

Stereotypes simplify but often miss the mark

People are often classified by religion and race, but no individual fits the profile.

In the personal minds of the members of our narcissistic culture, universality seems to dominate. We set, live and uphold the many standards we create in a search for simplicity. As a result, there is little sense of relativity in how we see things – in how we judge things. The

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ideologies this mind-set breeds are absolute and we allow very little to usurp that mode of thought. Implicitly, this egotistical mentality reflects a confidence in the self. This confidence however, often becomes delusional and in actuality renders itself as overconfidence. When writing for the *Old Gold and Black*, I often find myself mulling over the distressing possibility that I really don't know what I'm talking about. There is so much we all don't know yet we claim assuredness. Yet there is a palpable intimation that perhaps there is some other piece of evidence out there that has not been presented to me. Maybe I've been exposed to only one side of the issue. For these reasons, we have to be critical and skeptical of our own confidence. In a sense, perspective is rarely absolute. Whether you call this humility or

maybe a simple lack of conviction, I feel that it is just healthy skepticism. It is easy to be lured into the trap of simplicity and dogmatism. In fact this is what helps us survive in a complex world where common, convoluted rationality fails to quench our thirst for ultimate comprehension and understanding.

I guess this is where religion can come into play. Even though organized religion as an institution has holistically minimized the prospect for a truly personal spirituality, religious doctrine and rhetoric simplifies. Most can answer questions and pacify a void of darkness and unknown. Yet many demand full submission. If it didn't then complication would erupt.

Even though faith and reliance on religion has waned on the whole over many decades, the increasing belief and interest in extraterrestrial life (a 22 percent increase over the past 15 years, according to a telephone poll conducted by ICR, International) has supplanted the disquieting vacancy. Regardless, it is hard to ignore the aforementioned benefits of religion on peace of mind – but the price is often overconfidence in a professed absolute.

The abomination we call prejudice feeds off this need for simplicity. By subscribing to correlative tenets that say appearances correspond to personal character traits, one can lower uncertainty. Blue eyes equal this. Dark skin equals that. The examples are exhaustive. Our dependence on these prejudicial generalizations fosters racist indoctrination. Prejudgment is not limited, however. Every outward appearance factor can be picked apart and associated with some desirable or undesirable

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quality. Whatever the case, it simplifies, sometimes at the cost of others.

The modern social environment is, in a sense, a compartmentalized world. Many of us occupy a number of boxes and crates that designate our contents. Most come pre-labeled – things such as appearance, demeanor and clothes. All we have to do is hop in and we assume the role of our choice. Democrat. Protestant. We can jump from one box to another anytime we want, oftentimes claiming numerous labels. Lower-middle class. Conservative. College-educated.

This example of social interaction may be simplistic but that is how and perhaps why this is the case. It allows for the homogenization of the world – a world full of innumerable possibilities, personalities and outlooks. When predictions and expectations uniform a diversified populace, there are fewer people to analyze and fewer pangs of confusion to belabor over – a certain abatement for our minds. The cold reality is that risk and dubiety is displaced when these boxes shape our expectations. Is this compartmentalization fair to us though? Are we denying ourselves the liberty to occupy only one box – a box with our name being the

only label? More importantly, are these labels even indicative of the actual contents? Or does absolutism fade even in the most assured instances?

Growing up in this world often proves to be a labyrinthine stage for many due to teasing and criticism from the mouths of the confident. Much of growing up is reduced to aligning ourselves within socio cultural norms that are used as criteria for judging a person. In fact, there is little leeway in the impartial quest to be perceived as cool. My point here is that it is all relative. If someone doesn't see the world the same as you do then so be it. Learn from it. Grow into a better person because of it. French philosopher Joseph Joubert wrote, "Those who never retract their opinions love themselves more than they love truth." Perhaps they only love certainty of mind and are obdurate to forfeit the confidence it offers.

Our perceptions are far from absolute. As a final example, many Westerners view Islam as degrading to women. Most Islamic women, however, only have picayune qualms – if any at all – regarding the stipulations of their religion. The reality is a far cry from the perception that Western culture paints regarding the violation of unalienable freedoms. The socially colored glasses we see through and our cultural insularity ought to be abdicated – in order to attain a worldview where everything pulls the same weight. A Native American prayer comes to mind: "Great Spirit, grant that I may not criticize my neighbor until I have walked for a moon in his moccasins." It is this suspension of certainty and judgment that we should strive for. But what do I know.

Justice denied to blacks

Results of Diallo case show police racism against blacks.

He was convicted of an unspeakable crime. A crime so horrendous that police kill when they see it is being committed.

The crime ... being black. It's a crime that seems to give cops an itchy trigger finger and a crime that cost an unsuspecting

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West African immigrant named Amadou Diallo his life. Diallo was killed when four New York police officers – Sean Carroll, Kenneth Boss, Edward McMellon and Richard Murphy – shot at him 41 times outside an apartment complex. Unfortunately, justice was denied to the Diallo's family. The resulting trial and acquittals were merely formalities, like the singing of the national anthem before a baseball game.

The police say that he was reaching for a gun; Diallo was simply reaching for his wallet. So the question on everybody's minds and mouths is how could the officers mistake a wallet for a gun? Didn't they know the difference? Was the lighting too dim to make out the object that Diallo held in his hand?

No, it was the officers' racism that blinded them. It was their belief that every black male, black woman and even black cats are a potential threat and shouldn't be treated in any sort of civil manner. The procedure is as follows – shoot first, shoot second and then ask, "may I see your identification?"

Most white students reading this right now won't know what I'm talking about and some won't even care. Ignorance is bliss. That way the next time a situation similar to this happens, the next time an innocent man is gunned down, these same people can carelessly blow it off in anticipation for the new 'NSync CD.

In spite of all of this, the truth must be told.

And the truth is racial profiling is legalized war on blacks and other minorities. This unofficial but often followed policy is what leads to highly publicized instances of police brutality, such as the Tyisha Miller case in California and the infamous New Jersey police who patrol the New Jersey Turnpike.

But there are many other instances of racial profiling in action. Just ask any black person and more often than not they will tell you personal stories or stories that happened to their friends and loved ones.

No wonder the N.W.A. song, "F*** tha Police" was such a hit. It was the tangible form of the distrust that blacks had been feeling for years. That's why the demonstrations in New York that followed the acquittal of the officers were filled with so much anger. The police forces of America have given blacks and other minorities little reason to respect them.

What the Diallo case represents is a pure, simplistic, modern-day lynching. Hope everybody had their Kodaks focused because you're getting a time-honored piece of Americana. It ranks right up there with apple pie and baseball. Who would have thought that black folks in the 1900s would be asking for the same thing as blacks in the new millenium: justice.

The same lynchings that occurred in this nation under Jim Crow laws are happening in the year 2000 under DWB (Driving while black), WWB (Walking while black) and JBB (Just being black).



Students should be wary of university's 'changes'

The university's 'improvements' are logic-impaired.

We're finally back from our two week hiatus, on account of the fact that my esteemed colleague has been too far tucked into his deathbed to accompany me

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lately. He went to Student Health and they diagnosed him with either Mono or pregnancy, but he's healing right up. He is feeling much better now, but has generally nothing to say except "Hi" to the nurses at Student Health. I have realized that in the

past this column has been a bit on the sarcastic, some might go so far as bitter, side. So, this week, I thought it wise to focus on some of the positive changes that are happening around campus. Every day the administration and the employees at Subway are hard at work to make the life of the student just a little easier and more enjoyable. This is not duly noted. New conveniences are rapidly becoming the norm at this university.

For example, a large plastic banner strangely resembling a Winston cigarette ad informs me that an Office Depot has moved in on the quad. Apparently, desirable retail space has switched from warehouse floors to rooms in Taylor House.

Hopefully, they will still sell all of the same notebooks with school insignias so that the idea of purchasing school supplies from a wholesaler is completely defeated. Bringing this superstore into our midst might even heighten the chances of being able to obtain a printer

The removal of the chains result in two less jumps you have to make in your mad dash to the bank at 1:59 p.m. The debates preceding and following this change are phenomenal when one considers that these impediments neither kept the grass in or the students out.

Along with this change came another important step in the makeover of the Quad. The removal of the chains results in two less jumps you have to make in your mad dash to the bank at 1:59 p.m. The debates preceding and following this change are phenomenal when one considers that these impediments neither kept the grass in or the students out.

Fears that the grass will promptly disappear are ridiculous considering that except for the students travelling with

their ankles cuffed thus impeding them from hurdling a two-foot barrier except by means of a round off, the vast majority crosses the grass daily. Of course, superfluous black metal lying around is always aesthetically pleasing, so that could be the cause of alarm.

In addition to these minor changes, the trustees have really outdone themselves and decided to raise tuition again. But, not only will this tuition increase give students something to do with their money besides use bills as fire starters, "amenities" will also be included.

Each dorm room will have a microfridge. This would be even more exciting in the event that all but five students on campus did not already have a refrigerator, and if those five students did not have roommates to share with them. I would address the issue of lack of need for microwaves, but I don't want to get anyone written up. This raise will also include

laundry fees, but do not fear, you will still get to wait the full 88 minutes for your clothes to get warm and damp. Some charges that each student is required to pay, such as for a P.O. Box and computer insurance, will be done away with. On the tuition, room and board card that is filled out each semester, many miscellaneous fees will have disappeared, or are they still there? Tricky, tricky.

Thinking logically, one might argue that the same revenue could be obtained from the income of Parking Management, but logic would be the first mistake. Though parking spaces may be as hard to come by as edible fruit, future students will be able to stock multiple refrigerators and wash their clothes until they are threadbare.

The convenience and generosity is so overwhelming, that in the event of a miracle reducing the price of tenders, fries and a drink to below \$8, I will be brought to tears.