

# PERSPECTIVES

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## Protesters are just following the script



### A CAULDRON OF IDIOCY

AARON MCKENZIE

In a thousand years, if there's History / America'll be remembered as a nasty little Country."  
 — Allen Ginsberg

The above is a dooming epitaph for a doomed millennium, and not only because this country again fell for a centuries-old joke and elected another president. What frightens me is not the 50 percent or so who did not vote, but rather the other 50 percent who showed up to compromise their very selves at the polls, thinking Nader would be better than Gore would be better than Bush.

It's no great stretch here to argue that only sheep need shepherds, and that anyone capable of being president should by no means be allowed to do the job, least of all that crafty little sawed-off pip-squeak who, for the sake of simplicity, I'll say won the election. But if you voted in November, regardless of which lever you pulled, consider yourself implicated: Voting is not a political action, it's political acquiescence.

There is some kind of deep connection between these thoughts and the topic of activism here at the University and in Eugene. Excepting, perhaps, a few anarchists — who, as little more than caricatures of themselves, could stand to brush up on their historical and philosophical anarchism — the local, so-called activists are perfectly content to fancy themselves 'progressive' or 'alternative' because they or-

ganize a conference on 'sustainability' (insert your favorite abstract catchphrase here) or because they can afford to shop at Sundance Natural Foods or The Kiva.

Frankly though, when the cold eye of history looks back on this time, the idea that consumer tendencies or circle-jerk forums could affect significant change in a capitalist system is going to look downright ridiculous. The last thing this country needs is another insular academic movement or politics based on spending money.

But these people are good soldiers and true believers, and they're gathering some dramatic stories to tell their children. Our trusty activists will graduate from college, find a job with PepsiCo or a fashionable not-for-profit of dubious necessity, and they will ultimately become a piece of the system they once claimed to fight and detest. Should their motives ever be called into question, they can point to — as evidence of their open-mindedness — the time they went to Portland and chanted anti-U.S. slogans and demanded the liberation of East Timor or some other country about which they knew nothing. It's just an insurance policy against the inevitable future.

Political apathy, however, is no longer fashionable — to the point that those who are suspicious of the government are also no longer merely paranoid or subversive. As I write this, some 20,000-30,000 people with thorns in their respective asses are giving a very active finger to the pompous, flag-waving nonsense of "globalization," as it's so benignly termed. Then again, the fact that a multimillionaire oil titan president is paying less income tax than most city of Eugene employees, even while energy prices skyrocket, ought to put a

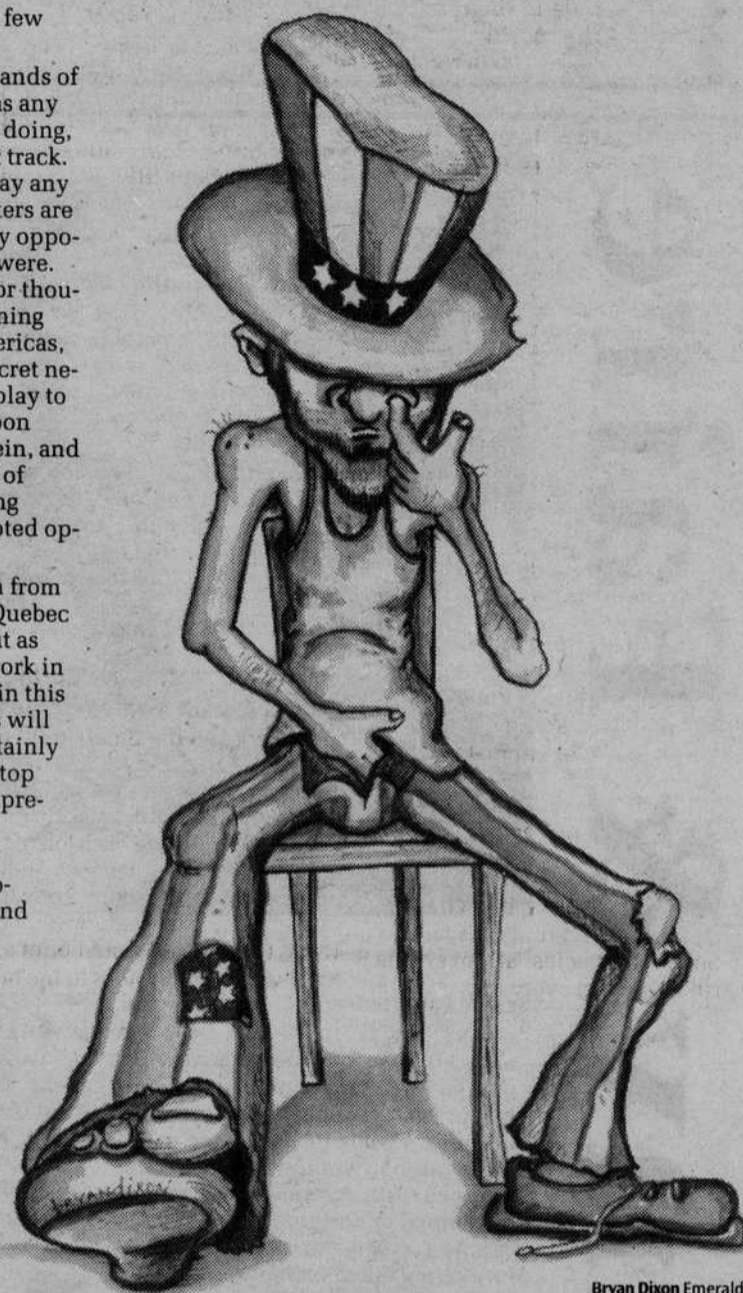
briar in the butt of more than a few normally complacent citizens.

But if any one of these thousands of valiant fools in Quebec City has any doubts about what he or she is doing, then that person is on the right track. It takes at least two teams to play any game, and the requisite protesters are merely providing the necessary opposition for the home team, as it were. Capitalism has been in place for thousands of years and this — meaning the Free Trade Area of the Americas, as well as wars, treaties and secret negotiations — is the game they play to propagate their wickedness upon you, the citizen. In the same vein, and for the same tens of thousands of years, people have been holding protests and rallies as the scripted opposition.

When the orders came down from above, these good soldiers in Quebec did as told: They protested. But as long as people are willing to work in sweatshops or for \$6 per hour in this country, none of these protests will do a damn bit of good, and certainly nothing will change until we stop thinking on their terms, in the prescribed realm of capitalism.

People en masse will have to walk away from our present economic and political system — and this means putting yourself on the line, for which organizing a conference or 'buying local and organic' cannot possibly prepare you — before anyone anywhere can expect a significant concession from the powers that be.

Aaron McKenzie is a columnist for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached at awmckenzie@yahoo.com.



Bryan Dixon Emerald

## Still waiting for 80 acres and a mule

GUEST COMMENTARY

Pamela Hairston

I say, David Horowitz has managed to stir up a real stink lately, hasn't he, preaching his 10 reasons why reparations for slavery are a bad idea — and racist too.

For the past two years or so, I've been following this often heated and controversial issue, and across the nation, most white folks are vehemently against reparations of any sort. Hell, you mention a mere apology for slavery and their shorts get all knotted. I truly believe that there would be another Civil War if the U.S. government ever considered this measure. Please, let me share with your readers why I'm still waiting on my 80 acres and a mule.

On Jan. 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves. On that very same day, the Homestead Act of 1862 was enacted. Under this act, the U.S. Congress literally gave away 160 acres of land per person or family, free.

For more than 100 years, more than 2 million white Americans received more than 270 million acres of land, and the only stipulation was that they had to "homestead" the land for five years and it would be theirs. Imagine that: 160 acres of land, free. And the settlers didn't even have to be U.S. citizens to qualify; they only had to be working on becoming citizens. This act, the Homestead Act of 1862, was, to my knowledge, never

known as the Southern Homestead Act, was also enacted by Congress. It stipulated that public lands in the states of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and Florida be disposed of according to the stipulations of the Homestead Act of 1862. There was no distinction for race or color. Settlers were to receive no more than 80 acres. This act was part of Reconstruction. Some ex-slaves did indeed receive a few Southern acres, which were eventually returned to the pardoned Confederates. In 1876, this second homestead act was repealed. America preferred to keep the freed slaves, my ancestors, as sharecroppers for another 100 years. The rest is history.

The U.S. government could give away 160 acres of land — free, even to noncitizens — but it could not give 80 acres, as enacted, to a people who provided them 200-plus years of hard, free labor. Instead, they gave my people 100-plus more years of hate, Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, the KKK, lynchings, segregation, oppression, miscegenation, poverty and more hate. I ask you, would black America — no, would America as a whole — be a better nation if we'd gotten our acres, as promised? Hell, right now, I'd take an acre and a chicken.

P.S. I realize that my chances of you ever printing my letter are about as good as me turning white, but like my dear old father used to tell me (God rest his soul), nothing beats a failure but a try. And besides, I get sheer satisfaction out of knowing that some young, white American on the other end will indeed read this. Peace and love, my fellow Americans; we are all in this together.

Pamela A. Hairston lives in Washington, D.C., and has been a researcher at the Library of Congress for more than 20 years.

## Letters to the editor

### Janitors are human beings first

An incident happened Sunday evening that concerns and appalls me. A female student came to the door of Grayson Hall at about 10:50 p.m. wanting to get in but discovered it was locked (the building normally locks at 10 p.m. — much later than most).

She saw a custodian, a classified worker on this campus, and asked him to let her in. He told her that he couldn't let her in (as is policy), and then was about to explain that she could use the outside phone to contact DPS to let her in. In an angry tone she replied, "you f---ing a--hole," flipped the custodian off and then said, "Enjoy cleaning your toilets, loser!"

This behavior is completely unacceptable. By dehumanizing this human being, she made herself feel better. When will we learn that people are human beings first and that the job they do is not who they are? Did she know anything about him? Did she just walk away? No, she had to dehumanize him first.

Please, remember this the next time you look at someone working on campus or anywhere else. They are human beings above all else.

Cheri Smith  
 University classified worker  
 Office Specialist I

### We shouldn't subsidize Major League Baseball

Major League Baseball is being touted as the new economic driver for our state. On April 20, the House of Representatives began considering House Bill 2941, a \$150 million lottery bond measure to build a baseball stadium in Portland. This bill will divert money that could be providing rural infrastructure across Oregon, offering jobs where they are sorely needed. What's more, the bill doesn't provide decent jobs for Portland residents whom it is supposed to help — selling peanuts doesn't pay the rent.

Portland and Oregon should not be sucked into baseball's sales pitch. Communities across the country have spent millions of dollars subsidizing sports teams only to realize no return on the investment. What is worse, the teams often threaten to leave once the government has built their infrastructure.

In fact, no baseball stadium project has ever returned more to its subsidizing government than it cost. An independent study from Lake Forest College found that of 30 cities, 27 of them experienced no significant economic impact from new stadiums, while three experienced a negative impact. Those are not win-