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Gerta Unger: Born in Berlin, died at Auschwitz



DIARY OF A MALCONTENT
MICHAEL J. KLECKNER

Today in the sunshine, amid the laughs and conversation of students outside the EMU, it's difficult to hear the Holocaust Readings. The names, places of birth and places of death get lost in the swirl of active, vibrant life.

Last night at half-past midnight, as I left the EMU, that was not the case. The deep voice of a male reader ripped into the fabric of night. It seemed like an image from a dream; no one was around, and only the buildings and I were absorbing the names of Holocaust victims. It almost seemed like an image from Nazi Germany, where official-sounding proclamations ring out from a PA, breaking the moist stillness of the air. The names rang out again and again, coming slowly enough to hear, but so fast they seemed to blur together, as though there weren't any specific individuals but just a mass of humanity.

The Holocaust victims were specific individuals, though, and they each died a very specific death. The movement of time must be what renders the readings so hyper-real to me. Enough years have passed and enough movies and TV shows have been made that hearing the names read seems like an archetypal experience — super surreal and yet devastatingly personal.

A few tears rolled down my

face as I stood transfixed, listening to the continuous recitation, family member after family member. So many people that sometimes the same name is repeated three or four times. But they were each an individual, worthy of dignity and respect.

Every year when I hear the reading of the names, I realize the paramount importance of the event; we must never forget. The deaths happened in the early 1940s. Sixty years is a long time, and today's freshmen probably have little more than a token understanding of the Holocaust. I remember that my own first visceral experience with it was reading Elie Weisel in high school in the late 1980s. It might be more poetic to say that my experience was immediate, that my grandfather escaped from, or died in a concentration camp, and that's why I can relate to this. But I can't because he didn't.

My own visceral relation to the injustice of human oppression is more recent. I am gay, and I have had enough experiences with intimidation and discrimination to know the feeling of being singled out for no rational reason. Obviously I have no idea what it's like to be enslaved or to have my entire family murdered because of race. The University, and Eugene as a whole, is generally very tolerant of my sexuality, and I never really feel the fear I occasionally experienced in New York and San Francisco. But last night, after hearing the names and thinking of the Holocaust, I looked anxiously over my shoulder at every loud, rowdy car that passed me on my way home.

That's the importance, to

me, of the Holocaust Readings and, in some small way, of David Horowitz's slavery reparations ad. Sometimes we need emotionally gripping, visceral reminders of the evils that have been perpetrated on humanity by humanity. Because it's not over yet, y'all.

All over the world, people are being captured, tortured, enslaved and discriminated against based on race, religion, gender and sexuality. When members of these very large segments of humanity speak out angrily about injustices and slights to their causes, some people in this community want to brand them reactionary. Some people say they are overreacting. Some people say they should find more productive ways to express their feelings.

But the kinds of injustices I'm speaking of are monstrous. These are systematic denials of expression, freedom and humanity, and they often demand very visible and very large demonstrations of outrage.

We all need to be more sensitive to the idea that everyone is not yet treated with equal respect, and the injustices we identify today are not less significant than those that have occurred in the past, even if they aren't murders and enslavement. The injustices identified today actually have added weight, because like the reading of the names, they emotionally remind us of all that has come before and of how far we have yet to go.

Michael J. Kleckner is the editorial editor for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached at opededitor@journalist.com.

Impact of ads depends on response of readers

GUEST COMMENTARY

Anne L. Leavitt

A paid advertisement this week in the Oregon Daily Emerald about slavery reparations reminds us of the power of the printed word and the conflicts we sometimes feel among our commitments to freedom of expression, the marketplace of ideas and the nurturing of learning and community.

The staff of the Emerald decided to print this ad, after discussing whether it might "needlessly offend a significant portion of... readers." They rightfully anticipated that some of us might find it offensive, and they have invited us to debate through the newspaper the decision to print the ad as well as the content of it.

The impact of these ads on our community will depend on the response that we, as readers, make to them. Some students tell me the ads are offensive to them and cause them to feel less safe on

campus. Others tell me that the ad is offensive because it is large, disputatious in tone and content and provides no avenue for discussion or rebuttal.

If you find it offensive in tone or posture, inaccurate in content, inflammatory in rhetoric or suggestion, or disappointing in failing our aspirations for respectful dialogue about controversial and emotional issues, I encourage you to speak out. Although the Emerald has the right to publish this material, you have the opportunity to read it and if you find it objectionable, to express your opinion.

You can marginalize the impact of these ads by expressing to the Emerald staff why and how the ad is offensive, and by challenging the content through accurately refuting factual information or inferences that you find unsound or pejorative. And you can support, through attendance and sponsorship, our alternative venues for discussion of these issues where the dialogue can be more interactive, more research based and more intellectually respected.

Anne L. Leavitt is an associate vice president and dean of students.

Fight political apathy, let youth in Legislature

GUEST COMMENTARY

C.J. Gabbe

Young people's declining participation in the political process should concern all of us. That is why I am working with Oregon Secretary of State Bill Bradbury to help pass House Joint Resolution 16. This constitutional amendment would allow 18-, 19- and 20-year-old Oregonians to run for the state Legislature.

Young people are underrepresented among voters. Thirty percent of the voting-age population in the United States is between the ages of 18 and 34. Yet only 20 percent of registered voters fall into this age group, and only six percent of votes in the 1998 primary were cast by 18- to 34-year-olds. However, in the 18 states where 18-year-olds can be candidates, there was a 5 percent higher turnout in the 1996 election among 18- to 24-year-olds than in the non-18-year-old states in the 1996 election.

This session, the Oregon Legislature has a unique opportunity to strengthen the movement to bring young people into politics by passing HJR 16. If passed, it would refer to the voters an amendment to the Oregon Constitution lowering the age requirement for service in the Legislature to 18.

At age 18, citizens can serve in the military and make fundamental political decisions by voting. From Portland to Grants Pass, Coos Bay to Pendleton, 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds can run for school boards and city councils. Yet unlike the District of Columbia and 17 other states that allow 18-year-old legislators, young people in Oregon are prevented from serving as representatives and senators in Salem. At age 18, Oregonians can run for state treasurer, secretary of state or

attorney general. Why can't they run for the state House or Senate?

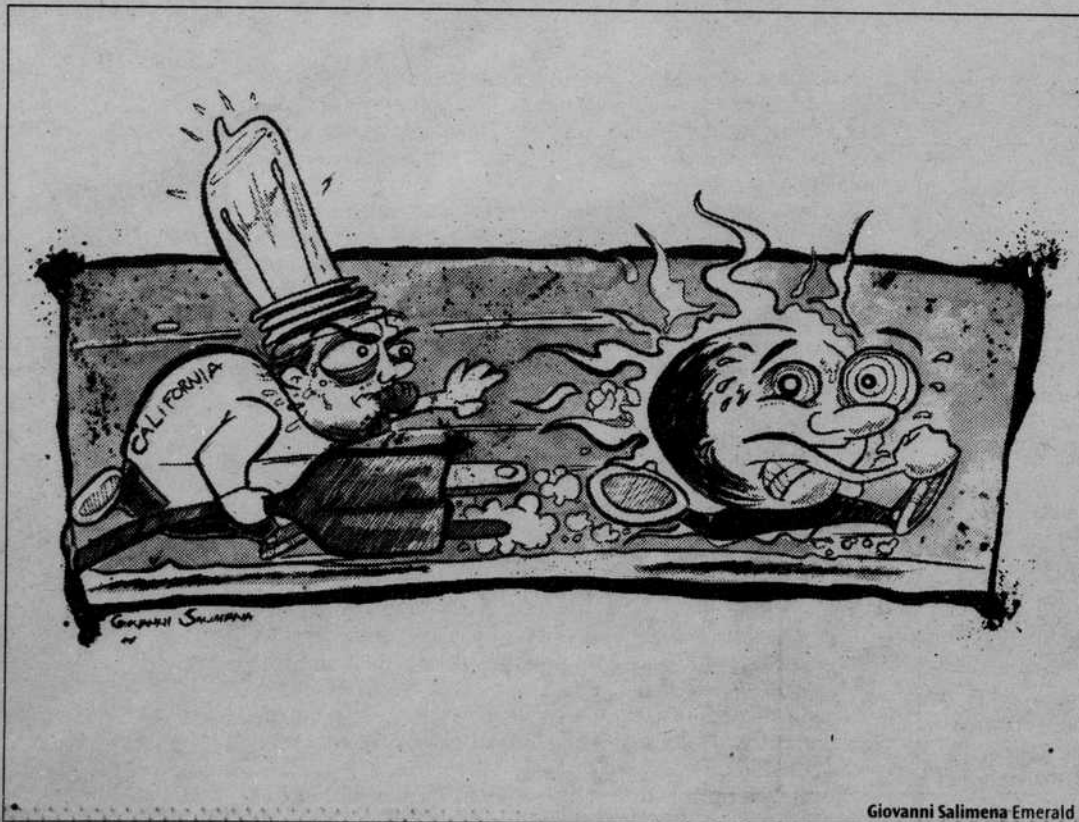
Some may question whether those under 21 have the life experience necessary to serve in the Legislature. Age alone isn't indicative of ability to handle responsibility, and contemporary politics offers many examples of leaders with years of "life experience" performing irresponsibly. There are at least 20 legislators currently serving across the United States who are under 21. Far from being overwhelmed and inexperienced, these accomplished young people work on complicated legislation, serve on numerous committees and stay abreast of issues affecting their constituents. They also bring a unique perspective that is appreciated by their fellow representatives.

It is important to remember that the proposed amendment doesn't mean the Legislature will be overrun with 18-year-olds — just like it isn't full of 21-year-olds right now. Rather, it means that Oregonians under 21 can legally run for office, and voters can decide which candidate is most qualified.

I know of no "magic bullet" for addressing political apathy in youth. The national "Rock the Vote" campaign and work by the Oregon Student Association to increase youth voting are familiar and successful efforts. But a younger person running for the Legislature powerfully illustrates that young people are important to the political process. An 18-, 19- or 20-year-old candidate understands youth issues, and this will encourage younger people to vote.

Will the passage of HJR 16 solve all the problems of political disinterest among younger citizens? Certainly not. But will it help engage younger Oregonians, who often feel alienated from politics? Without a doubt.

C.J. Gabbe is a student senator and a senior majoring in planning, public policy and management.



Giovanni Salimena Emerald