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COMMENTARY

Tuesday, August 3, 2004

EDITORIAL

'Empty Campus Day' only hurts undergraduates' opinion of GTFF

University undergraduates are the sacred cows that neither the administration nor the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation should slaughter in their ugly battle to hammer out a contract this summer. It looks, though, like the GTFF will gobble a hefty helping of beef for breakfast, lunch and dinner Wednesday.

The GTFF has declared Wednesday as "Empty Campus Day," during which students are asked to avoid campus and attend their GTF-taught classes at off-campus locations. GTFF President Eric Lindgren said the union has already reserved space at Lane Community College — one of those convenient off-campus locations — for GTFs and their undergraduate pupils. Lindgren said Empty Campus Day is not a strike, but is simply designed to show solidarity the day before the union enters arbitration talks in its stalled labor negotiations with the University.

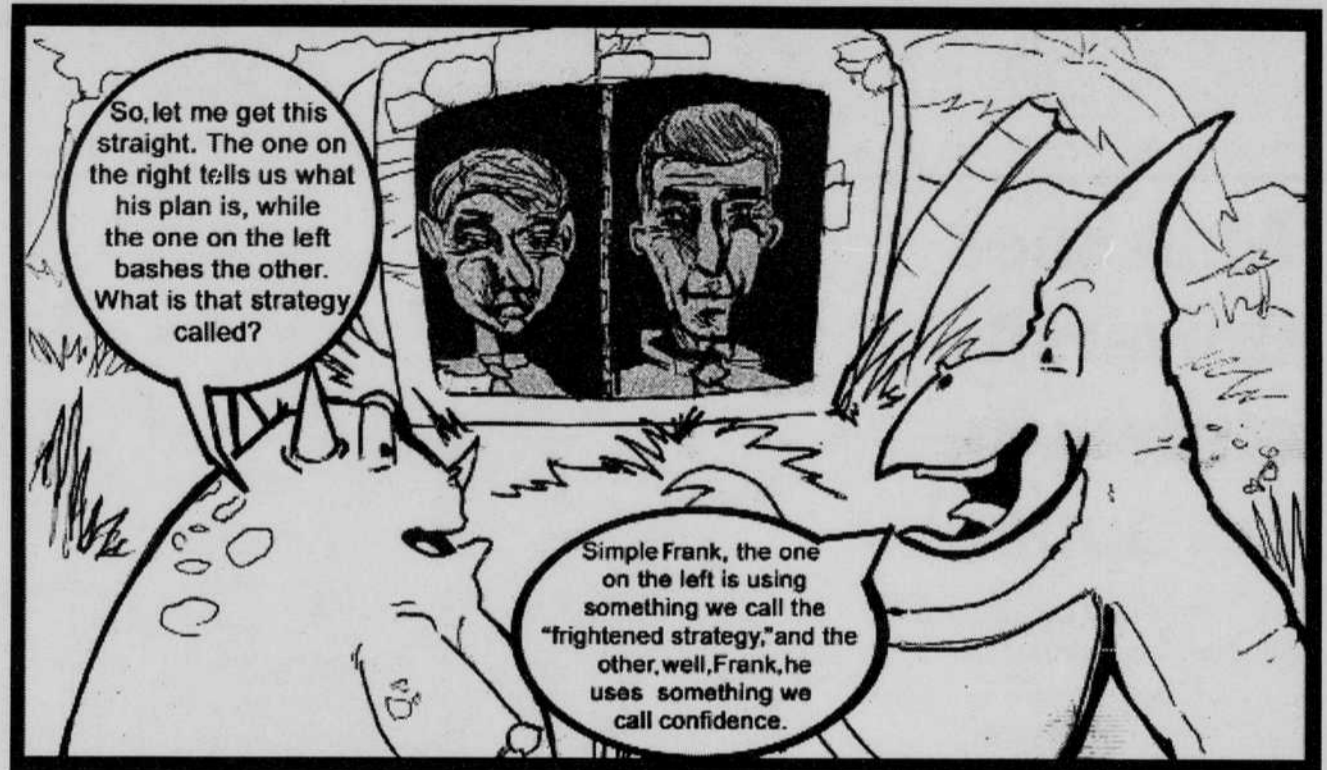
"We're not striking; we're just holding classes off campus," Lindgren told the Emerald. Lindgren said the GTFF wants undergraduates to know it's "not trying to hurt them."

Unless the Emerald Editorial Board missed something, that's exactly what the union is doing — hurting students by taking them hostage and using them as a bargaining chip as the union nears the end of its nine-month labor standoff with the University. Many undergraduates who live on or near campus and ride bikes or walk to school will be hugely inconvenienced in struggling to find bus routes and times (if they even exist) that fit their busy schedules. Many of the out-of-towners don't even know where LCC is! We fail to see how this tactic *wouldn't* hurt undergraduates — who are the reason the University pays GTFs in the first place — because it robs them of the University's resources and spaces, for which they have already paid thousands of dollars.

Lindgren was sure to point out that classes are not being canceled Wednesday. But, by scheduling classes at inconvenient locations, the union has effectively canceled classes for many students. While it is an undergraduate's responsibility to attend class, empty off-campus classes are no show of solidarity.

The Emerald Editorial Board supports the campus's GTFs in their difficult bargaining sessions and acknowledges their hard work and important contributions to the education of undergraduates. We feel they should be compensated appropriately with a fair contract. After nine months of unsuccessful bargaining, Lindgren said the union has member support for a strike, which would be the first GTF strike in the University's history. We support the right of any responsible union to strike; after all, this is the biggest conventional weapons any union has in its arsenal and the threat of a strike is often deterrent enough to break through negotiation impasses.

But, what the GTFF is doing is not fair. The GTFF should fight its own battle, and if undergraduates choose to join you, they will. If anything, this "Empty Campus Day" will only lead undergraduates to resent the union.



Aaron Sullivan Illustrator

The sacred institution of change

Seeing as this is my last column for the Emerald, I would like to reflect on an event that had an incredible impact on my world view and my perspective in this society.

In March, I got up bright and early and drove to Multnomah County to report on the county's controversial decision to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. In a tiny Portland Hilton Hotel room packed with friends, family and media, a homosexual couple was publicly and legally married for the first time in Oregon.

I witnessed history that day, but considering the hysteria from insane religious zealots I'd heard beforehand, you'd think I was witnessing two gay people foaming at the mouth, rubbing their hands together and plotting the demise of civilization. In fact, what I saw was two people in love who wanted to be recognized in the eyes of the law — just like anybody else.

This debate is not a new one in America. Americans had similar discussions before women's suffrage, when the social norm was to balk at any suggestion that women be allowed to vote ("Why, the sacred institution of democracy belongs to men!"). We had these discussions during the Civil Rights movement, when similar reasoning was used to protest a black person's right to drink from the same water fountain as a white person or to attend the same school as a white person.

Now, instead of the sacred institutions of democracy, human rights and education, at issue is the sacred institution of marriage — a brilliant political maneuver by those who refuse to admit they just don't like gay people.

Let's not forget, however, that the sacred institution of marriage was defended in a similar manner back when interracial marriage was outlawed in 38 states. It



J. TOBIAS MONTRY
 STOP BREEDING

wasn't until 1967 that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled those laws unconstitutional and people of different colors around the country were able to squeak past the tight bonds of religious oppression.

Oh, but if the sacred-institution argument doesn't butter your toast, how about the gay-people-make-terrible-parents argument? Or the what-rights-will-they-want-next argument (also made famous during the women's suffrage and Civil Rights movements). Then we've got the gay-marriages-lead-to-polygamy/bestiality/pedophilia argument, and the gay-people-will-just-get-divorced argument.

Interestingly, none of these arguments can be defended with any substantial or credible fact. So those who oppose gay marriage are left with only one talking point: the sacred institution of marriage.

While we're talking about sacred institutions in America, let's review another famous one. There used to be this sacred American institution called "segregation," and damned if whites were going to let blacks have the same rights. So as whites burned crosses, sending shadows dancing across their white hoods, states began separating white rights from black rights.

But as years and minds progressed, people slowly became open to bending that

sacred institution of segregation. Before you knew it, blacks were conquering the sacred institution of whites-only drinking water. The sacred institution of riding the bus to work was also shot to hell, and blacks were allowed to share in that glory.

The only sacred institution that was upheld during the Civil Rights movement, it seems, was that of human dignity and basic human rights.

Today, we face a similar situation with the same-sex marriage debate. It seems we've got this sacred institution of marriage, codified in the Bible, and many people don't want gays mucking it up.

One might say connecting the villainy of segregation and slavery with the seemingly passive issue of gay marriage is ludicrous, and in a way they're right. But let's not forget a basic tenet of both debates: freedom. In this case, the implied freedom of any individual to find somebody he or she loves and certify that love in state-sponsored marriage, regardless of his or her sex. I'm not saying those who use the sacred-institution-of-marriage argument are using the same logic as racists who did everything in their power to keep human rights from blacks. Oh, wait, yes I am. My apologies.

Then again, if it's the Bible we're using as a standard for our society, nobody will mind if I murder my children for swearing, rape a female war captive and kill a prostitute (but only if I impregnate her), right? Because all those things that can be found in the Bible, too.

What? Those values from thousands of years ago don't fit our current society? OK, just checking.

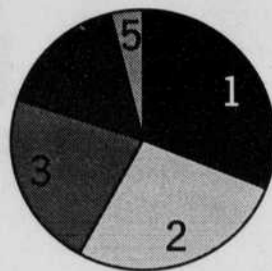
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ONLINE POLL THIS WEEK'S POLL RESULTS

- Are you a carnivore or a vegetarian? (49 total votes)
1. Carnivore — It's natural for humans to eat meat 31 percent
 2. Carnivore — Meat tastes good! 27 percent
 3. Carnivore — Meat is a good source of protein and vitamins 22 percent
 4. Vegetarian — For environmental reasons 16 percent
 5. Vegetarian — Eating meat is cruel 4 percent
 6. Vegetarian — For health reasons 0 percent

NEXT WEEK'S QUESTION

Do you support the GTFF walkout on Wednesday? Visit www.dailyemerald.com to vote.

- No — I'm paying for my classes to be on campus
- No — It will unfairly inconvenience students
- Yes — It's a great excuse to skip class
- Yes — We have a responsibility to support our students and staff

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