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In my opinion

MAINTAINING America



CHUCK SLOTHOWER
TAKING ISSUE

Two-hundred eighteen years ago this week, the Constitutional Convention began in Philadelphia. Fifty-five of the best minds of the day, including those of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and George Washington, met during a sweltering Pennsylvania spring to design the most profound governing documents known to man.

These statesmen managed to synthesize the entirety of Western political philosophy, from Plato to John Locke, combine it with experience and forge a workable framework for self-governance.

I bring this up as a reminder of what makes America special. It's easy to forget, in this age of Guantanamo Bay and the PATRIOT Act, that we're more than 200 years into a unique and wonderful experiment in republican democracy.

No one was sure this experiment would work. Madison feared the masses would overwhelm the aristocracy and establish a sort of peasant dictatorship. Thomas Jefferson worried the presidency would become a monarchy, leaving us no different from England.

Happily, the fears of neither man came true. In 2005, we can pronounce the American experiment a resounding success.

Sure, it's had some rough spots: slavery, genocide of the continent's original inhabitants, isolationism, imperial warfare, economic exploitation, McCarthyism, Watergate, Pauly Shore. But no nation, great or small, has maintained a perfect human-rights record.

America is an extremely special place. Not only can we afford material excess beyond the wildest dreams of citizens of less fortunate nations, past and present, but we can criticize our government without fear of official retribution.

Thousands can march on the nation's capital without being mowed

down in a state-sponsored massacre, unlike in, say, China circa 1989 (and things there haven't improved as much as many people maintain).

We are not forced to idolize our leader or his father, unlike those in North Korea.

In America, my mother and sister can drive, vote for all their representatives, own property and — gasp! — expose their elbows in public, none of which is possible in certain Middle Eastern theocracies. These thoughts occur to me when people excuse and rationalize, in the name of cultural sensitivity or "diversity," the repression perpetrated by those governments on their own people.

But I digress from my thesis: The United States of America is awesome, the Cadillac of the free world. This can be difficult for Americans to appreciate, given our proximity to the subject and the deafening cacophony of the reflexively critical Left and the blindly uncritical Right.

Thus it helps to read the somewhat foreign perspectives of writers such as Thomas Paine, Alexis de Tocqueville, Bernard-Henri Levy and Christopher Hitchens. They remind us that America is the world's seminal force for freedom and the only nation to make libertarian principles its founding self-justification.

Those principles need their defenders, now as always, from enemies both foreign and domestic. I won't belabor

to point out our foreign enemies, the fanatic religious fundamentalists who prefer a joyless existence devoted to a twisted sense of morality, because they can only affect American liberty insofar as we let them.

But I will belabor to point out the domestic enemies of liberty. Some are fanatic Christians whose moral outlook has much in common with that of the fanatic Muslims who so audaciously attacked us. Really, the John Ashcrofts and Osama bin Ladens of the world maintain that dancing, drinking and gambling represent horrible sins; that abortion of fetuses violates the sanctity of life, while the execution of full-grown adults is A-OK; and that God tells them to reform the world according to their personal moral dictates.

Fear these people. Fear them, and fight them.

A more subtle and less identifiable danger comes from Americans who value security over liberty. These people, whom Benjamin Franklin warned us about, have enabled such abominations as the PATRIOT Act and the detention of American citizens without charge or access to counsel. They reside in both major political parties and cannot be lumped together by race, class or political ideology. There's a simple explanation for that: Valuing security over liberty isn't a political position so much as an indication of cowardice.

The damage the two aforementioned groups have done to America is incalculable. Just as some rose to defend liberty against the Palmer raids and later McCarthyism, we must all recognize what is happening in our midst.

We have built an amazing country. Let's keep it that way.

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Out loud

"We're excited to have windows." — Director of Health Education **Paula Staight**, on the plan for University Health Center renovations and expansion.

"I would just advise them to listen, and ... I'd advise them to seek out students who might be concerned with an issue ... and seek out every side of an issue." — Former ASUO President **Adam Petkun**, giving advice to new President Adam Walsh and Vice President Kyla Coy.

"I want to thank Adam Petkun for his service to the University of Oregon and the kind of leadership he's shown." — Eugene Mayor **Kitty Piercy**, speaking at Monday's City Council meeting.

"There are very few people who drive alone every day." — **Georgeanne Cooper**, director of the teaching effectiveness program at Academic Learning Services, which won the "One Less Car Competition," an inter-department contest to see which could log the most miles without members driving solo.

"(Panova) is pretty much one of 10 girls in the country who can win it all." — Oregon head coach **Nils Schyllander** earlier this season. Oregon senior Daria Panova made her third consecutive appearance at the NCAA Women's Tennis Championships on Monday.

"I've talked with many (women in the community), and they all feel that this policy threatens their sense of privacy and safety." — **Mike Jaskilka**, a pastor at Berean Baptist Church in Eugene, speaking out against a city code revision that would allow transgender people equal access to bathrooms.

"There's no physical bar at the entrance of bathrooms." — City Councilor **David Kelly**, responding to arguments against the city code revision, pointing out that members of the opposite sex can already enter any bathroom they want.

"Burning changes the DNA in your skin cells." — University Health Educator **Ramah Leith**, on tanning and the risk of skin cancer.

"I'm a big homo and so are all my friends." — Sophomore **Steph Hyde** at OUT/LOUD, a queer women's music festival held May 20 and 21 at the WOW Hall.

"If we try to write in black and white what 'officer discretion' is, we no longer are having discretion." — DPS Interim Director **Tom Hicks**, on the policy change that gives DPS officers discretion for issuing citations when responding to calls for assistance involving alcohol poisoning.

"Beliefs about what defines race are, to some extent, malleable." — Psychology graduate student **Chuck Tate**, speaking during a "Community Conversation" May 20 in which the Campus Climate Research Interest Team presented the findings of a two-year study on the University's cultural climate.

CORRECTION

In "Love Your Body Day takes place today," which ran on Wednesday, the Emerald reported that Students for Choice was hosting a free event Wednesday that included guest speaker Eve Ensler, free massages, a body message board and music in the EMU Amphitheater. The event was also to include a speaker panel in Friendly Hall that evening.

The events did not happen Wednesday, and a spokeswoman for Ensler contacted the Emerald and said Ensler was never slated to speak at the event.

Students for Choice Co-Director Hana Binder said Thursday that a combination of speaker cancellations and the inability to get equipment left the group with only a few events, so the group canceled "Love Your Body Day." Binder said students planned to read from one of Ensler's works, but Ensler was never slated to speak.

The information for the original report was obtained from a flier produced by Students for Choice and an interview with group Co-Director Sarah Craemer.

The Emerald regrets the error.

Guest commentary

The key to relationships: Relate

I applaud the book "He's Just Not That Into You," discussed on Monday's commentary page ("Removing man from woman," ODE, May 23), for its approach to female self-worth as not reliant on a romantic interest. This is called self-esteem, and it is something that many women, and many men, suffer from a lack of. Clinging to a person to make you whole is called dependence, and kudos to yet more advice trying to get people off that addiction. However, the book's problems weigh more than the praise it deserves.

The book's ideas lower a woman's role in a relationship to one of extreme passivity, telling women only to react rather than act. It fosters mistrust rather than trust and encourages assumption rather than communication. It fosters an individualist ethic rather than an ethic of relationship. I'm not about to say the book isn't right to advise leaving a guy if he's cheating, stringing a girl along or generally being a bad example of masculine and relational ethics. The book, though, assigns the same approach to every relational hurdle, from calling to dating to meeting parents to marriage. Men should certainly treat women well, but every time a man doesn't call for a while or act in a relationship the way a woman expects and assumes he should, the advice the book gives is that he must not be that into you, so get out and move on. This is not reality.

The reality is that people have different ideas of what a relationship is, how it progresses and the appropriate role of each person in it. We all have different wants and needs. Go find a man who meets your standards, whose wants and

needs are similar to your own.

An underlying assumption the book makes about a man is that he knows the exact what, who, when and how for a relationship. One hundred percent of men surveyed for this commentary agreed they are, at times, uncertain, even about people they really like. The authors haven't heard of uncertainty, social ineptness, timidity or insecurity. These traits and others can lead to behavior that someone might not expect from a person who is "into" them. If these traits are reason enough for dumping someone, then so be it. It's up to individuals to praise, condemn and forgive what traits they wish within the rest of us.

So, how do we overcome different wants and needs? How do we continue having relationships when uncertainty is a part of emotion? The answer is that each individual must find a way to relate, or the relationship inevitably ends. The how, what, when and where of this relating is ultimately the responsibility of the individuals involved, and that is why self-help books on relationships often fail miserably; one person, or two, or even three writing a book cannot usually have perfect advice for particular situations.

My advice to women and men alike is to avoid like the plague anything given to them that tries to make relationship decisions as simple as the authors of "He's Just Not That Into You" do. Human beings are complex creatures, and they deserve to be treated as such.

Ethan Firpo is a junior at the University

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