

Thursday, January 16, 2003

Editorial

SUV 'terror' ads detract from real point of message

Over the past few decades, the United States' love affair with the automobile has become more and more an addiction to the pump as it is anything else. One of the main causes is the rising importance of what was once a niche vehicle: the sport-utility vehicle, or SUV.

The auto industry, seizing on the "flavor-of-the-month" status that the Chevrolet Suburban enjoyed, has produced ever larger and less fuel-efficient SUVs. With more and more SUVs on the roads, the need for the pump is greater than ever, to the nation's environmental, social and political detriment.

Conservative commentator Arianna Huffington has taken a stand against increasingly unnecessary SUV use, although we think she's using the wrong tactics. Advertisements that she helped create are now playing in the nation's largest car markets, claiming that driving an SUV is tantamount to supporting Osama bin Laden. Her argument: America buys oil from mostly foreign sources, including Saudi Arabia and Iraq, and these sources have had links to terrorist groups, such as Hamas and al Qaeda. Ergo, to buy oil from these sources is to fund terrorism.

While we believe that U.S. dependence on foreign — and all — fossil fuels should be diminished significantly, we also believe that Huffington's ads oversimplify a much more complex problem. While it is true that some wealthy Saudi Arabians have funded terrorism, it is often from their personal wealth and not directly from oil profits.

Secondly, at least some of them give their money not to directly sponsor the killing of innocents by suicide bombers, but instead into more benign purposes that these groups, unfortunately, provide. Either out of political opportunism or genuine concern, groups like Hamas actually provide education, food and clothes to the people under their purview.

The Huffington SUV ads were designed to parody the overplayed Ad Council/Partnership for a Drug-Free America ads ("It's only harmless fun. ... I helped kill a family in Colombia") that try to link marijuana with terrorism. Both ad campaigns are very misleading, and instead of trying to foster a discussion of the issues, they use scare tactics to disguise the truth.

In the anti-marijuana ads, the argument is reductive to the point of ridiculousness. All drugs do not come from countries that support terrorism, and even if they did, following the money back to any one specific source or act of terrorism is nearly impossible. Substitute "oil" for "drugs" in the preceding sentence, and the same point is true of the SUV ads.

Instead of offering the average citizen falsehoods to discuss around the nation's water coolers, as these ads do, why not take an informed look at how much of the total U.S. oil imports come from which nations; how much U.S. fossil fuel consumption is because of SUVs; and then put that information in front of the public and let them think about the issue?

We applaud the fact that people are starting to wake up and realize that an overbearing dependence on fossil fuels is dangerous. However, the tactics Huffington is using are counterproductive to a real discussion of the issue.

Editorial policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

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Counting in all Christians



Peter Utsey Emerald

A shadow has been cast on the campus and community of Northwest Christian College. With a new label, "racist," which is far from "Christian," this small religious college is facing a controversy over recent events concerning the firing of Associate Dean of Education and School Counseling Betsy Clewett.

As reported in the Emerald on Monday ("NCC dean questions reason for dismissal," ODE, Jan. 13), the firing of Clewett has raised awareness of how the institution treats minority students, leading a few students and staff to believe the school is unjust.

Clewett was fired from her position at NCC in December for what she and her supporters believe was having a voice for the minority students of the community. As a result, three other faculty members have resigned, including Cloe Veney, NCC's only black faculty member in its history, and lawsuits may be filed against the college.

Although President James Womack claims the dismissal of Clewett was not on the basis of race, I still feel that the handful of students have a right to be concerned.



Sarah Spellman
Spin cycle

Clewett and supporters claim that the treatment of minority students at the college was not up to par compared to that of white students. They said this often resulted in minorities having difficulties receiving help from the financial aid office, difficulty with housing and mistreatment of the black basketball players and other students of color from both staff and peers.

As a former student, it saddens me to hear of the recent events of this college that is so dear to my heart and has helped shape the person I am today. As I first read of this controversy in The Register-Guard earlier this month, I was shocked to hear the news.

Although I have never witnessed this kind of behavior from students and staff, I do not doubt that this goes on. I do recall a few instances where race was discussed between my peers in the rug room (a commonplace for students to gather), but I thought it was in good fun. Although I was not involved, I feel for the students who believe they were persecuted.

This behavior doesn't surprise me much, however, on the basis of the demographics of the institution. Within this small community of 500 students, NCC reported in 2001 that minorities compose only 10 percent of the student body (which is typical of small Christian colleges). Also, a typical trend I have noticed in the composition of the campus is that

many students seek the "small-college" atmosphere because they, too, come from small towns and communities, and often have not experienced such cultural diversity before.

I hope that this situation will bring something positive to the students and staff of NCC. I hope that NCC can continue to be a loving community, and only expand from here, integrating more culturally aware programs to help change the demographics of the school.

On Aug. 28, 1963, the powerful message from Martin Luther King Jr. rang through Washington, D.C., as his "I Have a Dream" speech was delivered from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. I can only hope that nearly 40 years later, it can make an impact at NCC as well.

As he said: "All of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

To use King's words, I hope the minority students can feel comfortable at their college again and not be treated differently on the basis of the color of their skin, but of the content of their character.

Contact the columnist at sarahspellman@dailyemerald.com. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Letter to the editor

Republican does not mean racist

Thursday's editorial, "GOP needs to use action, not just words, to heal racial divisions" (ODE, Jan. 9), simply perpetuates that tired shibboleth of the left that republicans are racists.

Republicans don't have a former Ku Klux Klan Kleagle, like democratic Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia, in their ranks. Only last year, Sen. Byrd, in an interview with Fox News' Tony Snow, referred to "white niggers." Byrd quickly

apologized, but he wasn't criticized by democrats or forced to resign his Appropriations Committee chairmanship.

During debate over the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Byrd spent 14 hours and 13 minutes in an unsuccessful filibuster. He voted against the bill along with 20 other Senate democrats. Only six republicans voted against the bill.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party panders to minorities with racial quotas, preferences and double standards. This is especially true at colleges and universities, dominated as they are by the left. Consider the University of Michigan's affirmative-action admissions policies: According to the Center for Equal Oppor-

tunity, the odds ratio favoring admission of a black applicant with identical grades and test scores to a white applicant is 174 to one. The implicit and utterly racist message here is that black students must be held to lower academic standards than everyone else.

It is republicans, not democrats, who punish nostalgia for racism in their party. It is democrats, not republicans, who perpetuate racial stereotypes and prejudices, or to use President Bush's memorable phrase, "the soft bigotry of low expectations."

Sean Walston
sixth-year graduate physics

CORRECTION

The final sentence of molecular biology Professor Franklin W. Stahl's letter to the editor ("University should review involvement with Nike," ODE, Jan. 15) was printed incorrectly and had a different meaning than Stahl intended. The sentence should have read: "It is not good for the University's image, not to mention its truth-seeking mission, to lie with the liars."

The Emerald regrets the error.