

America's finds some sensitivity to censorship

ANGELA LINDSAY



Ever since pop singer Janet Jackson's Super Bowl peep show marred the otherwise remarkable event that was our Carolina Panthers' first appearance in the contest, the fingers of the censorship czars hovering over their little "bleep" buttons have been itchier than a pure wool turtleneck.

They have torpedoed everything from Jackson's frustrated muttering of the name of Jesus in vain on "The Late Show with David Letterman" to completely nixing the annual, highly anticipated Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. The restriction regulators have gone too far, and equally appalling is the implication that her "one little breast," as Jackson referred to it on Letterman, is the lone culprit for this bleeping censorship brouhaha.

Jackson's halftime breast-capade has been an abomination for her personally and professionally, but the perpetual fallout at the hands of media executives everywhere is extreme.

For example, awards shows like the Grammys, which were once considered "live," are now plagued by a three-second delay in the hopes of avoiding another "Nipplegate." Has the alleged wardrobe malfunction ripped the fabric off of our functioning rationality? Have the morality police nothing better to do? What about the gory pictures of tortured U.S. soldiers that are allowed to roam liberally throughout the free press? A single, one-second nipple sighting from months ago seems hardly as detrimental to the psyche of the American people compared to the hundreds of lasting, heart-wrenching images of war flashed across television and newspapers daily.

Not since Congress attempted to usurp the First Amendment freedom of speech rights of vulgar rap group Too Live Crew has any black artist caused such a ripple effect in the way the Federal Communications Commission handles the transmission of certain information. But when conservative talk radio host Rush Limbaugh and, until recently, shock jock Howard Stern are allowed to spew their controversial and arguably venomous opinions all over the airwaves, it begs the question whether Jackson has become a convenient scapegoat.

We are bombarded with a

plethora of violent TV and movie screen scenes, sexually suggestive songs and curse words everyday. What's more, the entire broadcast industry's apparent "anything goes" approach seems to have virtually encouraged such behavior as a way for corporations to make money, especially in recent years. So what makes Ms. Jackson's mishap any more malevolent?

Some argue that her particular faux pas occurred during a primetime "family" broadcast on a non-cable channel as opposed to, say, the cartoon "Southpark" which airs on the cable channel Comedy Central and showcases potty-mouthed elementary school kids and routinely satirizes serious topics from racism to homosexuality. Even the infamous open-mouthed kiss between pop singers Britney Spears and Madonna during the MTV music video awards, an event specifically geared to the younger demographic, and the inescapable publicity thereafter seem to garner more praise than punishment. So where is the justifiable means when the end can be altered as simply as the flick of a remote control button?

Freedom of expression is guaranteed. Such is the beauty of our country. Therefore, we cannot, and should not, expect the communication controllers to play babysitter. I am, by no means, condoning the flashing of private parts during televised, family-oriented events, but I am a firm believer in the unadulterated right to self-expression. Media managers and their hypocritical selves have been and continue to allow all forms of "expression" to enter our homes everyday. So, before they try to make an example out of someone else for their lapse in judgment, they could all benefit from taking the time to sweep around their own front doors, as the old hymn goes. I'm sure they'd find more than a little bit of dirt under their rugs.

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Janet Jackson touched off a debate over censorship at the Super Bowl in February.

Lean, clean nuclear power in the best interests of blacks

It's less likely to cause respiration trouble than fossils

By Norris McDonald
SPECIAL TO THE POST

My view of the world has changed in many ways since I went into respiratory arrest 10 years ago. I always knew that I had asthma, but I'd never experienced an attack as severe as this one. I stopped breathing as an ambulance rushed me to a hospital in Washington, D.C.

It was scary. Thanks to medication and proper care, I lead a reasonably normal life. I'm proud of that. It's an achievement to live with a chronic and sometimes debilitating disease like asthma, which causes 5,000 deaths each year and afflicts 20 million Americans.

The American Lung Association says that the prevalence of asthma in African Americans is 38 percent higher than the rate in whites. It makes me mad that Harlem has the highest rate of asthma in the nation. Direct health care costs for asthma in this country exceed \$9.4 billion a year.

And yet many people don't understand the connection between air pollution and asthma - and the importance of having clean air. Ozone smog doesn't cause asthma, but it can trigger asthma attacks and worsen emphysema and other lung diseases. Ozone smog triggered my acute asthma attack and others since then, setting me on search for answers. I learned that high smog levels can be incredibly intense for asthma sufferers. I also found out that the pollutants which produce smog come from many different sources, but a leading one is electricity generating plants that burn fossil fuels. In time, I came to recognize the need for more power plants that don't pollute the air - and here I mean clean nuclear plants that provide large amounts of electricity but don't release noxious gases into the atmosphere.

What's more dangerous to an inner-city kid - a nuclear power plant or smog? No contest. Absolutely no contest.

Yet almost every environmental group in this country opposes nuclear power, and that bothers me. So many environmentalists are stuck in dogma. They claim that nuclear power is unsafe, but no one in this country has ever died in a nuclear power plant accident. The U.S. nuclear industry has an outstanding safety record.

Few people know more about nuclear safety than William D. Magwood IV, a black man, who is director of the Office of

Nuclear Energy, Science and Technology at the U.S. Department of Energy. Or Shirley Jackson, a black woman, who was chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission from 1995 to 1999 and is now president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in New York State, one of the nation's top technological universities. They are strong supporters of nuclear power and highly regarded by many members of Congress.

You'd think that environmentalists would recognize nuclear power's merit, its obvious advantages over fossil fuels. Nationwide, power plants that use coal, oil and natural gas as fuel are responsible for 66 percent of the sulfur dioxide pollution that causes acid rain and soot pollution, 30 percent of the nitrogen oxides that contribute to smog, 21 percent of mercury emissions, and 35 percent of the carbon dioxide that's linked to global warming. By contrast, nuclear power plants produce no air pollution.

The environmental movement advocates the use of solar and wind energy systems. I support solar and wind as well, but only as supplemental sources of energy. I know that we can't depend on them to provide the "base-load" electricity we need for our homes, businesses and industries. Where is our base-load electricity going to come from on a windless night?

I'm quite aware that nuclear waste is an issue. But it's a political issue, not a technical one. Experts say that waste coming from nuclear plants can be disposed of safely. After all, the new fuel for nuclear plants is being shipped safely to the plants, so there is no reason why they can't ship out the used fuel safely. In fact, over the years, there have been thousands of shipments of nuclear waste in this country without an accident that harmed anyone.

Obviously we're going to need more power plants for our growing population and economy. But states and localities need to meet federal clean-air standards. That won't be easy. The Environmental Protection Agency says that 474 of the nation's 3,141 counties do not comply with federal rules on the amount of smog in the air. In fact, more than 160 million people live in areas that exceed pollution standards.

These air-quality problems are not going to be solved unless we expand the use of clean nuclear power. If new nuclear plants using advanced technology get built, the savings - in human suffering and in health care dollars - will be huge. For many us with chronic acute asthma, it could mean the difference between life and death.

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D.G. MARTIN



Vote for person or the party?

One of my friends is a proud "I vote for the person - not the party" man.

So, I was a little surprised the other day when I heard him talking about the upcoming U.S. Senate race. He likes one of the candidates very much, but he is not going to vote for him.

He explained, "I know what will happen when he gets up to Washington. He will fall in line with his party's leadership, and maybe be the key vote to determine which party would be in charge. I would vote for him as a person, but I am not going to vote for his party."

I will not argue too much with my friend's way of thinking, except to file all this away to bring up the next time he says, "I vote for the person - not the party."

I often hear people brag about their commitment to always "vote for the person - not the party." Sometimes, it comes across as if they are superior to other voters who do take political party into account. Their pride in being "above politics" is careless and unmerited.

Of course, examining the qualities and approaches of individual candidates ought to be an important part of a voter's decision-making process. More on that later in this column. But someone who says, "I always vote for the person," is either not telling the whole truth or is naively putting aside a very important consequence of electing particular candidates.

In Washington and Raleigh, the legislative bodies are almost evenly divided. The battle for control in both places is bitterly contested as two weekend news events demonstrated. The North Carolina Republican Party disciplined Republican state house co-speaker Richard Morgan for making a temporary peace with Democrats and sharing power with them. Meanwhile, the Republican leader of the U.S. Senate, Bill Frist, broke a longstanding senate tradition by campaigning directly against the Democratic leader, Tom Daschle. Attaining and maintaining control is serious business and it leads to such extraordinary actions.

When a party's control of a legislative body is subject to ouster if one or two of its members are replaced with a member of another political party, ever race is critical. The results of an election in any district could determine which party will be in charge of the state or national agenda.

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THE BOONDOCKS

by Aaron McGruder

