

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXVIII, Number 66, 25 May 1994 — ACT UP protests Pulitzer cartoonist [ARTICLE]

ACT UP protests Pulitzer cartoonist

By DYLAN TAUBER

Spectator Summer Board

As Michael Ramirez received the Pulitzer Prize for his political cartoons in a ceremony in Low Rotunda Monday, eight protestors from the activist group Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) handed out fliers on the steps of Low Library, protesting the recognition of Ramirez's cartoons, which they consider homophobic.

Ramirez, a nationally syndicated political cartoonist who works for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, was awarded the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for political cartoons, which is administered by the Columbia School of Journalism.

ACT UP members say they will protest the Pulitzer Prize Committee's selection of Ramirez until they rescind his award, but Seymour Topping, Administrator

of the Pulitzer Prizes, said there is no possibility the committee will consider such action.

“I’m a bit surprised by the protest,” Topping said. “[ACT UP] doesn’t agree with Mr. Ramirez’s point of view, but it seems to me that in the American forum there is room for many points of view.”

According to Topping, the protest has been barely noticeable, as his office received only six telephone complaints in the last week.

Topping added that this is not the first time there have been protests against the awarding of prizes to political cartoonists who represent a controversial point of view.

Shane Butler, a member of ACT Up who participated in the protest and a second year graduate student at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, said his organization is

protesting what he calls an “incredibly amazing, sweeping portfolio of racism, sexism and homophobia, and from the perspective of ACT UP, most importantly, life threatening misinformation about AIDS.”

Butler said that although he is not sure which cartoons the committee members saw, he believes they were aware of Ramirez’s cartoons on AIDS and selected him for the prize in spite of them, partly because, according to Butler, committee members shared his “homophobia.”

“I don’t know which cartoons they saw, but I haven’t seen one Ramirez cartoon which didn’t revolt me, so it’s hard to imagine a defensible case being made for any of the cartoons. But I feel the Pulitzer committee has a responsibility to look at a journalist’s larger body of work before making a decision,” said Butler.

Topping said he saw no evidence that the selection committee had received a portfolio of only a narrow selection of his cartoons.

Topping added that it is standard procedure for the committee to consider the technique of the cartoonist as more important than the editorial content of

his cartoons.

“The award was given to Ramirez based on his editorial technique working for *The Memphis Appeal*,” said Topping.

According to Butler, Ramirez’s work suggests that AIDS is a disease confined to homosexual white men who spread the disease by “irresponsible behavior.”

Butler added that the cartoon he finds most offensive is Ramirez’s depiction of a homosexual white male sitting on a tombstone. The caption on the cartoon reads: “But...testing would severely curtail my lifestyle.” A second caption emerging from the grave itself reads: “Tell me about it...”

“AIDS is portrayed here as a stereotypical image of a gay man, and the suggestion of the comic strip is that his homosexuality and his irresponsibility and ignorance are the cause of AIDS and that only gay communities are affected by AIDS,” Butler said.

Butler said that Ramirez’s cartoons are not only misleading, but are also offensive to the gay community.

“It is deeply insulting to gay communities who have been in the forefront of efforts to educate not only their own communities, but the general public, about HIV transmission. The comic strip mocks gay people who have lost lovers to AIDS, and suggests that the disease only affects gay white men.”