

Minorities try to avoid American melting pot

Editor's note: The following is the third in a four-part series examining the problems of racial minorities at the University.

By DOUG FICK
Of the Emerald

"If a man loses anything and goes back and looks carefully for it, he will find it." — Sitting Bull

"And that's what the Indians are doing now," says David West, a Potawatomi Indian who co-directs the Native American Student Union. Upholding ethnic heritage in the white man's world has become a primary concern of American Indians, he says.

But Indians aren't alone in their effort. Many minority people are fighting to avoid the American melting pot and assimilation into the white man's world.

"Most of us try to maintain our educational vision and to balance that with our cultural and spiritual vision," West says.

Because of the significant differences between minority and white cultures, maintaining that vision in Eugene can be difficult, he adds.

The University has failed to "acknowledge and adjust to the individual needs of American Indians," says George Wasson, an Indian who works in the Office of Student Services. "They're stepping on

someone's cultural toes."

He says he's seen many toes stepped on since he came here as a student in 1953.

"I've watched young Indians who can't make it at the University because there is no give, no take, no room for their other part, which isn't part of this culture," Wasson says.

The University's cultural inflexibility also affects Wasson, he says, adding that occasionally he feels the need to return to his people, "but that doesn't cut shit with the University."

Janet Crawford, a black University law student says, "It's harder to maintain your culture without people around you to remind you of it.

"If you stick me in a white



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community, pretty soon I'm going to start trying to speak more properly, and I'm going to stop saying 'Ya'll' and 'what is it' and 'what's happening,' because I don't constantly hear it. What I constantly hear subtly brainwashes me into forgetting what's natural to me.

"Not only are there few minorities (in Eugene), but the minorities here have brought very little culture with them," she says, adding that many minority people in Eugene are content to abandon their cultural identity.

American-Indian students often do the same thing, says Bucky Minthorn, co-director of the NASU.

"Half the problem, once they (Indian students) get here, is to keep them in focus of what they are doing here so they don't get sucked up into the mainstream," Minthorn says. "Because everything here is geared toward perpetuating the white society."

Education in a white-dominated environment has traditionally been a way to destroy Indians' heritage, Minthorn says.

"That's a subtle way of assimilation. Their argument is to educate these pagans and set them on the road to Christianity and the Republican way of living. They want to do that so they can steal what we have.

"They've tried to kill us off and move us and throw us into the melting pot, but we still keep popping up," he says.

Cultural events and educational programs at the University can help Indians keep their cultural vision and help whites better understand Indian ways, West says.

Indians at the University can uphold their cultural tradition if they stick together and maintain a strict sense of purpose, West says.

"I've lost something and now I'm back on the path to find it — keeping my eyes down that path toward my Indianness, toward my spiritualness, toward my being one with the rest of humanity and the rest of creation."

Pool issue floods council

More than 100 people crowded into the Eugene city council chambers to hear testimony on the fate of the city pool system, especially the Jefferson Pool, at Wednesday's city council meeting.

The city would like to fund every program, but it doesn't have the money, said councilor Gretchen Miller.

Faced with a \$1.6 million deficit, the council cut program budgets by an average of 6 percent to ensure Eugene would make it through the current fiscal year, which ends June 30.

City pools were closed on a rotating basis, ball field maintenance dropped, and library hours reduced by the budget cuts, but everything was hurt, Miller said.

"It is exceedingly important that an aquatic program happen in Eugene," said Jane Wilson, a

member of Citizens for a City Center Pool Committee. "The issue needs to be addressed by citizens, not sent off to the joint parks committee."

To increase the funding of the pool program and reinstate ball field maintenance will require budget cuts somewhere, Miller said. "It's only fair to people that we let them know where the cuts are going to be made.

"But can we afford to keep on keeping the pools open," said Bob Martin. "Looking at it from an economic point of view, you're asking too much to keep the pools open."

The city council requested that City Manager Charles Henry itemize possible areas the city could cut to obtain funds for the three projects. The council will review the suggestions Wednesday at 11:45 a.m. in the council chambers.

CLASSIFIEDS

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