

Society, media lead to soldiers' decisions in Iraq

Try to remember the last time you turned on a TV. Chances are, you were bombarded with a slew of teen humor. Look at Fear Factor, where people are forced to eat everything from cow testicles to live bugs. Or maybe Wildboys is more your type. This MTV show takes the viewer on a wild ride with several twenty-some old guys who wear as little as possible without the FCC slapping a fine on them. They then proceed to find dangerous animals which they allow to abuse them in any way imaginable.

No matter where you turn in society, you will find that the images are progressively becoming more grotesque. Media outlets learned long ago that sex sells, and now they seem to realize that making fun of sex sells too.

So can we really be that surprised that a small group of soldiers in Iraq have decided to spend their free time torturing Iraqi prisoners?

The reports have been numerous as to what kinds of abuse have been taking place between American soldiers and their captives, but most consist of sodomizing prisoners, forcing men to stand naked and act as sex slaves, and a sheer lack of respect for the laws laid forth at the Geneva Convention some 50 years ago.

American troops who decided to partake in these activities are by no means justified in their acts of torture. There should be trials and martial law should be enforced; quickly and publicly.

But we have to remember that many of the soldiers who are now serving in Iraq are merely three years older than some of us here at Coffman.

These soldiers, just like us, have been desensitized to the manipulation of bodies and the exploitation of our bodies for sexual humor.

In the Middle East especially, many religions strictly forbid many of the acts the Iraqi prisoners were forced to perform. Not only was this degrading to the Iraqis, it was sinful; for many of them, they were sins that they believe will not be forgiven.

Perhaps it's video games which have made our generation feel as though everything has a good guy and bad guy, a black and white, and right and wrong. But when it comes to reality, war is not human versus computer-generated image; it is human versus human.

We have become so adapt to seeing the things we saw in the pictures sent back from Iraq, that I am amazed to see surprise in the faces of those who are witnessing the gruesome pictures for the first time.

And we wonder why other nations have grown to hate America.

Bush has attempted to take the War in Iraq from a search of weapons of mass destruction to a moral, righteousness thing to do. Now, even those who still supported the war because they saw Americans as doing the right thing and freeing a country from oppression and torture must reevaluate whether or not the morality of our troops was ever in the right place.

Fear breeds hate, and a feeling of superiority by one group leads to a feeling of fear by another. For each and every prisoner that was tortured by an American soldier, another hundred people from around the world began to see America in a negative light.

These acts have confirmed for many the corrupt and heartless image which America has become associated with.

It is truly unfortunate that an effort to liberate a country has been permanently tarnished due to then decisions of a few soldiers out of thousands.

But unless our society finally begins to realize how desensitized and one-minded we have become, we fear that the images being sent back from Iraq are just the beginning of a long line of proof the terrorists can use as propaganda to convince the Middle East and other struggling countries that America really is the great evil.

Letter to Editor

White Scholarship editorial misses point of Affirmative Action

Dear editor,

Let me, the people of a collective spanning far beyond the stereotypical boundaries and restrictions of race, start by stating the purpose of an editorial is to express the opinions of one or more persons, but also- despite its controversy- to exercise the freedom to derive varying opinions. Let it further be known that the perspective of a selected group does not (nor do I) speak for the tongues of all men and women; thus, we have something to say.

"I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia (and all the U.S.) the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. . . that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'" (Martin Luther King Jr.)

Whether one agrees with these great visions, or begs to disagree that his visions were in fact great, this much has become a reality in the lives of many, if not all: an issue that persists to be a problem- and perhaps always will- is the presence of prejudice and discrimination in society. Yes- Coffman included.

An article produced by The Perspective staff did in fact live up to its flashy title: White Scholarship Opens Eyes. It was the poor- or lack there of- research however, and the miss-targeted punches that caught the attention of expected (and unexpected) audiences. "The article did not properly represent the full perspective of the student body; hence the uproar." comments one student. And who would disagree? "The article

attempts to speak from the perspective of groups and cultures about which its authors know little, or have had little exposure. "What upset me most was it (the article) was not spoken from fact," a parent states, "and showed little understanding about the plight of the African-American male and female. . . that is something they will never experience." Indeed, but the defense refuses to rest stating, "The white male and female are being held accountable for the actions of their great-grandparents," a statement worthy of applause for its brutal truth and blatancy. Where, however, is the segment within the defenses statement that grieves for the rest of the worlds' races that too are held accountable for the actions of their great grandparents? Where is the excerpts including the yellow, the brown, the tan, the red, and the orange brothers and sisters? Who sympathizes for the population who were not "blessed" with a pale pigment? And, if Adam Noska of the Roger Williams University had been of South African decent, and wrote an essay about his heritage as an African-American white male, would it still have been deemed acceptable by the College Republicans' Organization?

Such questions the African American Student Enrichment Organization thought might have been answerable by the editors of The Perspective, but was declined a formal discussion by the newspaper for unknown reasons. In defense of ethnically directed groups, radio stations, and television shows, the purpose does not lie specifically in skin color, but rather culture;

the purpose is to appeal to the familiar social crowds created by the decades of racial difference and indifference, but also to allow others a glimpse into the evolved cultures in hopes of finding similarity, and dissolve the notion that black and African American (or Korean to Japanese, Latino to Mexican. . . etc.) are synonymous terms of distinction.

Black Entertainment Television, criticized for its African-American interest is a prime example of such networks. Despite The Perspective prior statements involving BET's portrayal of race, one interesting fact found through more thorough research indicates that BET is white-owned (the same company that owns CBS, MTV, UPN, and Paramount Pictures); thus, the negative portrayal- if evident at all- is the direct affect of social stereotypes, not the actual perspective of the African-American community. "You can have all the well-meaning people at Viacom (BET's newest owner) that you can collect, yet they do not and cannot have what is a unique African-American perspective. . .BET, as we know it, is dead," states Yemi Tour, an Atlanta-based media critic.

Thus the question does not come down to whether a white scholarship should be deemed acceptable or not- the issue has nothing to do with whether a predominantly white, conservative school chooses to decline the right of form a Conservative Club. The real issue is the way us, as Americans, decide to perceive one another; the shallow distinctions of race have haunted the hallways of schools, lunch rooms, and the office spaces of the business realm for too long.

Marking "Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)" on a college application is not crippling to students- the stigmas created through the past years that today's youth is forced to carry along is crippling. The bar of potentiality, nevertheless, does not fall; rather, it encourages growth, proficiency, and pushes to surpass the limits of expectation.

In closing, I am sure many will not share these views- just as many people fear the misunderstood- but in lights of the poor research in The Perspectives prior article, one can only express ones true feelings in the words of Charles Barkley: "I may be wrong, but I doubt it."

-Preston Guinn '04

Editor's Note:

The Perspective Staff and I personally would like to thank Preston for taking the time to read and respond to our staff editorial on Affirmative Action. Unfortunately, there are several misconceptions which have surfaced in this letter, and the staff feels responsible to clear up any foggy areas for our readers.

Firstly, every story run by the Perspective goes through an extensive editing process, and thorough research is our top priority. We speak with numerous sources and check a variety of background sources before each story is written.

However, one must remember that the editorial section is designed as an outlet for opinion. Many of the issues we talk about are controversial and consist of two very distinct viewpoints. Please do not confuse an opinion with a lack of

research.

There is also a factual error in this letter. The Perspective staff is accused of denying a discussion with the African American Student Enrichment Organization shortly after the editorial was published. In fact, the Perspective had set aside class time to listen to the views of AASEO, only to be left waiting all period for the group to come.

I would like to see this debate continue, and I feel that a discussion is still needed between the Perspective staff and AASEO members. In order to better understand an issue, one must look at the issue from all sides, and it is in this spirit that the Perspective would still like to have a public forum with AASEO before the school year has ended.

Please note as well that the contents of this letter were left in the original form. No edits were made by the Perspective Staff either to change content or correct grammatical errors. This decision was made due to the sensitive nature of the issue.

Once again, we commend Preston for taking an active role in a very prominent issue, and we encourage others to follow his lead and continue writing letters to the editor.

-Mike Scott '05

Perspective Editorial Editor