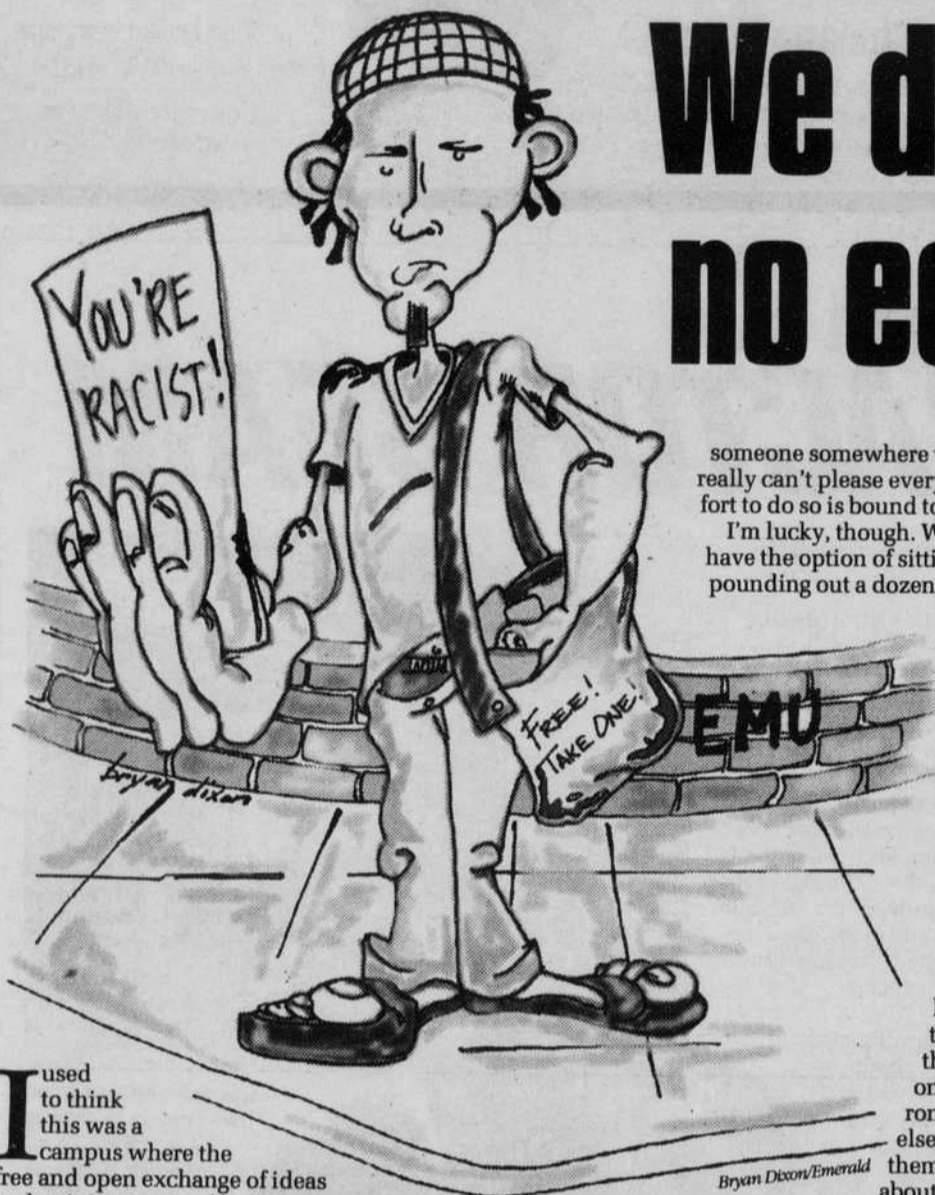


PERSPECTIVES

We don't need no education?

Overcoming racism requires information, not accusation



I used to think this was a campus where the free and open exchange of ideas and opinions was valued.

Then someone called me a racist. Well, not me exactly, but the Emerald. And after logging two years and more hours than I care to count working at this paper, it is sometimes difficult to tell where it stops and I begin. Suffice it to say that when someone levels criticism at the paper, I tend to take it at least a little personally.

It's the kind of thing that I can absorb fairly easily for a couple of reasons. One, it's a groundless accusation rooted in sloppy reactionism and two, I realized a long time ago, before I ever came to this place, that no matter what I said,

someone somewhere would take issue with it. You really can't please everyone all the time, and any effort to do so is bound to fail.

I'm lucky, though. When people criticize me, I have the option of sitting down at a computer and pounding out a dozen or so column inches of rebuttal.

Sadly, not everyone on campus can choose the same tactic. This is a column for those people.

It seems that the latest in a long line of disturbing trends is to arbitrarily label people and organizations as racist without any factual basis for the claim.

Now, I've always been a big believer in letting people have their say, if for no other reason than a fervent belief that someone who would stupidly and erroneously label me (or anyone else) a racist is saying more about themselves than they ever could about me.

This being the case, it's tempting to say that what these people say doesn't matter. See, in a year I'll be gone. Gone from this paper, gone from this school and, most assuredly, gone from this state. But it does matter. I don't think I even realized how much it matters until I started talking to people around campus.

Here's something you probably already know: This campus is entering a critical phase in its dialogue on race and racism, and it's very important that we don't screw this up.

For any real change to take place, as many students as possible need to be actively involved in the process. Prob-

lem is, many students have already been alienated from this process by the proliferation of reckless accusations of racism.

Words like racist and racism, incredibly important and powerful words, have been used so loosely so often that they've lost potency for many students.

I've had several conversations with students and even a couple faculty members who feel extremely uncomfortable broaching the subject of race on campus because they fear their contributions might be met with cries of racism.

Most of these people are indeed not racist, but some of them are terribly uninformed, even ignorant, about the issues that face people who are different from themselves. Sadly, many of them would welcome the chance to be challenged and educated but will probably never get the chance. They are afraid to ask questions, afraid to speak.

Should the plan for eradicating racism at the University include turning it into a place that is unsafe for ideas? If we create a climate where it becomes unsafe for any of us to voice an opinion, then we will be cheating ourselves of the most useful part of our education. If you can't speak freely, why speak? If you can't speak, why breathe?

Racism and ignorance are very different things. Ignorance can often be corrected, but not if the people who can best address it don't know where or how it manifests itself. And racism is too important to be trivialized by accusation and innuendo.

Whether people don't understand the grave folly of throwing around terms like racist or just don't care is irrelevant because the consequences are the same. As long as there are people who refuse to speak up because they are afraid of saying "the wrong thing," silence will gradually overpower discourse. And change has never come from silence.

Kameron Cole is an editorial editor for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

Opinion



Kameron Cole

Letters to the Editor

March tonight

In a society where a woman is raped every six minutes and one in three women is raped in her life, we are unable to separate ourselves from the reality of sexual violence. Rape is any unwanted sexual intercourse. It is about power, and more than 80 percent of rapes are committed by someone the survivor knows. These acquaintance rapes are, and must be seen, as violent acts, not as a difference of opinion. Unfortunately, myths about rape continue to persist and it is clear that we need to take all possible steps toward educating ourselves about rape and sexual assault.

Many such opportunities present themselves in May, which is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This year's Take Back the Night March is tonight. Take Back the Night, now in its 21st year, is a time for women to walk through the streets of Eugene without fear in an effort for their voices to be heard in protest of the continuance of rape and sexual assault in our daily lives.

The event begins with a 7 p.m. performance by Mare Wakefield at the EMU Amphitheater, followed by the rally and march through Eugene to the corner of Eighth Avenue and Oak Street, where there will be a speak-out. The event will be ASL interpreted, and return transportation will be provided from the speak-out to the University,

as well as child care (call 346-4095). Please come and share your voice in the effort to end violence against women.

Jessie Wofsy
Eugene

Outrageous demands

I read the little list of the protesters' demands (ODE, May 18). Who do they think they are? Requiring incoming students to sign a statement of "zero tolerance" is not only ridiculous but arrogant. I support tolerance, but I would never sign such a pledge. I am capable of respect without being bound by a contractual agreement. How diverse and tolerant is forcing people to sign a pledge like that, anyway? This is just another instance of the iron fist of tolerance that is life in Eugene. These protesters have too much time on their hands. They need to find a different hobby.

Kristen Mahoney
Photography

Interpretation skewed

First, Marcy Miranda Janes mistakenly assumes that the expression "a spade is a spade" refers in a derogatory way to African-Americans, when in fact she will find that it refers to shovels.

Now, the brouhaha over the Planning, Public Policy and Management class.

Threats to a student's safety should certainly be taken seriously. If the threat is

made by other students, there is a Student Conduct Code to deal with the problem. In reference to the students' list of long-term goals, however, what this University does not need and cannot enforce is requiring students to sign an oath of racial and gender orthodoxy upon entering the University. The recent protesters may not like it, but as odious as they (and I) find racism, people are allowed to think as they like. People are allowed to be racist and/or homophobic. The University cannot and should not refuse students admission on any ideological grounds.

This is an issue of free thought. Students who threaten other students should most certainly be investigated and, if found guilty, punished by the University to the fullest extent allowable. But we cannot start punishing people for the thoughts in their heads.

Joseph Renaud
German

Term misused

I am writing in response to a letter written by Marcy Miranda Janes (ODE, May 17) regarding Joseph Nicholls' description of Student Senator Michael Dixon's behavior. I am going to begin my letter with the same line as Janes. However, unlike Janes, I am going to continue mine with rational thoughts.

At issue is the intent of the line "a spade is a spade, and you are still a convicted felon," written by Nicholls and printed by the Emerald (ODE, May 12). The basis of Janes' argument is her definition of the term spade as: "Negro: usually taken to be offensive" from Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. My question is why Janes chose to use such a condescending definition of the term. Clearly the meaning of the term spade was dealing with the suit of cards. It is clearly Janes who is guilty of "ignorant oversight," not the Emerald.

Janes then concludes that the term spade in Nicholls' letter was used to "humiliate and subordinate and have the effect of silencing minority members of the University community." And that she "is here to learn and not have a dominant view forced upon [her] through intimidation." I cannot define Janes' version of the term intimidation, but I can conclude that it does not fit into the context of Nicholls' letter.

I will agree with Janes on one point. I do believe that racial discrimination is an issue that needs to be discussed on campus. However, I would choose to do so in a manner other than trashing Nicholls and the Emerald.

Scott A. Siuta
Economics