

It's time to rethink Columbus' voyage

Next year will mark the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America; this preceding year should be a time for re-evaluating ingrained perspectives — specifically, the ones surrounding this disputable hero.

Chapter 1 in most American history books is usually an inspiring blow-by-blow account of Columbus' "finding" of the "New World." From that glorious introduction on, elementary, junior and high school students are inundated with the wonders of the sailor and his daring journey — the first in search of the American dream.

And so our collective memory of history is formed. Fed the beautiful details about Columbus from day one, few of us know the marred truths.

From his first arrival in the Americas, on a Caribbean island, he led the enslavement of native islanders for trade back in Spain, for slave labor on island estates or for work in area gold mines and fields.

Of course, he had good reason to work the Arawak people to their extinction: Gold. Profit. Money. And should there be any nagging doubts, Columbus' search for the New World and all its riches was justified as "God's work."

These two motivating factors continued to serve well those following Columbus in their treatment of America's first inhabitants. (Yes, there were people here before Columbus' "discovery," and, no, they weren't savages or heathens.)

Those living here B.C. 1 (Before Chapter 1) and their descendants would be exploited, "civilized" and Christianized non-stop over the next few hundred years, all in the name of money or God, or both.

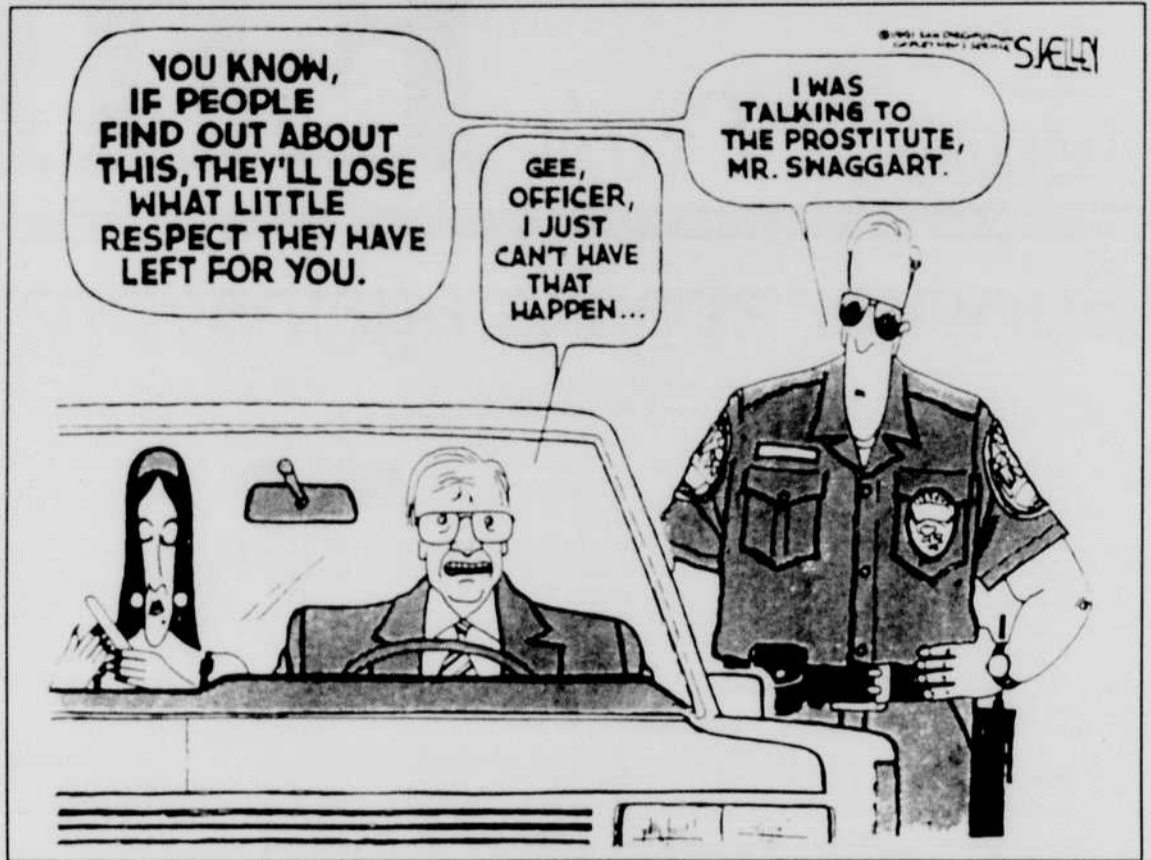
The details of this still-continuing saga, not surprisingly, escape America's white-biased textbooks, remaining untold so the images of heroes like Columbus may remain intact.

American history has typically been written and taught from a Euro-American, male perspective. Women and non-whites have either remained unmentioned or in the background, as if these groups didn't have a story to tell.

Truth is, American history is a synthesis of a variety of race and gender-related histories, each holding equal value in its own right and each deserving to be heard.

This nation's history needs to come clean by telling the bad with the good — even when it comes to treasured champions like Columbus, and by acknowledging all its participants' versions of how we got where we are today.

We've been taught to revere the man who "found" America, but now it's time to learn the flip side. In a nutshell, the coming of Columbus and all who came after wreaked irreparable havoc on this country's first inhabitants. This fact needs to be incorporated into the memory that encompasses Christopher Columbus.



LETTERS

Jump in

So I see that annual process of polarization has once again emerged in the ODE letters column. Well, allow me to jump right into the fray.

The flip of a coin helped me decide my topic of choice. Please allow me to deal with the issue of homophobia, whose spokesman clearly must be Jon Wollander.

Listen up, Jon! We should not care about what makes a person gay, anymore than we care about the causes of heterosexuality. What we should care about is ensuring that individuals feel safe in our society, free to live life fully in whatever fashion that is comfortable to them.

I personally consider the greatest threat to "the family" to be those people who seek to strictly define its meaning.

I firmly believe our society can only survive insofar as our ability to be open and responsive to all who belong to our human community. The natural world is filled with diversity. As humans we should seek to emulate nature.

It is easy for some to speak from a pedestal of moral purity. Jon, try to imagine if nature, or fate, had dictated conditions opposite of what they are today. In other words, come down from your pure altar of

"truth," and try to imagine life from the point of view you attack so unfairly.

Try to become a member of the larger, more diverse world outside your sheltered haven of righteousness. It isn't so bad out here!

Pasquale Anolfo
History

Why scream?

Dear Sharon Snow (ODE, Oct. 18), why would I scream at you when your point of view is so logical? Obviously you've heard the phrase: "Live simply so that others may simply live."

Kronda Adair
Student

Highs and lows

On a scale of 1 to 100, the Frohnmayer appointment deserves a score of 100. On a scale of 1 to 100, the elimination of the College of Human Development and Performance deserves a score of 0.

John W. Borchardt
Emeritus

Othello is

Regarding "Shakin'" (ODE, Oct. 18), Iago is not a person of color in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Othello is.

Iago is not a nice person in *Othello*. Othello is.

Amy Christine Thompson
Theater Arts

Keep quiet

Regarding the editorial titled *Conservative group pushes views again* (ODE, Oct. 21): It seems like a snowball, with everyone getting on the Oregon Citizens Alliance.

You criticized the petition for "lumping together homosexuality" with other behavior that is typically viewed as "... unacceptable."

Yet, you must admit that all of those behaviors you listed are "sexual preferences" of some kind. And of course, people all over are screaming that people should be able to enjoy their own preference.

You also stated that the OCA is trying to push its ideas down our throats. Well, I ask you, what is the motive of the homosexual community in promoting such things as "Gay Pride Week" and "Coming-out Day"?

They want us to accept their behavior as acceptable and OK. And talk about being militant! I think OCA should keep quiet ... and all homosexuals should keep quiet. Then the rest of us could live in peace.

Ron Williams
Eugene

