

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Debate on evolution's merits seems misguided

Christ versus Darwin. Creationism versus Evolution. Ongoing battles in the realm of theology and science, these two scenarios have been the subject of years of intense debate in school districts across the country.

On one hand are school-choice advocates and those who use religion as a moral compass to circumscribe their duties. On the other hand are the no-less-moral Constitution quoters and others of legal ilk who decry the teaching of creationism as a violation of the Constitution's decree of separating church and state. Kansas is the latest battleground for the decades-long debate on creationism's relevance in America's classrooms and whether evolution should be taught alongside it.

After months of debate, the Kansas Board of Education approved last month a set of education standards that dismisses reference to evolution - the theory that humans evolved from earlier species. Though the standards are suggestions only, and the 6-4 decision left the current state policy on the teaching of evolution in the public schools unchanged and gave local schools the power to decide for themselves whether to teach the theory.

Creationism - the belief that a higher power created the universe - though never mentioned in the proposed standards became part of the debate, and it has in debate after debate on the topic.

Some board members originally supported proposals that defined creation as "the idea that the design and complexity of the cosmos requires an intelligent designer." That proposal was later withdrawn.

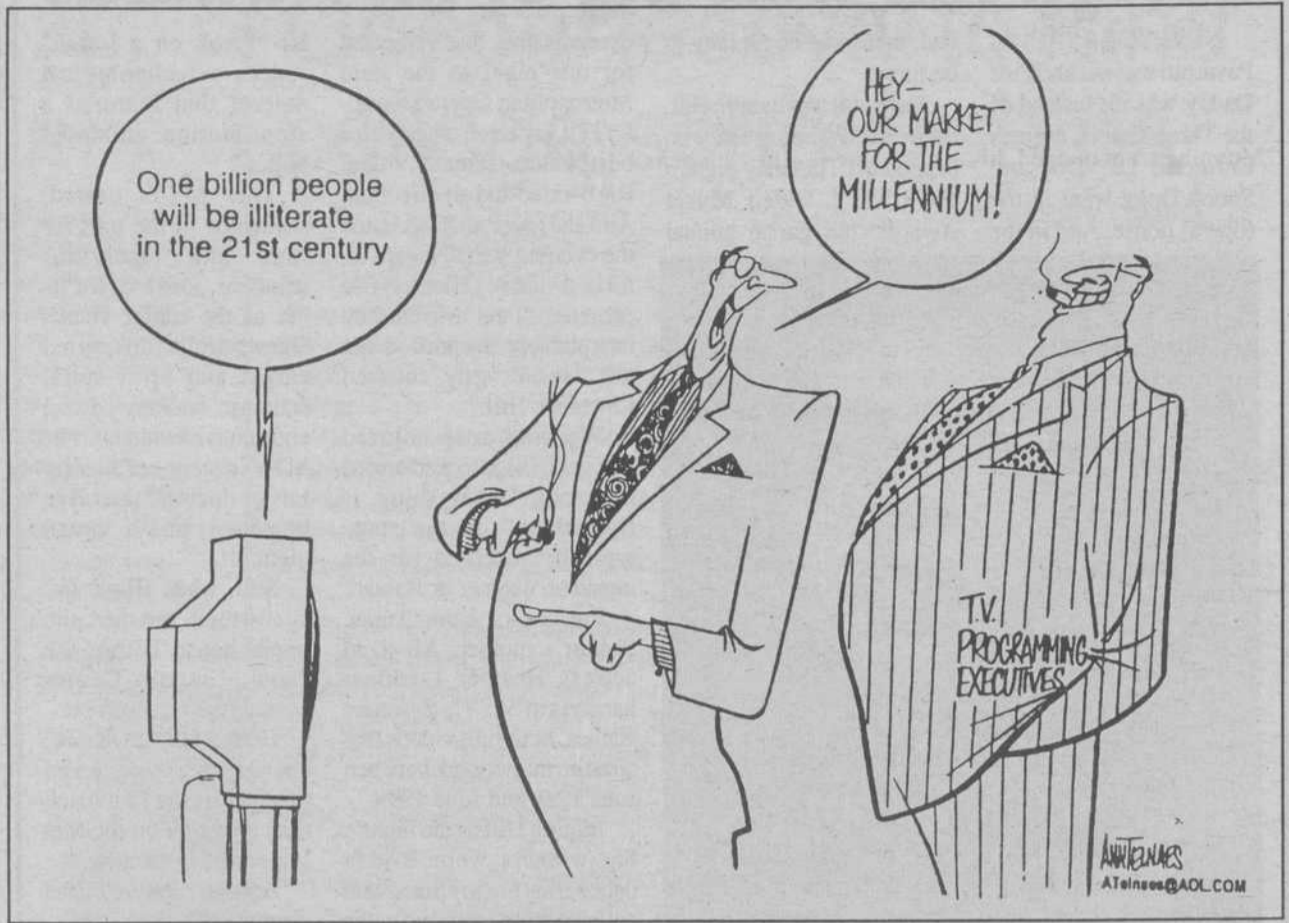
The debate over evolution isn't a debate, per se, on its merits, but more so a debate on its place, if any, in public school curriculum. Christian private schools have for years taught evolution along with courses on the world's other large religions - Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam. So the question isn't whether creationism and evolution can co-exist on a chalkboard but if the two competing concepts - whose proponents are often ill-framed, creationist backers as God-fearing and opponents as soulless athiests - deserve space in a publicly-funded classroom.

America's public schools are prohibited from championing one religion or religious discipline over another. Evolution advocates argue that excluding it from the classroom strengthens creationism and robs students of their freedom to choose which religion, if any, they consign themselves to.

Others argue about the importance of evolution's scientific merits.

Said Bill Wagon, who voted against the new standards: "I think they're weak — they're mutated. They don't prepare students to take placement exams for college entry." He said the message to local school boards is "we don't want you to think that (evolution) is important."

Currently, Kansas doesn't have a list of topics that should be on the statewide assessment tests. Educators are forming such a list and there is debate over whether evolution should be included. The debate rages on.



An insider's tale of police racism

Earl Ofari Hutchinson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

"If it'll make the family feel any better, we shot her with Black bullets." — NHI (No Human Involved) brother (referring to Miller).

"I saw her move again and capped her twice in the head."

"She wasn't going to hurt you I had that bitch covered."

"Yeah and big mama showed up and started doing the death wail."

The officer then mimicked an elderly Black woman that arrived at the scene and wailed loudly while the listening officers laughed. The four officers that shot Miller made whooping sounds, and embraced, and gave each other the high-five slap.

"We need to get you guys out of here," (referring to the officers who shot Miller). "These animals are arriving by the busload," (referring to friends and relatives of Miller).

"Turn your radio to a rap station in memory of Tyisha," (a remark by an officer when he heard that there would be a vigil in memory of Miller. The other officers laughed).

Black Riverside, Calif. police officer Rene Rodriguez arrived at the scene 40 seconds after four White Riverside officers riddled Tyisha Miller, a 19-year-old African-American woman, with bullets in December 1998.

The above quoted remarks are what he says he heard the

officers that shot Miller and others say about her, her family, friends and acquaintances immediately after the shooting and later at the station.

These bombshell revelations are, officer Rodriguez insists, only the ugly tip of the iceberg of the racist practices within the Riverside Police Department. He believes that these practices are officially sanctioned by police brass.

He described how African-Americans and Latinos are racially profiled by police officers and targeted for unwarranted traffic stops. He said that the practice is openly encouraged by training officers at the police academy. He also noted that one training officer told recruits that Black males with cornrow hairstyles and Latinos who drive older cars are "good stops."

The instructions on how to profile were reinforced during field training, he claimed. Training officers would make remarks when they saw Black and Latino drivers such as, "Look, they are driving without a license." Or, they would order a Black or Latino driver to pull over without any probable cause for the stop.

Rodriguez asserted that officers turned racial profiling into a competitive sport. They kept statistics on how many Blacks and Latinos they stopped, and how many of their cars they impounded.

The officers with the highest number of impounds and stops were commended. White drivers in turn who broke traffic laws were often given warnings and sent on their way.

Riverside police officials scoffed at Rodriguez's allegations. They claim that the department has no tolerance for racist acts by officers. But there are three compelling reasons to believe Rodriguez.

Several observers at the scene of the Miller shooting also said that the officers engaged in the behavior Rodriguez described. And Riverside police officials themselves said they are investigating possible inappropriate behavior by the officers.

The U.S. Attorney has launched a deep probe of the department to determine how widespread the abusive racial practices are. And finally, there's the treatment of Rodriguez.

He has suffered tremendously for blowing the whistle on the outrageous conduct of the officers in the Miller shooting and refusing to engage in racial profiling. Rodriguez says that he has been the target of threats, intimidation and harassment by other officers.

He says some have put his life in danger by deliberately refusing to provide him with back-up support in dangerous situations. He was placed on administrative leave in March and has been denied pay and health benefits. Rodriguez is financially destitute and unable to support his wife and two children.

Meanwhile, the four officers that shot Miller and their supervising officer were placed on paid administrative leave before they were fired in June and September. Even after their firing they are receiving financial support and encouragement from the police union, White officers

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