

# Latino article was tokenism but gave glimpse of culture

## Guest commentary

In Javier Ayala's guest commentary ("Latino experience reduced with acts of 'tokenism,' inaccuracy," ODE, May 7), Ayala offers his thoughts on a recent Eugene Weekly article, "La Lingua," and takes offense to the work's (and that newspaper's) representation of Latinos in the Eugene-Springfield area. Most importantly, Ayala alleges that the article is an example of ethnic tokenism.

To start, let me express my agreement that Eugene Weekly's decision to run Kera Abraham's article was a tokenistic act. From what I know of the matter, the author had submitted the piece to the Weekly some time prior to its May 1 publication, but the paper decided to run the work at that time because of a shortage of other material and because of the upcoming Cinco de Mayo weekend.

While this is galling, Javier, let's face it, it's a hallmark of our myopic, short-attention-span journalistic culture. The Eugene Weekly's decision to run "La Lingua" on May 1 makes the tacit assumption that Eugeneans only want to read about Latinos and Latino-related issues when their beloved "drinko de mayo" is looming.

I must express my disagreement, however, with other observations Ayala provides about the article. One example he uses to show the author's insensitivity to Latinos is the newspaper's awkward front-page teaser "La Lingua." To blame the author for the gaffe is inaccurate and unfair.

Abraham's article is properly titled "Two Languages, Two Worlds," but that did not stop the Weekly from a cute attempt at "Latinizing" their cover. Abraham does not work for the Eugene Weekly, though perhaps they could benefit from her tutelage the next time they try their hand at Spanish.

Most importantly, I would like to address Ayala's deepest source of frustration with the piece - namely, that "the Eugene Weekly runs an article on Latinos, yet does a poor job at representing the Latino experience" and that these experiences are "reduced to conflicts between English-speaking Latinos and those that speak Spanish." I would argue that this is not the case. No socially conscious writer would attempt to encapsulate the entire "Latino experience" in a three-page article!

Indeed, Abraham consciously sticks to the underrecognized issue of language politics within the local Latino community. In the ar-

ticle, she tackles the thorny matter of language choice/proficiency and its impact on ethnic identity - important and recurring issues within our community that are often misunderstood (or overlooked) by Anglos.

Abraham's piece allows several local Latinos (myself included) to weigh in. Some of the things they say are surprising - like Jaime Valderas labeling all Mexican-Americans as "a little bit racist" - but they are the opinions and experiences of the interviewees, and as such are valuable to read.

Abraham's article may not portray our population as one big happy family, but it should not be expected to. A healthy community must be able to openly face its challenges, rather than brush them under the carpet before the majority culture catches wind of it.

What Abraham's snapshot of language politics does provide is a sense of depth - proof that we are not a monolithic people who all think the same thoughts, listen to the same music, eat the same food, or in this case, speak the same language.

Tomas Hulick Baiza is the assistant director of admissions and coordinator for the multicultural recruitment office.

# Article had tight focus intended to deepen perception of Latinos

## Guest commentary

I am writing in response to Javier Ayala's guest commentary ("Latino experience reduced with acts of 'tokenism,' inaccuracy," ODE, May 7) about an article recently featured in the Eugene Weekly, "Two Languages, Two Worlds." As the author of the article, I was disheartened that Ayala interpreted it as an attempt to marginalize the Latino community rather than to add depth to readers' perception of it.

I think that Ayala's main objections can be traced to poor copy editing. The cover title, "La Lingua," was an egregious error. As a fluent Spanish speaker, I recoiled to see a word that doesn't exist in the Spanish language prominently displayed on the cover. And the cover's subtitle, "local Latinos face barriers," was misleading. It promised a discussion of the many barriers facing the local Latino community, whereas the article was tightly focused on language diversity within the cultural group. So Ayala is right when he says that the article reduced Latinos' experiences - its purpose was to shed light on a single narrow issue.

Ayala claims that "the author

then further attempted to show racial tension" between Latinos who spoke only Spanish or only English. The article was conceived when I was looking over Census 2000 data, which indicated that almost half (46 percent) of all local Latinos reported speaking only English, and 15 percent spoke only Spanish.

I wondered whether these two groups' experiences in Eugene differed greatly, but I did not expect to discover the tension between them. Each of the five sources with whom I spoke, however, said that this tension exists. Often it represents the difference between immigrants and second- or third-generation Latinos. To me, it means that the Latino community is much more diverse than many people might assume.

As an Arab American, I am especially sensitive to the racial homogeneity of Eugene. I wrote the article, in part, to illuminate the presence of a very strong and culturally diverse local minority population. Rather than tokenism, the article was an attempt to stimulate dialogue by bringing to light a seldom-discussed issue. The majority community in Eugene needs to un-

derstand more deeply and sensitively the range of experiences that minority individuals encounter when they attempt to hold onto their own cultural identity while living in a largely white city.

Again, I recognize that local Latinos face barriers much greater and broader than language diversity. It distresses me, as the author, that copy-editing errors led to a cover title and subtitle that incorrectly introduced my article and suggested that it would discuss issues beyond language. The Spanish punctuation errors in the text of the article were also unfortunate, and I was sorry to see them.

But in our city, there is too little discussion of ethnic relations, and Eugene Weekly ought to be applauded for trying to raise awareness of a population that is contributing culturally, economically and intellectually to our community. I am sorry that Ayala perceived the article negatively, but I hope that people will take advantage of this opportunity to discuss the myriad issues surrounding cultural identity in Eugene.

Kera Abraham is a graduate student in journalism.

## Letter to the editor

### Butch man-haters lie about abortion facts

While I sympathize with those who are horrified to see gruesome photos of aborted fetuses, the reality of exactly what abortion is has to be made public for all to see. That sometimes requires the truth to be displayed for what it is.

The anti-life people don't want people to see these photos because it exposes the inhumane nature of their position. It makes defending the indefensible much more difficult than they would like.

The hateful and mean-spirited feminist types like to present a sanitized picture of abortion in order to make this seem like a benign medical procedure that is no different than having one's appendix removed. Nothing has been more damaging to the pro-abortion position than modern medical technology.

A sonogram can vividly show the beating heart of an 8-week-old fetus. It plainly shows a live baby in the early stages of growth. And don't get me started on partial birth abortion; the fact that it took so long to outlaw should shock the

conscience of everyone the next time they vote in an election.

You will never be told the truth about what abortion is if you listen to the butch man-haters who could never attract a man if their life depended on it. Momentum is with the pro-life movement.

More young people today are opposed to abortion than ever before, and this will only continue with a sustained campaign to educate the public about what happens in an abortion.

Mark Cruz  
Renton, Wash.

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