

# COMMENTARY

Monday, March 1, 2004

## EDITORIAL

### Oregon takes backward step by scheduling Illinois game

As students at a progressive school, we should expect — in both the senses of expecting and demanding a certain degree of ethical coherence — that the University adopt stances that foster the right to free individual expression while, as an institution, honoring tolerance and respecting group and cultural traditions.

This expectation has become particularly germane in the realm of collegiate athletics in recent years, as many long-standing American Indian mascots have come under fire as politically incorrect, culturally insensitive or just downright offensive. But this particular issue transcends the usual ideological gobbledygook that is political correctness: Rather, many of these mascots present specific harmful caricatures of entire cultures that transcend the bounds of good taste.

This contentious issue, a dormant one at the University for most of the past year, has been rekindled by the recent announcement the Ducks would play the Big Ten Conference's Illinois this December in Chicago. In exchange, Illinois will face off against Oregon in the 2005-06 Papé Jam.

The move has disappointed some locals, who contend the agreement is tantamount to sanctioning racist and demeaning caricaturing. And rightfully so.

For some, though, the University's decision to schedule a game against a school that uses an American Indian mascot goes deeper than an implicit validation of a tasteless practice — it smacks of perfidy.

In summer 2002, law student Frank Silva and others presented University President Dave Frohnmayer with a resolution asking the University to not schedule games against such teams.

"(Frohnmayer) agreed to take it into consideration with a wink and a nod that it's not going to be an issue," Silva told the Emerald.

University Executive Assistant President Dave Hubin said there was no implicit consent to refraining from scheduling games, however, adding, "I think that there was a commitment that was retained to work with the NCAA (on the issue)."

Whatever was actually agreed to is beside this point: Crude stereotypes are bad not only for the groups they portray, but they reflect poorly a society that permits the perpetuation of the unfair characterization of some of its members.

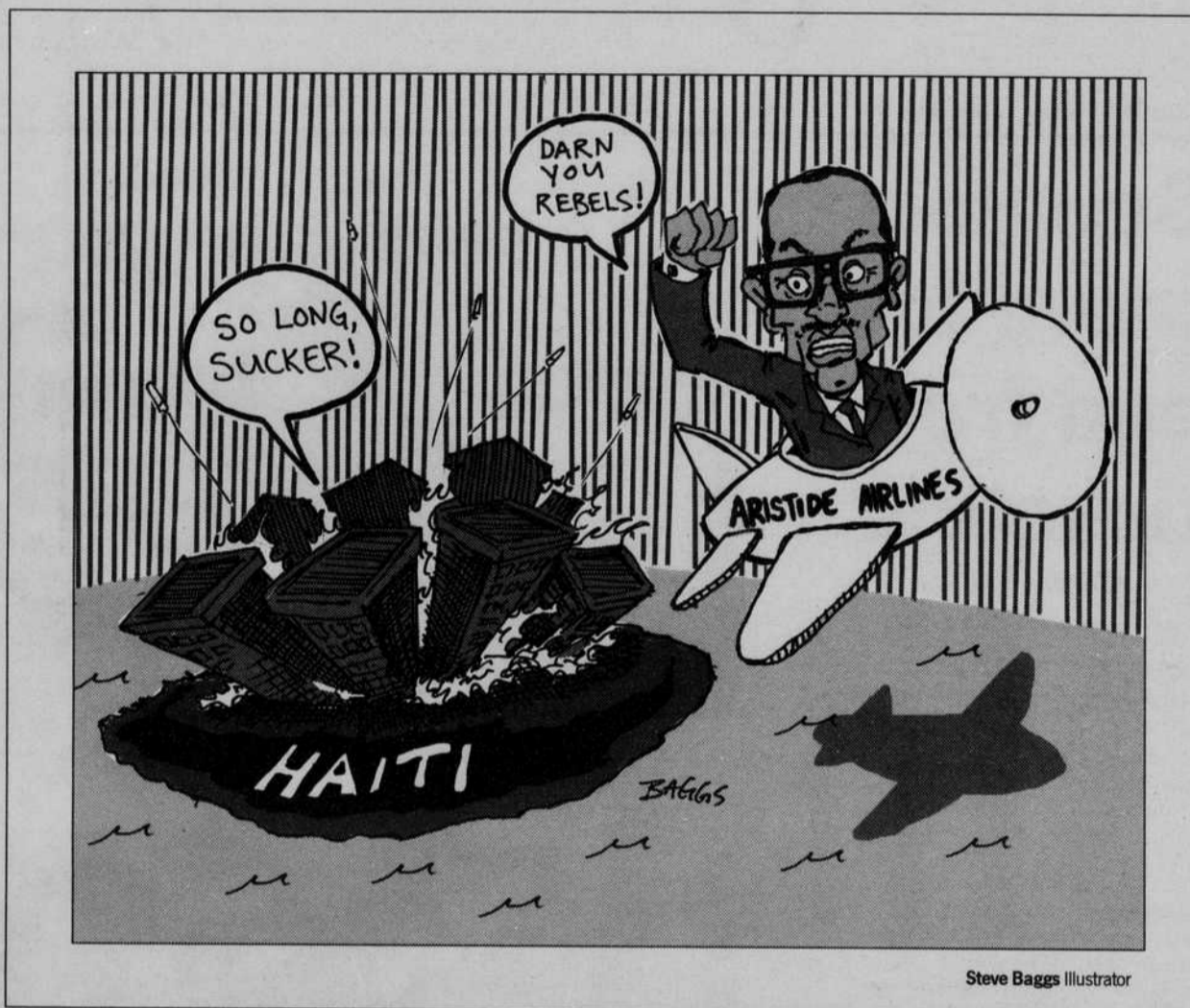
The Emerald Editorial Board calls on the University administration to cancel, if possible, the upcoming games against Illinois, unless the school first changes its embattled mascot. Moreover, the University should commit to not scheduling any sports games against any teams who offensively use a name or mascot of any ethnic group. This includes not only teams with American Indian mascots like Illinois, but of other races, such as Notre Dame's mascot — which crudely caricatures an ethnicity and exacerbates that stereotype, calling the Irish combative.

Hubin argues the University is not the appropriate place to address this issue, suggesting instead, "The proper forum is the NCAA."

If this were purely an athletic issue, maybe. But this issue reflects, too, on the cultural sensitivity and social responsibility of the University itself — and that's not an issue to export to distant athletic program bureaucrats.

## 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.



Steve Baggs Illustration

## Why, oh why...?

Why.

It's a word I'm rather fond of, and I've used it a lot over the years to understand the world around me.

I got my first inkling of the power of "Why?" at an early age. Like most kids, I hit my mother up with standard questions like "Why is the sky blue?" "Why is the grass green?" and "Why are my goldfish floating in the top of their bowl?"

She did pretty well explaining the properties of light, the importance of chlorophyll and the hazards of over-feeding your fish. For a brief period, I thought she was the smartest person in the world. I also thought that "why?" was better than three wishes from Aladdin's lamp.

Alas, my faith in both her and "Why?" began to fail almost as soon as it was formed. She could not tell me why we use red for stop and green for go. She couldn't tell me why we flip light switches up for on and down for off. Nor could she tell me why we drive on the right side of the road instead of the left.

Gradually, I began to understand that the problem lay less in her dwindling intelligence and more in the nature of my inquiries. It's easy to explain facts (they are reasonable, consistent, and they make the same sense everywhere you go). Light, chlorophyll, and goldfish are the same all over the world.

When it comes to explaining choices, however, things get trickier. After all, red and green are arbitrary choices, and purple and yellow or blue and orange would work just as well. Light switches are just as effective if they're wired to go on when flipped down. And nations



Jessica Cole-Hodgkinson  
 Huh? What? Really.

like England and Japan seem to roll along quite handily with their vehicles on the left side of the road.

My most recent foray into the world of unsatisfactory-answers-to-why occurred last week. A friend of mine is pregnant. Through the miracle of modern technology, she knows that she will give birth to a boy in a few short months. When it came up that her soon-to-be son was going to be circumcised, before I could help myself, I asked "Why?"

I wasn't trying to challenge her decision; I simply wanted to understand it. Cutting off body parts has always seemed a bizarre practice to me, and it's not easy to find people willing to discuss it. Here was someone — a mother — willing to explain the rationale behind it.

She explained that for her secular self, circumcising her son was necessary for health, hygiene and social reasons.

She had been told that having her son's foreskin removed would reduce the likelihood that he would develop urinary tract infections, lessen his chances for penile cancer later in life and help protect him from sexually transmitted diseases.

She was told that uncircumcised boys

often neglected to wash properly, something that could lead to infections of a very unpleasant nature.

And she candidly told me that she didn't want him to be made fun of in the locker room or feel uncomfortable with his body in sexual situations.

Put like that, it seems logical and reasonable to cut off a troublesome body part shortly after birth, doesn't it?

Well, I'm not so sure.

Health-wise, sewing our four littlest toes together would significantly reduce our chances for athlete's foot later in life, but I don't see anyone proposing that as a minor modification on nature's design.

Nor do I see anyone suggesting that we pull the teeth of children who are unlikely to brush and floss properly in order to save them from the potential trauma of a root canal.

And, call me cynical, but I have this sneaking suspicion that embarrassment in the locker room and self-consciousness in the bedroom are rights of passage we must all survive to reach adulthood, and no amount of nipping and adjusting will change that.

So, I gently explained my concerns to her with all my usual tact and diplomacy — like I said, my aim was not to challenge her decision, but merely to understand it.

Now, I find myself contemplating a new "Why?"

Why hasn't she called?

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## ONLINE POLL

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

Visit <http://www.dailyemerald.com> to vote.

Last question: What's your vice?

Results: 260 votes.

- Violence: 52.3 percent or 136 votes.
- Online porn: 21.2 percent or 55 votes.
- Reality TV: 4.6 percent or 12 votes.
- Music: 3.8 percent or 10 votes.
- Starbucks: 3.8 percent or 10 votes.
- Other: 14.3 percent or 37 votes.

This week: Should the Take Back the Night march have separate sections based on gender identity?

Choices: Yes — It will help people be more comfortable; Yes — It will attract more participants; No — It alienates people trying to support the cause; No — Segregation is hypocritical in a march for equal rights.