

COMMENTARY

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Wal-Mart gives 'family friendly' new meaning

The next time you walk down the magazine aisle at one of Wal-Mart's three stores in Eugene, don't expect to find the latest issue of Maxim. The nation's largest retailer has pulled the occasionally risqué men's magazine, along with FHM and Stuff, from its shelves.

Wal-Mart's refusal to sell the three magazines is the latest strike in the Arkansas-based retailer's continuing campaign to make its shelves safe for the easily offended. For years, Wal-Mart has pulled from the rack individual magazine issues that it felt conflicted with its family-friendly image.

As a private business, Wal-Mart has the right to decide which products it will and will not sell. Yet its dominance in the retail market means that its decisions affect, to an alarming extent, what Americans see and hear. This is especially true in rural markets where Wal-Mart may be the only game in town.

Censorial sales policies aren't Wal-Mart's only problem. In December, a Portland jury found Wal-Mart guilty of forcing its employees to work unpaid overtime. The lawsuit, brought by 400 Wal-Mart workers employed by 18 separate stores in Oregon, was the first of many similar lawsuits across the nation to reach trial.

Wal-Mart workers may need that overtime pay. They earn an average of less than \$9 per hour, according to The New York Times. Not one of them belongs to a union.

Wal-Mart's union-free status may not be an accident. The National Labor Relations Board has accused Wal-Mart of improperly firing union supporters and interrogating workers about pro-union activism.

Wal-Mart has revenues of \$220 billion, roughly equal to the gross domestic product of Sweden, and it employs 1.4 million Americans, a workforce greater than the population of Idaho. Apparently, its size hasn't helped Wal-Mart treat women equally. Six female Wal-Mart employees have launched a sex discrimination lawsuit against the company, accusing it of favoring men in pay and promotions.

The company denies the allegations. The suit alleges that managers told women, "God made Adam first," and "Men are here to make a career, and women aren't."

Wal-Mart has also aggressively entered the political arena. In 15 months spanning 2001-2002, Wal-Mart donated more than \$600,000 to political candidates, according to the Federal Elections Commission.

Wal-Mart has lavished thousands of dollars on President George W. Bush, Attorney General John Ashcroft and the Republican National Committee. Oregon Sen. Gordon Smith received \$10,000 from Wal-Mart last spring.

Some of the company's favored politicians hold abhorrent views. One of these men is Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., who recently landed in hot water for making anti-gay remarks. Santorum has received \$7,000 from Wal-Mart in a relationship lasting five years.

Despite Wal-Mart's ethically challenged record, consumers flock to the chain's 3,500 stores like Texans flock to oil. I can't say I blame them. The economy sucks, and Wal-Mart's prices are far lower than many of its competitors. I myself have dropped a few dollars there.

But socially conscious consumers should ask themselves whether Wal-Mart's low prices justify supporting its pro-censorship, anti-union, anti-gay and anti-women reputation.

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



Chuck Slothower
 Clocktower hush



Peter Utsey Emerald

Unthinking antagonism can hurt Jewish cause

Guest commentary

In some ways, the reality of the Holocaust best can be addressed by non-Jews. This is written with acceptance of the reality of the Holocaust, and the guilt understandably felt by many. I am not of Jewish heritage, but never have I doubted the horror and expansiveness of the Holocaust.

Unfortunately, as scholar Deborah Lipstadt told a University audience in April, there are those who try to cast doubt on the Holocaust. I choose to ignore them. But something I can't ignore is how some who know it to be incontrovertible fact wind up raising doubts by their response to critics of Israel.

My belief in the Holocaust is reinforced by awareness, as a Christian, of how the Christian church has fed demonization of Jews over the centuries. That issue erupted on the University campus some years ago when I was among several who challenged the Oregon Bach Festival for performing

Bach's St. John Passion. The music was not at issue, but some of the scriptural words were because of their bigotry toward Jews. To its credit, the festival scheduled public discussion of the subject.

Martin Luther, through his words, labeled himself the most visible anti-Judaic figure in church history. I'm convinced Hitler's Holocaust could not have been possible had German Lutherans and Catholics not heard it propounded for centuries from their sanctuaries. That is a terrible flaw that the Church needs to address in an effort to expurgate its writings of such un-Christian concepts.

Some Jews could encourage that important introspection within Christianity by looking within themselves for signs of behavior that feeds unthinking antagonism toward them among non-Jews. These include:

- Knee-jerk support for policies of a foreign nation, Israel, when those policies victimize Palestinians, and are inconsistent with the American view of justice, even if a federal administration chooses to be a party

to the injustice.

- Equating criticism of Israel with anti-Judaism. Earlier this year, University Professor Doug Card was arbitrarily and wrongly accused in that way by the most notorious self-appointed censor in the American Jewish community, scholar and New York Post columnist Daniel Pipes. Some morally and intellectually unstable Americans need only the Pipes-type behavior to justify their doubts about the Holocaust. Pipes and his collaborators, even some in Eugene who hound critics of Israel with that label, need to be discredited by the Jewish community.

As I left the Lipstadt talk, the darkness outside was broken by a solemn sight and sound: memorial candles in the EMU Amphitheater and voices of students reading names of victims of the Holocaust. That is a vital memory. But it can be demeaned when some descendants of victims act in a way that turns them into victimizers.

George Beres lives in Eugene.

Letters to the editor

We need to learn to love one another

Have a heart and use it. I was shocked, as was Elizabeth Reis, who commented on May 13, of the publication by Vincent Martorano on his views adequately entitled "Homosexual men should hide their disgusting acts," ODE, May 9).

However, besides Reis' simple argument of the biased opinion being published, I think more needs to be said. By Martorano's proud banner hanging in his window displaying his hatred for liberals, it is obvious of the boy's feelings already. I question his credibility. I wonder if his views of liberals and homosexuality are real, or if Martorano just likes to stir things up to get a spot in the Emerald.

Yes, it's possible that he hates gays, but does he hate all gays? Or just male gays? I can't recall reading anything about his hatred for lesbians making out on campus, nor

do I ever expect a male who preaches that he has no personal sexuality complex to do so.

I find it hard to appreciate an article expressing mere opinion, and especially if it shows no respect, let alone love, for people that are different than he is. For the most part, homosexuality isn't a choice. It's a sexual preference, not a disease, and it's a brave group of humans. Let's learn to love each other — life's not always easy.

Nicholas Wilbur
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Commentary lacked supporting arguments

The recent guest commentary "Homosexual men should hide their disgusting acts" (ODE, May 9) is problematic primarily because it lacks in content. There is no argument, support, or rationale in the article. Only assertion is present.

Indeed, the article shouldn't have been published — not because it might include an unpopular opinion but because it does a

horrible job of defending it. I totally disagree with the opinion presented, but how can one have an argument against an opinion that doesn't seem to have reasoning or clear arguments behind it?

Wishing that homosexuality be "viewed by society as an illness" and stating that the author has "a sense of moral decency that provides (him) with the knowledge that homosexual behavior is wrong" does nothing to support the argument that "homosexual men should hide their disgusting acts" or to bring light to the debate around queer concerns. Those are merely assertions of one's personal opinions.

I could state that I think lawyers are evil and should cover their faces in public, but if I don't explain why I think they're somehow objectionable to me, then I don't have much of an editorial. Indeed, printing editorial material totally bereft of supporting arguments is unprofessional and, rather than opening a hearty debate, stifles it.

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