

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

Currently, the air is warm here. Today is a bit more overcast than yesterday. I am starting to notice that spring is filtering through winter and making her presence known. The mountains, the vineyards, the quaint German villages and countless bottles of wine, all persist as they have for centuries, thick and full of their deserved tradition.

Bluntly, from my perspective, everything is constant and full. To you folk who know what I am speaking of already, I can assure you that the hill up to the Dorf is still as steep as it ever was...it will continue to be steep for a very, very long time. The hill and the wine and the people have been working at this Sudtirolian way of life for an eternity. To this day it is not perfect, yet it exists...after many hard rains and subtle battles beneath its surface, Dorf Tirol and Brunnenburg, Italy still stand firm and thick in their traditions.

The question I have for all of you is "Does Guilford College still stand firm and thick in its traditions?" For a

couple of centuries Guilford College has prided itself on its traditions. Its strong, vital roots of Quakerism, community, diversity, and acceptance have lived throughout all of its many processes as an institution for an eternity. However, in the last year, it seems to me—an aged, wisely sophomore—that these prided roots have been challenged from all sides simultaneously. I don't know whether this recent challenge is a "routine checkup," so to speak, or if it is something that the gods of fate chalk up every fifth year, but from my perspective (one that is young and naive) Guilford College as a fan, just sprinkled all of its grounds in a moist, thick, brown substance.

Alas, I am an on-looker. I am a student from abroad on a satellite campus. I don't see things as they happen, just as they come through in the monthly *Guilfordian* supplement which we receive two weeks late (which, by the way, looks very healthy, I applaud the staff). Guilford College for me is a sunlit, grassy, tree-filled community many eons away. It is a



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place where people smile whether they know you or not, and where improvement is the constant goal for everyone. These are manifestations of Guilford left in my memories...they are romantic, given my distance and nostalgia, yet they do hold to be strong truths. They are the evidence of Guilford's age-old roots; they are its mountains and its wine. They are what persist, out of necessity or nature in the unique, separate, involved and splendid Guilford College community...so I plead with you...from afar: remember these con-

starts when you next find yourself in a heated debate and you begin to personify and manifest someone's idea as the person themselves. Remember the community to which you belong. Be happy to be there. Remember the support that the Guilford College values retain/create. And lastly, remember Guilford's existence and eternity relies on whether or not these strong and preciously delicate roots of living, caring, and loving exist or do not.

David Jester

Categorizing is a double-edged sword

BY ROB MAGGARD
Guest Writer

On Tuesday, March 23, I went to the forum given by Future Leaders Future Changes. This is a group that educates and mentors students on issues concerning racism. At the forum I asked a question which was dismissed as white privilege by the group's lead speaker, Ervin Brisbon, and others who backed him up. I would like to explain the question because I do not believe I was heard.

In the forum, Brisbon explained that we are all confined by a "race construct" which is a structurally racist and Eurocentric system that divides us by our skin color, giving the most power to white people and taking power away from black people. This is an idea with which I firmly agree, and the question I asked is a logical follow up to the idea: "Since everyone's world view is limited and influenced by this race construct, then how is your theory of this race construct limited and influenced by it?" The purpose of this question was not to undercut the theory or the forum but to strengthen it with some critical thought. If questioning a system of thought is not permitted

by the system, then critical thought is not possible, and the system is dangerous. Here is the answer for which I was looking:

Since the dominant social system divides us by race, class, and gender, to understand that oppression, we must become aware of those divisions. When we do we see that white people are inherently privileged within this system. The term "white privilege" empowers us to understand and fight a racist system, but categorizing is a double-edged sword. Though labeling can empower, it can also limit. I am

more than a white male; I am a human being, and I am Rob Maggard. Seeing me as a person with white privilege limits your understanding of me as well as deepening it. But reacting against an oppressive system that divides us by color, requires viewing the system along those same dividing lines. It must be horrible for Brisbon to view everything in terms of black and white, and it is my white privilege that enables me to ignore that

distinction.

Instead of answering my question, Brisbon told me that I was using my white privilege to dodge the issues and that I was wrong for asking the question. That by theorizing, I was allowing room for complacency and stalling their movement forward. I was told to shut up and listen, as were many in the room. Other views, besides the group's own view, were not understood or permitted. One

student asked if oppression might be a human rights issue rather than a racial issue. The response to him was that making it a human rights issue waters down the issues that are racist (or sexist) and enables complacency. This is certainly true, but I could have turned the tables around and said, "This group is working within the race construct of the dominant class by categorizing people by their skin color, thus they are perpetuating the problems of racism. The humanist is struggling for equality by refusing to use those classifications. Since Future Leaders Future Changes are not

part of the solution, they are part of the problem. Thus, they are the enemy."

My point is this issue is more complex than a "race construct" or a single solution. The humanistic view and the understanding of structural racism are both valid and necessary. I believe in being led by an oppressed group. The victims know what is best for them, not I. But I don't believe in victimizing myself by throwing away all of my questions, beliefs, and experiences with the package of white privilege. The attitude at the forum was that white people are inherently morally handicapped. "I am a recovering addict of Western society," was the way one student phrased it. Such a limited understanding of ourselves is disrespectful to everyone. Viewing minorities only as victims who must teach us "Western addicts" is patronizing and damaging, just as the belief that I know what is best for minorities is damaging.

This experience has made me think critically about my own belief system, which says that it is always appropriate to ask questions. I am still grappling with that, but I think I value tact more now than before. Now bring on your questions and criticism. Let's talk about this.

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