

Guilty until proven innocent

Tactics used by Charlottesville police are nothing more than racial profiling

In the German Expressionist film "M," a rash of child murders throws an entire community into panic and soon has its citizens presuming innocent men guilty. Fortunately, such a thing would never happen in America, right? That's the way it is supposed to work in theory.



COLLINS EZEANYIM

Someone should send a memo to the police department in Charlottesville, Va. It is common law that Americans are innocent until proven guilty. Indeed, this happens to apply to black males who nonetheless are racially profiled in every way imaginable.

For months, police in the town, home to the University of Virginia, were trying to catch a serial rapist using a controversial and, in hindsight, not-so-brilliant idea. They asked hundreds of black men in the area to have their cheeks swabbed to collect DNA samples to see if one of the samples matched that of the rapist — who also happened to be black. Nevermind that the tests were voluntary, the simple act of being asked to undergo such an inspection is a humiliating and degrading experience. The tactics used by the Charlottesville police may have been legal, but they were far from ethical.

Charlottesville police said that in most cases, black men were chosen to be tested based on tips given to them by the public, according to The Associated Press. This aspect of their investigation only made an already horrendous situation worse. It is not a secret that much of the public regards black men — especially young black men — with suspicion. For many members of the Charlottesville community, it probably wouldn't have taken much

to arouse suspicion.

At a forum held at UV, Charlottesville Police Chief Timothy J. Longo was asked if the suspect had been white, would he still have authorized the DNA testing. "Absolutely," he said. "I will do them all." He added that he would perform the same type of test if the suspect were Asian or a woman. These statements made by Longo are dubious and an obvious attempt at damage control by the Charlottesville Police Department.

The Charlottesville police would never perform such widespread testing on groups such as white men because their population is so large that such tactics would be prohibitive. Black men, on the other hand, are only a minority of the population and thus make easy targets for this type of harassment.

Black men have grown up in this country with the notion that they are always suspects for something. Department store employees will tail them, fearful they might steal something. People, afraid they might be robbed, will cross the street when they see them approaching. In fact, this reality of perpetual suspicion has become so ingrained that when young black men come of age they are taught by older generations how to deal with the police when — not if — police stop their vehicle.

Some might call the policy adopted by the Charlottesville police necessary. After all, the suspect has been responsible for six attacks since February 1997 and may be responsible for up to 12 more assaults. Everyone agrees it is of utmost importance that this cretin be caught.

Putting aside the race issue, manpower has been wasted eliminating the reported 197 black men who submitted to DNA-testing to exclude themselves from being considered potential suspects. Also, the ACLU planned to distribute a flier that would alert black men to the fact that they have the legal right to refuse the test.

Charlottesville authorities will be put in a bind if the rapist they're looking for refuses to be tested.

Ultimately, this is racial profiling at its worse. This is further evidence that Charlottesville police required proof of a black man's innocence as opposed to evidence of his guilt. UV graduate student Steven Turner put it best: "Because the suspect is black, every black man is a suspect." Turner had the misfortune of having to twice refuse to take the DNA swab test. This is the exact opposite of how American due process is supposed to work.

After this story made national headlines and the Charlottesville method of tracking down criminals was correctly criticized, Longo reversed course and told The Washington Post that he had issued a temporary halt to the "DNA Dragnet." He said it will continue once more "stringent, well-defined criteria" are developed. It is a shame this type of compromise wasn't the guiding force behind the investigation from the very beginning.

Collins Ezeanyim is a senior computer engineering major. Graphic by Rylie Deyoe

"Black man, on the other hand, are only a minority of the population and thus make easy targets for this type of harassment."

Aggie tradition should not be exploited in hopes of gaining the audience's favor

Never again. That is the way I felt the evening of April 21, leaving Reed Arena. Never again should Texas A&M's traditions be exploited for political purposes. I could barely believe that I had just come from a memorial service, and that the eulogy had been a campaign speech. The 2004 Muster speaker was wrong to stump for Vision 2020 during his address prior to the Roll Call for the Absent. This should never happen again.



MATT MADDOX

This year's campus Muster speaker was Jon Hagler, Class of 1958 and a leader in the Association of Former Students and the Texas A&M Foundation. Hagler has contributed years of his life and thousands of dollars to A&M. However, Hagler's deep involvement in the drafting of and fund-raising for Vision 2020 has blinded him to what is an appropriate topic for Muster, and to the appropriateness of Vision 2020 itself.

To Hagler, Muster probably presented the perfect opportunity to try and salvage the reputation of Vision 2020. The Class of 1954 was in attendance along with thousands of devoted former students — the target audience for fund-raising for Vision 2020. And since those former students are further removed from current cam-

pus politics, a simplified and one-sided presentation of Vision 2020 was all that Hagler needed to persuade his audience.

Hagler started off his talk in the right tone, relating a humorous but tasteful story about American soldiers serving overseas. He hailed Muster as "A day of remembrance, of reverence for life and of re-experiencing the Aggie Spirit." Soon though, Hagler's words lost their reverence and digressed to defining the Aggie spirit as something that endorses Vision 2020.

Vision 2020 was a plan drafted starting in 1997 on how to "make A&M a top 10 university by the year 2020." Sadly, this "top 10" rating is based on the highly-discredited U.S. News & World Report magazine ranking system.

Critics of this system include the deans at 178 of America's law schools, the National Opinion Research Council and even former employees of the magazine. Their criticisms range from the ranking's fluctuating system for rating schools, the way it resembles a popularity contest by the university officials who vote in the survey and how it fails to address "the other education" that A&M is renowned for. How this embodies the

Aggie spirit is a mystery.

Hagler equated the need to embrace Vision 2020 today as the same "crossroad" as embracing Earl Rudder's changes to A&M. The difference in the crossroad presented by Vision 2020 is that it will slam doors on future Aggies, rather than opening them. A recent example of this is the faculty hiring initiative recently begun under Vision 2020. While Hagler stated that new faculty will benefit the campus, he failed to mention that the subsequent 33 percent tuition hike imposed on students over a one-year period needed to afford the hires is preventing current and future Aggies from attending A&M.

Hagler tried to quiet critics of Vision 2020 by claiming of Vision 2020 by claiming that "We (are not) trying to mimic Berkeley." However, since Berkeley is one of the six target schools cited in the report as being well-regarded by U.S. News & World Report, we are trying to emulate it.

Hagler also attempted to dismiss critics of the program who say that Vision 2020 cuts out tradition from A&M. While providing no evidence that these critics are wrong, Hagler instead con-

vinced the audience that the critics' assertions are correct. By interrupting Muster on behalf of Vision 2020, Hagler showed that no tradition is too sacred to be changed for the sake of Vision 2020's political expediency.

Hagler stated in his speech, "The Aggie Spirit asks us to take time to discern right from wrong, to think independently and to then do something about it — follow our conscience." Some will say that there is no room to criticize the prestigious Mr. Hagler. However, respecting the positions of Muster speaker, Foundation Trustee Emeritus and Association board member does not require respecting his message. My simple hope is that when the time has come for my fellow Aggies to say "here" after my name is called, my eulogy will not be a platform for political initiatives, that it instead praised A&M for being the best, not criticizing us for what some people want changed. Muster, and not Vision 2020, is the embodiment of the Aggie Spirit and should not be corrupted. Never again.

Matt Maddox is a senior management major.

"Soon though, Hagler's words lost their reverence and digressed to defining the Aggie spirit as something that endorses Vision 2020."

MAIL CALL

The line between hero and murderer is blurry

In response to Mile Walters' April 28 column:

Iraqis do not know how to react to the American invasion of their country. If Iraqis love the values that make their life good, then anyone who seeks to supplant them with foreign values through murders and bombings must be recognized as evil. Anyone who kills a Muslim, harms an Iraqi citizen or sends someone to kill Muslims should be a marked man. The distinction between the killing of Iraqis and the resistance to imperialist foreign invaders must be made.

We are at war, and since the United Nations allows for the targeting of hostile commanders as a legitimate act of war, with international approval we can assassinate the American commander in chief.

The above argument for assassination is ridiculous, but it is the exact same argument you made for justifying these crimes. If you truly support assassinations of enemy military commanders, then you must support a terrorist's right to assassinate President Bush. Thankfully your views are not entertained by most of the international community. Our world would be a very ugly place if they were.

Tim Holm
Class of 2007

Israelis are as guilty as Palestinians

To assume that Ariel Sharon and the Israeli government are the good who are seeking to protect themselves and the people they are sworn to protect is a naive understanding at best. Mr. Walters tries to make a difference between the good Israeli government which is only committing surgical strikes on terrorist leaders and the evil Palestinian terrorists who are targeting civilians.

The problem with this is that Sharon and his government are also killing innocent people unjustly. To simply think that only terrorists are being targeted would mean that Rachel Corrie was a terrorist when she was run over by an Israeli bulldozer multiple times because she simply stood in front of a Palestinian home refusing to let it be demolished. It's a shame that most of us do not know her story. And using a helicopter and three missiles to go after a quadriplegic in a wheelchair, which consequently took the lives of nine other bystanders, is hardly surgical.

If we hold occupying the land of innocent people and destroying their lives in so many different ways as some of our values, then, as Mr. Walters says, "Americans should stand by Israel as a country that shares their own values." However, if we are people who hold to the concept of struggling for truth and justice as our values, then we need to realize

that the Israeli-Palestinian issue is far from too complex to think of it simply as good versus evil.

Ali Hakeem
Class of 2004

Geneva Convention states detainees' rights

In response to Nick Davis' April 26 column:

It's ironic that Mr. Davis mentioned the Geneva Conventions in his article only to write: "These detainees are not U.S. citizens, so they have no rights."

Mr. Davis, the detainees are human, and under the Geneva Conventions they have basic human rights. The fact that they aren't U.S. citizens or they are "enemy combatants" doesn't change anything.

Article Five of the Third Geneva Convention states that anyone detained in the course of an armed conflict — soldier or otherwise — is presumed to be a prisoner of war until a competent court or tribunal determines otherwise. In the case of the Guantanamo Bay captives, this has not occurred. Thus, the "enemy combatant" designation is invalid.

Mr. Davis also labels all the men held in Guantanamo as terrorists even though they have not formally been charged with

a crime. What acts of terrorism did they commit? What evidence is there against them? Mr. Davis didn't answer any of these questions in his column. His charge: "They desired to kill American soldiers, and they would love to see many Americans suffer."

He accuses them of having a desire to kill! Not committing the crime, but wanting to do it! No wonder Mr. Davis doesn't want them to be tried in federal courts — his case against them doesn't even hold water.

Midhat Farooqi
Class of 2004

Some grad students do not feel included

In response to Chris Mahaffey's April 22 column:

As a graduate student here at Texas A&M I have not had the great experience that most have made this university out to be.

I would like to ask the question about the role of graduate students here on this campus. We are more than just research gophers, fill-ins for absent profs or test proctors. Some of us didn't have the opportunity to attend A&M for their undergraduate, like myself, and when we get here we feel kind of mis-

placed. I have never felt like I am a part of this family.

When I first arrived here, a friend of mine and I asked a fellow grad student about participation in yells. Her response was, "You're dead, you can't yell." How am I supposed to react to that? I had to learn The War Hymn from the local phone book. Most campus organizations don't readily accept or include graduate students. When I arrived,

I asked several of the student leaders on campus about getting more of the grad students and international students to participate, especially if Bonfire returns, and some were very proactive about this. Now they're not. Some grad students have families and jobs, but we want to belong. What do we have to do to be included around here?

Randy Jackson
graduate student

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