

Racial problems at OSU reflect national issues

■ **OUR OPINION:** A protest reminds us work to end racism is not finished

Students at Oregon State won't take racism sitting down.

Wednesday, 1,500 OSU students and faculty boycotted classes to protest anti-black attitudes and actions on campus and in the Corvallis community. The march was spurred by the intimidation of an African-American student by two white students as he tried to enter a dormitory.

The incident, however, was only the proverbial straw on a heavily-weighted camel's back. Black students, who comprise only 1.7 percent of the student population, say that racism confronts them in many subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Anita Hill posters and posters for a black candidate for student body president were defaced, and some students say they are patronized by professors or followed in department stores.

In the age of "diversity" and "inclusiveness" many people may be shocked that racism still exists in Oregon. But just because racists don't voice their feelings doesn't mean those feelings aren't there. Sooner or later, they surface. Pretending racism doesn't exist (see this university) doesn't make it go away.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the event was the low turnout. Time and again, it seems, white students think that racism has nothing to do with them.

Last October, the *Emerald* printed an editorial asking for student and faculty opinions about race issues on

this campus. We got four responses, none of them from caucasian students.

At OSU, a white student not attending the rally said he was worried the demonstration would give the university a bad name. Racism here, he said, was no worse than anywhere else.

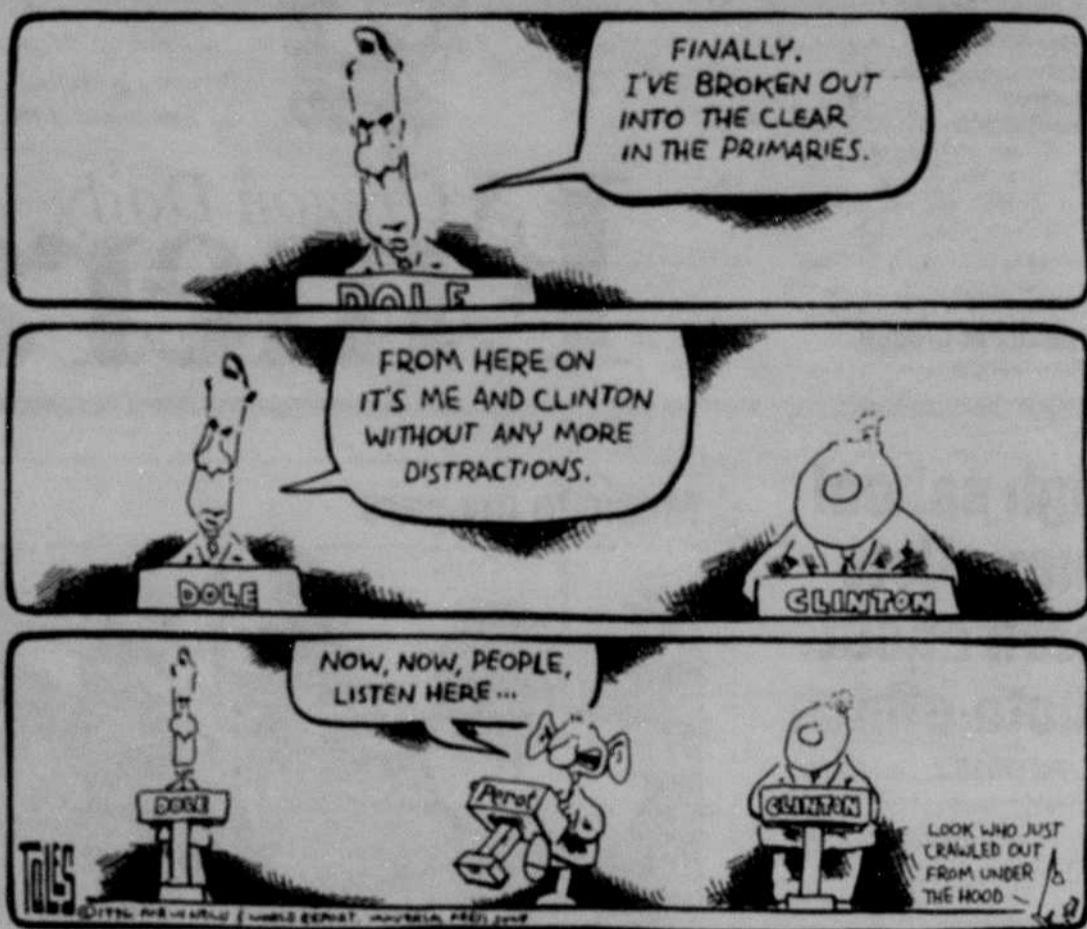
It is this complacency, this idea that race relations are "good enough," that will cause the greatest problem in future interactions between the white majority and people of color.

Any level of racism, whether it's better or worse than any other part of the country, should be unacceptable. And yet to many of us it seems racial tension has become an insurmountable obstacle — a wall we can scale and examine, but never quite get over.

The protesters at OSU reject that notion. The recent problems serve as a reminder that racism is not a benign tumor that can be cut out and forgotten. It is malignant, and we must be vigilant to keep it from spreading. Awareness is the treatment; an unwillingness to accept anything less than total equality is the cure.

The success of our future lies in getting to know one another. This sounds simple enough. But often people of a given racial group spend all or most of their social time among people of their own race. In addition, white people often expect people who belong to racial minorities to educate them about their culture.

It's time that white students acknowledge their part in racial tensions. Only when it is seen as problem to the majority, will all of us be free of the disease.



Lon Mabon's OCA — on its way out?

Things are getting interesting for Oregon Citizen's Alliance guru Lon Mabon. Everything Mabon has done has been directed at limiting the special interest rights of the group that occupies the opposite end of his political and personal spectrum. The beauty of his efforts, and what makes them poignantly ridiculous, is that they are finally beginning to backfire.

When Lon Mabon founded the OCA nine years ago, few took him or his political coalition seriously. The OCA was just another Christian Right splinter wagging the family values banner. But the group made a precedent: in 1987 it succeeded in revoking an executive order that banned discrimination based on sexual orientation in the executive branch of the state government, (later deemed unconstitutional).

The former nursing home operator and his wife concentrated their efforts on gay rights thereafter. Still, few people had heard of him, or if they did, they thought he was pretty mean, for a clown. In 1992, the OCA launched the now-infamous Measure 9 campaign to officially classify homosexuality as "abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse." While some voters were still wondering if the OCA was for real, 44 percent of the electorate decided it was.

The OCA rebounded, in 1994, with Measure 13, a semantic redux of Measure 9. Ballot results proved that a mere 1 percent of the population stood between Lon Mabon and the successful passage of hate legislation. Mabon blamed the initiative's failure on insufficient funds (he was busily backing several congressional candidates at the time; they all won in the Republican primaries.)

Mabon is planning a third ballot measure for next year, and two days ago, he announced his decision to enter the Republican primary for U.S. Senate. Mabon thinks he's ready to run the country; but lately, he hasn't even been able to run the OCA.

The Associated Press quotes a former OCA political pal, Al Mobley, as saying, "They've gone down from being a major statewide organization to an outfit that has no more than half a dozen counties with organizations that are effective."

Mabon responded with the remark that the OCA was being forced out of the political scene. The man who built his livelihood on legislation that would condemn 10 percent of the population to permanent status as immoral and perverse beings, now feels that he is being "marginalized."

The herald of middle-American family values may finally get a taste of what it feels like to be

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on the outskirts of popular opinion. The OCA's modus operandi has been to trade its 7,500-member endorsement in return for political support on its ballot initiatives. But now its membership has fallen to 2,500, and recently its former favorite, Gordon Smith, decided to dodge any alliance with the group. Mabon's seemingly charitable response to Smith's defection hints at the way his mind works, "I'm not going to do anything out of my way to damage him." (*The Hotline*, Mar. 5, 1995)

Marginalized Mabon is no stranger to subculture, however. Long before Mabon found the Lord, he was smoking dope with other soldiers in Vietnam. Post-Vietnam Lon even experimented with redux and LSD. When the mobile publishers of *Monk* magazine wrangled an interview with Mabon last year, he was comfortably frank. He told them that at the time, being in the subculture and all, he thought it was "fun." In 1970, Mabon went back to college, took some courses, and then, at age 23, got himself saved.

He joined a Christian retreat in Humboldt County run by believers of the Jesus People Movement. Within a week of being saved, Mabon and his fellow followers flushed the rest of his mescaline down a toilet and his stint in the subculture with it.

He's been flushing subcultures ever since. Mabon's efforts as a God-sanctioned champion of conformity have had one outstanding effect: an increased awareness of gays and gay issues. According to a Nov. 10, 1995, issue of the *Dayton Daily News*, Portland had more reports of anti-gay violence in the year that Measure 9 came out than Chicago or New York City.

At the same time, the ballot measures prompted a "coming-out party" among Portland business people and a surge in the number of political candidates running for local offices in Washington, where the OCA has one of their many chapters.

The phenomena are making at least one of the OCA's fears appear rational. A member once said that if you talk about homosexuality, more people will become homosexuals. Congratulations.

Sonja Sherwood, a senior majoring in journalism and English, is a columnist for the Emerald and, contrary to the Bible, sometimes wears clothing of mixed fibers.

Oregon Daily Emerald

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