

Tuesday, June 4, 2002

COMMENTARY

An act of misjudgment

On a warm day in June 1999, probably about 3 p.m., a stampede of boys and girls charged out of Mrs. Moore's seventh grade class at Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Clifton, N.J. Some went to camp. Others lounged around their houses, trying to avoid their summer chores. They went to the mall, the arcade, the pool, their other parent's house — stuff kids do in their free time.



Aaron
Rorick
Columnist

But no matter where they went or how they spent their summer, they all bid a happy farewell to Mrs. Moore: "No more homework, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks," or something like that.

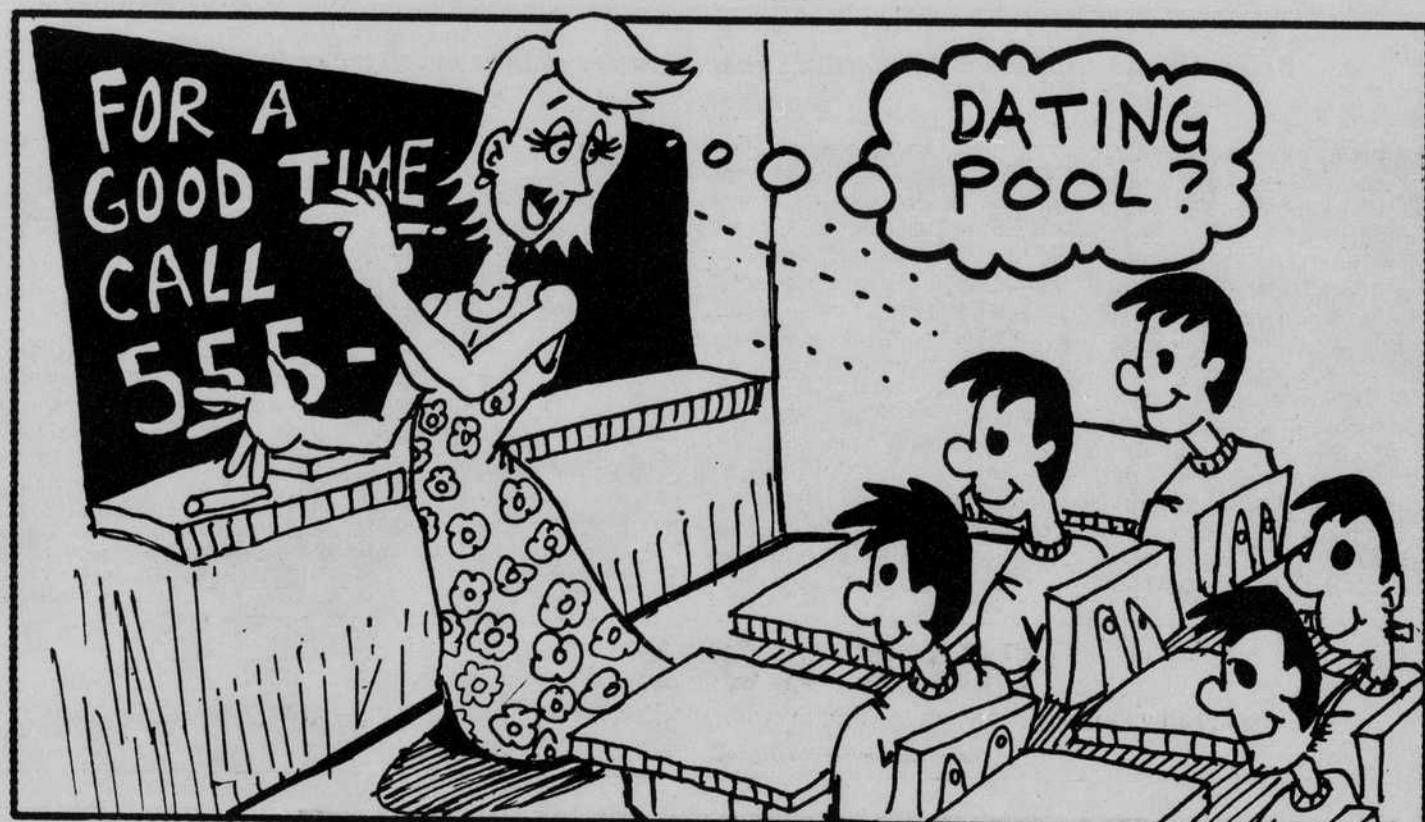
One little boy, however, wasn't so lucky. Or perhaps he was the luckiest one of all, depending on your outlook. He saw

a sharp decline in the homework and the books, but not the third item. That summer, and well into the next fall, he got enough dirty looks to last a lifetime.

Pamela Diehl-Moore, age 43, had a six-month love affair with one of her 13-year-old students. She was arrested in February 2001 and subsequently lost her teaching license. Moore pleaded guilty to sexual assault and expected to receive a three-year sentence. Instead, she got a slap on the wrist.

New Jersey Superior Court Judge Bruce Gaeta gave her only five years probation. "I really don't see the harm that was done," he said, "and certainly society doesn't need to be worried. It's just something between two people that clicked beyond the teacher-student relationship."

This was an act of incredible bias — not to mention stupidity — on the part of the



judge. Had a 43-year-old man spent his summer screwing a 13-year-old girl, he'd be swinging from a tree branch by now, or at the very least fending off his cellmate in the shower. Likewise if the 43-year-old and the 13-year-old had been the same gender. But, hey, boys will be boys, and what 13-year-old boy doesn't dream of a steamy encounter with an older woman he knows? Lord knows I used to. I was a bona fide pervert in the seventh grade and so were most of my friends and accomplices.

Here's where Judge Gaeta misjudged. Thir-

teen-year-olds have about as much logic and reason as spider monkeys, but with twice the sex drive. Most couldn't make a sensible decision if the instructions were tattooed on their forearms. That's why they need older, wiser, more experienced people to guide them through those tumultuous years. People like seventh-grade teachers.

Teachers are more than simply authority figures and learning aides. A teacher is a surrogate parent, a mentor and a therapist. There is a sacred bond between a student and a teacher, a bond that should never be violated.

The bottom line is that society is responsible for protecting its youth until they are able to make semi-sound decisions on their own. And right now, with people like Judge Gaeta in positions of power and people like Pamela Diehl-Moore in the classroom, we are seriously slacking in that responsibility. Contrary to what Gaeta says, society does need to worry.

E-mail columnist Aaron Rorick at aaronrorick@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the Emerald.

Letters to the editor

Thank you, George Beres

I read the commentary by George Beres, "Middle East discussion in need of solid University curriculum," (ODE, May 22). I've also read the responses, in which Beres was chastised for overlooking some of the details of how programs are funded at the University. However, I haven't read any letters that really shared Beres' dismay at the fact that the University offers so few options for students seeking a balanced curriculum, covering such a critical part of the world as the Middle East.

Although there may be more "philanthropists" willing (and able) to spend private money for Judaic Studies and other specialty programs at this public university, the fact remains that University students are not being offered a strong nonbiased option to focus their studies on events in the Middle East — especially as those studies might relate to Israel and Palestine.

So thank you, George Beres, for pointing out the need for a viable (well funded) and balanced Middle Eastern Studies program. And thanks also for your comments about the conspicuous lack of protest regarding United States/Israel policy ("Campus protesters take a break," ODE, April 16).

I'll be watching for more of Beres' letters in the future.

Paul Griffes
junior
history

'Jeff Olivers' of the world need a reality check

In response to the "Judging people by the color of their skin" by Jeff Oliver (ODE, May 29), I am

Letters to the Editor and Guest Commentaries Policy

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also from the Midwest, but from the housing projects. Chances are as high that the Jeff Olivers will go out into the world and not interface with people of color as I will be stopped for driving black over and over again. Of course, mine is already a reality.

Will preferential admission of African Americans to the University of Michigan change that? I hope so, because whatever we got now is not working.

The emphasis here is access to opportunities, and in the African American community it is easier to go to prison than it is to go to college. That stinks. Trying to correct the past is a bitter pill to swallow in a society based on greed and amnesia. Regardless of the token clubs on campus, it is only in lieu of a student body and staff in parity with the United States, since we are so bleeping united nowadays.

Ask my 73-year-old mother about diversity. She did not finish high school in Mississippi because the post-era white slaveowners figured that black people did not belong in schools, but in the fields working off bottomless sharecropping debts — so that the Jeffs of the world could one day grow up on a cul-de-sac with absolutely no sense of how they got there.

Right on to the University of Michigan.

Jane Roparte
Eugene

'Protest' nothing more than a drunken throng

GUEST COMMENTARY

D.J.
Fuller

I live on the corner of 17th Avenue and Patterson Street, where the melee on Friday night occurred. I saw it in its entirety, from the time the first unmarked police car arrived to ask the crowd on the sidewalk to disperse until the cleaning crew came a few hours later. What I witnessed in between repulsed me. I have heard analogies to some of the other protests that have occurred in Eugene over the past few years. From the footage I have seen of timber sale protests and the articles I have read about the tree-sit downtown exactly five years ago, I can say that what occurred on Friday night did not resemble them — at all.

This was not a case of peaceful protest being violently broken up by overzealous cops. This was merely a drunken throng without a cause outside of blind rebellion and showing little regard for safety and dignity bringing onto itself the consequences of its own aggression. In case you have heard otherwise, it was the students who initiated the conflict. The first cop at the scene was simply calling through a loudspeaker for the crowd to disperse when a bottle was flung towards his car, smashing against a van directly in front of it, sending the first of what was to be many shards of glass cascading toward the street. Bottles were hurled

continuously afterwards, too many of them landing dangerously near people at the front of the crowd. When backup arrived and the cops moved to clear the street, some of the malcontents threw bottles directly at them. That's not protest — that's assault.

And what was the cause at hand? Was some injustice being exposed, some oppression decried? Was there something to have been said beyond, "Fuck you, pigs," or was this merely an excuse to give vent to baser instincts? Who were the real pigs on Friday night? Don't get me wrong; I believe in protest. I know that cops abuse their authority and the people. My mother works as a counselor at a county jail and sees it all the time. I know that the criminal justice system is corrupt and I believe our government's priorities are skewed, but what happened on Friday night doesn't lend me any more faith in the people at large. And that's a travesty that can't be pinned on an authority, but for which we are all responsible.

D.J. Fuller is a junior political science major.