

EDITORIAL

The free press blues

Recently, we've stirred up some "controversy" on this campus. Some people have accused us of being too controversial or, at the very least, insensitive.

This criticism, however, is a moot point. Our mandate as an autonomous newspaper has never been to be either politically or ethically correct: these being relative, inconstant, arguable values — not absolutes.

The most significant objectives of any student newspaper are to inform and educate, but also to provide a forum for discussion. Sometimes in achieving these ends, we have reflected some of the unpleasantness that exists in the world, and in so doing have provoked "controversy."

However, in so doing, we have not had a hidden policy of directing malice toward anyone or any group in this community, as some people have mistakenly claimed.

Controversy is the lifeblood of democracy. If there is something which people believe is offensive or fallacious, we have encouraged discussion of it in this paper.

Offensive material should be challenged and defeated in the same public forum that allowed it to be expressed originally — through the grievance procedure of a newspaper (the letters to the editor) — and not necessarily removed or retracted by an apology.

Apologies, although sometimes necessary, can never take the place of a strong counter argument, nor can they match its impact on the reader.

The best that *Excalibur* can do when reaching out to a community as large as that of York is to offer many differing ideas, many of which will necessarily collide. If collision upsets you, we apologize.

But we believe that collision is better than the status quo. It challenges our progressive intellects and asks us to form opinions. In short, to think for ourselves: listen to all — accept some — deny the rest — and move on.

We should not homogenize our information by promoting one approach while muting another. A certain amount of opposition and criticism is healthy. Sometimes, the information we read is hard to swallow, but this should be a warning that we don't have the final, unassailable answers.

In an ideal democratic forum, giving the right of free speech to one person or group means you must honor it for everyone, even if their views contradict your own.

Unfortunately, there are no absolute freedoms, especially at York, so what we have instead is an arbitrary and hazy line between controversy and composure that changes slightly each year with each different editor and different volunteer staff.

Excalibur doesn't expect that everything it prints will appeal to everyone at any given time — we don't try to do the impossible. If we did, we couldn't continue; we would have to scrutinize every article, opinion, letter and illustration so stringently with "expert" sub-committees that we could never publish a paper twice a week.

Like any organization, *Excalibur* is staffed by people of differing viewpoints. But as student journalists, we must be willing to tolerate dissent and be as willing to look at ugliness as beauty before passing judgement. If we do not, then we had better be cautious of editorial chill in our newsroom: a bite which might suppress controversial opinions.

Jello Biafra, a controversial American free speech advocate, once said that even the most innocuous opinion can be construed as hate literature by an individual or lobby group.

Once we start making it inconvenient to reflect and comment on our society, we stifle the lifeblood that gives a free press its strength and character.

Excalibur will be holding its final staff meeting before the new editor-in-chief is hired in March.

Come to Room 111 Central Square on Wednesday, Feb. 27 at 4:00 pm to discuss specific concerns you have with the paper.

EXCALIBUR

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Excalibur is York University's community newspaper. We publish twice-weekly, and distribute across York and Glendon campuses and various locations within the North York community.

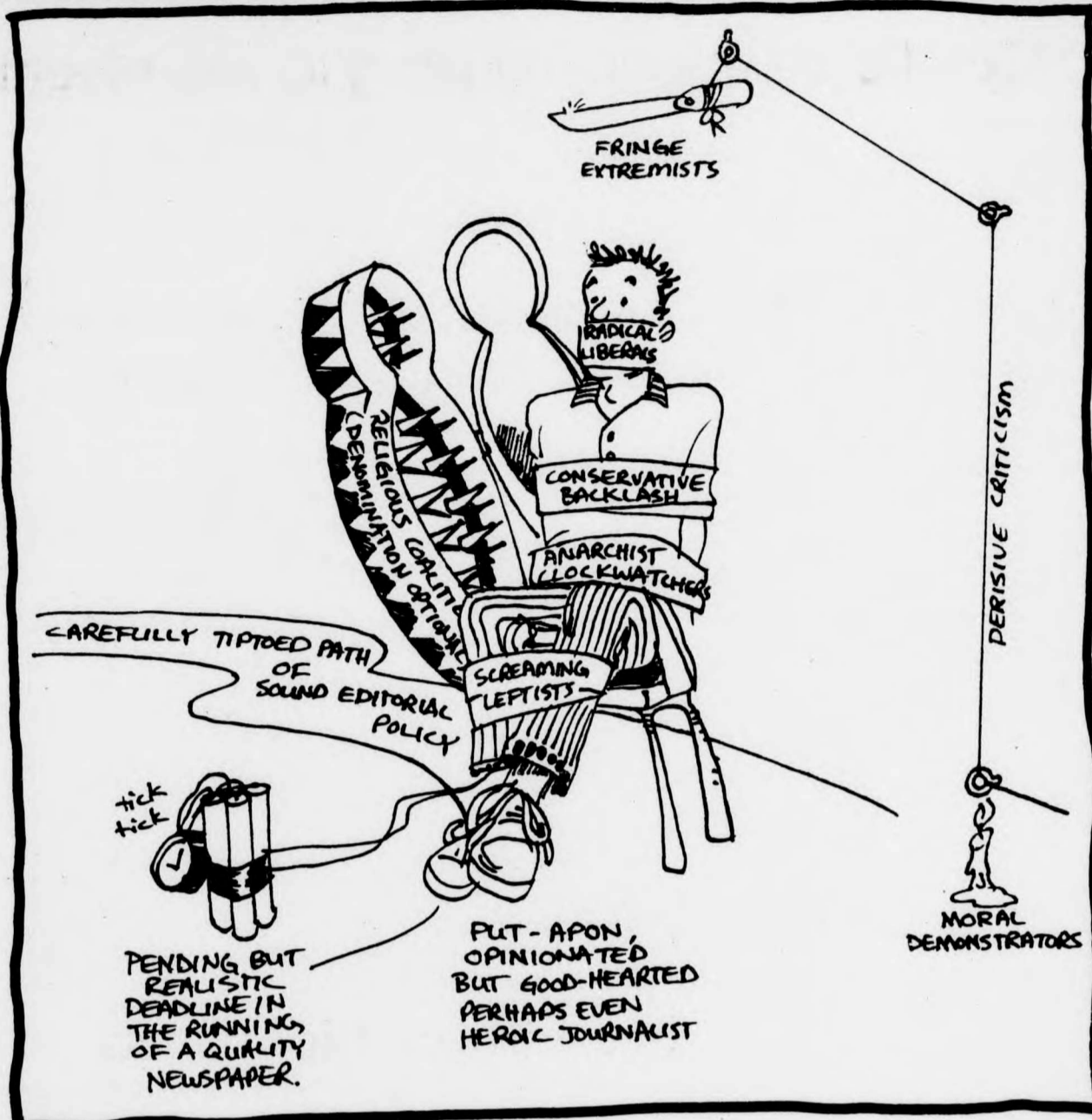
Excalibur is an autonomous corporation with a mandate to inform, educate and provoke thought among York University's diverse population.

The distinct opinions and articles appearing in *Excalibur* belong first and foremost to the individual writers and are not necessarily shared by any other *Excalibur* staff or board member.

Final editorial responsibility is retained by the Editor-in-chief.

EDITORIAL: 736-5239
ADVERTISING & TYPESETTING: 736-5238

MAILING ADDRESS
Room 111, Central Square
York University
4700 Keele Street
Downsview MJ3 1P3



LETTERS

Excalibur welcomes letters to the editor on all topics. We will publish, space permitting, letters up to 500 words in length. They must be typed, double spaced, and accompanied by the writer's name, signature and telephone number. The opinions expressed belong to the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of *Excalibur* staff or directors. However, we will refuse letters that are racist, sexist, libellous or those which attempt to incite hatred toward an individual or an identifiable group. All material is subject to editing. All submissions must be addressed to the Editor-in-chief, Room 111, Central Square.

A disservice to African people on campus

To the editor,

Tawanna Parris' article, "Black History: The struggle for identity," (Feb. 4), has done a disservice to African people on this campus and everywhere. I particularly object to your reference to Ontario Housing as "... building for black kids" and your statement that the parents of these children have "given up hope." The worst aspect of your article is its negative focus.

Sample these positives:

In 1893, an African man Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, became the first doctor — African or white — to successfully perform open heart surgery on a man named James Cornish. That Cornish lived another 20 years after, proof of the operation's success.

In 1914, an African man named Garrett A. Morgan invented and patented a breathing device that we today call the "gas mask." With this invention, many lives were saved in 1916 when a tunnel being constructed under Lake Erie exploded. In 1923, Morgan patented an automatic traffic signal. This signal became the forerunner of the overhead and sidewalk traffic lights that we use each day.

And so on...

These are what African people need to focus on and strive for. The African race has been and still is a vital part of history. African or black history (have you ever heard Chinese history referred to as yellow history???) is thousands of years old and is full of adventure, romance, accomplishments, and tales, supported by archeological evidence. People need to know that *slavery accounts for a VERY SMALL PART OF IT!*

Ms. Parris asks "how much can we as a black people suffer?" Well, if

articles such as this one are written and published to promote an understanding of African people, then you'll be asking that question for a long time to come.

Ms. Parris, as an African person, join the struggle, don't stab it in the back.

Susan Roberts

Black history feature lacking historically and culturally

To the editor,

Opening the Feb. 4 issue of *Excalibur*, I stumbled upon the article entitled "Black History: The struggle for identity." I began to read the article with enthusiasm with the hope of learning something about black history. Instead, I found only poor journalism and negativity that borders on hatred.

The author speaks of domination and oppression as if they are experienced exclusively by blacks. This is not the case. Blacks are unquestionably the victims of oppression, but so too are many other humans.

Racism, sexism and bigotry are rampant in our world. This is the case because fear and ignorance, which breed hatred, are also widespread. The struggle to end hatred rests predominantly on education. This is where Tawanna Parris failed us.

I do not profess to know the details of how a Black History Month came to be, however, I can certainly recognize its value. It acts as a small step toward countering centuries of injustice. It provides an opportunity to educate and foster understanding. Blacks and non-blacks alike may benefit from such education.

Education is of critical importance to the blacks that are without an identity. It is ironic that the

author is at pains to note how black kids "are tired of hearing about European history," yet no steps are taken towards reconciling this imbalance. Rather than tell us about Marcus Garvey, or other prominent black individuals, she speaks of some vague notion of a "European way of socialization." The article is void of historical and cultural specificity.

European history is fraught with social injustice and cultural intolerance, however, this is not the main issue here. What is most disturbing about this article is the author's contempt for "Europeans" (read "whites?") which borders on hatred.

There is a wealth of black history she could speak of, yet she does not. The blacks without an identity, without knowledge of their history, without pride of their past are thus found wanting. They are not the only ones. Non-blacks are also left without insight into the history of a people, left to remain ignorant about their fellow humans.

In the "Letters" section of *Excalibur* it is noted that letters which "attempt to incite hatred toward an individual or identifiable group" will be refused. Perhaps you might consider adopting the same policy for articles.

Yours,
Thomas A. Gillmore