

COMMENTARY

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Editorial

Alas, there's no nobility in U.S. portrait of war

As the U.S. war with Iraq moves further into the past, details of the conflict and ongoing events make it look less and less like the noble undertaking that President George W. Bush would like to portray it as, and more like the ugly routine that is the greater part of all wars.

That isn't to say that the troops involved didn't face danger or act bravely. Many of them did. But the sad facts of the war are emblematic of Bush's administration in general — smoke and mirrors that make things appear to be what they aren't.

The most recent revelation, that Pvt. Jessica Lynch wasn't actually heroically rescued from the abusive grip of evil enemy combatants, is perhaps the most astounding. British news sources broke the story that there were no Iraqi soldiers in the hospital at the time U.S. troops took Lynch out. Lynch did not engage in firefight with Iraqis before her capture, the Washington Times and other sources have reported. Lynch was well taken care of by Iraqi doctors, according to CNN and numerous other sources, including having hospital staff donate their own blood for her when the hospital ran dry.

The image portrayed in the media was very different, however, and it was a picture Bush needed at the time: Noble heroics and a daring rescue. Hardly, as it turns out.

The question of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, repeatedly cited by Bush as the "imminent danger" faced by America, is now a non-starter. This could be called smoke and mirrors, except there isn't even any smoke, much less a smoking gun. No WMDs have been found, and no proof has ever been offered that the United States faced any danger from Iraq. It sure sounded good at the time, didn't it?

Here's more ugly routine: Remember the sudden strike on a hidden bunker that began the war with Iraq? CBS News recently visited the site and interviewed Army Col. Tim Madere, who has been investigating the bombed remains. Madere says there was no bunker on that site, there are no bodies and the palace that was there is still standing. Madere told CBS that if people had been in the palace, they "could have survived" the bombing.

It's getting hard to find the real thing among all the mirrors.

On Sunday, Britain's The Observer reported that as many as 3,000 prisoners of war are being held in Baghdad, and the Red Cross has repeatedly been denied access to them. This is in violation of international law. It's hardly noble for the world's most powerful democracy to flout the law after using Saddam Hussein's disobedience as justification for attacking his country.

The event that best exemplifies the senseless routine of death accompanying war is also the saddest. Dwayne Williams, a 23-year-old sailor, was returning home onboard his ship, the USS Nassau, on May 23. He had been deployed for nine months and was only 900 miles from land when he fell overboard trying to catch a football. He was seen in the water waving his arms, according to CNN, but when the crew sent out a rescue team, they were unable to find him.

He was lost at sea while catching a football. The horrible meaningless of that is nearly enough to turn one to existentialism. And it's representative of the senselessness of the war with Iraq, which is increasingly looking nothing like the government's picture of it.

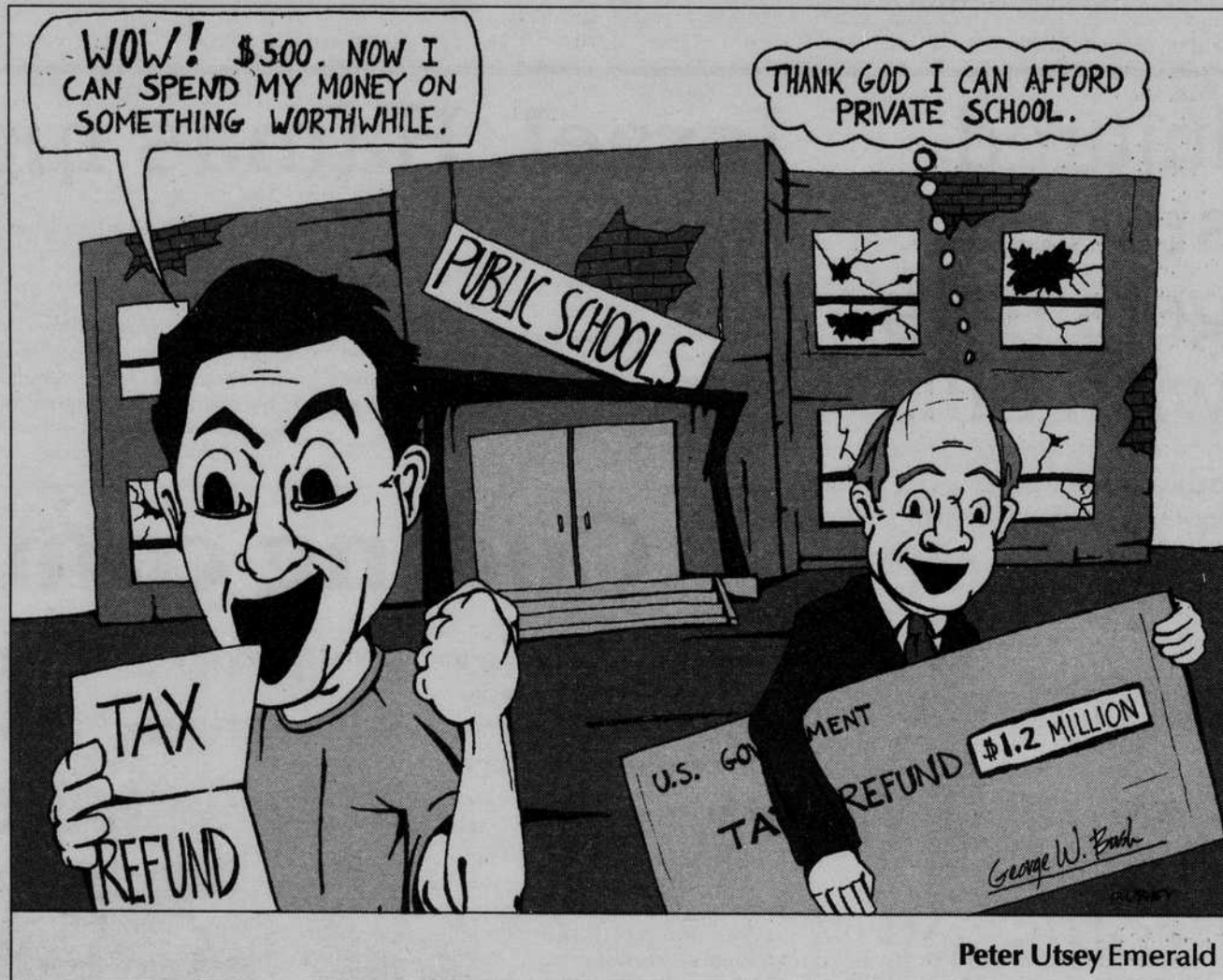
The war is reminiscent, however, of the French ship in Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," which Marlow sees firing repeatedly into a stretch of jungle where no enemies are visible.

Conrad writes: "There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives — he called them enemies! — hidden out of sight somewhere."

American men and women fought, killed and died in Iraq. Innocent Iraqis were killed. The entire affair — and the Bush presidency — is appalling.

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.



There is no quick fix for ending violence

Chuck Slothower's column ("Gunning for safety," ODE, May 5) outlined the dangers of the National Rifle Association and how there is not enough gun control in the United States. He addressed issues such as the number of gun deaths in the year 2001 (which is correct) and the lack of safety individuals taking to secure their firearms.

While his argument on tax credits for safe storage is semi-legitimate (but not practical), he veers off the path of reality and sanity a number of times. He begins his column with a heartstring-puller about a severely troubled 14-year-old who took the life of his high school principal and then turned the weapon on himself.

I don't understand how this story helps him prove his case for gun control. He implies, but doesn't prove, that stricter gun control laws would have saved those two lives. There are many stories which include death by firearms, and they are just as sad as those which include drunken driving accidents; however, there is no quick cure, if any at all, for either of these illegal acts. It's a matter of enforcement of these laws and addressing those in need

of help before they resort to violence.

Although I am not personally a fan of the NRA, there are some half-truths in Slothower's article which paint a biased picture of the organization.

First, he mentions that "Gun enthusiasts bring a level of passion, organization, and money, preventing even the discussion of reasonable gun restrictions." Perhaps gun control legislation doesn't bring headlines in the news, but each bill proposed at both state and federal levels gets its share of time to be discussed, same as any other bill.

This passage also leaves the presumption that there is no counterforce which attempts to combat the NRA and its ilk. This is not true, as there are numerous groups such as Handgun Control Inc. and Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, which battle with the pro-gun lobby to further restrict firearms ownership. Last time I checked, there was no violation associated with effective lobbying.

The second issue has to do with the "(prevention) of even the discussion of reasonable gun restrictions." I would like to know when the last level-headed

firearms restriction was contemplated in any legislative body.

The Brady Bill II on the federal level, the banning of all semi-automatic weapons in Illinois, or the establishment of federal ballistic fingerprinting are not what I would call reasonable or slightly realistic. It is also important to keep in mind that when a law is created, it has to be enforced, so there is no use in creating ones that aren't reasonably within the scope of police efforts to enforce.

There are other great flaws in the column, but the primary problem that stems from all of this is the culture of fear that we live in, and that Slothower, along with my good pal Michael Moore, have done their best to reinforce.

It is the lack of education concerning the roots of violence that is the greatest problem in our society — and the government's ignorant actions when attempting to curb them. There is no quick fix, and the violence won't stop until our country's war on the poor comes to an end.

Joel Sokoloff is a senior political science major.

Letter to the editor

Don't give up civil rights for patriotism

Memorial Day is a time to honor sacrifice. Unfortunately, politicians dishonor true patriots when they hide beneath empty catch phrases like "national security."

One such policy plays on fear while annihilating civil rights. Once called the Total Information Awareness office, the Department of Defense has given TIA a public relations overhaul — renaming it the Terrorism Information Awareness program after our own Senator Ron Wyden spear-

headed a movement voicing concerns about its lack of oversight.

Unfortunately, TIA's new makeover is only skin-deep. The premise is still flawed — that by cataloging millions of people's credit card reports, medical status and educational backgrounds, we can somehow establish patterns exposing terrorists. Not only is this a ludicrous proposition, but it would burden our already inefficient security system.

The FBI complained after Sept. 11, 2001, that they had too much information. As the ACLU pointed out, "You don't find a needle in a haystack by bringing in more hay."

Even if TIA was feasible, can the government be trusted with so much information? The Detroit Free Press reported that Michigan police used information databases such as TIA to stalk women, harass motorists, spy on estranged spouses and even threaten political opponents. Similar incursions happened during the Vietnam protests. The director of TIA, John Poindexter, has a less than impressive record when it comes to public accountability.

By all means celebrate apple pie, but also remember the price we've paid for civil liberties. Don't let it be in vain.

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