

Opinion

The United States is taking a giant step backward

Until last month, I thought America had come a long way since the 1800s in the areas of race relations and equality. But when the events that took place in Cumming, a small town in Forsyth County, Ga. made front page news all over the country, I changed my mind.



Paula Vogrin

On Jan. 17, about 90 people planned a peaceful, biracial civil rights march through Cumming. It sounded unobtrusive enough. But the marchers were met by hundreds of Ku Klux Klansmen and their supporters and became targets for bottles, rocks and racial jeers.

When I saw this on the news, I was disgusted. My parents raised me to believe that all people, regardless of skin color, are equal. No one has the right to claim superiority based upon the amount of pigment in his or her skin.

I attended a private high school in

Dallas. The ratio of blacks to whites was almost equal. We went to the same parties, restaurants and movies together, and we never thought twice about it. During my four years in high school, there was never an episode of racial violence.

When I saw the Klan in action in Forsyth County, I wondered if all men really are equal. How can men who throw rocks and bottles at other men for no reason except a difference in skin color be considered equal to other human beings? They can't be.

I know as much about the Klan as anybody else. I've read about the Klan in newspapers, books and magazines, and have seen Klan marches and rallies on TV news reports. In high school, I used the Klan for the topic of a paper about the person or organization, past or present, I felt had contributed the least amount of good to humanity.

But until the civil rights march in Forsyth county, the Klan never seemed human. It was an entity made up of nameless faces that managed to put a damper on any event promoting equal-

ity and civil rights. The violence associated with the organization was real, but it wasn't real enough to have a large impact on me. Murders, beatings, cross-burnings and various other violent incidents were simply reports on the news or articles in print. I had never witnessed or experienced firsthand any of the violence connected with the Klan.

So when the cameras in Cumming recorded the actions and words of the Klan and its supporters, the baseness of the organization struck me hard for the first time. These are people who have no greater regard for another human being's feelings and safety than they do for the paper this column is printed on. To hear those people chanting "White power!" and "Niggers go home!" and to see rocks they threw actually striking the marchers was enough to make me ashamed of my race.

And Cumming, Ga. isn't the only place racial violence is taking place.

A sample of the news stories from the last several months can attest to the fact that America is taking steps backward instead of forward where racism is concerned:

- A black cadet at the Citadel, a military academy in Charleston, S.C., was subjected to racist hazing when several white cadets entered his room with a burning cross.

- The sheriff of Jefferson Parish, a New Orleans suburb, made the suggestion (later retracted after public outcry) that blacks walking in white neighborhoods be stopped for questioning.

- A young black man died trying to escape from whites who were beating him with fists and baseball bats in Howard Beach, N.Y. before Christmas.

- Boutique owners in New York and Washington, D.C., began posting signs reading "Men by appointment only" to keep black men — potential robbers in store owners' eyes — from entering their stores.

This country has never been entirely free from racism, but if the events of the past several months are any indication, racism is on its way back into the mainstream of American society. Since 1980, the number of racial attacks reported in the United States per year has increased by almost 300 percent. The Justice De-

partment's community relations section recorded 99 such attacks in 1980. In 1986, that number had increased to 276. And, depending on how racial attacks are defined, other listings go much higher. Time magazine reports that New York City alone, the police department's bias-incident unit reported such occurrences increased from four a week to 10 a week in just the past month.

The most discouraging thing about racism is that it appears to be an unsolvable problem. Members of the Klan and other racist groups are instilling their children the same misguided beliefs that they hold. When cameras focus on infants dressed in miniature white robes and hoods, toddlers waving Confederate flags and teens brandishing signs emblazoned with swastikas and the words "White Power," remember — these children are the future of our nation.

Paula Vogrin is a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Presidential candidates should run, not crawl

Joe Biden, D-Del., says he will run for president if he can find the time for it. He says he has other responsibilities — you know, like being chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. In California, he gave a terrific speech on leadership and then, in a press conference, said he's not too sure he can offer it. He has so many demands on his time.



Richard Cohen

Mario Cuomo, D-N.Y., is similarly conflicted. He is governor of the Empire State and campaigning for the White House takes so much time. Besides, he is awed by the job. It's a very important one, "the most important in the universe" and fame is a heavy burden.

Indignantly, Cuomo notes that his daughter Madeline has been called a bleached blonde in the newspapers. "I mean, I could strangle that guy," the governor observed.

Together, these gifted men are the leading members of the Presidential Procrastination Society. Their anguished indecision is in the public domain. They wondered about how their families would fare in a presidential campaign. That behind them, they now wonder if they have the time for a campaign. Biden is putting the demands on his time into a computer to see, apparently, if there really are 24 hours in a day. Cuomo spurns the computer. He is ready to declare his intention to study whether he should have any intentions.

For an actor, Hamlet is a great role. The indecision and ambiguity that is synonymous with his name enriches the part. But for a politician, a Hamlet-like persona spells trouble. It announces that he knows something about himself that his admirers don't. Why is he holding back? Why all the political stuttering? Whatever the reason, the very public anguish of these two politicians is the antithesis of leadership. Instead of launching a crusade, they both seem to be awaiting a draft.

In Biden's case, he has been circling a presidential campaign for well over four years now. His organization oozes doubt and hesitation and you get the sense, maybe unfairly, that the champ is always looking to his handlers for encouragement: Can I win? Do I have the time? Send me a memo. Do a time-and-motion study. Could it be that Biden real-

izes he lacks that extra gene — that overweening drive and ambition that characterized John F. Kennedy?

As for Cuomo, could he be wondering if he can take the heat? Concerns about family are legitimate enough, but Cuomo is already in the fishbowl as governor of New York. Or maybe his doubts have to do with the critical area of foreign policy? He has never really dealt with it and, for a public official, he is something of an urban provincial: a big-city boy whose idea of foreign travel is New Jersey. A potential presidential candidate need only twirl a globe to have second thoughts: Nicaragua, Lebanon, the Philippines, Iran. Cuomo may prefer to whistle "I Love New York."

Neither Cuomo nor Biden are fools. On the contrary, they are both bright and insightful. Better than Ronald Reagan ever did, Cuomo realizes that knowing little about foreign affairs is hardly an asset. And as for Biden, he might sense that knowledge and expertise are not enough when it comes to seeking the presidency. You have to show you want it. The lust that Jimmy Carter said he had in his heart for women, he really had for the White House. He made it there on raw ambition.

The presidency is not your average job. It should go to the politician who has a vision, a message and fire in his belly. It should go to someone who picks up the newspaper, slams it down and says, "They can't do that." It should go this time around to someone who is furious about the deficit, balance of trade, cuts in the education budget, the plight of the underclass, declining living standards and a foreign policy being made on the fly by a clique of paunchy Indiana Joneses.

Aside from the way he has conducted his own presidency, Reagan ought to be an example to Cuomo and Biden. He really did slam down the newspaper in indignation. He had a message, an ideology and a program. He wanted to get to the White House in the worst way. Even between campaigns, he campaigned. There was never any question he was going to run for president.

Please, Mario and Joe, do us no favors. The presidency is not a humbling affair, like entry into a monastic order. It is the country's premier leadership position, and it demands someone who can fill that role, who exults in it, who shows by the very way he approaches it that he is at least as big as the office he seeks. If you want the job, go for it. If not, shut up.

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The Battalion

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REFUGEES FROM COMMUNISM? GEE, THAT'S TOO BAD... BUT HEY! IT'S REALLY GREAT TO KNOW THAT OUR SYSTEM WORKS! ... SEEN ANY PULITZERS AROUND HERE LATELY?



KARL SPENCE THE BATTALION

Mail Call

A real issue

EDITOR:

This letter is not of a political nature like so many I frequently read in this space. I won't address such lofty "intellectual" topics as abolition of the Corps, the existence or nonexistence of God, or whether or not this grand ol' school will ever achieve "worldly" status.

In fact, the subject of this letter is not really open to debate or interpretation by any religious, military or political faction, especially if the members of these groups have decent vision and are not afraid to look up.

The subject matter in question are those unsightly, unworldly, ungodly, untraditional, downright embarrassing stains, blemishes and residual eyesores which cover the exterior of one of the most frequented and observable buildings on our campus: Rudder Tower. I've even seen this structure on postcards.

Will someone please tap Frank Vandiver on the shoulder and let him know that visiting dignitaries and prospective students probably don't find our complacency cleaning very worldly?

If anyone out there agrees, please write The Battalion and let's get a wave of progression headed toward "World University Beach" by starting with the basics. We all know first impressions are very important. Would you wear dirty clothes to an interview?

If you haven't noticed the sordid spaces between the distantly visible windows of Rudder Tower, look up the next time you are within a few hundred yards. I feel confident your eyes will not fail you.

There is an alternative. We could call the soiled outside of Rudder Tower "art". It would blend well with those hideous frogs!

In an effort to gain support from the numerous people at A&M who subscribe to the more conservative and literal view of life, let me remind them of a basic Christian virtue. "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." That should help a bleeding-heart, commie-pinko like me get some right-wing sustenance.

Marty Tate '88

Tell it like it is

EDITOR:

Has anyone on The Battalion editorial board ever been in a high pressure, split second shoot/no shoot situation, such as occurred at a local 7-Eleven store Oct. 22. Has anyone on the board studied the dynamics of these situations? If not, I submit that the board is ill-qualified to pass judgement on men who have trained hundreds of hours for situations like this. Real hostage situations are not as simple as TV would have us believe. In real life, there are usually no cameras to show where robbers are hidden and no script to tell the police who is the robber and who is the victim. For these reasons, police train to quickly understand the varied situations and quickly make the correct decisions.

As I recall, most coverage of the 7-Eleven robbery had the officers handled the situation well. I believe the student/hostage said he was quite happy to be rescued. When someone opposes you — robber vs. police — with deadly force, such as firearms (shotgun) or edged weapons (machete), people who value their lives know that they cannot wait to see if the robber is bluffing. They can and must reply immediately with deadly force. From what I have heard and read, the officers in this situation handled it very well tactically and responded with an appropriate level of force.

To have The Battalion editorial board label the capture of these robbers as "bumbling" and "Rambom" is an unfair slap in the face to the police. It calls into question the professionalism of journalists who would print such an irresponsible statement.

Jay Schoenover '82

Editor's note: The College Station Police Department does not have a hostage crisis training program. The questions raised by The Battalion about the incident stemmed from concerns of the hostages and from prominent law-enforcement officials not associated with the College Station Police Department.

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial board reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.