

Troubling trends with black America and homophobia

Similarities between minorities should be embraced, not used to further divide historically disadvantaged peoples

Former Miami Heat guard and five-time All-Star Tim Hardaway caused quite a stir last week after sharing some rather unedited thoughts on gay people. His remarks came during a radio interview just one week after John Amaechi became the first former NBA player to disclose his homosexuality. Here's a glimpse of what he had to say:

"You know, I hate gay people, so I let it be known. I don't like gay people and I don't like to be around gay people. I'm homophobic. I don't like it. It shouldn't be in the world or in the United States."

Hardaway later issued an apology through his agent, although it's almost too much of a 180 turn to be convincing. Regardless, there is a bigger problem at hand, and it needs to be addressed: Hardaway is merely the latest member of a sizeable group of black celebrities to make anti-gay remarks. Recently, star of Grey's Anatomy Isaiah Washington was widely rebuked for his use of a gay slur while referring to costar T.R. Knight, who was subsequently forced to come out of the closet last October. And there is no shortage of black musicians (DMX, Dr. Dre and 50 Cent, to name a few) and athletes (Jerome Bettis, Allen Iverson) who have had accusations of homophobia leveled against them.

I realize there are plenty of white homophobes out there as well. However, I would expect anti-gay sentiment to be an issue among straight white people, who comprise a powerful majority in this country and therefore cannot truly relate to the discrimination and constant struggle for equal treatment that gay people face. The black community, and any other targeted racial minorities, to be fair, cannot say the same.

I understand the distinction. We must acknowledge that historically, African Americans have undergone unique suffering at the hands of whites — gay whites included. Blacks cannot hide their skin color, and



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although gay people should not be expected to disguise their sexual orientation, it is possible for them to do so in a threatening situation. I also realize that as a gay white man, I cannot possibly relate to the double minority status of LGBT men of color or the three-pronged discrimination facing LGBT women of color.

But for all of the differences, I am convinced that the similar hardships we have faced are more compelling. Hardaway's "apology" merely scratches the surface. The first time I read Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and realized how many parallels existed between the civil rights movement's struggle for basic fairness and the gay community's ongoing fight for equality, chills rushed down my spine.

I can't help but think that these words truly unite our movements: "When you are... plagued with inner fears and outer resentments... then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no lon-

ger willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair."

Black conservatives will counter that being gay is a choice, so no comparison whatsoever is appropriate. As a matter of fact, no conclusive research — sorry, the Jesus Christ Research Institute doesn't count — exists to show that homosexuality is any more a matter of choice than heterosexuality. Millions of Americans simply would not choose

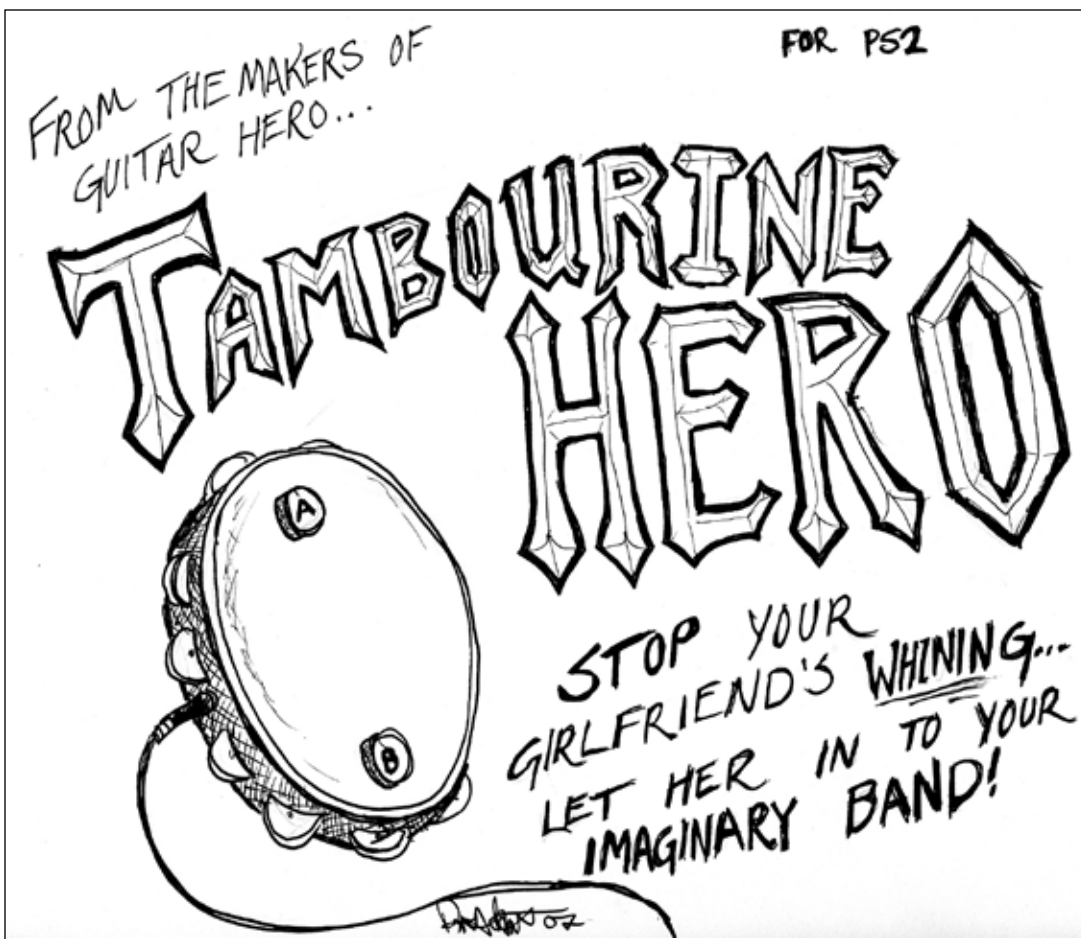
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-Tim Hardaway

to be oppressed by society on a regular basis. And for any anti-gay African Americans using the Bible to distinguish gays from blacks, I would refer them to "Black Theology and Black Power" author James Cone, who has documented Christian theologians defending both slavery and segregation through religious arguments. It's time to be honest about how much we have in common.

Homophobia in all of its forms is inexcusable. However, it is particularly distressing to see it coming from black celebrities, who serve as role models for millions of black youths in this country, and who quite frankly, should know better. As historically targeted minorities, neither group has had it easy. Rather than tear each other apart, we should identify our similarities and unite against injustice.

EDITORIAL CARTOON PAT ABBOTT, THE DAILY ILLINI



Famous politicians and Academy voters: an award-worthy match

When I was in grade school I listened to Weird Al Yankovic and Presidents of the United States of America. When I began to understand what real music was, I listened to Led Zepplin, Eric Clapton and Blues Traveler. I can barely read music and I don't hold a music degree but I played the oboe in grade school (quite well I think).

However, I think I should know what good music sounds like. And if I don't, then the American public should. The music that won awards at last weekend's Grammys is not it.

Congratulations are due to the Dixie Chicks. They took home five Grammys for their 2006 album "Taking the Long Way" that should have been earmarked for any other group than themselves (like the legendary Red Hot Chili Peppers for example.) After Tipper Gore decided that censorship was needed for current music, I thought that Hollywood would be off the backs of Republicans. Isn't censorship supposed to be the monstrosity of the Republican Party?

However, the Dixie Chicks have proven that voting members of the entertainment elite have zero interest in music, only in politics.

The Dixie Chicks sold fewer albums last year than The Pussycat Dolls, the soundtrack of "High School Musical" and Nickelback (I didn't think Chad Kroeger knew how to form complete sentences.)

Evidently, politics can overcome disappointing sales. If you have opinions that the Academy agrees with (See: Green Day's "American Idiot") then all the better.

The Dixie Chicks themselves have abandoned country music. They understand that they really aren't welcome in Nashville anymore after lead singer Natalie Maines remarked at a London concert in 2003 that she was ashamed that President Bush also hailed from the state of Texas.

Yet despite four country artists selling more albums in 2006 than the Dixie Chicks (six additional country albums made the top fifty) they walk away with the country album of the year



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award not because of their talent, but because of a small group of Academy voters' displeasures with our President.

They don't thank their lucky stars, but they should thank their President. After all, without him, they would just be one more country band that Hollywood wouldn't pay any attention to.

Why are celebrities, whose job it is to sing and to act, so deaf to their own ridiculous political rants?

Listening to actor Tim Robbins articulate his anti-war rhetoric is like listening to President Bush trying to read Dr. Seuss aloud. His response to everyone who is supportive of our troops is "Maybe you should enlist." Go dog go!

Whoopi Goldberg now has her own radio show called "Wake up with Whoopi." We can now listen to her "feelings" whenever we want. No need for facts or figures now, sugar, you heard it straight from Whoopi's mouth.

Republicans have their own celebrity supporters, but you don't see them out on the campaign trails receiving accolades from the party.

Country musician Ricky Skaggs isn't hosting morning shows or running for office.

He quietly earns money for the party and plays music at events when asked, but Republicans don't really need the entertainment industry nearly as much as Democrats do. When Republican celebrities do take the spotlight, they tend to do well.

Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger were both elected governor of Hollywood central (California) and then they were re-elected. Why?

Because Republicans don't welcome celebrities until they've proven their ability to speak articulately on issues and represent ideas of the mainstream members of their party.

Even the foolish and mangled Illinois GOP candidate Ted Nugent might run for Senate in 2004. Although "The Nuge" would have been better than Alan Keyes.

It's a shame that Hollywood has abandoned rewarding achievement in music and cinematography of rewarding political rhetoric.

If these are the new requirements for Grammys, then the members of the Academy should look at my opinions, and if they need further proof then I have several perfect scores on the PlayStation version of "American Idol" that I'd like to show them.

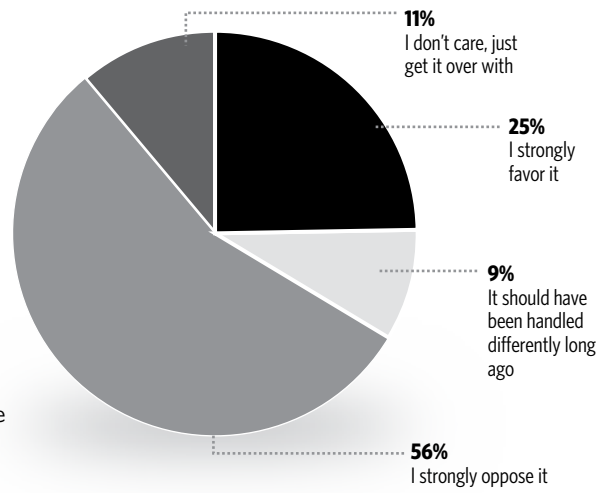
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WEEKLY POLL

How do you feel about the Chief's retirement?

Number of votes: 1,259

This The Daily Illini poll is not scientific and reflects the opinions of only those Internet users who have chosen to participate.



Next week's question:

What will you be doing on Wednesday when the Chief performs for the final time? Vote now on DailyIllini.com.

If you want to have your voice heard, send your letters to opinions@dailyillini.com or post on our blog "Critical Mass" at blogs.dailyillini.com/opinions. We'll publish as many letters as we can.



GUEST COLUMN JOHN BAMBENEK, ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL AND FORMER DAILY ILLINI COLUMNIST

Religion's scapegoats: Finding blame in all the wrong places

It seems in vogue lately to blame all the world's problems on organized religion, specifically Christianity. Lee Feder's recent column "Losing our religion" is the latest in the series of these factually-deficient attacks on religion.

There is the oft-recycled claim that organized religion has caused most of the conflict in the world. Northern Ireland is usually cited as a modern example of fighting between Protestants and Catholics.

The Irish believe Northern Ireland belongs to them. The English think it is theirs. Ireland has a national religion, Roman Catholicism. England has a national religion, the Church of England. The conflict is a geopolitical one. The fighting has nothing to do with



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Henry VIII's fertility issues. If it was, the Irish would be throwing bottles of Viagra, not pipe bombs.

Then there is the fighting in Iraq between the Sunnis and the Shiites. Even a cursory examination of the history of the Sunnis and Shiites shows this to be absurd. The division occurred after the death of Muhammad on who should succeed him. Both groups share the fundamentals of Islamic faith but differ on secondary issues. The division is politi-

cal, not theological. Further, the two groups in Iraq are fighting over division of oil revenue and political power; not fine points of the hadith. Likewise the fighting over Kashmir is over control of the territory, not because it's "God's will."

Lastly, there is the fighting between Israel and the rest of the Arab world. That conflict stems from Israel believing they have a right to continue living and the Arab world that is still angry that Hitler didn't finish the job. I'm not sure theological lines can be drawn there either. Before criticizing people as idiots, one might want to make sure they have their facts straight. Mr. Kettle, meet Mr. Pot.

What Lee and others can't grasp is that ethnic groups tend

to share a common religion, and have throughout most of history.

The Shiites and Sunnis are more than religious factions; they are sociopolitical groups. Nations have often identified with only one religion, that doesn't mean every war they fight is a religious one.

If we take a look at the most vicious genocides in human history, we'd find them products of secular governments, not religious ones.

Socialism, communism and liberalism have wrought the worst episodes of death in human history. Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, and Mao's China show just how far the goddess can go in dealing death. And let us not forget the worst genocide known

in human history, another product of godless liberalism, that of abortion.

Then there is the admonition to heed Jesus' advice to keep religion "personal" and spend more time living Christian principles. It is always amusing to be told what my faith teaches by someone who rejects it. It is hysterical to watch those who would mount the Judgment Seat of the very same Christ they reject.

As far as the living of Christian principles, one only needs to compare the charitable giving between Christians and others. Christians give substantially more.

A glance at the number of charitable organizations in this nation will show an overwhelming number based from Chris-

tian churches. In fact, where do you think the "cross" in Red Cross comes from? The people who claim Christians don't live Christian teaching ought to try and go out and meet a few Christians first.

There may be a "non-violent religious war" going on in America, and that is of those who seek to suppress those who would express Christianity. It is waged by those who shout out "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" but somehow manage to forget "or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." People have a right to express their ideas, even religious ones, and it's time that people stop demanding people bend their theology to meet some fabricated political notion.