

RECYCLING AND PROFITS

Alan Pittman's piece "Trashed Recycling" (11/24) questions the wisdom of co-mingling recyclable materials with trash. Pittman cites data from the Portland area, suggesting that a good percentage of plastic material currently being co-mingled with paper and other trash is not being recycled at all. As a recently retired manufacturing industry employee who has spent some time building paper recycling plants I can assure your readers that Mr. Pittman's figures are not exaggerated. They may, in fact, be quite conservative.

Decades of environmental pressure placed on forest-based industries forced paper makers to increase use of the recyclable wood fiber in waste paper. Virtually all the corrugated box manufacturing plants on the West Coast now use some recycled fiber in their paper-making processes. Some mills use 100 percent "recycled," and no "virgin" wood fiber at all.

This development has had several consequences. While it has reduced the amount of wood fiber (paper) going to our landfills and has taken some focus off the tree-cutting aspect of paper-making (the industry would claim not nearly enough), it has put upward pressure on the dollar value of waste paper. Used corrugated boxes now constitute a significant commodity raw material for which paper manufacturers compete in a worldwide market.

One of the realities of recycling is that a ton of used corrugated boxes will not yield a ton of wood fiber for the paper mill that buys it. Indeed, it will contain anywhere from 10 to 30 percent of "contaminants" which must be removed before the wood fiber can be reused. Materials like plastic, duct tape, hot-melt glue, staples, wire, twine and other "impurities" make the recycling process very expensive. While current automated processes will remove most of these contaminants, most of the removed materials must be sent to landfill because they cannot be effectively segregated by type for reuse.

The only process I know of today that can completely remove and segregate these contaminants from the wood fibers is manual sorting. Manual sorting is time-consuming, labor intensive, and requires lots of real estate. It should not surprise anyone that when responsibility for sorting recyclables is passed on to a for-profit enterprise, the quality of the sort takes a back seat to economics. There is a point at which the cost of cleaning a waste stream exceeds the value of the extracted product(s). In the case of household trash, the stream is best cleaned before it reaches the curb.

*Stephen M. Roberts
Eugene*

A LIBERATED LIFE?

I'm imagining that more people are now a little closer to shedding their denial orientation. With Bush's re-election isn't it harder to maintain a diet of endless compromise with this rotten order? Fixated by hatred of Bush, many ignored how far degraded — even by American standards — their hopes and principles can become.

But now, is it not clear what is lost by abandoning any sense of what a healthy, liberated life could be? To keep behaving as if nothing could be qualitatively better, freer, more authentic than the ugliness that obtains is a blindness that is pathological. It can only lead to even worse days.

Time to think and act autonomously, in defiance of the "acceptable," for the redemp-



tion of self, society and nature. Leave the racket behind, wake up to the critique of how awful things are and how immeasurably different they could be.

*John Zerzan,
Eugene*

THE RACE CARD

The race card was played when a deputy and city police officer stopped Cortez Jordan, and it is still being played, but not by Mr. Jordan and not by the NAACP. The race card is a card held by white people and played by white people — most notably, white politicians. It's a way to get white peoples' votes: Scare them with a black face, and they'll almost wet themselves in their urgency to vote for you. It worked for George H.W. Bush in

1988, who used "Willie Horton" and "quota, quota, quota" to terrorize white people. It got him elected.

It worked for Doofus, the one who used the old "pay a scholarship student to take your exam for you" ploy to get the C-minuses that got him through Yale. Nothing new there, and nothing new in his "terrorist, terrorist, eek-eek-a-terrorist" ploy, either. Just another way of playing the race card.

For that deputy to accuse the victim of racism of playing the race card, which the victim doesn't hold and therefore cannot play, is what I have come to expect from those, such as Bushes, who hold the power. Expected, usual, and sick.

*Ann Tattersall
Eugene*

OUT in THE COUNTRY

BY SCOTT THIEMANN

Mainstream Gays

That heterosexual Catch-22

Now that the idea of gay marriage has entered the public theater, we're all in for the biggest sparks yet on divisions caused by gay issues being brought to the front.

What is troubling to me on the left is that there seems to be a small group of people who decide how it should be for all of us regarding such a far-reaching objective. Many of us prefer proposing civil unions as the most desirable option, seeing marriage as a religious ideal and institution that doesn't need to be breached.

What bothers me about those on the right is they offer no reasonable alternative to bring us into the mainstream in a way that honors us as fully participating members in a democratic and free society. Relegating us to second-class citizenship has been an ongoing part of conservative policy.

At first, people were just arrested when caught in compromised situations. Then, those exposed could be publicly shamed or shunned or called communists. As time went on and gay folks started asserting themselves, as they became visible, they could be beat up, shamed, or discounted by publicizing the most ostentatious. When they stayed in the closet, they could at least be ignored.

Then they started having parades, so featuring those displaying the most disgusting and flamboyant behavior assisted straight folks in maintaining their superiority. But gay people kept insisting on being in the mainstream.



AIDS entered the nation's consciousness at a time when a scapegoat was needed, and gay folks could be discounted once again. If it wasn't for their promiscuity, they wouldn't have to worry about catching such diseases. Of course, this was hard to pin on lesbians, as their rate of infection was much lower than that of the straight population.

There was never any alternative given to gay individuals, except perhaps undergoing heterosexual therapy to undo the orientation (or "preference" if you believed being gay was a choice) natural for them and, of course, to insist on them remaining invisible.

When they started coupling, becoming visible as partners, they were once again flaunting their sexuality. No biggie that gay people were establishing more lasting relationships and even fitting the heterosexual ideal.

Although people of the same gender have been connecting since time immemorial, it has only been recently possible to pursue such relationships in a less clandestine manner. Part of this process is due to available technology which has allowed other-than-heterosexual folks to discover many others out there with similar orientations.

The true measure of freedom will be the day a gay man can approach you (if you're male) and openly express his interest in getting to know you better. When you (if you're heterosexual) are able just to thank him and say that you're not interested, being gay will truly become a non-issue.

Scott Thiemann's column ran for several months in the Port Orford News, but was canceled due to advertiser pressure. His columns and commentaries have also run in the Brownsville Time and the Brookings Pilot.