

Homegrown racism

The death of Raymond Yellow Thunder in Gordon, Nebraska, last month should weigh heavily on the collective Nebraskan and American conscience. Regardless of whether any individual or group is found guilty of slaying him, we are all guilty of perpetrating the racist attitude which led to his death.

Yellow Thunder, an Oglala Sioux, was found dead Feb. 20. Both State Indian Commissioner Robert Mackey and Russel Means, national coordinator of the American Indian Movement, have charged that he died of a crushed skull. In addition, Means has charged that Yellow Thunder's body was scarred with cigarette burns and he was castrated.

Sheridan County Attorney Michael V. Smith has denied those allegations and is prosecuting five persons in connection with the death. He says Yellow Thunder's death may be the result of injuries sustained Feb. 13. On Feb. 12, Yellow Thunder was reportedly stripped from the waist down and pushed into the Gordon American Legion Hall where a dance was in progress.

It is perhaps ironic that Gordon is near the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre. And the Pine Ridge area is a sharp-edged example of the environment into which the Indian has been forced.

Many of the Indian residents of the area have to walk up to 15 miles to the nearest hospital. The unemployment rate is high - there is little industry in the area. And many of the white residents of the area seem prone to use any of these conditions as an excuse to persecute the Indians.

The Sheridan County area is, of course, not the only area of Nebraska where overt racism exists. Thurston County, home of the Winnebago tribe, has also been a focal point due to the deplorable condition of the county jail.

The attitude is borne out in another area, as well. It is telling that no Indian student has ever completed four years of study at the University of Nebraska and received a degree. One would suspect the academic community would be one of the leaders in striving to

break down the barricades of racism. Instead, the academicians seem content to look the other way while the rest of the country kicks a people who are down.

It is indicative of the white American attitude to regard racism as a blight on someone else's landscape. The South is every Nebraskan's stereotype of a racist area. But the overt and covert racism of Nebraska is far more wide-spread than that of the South. Rarely has such a stomach-turning example of human mistreatment as that of Raymond Yellow Thunder come out of a southern state.

Sheridan County Attorney Smith is blaming Yellow Thunder's death on a "cruel practical joke." It is disheartening and disgusting to realize that the "American Dream" has deteriorated to a point at which it can foster people whose idea of a practical joke can result in a man's death.

It is not only the passive callousness of the Nebraskan and American people, but the active racism which is practiced that needs to be eliminated. The greatest degree of guilt lies not merely with the people of Gordon or with the people of Nebraska, but with the larger powers of government which allow such a racist attitude to exist.

But the fact of the matter is that the problem exists in that Nebraskans, rather than being the perpetrators of racism, have the opportunity to lead the battle to eliminate it. Hopefully, people are not inherently wicked. Hopefully, any wickedness that surfaces among societies is the result of environmental causes. If that is the case, the environment can be changed.

Raymond Yellow Thunder's death sears home the attitude of Nebraskans and Americans. When people's lives are endangered it is time for alternatives to be examined rapidly.

All of white America is responsible for allowing an environment which can produce the twisted minds that might find humor in a situation that results in a man's death. We are all responsible not only for the death of Raymond Yellow Thunder but for the oppression and degrading treatment of a myriad of other Indians, Chicanos, blacks and women.

Bart Becker

editorial



"The Earth people are evidently very similar to us here on Jupiter... except that they don't wear any clothes!"

arthur
hoppe
innocent
bystander

This month's "Clear Thinking Award" goes to our space agency for its triumph in finally launching the first grafitti to the stars.

The grafitti is aboard the Pioneer spacecraft, which, after passing Jupiter, is supposed to head out into the Milky Way. In case it runs into an alien civilization, it has a plaque aboard showing where Earth is located and what we human beings look like.

To show alien civilizations what we look like, there's a drawing of a naked gentleman and a naked lady. The gentleman has all his proper parts but the lady is constructed like a Barbie Doll.

Actually, the lady initially had all her parts, too, but she had to be redrawn. Our space agency flatly rejected the original version of the lady as being "a bit too explicit."

And rightfully so. There's no point giving offense to alien civilizations. But did our space agency go far enough in correcting this offensive plaque?

For example, what happens if this plaque falls into the hands of, rather, the tentacles of the puritanical Sluds on the planet Andromeda Seven?

There is the great Sludian cosmologist, Jorj, relaxing in his garden feeding roses to his snails when - kerplow! - Pioneer drops out of the sky on to his compost heap.

Reaching out one of his 14 tentacles, Jorj rips off the plaque and scans it with his central eye. "My gosh! he cries. "This craft is from the planet Earth. So that's what Earthlings look like."

"What have you got there, dear?" inquires his wife, Porsha, peering over his horns. Suddenly she blushes a verdant green to the very roots of her golden scales. "Good heavens, they're... They're stark naked! Oh, what sort of

sick, perverted mind would draw pictures like that?"

"Now dear, calm yourself," says Jorj soothingly. "They're merely trying to show us what they look like."

At this Porsha stamps one of her six tennis-shoed feet. "They want to show us, do they? You know very well where that leads, Jorj: 'I'll show you mine, if you'll show me yours.' Oh, what filthy little childish minds! Give me that awful thing!"

"Don't grab, Porsha. I have to study it. The drawing raises fascinating questions. For instance, how do these strange beings reproduce? The female seems to have no . . ."

"At the very least, Jorj, while you have that dirty picture in the house cover up those creatures' private parts. What if little Joonyur should see them? It could sap his moral fiber and warp his little mind."

"All right, all right!" And Jorj grudgingly snips off a strip of adhesive tape, which he sticks over the man's and lady's feet.

"Well, that's better," says Porsha with relief. "But I can't wait until you finish studying it and give it to The Council so they can send a fleet to wipe out these sick-minded smut senders, these interstellar obscene callers, these pernicious pornography purveyors, these . . ."

So you can see what a terrible mistake our space agency made in its effort to communicate with alien civilizations. Actually, it's not showing aliens what we look like that I object to. It's telling them where we are.

There just might be intelligent life somewhere in the universe. And if it ever finds us, we're in trouble.

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