

COMMENTARY

Editor in Chief:
 Michael J. Kleckner
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 Editorial Editor:
 Pat Payne

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Editorial

Felons deserve second chances after they have done their time

After reading about the recruitment of convicted felon and two-time All-American cornerback Rodney Woods, we take issue with Athletic Director Bill Moos' policy barring felons from being a part of University athletic programs. It seems as though Moos wants to punish people a second time for offenses in the past.

Isn't it the cardinal principle of the justice system that once a person has paid his or her debt to society, their slate is clean and they should not be denied the opportunities available to everyone else in society? How is denying a person a chance to build a new life doing justice? By the Athletic Department telling convicted felons "we won't take you," one more avenue for them to better their lives is closed.

At the same time, this policy has led to a strange and misguided effort by Ducks football head coach Mike Belotti — writing a letter to the court on behalf of Woods. Woods has served his jail time, is finishing his probation, and is trying to get his felony assault charge, stemming from a May 2000 beating, reduced to a misdemeanor.

The University should step back and let the California court system handle this one on its own. Let Woods argue how much he has changed since assaulting a man who tried to rescue Christopher O'Leary from being beaten to death by two of Woods' friends. Let a judge decide Woods' fate without the appearance of pleading to fill a spot on the team.

First, though, let Woods finish his probation. Then he will have paid his debt to society, and then the University would do well to give him a second chance — felon or not.

Society to blame for racial pattern in scholarships

Above, we criticized the Athletic Department for what we see as wrong. Now we offer qualified praise for something right.

We are heartened that one department seems to be forcefully recruiting black men and women — the Athletic Department. The lions' share of athletic scholarships go to black males, a segment of the American population among the least likely to go to college.

At the same time, though, it disturbs us that 35 percent of all black males on this campus are here because of athletics.

What we see is something we have touched on in previous editorials this year: Institutional racism. There is a lack of non-athletic opportunities for black youth in America, and especially on this campus. This is sad, but not surprising. These days, national black role models are not scientists (such as Dr. George Washington Carver) or war heroes (such as the Tuskegee Airmen) but are almost uniformly athletes — men and women who are famous not for their advances to humanity, but instead because they can throw a ball in a basket or rush 100 yards with a pigskin.

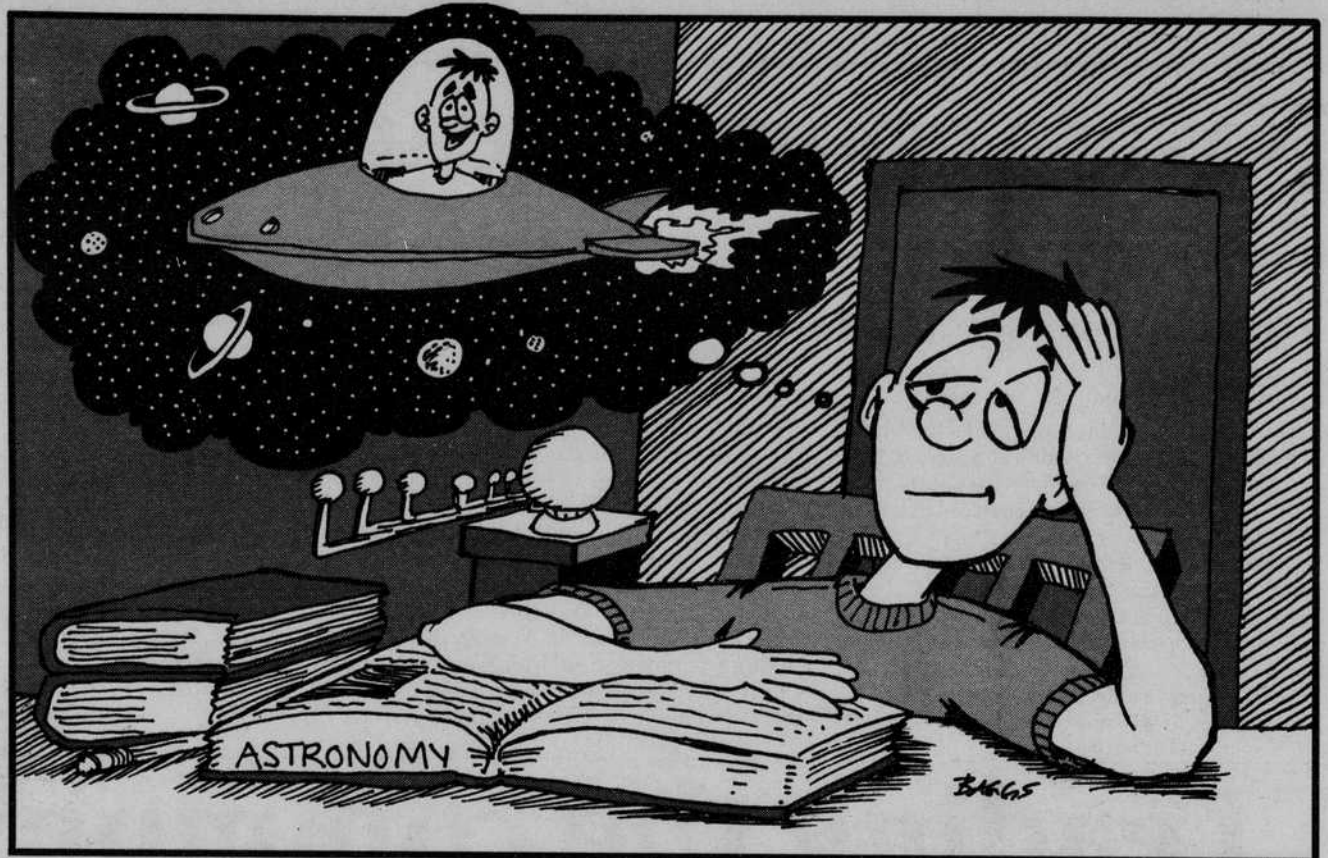
How can any black American become a Charles Drew, inventor of the process that makes blood banks possible, or a Dr. Mae Jemison, the first black woman in space, when their scholarship forces them to spend most of their college career on the court or gridiron and not in the classroom?

While we're heartened these men and women are getting the chance to better their lives, we can't help but recognize a symptom of latent racism in society that says to black Americans: "You're only worth something by performing as an athlete."

We're left to ask: Why doesn't American culture glorify any other black role models?

Editorial policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com.



Steve Baggs Emerald

Space: Still a frontier

I have an old children's book about space. Published in 1960, it concluded on a hopeful note: "Perhaps one day mankind shall reach the moon." Who thought that the next spring would see Yuri Gagarin and Alan Shepard shooting into space? Or upon Shepard's return, President Kennedy's proclamation that it was America's destiny to land on the moon before the decade's end? Or that in 1969, Neil Armstrong would indeed take that giant step for humankind?

Those were heady days. They were, despite war abroad and unrest at home, hopeful days. Millions of children saw the landing and dreamed of becoming astronauts. This week, we remember seven who achieved their dream.

I grew up in a different time. The Apollo program was over. Skylab had fallen into the ocean. But a new model for space flight was born. The first space shuttle was named Enterprise, after a fictional starship that explored uncharted galaxies.

I wanted to be an astronomer then. Which planet was the smallest? Which star was the brightest? Which planet had the most moons? Did other stars have planets, too? How many light-years was it from Earth to Alpha Centauri? How far is a light-year, anyway?



Philip Huang
 A different light

Did intelligent life exist elsewhere in the universe?

The search for answers to those questions filled countless hours during my childhood. Could other planets besides Earth support human life? The more I learned, the more the answer seemed to be "No." Venus was a boiling cauldron of toxic gases. Mars had virtually no oxygen and hardly any atmosphere. Other planets were out of the question.

Other solar systems? At 25,000 miles per hour, our fastest spacecraft would reach the nearest star in about 115,000 years. The odds against reaching another solar system are, well, astronomical. But astronomers discovered in early 1980s that many nearby stars were orbited by solid objects. Children a generation before dreamed of the moon. My friends and I reached for the stars and dreamed of planets.

Then the Challenger exploded.

For much of our generation, it was a shared memory like the Kennedy assassination. They were the first Americans lost in space. With Columbia's tragedy, we wonder if the shuttle is safe at all.

Yet in the darkest days after Challenger, science continued to shed light in our quest for answers. Physicist Richard Feynman, appointed to the committee investigating the explosion, identified the problem on his own. The night before the launch was so cold that ice had built around the rocket boosters, including the rubber O-Rings meant to seal the two massive rockets. Feynman demonstrated how rubber loses all resilience by

dropping a piece into a glass of ice water.

NASA said the chance of shuttle failure was 1 in 100,000. Feynman determined that failure would occur 1 in every 100 launches. The last Columbia flight was the 113th shuttle launch.

In tragedy's shadow, we should not forget the successes of the Hubble Space Telescope, Galileo and the Mars Global Surveyor. Unmanned spacecraft have given us incalculable knowledge of our solar system and beyond. They, rather than astronauts, have answered my childhood questions about Mars, moons and stars.

Nor should we abandon human space flight. We honor the Columbia seven by committing humanity to a future in space. What we should stop is giving away billions in contracts to spy satellites and space missile defense. Who knows how much stronger and safer our space shuttle system would be if our political and financial energies were in one place?

Columbia carried the first scientific payload in two years. Besides tests on human bone, muscle and immune cells in microgravity, the shuttle also housed earthworms, harvester ants and Australian spiders. The creatures carried the experiments of high school students who had won the opportunity to conduct experiments in space.

They are our newest generation of space scientists.

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

Letter to the editor

Tireless scout volunteers deserve recognition

As the Boy Scouts of America celebrates its 93rd birthday on Saturday, we commend the countless volunteers who have donated their time to instill timeless values in the lives of Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and Venturers.

Oregon Trail Council has 3,700 volunteers who serve 11,877 young people. We'd like these volunteers to know that we appreciate their hard work and dedication. Thank you for keeping

scouting strong and effective for 93 years.

If scouting's 3,700 registered adult volunteers gave only two volunteer hours per week, they would give nearly 385,000 volunteer hours per year. However, we know scouting's volunteers donate significantly more time than this. Through their actions they demonstrate the philosophy that, for our children, love is spelled T-I-M-E.

Our scouting volunteers understand the old adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." For more than nine decades, mothers and fathers have taken the time to use the scouting program as a remedy to the social ills

America's youth face. They have helped save them from the dangers of drugs, gang violence, teen pregnancy, vandalism and more. Thanks to their contributions, thousands of youngsters have gained the personal values, self-confidence, leadership and life skills to help them grow into strong role models for the next generation.

Oregon Trail Council, Boy Scouts of America, salutes our dynamic team of volunteers who make a difference in the lives of America's youth. They are the faces of the future.

Michael S. Quirk
 Scout Executive Oregon Trail Council,
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