

PERSPECTIVES

The Dream

As we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr., we need to recognize how far we have to go to reach the ideal of racial harmony

Monday we celebrated a great American hero whose contributions to the ideas of tolerance and racial equality have been unparalleled. What would King think of today's society in which people of all races and ethnicities are accepted and valued as important aspects of American culture?

Do you think he would, at first glance, be fooled by the language of our leaders, friends and even ourselves, into thinking the previous statement is fact and not just wishful thinking?

Yes, education and higher wages are more accessible to minorities than they were in the '60s when King was fighting for civil rights, but is that enough? There is still a significant difference between wages earned by African-Americans and Caucasians.

Even now, as liberal as we believe ourselves to be, we still have a hard time knowing what expression to use to describe ourselves without worrying about the implications of those words.

It is like all the races are standing at different sides of the fence looking out at one another, each seen as "us" and "them."

We may be making progress in the battle of equality in terms of education and wages, which is debatable, but at least it is an open fight.



Bryan Dixon/Emerald

We know it is there, and we can do something about it.

What isn't clear is what social equality and tolerance mean in our society. One doesn't have to go too far to find examples of inequality in our community. A University professor, John Gainer, was asked to exit a city bus twice in the last year as a police suspect even though the man they were looking for had only one thing in common with Gainer — he was black.

The mayor's office offered an official apology only after the media covered the story for a month.

As everyone at the University gasps and exclaims racism, they shouldn't point fingers before they look at their own campus community. Of 16,780 students less than 2,000 fall into the minority category.

For all its good intentions, the University is only an extension of the predominantly Caucasian community that it resides in.

Therefore, all these speeches and assemblies to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr. can only talk about equality and racial harmony as a hypothetical, considering that in Eugene there is not a lot of practical experience.

Eugene, in fact, only had three black families living in the community as late as 1940. Three families.

But no one ever discusses that and what it means to Oregon and the idea of racial equality.

We need to discuss it openly and dispel the "us" and "them" mentality that pervades every conversation regarding equality. The very fact that it is an issue shows that we have a lot of work to do.

King's vision of racial harmony is not regulated to education, wages and material possessions. Harmony refers to relationships, not merely co-existing with little conflict. Instead of looking back at Martin Luther King Jr. and thinking how things are a lot different now, we need to be thinking about where we need to go from here.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Letters to the Editor

No stamps for you

Once upon a time, police/fire officers were heralded community figures. The postal worker came to the door with mail only to be greeted by the milkman on the way back down the walk. Today, we encounter a new type of public employee, the disenfranchised postal worker.

I refer to the mean guy at the University Post Office. I will not disclose his identity for I believe that too many of us know of whom I speak. Far too often I have gone in for a stamp only to watch others be reprimanded by this man for their lack of postal knowledge. I watch, tensely awaiting my turn and hoping for the other window to avoid a conflict over a simple question about rate changes or a quick purchase. Unlucky to get his window, I painstakingly make it through the interaction without giving my opinion of how customer service works. I have

worked many customer service jobs where I gave that insincere smile to the annoying customers and moved on to the next customer in line hoping to find that smiling face in the line.

I ask the readers for help. The next time you get the mean guy, give a warm smile and offer him a greeting. Hopefully we can gain back his faith in the American public and get back to a simpler time; one when the simple exchange of a stamp for a few cents doesn't knock minutes off our lives because of the stress we presently encounter at the counter.

Jonathan Ward
Department of Molecular Biology

A Promise Forgotten

Last September, The Register-Guard editorial page editor, Don Robinson, decried opinion page

letters that could be interpreted to incite violence as he assured Eugenians that "their local newspaper will not serve as a forum for hate mail."

In December, an Oregon Citizens Alliance spokesman and Republican Party state delegate was allowed to vent his odium and rancor in a mailbag letter that characterized gays as immoral, unnatural, syphilitic, self-destructive, AIDS-infected and drug-addicted.

Presumably, editor Robinson is prepared to assure his readers that the sadistic killers of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard were not incited to violence by a lifetime diet of the same sort of venom currently being spewed by Barry Dean Williams and his OCA-GOP coalition of homophobes and hate mongers.

Ron Black
Junction City

Thumbs



THUMBS UP

To telling it like it is:

U.S. District Judge Robert Jones' response to a question about truthfulness posed by a witness in the abortion trial with "Truthful means truthful. ... This is not a Clinton deposition."

To Ducks in the Super Bowl:

Former Oregon football players Tony Graziani and Derek Loville and former head coach Rich Brooks will be part of the Super Bowl on Jan. 31. Graziani is the Atlanta Falcons' third-string quarterback, Loville is the Denver Broncos' second-string running back and Brooks is the Falcons' defensive coordinator.



THUMBS DOWN

To Greek students:

In central Athens student riots erupted after the education department changed its requirements for college entrance. By launching firebombs into the crowd, the students injured police and bystanders.

To tuition:

England's prestigious universities can no longer support a free education system. Students will begin paying tuition this term, which amounts to less than \$2,000 per year.