against women, and my anger that women have to go through this pain indicates the circle of casualties such crimes create. It is the attempt to understand the violence that women endure daily, as surely as I appreciate the bigotry that I endure as a black gay man, that makes me do what I can to make the streets feel safer for women.

It is also as an African American man that I am sickened by many aspects of the Nicole Brown Simpson/Ronald Goldman murder case. Though one might assume I would join the legion of folks upset about the menacing darkening of O.J. Simpson's face on the cover of *Time*—most shocking when seen in close proximity to the same photo, untouched, featured on the cover of *Newsweek*—I was more affected by the different headlines that accompanied the images. *Newsweek* used the sensational, all caps, "TRAIL OF BLOOD" headline, while the retouched *Time* photo was graced with the headline "An American Tragedy." I immediately thought that a photo of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman would have been more appropriate for the latter headline.

So much of what happened to Nicole Brown Simpson has been marginalized in the press. I understand that both magazines

would want to jump on the image of O.J. Simpson as a way to sell copies, but one would've thought that they would at least use a photo that featured both O.J. and Nicole. Is what happened to O.J. the "American Tragedy"? Thousands of battered spouses around the country would not think so. Looking at what we know about the Simpson's relationship, it is true that part of the tragedy lies in the way men are encouraged to view women in our society and the world. It is more than unfortunate that O.J. has become the symbol of the tragedy that has claimed two lives, as if what has happened to *him* is the tragedy.

But is it surprising, considering the whole phenomenon of what it now seems to mean to be considered a hero in our society? I recently wrote in this paper on what the late filmmaker Marlon Riggs meant to me as a personal hero, only to be shortly thereafter bombarded with words of praise for the deceased former President Richard Nixon as a hero. O.J. Simpson's accomplishments as a sports figure, a featured actor in a number of comedies, and a spokesman for Hertz Rent A Car were part of why he has been seen as a hero in the past. I don't want to downplay the power of his influence as a role model for African American youth, or the work he has done for worthwhile organizations, but are our standards for heroes now based on the idea "Once a hero always a hero"? I don't have the answer, for surely there are as many definitions of heroism as there are individuals who contemplate the question. But I think it is time we all evaluate our need for heroes and what they should stand for. And I think those who continue to cheer and support O.J. Simpson as a hero need extensive therapy...lest they become a part of yet another "American Tragedy."



Nicole Brown Simpson

PHOTO BY VICTOR MALAFRONT

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