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ing white people aren't going to get the column. That's insulting against Eugene. If freaking Wichita, Kansas, and Tulsa, Okla., can run the column, are you telling me that Eugene is stupider than both of those cities?

I have looked at the demographics of Eugene and also Portland. It's funny when I do encounter those more white cities — when it came out in Seattle, I got the same progressive guilty white liberal concerns that I'm getting right now from Eugene.

The second concern we hear is that because many white Eugeneans aren't experienced with being around Latinos and don't hear enough other Latino voices, they will not understand that some of what you write is humorous.

That's not my problem. If people have an issue with the coverage of Latinos in their newspapers, they should be talking to the editors and saying, "You should be doing more coverage." My column is not "¡Ask THE Mexican!" It's one voice. They should start doing their own columns talking about concerns specifically in Eugene.

Actually, one of the reasons I got into journalism was the lack of Latino coverage in Orange County. My column just happens to be one opinion.

That leads to another issue. Some people in the human rights community are concerned about "snark." Do you consider your writing snarky?

No. Snarky writing does not involve the amount of research that I spend on my articles. It does not involve me citing all the statistics that I do, or directly confronting Lou Dobbs and the politics of hate. Snark is not what I do with my column. I'm deadly serious with what I do in debunking stereotypes against Mexicans.

It's flippant, sure, but when it comes to columns, you have to have a particular voice, a personality. Sure, I'm a bit aggressive, but I'm also very well-versed, and the people who read the column read it like I watch *The Simpsons*. You could laugh at the jokes and the humor, but the more you know, the more you can appreciate it.

A really obscure example of a joke: One time I was talking about Mexicans and Islam. I wrote the name of the Prophet Muhammed. Whenever Muslims say Muhammed, they say Peace Be Unto Him; in print, Muslim papers will shorten it to PBUH, so I did that and got Muslims saying, "Hey, we didn't know you knew our culture!"

Do you think that people's reactions fall along generational lines?

I don't think it's a generational difference. The people I've met going across the country, they're not just young people; they're old, rich, young, poor, working-class, white, Latino. In Houston, a little Mexican grandmother came up to me. She said, "When I first read you, I thought you were a bad boy." She hated me, but then she started to actually read me and has been a fan ever since.

So do reactions depend on the length of time people read the column?

Yes. I totally understand where they're coming from the first time, not knowing the

methodology or my story or the context.

The best example I can give is this guy from Newport, Ore., Bob Diefenbach, who picks up a copy of [the alt-weekly] *Alibi* in Albuquerque. He picks it up, reads the column and thinks it's funniest thing he's ever read. He takes it home and shows it to a Mexican coworker in the hospital, who thinks it's funniest thing *he's* ever read. It gets spread all across the hospital. Soon, Bob gets called into the HR department and gets suspended for five days, for racism and sexual harassment.

The people who issued that read the column completely out of context. Read the column over space of a month, and you'll get what I'm trying to do. The biggest challenge is to keep it fresh and interesting. As well intentioned as serious stories about immigration may be, even I wouldn't want to read that all of the time, and I'm all about immigrant rights.

As a columnist, I have to mix up the questions and make sure that people continue to read. I might mix a question about history with a stupid question like "Why are Mexicans so damn happy all the time?" Another week, I might get a really racist question and pair it with one about music. I mix up the questions, and that's why if somebody read it only one week, maybe the question was really offensive or I was really, really rude.

When there is so much pain in immigrant communities caused by raids, new laws and a general sense of being under attack, how do you defend your column?

Well, here's where I'm going to attack Eugene. You guys are in this happy-go-lucky progressive paradise. I work with real live Minutemen who get elected to city council, who pass these anti-immigrant ordinances. We're the ones who created this anti-immigrant fervor that's spread like wildfire across the country.

I understand those concerns. I have been in trenches for years, and it is tough right now. People like Lou Dobbs are mouthing off and saying all this crap. You're supposed to confront them directly, but people are so scared of hate and anti-immigrant sentiment, they won't go and confront it; they will go after it from afar.

In my experience, my column is my best tool in confronting those know-nothings. I'm not going to just allow hate to run in circles around me. I'm going to use whatever weapons I have to confront it. Other people might be more serious — and I also do "serious" op-ed pieces for the *L.A. Times*. I'm involved in nonprofits in Orange County, I go across the country telling people to stay in school and I work with undocumented kids trying to get in-state tuition.

A couple of weeks ago, I dedicated my column to college students affected by the failure of the DREAM Act. I dedicated it actually to "the real ghouls of the season," who are harassing our country's most productive Americans: kids who go to college despite having the specter of deportation over their heads. I got a lot of emails from students saying, "Thank you for being a voice for us."

That's my weapon against hate. If people don't want to read the column, that's fine. I've seen it work, and I'm going to continue doing it.

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