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'Catchy' stereotypes are still inappropriate

The recent Taco Bell ads have received warranted criticism for exploiting Mexican stereotypes

One of the things I like least about the advertising industry (emphasis on the word one) is its inability to let go of a joke. Advertising is like that guy you occasionally run into at a party, the one you're never quite sure you like. You know the one I mean. He's so desperate for your approval, anyone's approval actually, that it is impossible for you to have even a modicum of respect for him. He rarely says anything particularly witty or insightful, but when he does, you know about it. You know because he will repeat this witticism until

it has been stripped of any humor or novelty. Eventually, you learn to avoid him because you know that all subsequent conversations will revolve around the same old joke.

And if today's logo-littered American landscape is the party, then the Taco Bell corporation is that guy — and he brought his dog.

I am referring of course to Dinky the Chihuahua, who from the first time he uttered the words "Yo quiero Taco Bell," was guaranteed a space in advertising lore.

But its ubiquity isn't the only reason I dislike the campaign; it's not even the biggest reason. The

main reason I hate Dinky is because he is a reminder of traditions that should have been left in the past.

That loathsome little dog is the 1990s version of the "Fritos Bandido," the now infamous ad icon that used a crude Mexican stereotype to induce the public to buy corn chips.

Frito Lay pulled those ads after widespread boycotts by minority groups. But it looks like Dinky the Chihuahua will be spared such a fate. Why? Because his popularity translates into profitability, and where is the incentive to respect culture when there's money to be made?

The most virulent critic of the campaign is Gabriel Cazares, president of the Tampa, Fla., chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens. Cazares opposes the commercials on the

grounds that "Mexican Americans are treated like dogs, they have to work like dogs, and now they're being portrayed as dogs."

Now before you roll your eyes or open your mouth to protest that Cazares, LULAC and perhaps even me are making something out of nothing, consider the timing of the Taco Bell campaign.

While Dinky asserts his desire for Taco Bell between episodes of sitcoms and movies of the week, campaigns against bilingual education in public schools are gaining momentum, affirmative action debates are raging and the idea that Latinos are lesser Americans persists.

Given the current climate of this country, can something so culturally loaded really be dismissed as harmless?

If that isn't enough to make you sit back and do a little chin scratching, consider Taco Bell's own history. Remember the image of the napping Mexican in the sombrero, accompanied by the phrase "run for the border"?

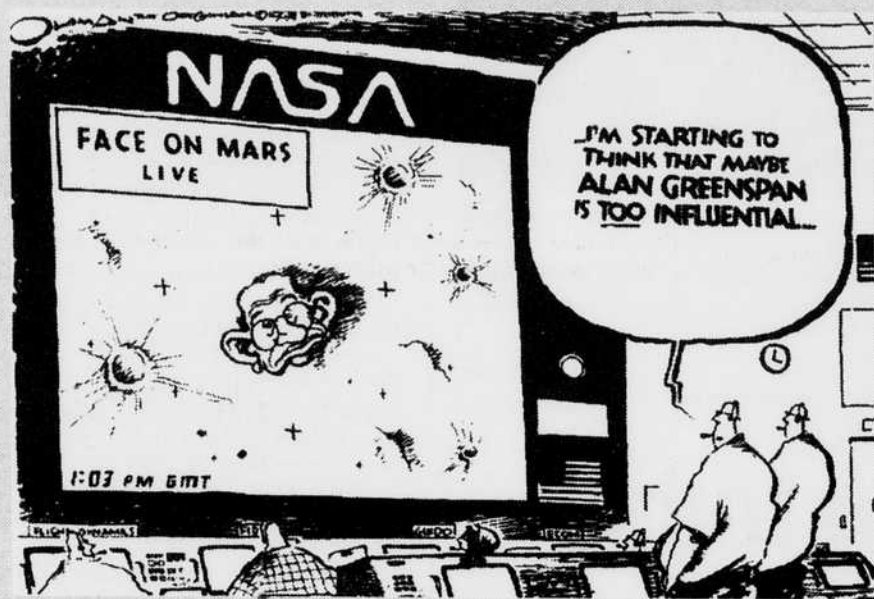
This kind of cultural appropriation isn't a new phenomenon. Industry and advertising have a well-documented history of using stereotypes and corrupted images to peddle products. But that doesn't begin to excuse the practice. If enough people stop laughing and start questioning these images, perhaps respect will become more profitable than denigration.

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



OPINION
Kameron Cole

DRAWING BOARD



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't plaster logo

I was surprised and dismayed to see the gleaming Starbucks sign on the front page of the Emerald (ODE, March 31). I was even more surprised when I realized that there was no story accompanying the photo. Starbucks' presence on 13th Avenue is being met with some very heated criticism and many informal boycotts. I don't think this "independent newspaper" is justified in plastering corporate logos on the front page unless it plans to address the issues surrounding Starbucks and corporate influence on campus. That kind of photograph is a free advertisement for the one coffee shop on 13th Avenue that could actually afford such a large ad.

Stephen Price
 Eugene

Poor coffee choice

In regard to the most recent coffee tasting that took place in the Fir Room this March, I would like to voice my concern over the newly chosen vendor. I am in opposition to the EMU's final selection, Seattle Roasting, for a number of reasons. First, I participated in the tasting, along with several other friends, and this company was by far not the best-tasting coffee. We all felt that Orsini Coffee or Cafe Mam merited that honor. Second, this company is not local, nor do they even originate from the state of Oregon, as do Cafe Mam and

Orsini — both of which are Eugene-based. Third, they do not operate with the exceptional organic, environmental and social standards that Cafe Mam employs. Fourth, to my own knowledge, their worker benefits and labor relations do not, nor do those of many larger companies, measure up to those of Orsini and Cafe Mam. Just contact one of their employees and you will learn about their job satisfaction and the soon-to-be worker owned and operated facilities of Cafe Mam. And, finally, the Emerald pointed out that the final choice did not offer the best tasting product, nor were they the best-priced vendor (ODE, March 30). So where did this decision come from?

In light of these objections, I strongly urge the University to reconsider its decision and consider signing on with a locally owned and operated vendor such as Cafe Mam or Orsini. At the very least, the University should re-evaluate the questionnaires that we filled out during the tasting. Perhaps even a second public tasting is in order. Whatever the remedy, I feel that my tuition fees and my use of the EMU facilities, along with the thousands of other students who attend the University, are entitled to a coffee product that we endorse and that we have deemed desirable. In simple terms, offer us a coffee product that we want to purchase, not the one that we are obliged to and compromised to buy on those unfortunate occasions when we

can't make it down to 13th Avenue and beyond in order to purchase a product we really wanted.

Erin Kuch
 Romance Languages

Vote Wortman, Cowling

ASUO elections are just around the corner and Geneva and Morgan wanted to take this opportunity to tell you why they want to represent the students as ASUO president and vice president. Some students feel that ASUO does not affect them, so why should they vote? The truth is that ASUO can and does affect your daily life. Geneva and Morgan are running with the goals to save students money and expand access to higher education for all.

Our first goal is an across-the-board tuition freeze. Thanks to the ASUO Executive two years ago, in-state students enjoyed a tuition freeze this year, but out-of-state, international, law school and graduate students' tuition has risen more than 80 percent in the last five years. We want to freeze tuition for all.

Our second goal is to have concerts in McArthur Court. It will take the effort of all the branches of student government along with the collective voice of the students to put enough pressure on administration so that students can access the building that they built with student dollars. Concerts in Mac Court will save us

money on tickets and will be safer for students than shows off-campus.

Geneva and Morgan feel that we, as a University, must address the decreasing diversity on campus. Geneva is at the University because she is on an Underrepresented Minority Scholarship. That scholarship no longer exists, and there are less funds available for underrepresented students. Geneva and Morgan are committed to increasing programs designed to recruit and retain students and faculty of color.

All of these goals can only be achieved by experienced leaders. Both Geneva and Morgan have fought hard in Salem and Washington, D.C., lobbying your representatives on issues such as financial aid, affirmative action and student control of student fees. But none of these goals will become a reality without students who care. We urge all students, no matter if you are involved or not, to look at each candidate's issues and decide which candidates have the experience to be the most effective and represent you the best. Vote April 15 and 16. Vote for active, effective leadership. Vote Geneva and Morgan for ASUO Executive.

Geneva Wortman
Morgan Cowling
 Candidates for ASUO Executive