

Is it possible to feel sorry for the Oregon State football team and coach Jerry Pettibone after they lost 49-13 to the Ducks on Saturday? Let us know.

OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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ODE editors bow to PC ruling

The Nov. 12 Emerald editorial wasn't given a chance to compete in the marketplace of ideas

Two weeks ago, the Emerald printed the first article worth debating that it has ran all year. The Nov. 12 opinion piece accused ethnic student unions of inadequately educating the student body about racism. That same day, students of color and others involved in campus multicultural programs wrote several blistering letters to the editor calling the Emerald uneducated and racist.



OPINION

Sonja Sherwood

Whereupon the Emerald began backpedaling at bionic speeds.

Kudos to the editorial board for apologizing for placing a phony byline on its Tuesday opinion piece. And congratulations to the editors for creating the position of multicultural reporter, panicked though the decision was.

These were smart steps that will defend the paper's credibility and ensure that ethnic student groups have access to Emerald coverage which, as one of the letters rightly pointed out, they should have had all along.

Where the Emerald failed was in its hasty repudiation of what the editors should have respected as a valid — if unpopular — viewpoint.

The day after the offending editorial ran, Editor-in-Chief Steven Asbury and Managing Editor Jennifer Carter published a baffling co-apology that defended free expression even as it condemned what was essentially an exercise in just that. Asbury and Carter's editorial states "the University should be a place that fosters various ideas and maintains an atmosphere where all people feel comfortable."

It could be argued — and it's unconscionable that any editor or minority student

activist/leader would disagree — that it is particularly urgent that unpopular ideas be heard. The marketplace theory of competing ideas upon which this country's entire system of First Amendment jurisprudence is based can't operate if only safe and acceptable viewpoints are allowed in the ring.

Unpopular ideas, and the fight to make them heard above the kind of white imperialist static most Americans learn as history, is the mainstay of the Political Correctness movement that emerged out of the 1960s. The PC campaign, alias multiculturalism, successfully revamped entire University curriculums to reflect America's diverse heritage.

Over the past 30 years, previously privileged European classics condemned as Eurocentric have been replaced by the works of minority authors and thinkers. Locke and Shakespeare are out, Toni Morrison and the Iroquois Confederacy are in. Earlier this year, yet another in a long line of scholars attacked *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* — the book that has been called the root of all American literature — for being racist (*Harpers Magazine*, Jan. '96).

PC has been so effective at making minority viewpoints heard that it in itself cannot fairly be called a minority viewpoint any longer. And as with any totalitarian creed, whosoever criticizes it runs the risk of being politically stigmatized.

As one of innumerable examples of the growing tendency toward cultural fascism, Harvard University professor and two-time Pulitzer-Prize winner Bernard Bailyn was criticized for reading his class excerpts from the diary of a Southern planter without giving equal time to the recollections of a slave. Other professors have been shouted out of their own classrooms for being insensitive to multicultural concerns.

Meanwhile, campus speech codes across the country painstakingly protect the feelings of the disenfranchised — women, students of color, Jews, Native Americans, Latinos, the overweight, the differently abled, ad infinitum — by fudging the First Amendment.

It's one thing to foster sensitivity and to encourage cultural equity in the classroom. It's

“It's one thing to foster sensitivity and to encourage cultural equity in the classroom. It's another to sacrifice a universal right in order to do it.”

another to sacrifice a universal right in order to do it.

One of the incongruencies — apart from the voluntary prostitution of the principles newspapers are supposed to hold most dear — in the Emerald editors' apology is the false alliance it makes between fostering diverse ideas and maintaining mass comfort.

Two things you don't find normal people doing in a free democracy is unselfishly nurturing opponents' ideologies or sharing consensus over tea and crumpets. Bloody wars are fought over ideas.

Only groupthink is comfortable. How many elitist white folk are "comfortable" with the idea that Columbus was a slave-trader? Or that America's founding fathers were a bunch of slave-owning aristocrats who didn't want to pay their taxes?

The mixture of myth-making, assumed class superiority and ideological Wonderbread that constitutes America's cultural identity is why this country desperately needs to acknowledge its shady past along with its multicultural present — but to suppress mainstream white criticism while doing so is diabolically inconsistent.

The Nov. 12 editorial wasn't given a chance to compete in the marketplace of ideas mentioned with such respect by the Emerald editors. Students weren't invited to defend or defeat the arguments therein. It and the perspective it represents were summarily squashed by an editorial corps who looked political correctness in the face — and fled.

Sonja Sherwood, a European-American woman majoring in journalism and English, is a columnist for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the paper. She can be reached by e-mail at cheers@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

LETTERS

False claims

In the Nov. 11 letter to the editor entitled "Party Lines," Lindsay Soto demonstrated the double standard ideology that far too many Democrats possess. In one breath, she accuses Republicans of being "narrow minded," while the rest of her letter is just that — narrow minded rhetoric. Just because I am a Republican (and despite what Soto would have you believe), I am not narrow minded or judgmental. Therefore, I will not classify all of "you Democrats" or assume that Soto speaks for all of you.

Now that that has been established, let me respond to Soto's accusations that she so flagrantly presents. She claimed the "fundamental strategy behind the Republican party lies in finding a scapegoat for each of society's ills." To make sure I understand her correctly, I assume when the Republicans proposed the first balanced budget amendment in 20 years, our scapegoat must have been... our children? And by accomplishing welfare reform, our scapegoat was... the tax-burdened working family? These charges are completely bogus, and Soto knows this! This is why she is using the Republicans as her scapegoat.

To Lindsay, I would say don't throw accusations around so loosely. You might be among friends and have the home field advantage now, but once you leave this liberal institution and venture into the real world, it will be a real wake up call.

Christian DeBaldo
Business Finance

Details missing

I would like to correct a number of facts that were presented in the Nov. 8 article about Robinson Theatre's accessibility improvements. Also, I would like to protest the subsequent "thumbs down" on the editorial page for the University's barrier removal efforts at Robinson.

The complete picture of barrier removal at Robinson is really quite different than what was implied in the ODE. Facilities built before 1977 are not required to be made accessible; however, the programs within them must be made accessible. Rather than proceed at Robinson with the legal minimum quick fix (which would have been less effective and much less expensive), the University decided to do the right thing and remove barriers nearly to the standard required for new buildings.

It is for these extra efforts that the ODE's editors unfairly characterize the University administration as un-supportive of barrier removal.

This project had been planned for some time and would have occurred regardless of pressure from within or outside the University community. Theatre patron Skip Collett did contact the administration and seemed satisfied to learn the barriers were to be removed in the near future. But to credit him with "getting the ball rolling" would be like blaming the recent flood on people upstream leaving their taps running.

It's no surprise that the Emerald reporter was misinformed, having written the article without interviewing those responsible for barrier removal on campus. Next time, please check the facts.

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