

iASK A MEXICAN! Letters

GIVING VOICE TO IGNORANCE

The Eugene-Springfield Solidarity Network/Jobs with Justice stands with CAUSA and the local Latino/a community in expressing our outrage and disappointment about *EW*'s decision to continue running Gustavo Arellano's offensive and dangerous column, "iAsk a Mexican!" If *EW* wants to "ask a Mexican" in order to educate our community about Latino culture and history, we are blessed to have many local activists and educators who could share meaningful, relevant information, rather than encouraging racist and ignorant stereotyping.

Arellano has a right to express his brand of cruel humor, just as the editors of *EW* have a right to run the column. However, by doing so, *EW* is showing that it is more committed to giving voice to ignorance and fanning the flames of racism than it is to respecting the requests of many local readers, including ESSN/JwJ, who want to see the column canceled.

We would much rather read a column written by local Latino/a activists who can share with *EW* readers the realities of Latino/a life in our community!

Maybe we could actually learn how to be better allies rather than seeing a weekly opportunity for racist stereotyping!

For the Steering Committee of ESSN/JwJ,

Bayla Ostrach
Eugene

DANGEROUS HUMOR

Was Lenny Bruce funny? Is Margaret Cho funny? I think, to respond to Roscoe Caron's comment (letters, 11/29), that Gustavo Arellano knows exactly where he is (Orange County) and exactly how dangerous his humor is. If humor isn't dangerous, it's not effective. You can't use safe humor as an organizing tool. Maybe that's why the labor movement has nearly collapsed: It's afraid of humor. If a comedian isn't walking a tight rope, no one pays any attention.

I think that Arellano's columns are full of love. I hope the *Weekly* continues to run them. They are some of the best pieces of writing I've seen in this newspaper.

Ann Tattersall
Eugene

HEED THE FEEDBACK

I hope you will heed the voices of our local community who are asking for the "iAsk A Mexican!" column to be replaced with a regular column written by Latinos and Latinas in the Eugene-Springfield area.

You'll undoubtedly attract a larger audience with these local voices, which beats the alternative of offending people who are already assaulted daily with hate speech, hate legislation and so much other singling out for unequal treatment.

I know your intent is not to publish material that hurts innocent people, and it's also probably not the columnist's intent. But the effect is what counts, and the effect in this community is what you're being asked to stop – and you can do your part to stop it.

Thanks for what I hope is your willing-

ness to heed community feedback from those who are on the frontlines of anti-migrant sentiment. Let's all of us who have any bit of power do everything we can to make a difference and make Eugene a welcome place for all!

Hope Marston
Eugene

THE SPICY APPROACH

When I suggested to the *Weekly* editors that it was way past time for a regular column by local people of color, or rotating local people of color, I have to admit that my bias for Latino writers tended towards Richard and Patricia's "Column of the Americas" more than "iAsk A Mexican!" But like Dan Savage's "Savage Love," "iAsk A Mexican!" is hella entertaining.

If you've ever hung wit' Latinos, then you know part of what you're getting is the simulated thoughts of a cultural insider speaking in a vernacular that only white people willing to hang with people of color with their hair down and their culturally smiling masks (and gloves) off would know.

In order to hang wit' 'em, you can't be a stereotypical culturally amnesiac American ignorant of commonly known (among us anyway) history. We have to know about Shakespeare and Chaucer, while you remain ignorant of, say Vincente Riva Palacio. *Parlez-vous* double insult, *cabrones*?

Basically, when a white calls all Latinos Mexicans, he's turning the cultural tables, and yeah, it's insulting both ways. But which voice do you hear most from? That is assuming [Arellano] is Mexican, and not a white guy fronting.

To the degree that satire is enlightening is the degree that one can get past the shock and insult and dig for the facts of what he's referring to. What is the *reconquista*? What about white invasions of Mexico and California? Why would Mexicans think the Spanish named states of the U.S. were stolen?

The drawback to the spicy approach is that some people are so dense they won't take the time to learn from either a low-brow or high-brow approach.

Mark Harris
Eugene

EDUCATED CHICANO

Oregon is white and bleeding red (spirit of Indians), and there are very few Hispanic writers in good ol' Oregon. How many of you gringos read the *Hispanic News*, *Noticias*, *Puertolandia*?

Danger! Gustavo Arellano is an educated Mexican; that's what this whole fuss is about. Reading the responses by all the whiners, I saw no criticism on historical evidence or research presented by Arellano. I read: "He is racist! He is reinforcing stereotypes!" Blah, blah, c'mon progressive liberals (Google "freedom of speech").

More than a voice, Arellano provides a little history on white hypocrisy and Mexican bigotry and homophobia, but most of the time he brings positive notes to the table. I think it's safe to say: White, middle-class-hippie-organic-vegetarians in Eugene feel guilty with so much history

(read, the lies my teacher told me); they hide behind the rhetoric: everything is fine, as long as these pitiful minorities keep quiet and don't raise their voices. Once somebody like Arellano provides a piece of research to all of us, suddenly we abandon our salsa dancing lessons and our foreign films (sound familiar?) to scream at the *EW* editors. Oregon, we love dreamers, but sometimes we have to see the realities. I'm not scared of those rednecks who are blatant explicit racists; I'm scared about the backstabbers who hide behind the peace sign, just like a cheating wife or husband or partner.

Hey *gabachos*, rather than complaining against a *compadre*, why don't you complain against your *compadre* Lou Dobbs. Oh, by the way, we felt abandoned by the progressive hippies during our May 1st demonstration (read Sensenbrenner bill) last year in Salem, Corvallis and Eugene.

Si yu laiter, amigos.

Pedro Rosa-Meleño
Eugene

OVER THE TOP

My two cents on your running the "iAsk A Mexican!" column is that it is that the extreme sarcasm of Arellano's humor is a bit over the top for current Eugene to the point where many people, Anglos and Latinos alike, will perceive it to be nothing more than offensive.

I think if you are going to persist in running the column, you should at least go to the effort of running some serious stories, commentaries, etc. on local/statewide Latino realities. Especially in a year when immigrant and Latino communities are under severe attack by racist and right wing forces, I look to you to be supportive of human rights and positive, inclusive social solutions.

Herb Everett
Eugene

THE RACE CARD

Since Gustavo Arellano clearly thinks the U.S. should welcome the tsunami of humanity pouring illegally across our southern border – and since *EW* apparently agrees – why don't you write a piece on what Mexican authorities would do to a U.S. citizen or a Guatemalan caught trying to enter Mexico illegally?

Arellano had no intelligent response when I "asked a Mexican." Instead, he – like most open borders proponents – plays the "race" and "hate" cards against those of us who want our laws enforced.

Jerry Ritter
Springfield

JUST A SMOKESCREEN

I guess I'm just one of those people Gustavo Arellano has labeled a "PC *pen-dejo*," but I still can't see how his insistent use of a racist piece of crap like his logo can turn said crap into a shining tool for undoing racism. Maybe this kind of postmodern alchemy works in grad-level sociology classes or maybe even in his Orange County stomping ground. But unless he can show his work, I'm tempted to believe that the rambling rationales he gave in his interview in the Nov. 29 issue of the *EW* are

just a smokescreen for what he's really trying to do: draw attention to himself.

It's not for nothing that Arellano has been dubbed "the Paris Hilton of the Latino journalism world" by *L.A. Times* critic Agustin Gurza. In fact, speaking to the L.A. Press Club recently (video available on YouTube), the rationale Arellano gave to that audience was that the logo draws young people's attention to his column.

Despite protests to the contrary, Gustavo Arellano really is *the* "Mexican" voice of *EW*. Our community deserves a local Latino voice, to address Latino issues from a local perspective, not a snarky, self-serving, syndicated columnist who tries to offend as many people as he informs.

EW can be an outlet for local community voices, or a weekly collection of ads and movie reviews with filler from "edgy" syndicated columnists. Which is it gonna be, *EW*?

Scott Miksch
Eugene

BEYOND COMFORT ZONE

Ha ha, you all kill me. Seriously, do you think we're so advanced that we need not discuss race? There is a time for everything, and cleaning the dirt out of the wounds is what is needed now. Yes, you will be somewhat uncomfortable. Deal with it! Actually, we'll all deal with it as a community. Yes, we should be uncomfortable. I'd be ashamed to not be.

Trevor Ballard
Eugene

NOT ABOUT RACE

It's extremely ignorant to assume that just because we do not want our borders invaded by illegal aliens (many of them are from South and Central America as well as Mexico) and we do not want illegal aliens to live here and work here, that does not mean we have stereotypes of Mexicans, and we have to "be educated." My Mexican friends in California, who were legal citizens of America, did not like the U.S. being invaded by illegals who come over the border, either.

They were the ones who pointed out the dangerous gangs in our neighborhood who they knew came over the border illegally and were now making our area very dangerous. My friends were legal citizens of the U.S., and they told me they did not like illegals coming over the borders anymore than we white people did. In other words, this dislike of "Mexicans" is not a racist problem; it is anger from all American citizens of having their borders invaded by illegal aliens (of any kind) and having them come over, live here, work, have families and not come through the front door like all the other immigrants are forced to do.

Get that through your head, *EW*: It is not a "racist problem," it is an immigration and border-invasion problem. We do not want any race invading our borders, illegally, stomping in and declaring that they have as many rights as any immigrant who has to come in legally. Do you finally understand the problem? Get people to come in the front door of the U.S. or not to come in at all. Stop insulting our intelligence with stuff like (this) "iAsk a Mexican!" B.S.

D.H. Bucher
Eugene