

Self-deception characterizes majority attitude

By Robert St. John

I am a racist.
In spite of years of open-mindedness, in spite of years of education, in spite of everything I always believed true, I am a racist.
I feel qualified to make the determination. I am a white protestant who grew up in the South, in and around the city limits of Atlanta. My grandfather owned a farm, on which he raised cotton. As a child, I actually believed the black men and women working bent over

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in the fields were my grandfather's slaves.
Taking into account the lack of information most students at this university probably have concerning Atlanta, I should point out it is not a backwater town.
Atlanta also is no longer the capital of the Old South, lined with white-columned mansions and proud old colonels in snappy white suits. The metropolitan Atlanta area contains the country's fastest growing county, a county that has held that distinction for the past three years and has joined with the city proper in an explosion of opportunity the likes of which Oregonians have never seen and are not likely to see.
Furthermore, Atlanta is no flash in the pan, as was Houston. The economy is not based on oil production or the manufacture of automobiles, but rather on communication, information and education. Atlanta, in short, is a progressive city that many predict will some day rival New York — not only in its population, but culturally and educationally as well.
And yet, as the city swells and absorbs the suburban communities that sprawl around its outer perimeters, a small and vicious resistance takes place. Occasionally, one of these activities makes the news. You see, Atlanta is a city almost ex-

clusively populated by and politically led by blacks. This is a fact that sits none too well with the Ku Klux Klan, which holds its Southeastern annual rally at Stone Mountain Park, the area's foremost attraction.
Of course, the KKK owns a very small grip on the public ear. In spite of the stereotype, most Southerners recognize the criminal nature of the KKK, and indeed, of all overt racism.
And since most white Southerners have lived their entire lives within a stone's throw of their father's farm, they do not think about some of the things that always seem surprising to folks from out of town.

For instance, Stone Mountain Park, the world's largest solid granite mountain, stands as a glorious monument to the South's efforts in the Civil War. On the mountain's side has been carved the world's largest bas-relief sculpture: of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis, the three key figures in the South's efforts in the war that killed more Americans than any other war in history. If one walks down the path from the viewing site, a souvenir shop there offers Confederate flags, Confederate money, Confederate caps and little dinner bells dressed up like Civil War negro "mammys".

The Georgia state flag is nothing more than a Confederate flag with a Georgia state symbol in the upper left corner. On top of that, unless things have changed since I left a few years ago, the state that boasts Atlanta as its capital does not recognize the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. (who was from Atlanta) as an official holiday.

My point, however, is not to attack Georgia or the South in general. The South remains the home of the country's most sincere hospitality and openheartedness, one stereotype that holds true. Congeniality is the general rule. So why does the wonderful and gentle majority support such an obviously in-

sensitive agenda for day to day life? Because they have done it for years, because they do not know that they are doing it, because they have lived for years in the delusion of harmony and ignorance. And why am I telling you all this?

Because of the subtle racism so openly adopted in the attitudes of the almost exclusively white community of Oregon.

If you don't think you practice discrimination, test yourself. Go sometime to a country, or even a city or section of a city, in which you are the minority, as in barely being able to speak the language, or just looking as if you do not belong. Sometime, as a white, try applying for a job in Miami.

Maybe I am preaching. But racism is subtle, and practiced by liberals, baby-seal lovers, our mothers and fathers and our friends.

When a bus driver looks with scorn at an elderly Asian woman, what is that if not racism? When a grocery clerk snaps at the same woman, but treats the white woman behind her with the proper politeness, what is that if not discrimination? When a black first grader is taken from her school by policemen over the question of a stolen bicycle and her parents are not notified, what is that if not racism? When we go into the Rax restaurant near campus and are able to sit down to a meal and read subtle but real Charlie Chan-isms on the placemats, what is that if not the most uneducated and unenlightened form of insensitivity?

In the past few weeks, several local issues have come to my attention that relate to the point. And on this campus alone, I have seen an embarrassing surge in defensiveness. Certainly fraternities should not be judged racist by the example of two individuals who happen to be on one fraternity's property. But an outright denial that fraternities contain discrimination fools no one. Why have no letters in defense of fraternities been seen in this

paper from the minority community? Probably because most minority members actually do perceive a degree of prejudice among fraternities. If I am wrong, I invite minorities to tell me that I am wrong, and not white fraternity members. Prejudice exists everywhere.

Further, several letters have been written regarding an editorial that pointed out the trend of student phone directories to include only white people on its covers from year to year. Some white people think that the Emerald is being too sensitive, that the Emerald staff should spend time on more pressing issues, that the editorial writers must not have anything better to write about. How very wrong.

In fact, I am proud of the Emerald's stand, and I am proud

of my oversensitivity to this issue. Because oversensitivity is necessary to balance the insensitivity that the world around us has found so acceptable for so long. The time has come to wake up and look around. The time has come to realize that if we want to fight racism — as we truly claim as members of the majority, where it is easy to make such claims — then we need first to look in the mirror, and prepare ourselves for the cold, direct stare of reality. My friends, you and I are racists. Never deny it, and our brothers and sisters may have hope. Otherwise, they will see right through us with the eyes of first-hand experience.

Robert St. John is Co-Editorial Editor of the Oregon Daily Emerald.



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THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON

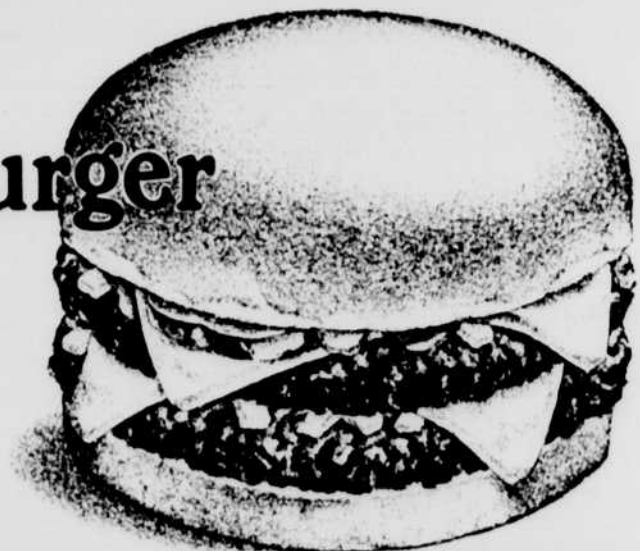


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