

OPINION

Whines & Gripes

Why did it only take a year to build the new athletic complex, but the library still doesn't have lights upstairs?

Girl down the hall who blasts your bass at random times day and night: I wish someone were beating your head against the wall every-time the beat drops.

Why can the girls who love corn pass judgment on me for not liking corn, but I cannot pass judgment on them for wearing silly clothes and waking up at 4 am to run through the hallways?

Dear campus police: the conduct you exhibited at Cornhuskin' was unprofessional. Trying to keep parents from sitting in an area that was not roped off, accusing them of moving the stake, and then proceeding to tell them you would have them arrested is completely uncalled for.

Please don't talk about paying someone else to write your research paper for you while you're in the Honors lounge. Announcing your plan to demolish the Meredith Honor Code in a public place on campus just isn't smart.

Why do you have to call campus police to get the fire alarm to go off in your apartment?

Why does the Beehive always manage to run out of coffee when I need it the most?

Sanity Delivered Dr. Rebecca Duncan, English Faculty

For weeks I had tried and failed to explain to family, friends and my students why it mattered to board a 3:30 a.m. bus to attend the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear in Washington, D.C. The event risked silliness, open conflict, or smarmy platitudes. My students were amused, uninterested or skeptical. Yet I was curious to see who would be there and heartened to see that it mattered to so many others as well.

From the moment we arrived, my friend and I floated in a sea of people. A pair of stunt men led stadium-style waves: first the whole crowd, then the men against the women, and finally a surge from two directions that met in the middle (metaphor surely intended). When the crowd seemed to close in upon us, we threaded our way through hips and thighs and shoulders, stepping around family picnics and strollers and wheelchairs to the outer rim, where we could breathe and feel the breeze. We tried to cross the mall to eat, and for nearly an hour we bobbed and swayed through a conflicted mass of standers and movers. A woman balanced on the rim of a lamppost assured us we'd be free in 20 more feet. We gulped into the blue, vapor-gridded sky for air and pressed on, past costumed versions of Darth Vader, Alice in Wonderland, Sarah

Palin, Waldo, a pile of spaghetti, and several giant tea bags.

Yet questions remained, as kind people pressed cardboard "Team Sanity" and "Team Fear" signs into our hands (no need to choose; we could have one of each.). Were there really "sides?" Would a comedy news show host with a penchant for the giggles have anything to tell us, and could a manic parody of a conservative pundit actually "turn it down a notch"? Most importantly, how would the events of the day be shaped and informed by that crucial element of irony?

Irony is a tough one; it requires a common understanding of the intention or attitude that is being undermined. Likewise, parody involves homework; we need a solid sense of the original, the target of the imitation, and an ear for the subtle subversive gestures of which language is capable before we can laugh knowingly. To further complicate things, The Daily Show's irony often runs smack into The Colbert Report's parody; theoretically, it seems unlikely that one person would find them both interesting or valuable. Yet people seemed to get the complexity, and they diffused the polarity with a collage of signs,

ranging from the professionally drawn "Oh Sanity, Where Art Thou?" to the hand-scribbled "Keep Beer Alive." And even before Jon Stewart spoke seriously about amplified distortions by media extremists, people seemed to have identified the amplifiers and the distorters as the common enemy. Fox News took a beating on numerous signs and shirts, and so did Sarah Palin, particularly for her involvement with the network.

North Carolina voters have been treated to our share of the political rhetoric that Stewart says makes it nearly impossible to reach across the aisle. Some of the postcards that arrived in my mailbox looked like PhotoShop creations, and others aimed to make monsters of the opponent. Some were not endorsed by a candidate at all. Before the Washington trip, the notched up ads made me angry. Thinking of those happy, thoughtful people who also made the sanity pilgrimage, though, I can now find them as funny as Stewart's "your moment of zen" or Colbert's "The Word." Stewart's closing speech is on YouTube; if you missed the rally, check it out, and see if you can laugh yourself back from the edge.

Virtual Soup Lines Lyn Triplett, Staff Writer

I believe that what we are experiencing in the current economic crisis is the closest to the experiences of our grandparents and the Great Depression that has occurred in the 75 years. I think that the electronic age has created a false sense of innocence in regards to the magnitude of the enormous plight of the vast numbers of the faceless unemployed.

My first semester at Meredith I took a photography course. One of the assignments was to research a famous photographer, view her works, read and learn about the person and then using our cameras, try to re-create a photograph in her style. There were numerous photographers to choose from, and although I did not know them by name, some of their photos were instantly recognizable. This week, I began to wonder about how current events and culture would be documented. Where would be the joyous picture of the sailor kissing the nurse in Times Square when the war in the Middle East ends? Would it be on Facebook? Would it appear on someone's cell phone?

The Great Depression had many iconic pictures of women and children, the dust bowl, soup and bread lines. So how would today's economic problems turn into history for our younger generations? Would it be a collage of digital images from literally hundreds of thousands

of cell phones?

I know something of the struggle of this early part of the new millennium. My husband and I were caught in the early economic downturn, and we are still reeling from its effects. But what worries me is that even though many people hear the numbers and statistics of the loss of jobs, there is a namelessness and invisibility surrounding the thousands who are struggling. In today's world, people cannot see faces of the unemployed. There are no lines outside a factory, no pictures of desperate men and women queuing up for soup or bread, no visual icon to capture the hardship that so many people are enduring at this point in history. Today's media, along with everything else, are presented electronically. This generation of unemployed workers never has to leave the house. Now the unemployed can fill out an e-application and press send. The application goes into the black hole of digital space. Only if a key word is written somewhere on the form is it re-directed to someone else's mailbox. Then if the recipient is not ready to view an application — he or she can press delete and off go the applications. Those searching for work never hear anything from any-

body from anywhere. Once, we drove over to a major university and walked into the human resources office. We asked if we could speak to a real live human being. Answer: No. This office accepted over 1000 e-applications a day, making it logistically impossible to see a person.

Unemployment statistics do not include the segment of the population that has used all of the unemployment benefits and are still unemployed or vastly under employed. Therefore, the competition for any type of job today is probably equal to what my grandparents experienced in the Great Depression. Only now, instead of seeing photographs of hundreds of people lined up for a factory job, one sees only e-applications and online job searches. These faceless methods have replaced the visual images that created a sense of crisis and desperation during the Great Depression. There are now "virtual soup lines" of people applying for county services and government assistance, but the sense of urgency and the realistic perceptions of an economic crisis have diminished because we cannot "see" them. Nobody seems to know how bleak the entire economic situation has truly become.