

POINTS OF VIEW

# More than ever black, white and 'red' all over

**T**he rules of the journalism profession are not black and white. It is a profession where shades of gray are the rule and not the exception.

Whom to interview, what stories to cover, which story line to take, and where that story should run are all judgment calls which most try to make as fairly as they can.

But even given that lead, the recent phone call(s) to a juror in the Malice Green case trial by a Detroit News intern against the dictates of the trial judge leaves more than one inkblot on our profession.

No, the intern should not have contacted the juror against the judges orders.

Even more important, the intern should not have been made the scapegoat for that situation. (It is curious that the News would have put an in-

tern on such a critical story, a story that most professional reporters would have given a lot to have even a small part in.)

He was an intern, after all, serving a stint at the News to learn the profession — during which mistakes, even big ones, are part of the learning process. And you would presume he was working with at least one seasoned reporter and under at least one seasoned editor.

One of those professional journalists should have stepped forward to assume responsibility for the episode and taken on the forthcoming punishment.

Part of that punishment, by the way, was out of line. The judge should not have ordered the sentenced person to sit through the trial in prison garb, shifting the spotlight from crucial trial issues.

I can't help remembering the high



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esteem in which the news profession was held following Watergate, when two Washington Post reporters, through painstaking investigation and reporting, exposed the abuse of power of a presidency.

Young people were turned on by that kind of work and they flocked to college newspapers and journalism programs

to learn the skills to become the Woodwards and Bernsteins of the future.

Not so today. Journalism was embarrassed when NBC News faked the explosion of a General Motors pick-up truck; when USA Today forced Arthur Ashe to acknowledge he had AIDS; most recently by the erroneous New York Post story about singer Whitney Houston's supposed drug overdose. And, closer to home, the press in its zeal to get the story failed to respect the intense pressure the students from Cranbrook/Kingswood were under as they waited for word of their classmates lost in the Great Smokies.

Journalism classes to which I have spoken are full of young people going into public relations and advertising, dutifully fulfilling their news writing requirement.

I feel sad about that. And it can only

hurt further that a Wayne State University journalism student is left to take the rap for those who know the news business as opposed to one who's still learning it.

We who are lucky enough to be part of the journalism profession have a responsibility to those who will come after us to get back to our basics.

We must report the news, not make it. We must interview others on the critical issues of the day, not ourselves. Just as we publicize our awards, we must acknowledge our mistakes. And we must leave the profession on a high or plane than the one on which it is resting today.

And that is black and white.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric. You can reach her at 901-2563.

# Cultural diversity forms suburban traffic patterns

**D**uring a recent conversation, a poet lamented that the world was breaking down into tribes. That's how he explained the mess with the Serbs and the Croats. It's cultural diversity in overdrive. He's probably right, but when you're an eighth generation redneck like myself, you can't tell a Serb from a Croat to save your four-wheel drive vehicle.

But then I thought of it in suburban Detroit terms. One friend contends that suburban Detroit people only want to know two things about you. "Where you live and what kind of car you drive."

He's probably right. Those two pieces of information define the tribe to which you belong. And put into those terms, the sage is right. Although I

can't tell a Croat from a Serb or for that matter a Greek, I can tell a Birmingham resident from one who parks his mini van in Canton at night.

First of all there's the gold trim line. It runs down Eight Mile, with cars falling to the north going for the gold. Those gold trimmed beauties also come with car phones.

The gold trim serves more of a purpose than identifying the owner as having bad taste. It allows them to identify each other when in Traverse City during August, as if the boat shoes and Izod shirts weren't enough. But we shouldn't feel guilty about the gold markings, native Americans used such markings on their bodies as they would be able to identify fellow tribe members.



JEFF COUNTS

Then there's the Lite beer and white wine line. It's rarely crossed by any in the suburbs, which allows the natives in northern Michigan to identify a tourist on the spot. Going native there means drinking bourbon or brandy with your un-lite draft beer.

My own tribe of Livonia residents can be identified by their mini vans. I have trouble finding my own during visits to the happy hunting ground at Builders' Square. A neighbor owns one the same color as mine and there have been times I couldn't tell the difference until finding out the key didn't fit.

My wife violated a Livonia tribal law by lamenting at a neighborhood party that there wasn't a good corner bar that offered cheeseburgers and beer. My wife has since been banished to the tribe of those who are recovering from some sort of addiction.

Then there's the Grosse Pointe tribe which engages in the strange custom of not wearing socks, even in January.

But even though we've got our own tribes, there is a big difference between

us and the Serbs and Croats: We don't kill each other with any regularity.

There's no militia in my Livonia neighborhood prepared to halt the invasion of birkenstock wearing, Volvo driving Farmington residents. And there's a reason. We've still got the idea in this country that we're more alike than different.

Celebrating our cultural differences is fine, but too much of it divides us into tribes. And when that happens we become suspicious of those driving Volvos.

Jeff Counts is the editor of the Plymouth and Canton Observer Newspapers whose tribal origins are somewhere between a 1956 Chevy pickup and a Dodge mini-van.

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