

Editorial

Scarlet letter warning a sign of the times

An FBI report recently listed Portland as one of the most dangerous cities in the country, ranking the Rose City above larger cities such as Cleveland and Washington, D.C. "It goes back to the old story of where do you put these people (criminals) and what do you do with them," Police Chief Richard D. Walker said.

Finding a place to keep and rehabilitate criminals in a society that demands safety and fair punishment has become increasingly difficult. Jail overcrowding and a rising crime rate only perpetuate the problem.

But early last June, Multnomah Circuit Court Judge Dorothy Baker came up with one solution to end this cycle.

When Baker sentenced Richard Bateman to one year in jail and five years probation for molesting two neighborhood children, she added an unusual condition. Bateman is required to post signs on the doors of his home and car stating: "Dangerous sex offender, no children allowed."

If Baker had sent Bateman to prison for the maximum possible term, he probably would have been released on parole within months. In passing the sentence, Baker said the signs will better protect the community.

While this may alert the neighborhood to Bateman's crime, it certainly will not solve Bateman's problem. As Arthur LaFrance, a professor at Northwestern School of Law, argues, Bateman has become a prisoner within the society and the community has become his jailkeeper.

The basic idea behind this nation's penal system is not only to punish people, but also to help them overcome their past and re-enter society. Branding Bateman with a "scarlet letter" works against this principle by making Bateman a spectacle.

Instead of trying to overcome his problem, the sentence emphasizes Bateman's crime in bold, three-inch letters. It invites the community to shun and ostracize him — to judge him for his crime without the benefit of an explanation.

Bateman protested the sentence to the Oregon Court of Appeals, arguing the signs will prevent him from getting a job or a new place to live. His concerns are justified. The distrust and hatred generated in a community can be very strong.

As a result, these signs do not work to help Bateman or the community; they only stress the point that Bateman is a convicted sex-offender and will not be welcome into the community. This type of negative reinforcement will not change Bateman's ways or prevent him from committing more crimes. Instead it only perpetuates the problem it is trying to solve.

Bateman's case is only a small reaction to a much larger problem. Our society is searching for a way to punish and rehabilitate its criminals while keeping our communities safe.

But this example should not be ignored or accepted. Imprisoning Bateman within the society is not an effective or fair punishment. It shifts the burden of trial and judgment to society. We should not condone such a desperate action. Rather we should recognize the overshadowing problem and work for a better solution. If we do not try to achieve this ultimately we all will become victims.

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NEWS



Letters

Deadly theory

Hmm. I must say that in his letter to the editor, Jon Wollander has shown the world, both gays and straights, that he lives in what is obviously a fool's paradise (ODE, Nov. 4).

Wollander is against Gov. Neil Goldschmidt spending taxpayers' money to educate the public on AIDS prevention through the use of posters advocating the use of condoms.

How is this different from the government spending our money on advertisements promoting the use of a seatbelt while driving? There is no difference. Both condoms and seatbelts help save lives (when used properly). And if one life is saved, isn't it worth it? I think so. I've always been taught that the gift of life is priceless. And if Goldschmidt's ad campaign saves lives, he's given the greatest gift of all.

You say that the posters should show a body ravaged by AIDS with the caption: "Condoms fail — AIDS doesn't." (Nice scare tactic, by the way; it brings out the Republican in you.) Well, yes, condoms do fail. But then again, so does

your precious institution of marriage.

A recent survey done on a national level has shown that 46 percent of the population has cheated on its marriage partners. It does not take a genius to figure out that your wife or husband can bring you AIDS from one of their extracurricular activities.

And it does not take a mathematician to figure out that a 46 percent cheat rate is a lot worse than a condom breaking.

Your wedding ring theory is deadly. Let's hope nobody bought it.

Dan Gruber
English

Technology

There is a misconception that technology alone can solve important problems. Technology in a vacuum solves only the immediate financial needs of the institution that receives the grant to develop the technique. Institutions have a higher success rate at being awarded grants if they appear able to translate a discovery into something useful. This is obviously the University's motive for supporting a research park.

But we should not confuse the word useful with appropriate. Applying the technology of atomic energy to the construction of bombs hardly seemed appropriate in the beginnings of atomic science: Even Einstein felt this application to be foolish.

Letters Policy

The Emerald will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community. Comments must be factually accurate and refrain from personal attacks on the character of others.

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

Sometime after WWII, a new technology of plastics fabrication came about. Today, the use of persistent plastics in consumable products is creating a solid waste problem and causing considerable damage to the environment. The application of computer technology in the area of stock trading recently demonstrated a complete lack of foresight.

It has been common knowledge for several years that styrofoam products release a gas that damages the protective layer of ozone in the upper atmosphere, though styrofoam coffee cups are used at all the public forums on campus.

In many ways, our society is ill-prepared to control inappropriate uses of the technologies we already have. Short-term economic benefits should not determine appropriate uses of technology and the myths surrounding the utility of future technologies must be examined.

Francis Saffell
Eugene

Parking problem

The parking situation for scooters and motorcycles around campus is inadequate. The few designated areas left are crammed and overflowing with motorcycles and scooters. Thus all scooters parked outside or even partially outside the boundary line get tickets.

All the construction around campus has made the problem even worse.

There is no parking on the corner of 13th Street and Kincaid Avenue or between University and Kincaid Streets on 13th Avenue. Students with classes in Gilbert, Fenton, Chapman and other Halls end up walking several blocks.

Thirteenth Street should be opened up for scooter and motorcycle parking, thus relieving a large part of the problem.

Mike Rademacher
Student

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