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'Herstory' ignored

Recorded past is of, by and for men

"Of our fathers we know always some fact, some distinction. They were soldiers or they were sailors; they filled that office or they made that law. But of our mothers, our grandmothers, our great-grandmothers, what remains? Nothing but a tradition. One was beautiful; one was red-haired; one was kissed by a Queen. We know nothing of them except their names and the dates of their marriages, and the number of children they bore."

—Virginia Woolf

Tucked among listings of American, European, ancient, medieval and modern history classes in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln class schedule is a course entitled "Women in History."

Some question whether a class on the roles and accomplishments of women from antiquity to the present is necessary or simply redundant in light of the many other classes offered at UNL. But a glance through the materials of other courses reveals that the experiences of women have largely been ignored or trivialized.

Women's studies courses and the celebration of Women's History Month, which concluded Thursday, attempt to correct the inattention given women's issues and accomplishments.

Many feminists use the word "herstory" in reference to the experiences of women. This word, according to Casey Miller and Kate Swift, emphasizes that "women's lives, deeds and participation in human affairs have been neglected or undervalued in standard histories."

H.M. Swanwick wrote in 1935 that history is "largely a record of battles or of alliances in preparation for battle." The lives of women have been omitted or not regarded as "real his-

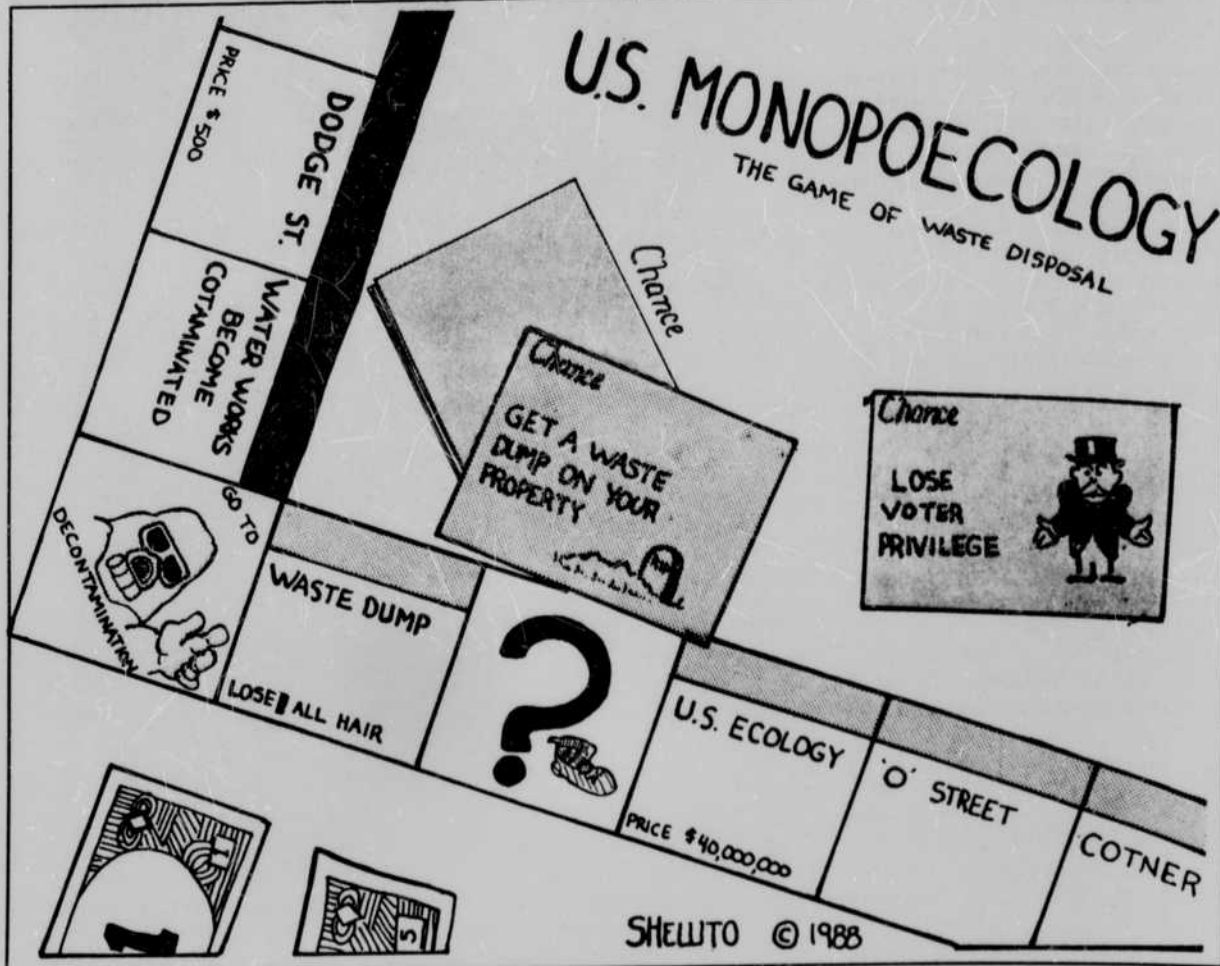
story." Women have been considered mainly as wives, mothers and daughters of important men.

But such an approach ignores the contributions of women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Sanger, Elizabeth Blackwell, Harriet Tubman, Sally Ride, Golda Meir and Mother Teresa. Not only have women been ignored in history classes, but works by men dominate literature and art history studies, even though there have been many talented women writers and artists. And books by women often are demoted to the status of "romance," when similar works by men are considered classics of literature.

Further indication of the trivialization of women's accomplishments is the persistent labeling by gender rather than by talents. While men can be doctors, lawyers and writers, even the most accomplished of their female counterparts are referred to as "lady doctors," "lady lawyers" and "women writers." Think of the strangeness of referring to a physician as a "man doctor."

Congress has declared March Women's History Month each year since 1982. According to an article in the Christian Science Monitor, each state plans celebrations in conjunction with the month. Essay contests, parades and awards are among the events during the month.

Women's studies curricula and events such as Women's History Month and UNL's Women's Week aim to increase people's awareness of the treatment of women. But ultimately, such endeavors have a more idealistic goal: to work for the day when women's issues and history are integrated into mainstream education and students learn not only the accomplishments of their forefathers, but of their foremothers as well.



Everyone has some handicap

But the flaw of prejudice is more crippling than any other

Sometime before spring break a friend and I were discussing the letters on the Daily Nebraskan editorial page that denounced gays. They condemn those they view as "subhuman," writing letters to the editor, publicly publishing their prejudice and perpetuating bigotry — oftentimes in the name of God.

Here we are at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, an institute of higher learning that places great emphasis on tolerating viewpoints and lifestyles that differ from our own. Almost funny, we thought, if it weren't so sad. These people exercising in this perverse form of "Homophobic Olympics." Too bad, my friend and I agreed, that these extreme forms of prejudice that people utilize to cast out of the human race those different from us.

I waved off my friend and turned to see David, an acquaintance from my high school days. To be honest, whenever I saw David, I gave him little more than the time of day. I didn't have time for him, his problem readily apparent with anyone to whom he talked.

David is handicapped. He's not handicapped in the visible way one imagines such a person to be. He has no wheelchair. In fact, my acquaintance with David goes back to a roller-skating rink where he was one of the best skaters. He could skate circles around me, and I worked there.

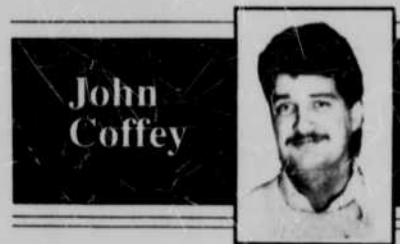
But when David talked, he spoke slowly and without precision. It made him sound dense, inarticulate, without much to say.

When you're a cocky 15-year-old, as I was at the time, you don't take people like David very seriously. I didn't perform overt forms of ridicule toward him like others, but he wasn't like me or my friends. He was, in my mind, less than human.

Now, nearly 10 years later, I've grown up, but my attitudes toward David haven't. And we met once again in the Nebraska Union.

"Hi John," he drawled in his characteristic slow speech.

"Hi David," I said. My vocal tone toward him was the same as always: foaming-at-the-mouth friendly, but patronizing and aloof. It's the tone reserved for those not taken seriously.



John Coffey

Much like one would talk to a 3-year-old who just recited the alphabet.

Normally, I give David a few superficial scurries, "weather talk" I call it, then scurry away. This day, though, I sat down with him. Why, I don't know. Maybe I was just into weather talk that day.

But David had more on his mind than the weather. He was depressed. "I want a girlfriend," he said. "I want a job, too."

He struck a mutual chord. When the first words from someone you've categorized as subhuman are the very thoughts you spend 90 percent of your mental capacity pondering, you take note. In the 10 years I've known him, he has never said anything dealing with much substance. Maybe because I never stuck around long enough to listen.

Today, David was talking about more than simply women and jobs. He was analyzing why he had neither. He didn't say the word, but he knew it. Prejudice.

My reasons for not having a job or a meaningful romantic relationship deal with problems that exist within

me. David's problem lies not inside him, but in others. It lies in prejudiced people — people like me, who look at those with handicaps as crippled mentally as well as physically.

I wish others could've sat where I did that day. They would have heard a man with a speech impediment articulate himself flawlessly. The man before me was sensitive and traditional, yet non-chauvinistic in his views about women. On relationship roles he was very modern. He even wanted to be a "Mr. Mom" for his kids someday, should the situation warrant it.

They would have heard a man outlining his determination to work hard at a job, if only someone would give him the chance.

They would have heard a man who'd felt the pain of prejudice, a pain that some of us will never know.

"People put me down so much I can't pick myself back up," he told me.

I know people who did that. I was one of them. Perhaps directly in my earlier years, certainly indirectly in the latter. He may never have known it, but I did; I viewed him as a member of a humanity just under mine. Not explicitly, but implicitly.

In my mind he was mentally retarded. His speech seemed to indicate this. After our talk I don't know anymore. And it doesn't matter anyway.

Better than any professor, David gave me a refresher course in Human Relations 101. That all humans, despite sex, creed, color or sexual orientation, have their flaws.

"Everybody has a handicap," he said. "You have a handicap in you, I have a handicap in me."

Somehow I felt my handicap was more crippling than his.

Coffey is a senior political science major and a Daily Nebraskan arts and entertainment reporter.

Letter

Lynch thanked for proposing helmet law

Since State Sen. Dan Lynch proposed LB428, the mandatory helmet law, I have heard many complaints from others who say it is an infringement on their rights. I would like to thank Lynch for proposing this very important bill.

My 18-year-old brother was one of the "complainers." He said helmets were not "cool." He also said that he was a careful driver and would never be in an accident — if he could help it.

Unfortunately, he did not take into account other drivers who were not so careful.

On March 10, my brother was a passenger on a motorcycle. My brother was hit by a car that (allegedly) ran a stop sign. My brother flew over the car and hit the back of his head on the curb. He was not wearing

a helmet. Luckily a nurse saved his life by administering CPR. He was knocked unconscious and has been in a deep coma ever since.

The doctors tell us he might come out of the coma eventually, but they say he has a very slim chance of leading a normal life. The extent of damage will not be known until he regains consciousness. All my family can do is wait, and frankly, the wait has been extremely painful.

I thank Lynch because maybe now some other family will be spared the hardships and agony that mine faces and will continue to face until my brother's condition improves.

Christine Allerheiligen
senior
English

Letter

Reader: Legislature can afford to fix door

About four months ago, I visited the Nebraska State Capitol with some out-of-town guests. I was shocked to see the door to the post office on the first floor torn from its hinges and propped up against the opening. I told my guests that we must have had a break-in. They accepted this.

A month later, I again visited the Capitol, and I was even more distressed to see that the door has not

been repaired and is still propped up against the opening. This is certainly not a very secure situation for a post office.

I was concerned for the image this gives our fine Capitol Building.

I realize that since ConAgra has gotten both feet in the trough, there is not enough tax money to take care of the Commonwealth and State Security depositors, as this is "adult" money. I do feel, if our Legislature can afford \$100,000 for new entrance

doors and generous salary increases for themselves, they certainly can find \$100 to install a new door at the Capitol post office.

Lester Christiansen
Lincoln

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