

The Behrend College Beacon

published weekly by the students of Penn State Erie, The Behrend College

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Live From Guyana

Is the Dream still alive in America?

AYODELE JONES

"I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of the creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." As citizens of the world, we all recognize these words as the hopes, dreams, and prophecies of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Every year around this time we are reminded of his dream, a dream which has not yet eradicated the walls of bigotry and racism. Of course there have been great strides in achieving equality for all, yet these great accolades have been accompanied by some major setbacks. These relapses or rather regressions remind and alert us that we are not accomplishing the tasks at hand.

This summer James Byrd Jr., a 49

year old man, was chained to the back of a pick-up truck and dragged to his death on the rural roads outside of Jasper, Texas.

Matthew Shepard, a 21 year old gay student at the University of Wyoming was beaten and tied to a wooden fence for up to 18 hours. He was discovered by a passerby and later died of his subsequent injuries.

In the latter part of the year, Dr. Barnett Shepian, a 51 year old doctor who provided abortion services, was shot and killed in his Amherst, New York home. He was often targeted by anti-abortion protesters.

These biased attacks only reinforce the idea that we are not being judged by the "content of our character," but rather the color of our skin, case of Dr. Shepian, our profession.

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The Constitution of the United States is the most powerful instrument of equality, and I wonder if it is truly effective. There are certain inalienable rights guaranteed to a person upon birth, and yet the Constitution did not outlaw "involuntary servitude" until the thirteenth amendment. It did not grant African-Americans and women the right to vote until the fifteenth and nineteenth amendments respectively. These amendments can be regarded as afterthoughts. If they were considered pertinent in the beginning, they would have been included in the "original" document. Equality is not something that is amended, added, or adopted, but rather it is a birth right. If the founding fathers should the generations after them do

should the generations after them do so?

As a society we have made huge technological advances. As a community and as a people, we have failed to improve our tolerance of those "different" from us. Proposing legislation and having town hall meetings will not resolve the problem of intolerance. We must break down the walls built of racism, stereotypes and prejudice to make way for a society of people free of ignorance but full of respect and equality. How do we accomplish such a feat is unknown to me; I am only a college student. I only know the desires of my heart, and that is my starting point. What is yours?

Ayodele Jones is the managing editor of the Beacon. Her column appears every three weeks.

MIKE PERKINS

The Lobster and the music to the dance of life

A view from the lighthouse Where's the support?

Pack the Gym Night was held last Saturday to increase support of the men's and women's basketball teams on campus.

Free tickets, valued at three dollars a piece, were distributed in the mailboxes in the attempt to persuade students to attend the event. But did a lot of students attend the event? No.

Pack the Gym Night was hardly an appropriate name for the affair. "Easy to Get a Seat Night" would have been a more suitable name. What does this say about Behrend's spirit and support towards athletic teams? There is none.

The student body's support of athletic teams plays an integral role in a team's success as a whole. The reason for this is that the more encouragement a team receives, the more motivated they are, and the more

likely they will be victorious—both spiritually and physically.

Considering the absence of support and attendance at the event, both the



men's and women's basketball teams are to be congratulated for still managing to come away with a victory.

However, more students need to attend athletic events and demonstrate their support in order to bolster the teams' winning records.

Clinton is confident at the State of the Union Address

Last Tuesday, history was made Bill Clinton became the first President to give a State of the Union address to the same congress that voted to impeach him. The very fact that Clinton gave his address testifies to his confidence in his future and sense of continuity.

Most Republicans and many Democrats wanted Clinton to postpone the address or even deliver a hand-written report (the constitution doesn't say the President has to give an address). They felt that it wouldn't be proper for him to speak to them, but I feel that they, not Clinton, would have been uncomfortable with the situation.

The address, I feel, was marred by the Republican attitudes and the overhanging cloud of impeachment. Last year, the standing ovation Clinton received when announced by the sergeant-at-arms was over two minutes long. This year it was far shorter, with most of the Republicans clapping only enough to barely be considered polite. Several people in

the gallery also booed the President extensively until his address started. Normally the President shakes hands with both people from both sides of the house, but this year, it seemed the Republicans were moving away and avoiding him. Rude? I would think so.

His address opened with an explanation of what was accomplished since his last address, and it moved into his plans for the next year. In perhaps an attempt to strike back at the Republicans, Clinton urged cooperation between the parties, but he announced his plans for the budget surpluses for the next 25 years. None of that money will be used for the Republican's top priority, tax cuts. Rather, more than half will be used for Social Security, while the rest will be spent on Medicare and education. The Republican party has been dead-set against using money to save Social Security, so it must have been devastating to hear that so much money, several hundred billion dollars, was being used to salvage it.

Clinton wants to expand Medicare benefits and add a Patient's Bill of Rights, which is another bill the Republicans didn't like. In fact, the only new peace of legislation that Clinton proposed that gathered a Republican response was a call for increased defense spending.

The Republicans responded to Clinton's ideas by sitting silently, while the Democrat side of the house spent most of the speech on its feet cheering.

I applaud Bill Clinton for his new agenda. It seems that he is willing to take the steps to fix things in this country. Social Security would be bankrupt in only a few years if it wasn't saved, but the Republican's don't care. They voted against it being created in the first place. However, millions of elderly Americans depend on it for food, clothing and other necessities. By taking action now, Clinton will insure that Social Security is secure for the next several decades.

I have long been a fan of the Presi-

dent, and my faith in him has never wavered during his whole scandal. Bill Clinton is not a good man, but he is a great leader. He has taken the nation from a deep recession at the start of his term to the largest peacetime economic growth in the history of the United States. We have a balanced budget, with a surplus, low crime, better education, and the lowest unemployment rate in more than 40 years.

By giving the State of the Union address and keeping with tradition, Clinton has shown his courage and his desire to lead the country forward no matter what the Senate will decide. He took an oath to serve this country. He has always upheld that oath, and he always will, even if the Republican party is trying to destroy it.

Mike Perkins is layout editor of the Beacon. His column appears every three weeks.

MLK Jr. Lifted Burden from white folks, too

By Leonard Pitts Jr.
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

Somewhat it's not quite Martin Luther King Day if you don't get at least one Klan rally in protest. Sure enough, the Klan staged a demonstration a few days ago on the steps of the Indiana statehouse. It was the usual pathetic affair. Thirteen losers with a raggedy sound system yelling "White power!" to an audience of about 500 cops and 50 protesters in 12-degree weather. Their rhetoric, predictably, fell on largely disinterested ears.

But it occurs to me that there's at least one part of the Klan creed that mirrors the beliefs of more than a few white Americans. Meaning the part that sees King and his holiday as something purely for blacks. It's something one hears white folks say occasionally - and not just those guys in the pointy white dunce caps, either.

Late in 1997, white parents in Riverside, Calif., were up in arms over plans to name a majority-white high

school after King. He helped free black people, goes the thinking, but he didn't do squat for the rest of us.

So it seems appropriate, as we approach his holiday, to say what ought to be obvious: Martin Luther King freed people. If you don't understand that, you don't understand America.

There were two groups in bondage during the Jim Crow years. Blacks were one, whites the other. I don't mean to suggest that their experiences were equivalent - African Americans bore the weight of segregation, denigration and oppression, particularly in the South. And yet, if Jim Crow bound black people to lives of poverty, suffering and toil, it also bound white people to blacks, linked them in ways neither would have chosen.

Hatred, you see, is hard work. It requires vigilance - an ever-readiness to envy the gains, impede the advances, prevent the successes of those you despise. I don't know about you, but I'd hate to have to be like that, hate to have to think like that,

especially knowing I'd be ostracized for bucking the system, for offering some black guy simple human respect. In the Jim Crow years, white people as much as black ones were forced to live by an unspoken code that governed behavior down to the most trivial interactions. You didn't extend certain courtesies to blacks - take off your hat upon entering their homes, for instance - on pain of ridicule or reprimand.

If the first effect of Martin Luther King's crusade was to liberate African Americans from subjugation, then its secondary effect was to free white Americans - those who had the courage, at least - from the burdens of "supremacy," from the need to maintain that silly system. He lifted from them a weight.

A few weeks ago, I received a call from one of the beneficiaries of that gift. Steve Fischer is a 50-year-old white guy who works for a Dallas software company. He told me that as a young man, he was one of those

who didn't see what King's work had to do with him. But in the years that followed, Fischer was hired by a black guy, met black co-workers who became invaluable friends, had black girls join the soccer team he coaches, gave a job to a black woman who became "the light of the office." He says, "And I got to thinking, if it wasn't for Dr. King, I would never have had a chance to know these people."

It really is as simple - and profound - as that. King changed America. Offered a redemptive example that changed the world.

And though you lament the dullards who shivered in the cold of an Indiana winter while shouting white supremacist slogans, the truly pitiable ones may be those who insist on segregating the man's accomplishments behind some mental and emotional door marked "Blacks Only." Steve Fischer surveys the richness of his life and realizes that the door speaks a lie. "Martin Luther King," he says, "freed me, too."

"South Park" Doesn't Deserve Criticism

By Richard Parker
The Crimson White
The University of Alabama

What's the most popular show on television today? If you answered anything other than "South Park," you may not be in the loop.

For those of you who don't know, "South Park" has been the hottest thing to hit television since "The Simpsons," yet it is beginning to draw a lot of fire from people who misunderstand the show's humor or haven't even seen an episode. Many people complain that "South Park" is inappropriate for children. Well, no joke! That's why they have the really big "TV-MA" symbol on screen before the show starts along with a disclaimer that the show may be inappropriate for some viewers.

It is troubling that department stores are selling Stan, Kyle, Kenny, and Cartman dolls to kids. Even more disturbing is that 8-year-olds know all

of the characters including Mr. Hat, the gay hand puppet of Mr. Garrison the school teacher. But should the show's creators, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, be blamed for all of that? No! Try leveling criticism at the parents out there who aren't exercising enough control over what their kids are watching on television.

Critics of the show also rant about it when they either haven't even seen an episode or haven't taken the time to let the story line sink in. Take *The Birmingham News*, for example. It described the ever-lovable Chef as the school's exploited, black janitor. The Chef is hardly exploited. He is one of the pivotal characters on the show. And Isaac Hayes, who does the voice for Chef, was the perfect choice. It's hard not to laugh every time the Chef asks students, "How are my little crackers today?" *The Birmingham News* also goofed when it erroneously printed that the child-character Kenny is "murdered" on

every episode. Everyone who watches the show knows the line, "Oh my God, they killed Kenny!" While Kenny indeed dies on every show, he's no more murdered than is Wile E. Coyote, who has an infinite number of anvils dropped on his head; it's the same concept. Recently, for example, Kenny was killed when Ozzy Osborne bit his head off. Yes, it was sick, but it was funny! Kenny has also been killed by wild turkeys, pet goldfish, the Chinese national volleyball team, and a falling pine tree.

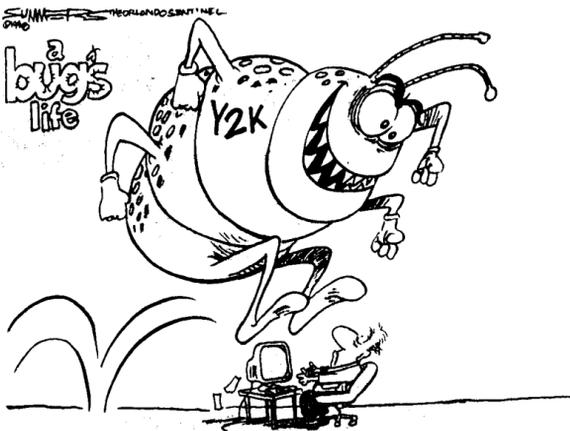
"South Park's" critics also like to lament about the show's language. If you don't like what Cartman has to say, you can always catch NBC's "Law & Order," which airs during the same time slot.

For those folks appalled that anyone could defend the show, bear in mind a paraphrased thought from comedian George Carlin: If you don't like "South Park," there are a couple of buttons on the remote control —

one that changes the channel, and the other, which turns off the television.

The same controversy now surrounding "South Park" once targeted "The Simpsons," "King of the Hill," and the now legendary "Beavis and Butthead." After a while, those shows were, in the words of one of my fraternity brothers, "co-opted," meaning that they were commercialized and toned down. Let's hope "South Park" isn't destined for the same fate. The show wouldn't be as funny if Stan said "gosh darn it" or Kyle said "you dummies" after an "Oh my gosh, they smacked Kenny!"

"South Park" is not suitable entertainment for everyone. But some people shouldn't have the right to determine what everyone else is able to watch on television. That is an infringement on our right to choose.



Write a letter
to the editor
and send it to:
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