

Restorative Justice

How do we recreate the connections?

Restorative justice is broadly contrasted from the usual system of retributive justice by the underlying belief that crime occurs because the relationship connections that prevent crime have been broken or severed. To the degree that punishment works, whether as a deterrent, or as consequence of someone's actions, it does not address the issues of the social connections which have been severed or frayed.



Michael Clay, a longtime resident, musician and community elder (at least in terms of attainment in age) was attacked by two white teenagers in a manner, by a means, echoing the slaying of Mulageta Seraw, an Ethiopian father in Portland, by racist skinheads, using a baseball bat, instead of the fish club that was used against Clay.

Whether or not the word nigger or any other racial epithet was used during the attack, or there is any other overt evidence meeting the definition of a hate crime, the simple fact remains that two able-bodied teenagers attacked an older man walking with a cane. One can cast aspersions on parents who through possible neglect raise cowards, and one can possibly sue said parents or their legally adult children for the costs of medical bills and pain and suffering, but as Clay pointed out (*EW* cover story 8/14), the attack itself points to a degradation in community values, which cannot simply be repaired by marches and vigils.

I offer an analogy: If former Eugene Symphony music director Marin Alsop had been attacked while jogging on the bike path or Amazon, we'd be even more shocked, the outcry would be greater, even though violence against women in this community is even more commonplace. We live in a society where even a Rosa Parks can be rolled by a crackhead for her purse, without the crackhead even knowing who Rosa Parks was.

Two teenagers were raised without sufficient empathy towards the pain and suffering of others, in order to inflict pain and suffering on another. Regardless of the divisions of race, gender and class, whether you can blame it on parents, videogames, television or lack of education, the problem remains how to restore the social connections that prevent such behavior and worse behaviors in the future.

Clearly social connections had been established that made the attack on Michael Clay "normal" behavior. It's beyond dispute that there remain historical traditions dating back to the formation of the state, and within Eugene history, that support so-called hate crimes. When the kids go to prison, they will be considered heroes by the white supremacist gang members that infest the so-called corrections system and remain a consistent presence in our community.

Retributive justice can sentence them to prison, coerce them into paying restitution and doing community service upon their release, but that will probably be the end of it. We will still have a community in which women, minorities and vulnerable others can be assaulted, exploited and denied equal protection or access to safety.

I don't worry in particular about walking late at night in my neighborhood, but I also never go walking without considering possible lines of attack. Perhaps it's paranoia, perhaps it's prudence, but it is an indicator that the justification for fear is not imaginary.

How do we restore severed relationships? I would suggest the larger community consider the establishment of a cross-cultural rites-of-passage program, parallel or in tandem with what LCC has been doing for more than a decade with kids of color. What would a nonracist, nonsexist, nonheterosexist, an-archist (without hierarchy/class/caste) Anglo culture look like? If there were class distinctions, it would be for one's ability to bring different people together across their conflicts and utilize their diversity, not create fear because of it. An-archy in its original sense does not mean chaos; it means without hierarchy. In cultures of tradition (aka "primitive indigenous people of color"), a chief or an elder is selected by the people for the ability to unite people, not to instill fear in them. Not to lead from above, but to move them from within. This requires a network of interrelationships generally invisible to Western anthropologists.

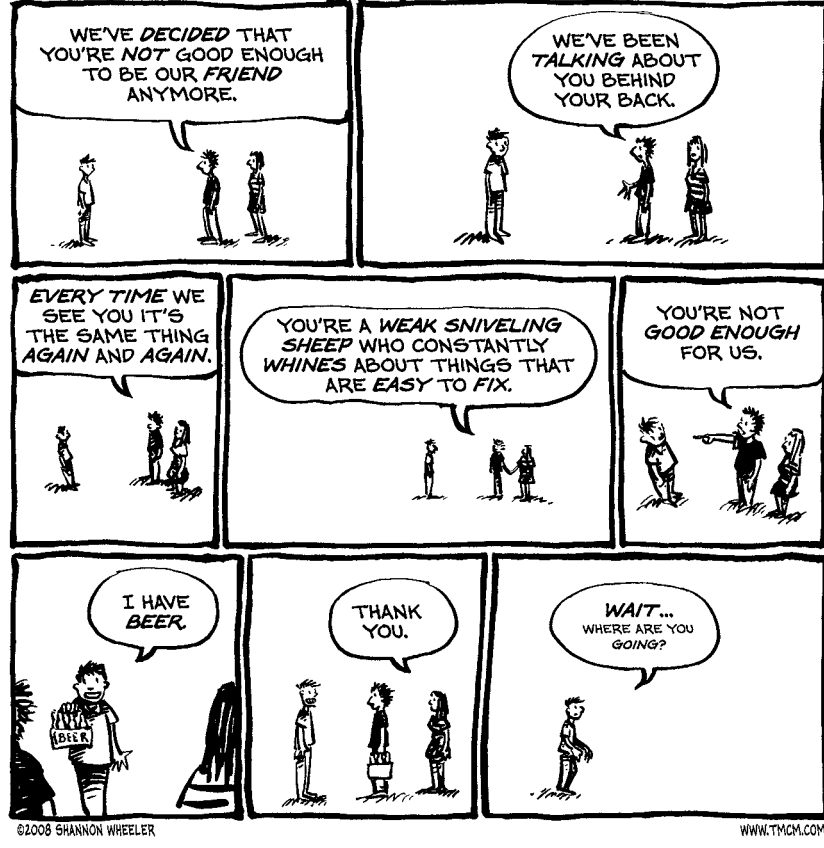
How do we illuminate and eliminate the divisions and differences that divide us so that instead of asking for a cigarette and beating a black man, random white teenagers know him and escort him home as the Boy Scouts were reputed to do in walking elderly ladies across the street, back in my day?

How do we restore or recreate those connections?

Mark Harris is an instructor in ethnic studies and substance abuse prevention at LCC.

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HOW TO PROTEST

I have been reading, with some interest, the replies to my letter ("Yes, Sir!", 7/3) placing part of the blame on protesters escalating confrontations with the Eugene police. Let me quickly touch on some of those responses.

When did the white, middle class protesters of Eugene become the black protesters of the Deep South in 1955? There are no policemen with water hoses waiting. In fact, no one really cares if there are protests in Eugene. There is more excitement when the pancake van opens at a Grateful Dead offshoot concert. The police just want everyone to follow the laws. The police really want to do their jobs, without getting hurt and without hurting anyone.

When did the First Amendment to the Constitution get rewritten to allow breaking the law? Can bank robbers claim they are innocent if they are protesting too? Just silly. When did the republic form of government in the U.S. become a fascist government? Just clueless. Arguments based on name-calling and ignorance don't work.

If you break the law during a protest, it is called "civil disobedience." It is a time-honored way of moving your protest forward. If you are going to get arrested for the cause, do it with class and dignity. There is no way to punish you in the U.S. beyond a slap on the wrist. You can't win if you resist arrest; the laws are stacked against you.

If you wanted to get better results with your protests, wouldn't it be wise to study the great, successful protests in history and follow their lead? Gandhi and MLK Jr. led protests are great examples of how it should be done.

Peter Gregory
Corvallis

HELMET LAW

Regarding Karen Kennedy's letter (8/7): She thinks it would be great to have a new law to force adults to wear bike helmets. A Gang of Four song comes to mind: "Save me from the people who would save me from myself; they've got muscles

for brains." If it is so easy to pass a law controlling the daily behavior of millions of people without their consent, but for their "own good," then let's pass some laws that are really for our own good. Let's make cutting old-growth trees and cutting in any headwaters illegal, and outlaw field burning and stop local businesses from dumping poison into our river that we and the salmon share and Corvallis drinks.

Oh, wait, that's crazy talk. We can't "control" these activities! The relatively few people engaging in them are making lots of money. And passing a law forcing millions of people in Oregon to wear bike helmets would also make a few people lots of money (on helmets). Karen, do you wear a helmet when you are in a car? That's when you have the greatest chance of a head injury. There should be a law.

Kari Johnson
Eugene

PRIORITIES SKEWED

The police in Eugene are sadly coming up with a shortfall of violent crime arrests, even in the downtown area. After a few weeks of the exclusion ordinance in effect, will people start to realize the unfortunate reality? Friday of last week, six or seven cop cars were congregating up and down along the corner of Broadway and Willamette Streets, across from Ken Kesey Square. Several of them were truly doing nothing but looking busy. Is that to invite the idea that they are in fact investigating a crime? Hell no. The cops will tell you that violent crime has dropped substantially in the last year or so, but does that really make any sense? I don't think so.

The city of Eugene could sneakily be using the downtown area to manipulate funding. If the cop sees a dime bag in your pocket, he knows you're guilty of the charged offense, even if you say you are innocent. There goes that. But if someone is assaulted, like on Friday, cops will not make a single arrest. I guess at this point I have to ask about voter-passed mandatory-minimum sentencing guidelines for violent crime, Measure 11. What? The priorities of