

COMMENTARY

Monday, November 3, 2003

EDITORIAL

Anti-porn week forces Bush's moral opinions on Americans

While soldiers continued to die in Iraq last week, President Bush exercised his power and took bold steps to ensure that people of this great nation, the United States of America, are protected from the evils of the world.

He didn't end American involvement in Iraq; instead, Bush declared it "Protection from Pornography Week," via presidential proclamation. Bravo.

In continuing attempts to use his office as a pedestal for preaching the high ground of his personal moral definitions, Bush committed in his proclamation for the anti-porn week "... to take steps to confront the dangers of pornography," which he said "can have debilitating effects on communities, marriages, families and children."

Much of the proclamation focused on child pornography and steps the Bush administration has taken to combat it, including Department of Homeland Security efforts in "Operation Predator" to "identify child predators, rescue children depicted in child pornography and persecute those responsible for making and distributing child pornography."

We agree with this, and we commend those efforts. But while child pornography is obviously harmful to and exploitive of children and, as a result, very illegal — and rightfully so — we find it hard to believe that the '70s classic "Debbie Does Dallas" is going to break up any marriages or terrorize any communities.

Unfortunately, Bush didn't narrow his focus solely to child pornography in his proclamation, choosing instead to condemn legitimate forms of sexual expression protected under the First Amendment. Only after declaring that all pornography has "debilitating effects" did Bush explain that "the effects of pornography are particularly pernicious with respect to children."

Sure, we acknowledge that children can be harmed by porn exploitation and that curbing child pornography is a noble and legitimate goal for the federal government. Declaring a day to protest all pornography and creating a misleading link between exploiting children and catching the newest "Girls Gone Wild On Campus" on widescreen, however, is not.

Moreover, we challenge Bush to find one shred of reliable scientific evidence that directly links pornography to "debilitating effects" on marriages, families or communities. Say, for instance, a higher propensity for broken marriages. Or that pornography directly leads to worse communities, a higher crime rate or more unemployment. We're guessing he won't find it. But then again, evidence isn't something much needed when morality is the driving policy.

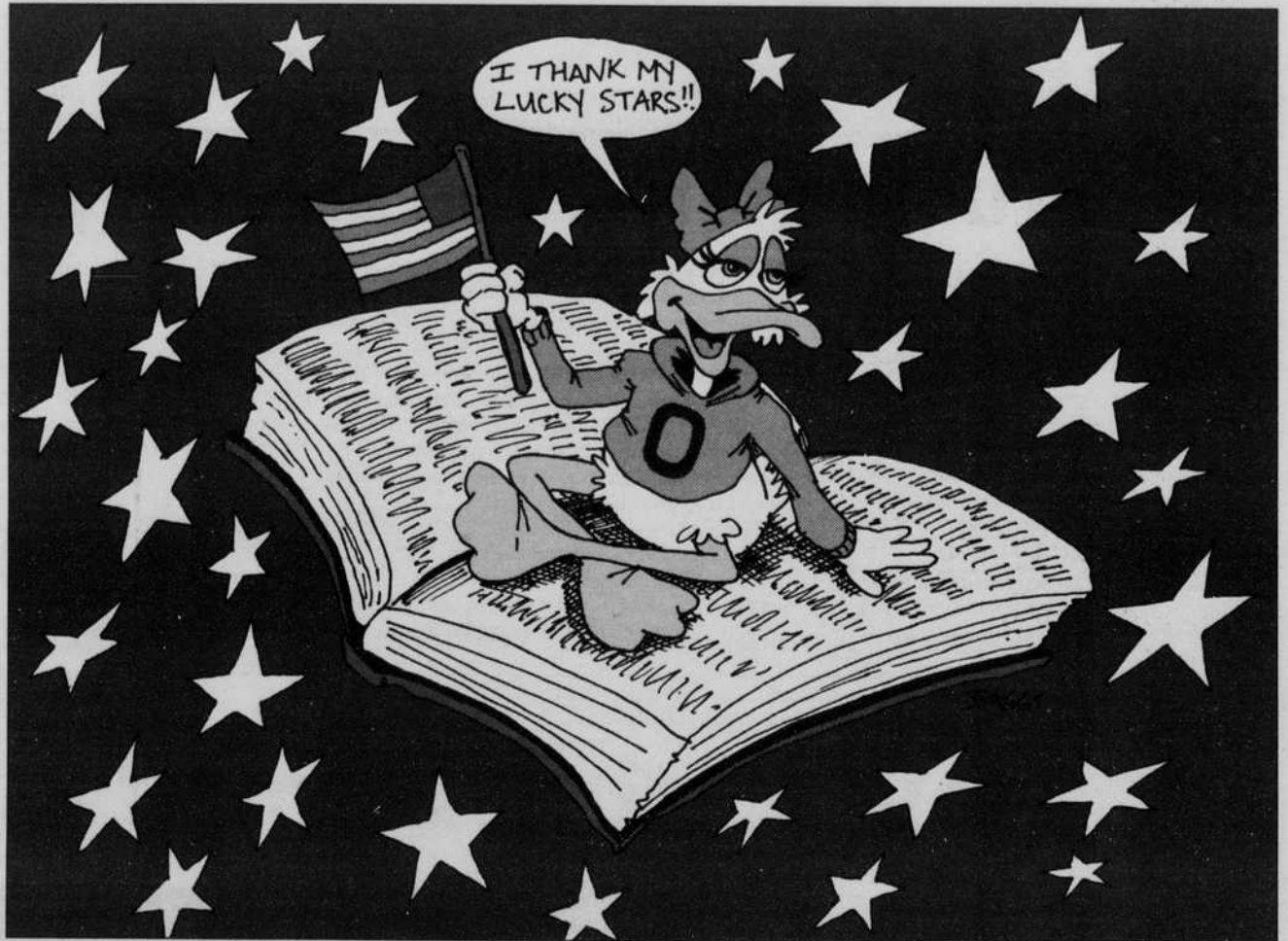
Bush's rhetoric toward all pornography hurts the administration's successful efforts to rid the United States of child pornography. The subtle comparison Bush draws between child pornography and other pornography is, truthfully, insulting to those who lawfully use porn in the inviolate private of their own homes.

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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Life's simple pleasures

There's a lot in this world you may take for granted. Indeed, it would be a difficult chore to be continually grateful for each and every good thing in your life. After all, in a single given day there is not only a lovely sunrise but also a rather fine sunset. There are the people who love us and those whom we love. Then there are the bazillion little kindnesses and advantages that come to us — not because we deserve them — simply as a matter of happenstance. I'm talking about the nice-but-too-little-to-take-conscientious-notice-of things like a green light when you're running late, finding your favorite ice cream on sale at the grocery store, or making it back to your car before the meter attendant can pull out the trusty ticket book.

It would be great if we had the time, energy and presence of mind to notice all the good stuff in the world around us, but that would significantly reduce the time we have for the more important things in life — like watching "Buffy the Vampire Slayer."

So, how about this: Once in a while (perhaps during a commercial break), take stock of your situation and find something to be grateful for that you might not have paid much attention to before. For starters, I'd like to propose that those of you reading this column be grateful for your literacy. Since most of you reading this are or have been in college, I'm going to assume that your literacy is a fairly well-established fact by now. But, have you ever imagined what it would be like to be illiterate?

Personally, I don't have to imagine it because I've experienced it first-hand. Several years ago, I moved to Japan, and I can vividly recall the trip from the airport to the hotel



Jessica Cole-Hodgkinson
Huh? What? Really.

— I looked at this place that was to be my home, and I realized that I couldn't read any of the signs. I saw the occasional trademark or logo that I recognized, but all the media around me were indecipherable.

It was scary.

For the next few weeks, I dealt with immense insecurity. I was terrified of getting lost because I couldn't read the street signs. I had to leave some restaurants because I couldn't read their menus. I even had trouble at the grocery store; unless the package had pictures, I couldn't tell what was inside.

Eventually, I began to cope. I became familiar with enough kanji to know the difference between a bookstore and a bar. I learned to navigate by landmarks instead of street signs; to this day I get a kick out of recalling that to get to the veterinarian you turned left at the large purple gorilla and right at the building with the green cross painted on it.

Nevertheless, I was always aware of how vulnerable I was because of my illiteracy. When I received a bill from the electric company, it showed numerous columns of figures. I knew I was supposed to pay the one on the bottom, but if they were overcharg-

ing me I had no way of disputing it. The contract for my apartment was in Japanese. I signed it based on the information the rental agent gave me. For all I know, I may have signed away my firstborn child when I thought I was promising to clean the floors.

After years of coping with illiteracy, I returned home to Eugene. Life became much simpler. Once again, I was independent. Need I say I was grateful?

That was four years ago. I don't remember to be grateful for my literacy everyday. In fact, when faced with the reading my professors think appropriate for one evening, I am sometimes extremely UNgrateful.

Then I met Wanda. Wanda is a middle-aged woman who has spent most of her life doing and selling drugs. It was all she thought she could do to support herself and her children. You see, while anything but stupid, Wanda couldn't read. Eventually, Wanda went to prison.

It turns out that going to prison was something Wanda would be grateful for. You see, while in prison, this middle-aged drug user and dealer finally learned how to read.

Now, out of prison, Wanda proudly tells people that she has a job — she's the assistant manager at a fast-food restaurant — and is reading at the third grade level. Wanda has changed her life. Knowing Wanda has changed mine. I am grateful.

Editor's note: To protect her identity, Wanda's real name is not used.

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

ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the results of the previous week's poll and the coming week's poll question.

Visit www.dailyemerald.com to vote.

Last question: Do you support the distribution of free condoms in the residence halls?

Results: 82 votes

• Yes, it will prevent disease and overpopulation: 57.9 percent or 48 votes.

• No, if you can't handle asking for condoms at the University Health Center, you shouldn't be having sex: 20.5 percent or 17 votes.

• Maybe, will this increase my chances of getting laid? 9.6 percent or eight votes.

• No, students will abuse the privilege: 8.4 percent or seven votes.

• Yes, it will increase my chances of getting laid: 3.6 percent or two votes.

This week: Should CIA Director George

Tenet's presence at the AAU meeting have been announced to the student body?

Choices: Yes, students should be made aware of what is taking place on their campus; Yes, it would have given students a chance to voice their opinions; No, students would have protested, thereby threatening security; No, students couldn't attend the AAU meeting anyway, so there was no point in announcing anything; George who was where?