

Everyone's a racist

There are probably a lot of you out there who will feel pretty good after reading through this week's African Heritage Month Supplement. You'll educate yourself about some of the achievements of the black people of Nova Scotia and gain a better understanding of the hardships they've encountered. Darn it, you'll think, discrimination against black people has got to stop. You'll close this paper, knowing that you're one of the good guys, that you are part of the fight against racism. I wish we could do something, you'll think, but at least I'm not racist.

Wrong.

You are a racist. And so is everyone around you.

The woman sitting next to you in class is a racist, and so is the man at the end of the pew in church. All of your professors are racist, and so are your parents. The prime minister is racist and so is the Pope.

It is impossible to be born into the world and be shielded from racism. What does racism actually mean, how do we define it? We must define a few terms, taken from the 1983 Ninth New Webster's Collegiate Dictionary:

racism

1. a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race
2. racial prejudice or discrimination

The racism that results in the images we see on television or the horrific deeds that are printed in out newspapers is more like the first definition of racism. These are the white supremacist militias and white power skinheads who we associate with racism. These are the holocaust deniers, the Doug Christies and the Ernst Zundels.

The racism we fail to see, or that we ignore, is the racism of the second definition: "racial prejudice or discrimination." The preconceived judgements, the opinions formed unjustly or out of ignorance. This is the racism inherent in everyone.

prejudice

- 2.(a-1) preconceived judgement or opinion
- (a-2) an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge

We grow from infancy, if we are lucky, in a single family unit. We learn most of our behaviour, and biases, from those around us: our parents and grandparents, our friends, the members of our neighbourhood. No matter how much experience we have with members of different races, we have always been most comfortable with a select few. It's not possible to have all your experience divided equally between the different races. It's not possible to grow up without thinking of some members of the planet's population as "different" or "not like me."

We might form our impression

of the "uncomfortable" people because of something a child of a different race did to us at a young age. We might form our opinion of people who look a certain way based on a few misunderstood instances the first time we find ourselves in an unusual environment. If I grow up in an all-white neighbourhood, and the only black kid I know beats me up everyday, my preconceived notions would lead me to think ill of other black kids. If I grow up in a black neighbourhood and I see my father discriminated against by white people every day of his life, I will harbour a lifelong resentment of whites.

It is this bias, ingrained in our experience, that causes us to feel apprehension walking through unfamiliar environments, or unease in an atmosphere that is unusual. We can never escape this bias, no matter how much education we have or politically correct language we use. Someone who defines himself as immune to racist thought is either foolish, or ignorant.

The way to deal with this universal racism is not to ignore it. It is to recognize that in every single one of us, there is a discomfort with something out of the ordinary. And it requires us to be conscious of this fact 24 hours a day. We will live with racial bias all our lives, and all our lives must be dedicated to fighting it. We must fight with our own preconceptions, to always struggle to open our minds to the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable.

So you should read this week's supplement, you should remember what you learned. You should make a commitment to fight discrimination. And you should keep this in mind: you are a racist, but you don't have to behave like one. You can make the informed choice to fight your biases, to never let your preconceived judgements of people be your final ones.

It is only through the realization of our fear of each other's differences that we will be able to overcome them.

I am a racist, but I'm trying not to be.

TIM COVERT

letters

Pointing fingers

I wish to comment on James Worrall's criticism of the way DSU communications has been mishandled this year. While certainly disappointing, I don't think it should come as a surprise to anyone. If fingers are to be pointed, they should be pointed at the constitutional changes made last year in the DSU, not at Carman Barteaux personally. During elections, I think Carman made it clear that he had little knowledge or skills pertaining to communications, but had considerable enthusiasm and many ideas for community affairs. This year he has made use of his strengths, and communications has slipped.

Although worrisome, I think that this will be true of almost any candidate to run for this position in the future, because the skills required for the two jobs don't really overlap. Candidates will be well-suited for one or the other tasks, and I predict that community affairs will always win out over communications.

The skills required for a good communications person are relatively rare and specialized. The community affairs position should be scaled back to part-time and the communications vp should be hired by the recruitment committee.

Communicating to students and the community is one of the most difficult, yet important jobs that the DSU faces. It is time that it was treated that way.

Jason Morrison

Comments objectionable

Regarding last week's letter from James Worrall ("Deeply Disappointed", Jan. 30), I found Mr. Worrall's comments regarding Carman Barteaux's performance quite objectionable. He said, "Admittedly, I know little about these jobs; maybe there really is too much work [for one person]."

Mr. Worrall, I do not know any more about these jobs than you do, but I do know that if one does not know it is best to keep one's mouth shut. It is unfair to comment in writing about a situation when one does not know the facts. It is disgraceful to defame a person and comment about his performance when one does not know the facts. I do not know anything about the DSU situation, but I know what you said in your letter and I know Carman Barteaux. Carman Barteaux has a quality that is alarmingly scarce in the world today. He possesses integrity. He also possesses loyalty, and dozens of other people are as thankful as I am that he was there when we needed him. He is the last person who deserves to be treated in this manner.

Mr. Worrall, I cannot feel much sympathy for you. I am sorry sir, you have disappointed me.

Michael Hollinger

Fetal rights

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

Another interesting twist has emerged in the debate over fetal rights in Canada. A New Brunswick judge, Justice Richard Miller, has ruled that a child can sue his mother for damages suffered prenatally. Miller also said that legal action can be taken against a stranger for injuries suffered before birth.

So the fetus has a right not to be harmed, but still has no right to be protected. Provided the child can survive whatever harm is inflicted upon him while in the womb, he will at birth inherit the right to defend himself. At that point unfortunately, not much can be done about the injuries and/or disabilities resulting from his prenatal abuse.

Our Criminal Code currently does not include the unborn. Young Jonathan Drummond was born with a pellet in his brain as his mother shot herself in the vagina two days before he was born. An attempted murder charge was thrown out. His mother is now claiming she was so depressed she didn't know she was pregnant and was trying to commit suicide when she shot herself. Mrs. Drummond will not be going to jail for her crime. If anything, she may serve six months probation for "failing to provide the necessities of life to her infant son."

Perhaps someday if Jonathan suffers lasting problems due to his prenatal abuse, he may sue his mother for compensation. If not, his

shooting will go unpunished.

Would it not make more sense to protect our unborn so they won't have to suffer after birth? In this age of feminism, our society has become so afraid of stepping on the rights of women we are ignoring the rights of children. We'd sooner allow a child to be born with a mental handicap, like his siblings before him, than infringe on his mother's right to inhale solvents.

To allow a fetus protection means admitting that an unborn child has rights. If the fetus has a right to be protected, then would it not have a right to live?

As a society, giving the fetus any rights, let alone a right to life, is a threat to our lifestyles. Abortion, rather than being relied upon in emergency cases, is being abused as a back-up birth control method; another way for humans to pass off the responsibility for our actions.

The unfortunate reality of it all is that the debate over fetal rights is one that has no foreseeable end. Too many people have too many different views on the subject which they stand firmly by. Any politician who takes any sort of stand on the issue immediately isolates himself from a large portion of the population, as Preston Manning has already learned.

We will continue to make contradictory rulings on the subject until neither the fetus, the mother, or anyone else immediately involved, has any rights left.

the Dalhousie Gazette

editorial board

Managing Editor Shelley Robinson **Copy Editor** Tim Covert
News Gina Stack **Arts** Andrew Simpson & John Cullen
Sports Aaron Bleasdale **Opinions** Michael Alves
Focus on Dal Kaveri Gupta & Tamara Bond **Dalendar** Sophia Maxwell
CUP Editor Mark Reynolds **Photography** Danielle Boudreau
Science & Environment Adel Iskander & Anthony Skelton
Online Manager Daniel Clark **Office Manager** Natalie MacLellan
Art Director Peter Ross **Ad Manager** Amit Batra

Vol. 129 / No. 17

Student Union Building, Dalhousie University, 6136 University Ave, rm 312, Halifax, NS, B3H 4J2
 editorial tel. 902 / 494-2507
 fax 902 / 494-8890
<http://is2.dal.ca/~gazette/home.html>
 e-mail GAZETTE@is2.dal.ca

97

For advertising information, call 494-6532 or visit our ad manager, 9am to 5pm daily.

The Gazette welcomes letters to the editor and commentary. All letters will be printed up to four per week. The printing of additional letters will be at the discretion of the Opinions Editor.

Letters may be edited for length above 300 words and we reserve the right to edit commentary.

All submissions must be typed double-spaced on paper, e-mailed, or on a Mac or IBM 3 1/2 inch disk, in a WP version not greater than Word 6.0 or equivalent. The deadline is Mondays at 4:30 p.m.

contributors

Andrea Smith, Jeanne Ju, Tracy Major, David Alexander, Greg White, Amy Dunphy, Dan Hennigar, Scott Aldridge, Michael Hollinger, Jason Morrison, Paula Cornwall, Adwoa Buahene, George Borden, Sohrab Farid, Alexis Milligan, Stuart McMillan, Greg McFarlane, Greg Bak, Eugenia Bayada, Monica Gillis

Founded in 1869 at Dalhousie College, the Gazette is Canada's oldest student newspaper. With a circulation of 10,000, the Gazette is published every Thursday by the Dalhousie Gazette Publishing Society, of which all students of Dalhousie University are members. The Gazette exercises full editorial autonomy and reserves the right to refuse or edit any material submitted. All editorial decisions are made collectively by the staff. To become voting staff members, individuals must contribute to three issues. Views expressed in the Gazette are not necessarily those of the editors or the collective staff. Unless otherwise noted, all text © 1997 the Dalhousie Gazette Publishing Society. ISSN 0011-5819