

OPINION

This column represents the views of the Old Gold and Black Editorial Board.

Racist plaque raises students' hackles

In the wake of a campus-wide controversy over racially insensitive remarks made in the 2003 *Howler*, another contentious issue involving race relations at the university has recently come to light. A plaque displayed outside of Tribble Hall memorializing former janitor Tom Jeffries has been criticized by many students as offensive.

Jeffries, who worked for many years around the turn of the century on the old campus, is referred to on the plaque only as "Doctor Tom." Given that such a nickname is understood as demeaning due to the racial climate of the day, students are certainly warranted in taking offense at the memorial's implications.

The plaque is a product of its time. In all likelihood, those who knew Jeffries and worked to have him honored in such a fashion meant no malice in seeking to preserve his nickname on the memorial. This is evidenced perhaps most evidently by the fact that a number of students and faculty who were particularly fond of Jeffries served as pall bearers and spoke at his funeral in 1927.

Good intentions, however, do not necessarily translate into acceptable

results. Seventy-five years after Jeffries' passing, the university, as well as the entire nation, has come a long way in building positive relations among all races and in both establishing and refining the universal principle of equality. Having made so much progress, we are now able to recognize that the nickname "Doctor Tom" is grossly insufficient if Jeffries is to truly be honored with the same amount of respect granted to others who have served the university.

Jeffries should continue to enjoy a revered place in the history of the university, but he should occupy that place without the stigma of a memorial that expresses racist sentiment.

To this end, a new plaque is needed. Jeffries' memorial should include his last name and rid him of what is now understood to be a degrading and inappropriate title.

The current plaque should not merely be forgotten, however. To simply sweep uncomfortable issues under the carpet and forget about them is never a responsible solution for an academic community that prides itself on discourse. Numerous places exist at the university where the plaque might be kept in order to serve as a historical reminder of the inequality that existed here in the past.

Conservative pundits drive nation backward to fear, paranoia.

Last Saturday in Kernersville, I picked out a new firearm I thought would make a nice addition to my collection. I explained to the owner of "The Gun Rack" that I was not a U.S. citizen. I knew as a Permanent U.S. Resident that he was required to make a photocopy of my

Erik Jacobson

GUEST COLUMNIST

"Green Card" in compliance with federal law. What I did not know was that this mild mannered storeowner was in fact a true American patriot, a man who had just stumbled upon his first chance to aid in the war on terror and was not going to let the opportunity slip through his fingers.

So perhaps I should have been less surprised when he proudly proclaimed, "I ain't gonna sell you this gun." Stunned and humiliated, I said, "Excuse me?" to which he smugly replied, "Sorry, I ain't gonna sell you this gun, it ain't worth the *paperwork*." I knew that there was no extra *paperwork*. I had done this several times in several states, including North Carolina. The reality is that my status as an immigrant led this man to treat me with scorn and suspicion.

In my 16 years here in the United States, that afternoon was the very first time I have ever felt unwelcome in what I consider to be my home. I wondered as I walked out of the gun store if the owner knew that over 31,000 non-citizens were currently serving in our military. I wondered if

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in his patriotic fervor he would have refused to sell them a firearm. I found it interesting that these "immigrants" were deemed good enough to fight and die in the defense of this country, but unworthy to buy a firearm with which to defend their homes.

It seems this shop owner is a product of the neo-conservative culture sweeping our nation, driven in part by a right wing media that after Sept. 11 managed to become mainstream. Never before have I seen this country in the grip of such a xenophobic frenzy. Witness Bill O'Reilly comparing the Koran to *Mein Kampf*, or Anne Coulter writing of the Arab nations; "We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity." These are the beliefs of only two people, but along with Rush Limbaugh they are some of the most widely watched and read political voices in the nation. People like Limbaugh, Coulter and O'Reilly have capitalized on the confusion and fear of the average American by serving as a kind of simplifying filter. They have become a medium between complex world events and an audience demanding black or white answers for questions that imply only shades of gray.

There is no denying the appeal of these programs. They claim to solve humbling and enormously complicated issues with a witty one liner and a touch of "country boy"

common sense. Who wants to listen to experts calmly debate two sides of an issue when you can watch O'Reilly or Coulter champion their radical views by shouting down their opponents? I think that their target audience has no interest in rational discourse, they just want to hear an affirmation of what they already believe: democrats and foreigners are bad, republicans and President Bush are good. With the help of these fanatics, a dissenting liberal voice has somehow become synonymous with treason; how peculiarly un-American considering our nation was founded upon potent dissent.

Watching these programs I can't help but think: replace the word "terrorist" with "communist" and we have stepped back 50 years into one of the darker and more shameful periods in American history.

Coulter herself made the comparison when she stated the only real difference between a terrorist and a communist was that you could smell a terrorist in a subway. This racial slur reveals the type of lowbrow conservatism she promotes.

It is indeed a sad time when Coulter, O'Reilly, and their ilk have managed to become the sensational voice of so many within America. They prey on people's basest prejudice and rely on misinformation and oversimplification to sell their books and raise their ratings.

For those who recognize what kind of social and intellectual damage is being done by these media demagogues, there is some solace in the knowledge that like McCarthyism, this phase in American history is bound to pass. Equally satisfying is the hope that like Joe McCarthy, Anne Coulter will one day find the cozy walls of an asylum very receptive to her particular brand of frothing diatribe.

Erik Jacobson is a junior.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Budget cuts promise difficult future

Recent news that federal grant money provided to low income university students will be cut beginning in 2004 could spell trouble for many college-bound students, as well as for universities themselves. Washington's decision to revise the formula that calculates eligibility for the federal government's Pell Grant is expected to render 84,000 students ineligible to receive its funds.

The news presents several problems that the university will have to face. First, a drop in financial aid for needy applicants necessarily makes attending an expensive private institution more difficult. As a result, the university will likely have to work harder to attract a wide range of students and achieve its goals of improving socioeconomic, racial and geographic diversity.

Second, the news could potentially put a strain on the university's current promise to meet 100 percent of each student's demonstrated financial need. Thirty-two percent of students receive

some type of federal aid, and in 2001-02, this meant distributing \$13 million of federal money to students. With the diminishment of the Pell Grant, the university will have to either make up for that money with funds from some other source, or potentially even withdraw its promise to meet all demonstrated need.

Although the U.S. Department of Education has explained that overall education spending is likely to rise next year, this loss in federal grant money for college is upsetting. Ensuring that all of its citizens have the opportunity to attend college should be a high priority for the government, and the Pell Grant helped to make significant steps in that direction.

Furthermore, with many families struggling due to the economic downturn that the country is currently weathering, financial aid for college is of increasing importance. Without it, some are left with few avenues down which to turn when seeking higher education.

Indeed, families and universities alike will bear the costs of this lost funding.

Watts' response fits 'pushy prof' stereotype

Upon reading Miranda Mills' column ("Pushy profs unnecessary", Sept. 18) my first reaction was disbelief and dismissal. Though I have, in my almost 12 years in higher education as both a student and faculty member, run across one or two overbearing or bullying professors, I've never been under the impression that this was commonplace.

Indeed, almost every faculty member that I'm personally acquainted with has always shown the greatest respect for, and encouragement of, diverse ideas, opinions, and yes, even respectful disagreements in their classrooms.

The idea that any of them are "bad guys" who routinely try to "squash," "pulverize," otherwise intimidate students seems ridiculous to me. I would suggest that students not allow strong opinions and intellectual questioning to be read as dismissal of their ideas.

But then I read Professor Eric K. Watts' response to a student editorial a few pages earlier. In that article, Professor Watts refers to a student as "ignorant," "angst-ridden," and possessed of a "pained imagination"—none of which seems to contribute anything productive to the discussion at hand.

While I largely agree with Professor Watts' assessment of Lyle's argument, I do take issue with the tone in which this debate seems to be taking place, on both sides of the fence. But while it's one thing for a student to express himself poorly and without a full understanding of the issues at stake (that's what they're here to learn), it's quite another for a professor to publicly shame or insult them because of it.

The related column on that same page, by Ben Halfhill and Sarah McArver, offers a far more even-handed (and even-tempered) assessment of both sides—and they're both students!

All of this makes me wonder about the status of civil discourse on a campus that has taken "Dialogue" as its theme for the year.

Are students feeling bullied or intimidated?

Are professor's feeling disrespected and dismissed?

Perhaps both sides need to take a deep breath and consider their

respective approaches.

John Edward Martin
Visiting English Instructor

Lack of remembrance insults those affected

Wake Forest University paid a horrible injustice to the people who died as well as those who were personally affected by the events that occurred on Sept. 11, 2001. Coming from just outside New York, New Yorkers held a type of reverence for that day. There is not one person I know who was not personally affected; either knowing someone killed in the towers or knowing someone who narrowly missed the collapse. I still remember the muffled cries I heard at the funeral of a friend's father and the people who were off to three other funerals in the same day.

When I look back, it is comforting to know I shared that horrible day with my family, friends and fellow Americans. Upon coming to college, I frequently heard people jokingly speak of the "Wake Forest bubble." I did not realize the extent of it until this past Thursday. I woke up to the crisp morning air and "Carolina" blue sky. Walking to my first class it seemed like any other day. People were cheerful and classes went on as normal, a far cry from the tributes paid a year ago. The only effort I saw as a specific tribute was a newspaper article that was allocated to the second section, Life. Despite only having a one page layout the editors of the section did a fine job. But is one page in the second section of the newspaper enough for the 3,057 lives lost that day?

Apparently people call Sept. 11 a national tragedy, but from my experience at Wake Forest, I found out that people are either ignorant to what was experienced by the families of the people who died on that fateful day or are indifferent. I can only hope it is not the latter.

Kathleen Lewis
Freshman

Panhellenic Council clarifies Chi-O position

In response to various articles

previously published in the *Old Gold and Black* regarding Chi Omega, the Panhellenic Council would like to state its constant support for the women of the Zeta Lambda chapter. The Panhellenic Council has provided much needed support for these women throughout this turbulent time. Furthermore, the Panhellenic Council would like to stress that Chi Omega made the decision to give back their charter because of an incident between the chapter and the national organization, independent of the university and the Panhellenic Council. Currently, the Panhellenic Council is doing everything it can to assist the women of Chi Omega; whether they decide to return or not. If anyone would like further information, they can contact the Office of Greek Life.

Robin Porter
Advisor, Panhellenic Council

Football support makes WFU Triad's team

I want to compliment the support of our student body at football games this year. The attendance, participation and enthusiasm are the best ever!! The WAKE.....FOREST..... cheer is outstanding. The students are our leaders in fan support and set the tone for the atmosphere at the games.

What else can students do for Wake Forest football? Promote Wake Forest football when you go to area restaurants, businesses, and anywhere in the Winston Salem community. Wake is the team of Winston-Salem!! Encourage people to buy tickets and support the Deacs!!!

Your football classmates deserve your great support and they are getting this support!! Congratulations, thanks, be loud, and GO DEACS!!!!

Ashby M. Cook, Jr.
Class of 1971

Our letters policy

We welcome letters. Send yours via e-mail to letters@ogb.wfu.edu, by campus mail to P.O. Box 7569, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27109, or deliver it to Benson 518. We reserve the right to edit all letters for length and clarity. No anonymous letters will be printed.

OLD GOLD & BLACK

THE STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY SINCE 1916

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The *Old Gold and Black* is published Thursdays during the school year, except during examinations, summer and holiday periods, by Times Enterprise Print Services of High Point, N.C. Send e-mail to comments@ogb.wfu.edu or mail to P.O. Box 7569, Winston-Salem, NC 27109. © 2003 WFU Publications Board. All rights reserved.

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