

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

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February 19, 2009 - Issue 312

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**Octuplet Mom:
If She Can Care For Fourteen Children,
Without Welfare,
She Can Fix The Economy
Between the Lines
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The one thing American popular culture loves is a good "freak show." Anything out of the ordinary gets our society's attention, but the more bizarre it is - the more media attention it receives. The demand for the outlandish is so outrageous, that so-called media conglomerates are willing to pay millions of dollars for the rights to break the story, get the first interview or the "first photos." Ethics be damned as these same organizations swear they don't compensate for news, but do for entertainment.

Most of these conglomerates have news divisions and entertainment divisions, and most use their news anchors to do segments on their primetime entertainment "investigative report" shows (CBS' 60 Minutes, NBC's Dateline and ABC's 20/20 are examples where serious news anchors dabble in quasi-news entertainment formats). So while they don't pay on the news side, they do pay on the entertainment side and can still get the "news effect" by having their network's star news reporter do the interview.

That's where the lines become blurred and what the public thinks is really news is little more than entertainment - feeding the public's "need to know" in a publicity façade covered by the guise of news. That was (is) certainly the case with the woman now being called "Octo-Mom."

Fertility drug experimentee, Nadya Suleman, made international news by giving birth to eight surviving fetuses. Her first call wasn't to the father. There was none. It was to a publicist. This was the "freaky flavor of the month," a phenomenon for which the world just had to hear. Or was it? Wonderment turned to opportunity to benefit, as a bidding war ensued, and an alleged two million dollars was paid for the first interview. More was paid for the first photos. Now that the bizarre side of this freak show has been covered, the reality side is sitting in - which includes the ethical implications of implanting eight embryos at once and the cost of life-long care for these children, much less the other six children Suleman has. This is where the bizarre gets even more bizarre.

When presented with the cost and complications of caring for octuplets, Octo-Mom appeared more scripted than realistic. The costs ranging from medical, health care, child care, living expenses, school expenses and the unthinkable, college expenses 18 years from now, presented a pretty sobering reality. That reality was (is), outside of boundless love and time (and we all know time has its limitations).

There is not much more a single mother with a B.A. (and school loans) could give these children. Then add in the other six children and you have an even more sobering reality. Add in the fact that her prospects for a mate have significantly declined - not a lot of guys looking to take on a two-baby "Mama," much less a fourteen-baby Mama. Unless she really does find "Prince Charming," this fairy tale forecasts more like the old lady "who lived in a shoe and had so many children she didn't know what to do." That's pretty much how Suleman's responses sounded.

She hadn't thought much about the future and gave unrealistic responses to the very real dilemma she faces. When posed with the question as to how she could care for all these children, the most outrageous response she gave was that she could care for all fourteen of her children, without welfare. She is delusional or crazy. Or both. And she's in denial.

Suleman already receives food stamps and government subsidies (not TANF [welfare], but it amounts to the same thing if it's taxpayer subsidized) for the first six. The two million dollars she "allegedly" received is already spent to cover the very real \$2 million (estimated) hospital bill for medical expenses associated with the octuplet pregnancy. That leaves a lifetime of very real bills, boundless love, and questions as to how responsible this experiment was.

I call it an experiment because responsible fertility treatment is reserved for infertile and/or child-less women. Vitro fertilization is not for women with six children but the individual rights legalists say Suleman is covered under a woman's "right to choose" (Roe v. Wade, 1973). The medical ethic here is to implant not more than two fetuses at a time. Not eight. Suleman's doctor is now having his ethics called into question (and he should) for trying to push the limits of medicine science, not medical care.

That's how you know cloning people is going to occur one day. There's always some "mad doctor" out there looking to elapse moral questions for the sake of advancing science. As kids, we called that "being wild and crazy" (Let's do this to see what happens?). In this case, both Suleman and her doctor were socially (if not

economically) irresponsible and morally reckless.

While we understand the subliminal argument of casting Suleman as a potential "welfare mom" and the ramifications this discussion has for single women who choose child birth without considering marriage (and has historically had on women of color), it offers a legitimate argument for taking personal responsibility for one's quality of life and the circumstances they create for themselves and the larger society. Having an "oops" or two on the state's tap usually brings about an outcry by conservatives. Having fourteen oops on the state's tap should bring about an outrage. Children already live disproportionately in poverty in comparison to all others (1 in 4). The future of these children will be circumstantial, predicated on the machinations of their mother.


Is it society's responsibility to pay for one woman's publicity stunt? I think not. It's difficult enough to live on optimism, much less unrealistic idealism. And if it is possible for a single woman to take care of fourteen children without government help, Suleman certainly should offer up what she knows that nobody else has managed to figure out over the annals of time. In fact, her first call should be to President Obama. If she can fix this situation, maybe she can fix the economy too, an economy to which she has just made a significant contribution, one way or the other.

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