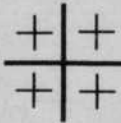


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Human rights commission hosts War Against Memory

The USA PATRIOT Act and the denial of racial injustice were among the topics the panel discussed

BY MORIAH BALINGIT
NEWS REPORTER

One might find it difficult to believe that a Yugoslavian middle school teacher, a Syrian-American journalist, a Lakota Indian and a labor-rights activist have much in common.

But on Wednesday, as they shared their experiences with racial injustice, they found their stories echoed the same frustration that stems from living in a society that has refused to acknowledge their struggles.

The Eugene Human Rights Commission hosted the panel, titled The War Against Memory, to discuss the denial of past and current racial injustice in this community and all over the world. The 10-person panel included University law professor Keith Aoki, associate professor of international studies Rob Proudfoot and graduate student David Lewis.

For Eugene Human Rights Commissioner Misa Joo, the war against memory is the deliberate "reinterpretation or even erasing of the history of oppression" in order to justify continuing practices of racial injustice.

Kera Abraham, a writer for the Eugene Weekly who is of Syrian descent, said she only recently began "delving into my identity as an Arab-American."

"As a child, I didn't like the word 'Arab,'" she said. "What I saw growing up was Arabs as ... terrorists, fat greasy oil mongers and the women as totally oppressed."

Abraham, through her study of the media, concluded that this conception was a result of "a century of

priming of the Arab as the enemy," stemming all the way back to immigration laws at the beginning of the 20th century.

"It follows the same pattern as Japanese-Americans ... of subtle planning," she said, referring to the cultivation of the Japanese as an enemy in the early part of the 20th century. "It's a simple mechanism, and it's being deliberately applied right now (to Arabs)."

Eugene Human Rights Commissioner Ibrahim Hamide, a Muslim, concurred.

"They have made us feel so vulnerable that we should feel threatened by this Muslim community," he said. "Anyone that we fear becomes the enemy, and they don't even have to commit a crime."

Lewis, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, said this pattern of the internment of specific ethnic groups extends back to the Native Americans.

"We're the first people to be interned, and we still are interned," he said.

Aoki argued that the government's actions after Sept. 11 are testimony to its failure to learn from its history.

"The United States has learned nothing," Aoki said. "After 9/11, you see the USA PATRIOT Act and a selective incarceration of people of Arab descent. ... It's selective amnesia."

This failure to learn, the panelists said, comes from the marginalization of the history of oppression of

certain groups.

Lewis is currently studying oral narratives of Oregon's native people and said academia is responsible for some of this marginalization.

"What I'm looking at is how archaeology and anthropology created the erasure (of the narratives)," he said. "They collect a lot of data, and, somehow, a scientist comes to the forefront, and his narrative becomes the master narrative of the people."

University professor emeritus Ed Coleman said this denial of history can occur when the victims themselves don't want to share their stories. As a young man, Coleman had a friend whose family had been interned.

"The family really didn't want to talk about it because they had lost everything," he said. "It's that repressed memory, just like a lot of African-Americans didn't want to talk about slavery."

Through the recounting of their experiences, the panelists emphasized the importance of communicating and passing on their stories.

"Unless we pass on our stories to our kids, they're going to learn from MTV and CNN," Pete Mandrapa, who was born in Yugoslavia, said.

Rabbi Yitzhak Husbands-Hankin said the denial of history can have potent effects.

"When we make a war on memory, we limit our capacity to learn," he said. "If we don't remember what it's like to be the outsider, the vulnerable, we're destroying our capacity to become compassionate enough to change the world."

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Senate: Cortez excluded from budget matters

Continued from page 5

"We're kind of at their will," he said. "It's kind of up to the scheduling gods and their prices."

Also at the meeting, Senator Michael Watson, a law student, announced that the Senate plans to introduce a resolution next week condemning the ASUO Constitution Court's decision to place an injunction against Senator and Programs Finance Committee member Eden Cortez.

Since then, Cortez, who was among three PFC members who received injunctions last week after a representative of the Oregon Commentator filed petitions with the court alleging misconduct, has been

excluded from voting on any budget matters at Senate and PFC meetings.

Watson, who said he is "not entirely familiar with the controversy," said the resolution was not submitted Wednesday because of formatting issues.

A draft of the resolution obtained Wednesday by the Emerald states that "the Chief Justice of the ASUO Constitutional (sic) Court has usurped the Court's constitutionally derived judicial authority by enjoining ASUO Senator Eden Cortez and Program Finance Committee (sic) (PFC) Members Dan Kieffer and Mason Quiroz from fulfilling their constitutional obligations as political officers of the University of Oregon student body."

Watson said injunctions usually

focus "precisely on one problem at hand" and the injunctions were "unusual."

He said the decision is a "separation-of-powers issue" because legislative bodies usually regulate themselves. He added that PFC members "are not mere ministers" of funds and that the PFC process is meant to be deliberative.

"I think this is a bad precedent" to set, Watson said.

The Senate also approved a request by the EMU Board of Directors to submit its budget a week later than planned because of new information presented to its budget committee that needs to be discussed.

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