

# Use of political swastika protected by first amendment

## Guest commentary

A recent commentary by Masha Katz and 12 others ("Anti-war sentiment borders hate speech," March 4, 2003) has disturbing undertones. The article suggests that a sign at 13th Avenue and University Street was akin to hate speech because it equated President George W. Bush with Adolf Hitler near an image of a swastika.

The article boldly asserts, "using a swastika for political discourse is offensive and unacceptable." It concludes, "The time is now to think seriously about . . . what the result may be if hateful speech is allowed to continue on campus." In short, the article suggests the speech at is-

sue is so hateful that it should not be allowed. The article fails to acknowledge that not allowing certain speech on campus invariably demands the use of police power.

While I too urge others not to use such symbols of hatred (in part because I am offended by such symbols), I disagree with the assumption that the protest described in the article constituted hate speech. Equating Bush with Hitler conveys a specific and clear message: Bush is a tyrant who uses propaganda to fulfill some sick Third Reich-like destiny to rule the world and commit genocide.

I may disagree with that assertion and even find it absurd if not offensive because it cheapens the suffering of Jews, Gypsies, gays and oth-

ers, but I find it hard to believe that such an equation constitutes hate speech or that it espouses a viewpoint unworthy of debate. The use of a swastika by itself to communicate fear, intimidation or violence, however, clearly constitutes hate speech. This distinction is important to avoid confusing meaningful political speech with which one disagrees with hate speech.

The article also claims the demonstration was juvenile, unreasonable and mindless — thereby unacceptable — and further suggests that such mindless speech has no place on campus. Nothing can be further from the truth. This sort of speech should be permitted so that Mr. Katz, et al. may expose it for what it is: Unadulterated nonsense.

Free speech is essential to a free and open society as well as a robust learning environment. Others must be free, barring certain circumstances articulated by the U.S. Supreme Court (i.e., incitement, defamation, clear and present danger, etc.), to express their views even if the majority or minority disagrees.

The First Amendment protects Americans not from one another's unpleasant speech but from their own government (e.g., *Cohen v. California*). We may disagree with the views of others, we may deplore the burning of flags, abhor the burning of crosses and meet the brandishing of swastikas with outrage.

Indeed it is our responsibility, just as the article suggests, to hold

others politically accountable for what they say or the messages they convey. A letter to the editor is but one good example of how one may respond to disagreeable speech. Yet we must be equally vigilant in ensuring government has no participatory role in holding others accountable for views with which we disagree.

The moment we concede that some speech may be regulated by the government merely because it conveys an offensive or emotional viewpoint is the moment we acquiesce our First Amendment right to our government and the moment we cease to be American.

Simon Ravona is a third-year law student.

# Equating Bush to Hitler is offensive to Jewish community

## Guest commentary

*Editor's note: This was submitted before the publication of editor-in-chief Michael J. Kleckner's column discussing the article in question; please see "Two apologies, one good-bye, much good luck" (ODE, March 17).*

After reading "Americans must end support for oppressive Israeli rule" (ODE, Mar. 12), I was appalled and angered that someone would write something that ignorant and anti-Semitic and even more angered that the Emerald thinks it is OK to print his crap. I have never felt the urge to write the Emerald with my opinion of world politics, because frankly I could care less

what other people think about the war in Iraq and the Middle East, and I'm sure others feel the same way about my views. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. The one thing I will not stand is this guy comparing the Bush administration with Hitler and the Nazi Party.

As a Jew, I am deeply offended. No matter what a person's view on Bush is, and I understand that most at the University can't stand him, there is no comparison with Hitler — a man who ordered and carried out the murder of six million Jews, including one million children under the age of 12 in a three-year period. Many, many members of my family were slaughtered at the hands of the Nazis, and I grew up with family stories that I still have a

really hard time talking about.

I refuse to let this guy trivialize the Holocaust with his views on the current administration. To me, that is the most insulting thing someone can do to a Jew. If Paul Aranas doesn't understand that a sign with "Bush=Hitler" and a swastika is completely not appropriate, he is extremely ignorant. I know that if I had seen a person with that sign, I would definitely have done something about it.

On the matter of the Palestinians, if Aranas wants to inform us about the current situation he should at least have his facts right, but his numbers were wrong. Aranas wrote that the Palestinians are basically freedom fighters who are blowing

themselves up around innocent civilians because they are "exacerbated by oppression, murder and 36 years of brutal occupation." As if the Palestinians in charge just want peace and would stop the murders if Israel just gave them a little bit of freedom so they could live side by side in peace and harmony under a beautiful rainbow.

I looked up Hamas' charter from their Web site. Hamas is the main terrorist organization that has sent the vast majority of suicide bombers into Israel (including the Haifa bus blast a week ago) since the late '80s. Their mission statement reads, in part, "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it. . . . The

Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgment Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: It, or any part of it, should not be given up. . . . There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad."

It is clear that until the Palestinian terrorist organizations acknowledge Israel's right to exist there will never be peace, and that is a fact. I feel badly that there are people as ignorant as Aranas in the world. Until he knows what he's talking about, he should keep his mouth shut.

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