

We're in this world together
Learn to respect other
people's viewpoints

Recently, it seems that one of the hottest topics on the Opinion Page has been the tolerance (or from some points of view, intolerance) of other opinions, ideas or even other people. This is a broad issue, as it deals with interpersonal relations of all kinds.

The most obvious displays of intolerance appeared on Feb. 4 (B. Jon Traylor) and Feb. 7 (Robert Low). These gentlemen suggested that all those who hold opposing views should leave. Moreover, this topic deals with interracial relations, as in the questions raised about the relevance of Black History Month.

There is something everyone should know about this issue: Step back, be quiet, listen and learn.

I don't think the racial issue is simply prejudice. The root of the problem is much deeper than "who is different" and "who is like me." My prejudices are the result of my own ignorance and, more importantly, my attitude toward that ignorance.

Obviously, I attend this University to try to replace some of that ignorance with insight and knowledge. For the most part, I am quite open to that kind of learning.

Academics are definitely an important part of my life here at Texas A&M. If I have a "bad attitude" about academics, the direct result is a poor GPA. However, there is much more learning to do to overcome ignorance (and prejudice) than studying textbooks.

Like myself, I would guess that many readers don't know the first thing about any one of the many cultures and peoples represented here at A&M. For the most part, I too have not been open to these "other" people. Although I have never outwardly shown any blatant contempt for a member of another ethnic group, I have developed an attitude toward those "others."

I often have been annoyed with people who weren't more like myself. The way I saw it, if they were going to reside in this country and go to this University, they should adapt to my way of life. There is something very wrong with this frame of mind.

I was comfortable with this kind of attitude because it is so prevalent around here. It is too easy to remain static in my own little world and be unaffected by the diversity around me.

Besides, this is my country and my University; there are more people like me than all those minorities. We are right, and they should adjust to us, right? WRONG!

Not only do I annoy and insult peoples of different backgrounds by showing my intolerance, I do myself a great injustice. These people are every bit as vital to our society as those who share my background. I could stand to learn from everyone I meet. I must be open to that, otherwise, I perpetuate my ignorance and manifest prejudice.

What brought on this revelation, you ask. Why change? I was fortunate enough to attend a retreat for new and old members of MSC Hospitality.

The first thing I noticed about this organization was the diversity of its members. I thought I'd never find a place for me there. I was so wrong. I could be myself and allow others to be themselves without regard to where they were from or what they believed. I learned a great deal in one weekend (and I didn't even bring a textbook).

The greatest impact occurred when Mr. Kevin Buchman spoke about

M. Tobey Hayes

Reader's Opinion

"multicultural diversity" at the retreat. He mentioned many valuable points regarding the subject of acceptance and tolerance of other people.

I feel the most important point was that we need a change of attitude: We need to experience each other's cultures and be willing to learn from each other.

This does not mean we should conform to all these different people. We should maintain our own identity, but develop that identity by learning about and experiencing other ways of life.

Let us take it a step further. Let's try to adjust our general outlook. How does this sound: Step out of the I/me attitude and adopt the we/us frame of mind.

We are all in this world together. We can make the best of it by listening to one another and learning from one another. We don't have to like what someone else is saying or doing, we just have to accept it as the VALID (and valuable) opinion of someone other than ourselves.

Thus, we would hear much less of "if you don't believe this, you don't belong here" and "if you don't support that, then you're not an Aggie — go to t.u." I have never discovered a certain code of beliefs or doctrine that determines my Agginess. I certainly hope that one does not exist.

So, even the bonfire protesters are Aggies. I don't agree with their point of view (although they have some valid points), but I respect their right to their opinion.

Even the war protesters are Aggies (and Americans). I don't agree with them for the most part, but it is ridiculous to suggest that they leave the University (or the state, or the country, or the planet ...). This kind of suggestion displays a very narrow-minded attitude. We need to avoid this "tunnel vision" at all costs.

The beauty of being an American is the fact that we can be ourselves, speak our mind and live in freedom without someone else dictating our thoughts and actions. Enjoy it and learn from it. It's worth it!

I have certainly learned a lot from the retreat. I owe most of it to the "real" people of MSC Hospitality and the genuine attitude of Buchman. I thank both wholeheartedly. God bless you all.

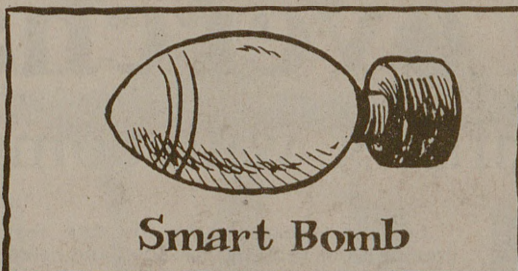
I will close by paraphrasing a wonderful analogy that Buchman presented this weekend. He delivered the "tossed salad" theory of society.

According to this theory, we all represent the ingredients of the salad: the lettuce, the tomato, the onions, the peppers, etc. Each of us comes together to form a whole and complete entity (the salad), and yet we all retain our individual identity and flavor. Every individual is vital to the whole.

Think about it ...
E Pluribus Unum — One out of many.

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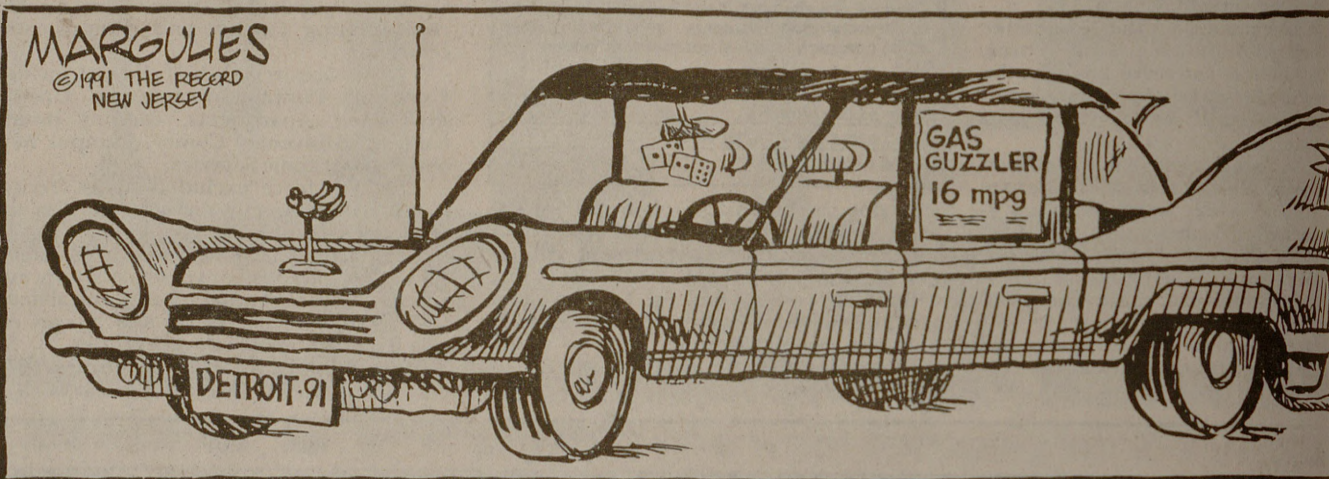
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Don't believe all you hear

EDITOR:

The United States of America is at war. But what is the definition of war?

Our government has deployed troops, ships, planes and everything else in a country neighboring another country which has invaded and now occupies a third little country which borders both.

For 26 days, our planes have delivered a number of air strikes (so high that it is hard for me to comprehend) while the occupying troops take cover.

Before the war, Iraq was said to have had the fourth largest military machine in the world, but could not defeat their neighbor to the north, who they had been fighting with for eight years while we condoned it.

But now things have changed. Suddenly, the leader of the invading country is the reincarnation of Adolph Hitler, looks kind of like Joseph Stalin — if you stare at his picture long enough — and is insanelly trying to take over the world.

But is it realistic to think that a man would suddenly go insane last August and seek out democracy with the intention of rape and pillage?

Then why is it so shocking that he would use his military machine, paid for in part with our oil consumption, to invade a rich little country which lies between himself and the Persian Gulf?

Weren't the borders created by the British and French after World War II? How sacred do the people in that region think those boundaries are?

He has been there for a long time, ruling the same ruthlessly way that we now have realized. But now things have changed.

The world oil market, which has repercussions in this country, has been threatened. Some insist that this war is not over oil, but why do we complain so loudly that Japan does not pay their fair share of this war; the justification of which is that they import a higher percentage of their oil from that region than we do?

I'm not totally opposed to this deployment of troops, etc. But it scares me to see people so influenced by emotion in the form of nationalism and patriotism.

Our service people have their lives on the line, and this war has been set up for us all too well.

We have been shown a brutal dictator who looks very arrogant and oozes with machismo. He has invaded and brutalized a helpless, innocent little country and is looking for more.

We have joined together with the rest of the world in an alliance in order to liberate this little country and protect others from the same fate.

And furthermore, he and his poorly trained envoys have looked awkward but stood firmly to their position when we insisted that they back off.

Again, I am not against our actions nor am I justifying Iraq's. However, I must insist that this war be put into perspective before I can jump onto this emotional bandwagon and justify the loss of life and physical destruction by attacking this Hussein monster.

I don't like him, and I thank God I'm on the other side of the world.

But he is the same man that we supported to a certain extent in his fight against Iran. And it didn't really matter how many thousands of people died then.

I hope he gives up soon and no more people die, because when we are through there, there are a few million people who need liberating.

Blind faith is dangerous. Study the history and culture of the region and don't believe everything you hear.

Derek Ryter
graduate student

Flowers of peace

EDITOR:

On Monday night, Feb. 19, University Police detained Hugh Stearns, owner of Front Porch Cafe, for the "criminal mischief" of placing at the MSC a flower wreath in the shape of a peace sign.

In this act, the police have exhibited precisely that behavior of human beings which leads to war, and all similar horrors.

Had the wreath not been made in the shape of a peace symbol, but was in a circle of yellow flowers, I wonder if police would have still called it criminal mischief and handcuffed Stearns.

Granted, we are (or as some would say, "were") a military school, but does it warrant the University Police to behave in such a fashion?

Freedom is a word, but beyond it is an attitude, a lifestyle, a certain deep and non-negotiable respect for conscience.

Somewhere in this freedom lie seeds of peace and seeds of destruction. The choice is ours: Charr the innocent civilians, bomb nuclear reactors, fill the oceans with oil spills, be international 911; OR listen to the screams of a man from Boston who, in his freedom, charred himself to death or to the innocent Stearns.

May both the yellow ribbons and the peace sign bring peace to those who survive. May those who die someday forgive the species to which they too belonged and save us from ourselves.

May we hear the silent screams of yellow ribbons and flowers of peace.

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The Battalion

(USPS 045 360)

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Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

The Battalion is published daily, except Saturday, Sunday, holidays, exam periods and when school is not in session during fall and spring semesters; publication is Tuesday through Friday during the summer session. Newsroom: 845-3313.

Mail subscriptions are \$20 per semester, \$40 per school year and \$50 per full year: 845-2611. Advertising rates furnished on request: 845-2696.

Our address: The Battalion, 230 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111.

Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.
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