

# Opinion

## Free speech demands tolerance of others

How many of you believe in free speech? I imagine probably everyone. If you didn't believe in free speech for everyone, then you would be forfeiting your own freedom to speak. Unless, of course, you were some authoritarian dictator who had the power to control the speech of others without affecting your own.



Glenn Murtha

I consider myself a hardliner on free speech. Free speech is free speech whether I agree with it or not. Yet this hard line can run into problems — like yelling "fire!" in a crowded theater. Does one have the right to do this? Obviously one does, though he or she may be prosecuted for any physical harm done.

Believing in freedom of speech is one thing, recognizing it is quite another. Some individual is always trying to silence the speech of others, speech that he doesn't like. A close-to-home example of this is the Gay Student Services case.

By denying recognition, the University tried to prevent the group's ability to speak on campus. Only recognized groups are permitted to use University forums such as the open microphone at Rudder Fountain, post flyers on campus or reserve tables to distribute literature in the main hallway of the Memorial Student Center. The GSS could only participate in these activities when sponsored by another recognized group.

The same holds true for fraternities and sororities. The University refused to recognize them, thus hindering their ability to freely disseminate their views on campus. The difference between the GSS and fraternities and sororities is that the latter never challenged the University in court. The GSS did and won. So, in effect, if you didn't favor recognition for the GSS or fraternities or sororities, you didn't favor freedom of speech, though you might not have realized it. You wanted to silence the speech of groups you did not agree with.

From a national perspective, many groups are trying to silence the speech

of others. The American Medical Association wants to ban all cigarette and tobacco product advertising. The Parents Music Resource Center wants to control speech by rating rock albums. If they could have their way, they would probably start censoring material they deemed unsuitable.

Some blacks want to remove the American classic *Huckleberry Finn* from the classroom and the library, calling it racist trash. Various fundamentalist religious groups want to remove Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* from schools claiming that it promotes a promiscuous lifestyle. Many feminists, along with many religious groups, want all forms of pornographic material banned.

Who made these people God? What gives them the right to tell me or you what we can read, write, hear or see?

Religious groups seem especially prone to favoring censorship. They played a key role in the Southland Corporation's recent decision to remove the adult magazines *Playboy* and *Penthouse* from their 7-Eleven stores.

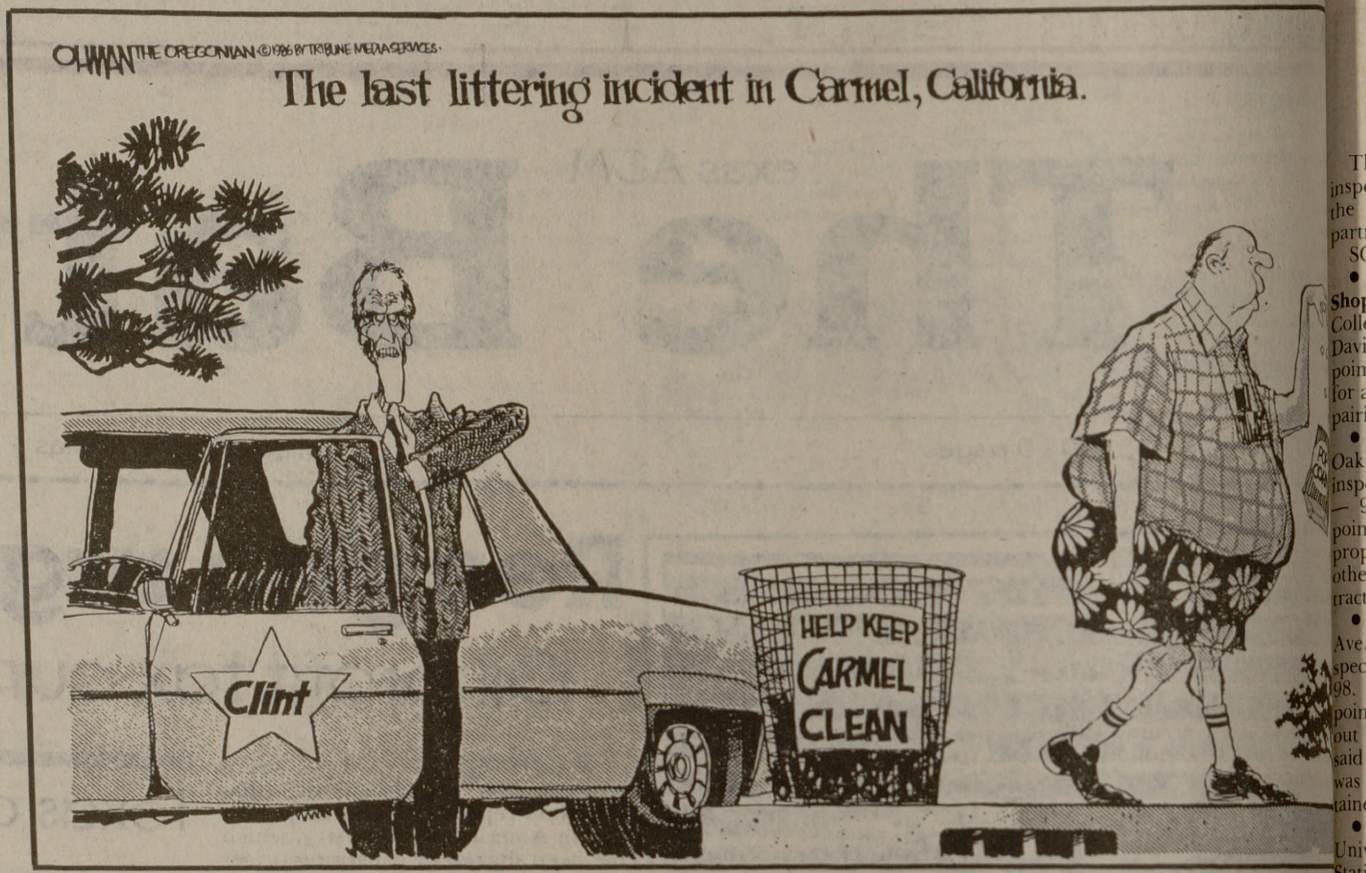
Well, I propose that we ban the Bible. The Bible is obviously a dangerous work of literature. About three weeks ago, the *Houston Chronicle* reported that a Baytown woman "repeatedly stabbed her children with a butcher knife." The woman wanted to "send them to Jesus." If we banned the Bible, this would never happen.

We're all fooling ourselves if we believe that. So what makes the Bible different from any other work of literature? Nothing. Any unstable person can be inspired to hurt others from virtually any source of literature. Banning or censoring is not the answer.

The freedom to speak is a fragile concept. If we did not have constitutional protections for speech, we quickly would lose the ability to speak freely.

Freedom of speech means tolerating the words of others, even if we may not agree with it. Think about this the next time you hear or read something you don't like. You could be the next one silenced.

Glenn Murtha is a senior political science major and a columnist for *The Battalion*.



## U.S. sacrifices all for the mission

On his recent visit to Washington, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres was a man with a mission. In his head he held a plan and in his briefcase he held some statistics. They showed that a combination of sinking oil prices and military profligacy had (as they don't say at the World Bank) busted some Arab countries. Contrary to what you might think, this did not make Peres' day.



Richard Cohen

Instead, it put the Israeli prime minister in a somber mood. In a meeting with Secretary of State George Shultz, Peres outlines his worries. A bankrupt Arab world is an unstable Arab world, he said. In particular, Peres was worried about Egypt. It was in trouble. Revenues from oil and tourism were way down and the moderate regime of Hosni Mubarak might be in trouble.

At about the same time that Shultz was hearing from Peres, others in the State Department were hearing from reporters. They were asking if it were true that the United States had on three occasions asked Egypt to consider joint military operations against Libya. The plans apparently varied, but they seemed to call for some combination of Egyptian troops and U.S. planes. The State Department confirmed the reports after the news leaked from Cairo.

The two events — U.S. attempts to enlist Egypt in its anti-Khadafy crusade and Peres' attempts to enlist the United

States in a program to help Egypt — are juxtaposed here for a purpose: They illustrate differing, almost contradictory, world views. And they raise questions of whether the Reagan administration is so enamored of force that it fails to consider long-term implications.

For instance, the Egypt that figured in U.S. invasion plans bears little resemblance to the same country that so worries Peres. Peres' Egypt is a fragile society — one whose last leader, Anwar Sadat, was assassinated by religious zealots. It's a country in economic trouble. Its security police recently rampaged in Cairo because of low wages and miserable living conditions. Mubarak was able to handle the riots, but not the cause of them. None of that has changed.

The Egypt that worries Peres could be pitched into chaos by becoming an American ally in a joint operation against another Arab country. Moslem fundamentalists might revolt at fighting their co-religionists and, in particular, a leader such as Khadafy whose poverty, religious extremism and anti-Americanism could produce a fifth column. Even if the Mubarak regime survived, it might find itself once again isolated in the Arab world. Would it then be forced to assert its pan-Arab bona fides by repudiating the peace with Israel?

The U.S. plan for a joint operation might have made military sense — but that's about it. It was drawn up in a strategic vacuum as if short-term gains were everything and nothing mattered but what the Army likes to call "the mission." The reason it is worth citing is that it is similar to other recent Reagan administration actions in which legiti-

mate questions were brushed aside in a rush to use force in the name of the Reagan Doctrine.

For example, is it worth the lives of ourselves with Jonas Savimbi in mind since he himself is allied with the floor. A regime in South Africa? Is it worth the lives of ourselves with the Angolan allies even more so? Is it worth the lives of ourselves with the same stingers to the Alghul wall-floor las and risk them turning the other Moslem zealots whose not the Soviet Union — but the States or Israel?

You could ask similar questions of Nicaragua: What happens if the Contras are trained and ready to fight? How lengthy a war would it be? What happens if the Contras do the job? Will Americans in Nicaragua that important and more important, can such a war be won? Will the hills forever be guerrillas?

The answers to these questions are not forthcoming, but they are even being asked. The problems are given to the simplify, and courses are set. It will take years to change. It would be hard to disengage from Nicaragua. Already, the use of force in Libya has begot even more trouble.

A short-term "September 11" has seized the administration's foreign policy it's no longer again in America. It's December.

Richard Cohen is a columnist for the *Washington Post Writers Group*.

## Frequent examining of values needed to prevent oppression

As I've taken it upon myself to publicly defend gay rights for the last two years, I've learned a few things about America, people and their beliefs. It has never ceased to amaze me how people who so firmly believe in America as a nation can have so little faith in its values. How can people talk about America as a great nation and yet refuse to abide by the values of free speech, religious tolerance and civil liberties — the values which make it a great nation?



Marco A. Roberts

Guest Columnist

I would not be fighting if I did not believe there is a right and wrong, a truth and untruth. But more often than not, we don't know what it is. All we can do is what we believe is right, not only for us, but for those around us. We must have moral values and beliefs. Without them we have no convictions and without convictions, little reason for living. I'd like to think that there is more to life than pursuing personal gain.

But as we hold these values which we inevitably derive from the lessons of the past and our understanding of our surroundings (including written words), we also must keep in mind that we are not infallible. There will come times when we may find we need to change. Values are worthless unless they are held with conviction, but they become oppressive if we are not willing to re-examine them from time to time. For this reason we must allow dissent, if only to keep us

when we do change our values so with respect for the past, the present, and hope for the future.

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to hold on to traditional values for the sake of the values themselves is stubborn. To change them for the sake of changing them is meaningless. Traditions and values are here for a purpose: To remind us of our past and give us a better understanding of who we are. For these reasons we must honor them. But when a particular tradition or value no longer serves this purpose (or we find it never did), we must be wise enough to let it go.

I'm equally amazed by those who so strongly exercise their rights to free speech and their civil liberties while showing total disrespect for the nation and institutions that guarantee them those rights.

Our system may not be perfect — believe me, I know! But it is ours, and it is a lot better than of many other nations. Texas still discriminates against gay people, and the United States still will not let us serve. But I'm still an American with both rights and duties, and I'll do what I think I have to make it better (at least in my view). I'd like to think that I'll always be just as willing to fight for America as I have for gay rights.

Those of you who think that gays are simply out to embarrass Texas A&M should remember this: There is no greater compliment you can pay an institution (or nation) than to fight to become a part of it. No matter how great pain, pressure or fear may be, we should show respect for reason. And

## Mail Call

### Why Wasson?

EDITOR:

Vice Chancellor William Wasson is personally being sued for \$4 million by KLS Computers in College Station.

In trying to provide the best possible access to computing tools for faculty, staff and students, the University organized the Micro Center in the Memorial Student Center. KLS now contends that local computer retail merchants cannot compete with Micro Center prices, so they want \$4 million out of Wasson's hide.

Why Wasson? Because in the world of legal tactics, it is faster and easier for KLS to get immediate attention in this matter by suing Wasson as a private citizen rather than suing a state agency like Texas A&M.

This is disturbing for several reasons. Wasson, in his administrative role as vice chancellor, acted as any faculty/staff employee or student has acted to help the A&M community — to make their buying power go as far as possible. Many of us, as members of extracurricular clubs, classes, professional societies, etc., have obtained advantages of discounts for our groups. As a retail merchant, KLS doesn't like that idea anymore.

As a precedent, this could mean that T-shirts, food, Aggie memorabilia, books, entertainment programs, etc. that we might provide for our classes or clubs could cost a few million dollars more if some merchants thought it was their job to provide that particular service.

There is simply no excuse or convoluted "logical explanation" that justifies the KLS action against Wasson. If the KLS action is condoned, which of us will be next — the mechanic at the transportation pool, the milkshake maker at the dairy, the butcher in our meats department, professors who distribute class notes, the director of a club's plant sale, chairman of an MSC program...?

The University will always offer services that can benefit its students and employees. We can stop patronizing local merchants who jeopardize programs with that purpose or hinder the individuals who try to provide them for us.

By expressing our concern, we can also show that we appreciate the University's efforts to afford us these programs — in this case, its efforts to make personal computing power a more available tool for all of us.

Charles P. Giammona  
Civil Engineering Dept.

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