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COMMENTARY

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Columbus Day celebrates lies, corporate greed

One reason crimes against humanity continue is because some countries rationalize similar acts in their past that brought them to power. On Monday, October 13, the United States celebrates Columbus Day with parades and sales on consumer goods. Many people will honor one of history's most infamous mass murderers while they give their money to the corporations that continue his legacy of atrocity.

GUEST COMMENTARY

According to Howard Zinn — selections from whose book "A People's History of the United States" will be featured in a reading Monday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the EMU's Ben Linder Room — Columbus is not worthy. He didn't find

Asia, and if the Americas had not been in his way the expedition would have failed. He lied to Madrid about his finds and was willing to commit any act of barbarism to satisfy his greed. He instituted genocide: He caused men, women and children to be raped, burned, maimed, tortured, enslaved, mutilated and murdered. The day dedicated to him should be one of mourning, not celebration.

Bartolome de las Casas was a young Catholic priest initially participating in the ravage let loose upon the Indies. Eventually rebelling against the cruelty he witnessed, he transcribed the admiral's journal and began a multi-volume work titled, "History of the Indies." He relates how the Spaniards "thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades," going on to describe how "two of these so-called Christians met two Indian boys one day, each carrying a parrot; they took the parrots and for fun beheaded the boys." According to la Casas, between 1494 and 1508, over 3 million people died from war, slavery and the mines. As he writes, "Who in future generations will believe this? I myself writing it as a knowledgeable eyewitness can hardly believe it..."

How is it that our people today can celebrate this guy? Is it because Americans like those who facilitate the death of over 7,000 children in three months on Cuba alone, as reported by la Casas? I don't believe so. People continue to participate because the corporations who control the country's media tell them it is okay to do so; the ease of rationalizing wrong is directly related to the number of those participating. Our population has been subjected to the longest and most sophisticated program of brainwashing ever attempted: We are living in a constructed society — our own Matrix — a bubble of unreality not shared by the rest of the world. But, as Lincoln may have said, "... You can't fool all the people all the time..."

Good character is not derived from simply not doing wrong, but rather from actively doing right. Fight back: Pop the bubble. Tear down the construct: Destroy the Matrix. Refuse to spend money that day except in local, non-corporate businesses. Regain your power, help expose a wrong, support your indigenous sisters and brothers, and save the world for our future generations.

Kayanow and peace to all.

Bob Kezer is a junior in the international studies and religious studies programs.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Parking citations make students, parents feel unwelcome

Does the City of Eugene Planning and Development's Parking Administration have any decency? No! On Sept. 25, the day that University students officially began to move in, the Eugene parking police buggies gave citations to vehicles in the two-hour zones around the University residence halls. Are traffic fines the way the city wants to welcome the parents of the thousands of University students? Apparently so. The city ought to be ashamed of itself. Don't the parents and students contribute enough money to the city's economy to allow the city to not give them parking citations on the one day that is supposed to be fun and when students will be starting their new journey?

Although I was not a victim of Eugene's Parking Nazis this time, I am still outraged. Both the city and the University have refused, and still refuse, to provide adequate parking space for the city's and University's population. I suspect they refuse to do the right thing because they see Eugenians and students as cash cows from whom they can reap hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. Does the city's greed have no limits?

I have never lived in a city where the powers that be make its residents and visitors feel so unwelcome. I guess there really is a first for everything. I keep counting down the days until I graduate next year and leave this town. I'll take myself and my money elsewhere.

Kevin Franken
Law



Steve Baggs Illustrator

Recognizing PATRIOTISM

Monday is Columbus Day — in grade school the holiday we spent making construction paper American flags, acting in usually naive explorers-encounter-Native American vignettes and hearing a 30-minute review of the European "discovery" of the New World.

The second Monday in October, and moreover the legends of daring explorers scouting the Brave New World, is traditionally venerated in the schoolroom and in the public forum, a patriotic celebration of the human spirit and the quest to push outward the bounds of knowledge. Indeed, Christopher Columbus has become the namesake of no fewer than 10 American cities, a university and the United States' capital district.

But in recent years, critics have lambasted the holiday, claiming that Columbus Day is at best a misguided, undeserved commemoration of a greed-driven quest for power to an implicit affirmation of past genocide on the part of the modern American consciousness.

Conversely, Columbus' most ardent modern supporters invoke historical inevitability or cultural Darwinism as a justification for what modern historians recognize as a gross, discriminatory quashing of human rights. After all, they might argue, a collision between the Old and New worlds was, in the long run, a certain eventuality, and moreover, that Columbus didn't have the privilege of knowing the modern construction of human rights.

Both of these extremes are, of course, absurd. And, as usual, the truth is somewhere in between. But herein lies a lesson about criticism of America in the modern world.

Most sociopolitical extremists fall into one of two categories: The most fanatical social Darwinists tend to approach the history as a series of conflicts in which the superior — that is, the most fit — culture or idea rightfully tends to win. Operating under the Panglossian

assumption that ours is therefore the best of all possible worlds, they tend to view even obvious abuse as part of history's natural flow, even if that abuse is regrettable.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are usually paranoid, counterculture radicals like overzealous Marxists. At worst, they see soul-crushing exploitation in every power structure everywhere and often rabidly protest accordingly.

Philosophical fallacy plagues both of these stances, but I'm going to spend most of the rest of this column addressing the latter. In the few years since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, America's critics have protested more and more loudly. Indeed, informed and rational dissent is the very basis for American patriotism, per Thomas Jefferson.



Travis Willse
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Many of America's domestic critics, however, are regrettably uninformed, irrational or both.

Often, they will appeal to America's history what they see as the nation's unequivocal, unrelenting evil. Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War, the establishment of Japanese internment camps in World War II, slavery and at least several other human rights violations all mar the nation's human rights record.

Being human, we have inherited the legacy of our predecessors' successes, and we are heirs to their mistakes. Fortunately, though, the individuality of human thought spares us from culpability for

them. Thus, to assign a blanket of blame to some or all Americans for past transgressions — regardless of whether they have indirectly benefited from them — is morally and philosophically bankrupt.

Furthermore, the irrational among America's critics often claim that America represents a grandiose, culture-crunching evil. Certainly, even the nation's recent history includes civil and human rights violations. However, America's record of human rights is among the cleanest of history's world powers. Also, the nation, particularly as it stands now, is more accurately characterized by traditions of free speech, free press — as criticism of the government in this publication and others demonstrates — and a usually open political process.

American law, culture and politics clearly have much room for improvement: You'll certainly see criticisms of some of those shortcomings later in this space. But citing policy faults or civil rights violations as a basis for characterizing the modern American zeitgeist as wholly or inherently evil is intellectually dishonest, genuinely unpatriotic and represents a lack of gratefulness for living in a nation where the above freedoms are enjoyed. Not all societies are equally good: Freedom is better than slavery, free speech is better than censorship, open debate is better than political imprisonment.

True patriotism lies neither in blind defense of the nation's political machinations and mistakes nor in rabidly attacking your country — which embodies as law or tradition the importance of human and civil rights — as immoral.

I can think of no better way to celebrate the second Monday of October than by reflecting on the importance of rationality and the many blessings of living in free society.

Contact the editorial editor at traviswillse@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.