

Americans could learn from culture 'gap'

Mind the Gap. That popular London phrase not only warns one of falling into the gap between the tube car and the tube platform but also applies to the cultural differences I observed between the United States and Western Europe, particularly England.

Last spring, I spent the semester studying abroad at the Worrell House in London. It was by far the best semester I have ever had at Wake Forest and was the semester in which I learned the most academically — but more importantly, the most about life in general.

Studying abroad, no matter where you go, offers you the chance to broaden your worldview. Throughout years of schooling and learning the history of the world, I thought I had a pretty good sense of Europe even without seeing it.

But the chance to see everything from Buckingham Palace to Roman ruins with one's own eyes completely changes one's paradigm. I now see the world through a very different lens: Where the United States was once the center of my thought, I am now able to better understand the world as a whole. Reading up on different countries and different peoples is a poor replacement for experience, the true teacher.

Traveling through much of Western Europe on spring break was an interesting experience. The differences in lifestyles between countries like France and Italy are apparent and fascinating to observe. However, I think the most interesting differences are those between the United States and England.

One assumes that because the United States shares a mostly common language and some common history with England, Americans could not be that different from the English. Yet they are.

First there is the language. Besides slang like "bloody" and "bloke," the British use many different and often more verbose, but obvious, names: tube instead of subway, way out instead of exit, way in instead of entrance, Kellogg's Frosties instead of Kellogg's Frosted Flakes and washing-up liquid instead of dishwashing soap. Sometimes the smallest differences are the most intriguing.

Then there is society in general. The British do have a strong sense of propriety, though the atmosphere does not seem quite as repressive as perhaps it once was. For the most part, the people are polite and

RACHEL SHEEDY

MANAGING EDITOR

reserved — quite different from Americans who do have an innate tendency to be loud and obnoxious, perhaps stemming from our original rebellious, revolutionary nature.

On the one hand British society is reserved, but in some respects their society is more open than American culture. Sex and alcohol, in particular, are two topics that do not have the same taboos as they do here in puritanical America.

Condom ads run in magazines. And in America where nudity is mostly relegated to porn movies, the British put it onstage in their plays. Alcohol regulations are also more lax — open containers are not a sin and the drinking age is not much of an issue.

Pubs abound in Britain where people stop in and have a drink or two with some conversation. Drinking is more of a social affair than a "let's go get drunk" endeavor, though that's not to say that I didn't see plenty of

Drinking is more of a social affair than a "let's go get drunk" endeavor, though that's not to say that I didn't see plenty of inebriated British people.

inebriated British people. The point is that English society and European society in general do not have the same hypocritical attitudes that pervade America. In America, institutions tell you not to do this and not to do that, but then everybody goes out and does it anyway.

In Europe, people seem to embrace all of life, good and bad, and don't beat themselves up for doing so. It's too bad Americans haven't caught on to this way of thinking.

Experiencing these societal differences is the greatest aspect of studying abroad. Not only do you learn about other cultures, but you learn about your own culture and how your culture has shaped you.

Being abroad is like taking a step backward and getting a view of the bigger picture. I no longer live in just the South or just the United States — but in the world. Global society is a reality, and to best see how you fit in it is to go out and explore.

For those who have gone abroad, hopefully my observations are not too far off the mark. For those who haven't, I highly suggest and recommend that you take the time to go and see what's out there. When you do, don't forget to mind the gap.



DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Fiery gab has consequences

MATTHEW J. GILLEY

STUDENT COLUMNIST

Last spring, a deafening roar shook the downtown district of Oklahoma City. As the smoke cleared and the damage was assessed, the whole nation reeled at the atrocity of the attack. The shock, however, was not solely attributed to the wanton disregard of human life.

Americans were also struck with the realization that acts of dissent in their country have turned increasingly violent, and that the United States is no longer a safe haven from terrorism.

The bomb did not explode in an unfamiliar foreign city. The accused perpetrators were some of their own.

Although the outcome of the prosecution's case against the accused bombers is hardly certain, a fair assessment of the Oklahoma City bombing is that it is a violent manifestation of the recent polarization of American politics.

Several impassioned issues such as abortion, firearms legislation and the extent of federal power have splintered the population into belligerent groups demanding rash action in support of their assorted agendas.

Meanwhile, feeding off this excitement are a new breed of mean-spirited, self-styled "analysts" and "watchdogs" who fan the flames with incendiary commentaries through radio, television and print. Now that this dissent has erupted into several cases of blatant violence, some wonder if these violent words are contributing to the crimes.

Taking into account the general agitation in the United States and several recent deadly episodes (the bombing in Oklahoma City, the Branch Davidian standoff and violence at abortion clinics, for example), a question about these fierce exhortations should be considered: How much, if any, responsibility should be borne by these aggressive commentators for the irresponsible actions of acknowledged fanatics?

It is not unreasonable that a person removed from the physical commission of a crime should share some responsibility for the act. For example, Adolf Hitler was an acknowledged master of persuasion who took a frustrated nation and drove its people to

commit unimaginable crimes, primarily the Holocaust.

Yet is the historical blame for the Holocaust placed on the individuals who actually performed the mass killings? No.

The blame sits forever on the shoulders of their leaders who encouraged

Certain American talk show hosts are playing a dangerous game by routinely offering fiery messages to an already charged public.

a delirious climate of hate in which such atrocities seemed rational and justifiable.

This is not to attribute the same murderous ambitions of Nazi Germany to present day American spokesmen. Rather, the example demonstrates that one or a few people can encourage destructive behavior if their exhortations of violence drive an emotionally charged audience to take those suggestions to heart.

Naturally the direct perpetrators of such acts should be punished according to the law, and commentators like William Safire assert that they are the only ones who merit retribution. As he writes in *The New York Times* on April 27, 1995, "Responsibility rests on the criminals themselves, not on chosen motivators or 'root causes.'"

No one can arrest Gordon Liddy, formerly of Watergate fame but currently a nationally syndicated radio host, for his questionable remarks. No one can punish Mark Koernke, a broadcaster popular with many right-wing militia groups, for his aggressive stances on such issues as gun control and the United Nations.

However, with free speech comes a responsibility for what a person chooses to say. It is extremely unfor-

tunate that the sentiments of Safire and many others deny that incendiary rhetoric can agitate an already volatile situation.

When these broadcasters hazily sling their combative, ill-tempered message to the public through radio, television or print, they create an antagonistic atmosphere that encourages potential killers to feel as if they will not stand alone when they pull the trigger.

Thus, certain American talk show hosts are playing a dangerous game by routinely offering fiery messages to an already charged public.

Indeed, in most instances, punishing the hosts for the rash behavior of others is unfair and removes blame that should rightfully be borne by those committing the crime.

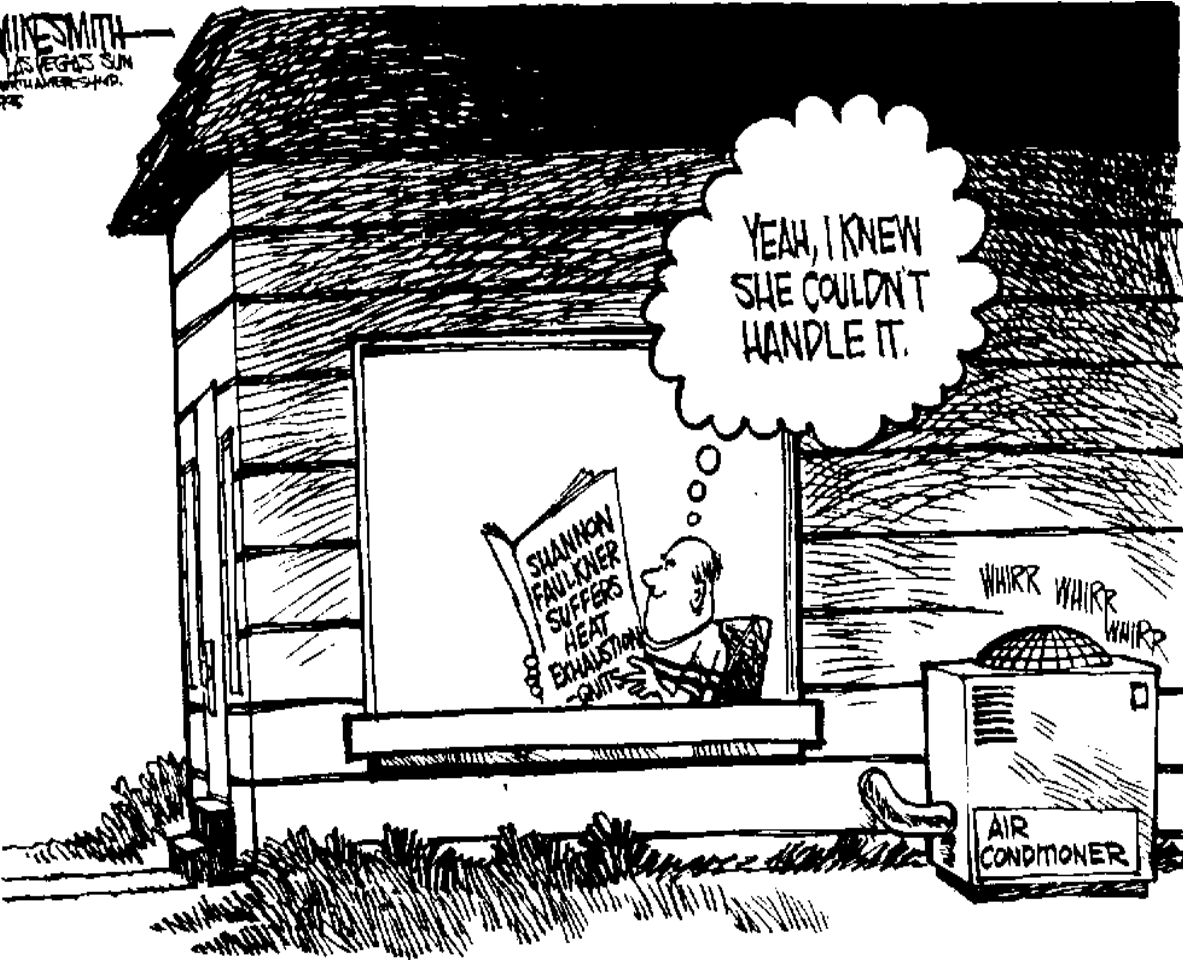
However, irresponsible acts will follow an irresponsible suggestion. So when Liddy candidly instructs his listeners on the most prudent method of killing a federal ATF agent (a shot to the head), he effects an atmosphere where such violence appears to be justifiable.

Likewise, divorcing the point-blank murder of a doctor outside an abortion clinic from militant pro-life rhetoric is extremely naive.

Undeniably, a criminal should receive a just punishment for his or her crime; otherwise, justice is an empty notion. Yet failing to consider rash commentators as primary agitators ignores significant contributors to recent, and future, incidences of bloodshed.

If a talk show host says something over the air, he or she does not forgo responsibility for those words. The speaker should be prepared to handle the possible consequences of someone acting in accordance with an irresponsible proposition.

All involved with the broadcast of hostile commentaries must objectively regard the effects of irresponsible, belligerent blustering; otherwise, their status as public spokesmen deserves serious reconsideration.



Volunteer — but be sincere

Last Wednesday I was cutting through Benson on my way back to my dorm when I ran into a friend whom I had not seen since last spring. We talked for 10 or 15 minutes about our summers, our class schedules and the prospect of getting into graduate school. He then said that he had to leave so he could attend the Volunteer Service Corp fair.

When I asked him what he was interested in doing, he replied, "Improving my resumé." He then walked up the stairs to room 401.

Unfortunately, my friend's attitude is indicative of many students on this campus. Boggled down with anxiety over an unstable future, students grasp at anything that will make them more marketable to prospective employers and admissions counselors. Thus, seemingly altruistic volunteer work is perverted into an act of self-interest.

Many people will argue that the reason for participating in volunteer work is irrelevant. Whether a person volunteers to increase his or her chances of getting into law school or because of a sincere desire to make a difference in someone's life, the outcome is the same — work gets accomplished.

KATIE HURLEY

GUEST COLUMNIST

However, volunteering is about more than getting a job done. Instead of simply doing work, volunteering is about working with plea-

Seemingly altruistic volunteer work is perverted into an act of self-interest.

sure, compassion and concern. This is what separates the resumé-padding volunteer from the person who volunteers sincerely.

The person who uses volunteering as a vehicle to financial stability is less enthusiastic. For example, he or she may deliver a meal to an elderly woman on time, but it would simply be a delivery. There would be little conversation between them.

So while the woman's physical hunger may be satiated, her need for companionship is left unfulfilled. A person seriously interested

in the woman will not only take her a meal but also take the time to talk with her, fulfilling that need as well.

Moreover, a volunteer who is looking for something that builds a resumé will be less conscientious. Essentially, just by signing up he or she gets what is wanted — something that looks good on paper. There is no incentive to diligently follow through or go beyond one's obligations.

However, a volunteer with altruistic motives is more likely to develop an emotional bond with the people he or she is serving. Because this volunteer truly cares about what he or she is doing, it is less likely for that person to shirk duties.

Volunteering is truly an essential ingredient for maintaining society. Children need to have role models, senior citizens need someone to talk with, homeless people need someone to staff shelters and immigrants need someone to help them make a smooth transition to U.S. culture and language.

However, the type of assistance that is so desperately needed can only be given with the proper attitude. Volunteering is about helping others, not yourself.

