

Reality Check

MLK Day is an opportunity for examination

For me, every new year in Eugene is a reality check. I'm minded to recall two phrases spoken around rivers in Africa by those not in a state of denial: "What goes around comes around," and "What you have done to the least of these you've done to me."

In particular, community celebrations of Dr. King's birthday become a kind of zeitgeist barometer. One of the earliest grassroots celebrations continues, with HONEY (Honoring Our New Ethnic Youth) having its celebration from 9 to 11 pm Saturday, Jan. 17, at Cozmic Pizza. The Lane County Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration returns to the Hult Center where it began, with a keynote speaker whose work constantly reminds us to stand for children, that they may suffer less.

Jonah Edelman is the co-founder and executive director of Stand for Children, a children's advocacy organization based in Portland. One of the country's leading voices for children, Edelman has drawn inspiration from civil rights leaders, including his mother, Marian Wright Edelman, in creating a politically influential grassroots movement for children. Under Jonah Edelman's leadership, Stand for Children members have won 80 victories affecting more than three million children.

Stand for Children is an innovative nonprofit advocacy group that harnesses citizen commitment to affect political decisions and elections in order to get results for children. Beginning with his organizing Stand for Children Day in Washington, D.C., where 300,000 people made it the largest rally for children in American history, Edelman helped the organization grow in influence, changing the lives of over a million children and families.

Other events happening around town that same day: At 10 am, a march begins at Moshofsky Center at Autzen Stadium and ends at the Hult Center for the Performing Arts. At noon, there's an unveiling of a Rosa Parks commemorative sculpture at LTD Eugene Station. And from 2 pm to 4 pm, there's a Springfield MLK Celebration at Springfield Middle School.

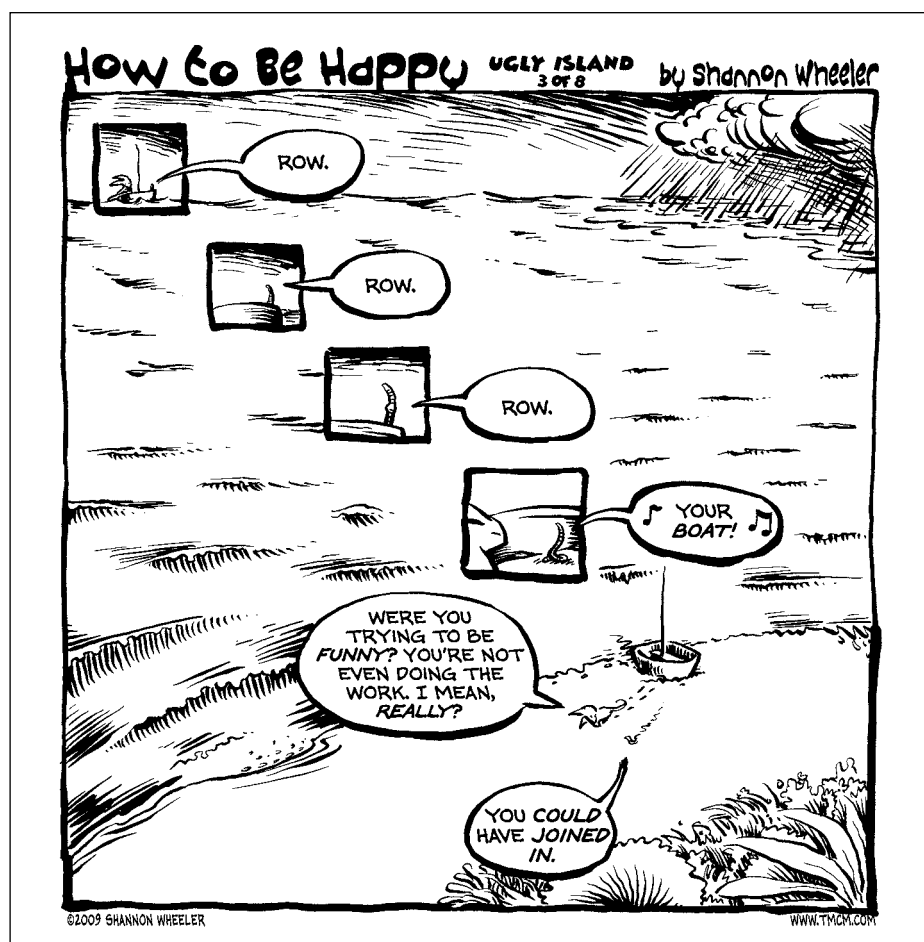
As a zeitgeist barometer for Eugene, the Hult Center itself has been a focal point from before its inception. Its ground from the 1920s through the 1980s has variously been the showcase for movies supportive of the organizing Eugene Klan #3 (*The Face at Your Window*, *The Ku Klux Klan Rides Again* at the Eugene/Heilig Theater); a gathering point for innocent Japanese-American citizens on their way to WWII concentration/internment camps; and three consecutive African-American related events which received bomb threats emptying the Hult Center attendees into the streets (Ethiopian Famine Relief, two MLK celebrations).

Being raised in the heart of Southern California, by two Southerners, I've come to appreciate my upbringing in a geographical black community, one that has a sense of its history, especially its hidden history. Oregon is a Southern state in the Northwest, and it is appropriate we recognize national level civil rights leaders here and recognize local historical and ongoing civil rights struggle right here in Eugene. We note, of course, that gains are won at the cost of resistance, which not so much fades but goes unreported.

Case in point: Oxfam America's 1985 Heart of Oregon's Pledge to Ethiopia, a fundraising event in which phone pledges were taken to send money to famine stricken Ethiopia. Arzenia Richardson (longtime KLCC Jazz Sunday host at the time) took a phone call and told me what he told *The Register-Guard*: The caller said he planted a bomb because he didn't like the fact they were "raising money for niggers in Africa." The *R-G* reported the little white lie that "The caller was concerned the event wasn't raising money for Oregon children." Arzenia told me that the caller never once mentioned Oregon children as a concern, and that of course he gave the direct quote, disturbing as it was, because it indicated the presence of an ongoing community constituent voice – one that was repeated at early Hult MLK celebrations featuring two of Dr. King's children. Having been present at all three of those events myself, and recalling several attempts to name a street after Dr. King, I have observed the winds of progress and resistance as well as the fog of obfuscation that rises after the cold reign of denial moves in.

Celebrations, street names and sculpture are barometric indicators of change in the spiritual weather, but can one say the climate is warm and hospitable? Mmm, still chilly.

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



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HEALTHY SKEPTICISM

I enjoyed James Earl's take on the myth of Santa Claus, "Better Not Pout" (12/24). After arguing with my best friend that while all the facts made it seem quite impossible, why would my parents lie to me? Then I asked for the truth. My parents told me, and my world was shattered. If they lied about that, then what else were they lying about? This came about as the lies surrounding the Vietnam War were surfacing and Watergate was just around the corner.

Very soon I developed a healthy skepticism towards all institutions (government, school, society, history, religion, etc.) that at times could be lonely and cynical but also made me feel that people could change things for the better and to a lifetime of activism. If more people would have had this reaction, maybe we wouldn't have been so easily led into the current war(s), voting for George Bush and multiple manmade disasters.

As the old bumper sticker says, "Question Authority."

Scott Fife
Eugene

LIFE UNDER SEIGE

If you want to see first hand what it must be like to be in Gaza City these days, I invite you to view the uncensored, uncut video at the top of the main page at asia-stat.com

It gives some faint idea of what it must be like to be in a densely populated city under siege from air, sea and land. Why would anyone support Israeli state terrorism and pretend that Israel is all squeaky clean, moral and upstanding? OK, OK, Israel is not trying to kill non-combatants, but is doing so nonetheless.

Israelis have long used the tactic of economic strangulation to subdue and weaken Palestinian mothers and children, many of whom have been suffering from malnutrition and weakened immune systems long before this current bout of insanity was unleashed.

In the old times, economic siege was considered an act of war. Israel has subjected Gaza residents to just this tactic for decades while refusing any *real* olive branch. And they wonder why Hamas refuses to recognize their legitimacy?

First it was Fatah that Israel wouldn't deal with. Now — how convenient — it's Hamas. Fatah good now, Hamas very bad. It's a shocking disconnect to value human life so disproportionately.

Israel is privileged and pampered. Gaza residents, by comparison, are achingly poor. Have some compassion!

Diplomacy is the *only* way that Israel will ever be able to feel secure within its borders. When will they put forth a leader who truly understands that?

Peter Holden
Eugene

RUSH TO JUDGMENT

Recently I witnessed something that needs to be called to attention. A child was playing with a cat, and she unintentionally mishandled it, causing the cat to grab for a stable surface. She was scratched. She mistook the cat's behavior for aggression; she reported it to the patriarch of the family, and he immediately punished the cat. This cat is not prone to such behavior and should have been given the benefit of the doubt. But so quickly was a judgment rendered that I wasn't even in the room to object.

The cat was punished for reacting to a situation beyond its control. I don't see how it will learn a "lesson" from such. There is an analogy I'd like to make. Our media is singing in concert the need to punish the leadership of the Palestinians for responding to situations out of their control.

I am not denying the right of Israel nor Palestine to defend their loved ones. I am not asking for punishment and retribution. I am asking for understanding and a righting of wrongs.

Punishment and retribution are tricky things in a complex world, for seldom are