

# CHICAGO SUN TIMES

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## TELEVISION REVIEW

### '30 DAYS'

★★★★

9 p.m. Wednesdays on FX

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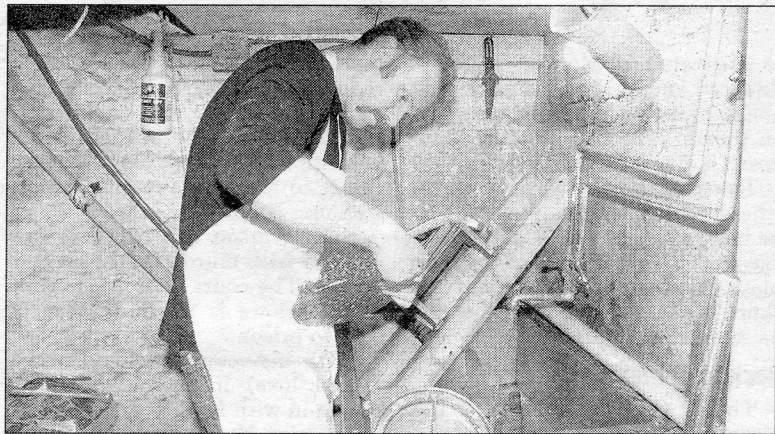
**M**organ Spurlock took on McDonald's in his critically acclaimed documentary film, "Supersize Me." Now, he's back, albeit on the small screen, and his targets this time are a little more abstract.

In his new reality show, "30 Days," Spurlock tackles some weighty issues — such as racism, poverty and homosexuality — and he does it in his documentary style (read: Michael Moore-lite). He literally throws himself into this project — starring in one and then hosting the others.

The show features a diverse group of participants who are given the chance to experience life as a radically different person for one month, investigating firsthand a world vastly unlike their own. In the premiere episode, Spurlock and his girlfriend explore the life of the working poor by giving up their NYC lifestyle and moving to Columbus, Ohio (Flint would have been too obvious), to attempt living on minimum wage.

He does surprisingly well (his girlfriend is really an anchor, however, only working one job!) and shows viewers how difficult it is to get by on a measly \$5.15 an hour.

But there are elements of "no duh!" in the series. Is anyone surprised that living on minimum wage is nearly impossible? Shocked to know that Arab-Americans get stared at in airports and have to endure racism? Were you floored when you found out eating Big Macs morning-noon-night would make you fat? Of course, not. But Spurlock now spends an hour each week showing us a lot of things we already know.



Morgan Spurlock stars in one episode of his new reality series, "30 Days," in which he washes dishes for minimum wage. He hosts other episodes.

That said, it is fascinating to watch. This is *real* reality television, where a person's actions actually matter. This is a reality show that may give some people the chance to see how the other half lives, a reality show that goes beyond eating bugs or competing on a remote island.

Along with watching the person live a different life for 30 days, the show is interspersed with facts and details — along with some animation to help tell the story. Just like Moore, Spurlock has found a way to make documentary films more accessible to middle America. That this series runs on FX — home of NASCAR — may be a good thing. Maybe it's exactly that audience that needs to see this series.

(Yes, yes, I know NASCAR fans come in all shapes and sizes and they aren't all Rebel flag-carrying yahoos. But, really, there's no denying a good number of them might not have realized the North won. More than, say, Wimbledon viewers.)

So while those liberal lefties may know poor folks can't survive and gays are treated unfairly, others in this country may not realize how easy it is to talk about outlawing gay marriage or setting minimum wages without seeing the faces of the people involved.

The show's visual quality is spectacular. Not surprising, considering one of the show's producers is R. J. Cutler, who began his career by producing the acclaimed documentary about Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign for the presidency called "The War Room." He also produced the critically lauded — but audience-hated — series "American High," which followed a group of Highland Park High School students throughout the school year. This guy is the Marc Burnett of documentary reality TV — and this show is the real "Survivor."