

EXPLAINING THE MEDIA:

What is a No-Snow Story?

Shortly after Mr. Johnson took over management of the Vietnam war from Mr. Kennedy, the new president determined that there was no need to disrupt family life for a little thing like a war that wasn't even declared. Married men, consequently, were no longer to be drafted.

My editor at the Washington Post assigned me to look into the rush to the altar which was certainly occurring even as we spoke. It turned out, though, that business at the marriage license bureau was bumping along at pretty much the usual rate. "There's your story, then," the editor said. "Give me ten inches."

"Classic no-snow story," an older reporter said when I whined to him about the stupid thing. A no-snow story, he explained, was one which grew out of the world's failure to live up to an editor's expectations. Yesterday's paper predicted snow, the editor tells his reporter, and yet there is no snow. Our readers will want to know why.

Once the concept was denominated I began to see no-snow stories everywhere, and still do. *Saving Private Ryan's* failure to win the Academy Award for best picture gave rise to a regular blizzard of them not long ago. The "Natural Law of Unemployment's" stubborn failure to exist has caused a decade of no-snow stories on the nation's business pages. Where oh where can Old Mr. Inflation be hiding?, the baffled editors cry. (The answer is the same one it has been since World War II: Old Mr. Inflation shows up whenever the oil-producing nations manage to set aside in-

dividual greed in favor of the common greed for long enough to raise oil prices. Just watch; it's going on now.)

Never has the real world so disappointed the American press as in the matter of Monica Lewinsky and her reluctant non-but-near-lover. The finest investigative journalists in all the land rooted and snorted about until they had raised what looked to them, blinded inside it, like the biggest dirt storm ever to besmirch the our virginal Republic. And yet poll after poll showed that the rest of us saw only a light smudge of no particular consequence, hardly rising above the horizon of our concerns.

The nation's most learned and subtle public philosophers—men on the order of George Will, William Safire, William Bennett, William Kristol and the blessed Father McLaughlin—noticed that there was only a light dusting of snow visible outside the beltway, although they themselves were up to their axillae in the stuff.

Manfully the brave little fellows set to work. Interminably we were instructed that we were callous, jaded, indifferent, self-centered, unethical, over-permissive, undisciplined, rudderless, shameless and godless moral relativists who were in all possible respects an utter disgrace to family and flag.

For had we not let down, God save us all and Tiny Tim, our editors?

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