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# O.J. drama played to divided house

## Kokomo must not rest on its laurels

**M**y addiction to soap operas stopped back in the pre-television days when "Stella Dallas" and "Back-Stage Wife" were really sponsored by soaps. "Oxydol: It actually beats the sun;" and "Camay: The soap of beautiful women."

So, it was no big deal to bypass The Soap Opera of The Century. For two and a half years, the O.J. Simpson drama played to a divided house — divided on the verdict before there was a verdict, and divided by race.

A lot of white people, in the aftermath of the surprise verdict, found the justice system not to their liking. African-Americans have had a long-standing discomfort with the justice system dating back to the days of frequent lynchings (a.k.a. Mob Justice).

## Women speak out

African-American Ida B. Wells, editor of the Free Speech Newspaper in Memphis, Tenn., protested against lynchings and other racial injustices. This led to the destruction of her newspaper building. A group of whites demolished her office, wrecked the presses and made threats on her life.

Undaunted, she published The Red Record, a chilling tabulation of recorded lynchings in the United States for the years 1892, 1893 and 1894. An account of brutality and murder.

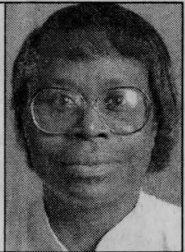
Justice was not a viable consideration.

Body mutilation accompanied lynchings. Fingers, toes, ears and other body parts were cut from the dead or dying victim and taken home as souvenirs by amused onlookers.

As famed jazz singer Billie Holiday travelled the roads of the South in the 1930s and 1940s, dead black

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men hanging grotesquely from tree limbs with ropes strung around their necks was too common a sight.

She was compelled to act in the only way she knew how. She composed and sang her protest song, "Strange Fruit."

## Thread of racism

Beyond any reasonable doubt — the O.J. Simpson Trial raised the issue of race.

Those who stubbornly deny that reality should take note: *Denial* is not a river in Egypt!

Racism is an undeniable thread woven into the fabric of life in America.

Naming the demon may be a first step in its eradication.

The City of Firsts is to be commended for its creative stand of a few years ago, but must not rest on its laurels.

I suggest that people of goodwill continue to set up displays e.g. "I Dream a World." Show more films and videos that address racism and solutions; write letters to the editor sharing personal experiences that promoted good race relations; and have deliberate dialogue between people of diverse backgrounds e.g. The International Women's Association.

Respond to racial attacks with moral support and visible public solidarity; urge the library to expand its media resources on cultural diversity; churches of different cultures should worship together and have pulpit exchanges; speak out against racist remarks and attitudes — silence breeds consent.

I've had the privilege of attending, participating in and conducting racial awareness workshops where people of different races faced the problems and came up with doable solutions.

I am convinced racism will triumph only if good people do nothing.

(Word is a retired teacher from Evansville, living in Kokomo.)