

Hey, Censors: Let us think for ourselves

The Religious Right is at it again. This time they're not burning copies of "Huckleberry Finn" or "Catcher in the Rye," but calling for the persecution of the director of a Cincinnati art museum.

The director, Dennis Barrie, has been charged with obscenity for showing the controversial photographs of the late Robert Mapplethorpe. If you haven't heard, these photographs are supposedly homoerotic, and the guardians of righteousness claim that the pictures depict obscene and indecent acts of sexual perversion and should therefore be banned.

Mapplethorpe's photographs first gained notoriety when it was discovered that the National Endowment for the Arts funded some of the exhibited photographs. Since then, censors have been protesting the Mapplethorpe exhibit with a zeal not seen since the days of Joseph McCarthy. But the issue here is not about the government funding controversial art like the Mapplethorpe exhibit. Rather, it is who is to decide if something is indecent or obscene — government or the individual?

Mapplethorpe's exhibit was presented in a museum where people had to make a conscious effort to view it. It was not presented over the airwaves or in plain view of the citizens of Cincinnati. Instead, it quietly toured the country until it was labeled pornographic and homoerotic by the likes of Pat Robertson and Senator Jesse Helms.

Most Americans had not even heard of Mapplethorpe until the uproar about his photographs brought nationwide attention. Now, the director of the Cincinnati museum who felt that individuals should decide how they felt about Mapplethorpe's photographs is on trial. Sadly to say, the trial does not seem to be generating the public concern that it deserves.

This trial goes to the core of the American belief of free expression. Are we as a nation going to sit back and allow an individual to be tried on

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criminal charges simply for exhibiting someone else's supposed indecent photographs? What type of judgmental society would convict a man for permitting people to think for themselves?

If the critics of Mapplethorpe's photographs believe that they are shielding the public from some God-awful evil, think again. Where do they get the self-righteous notion that their views and convictions should apply to all mankind?

The director of the Cincinnati museum is not on trial here, the First Amendment is. And it is the citizens of the United States who will have to suffer if Dennis Barrie is convicted.

Does the First Amendment ensure that individuals have the right to express views or ideas which society finds unpopular? You bet it does. If this trial is not the perfect example of this right being trampled upon by a lynch mob of censor zealots, what is?

Let the flock of piousness form their own opinion on Mapplethorpe's photos, but that doesn't allow them to decide for the rest of us what we should see, hear, view, or think. And let's not permit them to bastardize the First Amendment by saying that society should decide what is indecent and what's not. Our history is full of examples of people who were unpopular because of their views; yet looking back, we realize that immorality is purely relative.

So let's not get ourselves in a frenzy over photographs that seem to arouse a few misguided individuals. Instead, let's view these photographs as any other constitutionally protected expression. Voltaire said it best over 200 hundred years ago in an essay appropriately named *Essay on Tolerance*, "Think for yourselves and let others enjoy the privilege to do so too."

Patrick Nolan is a senior political science major.

Abort debate over abortion laws

The nomination of David Souter to the Supreme Court has brought the abortion conflict into the limelight once again.

I say "conflict" rather than "debate" because rational debate on this issue long ago gave way to strident conflict. Few people are speaking rationally about this subject, and virtually no one is listening, either. Furthermore, the news organizations usually report the most extreme and unreasonable views — those of the activists on both sides. The vast majority of reasonable citizens, looking for leadership, are instead treated to a shouting match.

I would like to identify what disturbs me most about the "party lines" of both the abortion rights and the anti-abortion activists. I maintain that they are unrealistic, hypocritical and uncompromising.

The single most unrealistic aspect of the conflict is that both sides think that I either can't or shouldn't tell the difference between a cell, a fertilized ovum, a seven-month old fetus and a baby. Of course, they all agree that a cell is not a baby, but they refuse to accept the simple observation that a fertilized egg resembles a cell, and a seven-month fetus a baby, far more than they resemble each other. Any person who wishes to formulate some public policy without considering this distinction loses both my attention and my respect.

It doesn't matter that one side wants them both given full constitutional rights and the other side wants them given none; neither is giving consideration to basic biological reality. Heartbeat, brain function and viability count for a lot in my book; I don't think one can begin to formulate a reasoned opinion without discussing them.

Once one outlines how life develops (not when it begins), one can then attempt to consider what the proper role of government may be in protecting it. This is where hypocrisy rears its ugly head, on both the abortion and anti-abortion sides. I used to think that it was the conservatives who wanted less government and the liberals who wanted more. Here we have the pro-abortion (usually "liberal") folks insisting that government stay out and the anti-abortionists (usually "conservative") who want government in — in the bedroom, as a matter of fact. Then once the child is born, they swap

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positions, just to keep things tidy.

Conservatives want no government say in how children are raised, educated, disciplined or guided; while liberals seem to want a social worker in each living room, explaining how this particular family is "dysfunctional." If the issue weren't so serious, this inconsistency would be amusing.

The question of government involvement is an important one; few people in the United States today give it enough thought. Just because something is "bad" (drug addiction, prostitution, junk food) does not mean the government should prohibit it; likewise, just because something is "good" (health care, auto insurance, higher education) doesn't mean that the government should provide it. This simple and obvious statement should be heeded more often; we would avoid a lot of public conflict about things people can't agree on (funding for the arts, SDI, foreign aid or agricultural subsidies). I'm getting tired of pressure groups asking the government to "force" various people to do or not do things (or to pay for them); the government has too much say in our

lives as it is without our exacerbating the problem.

Last, there seems to be no recognition, on either side, of the importance of compromise in resolving political disputes. Compromise, by definition, is unsatisfactory in some respect to everyone concerned; the idea is that since we are all living here together we have to try to find things to agree on — we compromise on the less important aspects of an issue in order to coexist. This is where we need the leadership of our politicians and officeholders. They cannot provide it, however, when an issue is so polarized that any compromise can only make enemies.

Somehow, we must reopen dialogue on this subject. "Come, let us reason together." Even though everything has already been said, and even though everyone has already made up their mind. The so-called "pro-lifers" had better start considering the lives of all the people involved, and the so-called "pro-choicers" need to admit that not all choices are equally desirable (or even acceptable).

I don't consider myself wise enough to have an answer to this problem. But it is so difficult, so troubling, and so significant that I know I can't afford to listen to anyone who won't address all of the issues. Instead of rhetoric, I'll be looking for reason. I only hope I'll find some.

Jeff Farmer is a graduate student in mathematics.

Mail Call

Don't harass the visitors, Army

EDITOR:

If you were a visitor at an away game, would you participate in their yells and their school song? I think not. So why do so many of you insist on forcing visitors to participate in ours? At Saturday's North Texas game we found ourselves having to apologize to a proud Eagle for the juvenile behavior of fellow Ags. Because of his school spirit he chose not to uncover during our yells and found himself a victim of verbal abuse. We're afraid to think of the impression he must have now of Texas A&M and its student body. Be proud to attend A&M but realize others have pride in their schools also. Rest, Army.

Amy Beardsley '93 accompanied by two signatures

Human rights, environmental fronts must unite

If you can't smell it, then open up your nose. There's a revolution brewing here in America. But violence is not an ingredient in this stew. This revolution originates from the love in the hearts of people, and it has been cooking on the American stove for a few years now.

The non-violent revolution can be divided into two basic fronts. The environmental front includes the whole environmental movement and the animal rights movement. I will call the other front the human rights front because it concerns itself mostly with the rights and the quality of life of humans. The human rights front includes the human rights movement, the workers' rights movement, the civil rights movement, the working-class renaissance and the peace movement.

The two fronts have been making good progress. Simply looking at the Texas A&M campus, this fact becomes obvious. In the fall of 1988, there was only one activist group on campus: Students Against Apartheid. Today, there are several environmental groups and a good variety of human rights organizations, and these groups are

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growing in membership and prestige. And there seems to be an increasing number of freshmen in each group, which means that the younger generations are growing up to be more environmentally, socially and politically conscious.

The progress that the two fronts have made working separately both on the national level and the local level has been good, but in order for either of the fronts to succeed, they must come together immediately. Both groups must realize that their enemy is common and that all of their problems are entangled in the same corrupt structures.

The control that Big Business holds over the government, the media, and

our minds is a source of both environmental and human rights problems. Corrupt and uncaring government officials send arms to the rebel coalition in Cambodia (that includes the Khmer Rouge) and allow toxic chemicals to seep into our drinking water.

Logging companies leach off the taxpayers through subsidies and bulldoze forests. Weapons companies make the weapons used to arm both the assassins that kill ecologists and the Salvadoran death squads. America's insistence on collecting the Third World debt keeps the Third World impoverished and necessitates the destruction of precious rainforests. The hazardous chemicals that workers are exposed to are the same ones that run into our lakes and rivers. The list goes on.

It is obvious that both the environmental and the human rights groups need to solve some of the same fundamental problems in our government and our society to succeed. The individual members of each front often spill into the others' group, but

the leaders of the various groups must come together to organize for greater cooperation and coordination. They should unite under a common umbrella organization that works toward both environmental and human rights goals.

Rachel Carson, Cesar Chavez, Ralph Nader, John Robbins, Jesse Jackson, and Mother Theresa sitting at the same table talking about problems and solutions would make the corporate money mongers shake in their gator-skinned loafers. Imagine Amnesty International, the AFL-CIO, Ox Fam America, SANE, Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and Common Cause working together as one. It would cause a hurricane of change throughout America.

But it takes two legs to walk. The movement must incorporate even those that happen to be right of center. Having one portion of society resent the changes being made will only slow change and leave a bitter taste in everybody's mouth.

Thus, the current groups must work hard not to alienate their conservative brothers and sisters. No, I do not mean

for any group to sell out. They should educate the public so that all may understand and some may join. Image does count because practicality is a requirement for success.

Finally, a united third party must begin to work its way up from lower local levels. The Democratic Party compromises so much on the environment and human rights that the only reason the activists hang on to them is to prevent Republican victories. If a third party can build itself up from local successes, it could one day challenge the likes of Bush and Dukakis.

So, you start out with millions of caring but angry people that are sick of seeing our Mother Earth being raped, and people working and living in putrid conditions. Put them into a big melting pot. Stir in a pound of Unity. Keep the mixture calm, practical, and directed. Let the Party people smell it. If they don't like it, start your own party; heat until world peace, prosperity and ecological harmony are reached. We have the recipe. Let's cook.

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Adventures In Cartooning

by Don Atkinson Jr.

