

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Choosing sides President-elect makes use of a policy he decries

George W. Bush's rainbow-colored cabinet could serve as a shining example of inclusiveness and diversity if it were not so mired in sheer politics.

His cabinet, called the most diverse in history, includes four women, two blacks, two Hispanics, an Arab-American, a Japanese-American and a Chinese-American.

This, from a man who opposes affirmative action.

It simply doesn't make sense for Bush to denounce affirmative action programs as "racial preferences" and then go on to appoint a disproportionate number of minorities to his cabinet.

That's not to say appointing minorities isn't a laudable goal — on the contrary — but Bush certainly had to deploy some kind of "affirmative action," whether he admits it or not, in selecting these appointees.

Affirmative action, as generally defined, grants historically disadvantaged groups, such as blacks and women, certain opportunities, such as jobs and school admissions, they may not otherwise have gained.

Supporters of affirmative action attribute the need for such programs to the systematic manner — through legalized and accepted discrimination — in which minorities have been excluded from top positions in society.

Granting someone from a disadvantaged group a certain position over a person from a group with a more stable societal footing, most affirmative action supporters say, can help "right" past injustices.

Affirmative action opponents say everyone should fight for him or herself when it comes to jobs or school admissions. Many opponents decry affirmative action programs as setting quotas and furthering unjust treatment: Two wrongs don't make a right, they say.

Regardless of where one falls on the affirmative action spectrum, most important is that someone — especially the President of the United States — is forthright with his or her opinion of the issue and the possible application of it.

In appointing his cabinet, Bush almost certainly used the principles of affirmative action — that is, he paid close attention to the race and gender of those he chose to work under him and specifically favored those attributes.

This is certainly a political move on his part, meant to woo the minorities — about 90 percent of blacks voted against him — that he failed to woo to the polls.

And certainly, at least in appearances, a diverse cabinet is good for the country. Some would argue, though, the diverse palette of cabinet appointees doesn't truly represent a diversity of opinion.

Regardless, it could be heartening for minorities, who often don't see themselves in high-level cabinet positions, to see a good number of people who look like them in Bush's cabinet.

Bush, though, should admit that he's using what he claims to oppose to win over those people who haven't traditionally favored Republicans.

And then he should, perhaps, reevaluate his stance on the issue.

For if he's going to use affirmative action, he should embrace it.

Otherwise, he should stick to the "every man for himself" platform he espouses.

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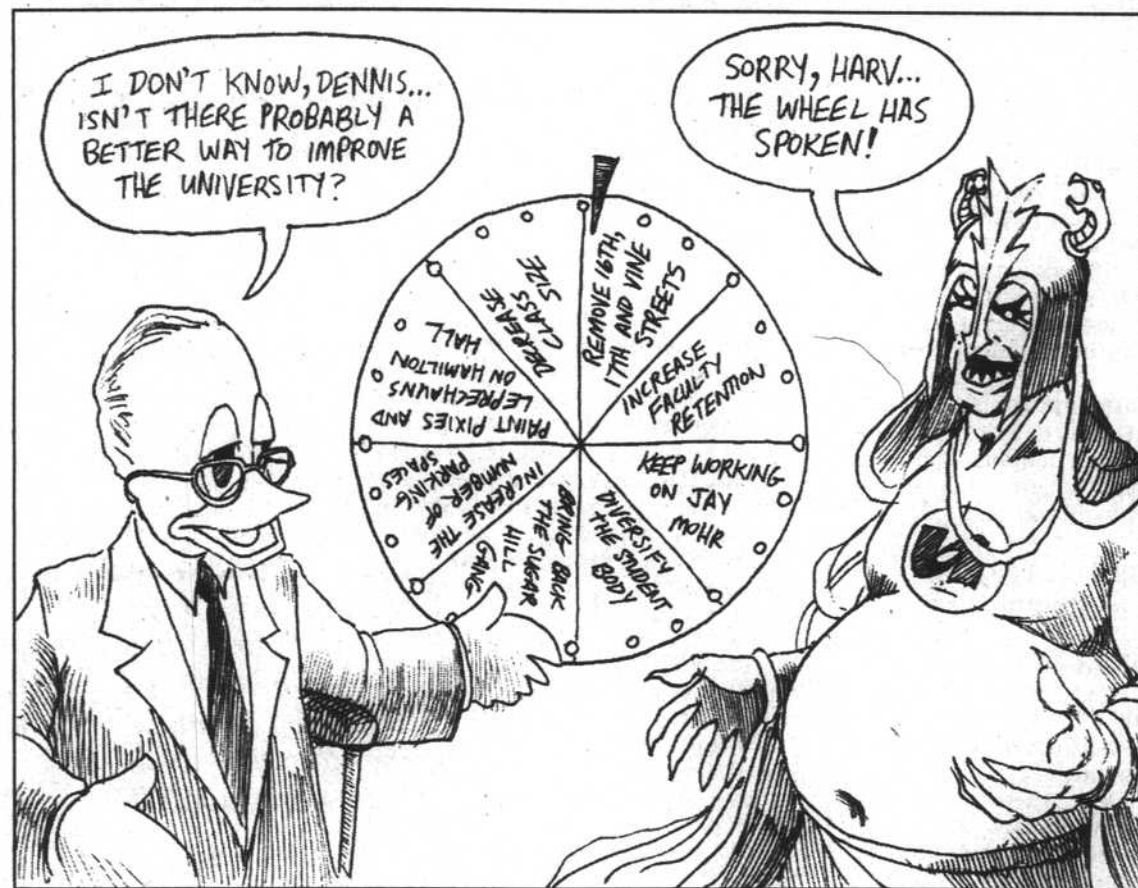
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Moment of unguarded tenderness

While most of you reading these words will be able to do something useful and productive with your degree, I won't.

I'm a journalism major.

Basically, I'll be able to tell stories for money when I graduate. True stories, but stories nonetheless.

My column will be, mostly, the kind of stories I couldn't tell on any other page of this paper. Stories that happened to me or my friends. Stories with a bias, a point of view. Stories that don't so much inform or educate or persuade, but instead give glimpses of ordinary people doing ordinary things.

One person I'd like to tell a million stories about is my friend Daniel. I'll limit myself to one story.

During one school break or another, I'd gone home to Gering to visit my family. I'd driven the 400 miles of monotony that is Nebraska's I-80 on a Friday night and was looking forward to sleeping in the next day.

No chance. Daniel called bright and early Saturday to tell me we were going to write a song.

If that seems odd to you, it is.

I'd never seen anyone just sit down and write a song. There are probably people who can write great songs on command, but I can't. Neither could Daniel, at least not as far as I knew.

Daniel didn't know what the song's lyrics should be about or what the music should sound like or who should hear the song if it ever got written. In other words, writing a song was a dumb idea.

But I knew arguing with Daniel would be useless. He was convinced that we would write a song that day. Since I wanted to see Daniel anyway, I told him that writing a song was a fine idea.

Daniel picked me up and we went to an old church to borrow a piano. He played me a few songs he'd written on his guitar, I played some I'd heard on the piano. Every five minutes or so, he'd ask, "What should we write a song about?"

I'd tell him I didn't have a clue, so he'd nod his head and play me something else.

I finally told him that I didn't think I had a song in me. I asked him how things had been while I was at school.

We talked for an hour before he broke my heart.

He told me about a little girl we knew, a 14-year-old, who had gotten pregnant and miscarried. When he finished and we'd stared silently at the floor for ten minutes, I closed my eyes and began playing some mournful chords on the piano.

Before I could finish what I was playing, Daniel jumped up.

"That's perfect!" he yelled, and he began playing something on his guitar.

To this day, he claims he was just repeating what I was playing on the piano, but the truth is that the music came from Daniel.

He played several phrases of music and then abruptly stopped.

"What are the words?" he asked me, as if I knew.

Maybe I was mesmerized by Daniel's music. Maybe I was still reeling from his story.

But I didn't argue. I picked up an orange crayon and a Sunday-school worksheet and wrote.

Thirty minutes later, Daniel had his song.



Josh Knaub

Baobabs, roses and a Prince

The snake bites the child and he falls to the desert floor. But it only looks as if he were dying; the deeper reality is visible to the unerring sonar of the heart:

The little Prince has gone home to his Rose.

This is the denouement of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic, *The Little Prince* — surely the saddest, the moodiest of children's stories and (I am told) the third-most-read book in all the world, after the Bible and the Koran.

It may be that the figures are higher than that, even; it's just possible that an embarrassed piety might slightly inflate the number of "readers" of any given "bible."

But S-E's book comes to us in the easily digestible form of a fable, making it by far the most palatable of the Big Three.

I have meditated deeply on its message, watched its simple plot line unravel again and again and I can state with certainty that *The Little Prince* owes something to Divine Inspiration.

You can see it for yourself.

Take the baobabs. These are trees as big as castles, capable of tearing a (very) small planet to pieces, if left to grow unchecked.

But they don't begin as giant trees, as our Prince points out. At first, of course, they must sprout like any sprout. Like a flower, even a rose.

Early on they can be pulled up by the roots, nibbled by sheep; they are that tender.

But somewhere along the way, there comes a day, if the baobabs are left to grow, when nothing in the world could weed them out.

By then, of course, it is already too late, and your little planet will look like the terribly impressive and apocalyptic illustration left us by the author. (Did I mention there are pictures? Another reason to hope this good book might have been read more often than those others.)

For his first readers, the meaning of Monsieur Exupéry's metaphor must have been obvious: while writing this book he was also serving as a pilot in World War II.

In the world's garden, a hand-full of tyrants had appeared whose mutant growth, a seemingly irresistible force, threatened to destroy everything, all freedom, everywhere.

No love affair, no tenderness could possibly come before the task of uprooting a villainy which would choke all love and tenderness for generations.

And yet the author found the time — while recovering from wounds received in confronting these awful powers — the requisite tenderness still inside himself, fostering it like a flower, to write and illustrate a book for children. And in such gentle tones!

It would not do to forget the lesson

It is free, then, to remain simply true.



Mark Baldridge

of the baobabs, even if all it ever stood for was the necessity of fighting oppression.

But it has thankfully been many years since the balance stood so precariously poised, ready to tip the world to war.

What has the book been meaning in the meantime?

Well, the soul is also a garden that needs weeding. In this, the inspiration of the book shows right through.

Self-defeating thoughts, revenge fantasies, bad habits, addictions and simple depression can spring up overnight and choke the soul. The careful gardener of his or her own soul must be always vigilant against the careless weeds.

At the same time, the flowers, delicate unfoldings of the heart, must be tended if the garden is to remain an Eden. It's not enough to shelter no weeds; the soul must have roses.

Difficult, thorny, fragile — but otherwise you might as well pave over everything and be done with it.

A book for children, a reconnaissance flight over Nazi occupied France, each must be undertaken in its turn and, in turn, each metaphor superimposes itself over the other as deeper meanings reveal themselves.

If the garden of the soul sounds like a monastic, contemplative emblem, there is an interpersonal dynamic to the book as well — in the theme of taming.

The Prince, in his travels, tames and is tamed by a fox, a wild animal of the fields.

In Exupéry's sense, taming is a universal principle, a technique for cultivating love and trust.

An act "too often neglected," taming is the means by which we domesticate the heart to communion with another. It's a way of making oneself harmless to the other, and without it one can never be fully known.

The story has a mysterious and heartbreaking ending. The little Prince has passed into the invisible where he can only be perceived by the heart.

But by this transmutation the natural world is, in a sense, redeemed. Roses, the wild foxes, wheat fields, long sunsets, the stars themselves are animated by his unseen presence.

What is this but the resurrection of the dead? When the merely mineral or natural world takes on the penumbra of the Spirit?

If this story of an extra-terrestrial Prince on his travels through the void sounds sentimental or trite to readers jaded by television violence and gangsta rhymes, at least believing in its simple message doesn't entail any more serious mental gymnastics.

For those who find the strain of believing in literal communiqués from a vengeful God more than they can bear, *The Little Prince* offers a spiritual document which does not claim to be factual.



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