

Bookstores lose sight of freedom of speech

Waldenbooks, Barnes and Noble, and B. Dalton, the book purveyors of choice for our nation of mall shoppers, turned heels and fled the First Amendment battleground by removing Salman Rushdie's book, "The Satanic Verses," from their shelves.

Such an action should have shaken the sleepiness from a self-centered America caught in a period of civic lethargy.

Instead, the public apathy that followed raises disturbing questions about the nation's sensitivity to the political essence of freedom of expression in this country. Have we forgotten that our forefathers were willing to go to war to defend that right?

We respect the wishes of and have sympathy for the bookstore employees who have prioritized their own welfare over the assumed First Amendment concerns of their employers, especially in light of the generally accepted bookstore practice of paying their employees minimum wage. We even sympathize with the economic concerns of the bookstore industry's decision-makers, who do not want their bookstores boycotted or bombed.

However, neither bookstore employees nor bookstore mega-chains should have such far-reaching powers of literary censorship in a country founded on the principles of free speech.

If American bookstore chains allow fear of the Ayatollah Khomeini's fanaticism to dictate inventory, they obviously do not understand the importance of their positions as book merchants. They should be selling fishing rods or chicken sandwiches.

Mall bookstore shoppers should take their business elsewhere, namely back to the good old days of the local corner book shop owned and operated by a management team who loves books, who understands the passions of the American reading public and the importance of the total freedom of access that we, as Americans, are constitutionally allowed.

Nothing less should be tolerated.

Books simply are not items in an inventory ledger: they carry with them the considerable weight of the very meaning of our history and our future as a country. Our stand as a nation — and by extension, the stand of our nation's book merchants — is seen by the world community in terms of its economic and philosophical leadership. We cannot afford spinelessness in the face of fanaticism.

Bookstore employees should stand with us, not against us. We must demand this of them. If they are not philosophically so inclined, they can move on to another job, or they can ask for a raise. They must face up to the responsibility of their stock in trade, and step in line with the rest of the American purveyors of free thought and free expression, those of us who understand the purpose and the importance of our professions.

Carper's decision to leave may wake AIDS education

After two years of frustrating public activism in the fight for the rights and welfare of people with AIDS locally and nationally, Richard Carper has chosen to leave Oregon.

His decision, although regrettable, is understandable.

As a rule, sensitivity to people with AIDS has been preached, but not practiced in Oregon.

Carper's absence may further hinder the advancement of AIDS sensitivity and misunderstanding in our state. We only hope he meets with greater appreciation and acceptance wherever he goes.

Ultimately, perhaps, his change of strategy will prove beneficial to Oregon and will lead to more understanding of the tragedy and the imminent danger of AIDS to all of us. But we doubt it.

Carper's decision to leave Oregon tarnishes our state's image, and particularly the Eugene community's image, of openmindedness.

No doubt Carper understands the public perception of his leaving Oregon; more than likely, he hopes our state receives all the considerable negative publicity it deserves.

Carper realizes that drastic steps often are necessary in the fight against prejudice and ignorance, particularly in communities with a perception that the victims of the discrimination represent a negligible part of the population.

Further, young children will not self-destruct if taught correctly and openly about sex. By excluding them from the knowledge of AIDS, we may inadvertently succeed in exposing them to it. At the very least, we offer them membership into a society of bigots.

We hope that when Carper openly turns his back on Oregon and walks away from AIDS activism in our community, Oregon takes it as the signal Carper wishes to send. We hope that the people of Oregon decide to humanize the AIDS issue by waking to the serious need for sensitivity.



Letters

Integrity

Your Jan. 24 editorial on Proposition 42 penalizing black and low-income student-athletes does not go far enough. There is the fundamental question of whether black and low-income student-athletes are given the opportunity to attend college in order to provide entertainment for the masses, or to get a decent education. Your editorial, while indeed sympathetic to a target population of disadvantaged blacks, does little to address the personal plight, institutional ambiguity, and economic paradox of academic institutions whose primary purpose should be education, and, the economic interests of the sports industry.

As your editorial pointed out, a college president should be responsible for the academic integrity and policing. But when it comes to money-making sports programs and its vested interests, the president will need help. Faculty, administrators, support staff and student government should all act to assure that the student-athlete receives a valid education.

Any student-athlete, no matter what color or income status, should be in college to receive a quality education and not at the expense of playing sports. Mechanisms need to be put in place which articulate and evaluate the process and quality of such education. Only then can we reasonably assume that "academic integrity" is assuring a decent education for student-athletes.

Clarence Spigner, Dr.Ph.
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Competency

I recently introduced a motion in the student senate that basically stated that in order for GTFs to teach at the University they should have a requisite level of oral communication competency. A student faculty committee would determine "competency."

The motion was a response to numerous complaints from the

constituency I represent.

After the Emerald printed news of the motion in its Feb. 17 issue, I received five phone calls. Three callers supported the motion, one suggested I was a racist and one screamed something similar in my ear.

The point the two callers made and the reason the motion has been tabled, is because some people believe it is the students' burden to understand the instructor, and that nobody speaks perfect English. I agree that not many people use perfect English, but I believe it is the instructor's job to be understandable in the classroom.

Because there are departments on campus that allow GTFs to teach without ever assessing their verbal competency, my proposal requires prospective GTFs to take a verbal competency test before they are allowed to teach.

Any input on the issue can be directed to the ASUO Student Senate Office, 686-3724. Student government is here for the students, and I am not too stubborn to listen. If the majority of responses favor competency requirements, hopefully my colleagues will listen to their constituency.

Clay Kinney
Student Senate

Old tricks

It was with some amusement that I read Michael J. Ryan's letter (ODE, Feb. 17) condemning the Emerald's "slandorous attacks" on the Beta Theta Pi fraternity. Mr. Ryan would have us believe that the Betas are the misunderstood victims of some kind of baseless prejudice, and that their recent troubles stem from "isolated incidents," mere blemishes on a "long and rich tradition" at the University.

Gimme a break, dude! As one who had the misfortune to be neighbors with the Betas for many years, I am very familiar with their quaint traditions. How could I ever forget being awakened night after night as they mobbed out of their house to dump another hapless sap into the Millrace? Or the count-

less footballs, frisbees, water balloons and insults hurled my way as I walked past on the sidewalk? Or the sound of breaking glass as yet another beer bottle was tossed through one of my windows? Trespassing, theft, breaking and entering and harassing street people are all part of the Beta tradition that I have witnessed time and time again. The last straw came for my household when the Betas graduated from throwing beer bottles through our windows to shooting them out with pellets while there were people inside.

In 1981 we took our case against the Betas before the Interfraternity Council and won. All that happened was the house was placed on probation for a couple of years. Now it seems the Betas are up to their old tricks again. Far from being "isolated incidents," the Beta's current troubles are the stuff of which their "long and rich tradition" is made.

And by the way, someone should explain to Mr. Ryan that editorials are, by definition, subjective.

Mary Murdzek
Eugene

Rabble

In case you were unable to buy tickets for last Saturday's "China Night," this is what one got for \$5: a buffet dinner, a cultural show, and a chance to see the Chinese Student Association (CSA) and the Chinese Student Union (CSU) make complete fools out of each other in a little political rabble.

I would like to know why, in the first place, a Taiwanese delegate was flown in from Seattle to make such a useless speech when the CSA and CSU knew beforehand this would cause tension between them? Both groups should apologize to those who spent money on tickets and had no intention of seeing such a "brilliant" opening number that cast a shadow on the rest of the evening.

Lloyd Roberts
Student