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DISCUSSING DIVERSITY

Too little talk about race has occurred in the years since King died

When the last parade is over, when the last speech has been made, and when the last obligatory news report has been filed, a question remains.

Would Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., had he lived to see his 69th birthday, be satisfied with the state of race relations in America today?

This question was posed many times to many people as the country commemorated King's legacy earlier this week.

That positive changes have occurred in the way the country perceives and reacts to race is undeniable. And while

OPINION



Kameron Cole

King would undoubtedly be pleased with the progress the nation has made, he might be dismayed that national discussion on race has stalled.

Racism has a unique status in America. Everyone knows about it, but

very few people are talking about it.

Part of the reason the civil rights movement of the 1960s was so powerful was because it forced Americans from every walk of life, in every corner of the nation, to confront the ugliness of racism, not only in the streets of Atlanta and Birmingham, but within their own communities. And, most importantly, within themselves.

Today we find open, rational debate on race has fallen victim to a laissez-faire American mindset that believes anything too complex or painful to address should be ignored in the hope that it will simply go away.

Unfortunately, this conflicts with the incontrovertible fact that the only way to effectively address racism is to do what Dr. King knew had to be done, and what so many Americans today are reluctant to do: Talk about it.

As college students, our burden is particularly heavy. The American university's reputation as a place that fosters discourse has been severely imperiled by recent trends toward apathy and thought policing. When the juggernaut of political correctness swept across the country, the message left in its wake was that while every issue has myriad facets and viewpoints attached to it, the only correct way to view an issue is the least offensive one.

The effect of such efforts, ostensibly undertaken to make the world a kinder, gentler place, has been to set back progress to a degree that we are only beginning to realize.

Nothing significant has ever been accomplished in the absence of significant discussion. And as we attempt to tackle issues such as affirmative action and diversity, we as a nation need to realize that any attempt to do so without also addressing the larger issue of race is akin to attempting to build a house without first laying a foundation.

In a less frequently quoted passage of his "I Have a Dream Speech," King spoke of the "fierce urgency of now." This phrase takes on a striking significance today. As we stand at the threshold of the 21st century, we cannot afford to ignore the issues of race and racism. Racism is a disease of ignorance, and the only cure is to hold it up to the light.

America still feels history like an open wound. Confronting racism will be a painful process, but also one essential to the health of the nation.

Monday, at Eugene's annual King celebration, keynote speaker Okianer Christian Dark implored that we not "be afraid to notice differences." We must not be afraid to talk about them either.

Kameron Cole is a columnist for the Emerald. Her work appears on alternate Wednesdays. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

Hutchinson

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Overtune Roe

The 25th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade has heightened national attention on the abortion issue. Most editorials and articles that I have read praise the decision, but as Americans — both pro-life and pro-choice — we should look past the rhetoric on both sides of this divisive issue. It is important to understand what Roe means in terms of the role of our judiciary and the implications for constitutional government itself.

Proponents and opponents of abortion need both realize that Roe marked the pinnacle of judicial despotism in this country, at least since the Dred Scott decision, which spurred the Civil War. I give this example not to draw the rhetorical parallel between slavery and abortion, but to show that the door of judicial tyranny swings both ways — from slavery to extreme libertarianism. Roe overturned the anti-abortion laws of 48 states, based on the premise of a natural right to privacy that can be found nowhere in the Constitution. Chief Justice Taney did exactly the

same in 1857 by outlawing the prohibition of slavery in the free states and territories on the premise of a natural right to transport one's property. Even well-respected liberal constitutional theorists like Alan Dershowitz decry the logic behind Roe because they know that it presents one of the greatest threats to freedom in America.

The relevant question is why must the Court usurp the community's right to abolish a practice that its citizens view as immoral? Should the Supreme Court legalize prostitution, drug use and gambling as an infringement of privacy as well? The same reasoning used in Roe would have nullified all state laws that outlaw doctor-assisted suicide. Is this what we want from the judiciary — an unelected group of lawyers appointed for life who arbitrarily determine the legitimacy of individual states' laws?

Overtuning Roe by a legislative mandate is the least we can do to restore confidence in our Constitutional framework. It will not necessarily make abortion illegal or less accessible, but confer autonomy to the community to make its own decisions

democratically. Please don't be fooled by rhetoric praising the decision and understand that its annulment is not as drastic a step for policy as many would claim. It was a poorly-reasoned decision that set precedent for present and future rulings, and overturning it is the least we can do to restore respectability to our Constitution.

Jonathan Collegio
 Chairman, College Republican
 Federation of Oregon

Solar planning

The Eugene Planning and Development Department is in the process of updating the city's land use codes. Included in this proposal is the elimination of solar access in most districts. According to staff, the existing solar code is difficult to implement and conflicts with the city's desires to have a more compact downtown area and neighborhoods. The updated-code draft limits solar access to the residential districts.

Energy options in the Northwest and the world are decreasing rapidly. For example, hydroelectric dams are having dis-

turbing effects on the local salmon population, which has led to the recent addition of the coho salmon to the endangered species list. In addition, the December Kyoto conference on global warming has shown this issue is a major concern for humankind.

With the rise of the solar industry and practical advances in solar technology, we need to look at creative ways of protecting solar access in all districts and all buildings. Transforming to a more sustainable lifestyle rests on the use of our solar income. The Solar Information Center believes that Eugene's zoning must incorporate solar access.

The solar access panel will be looking into alternatives to the current solar zoning ordinances. The panel discussion will be an opportunity for people with various views to collaborate and find a solution that can propel Eugene into the solar age.

Please join us today at 7:30 p.m. in 177 Lawrence. For more information, call 346-3696.

Jason Wilkinson
 Eugene