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Speak Out

White guilt

TO THE EDITOR:

How dare you suggest we need a kinder, more gentle word than racist ["Community, Not Conformity," June 6].

Maybe you should do some research, but there are a lot of words out there: biased, prejudiced, intolerant, bigoted, narrow-minded, discriminatory, inequitable and the list keeps going. Just go to your Microsoft thesaurus.

You say the word racist provokes such a negative reaction, the meaning becomes lost in fear and denial. Whose responsibility it is to deal with these emotions? People of color have and continue to fight to make the word racist powerful and a "bad thing."

As a child of color growing up with a white parent, I was never taught about racism. When other kids said my father worked in a gas station, made machine gun noises at me as I walked by or said I didn't have the right to live here because I'm Iranian, it would have been really good for an adult to say to me: "Don't worry about it, because they are being racist. It's their issue, not yours."

Or, when I didn't get the joke and wondered why everyone stared at me, it would be nice to have known that this was racism and that I was not deserving of this. Not until I was an adult was I empowered to put my reality into an oppression analysis.

And now I read that my empowerment is hurtful and makes white people shut down. This is white guilt that you must deal with in order to tackle the issues of racism and work to make yourself the "best you can be."

It is not OK for you to attempt to take that empowerment away in order to make it easier. It is time to deal with some of your issues before subjecting others to your personal process.

If white people want to engage in a dialogue,

they must acknowledge that racism is their issue and take responsibility for their own feelings about it. The day you remove the word "homophobia" in your newspaper out of worry about how straight people will feel, I will not call you racist and instead call you biased.

You speak of wanting to foster a dialogue about race. I have read many of your commentaries in my years in Portland, and you are never inclusive in your language.

As a queer woman of color, I have never seen myself represented, supported or even acknowledged in your words. Who exactly are you talking about when you say "we"?

You speak of creating community, and yet you are so extremely exclusive in your language, prescribing how queers should represent ourselves at Pride, in the media, with the police chief, meeting the mayor and various other opportunities for us to be heard. If I wanted to go by your understanding of our community, then my eight-year relationship with the love of my life will no longer be defined as queer.

P.S.: People who knew Kendra James read your paper. How is what you have done different from the right-wingers yelling at Matthew Shepard's funeral? Your comments were uneducated, mean and, once again, exclusive. Who are you talking to, anyway?

MITRA RAHNEMA
Portland

Men in blue

TO THE EDITOR:

I am sickened by the recent killing of Kendra James, which, like the murder of José Mejía Poot, is yet another injustice in a long list of murders, civil rights abuses and crimes by the Portland police. This is a tragic result of training

officers to be trigger happy and then unleashing them onto Portland's streets.

I disagree that James' death was caused by "bad cops." Officers demonstrate a pattern of blatant disregard for the lives and rights of working people. When is the last time we heard about police "accidentally" strangling a West Hills resident or pepper-spraying one of Portland's well-to-do?

The fact is, the job of the men in blue is to bully and intimidate the have-nots while protecting large property owners and big business. The real corporate criminals, like Enron executives who stole retirement funds and created an energy crisis to boost utility costs, or President Bush and crew, who slashed our social services and Constitution in the cause of war, get away with their lawless behavior and laugh all the way to the bank.

Kendra James' life was stolen, like so many before her, while the perpetrators are freed by a grand jury and the good ole boy system. Mayor Vera Katz and Chief Mark Kroeker are not held accountable for the policies that led to her shooting. How is this justice? The officers involved, the chief and the mayor should all be indicted by a grand jury.

The only way we can begin to curb police abuse of power is to have public oversight of their actions. We, the taxpayers, should oversee police behavior through an elected civilian review board, independent of City Hall and the police bureau. The board should have the authority to discipline and fire officers.

If the public has no control over the police, we should not fund them. Give their budgeted allotment to Portland Public Schools and let the police hold bake sales and walkathons.

JENNIFER LAVERDURE
Radical Women

just asking *If you could create the ultimate Portland queer community center, what would be its top priorities? Where would it be located?*

I would make the youth a top priority! Youth groups give hope to those who normally wouldn't have it. Even if they use it as a social engagement, it helps with their acceptance with themselves.

I am from Phoenix, Ariz., and was in and assisted for about 12 years with a group called VOIT, and it helped me understand homophobia, anger, sexual awareness and the pros and cons of coming out and not coming out. It is so important to have those issues shared. The young LGBT and questioning need people there to show them that it is all right, whatever they identify with.

I am not familiar with the city enough to know where to put this center, but I am willing to help in any way possible in getting it together.

JAE COURSEY
Portland

Safe haven for all, regularly scheduled events for others to get to know each other in a safe but fun setting, venues to become active in our community, perhaps fun things like a hosted barbecue from a favorite gay-operated business and a place where everyone can have fun—i.e., mixed crowds so that it is not just for specific gender groups within our community. It is important for everyone to have a nice place to come to so we can start creating a circle of friends within our community.

ALISON BENN
Tigard

I believe the ultimate Portland queer community center would focus its purpose on providing a central point in which queer people of all ages can find nonprofit agencies and support groups that center around their personal needs and desires. Its second focus should be to gather the community to a central point and assist in legislation of equal rights for queer people. In general, it really should bring the queer community together and distribute helpful information.

Downtown Portland is a beautiful place to have a queer community center. Why not just take over Stark Street?

JIMMY YOHE
Portland

It would be on the east side of the river away from the bars. It could be a pleasant improvement to the community there. It would have access to downtown yet be a major part in revitalization of the PDX area. This would allow inexpensive housing to help with rents and volunteering. This would also allow cheaper parking for same.

Congratulations, Portland. It's about time. I might even move back here and help if this area was selected.

I have traveled the United States for three years in my RV, and I stop at many GLBT community centers. I also have volunteered at many and put in thousands of hours at those that offered free parking. Make this place a parking-

friendly place near downtown and watch it flourish. If not, it will surely fail. Keep some distance from the bars.

DANIELLE CLARKE
Hillsboro

The Portland queer community center should represent the values and culture of our GLBT community. That may seem like an obvious and simplistic statement, but we will see many hidden agendas as this idea moves forward, and we always need to ask ourselves this basic question.

The top priorities can be a moving target. It seems like a gallery that represents the current issues and historical perspective of our community along with display space for our regional talent would be valuable.

Northeast Broadway seems like a good location for two reasons. First, Broadway has a universal identity to the GLBT community throughout this country, and it is nice to be linked to a greater consciousness. Second, there is a significant number of GLBT businesses and residences in both the Northeast and Southeast sections of town.

Further evaluation of affordable site options weighed with the qualities of the neighborhood is necessary. For instance, the east bank is moving toward a new industrial design center and might be a great location for our center.

DEB FRANCE
Portland