

OPINION PAGES

Our VIEW

New standard

We shouldn't need another Robinson

Fifty years ago today, Jackie Robinson did what many people thought was unthinkable.

On April 15, 1947, Robinson walked onto the baseball field with more than a bat or a glove in his hand; he walked with the dreams and aspirations of an entire population of Americans who had — to that point — been marginalized in both the sport and society.

And on this anniversary of Robinson's feat — that of breaking baseball's color barrier — another young man who is also of African heritage is celebrating his victory at The Masters.

Immeasurable comparisons are bound to be drawn between Tiger Woods and Robinson.

Robinson's on-field heroics were overshadowed by his symbolic strikes against racism. Woods' golf game is equally surpassed by his persona and his youth.

And even in 1997, in a country where institutionalized racism supposedly has been eradicated, Woods' victory Sunday and his astounding successes on the PGA Tour seem to be taking a back seat to the fact that this young man doesn't happen to be white.

While it is true that Woods is the first African-American to win a major PGA championship, he is also the youngest player to do so. And while much of the hype surrounding Woods focuses on the fact that he is black, it should also be noted that his mother is from Thailand and his father has described himself as a "one-man melting pot," with an ethnic background that spans Africa, Europe, Asia and America.

And the fact that Woods is making a name for himself in golf — a sport that to this day is widely reviled for its elitist tendencies — is admirable.

But the point is that we shouldn't have to make a big deal out of any of these traits. Many of Woods' peers on the PGA Tour have said it best: that they don't care if he's young or black or anything, really. All they know is that he's one hell of a golfer.

And until the rest of America and the media that surround Woods learn to accept that view, he will remain an outsider to the game — even if he plays in every tournament and wins most of them.

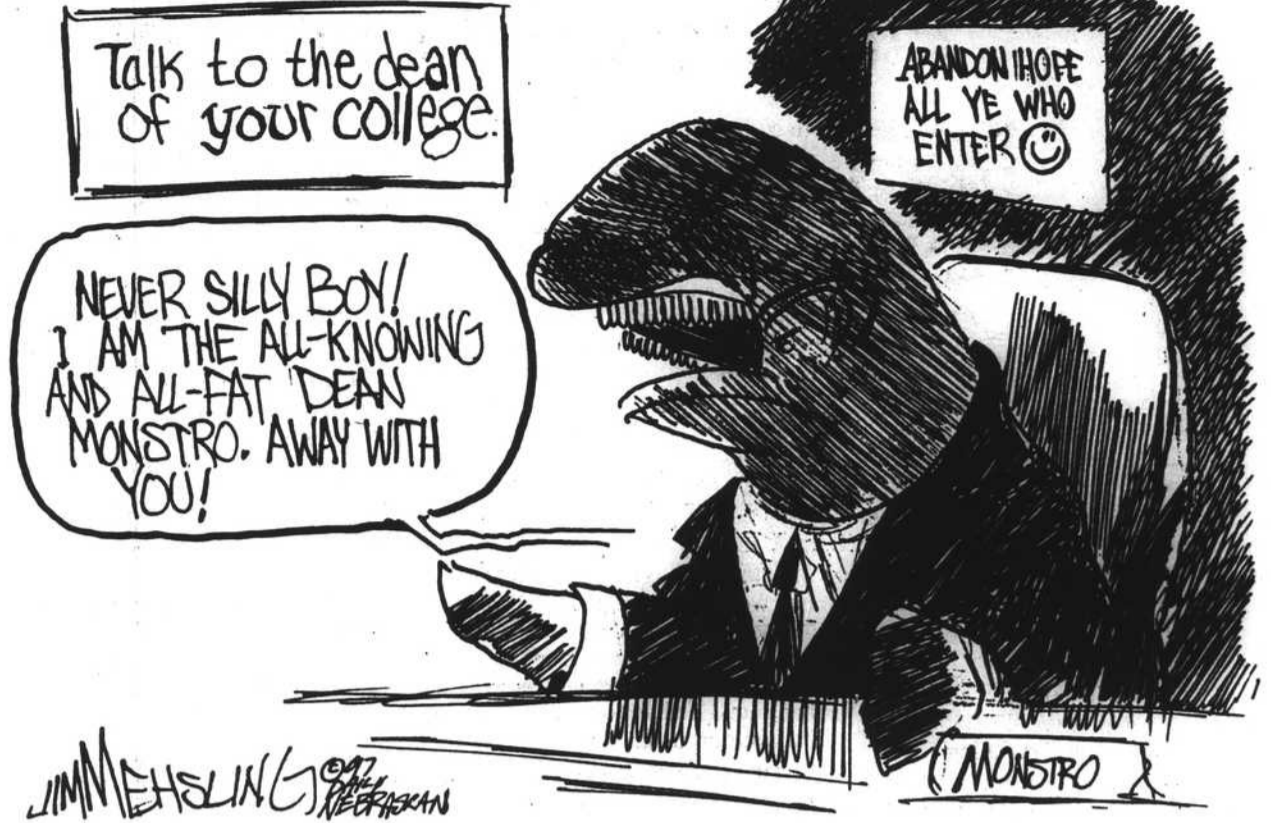
Because in 1997, we shouldn't have to look for a new Jackie Robinson. The fact that we still are signifies either our ignorance toward racism's continued existence or our lack of ability to recognize its end.

And everything that Robinson did for the game of baseball and America won't truly be fulfilled until we can say that we don't need any more Jackie Robinson's.

Oh, and by the way, Mr. Robinson, thank you.

Mehsling's VIEW

IF YOU'RE STILL HAVING TROUBLE GRADUATING BY MAY PART II



DN LETTERS

Safety Walk?

This is an open letter to university officials concerning pedestrian safety on campus, specifically R Street in front of Love Library.

There is no such thing as pedestrian safety.

For about the 20th time since I moved here last August I was nearly run down this morning. No, I wasn't jaywalking. No, it wasn't 3 a.m. and I wasn't dressed all in black.

I was almost exactly two-thirds of the way through the crosswalk and I was doing just what I was supposed to be doing there. I was simply walking across the street.

I noticed soon after I started graduate school here that my safety on campus (or anyone else's for that matter) is not an issue. Bicycles are allowed to travel wherever and however they choose and maintenance vehicles have forced me to walk in the mud or snow on several occasions.

But these are mild inconveniences compared to trying to cross any of the crosswalks on R Street.

I am sick and tired of being made to feel like I should scuttle across the street like a frightened animal because Joe Racecar is in a hurry to turn the corner or Sally Familycar is too busy talking to her passengers or screaming at her kids to stop for a minute — just so I can safely cross the street.

Since when did my life become less important than their time schedules or stupid impatience?

If people can't govern their own actions, then perhaps the university should do it for them. How about some stop signs? Perhaps then the concept of stopping would be crystal clear to those who think that it's OK to simply drive faster to beat the pedestrian through the crosswalk. Or how about issuing some traffic tickets? I have never once seen a ticket for, say, reckless endangerment.

Perhaps if a person's insurance was raised because his or her driving endangered the life of a pedestrian then maybe that person would stop driving like an idiot.

I don't think it's too much to ask that pedestrians be treated with a little courtesy. How would you like it if I almost ran you down with my car. It wouldn't make you very

happy would it?

On a personal note, to the woman who almost hit me this morning: You were in the wrong. I'm 5 feet 9 inches tall and I had on a bright orange sweater, and if you didn't see me then you were twice as wrong.

When there are no pedestrians in the crosswalk then you can drive through. And not one second sooner. I saw you had a baby seat in the back of your car.

Is that really an example you want to set for your children? Do you want them to be disrespectful of the lives and safety of others? If so just keep on driving the way you drive now. I'm sure they will learn in no time.

Stephanie A. Whitmer
graduate student
English

Article the First

At the forefront of much of this last month's news has been the First Amendment. A few weeks ago the Lincoln City Council passed an ordinance that restricts residential picketing. And just last week an NU regent attempted to censor a UNL play containing nudity and homosexual themes.

When will government or university officials stop seeking to suppress speech? And when will citizens stop picking and choosing which First Amendment rights they will seek to protect and which they will gladly surrender to our government?

The aforementioned incidents offer an example of the picking and choosing that is currently going on in our country with regard to First Amendment rights.

The recent outcry from an NU regent over a nude scene and reference to homosexuality in UNL's production of the Broadway hit "Six Degrees of Separation" illustrates why this is a problem.

It is probably not a stretch to say this regent found some of the award-winning play's contents to be indecent or offensive. This is what happens when we give officials the power to define what is indecent or offensive — they start attempting to censor critically acclaimed works of art.

What is more troubling, however,

is the way many supporters of this form of censorship seek to use the First Amendment to protect only speech that is sacred to them. The recent outcry over the Lincoln residential picketing ordinance is illustrative on this point.

Here we have a group of people saying that the government cannot restrict, as opposed to ban, their speech in an attempt to balance fundamental speech and privacy rights. It probably is no stretch here either to guess that many who oppose this restriction on speech support the outright banning of certain speech on the Internet or a university play.

The fact is, our speech rights are much less at risk of being infringed upon when the government reasonably restricts speech, while still leaving open ample alternative forms of communication, in an attempt to balance two fundamental rights. The residential picketing ordinance does not ban speech, it simply moves it 50 feet away from the targeted individual's residence in the interest of privacy rights.

This is not to say that we should blindly allow government to restrict speech as long as they do not outright ban it. On the contrary, we must always be suspicious of laws seeking to restrict or ban speech. Only when competing fundamental rights need protection should government be allowed to place restrictions on our speech. And even then the restrictions must be carried out in a least restrictive manner that leaves ample alternative forms of communication open. Whether the Lincoln residential picketing ordinance accomplishes this is for a court to determine and really is not the point here.

The point is we should be concerned about all forms of government speech restrictions, not just those restrictions being placed upon speech of which we approve. Thus, I too ask where does it end? However, my question is aimed at when will we stop picking and choosing our First Amendment battles and start taking a firm stand against all forms of unreasonable restrictions and bans upon speech?

Matt LeMieux
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ACLU Nebraska

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