

PERSPECTIVES

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Protecting a sacred past



CAPTAIN SENSIBLE

PAT PAYNE

The Taliban, well into the third year of rule in most of Afghanistan, have shown that they intend to extend a brand of Islamic law over their land which makes Iran's law look permissive in comparison.

All women are forbidden to work outside the home and must wear the body-concealing *chador*. Music, television and the arts have all but disappeared. The death penalty is mandated for many actions that in most other countries would be considered innocuous — try flying a kite or going without a beard there sometime. Now, the Taliban are turning their attention to the destruction of their own heritage. Hundreds of Buddhist-era statues are going to be destroyed as an affront to the Taliban's brand of Islam. Among these is the world's tallest representation of a standing Buddha, at 175 feet tall. This destruction should be stopped.

This would not be the first or even the 101st time that religious art has been destroyed or damaged due to a conflicting belief. In the Book of Genesis, no sooner does Moses leave Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments than he orders the destruction of a statue of the calf-god Apsis and the slaughter of all who worshiped it. Groups of Greek vandals, angered at a god represented in statues in Athens, chipped off the penises on said statues. Emperor Constantine looted the temples of Jupiter and other

traditional Roman gods and dragged their statues through the streets of Rome. Napoleon Bonaparte allowed his troops to use the famous Egyptian Sphinx for artillery practice.

The Taliban have only proffered one argument for why the statues must be destroyed. Under their strict reading of *Sharia* law, representations of human beings are forbidden. It is this same rationale that has imposed strict punishments on photography and forbade TV.

A second, mostly unspoken reason for the destruction, is the fact that the statues were carved in adoration and worship of the Buddha, whom the Taliban consider a "false god." Under most fundamentalist systems, so-called "false gods" of other belief systems are mocked and treated with scorn and derision by followers of the fundamentalist sect.

We have seen this in America, where Pat Robinson has denigrated Jews, Buddhists and other belief systems that he believes deny Jesus. To the Taliban's credit, however, they appear to be letting the small Buddhist and Hindu communities continue worshipping with little harassment, and a small Jewish synagogue in Kabul, manned by a lone rabbi, has been allowed to stay open. This does not abrogate their seeming hostility to statues the Hindus and Buddhist hold dear.

On the other hand, there are numerous arguments to be made for preserving these works of art. First and foremost is that these statues are historical artifacts, some dating back as far as the 6th century AD. Historical treasures and antiquities are, or should be, protected by international law. They are a link to the past in Afghanistan, provid-

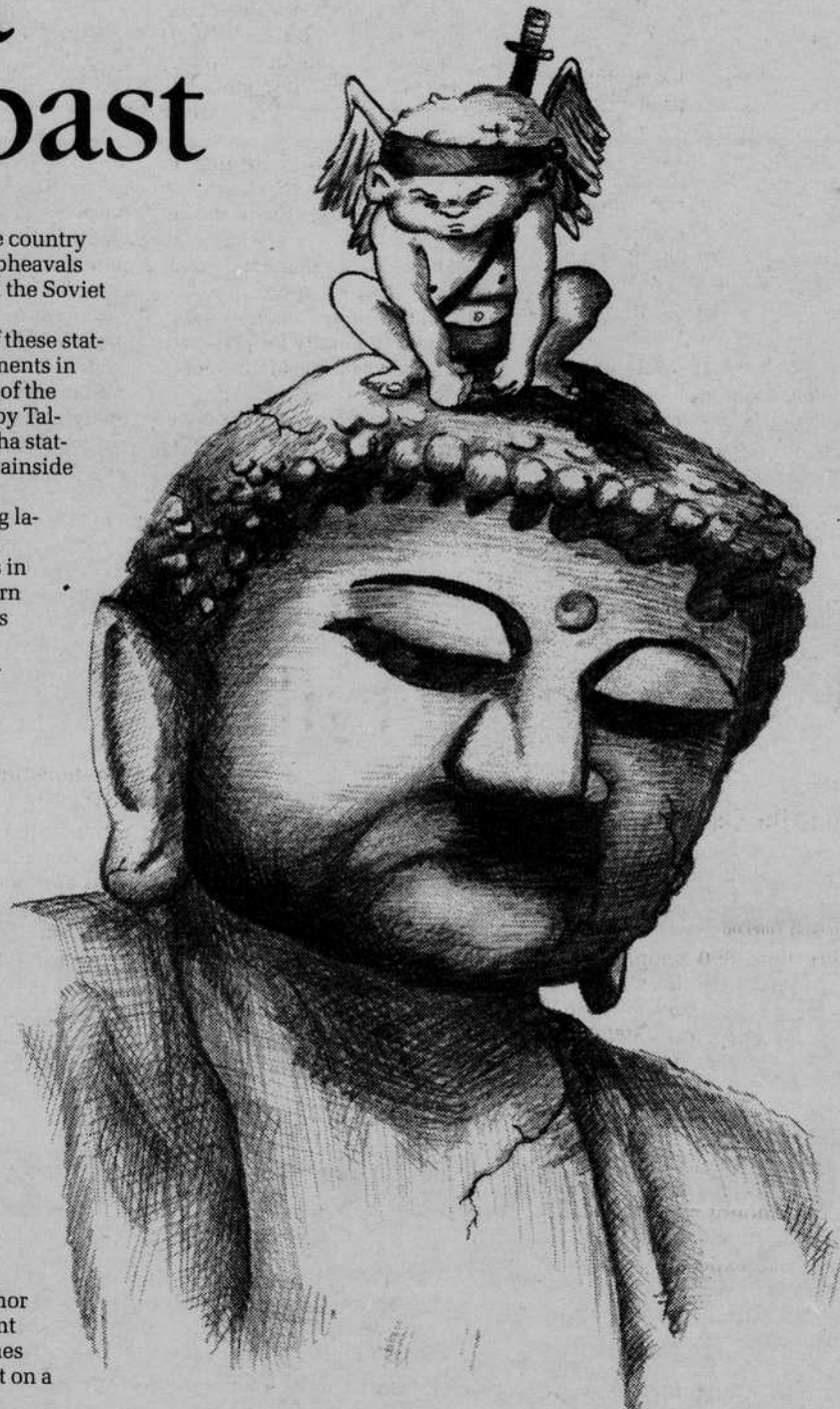
ing a glimpse of how the country functioned before the upheavals that began in 1979, with the Soviet Union's invasion.

Furthermore, some of these statues are human achievements in and of themselves. Two of the pieces being destroyed by Taliban weapons are Buddha statues carved into a mountainside in the 5th century. The amount of back-breaking labor involved in creating these two unique pieces in an era long before modern excavation tools, such as those used on Mount Rushmore, should by itself be a case for preservation.

Finally, Buddhists, who do not share the ban on graven images that the Taliban uphold, feel that these statues are sacred relics to them, images of devotion to their Buddha. To destroy them is to destroy something inside of every Afghan Buddhist, and those around the world.

We, unfortunately, cannot prevent the Taliban from taking this action. But they have to know, in no uncertain terms, that the world has taken note of their actions, and that they disapprove and abhor the destruction of ancient works of art. These statues belong in a museum, not on a bonfire.

Pat Payne is a columnist for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached at Macross_SD@hotmail.com.



Bryan Dixon Emerald

Letters to the editor

Don't hog the poster space

As a coordinator for the Cultural Forum, I dread the ASUO campaign season for the sole fact that all our wonderful candidates feel the need to cover other student groups' posters with their campaign poster. If the candidates really did care about the well-being of the students and the student groups that represent the students, they would realize that event promotion is costly and requires a lot of effort.

It is so discouraging to walk past the informational kiosk no more than three hours after I put up my posters only to find them covered by three copies of the same campaign poster. If they really cared about students, these candidates would show some respect to what we non-political, student-serving groups commit ourselves to.

If these candidates really cared about the students, they'd have the integrity to see beyond the popularity contest of the elections and actually show some respect for the people they claim they to serve. I wish all these candidates would quit wasting paper and

quit forcing student groups to spend money we don't have to re-poster for our events.

Steven Sawada
 Cultural Forum regional music coordinator
 senior journalism

Bailey explains differences

Many people have said that the platform of Nilda and Joy is very similar to that of Jeff and I. While we may agree on some issues, such as *renters' rights* (the need for a housing code in Eugene), *keeping tuition down* and diversity, there are also many differences between us. There are six key issues that we have talked about time and again that I have failed to hear Nilda and Joy talk about.

- Jeff and I want to make sure that we retain all of our student athletic tickets.
- We want to increase incidental fee awareness by informing the student body on how much they pay and where it goes, so they can make more informed decisions.
- We want to begin mending relations with the University Administration, Greek Life, student groups, the Eugene Police Department and University Housing.
- Jeff and I want to make sure that everyone

has the opportunity to voice his or her opinion on decisions that will affect them, so we will make an effort to be more available to the student body via bi-weekly town hall meetings.

- We want increased Greek voice in the ASUO office and will look into recreating the position of Greek Advocate.
- Finally, we want to make sure the ASUO represents *all* of the student body. We will try to create an office that represents students from across the political spectrum.

Vote for Bailey and Oliver on Duck Web!

Eric Bailey
 ASUO presidential candidate
 sophomore undeclared

President commended for Insurgent statement

University of Oregon President Dave Frohnmayer is to be commended for his strong statement ("Campus paper used bad judgment," ODE, Feb. 28) condemning the December issue of the Insurgent, with its description of illegal action — including arson — in connection with animal research and its listing of names and addresses of University of Oregon faculty members.

As President Frohnmayer put it, the Insur-

gent "in effect created risk that put these individuals' safety and the safety of their families in peril." He deserves the strong backing of University faculty, students, alumni and other supporters.

An important question is whether the Insurgent will continue to receive a University subsidy through the programs of the ASUO. Whether President Frohnmayer has administrative discretion over this is something I don't know. In any case, it would be a matter of good judgment for the ASUO to promptly end the subsidy.

As President Frohnmayer says, such a publication cannot avoid censure by cloaking itself in the First Amendment. By the same token, it should not expect subsidy from University funds. Whether that subsidy comes in the form of mandatory student fees, state appropriation or tuition is not the issue. This would be true at any time, but especially now as the Oregon University System, of which the University is a part, urgently seeks increased state funding to maintain programs and avoid tuition increases.

Michael Kellman
 professor chemistry