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The Daily Tar Heel

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BOARD EDITORIALS

Dine Out Tonight

R.S.V.V.P. offers local residents an easy opportunity to help out in the fight against homelessness in Chapel Hill. Take advantage of it.

Homelessness is a visible problem in Chapel Hill. One walk down Franklin Street provides more than enough evidence of the ongoing problems of the poor in our own backyard.

But one local organization consistently and thoroughly provides food and shelter to the homeless and working poor: the Inter-Faith Council. And today they are asking for your help in what will be one of their most significant fund-raising drives all year.

Restaurants all over Chapel Hill and Durham will be donating 10 percent of today's sales to the Inter-Faith Council's shelters in Chapel Hill and Durham and to the North Carolina Food Bank through the annual R.S.V.V.P. (Restaurants Sharing 10 Percent) charity night.

By participating in R.S.V.V.P., you are contributing to a worthy nonprofit organization. The IFC has done a wonderful job offering the homeless and working poor meals and shelter throughout the years.

But budget shortfalls last year forced the IFC to cut back on its services, making fundraising drives like this one even more important than they otherwise would be.

R.S.V.V.P. is also more of a secure invest-

ment than donations to panhandlers on the street. When participating in the event, you know that the money will be put to good use. The IFC is an established organization that helps out Chapel Hill's homeless in a systematic way year after year.

And it's so easy. You now have a great excuse to eat out on a weekday while getting a great meal and helping the IFC - all in one night out.

Thanksgiving is right around the corner and appeals to the "season of giving" during the weeks between now and Christmas will become more frequent.

But tonight's event will undoubtedly be one of the easiest ways to give something back to the community this holiday season.

So do not pass up the opportunity while it's here. R.S.V.V.P. is an admirable effort among community businesses and the IFC to raise money combating the problem of homelessness and poverty.

Do your part and eat out on Franklin Street tonight.

It will probably cost less than a meal at Lenoir Dining Hall, and you have the opportunity to help out the IFC at the same time.

That's quite a bargain.

A Step Backward

Outdated and small-minded thinking led Nevada and Nebraska to amend their state constitutions to ban same-sex relationships.

When it comes to civil rights, we still have a long way to go.

On Election Day last week, voters in Nebraska overwhelmingly approved Initiative 416, the so-called "Defense of Marriage" initiative. A similar referendum in Nevada also easily passed.

In effect, the two states have added a little piece of discrimination to their state constitutions by banning same-sex marriages, as well as civil unions, domestic partnerships or other similar same-sex relationships.

But by recognizing one relationship as "valid," while condemning - and banning - other types of relationships, Nebraska and Nevada only reinforce and endorse small-minded and outdated thinking regarding love and marriage.

But these two initiatives have a darker consequence as well. In singling out gay and lesbian couples, these new amendments promote a culture of hate and discrimination targeted toward homosexuals.

Many call for hate-crime legislation to protect gays and lesbians from violence. But hate-crimes stem from initiatives like these, which seem to give state sanction to discrimination based on sexual orientation.

And unfortunately, with the hoopla over the presidential vote, little attention has been

paid to these measures. They are not receiving national condemnation, as they deserve.

Think about how ridiculous it is to add an amendment to a state constitution - a document that is meant to outline the rights and privileges of the state's citizens - that specifically refuses one segment of the population the same opportunities afforded to the rest of the state. If you are not "a man and a woman," then your love is not valid, according to Nebraska and Nevada. And just to make sure you do not forget, we have pegged your partnership as unconstitutional.

Traditionalists and the Christian right - two groups instrumental in getting these initiatives passed - often stigmatize gays and lesbians as "loose" and promiscuous.

Yet when a gay couple seeks to enter into a stable union, as marriage or domestic partnerships provide, they are denied by the same state that willingly takes their tax money. Those looking to take advantage of domestic partnerships or civil unions have a stable relationship and seek the same status given to heterosexual couples.

But they are rebuffed.

Ironically, Nebraska's state motto is "Equality before the law."

Perhaps next year, a referendum can amend it to correct that bit of hypocrisy.

For the Record

The Nov. 13 board editorial "Switch the System" incorrectly stated that Samuel Tilden won the popular vote but lost the presidential election to Benjamin Harrison based on electoral votes. Tilden lost the election to Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876 after winning the popular vote but losing the Electoral College. The Daily Tar Heel regrets the error.

READERS' FORUM

Israel-Palestine Panel Was Not Biased In Favor of Palestinians

TO THE EDITOR:

As outsiders to the Israel-Palestine conflict, we feel that last Thursday's panelists in the Palestine-Israel discussion were not necessarily pro-Palestine.

We agree it is a fact that the historical presentation lacked Israeli perspective. There were also individual panelists who spoke with great emotion against the action of the Israeli government.

But to say the panelists were pro-Palestine is grossly simplifying the issue into only two sides, pro-Palestine and pro-Israel, which is utterly untrue.

There are many people such as Palestinian civilians, Jewish settlers, Israeli Arabs, women and children whose views are not necessarily represented by one of the two sides.

But they are the ones who are caught in the violence.

If the panelists were advocates to one particular side, they were surely pro-human rights, pro-peace, pro-justice and not pro-

Palestine - as accused by some people. The panelists condemned the excessive use of force by the Israeli government, but they also detested the violence used by Palestinian radical groups against Israeli civilians.

The neutrality became very evident when Rania Masri and Majd Aburabia talked about their views on a possible solution to the issue.

They demanded the right of return of the Palestinian refugees but at the same time they recognize that the Jewish settlers could not be forced to leave the homes they already settled in.

Rania suggested a bi-national state, which will be truly responsible to all of its citizens, Palestinian and Israeli alike. This illustrated the fact that they spoke with everyone's well-being in mind, not just Palestinians.

One reason that some people felt even the fair statements of Rania and others to be pro-Palestine is the fact that American mainstream media is strongly biased toward the Israeli government due to many factors, including the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) lobby. After daily influence by lopsided media

reports, one will feel even true neutrality to be off-centered. It is unfortunate that even The Daily Tar Heel's article on Friday ("Talk on Conflict Angers Pro-Israel Panelist" Nov. 10) re-enforced the off-balanced reporting method.

Finally, we encourage anyone to participate in future discussion - even if they disagree with me and feel that their opinion was under-represented in Thursday's event.

After all, dialogue and communication is the only way that we can move forward as a society.

Last Thursday night's historical panel with an audience of 125 people from all parts of UNC and the Triangle community was a great beginning. Anyone who would like to get a cassette tape of the event can contact SURGE.

Tung Siu
Freshman

Dennis Markatos
Senior
SURGE Organizers of the Event

The length rule was waived.

NORTH CAROLINA KICKS OFF THE NEW MILLENNIUM ON THE CUTTING EDGE ...



Addressing the Problem of Racism

Ah, the joys of public debate. Last week, I devoted my column to the volatile subject of racial discrimination. Understandably, some people disagreed with my opinions on the matter. And predictably, an extreme minority of those people chose to take the low road: Instead of offering an intelligent rationale for their disagreement with my ideas, they resorted to name-calling. As a result, my column was denounced in several letters to The Daily Tar Heel as "racist," despite the fact that its entire (obvious) point was to highlight those realities that I believe are standing between us and the end of racial discrimination.

Accusations of racism are very serious business. So despite the absurdity of the few charges of racism that were leveled against this column last week, I feel it necessary to re-emphasize my feelings on the subject.

In last week's column, I noted that racial discrimination still exists in America - some of it due not to overt racism, but rather to rational fear.

For example, cab drivers in New York (many of them black) often refuse to pick up young black men. The drivers insist they are not racists; instead, they are merely afraid for their safety because of the high black crime rate.

I concluded that this sort of discrimination - based not on racist ideology but on a rational concern for one's own safety - cannot be effectively stopped with legislation and lectures against racism. Instead, I argued, we need to focus our energy toward eliminating the reasons that cabbies are afraid of young black men - by finding ways to reduce the black crime rate.

Despite this departure from the liberal "conventional wisdom" on discrimination, my entire column was written with the explicit assumption that racism and racial discrimination - of any sort - are immoral and unfair to law-abiding black Americans.

Thus, although I certainly expected some healthy debate over my ideas, I was genuinely mystified when critics leveled accusations of racism against my column. In my humble opinion, the backlash is indicative of a problem among certain groups at UNC: They are



CRAIG WARNER
HARSH LIGHT

unable to recognize that some good people, with good intentions and good motivations, hold different opinions than they do.

However, for those who recognize that an unorthodox opinion is not always a surefire indicator of Nazism, I'd like now to offer a few thoughts about "rational discrimination." To begin, it is not "racist" to acknowledge the facts. One of my critics suggested that it was "racism" for me to observe that there is a high crime rate in black communities. I disagree - in reality, it is our refusal to acknowledge such problems that is the biggest hindrance to racial harmony in the United States.

The current tendency to blame white racism for every instance of unfairness only prompts bitterness and apathy - especially when such accusations are not supported by the facts. Many whites with good intentions become insensitive to instances of genuine racism when the specter of racism is constantly (and inaccurately) invoked.

We must be absolutely honest about the facts, so that racism will be taken seriously by all Americans when it really does appear. That means facing the reality of some harsh statistics.

Black Americans make up about 12 percent of the U.S. population. At the same time, according to FBI statistics, blacks comprise 39 percent of those arrested for aggravated assault, 43 percent of those arrested for rape, 55 percent of those arrested for murder and 61 percent of those arrested for robbery. Even allowing for some racial bias in criminal arrests, these numbers are staggering.

When one considers that the vast majority of these violent crimes are committed by young men (women and the elderly rarely

commit murder or rape), it becomes clear that cabbies in New York have a very legitimate statistical basis for fearing young urban black males.

Most of these taxi drivers are not discriminating based on racist assumptions of black biological inferiority, but because they have a grim understanding of the statistics. It will do us no good to pretend that these taxi drivers are vicious racists when in fact they are merely afraid for their safety.

For the record, I don't think that rational discrimination is moral or acceptable, and I believe that it is just as horribly unfair to the vast majority of black Americans (who are absolutely law-abiding) as discrimination based on racist ideology. This is why we should work together to end it.

But while legislation and denunciation are relatively effective in combatting discrimination based on old-style racist ignorance, they are much less effective in stopping discrimination based on rational fear.

No matter how many laws we pass, people will continue to act to protect themselves when they feel threatened. Thus, the way to stop rational discrimination against black Americans is - quite simply - to lower the black crime rate. Improved education, stronger families and decreased violence in entertainment are all important aspects of this process.

Right now, honesty is needed perhaps more than any other virtue in the effort to bridge the racial gap.

That means acknowledging that racism is still a serious problem in America.

It also means recognizing that racism is not responsible for every case of hardship faced by American minorities.

Most importantly, it means being willing to listen to ideas about the racial gap that differ from our own - without trying to brand those who disagree with us as racists.

For my part, I intend to practice what I preach.

You know where to reach me.

Craig Warner highly recommends the new U2 album. Reach him with any questions or comments at cmwarner@email.unc.edu.



The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticism. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 300 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarity. Publication is not guaranteed. Bring letters to the DTH office at Suite 104, Carolina Union, mail them to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or e-mail editdesk@unc.edu.

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