

EDITORIAL

Ramadan, free speech and DailyIllini.com

At issue:

Guest column provokes discussion about holiday, religion and free speech.

The Daily Illini Editorial Board:

Editorials reflect the majority opinion of the board, which comprises:

Joe Lamberson, editor in chief; Stephanie Lulay, managing editor reporting; Martha Spalding, managing editor visuals; Kristin Maiorano, managing editor on-air; Christine Kim, newscast editor; Beth Gilomen, managing editor online; Susan Kantor, campus editor; Katie Foody, metro editor; Katie O'Connell, online content editor; Andrew Mason, opinions editor

Last Thursday, this page featured a guest column about the start of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month. The column itself was a benign message highlighting the virtues of a religion shared by a significant portion of the University population that unfortunately, has been subjected to misrepresentation, hatred and downright ignorance. During the weekend, the column, as it appears on DailyIllini.com, was flooded with comments ranging from the reasoned and informed to the vile and unconscionable.

Even though it's a sad reflection on what is hopefully a small minority of our readership, in our experience, that's just the way it goes. We instituted online commenting

last year because the Internet is now the fastest way readers, writers and editors can interact about the content and relevancy of columns, editorials and hard news stories. Like most new technological endeavors, it certainly has its weaknesses.

We've found that anonymity is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it allows people to remove personal filters that inhibit honest debate. But on the other hand, the filters they remove are sometimes the ones between their brain and their typing fingers.

We moderate comments that we feel are abusive, off-topic or use excessive foul language. For the most part, our online readers adhere to these standards. Those

that don't find their comments removed as quickly as possible. But the problem that's inherent in any standard of conduct is where to place it.

In the case of a comment which doesn't involve verifiable claims or copyrighted material, the question we ask ourselves is whether it has substance or not. While this is not a particularly nuanced determination, it is one that can be applied without deference to any particular political, cultural, or in this case, religious ideology.

There is no one-size-fits-all method of deciding what is acceptable speech. We believe that in cases such as last week's column, more speech is the way for readers to understand and form opinions on

such issues.

While we wish that we could temper the anger that sometimes accompanies controversies such as this, we don't view them as regrettable situations. We view them as opportunities.

We encourage readers to let us (and each other) know how they feel about the events of the day. If someone's opinion runs contrary to yours, send us your thoughts instead of calling for theirs to be silenced.

It may be blunt, but the price we pay for living in a free society with a free press is that sometimes feelings get hurt.

But like our parents taught us, we need to talk about our feelings for things to get better.

EDITORIAL CARTOON MIRANDA SINGLER, THE DAILY ILLINI



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil."

-Former Federal Reserve Chairman **ALAN GREENSPAN** in his new book "The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World," in which he also criticizes many economic policies of the Bush administration, including deficit spending and congressional Republicans who in his words "...swapped principle for power. They ended up with neither. They deserved to lose (the 2006 election)."

OTHER CAMPUSES NEAL HERBERT, THE DAILY REVELLE (LSU)

The Pillsbury Doughboy is real

Here's something crazy: To Pillsbury, the Doughboy is just as real as you or me. This highlights a real problem — I don't think our generation can tell the difference between what's real and what isn't. In fact, I'm not sure that the distinction even matters anymore.

I know that the Doughboy isn't real. The good people at Pillsbury disagree, however. At some point during the past few decades, the Doughboy became far more than a cartoon character and marketing tool — he became more real than Jay-Z and more of a diva than Rihanna.

This became apparent to Jeff Manning, architect of the Got Milk? marketing campaign, when he tried to work with Pillsbury to cross-promote milk with cookies. His vision was a domestic scene featuring both milk and cookies. The Doughboy was the star of the show, an impish rogue who drinks the last bit of milk.

Test audiences loved it. It was a hit. So why didn't we ever see these ads?

The Doughboy cited creative differences and refused to do the commercial.

Manning lamented this fact to Salon.com, a popular online magazine. "It was a fabulous spot, really interesting and contemporary. Unfortunately, the Doughboy couldn't do it."

I'm sure you're thinking what I'm thinking — how can a cartoon cite creative differences? After all, he doesn't freaking exist, right?

But that's not really true, either, because the Doughboy does exist. We've been watching him on TV for generations. The Doughboy is always around to make those cookies extra special. He is the real mother's lit-

tle helper, Rolling Stones be damned; mommies love cookies more than Valium, and probably more than daddy.

Pillsbury gets it. "The Pillsbury guidelines stipulate that the Doughboy must always be a helper, a teacher or a friend," Manning noted to Salon. "Our spot showed the Doughboy drinking the last of the milk. Therefore he wasn't being a helper. He wasn't being a teacher. And he certainly wasn't being a friend."

I never knew that Doughboy paradigm was "helper, teacher, friend." Maybe it makes the cookies taste better. Alas, it didn't help them sell cookies. Pillsbury's Director of Brand Development, Brad Ready lays down the law: "It might be a real funny thing for him to do. But not the Doughboy. He doesn't trick people. He doesn't take advantage. It's not in his character to do that."

What's amazing is that Ready can say something nonsensical — the Doughboy has ethics — and make sense. We do it all the time when we talk about stuff: Pirates did call the sea a "harsh mistress." We name our cars. We do the same thing with TV shows: Everyone on sorority row knows that Seth Cohen from The O.C. is a sensitive guy but Ryan's the brooding one.

We also know that things can't feel, but we act and talk like they do. Some people probably believe that they do. And maybe, in a sense, they do feel. Ready says, "Look. If you asked the Doughboy if he wanted to do that commercial, he'd say no. He'd say, 'I just want to talk about my cookies.'" Ready's absolutely correct, too. In fact, he's probably got a hell of a lot better chance of predicting how the Doughboy feels than I do of predicting how anyone else will

react. The Doughboy's beliefs are pre-existing, delineated in a corporate mission statement. People don't come with user's guides.

We live in a world where the Pillsbury Doughboy can exercise creative control. Welcome to hyper-reality, baby. There's a catch though: Where hyper-reality tricks the mind into detaching from real experiences in favor of simulated or constructed artificial experiences, I think we're approaching the point where we can declare "real" experiences as dead as the dodo. Reality TV is more real than reality — just look at the Nielsen ratings. VH1's "Celebrity" is an alluring mistress, and our eyes are becoming just another camera for the reality TV gangbang.

We can talk about the Doughboy's morals because we made them. They are fixed, permanent, immutable — the closest consumer culture's getting to Plato's Forms. And it's not like the Doughboy's going to contradict us. He can't. He's just baked that way.

So I'd say the Doughboy's morals and personality are a lot more consistent than that of anyone I've ever dated. My perception of real people is a lot less reliable than my perception of the Doughboy. I might even say that the Doughboy is more real than some of the real people I know. I'd certainly trust him more.

I can predict his actions, his feelings — helper, teacher, friend. Everything I know about him is objectively confirmed by the Doughboy's corporate masters. The Doughboy would never tell me no. The Doughboy would take a bullet for me. The Doughboy always returns my calls.

'Cause nothing says lovin' like fresh from the oven.

The irrational conservative animal in its natural habitat

Where they come from and where they should go

In the modern world, there is only one thing that frightens me more than international terrorism, and that is the American conservative. This summer, Fox News covered the National Conservative Student Conference, organized by Young America's Foundation, and reported that young conservatives are "brushing off their image as impressionistic and naive followers" and rejecting the Republican Party.

Before I could even start donning my party hat, the Noise continues on to conclude that the future of the conservative movement lies in "edgier" icons like Ann Coulter and Dinesh D'Souza. Although my initial reaction was to write them off completely, I realized it would be folly to blame conservatives for this lemmingesque idiocy. It is simply in their nature.

The conservative is, like all of us, a certain kind of animal. However, where the common man is endowed with reason and good sense, the conservative happily surrenders these faculties for nebulous concepts like "protecting the homeland" and "family values." Of course, these concepts are not abhorrent. In fact, liberals actively pursue the same ideals through fully considered and rational policies. Why, then, does the average conservative have an image of liberals closely resembling that of the Antichrist? To put it bluntly: because this kind of false dichotomy favors Republican politicians.

They realized, some time in the 1980s, that they could not substantially sway the South unless they could create an incentive powerful enough to overcome an entrenched loyalty to the Democratic Party. Finding themselves shut out of the legislatures, they tried the churches. There they discovered a population with strong values, overwhelming faith and a healthy skepticism for the federal government. All they had to do was train them to believe that liberalism was irreligious,



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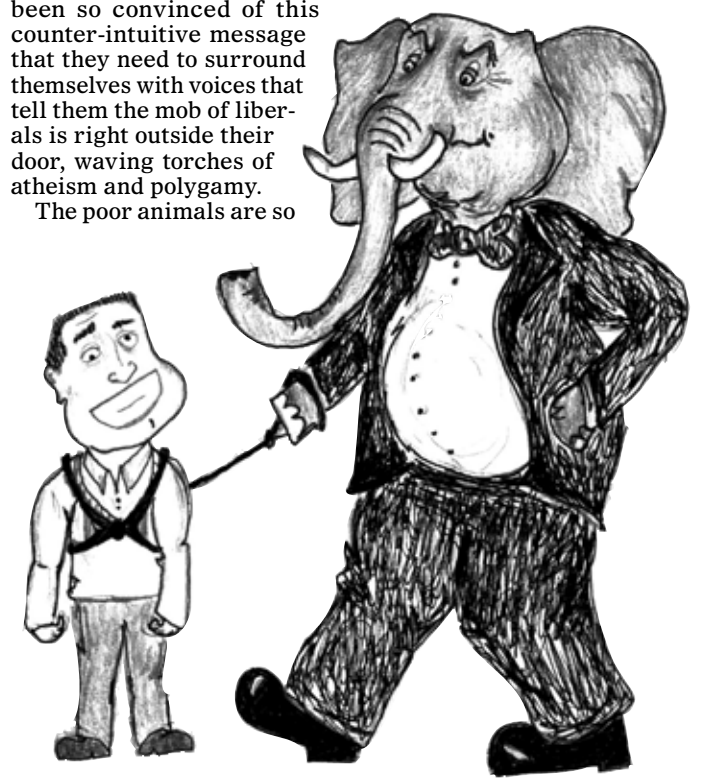
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and only Republicans could save them from an oncoming moral decay. Thus the Republican elite became not only their brother's keeper, but his handler as well.

The ideology they created was a hodge podge of religious ideals connected to big business, tied together with a string of vicious emotional imagery and invented doubts in Democratic patriotism. The strong sense of community that exists in religious people, who are

abundant in the South, has been warped into a political Frankenstein. And now, it has begun to turn on its master. Instead of maintaining their loyalty to the Republican Party, conservatives find themselves craving those who will feed their hunger for anti-liberal rhetoric. They have been so convinced of this counter-intuitive message that they need to surround themselves with voices that tell them the mob of liberals is right outside their door, waving torches of atheism and polygamy.

The poor animals are so



OPINION POLL

What action should America take on Iraq?

Number of votes: 242

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: Do you still care about O.J. Simpson? Vote on DailyIllini.com.

