

COMMENTARY

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Thursday, March 6, 2003

Editorial

Terrorism profiles offer no security; they Slip 'N Slide toward fascism

There are times where we almost have to wonder whether the Transportation Department and the TSA are on the payroll for Amtrak. Many of their attempts to increase security at the nation's airports have ended up hamhanded or worse. Asking mothers to drink their own breast milk, confiscating miniature rifles from "G.I. Joe" and strip-searching old ladies was just the tip of the iceberg. Now, there is a new arena for the erosion of civil liberties in this nation after Sept. 11, 2001.

Delta Airlines, in cooperation with the Transportation Department, is beginning a pilot program in three undisclosed airports next month that should have every American outraged over its potential for abuse.

The way the program is supposed to work is that a "profile" (our first warning bell, by the way) will be created from every passenger's credit and bank account reports (our second warning bell) and from that, each passenger will be assigned a color code (bingo!) that assesses his or her threat level. Green-coded passengers will be clear to fly, yellow-coded passengers will get extra attention from security screeners — "take off ze shoes!" Red codes won't be able to fly at all.

Needless to say, this new initiative from the Transportation Department worries us and raises a whole host of privacy questions. We are appalled that the government is going to be further rooting around in our personal lives wholesale. This is not the police or FBI going into one person's history to solve a crime — this is a new security apparatus digging around and pinning the tenuous label of "potential terrorist" on people who may very well have done nothing wrong. This is the kind of unfettered access that the Gestapo, or the Stasi, or the KGB could only dream about. This is Total Information Awareness Lite — and this time, there's nothing that Congress can do about it.

Further, what exactly would trigger a yellow or red code? We don't know, and certainly, they're not going to tell us. For all we know, not having a credit history could trigger an alert — which could be problematic then for students and others who may not have credit cards. Or is it those in debt? Or those with "interesting" purchases?

Maybe red codes are given out to college newspaper editorial boards that write opinion pieces opposing this new destruction of civil liberties. Or is it discretionary, left up to the judgment of the officer doing the investigating and his or her biases? Will a first name of "Mohammed" trigger a yellow or red? And is there recourse for those given the scarlet letter if they could prove they're not threatening?

Finally, there's no indication how long the information will be kept by the government, and how secure the info will be on their end — that sort of personal information concentrated in one place, especially if it's not secure enough, could be El Dorado for information thieves.

We are for security, and we believe that the nation has to do things to prevent another Sept. 11. This, however, is more of the expanding government surveillance that will not bring America any closer to catching terrorists. Instead, it makes us wonder in what direction this nation truly is headed.

Editorial policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

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Letters to the editor

Hall residents need to be less wasteful

When kids come into the residence halls, they learn a lot beyond their school subjects. One of the things they learn — or don't, as the case may be — is how their presence affects the world both socially and environmentally.

Kids in the halls waste hundreds of paper plates and cups every year, and many of them don't think once about where that paper is coming from or where it is going. As dramatic as it may sound, residence hall students learn to live unthinkingly here, and then they feed into the workforce and into influential positions, and still don't care about their waste.

When I try to bring my own plate to Common Grounds, I usually get the response, "It's a cleanliness issue." If this is a true concern for the housing food system, then why is it that a place like the Buzz Café is so accepting of the idea that they give customers a 20-cent discount for using a personal cup? We need to change the system in the residence halls so that those of us who want to bring our own cups and plates can, and then maybe we can influence others not to waste either.

Amy Seidenverg
sophomore
English

Support international students on campus

We are writing to express our support for University students from largely Muslim countries who have been required to register in person with the INS. We are concerned that these students are being subjected to intrusive practices (e.g. fingerprinting, questioning and photographing) and

have been placed under suspicion for no other reason than their nationality.

Studying abroad in itself can be a stressful experience. Just imagine what it would be like to be thousands of miles away from your family and friends, and then to have to travel to Portland to be interrogated by federal officials, knowing that some of your compatriots have been jailed for minor visa infractions. Perhaps we would say the wrong thing. Furthermore, we might be reluctant to seek support from our friends because of the stigma. At the end of the day, many of us would feel alienated and afraid.

In acknowledging the position of students from largely Muslim countries, we in no way intend to diminish the very real stress and hardship that other students may be experiencing. We draw attention to this group because they are among the most vulnerable members of our community, targeted for suspicion and denied legal rights.

In the spirit of creating a safe and inclusive community, we ask all of us to be aware of the stressful circumstances these international students are facing. We invite students, faculty and staff to reach out and let these students know that they are valued and have friends here.

Edel Davenport, M.S.
Mark B. Evans, M.D.
Robin Holmes, Ph.D.
University Counseling and Testing Center

Pipe raids waste of tax money

We must all give praise and thanks to the great hero Attorney General John Ashcroft and all those brave people who worked under him and spent god knows how much of our tax dollars to raid the dangerous criminal masterminds that blow glass.

We can't afford to fund our schools,

but at least we can prevent people from making pipes that could potentially be used to smoke marijuana (gasp!), a very evil drug. After all, according to the DEA, no amount of marijuana that a person can smoke or ingest constitutes a lethal dose. But alcohol, a good and legal drug, is a poison that can kill you if you ingest too much, is involved in the majority of traffic fatalities, and is known to loosen inhibition, which I'm sure we've all seen lead to a violent outburst at some party or in some bar.

When was the last time you saw a pothead do something violent? Maybe it's just me, but it seems like they should be spending our tax dollars on something more useful, like keeping our frigg'n state budget afloat or preventing some wacko from crashing an airplane into a building.

But then again, I guess it's pretty important to make sure someone isn't smoking dope. It could lead to all sorts of dangerous behavior like playing video games, eating junk food and sleeping.

Mason Gummer
senior
sociology

Don't blame the high school kid

I was casually reading the editorial "Sex, drugs, booze at college parties? Why, we never!" (ODE, Feb. 14) until the last line, "Perhaps he could have told us ... and saved everyone a lot of grief." Sounds as though the editorial board was blaming the whole thing on the high school kid.

Most, I would think, would have blamed the older, more experienced and presumably wiser person as the responsible party. But to get the school and the star athlete off the hook, the board chose to go with, "Perhaps he could have told us."

Vince Puleo
Eugene