

# Making the Earth a Better Place, One Step at a Time

A couple of years ago, I kept seeing this car on campus that constantly drew my attention. It was a Ford Excursion – the colossus of sport utility vehicles. On the Excursion's back window was a sticker that advised people to "Keep Tahoe Blue." Now, I'm sure the owner of the car meant well. He was probably a real cool kid. But environmentally charged bumper stickers don't cancel out the negative effects of an Excursion on the environment. It still keeps on being an inefficient and wasteful ride, no matter how many Chief Seattle stickers go on the back.

Considering that a majority of Americans align themselves with the environment politically yet most refute those ideals in practice, this is a lesson from which most of us could benefit. As people born into a capitalist system

that implores us to consume rather than reduce, it's sometimes hard to question American values. But often, those values don't make much sense.

Take a closer look at America's love affair with the SUV. America is an oil-poor country, yet our most popular cars are gas-guzzlers. We freak out if gas prices get above a dollar fifty, but scarce oil doesn't stop people from buying Suburbans. The technology exists to create cars that get 60 miles to the gallon on the highway, but people instead choose to purchase vehicles that get ridiculously low gas mileage. Why is this the case?

Perhaps SUVs are practical investments for those living in mountainous terrains but that would hardly account for the prevalence of these cars

throughout America. And anyhow, a person can get the benefits of an SUV in a Subaru Outback, so the "I live in the mountains" excuse isn't even a good one.

The truth is, most Americans buy SUVs because most Americans value fashion more than the environment.

Obviously energy conservation just isn't in vogue.

Sadly, most Americans don't consider the environment at all in their daily actions – but that's just the place where a strong earth consciousness should exist. People associate environmentalism with frivolity and hippies, but there's actually nothing whimsical about it.

To be a true environmentalist, conservation and prudence are the main

requirements. It's simple: We live on an earth; we should try our best to preserve it. Environmentalism shouldn't be a political theory but instead a way of life.

This preservation of our planet can occur in many simple but painless individual lifestyle changes. For starters, try to purchase a car that gets good gas mileage and emits fewer fumes. Or better yet, ride a bike or walk if you don't have to use a car. Or use public transportation. This is especially easy to do in Chapel Hill since busing is free for everyone.

Even if you decide that you must use your car, try to be considerate of those who don't. As someone who bikes everywhere, I understand that many don't consider a Schwinn the hot vehicle that I do. In fact, I get a lot of hell for it – people yell at me to get a

car, dudes heckle me nonstop just for being a girl on a bike and drivers offer me the evil eye for daring to ride on the road. And sometimes, yes, I feel like a tool rolling up to Players on my Trek, but, to me, being a loser on a bike is better than needlessly using a car.

Eating less animal products is another way to positively impact the environment. Since two thirds of the earth's arable land is devoted to growing animal feed rather than food fit for human ingestion, animal consumption represents another inefficient allocation of resources. Furthermore, animals are often raised in factory conditions, with little regard to the health of the animals or the environment.

As North Carolinians, we should all be concerned about the effect the hog industry has on our air, land and water.

Southeastern North Carolina is quickly becoming the pig cesspool of America. I understand that pork chops, bacon and barbecue are all blessings from God and that many people aren't ready to put down the pork. But, the next time you bite into a barbecue sandwich, ask yourself if the delicious taste is worth North Carolina's future.

The point of this article hasn't been to preach but rather to highlight the importance of an earth-friendly outlook. The actions listed above are small steps meant for individuals to incorporate into daily life. But perhaps the most critical thing one can do to help the earth is to constantly recognize its utmost importance and behave accordingly.

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### ASHLEY HOLMES GUEST COLUMNIST



## A Quick Report From the Front Line

This is an unofficial, informal "report" on the march that took place this weekend in Washington, D.C. I place "report" within quotation marks because I know I am writing only it as a human witness and no mainstream media in this country will have the guts to confront the historic significance of what more than 100,000 people collectively witnessed this past weekend.

A report on counterpunch.org quotes Washington, D.C. Police Chief Charles Ramsey placing the number well above 100,000 people, and informal estimates now suggest that there were probably a quarter of a million people. It was a march that brought together the first signs of a true mass movement that is gaining ground in this country and around the world against racism, economic exploitation and the endless war and occupation that is being heaped on the world's disenfranchised.

North Carolinians against the war decided we were not to be left behind. So hundreds of us woke up on the morning of April 20, groggy but determined, to board our various buses and vans for the five-hour trip to Washington. As we approached the city and crossed the Pentagon, marked by a gigantic crane near where a part of it had been destroyed on Sept. 11, we wondered if the officials planning our lives inside would care to look outside to see what the world is telling them in no uncertain words – no destruction in our name, no "not in our name!"

As we approached the first of several rallies going on simultaneously, the "collective" cries of, "We are all Palestinian" rent the air. People said, "Free Palestine" and, "No more war." People from around the world and around the United States (We heard over 70 buses had come from New York City alone) were there to break the silence. One Jewish woman we met had just taken a plane up to Washington from Nashville, Tenn., simply to look for other Jewish people who would oppose the occupation. Another wrote, with tongue in cheek, on a banner, "One Jew for Palestinians."

Some of us tried talking to the police about Monday's pro-Israel rally that had been graced by several Washington politicians and Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu. Two didn't want to comment, but the third, a black woman, said to me: "No way, this is much bigger! If I was to give a number I would just say, there are zillions and zillions of you."

It really was a collective coming together of oppressed people from around the world, as even the National Public Radio admitted on Sunday's morning edition. We saw and met Venezuelans, Colombians, Cubans, Canadians, Brits, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Indians, Filipinos, Koreans, Algerians, Sudanese, Palestinians, Jewish rabbis, Chicanos and white and African-American allies – the Green Party, the global justice people, the Raging Grannies, school children from inner-city New York and veterans of U.S. wars. I had never seen such a

gathering of white people and people of color anywhere, not to mention the age range – from infants to the really elderly. Children, Palestinian and otherwise, were shouting slogans such as, "Sharon, Sharon, what do you say? How many children have you killed today?"

Yes, "We are all Palestinians" – by virtue of being occupied by a media that distorts the pain and suffering of people around the world; "We are all Palestinian" because no politician or public official has the courage to stand up and speak on behalf of those of us who oppose the system on moral and ethical grounds, and we don't have the money to buy influence either; "We are all Palestinian" because we still have humanity left in us.

But we are not all Palestinian because we can only shed tears for them when they are shedding blood (as Robert Jensen, quoting Jose Marti, reminded us at the teach-in on "New War Economy"), and we are not all Palestinian because we have comfortable homes to go back and sleep in at the end of a long day.

For us North Carolinians on the bus, the day ended with our African-American bus driver Mike congratulating us for having made the trip and wishing that all of this should have been done a long time ago. He ended by thanking us for traveling with "American Classic!" I think that sums it all up! For it was in America that the world's conscience was finally making itself visible.

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### RASHMI VARMA GUEST COLUMNIST

## Bombers, Terrorists and Prime Ministers: A Brief History Lesson

We are often reminded that if we do not remember history, we are doomed to repeat it. These days prove that point. The horrifying actions by both sides in the Middle East have led to a terrible cycle of terror, with each action and reaction more devastating than the last. The two sides each label the other the aggressor and their own actions as simply self-defense.

Our government demands that Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat denounce the senseless violence of the suicide bombers. International pressure mounts on Israel to back off from its violent and destructive reoccupation of the West Bank. Who is right, and who is wrong? History may not answer that question, but it provides an interesting perspective.

Turn back the clock 54 years, and you will see a strikingly similar picture to today's situation – with the roles ironically reversed. The Israelis, blinded by fear and anger, seem to have forgotten that their nation was born in a struggle that has striking similarities to that which is now under way to create a Palestinian state. The Arab nations have likewise forgotten their role as sometimes allies of the colonial occupiers at the time.

If you picked up a newspaper on July 23, 1946, you would have seen a headline that could have been yesterday's. In retaliation for escalating violent resistance to British occupation in Palestine, the military sealed off the headquarters of the Jewish resistance leadership and arrested 3,000 members of its military and political leadership. In reaction, the Irgun, a militant faction of the resistance, set off a massive bomb blast that destroyed a wing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. Ninety-one people were killed, including government and military officials and ordinary civilians. International outrage led to intense pressure on the political leaders of the Jewish resistance to denounce the violence and break ties with more militant factions.

What can we learn from this history? First, our government should think carefully about refusing to negotiate with Palestinian leaders who have any ties to violent acts. The Jewish resistance in the 1940s, like the Palestinian leadership today, comprised a spectrum of individuals from those who sought solutions through political action to those who led the military resistance. However, all were linked by formal and informal ties. The Jewish resistance leaders included

most of Israel's future prime ministers. One of them, Menachem Begin, was a leader of the group that bombed the King David Hotel – he was viewed by some as a terrorist. When we brand all current leaders of the Palestinian people terrorists, we should remember that it was Begin who met Anwar Sadat, the president of Egypt in Jerusalem and signed the historic Camp David Accords in 1979.

The international community also can learn something from that more recent history. The peace between Israel and Egypt was catalyzed by bold strokes in which Sadat made a historic trip to Israel and Begin responded with equally dramatic moves. Last week, Thomas Friedman of The New York Times challenged President Bush to meet the current crisis with bold action on that scale.

For the past two years, the United States waited on the sidelines for the two parties to resolve the issue on their own, with its only role encouraging a cessation of violence. This policy has not worked, because it provides control over progress to the most militant elements on both sides, who derail peace by continuing the cycle of murder and retribution. Secretary of State Colin Powell's trip to the Middle East was a beginning, but the United States must act more boldly.

The war on terrorism will never succeed without progress toward a just peace in the Middle East. We should tackle this problem with different tools than we used in Afghanistan but with the same vigor. We must intervene immediately to broker a peace settlement based on the Mitchell accords, with both sides offered statehood and security in return for major concessions – the closing of the Israeli settlements on Palestinian land and the realization that Palestinian refugees will never be able to return to former homes in Israel. This must be backed up by a U.N. mandate and U.S. or NATO forces.

We must then invest in both nations, not in military hardware but in economic development, to make them showpieces of the rewards that peace can bring. This will be a difficult task, but it is an essential one – the only alternative is a devastating war that will destroy both nations and whose ripple effects will make terrorism the new world order.

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### MARK PEIFER GUEST COLUMNIST

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## The Myths of the American Anti-War Movement Today

The Virginia Military Institute is a small state-supported college that lies tucked away in the valleys of western Virginia. The student body is composed of 1,300 hard working young men and women from over forty different states and 20 different foreign countries. And unlike the scores of other colleges and universities in America, this small campus never sees a student out of uniform, never sees a wild frat party gone out of control and speaking specifically to the turbulent international incidents of last few months, never sees a large number of students rallying outside in protest of various government policies or actions.

Naturally, most of us were pretty shocked to hear that students from colleges around the nation were openly and vocally protesting the war on terror. To me it came as no surprise.

Every time we go to war, there is immediate and unyielding dissent to whatever crisis we may be facing.

Regardless of the specifics of whatever military action we're taking, this vocal opposition usually comes from liberals who seem to have recently discovered the fact that wars do kill people.

Generally, once alerted of the military action, the proper left wing authorities come up with several folk tales about the United States government and military in hopes that political pressure will force them to stop bullying whatever innocent terrorist or dictator we're focused on at the time. Although these accusations have about as much truth in them as a Disney movie, their popularity in many

protest circles deems them worthy of addressing.

The first is that the United States military kills thousands of civilians every time we engage in armed conflict. Right. It is, after all, common knowledge that our soldiers can't wait until the next war just so they can get the chance to kill a few innocent women and children. They actually train extensively for this right next to the hanger that holds the UFO from Roswell, N.M.

The fact is, U.S. soldiers, sailors and airmen are average, industrious, church-going Americans, not evil murderers part of a faceless military machine. In war, they are generally too preoccupied fighting the armed opposition that is trying to kill them to go out looking for a few babies to annihilate. And from a military standpoint, it doesn't make too much sense to use a million dollar smart bomb to take out a group of people that pose no tactical threat to our forces.

The second claim I often hear is what I call the wishful thinking complaint. I know you have heard these people too, they're the ones who suggest if we burn all of our sophisticated weaponry, appease every dictatorship and military regime and dissolve all the armed forces on earth, we could all live in peace and loving harmony. Sure. If we did all that, we would be subject to the whim of whichever group of people who came up with the most creative and effective way to murder their fellow citizens. It doesn't matter if we have powerful aircraft carriers or boards with nails through

them, people will kill for the sole reason of power and control over other people. Plato himself wrote: "only the dead have seen the end of war."

The third accusation is one that is specific to the war on terrorism today. This is that the U.S. military and the terrorists who attacked us on Sept. 11 are equally evil and corrupt. This accusation isn't just wrong, it is one of the most insulting things I have ever heard.

Saying that the United States is no better than the terrorists who killed 3,000 innocent women and children, real innocent women and children that aren't concocted in the minds of left wing critics, is like saying the right hook you gave a bank robber is the same as the bullet he just put into the vault clerk.

Whether you want to believe it or not, Afghanistan after the liberation from the Taliban is leaps and bounds better than it was before. If you want to equate waging a military campaign against military targets to turning innocent Americans into flying missiles targeted at thousands of other innocent noncombatants, you seriously need to reconsider your logic.

This doesn't mean these folks have to become cheerleaders for the war on terror, all they have to do is research it a little. From a simple VMI cadet's point of view, the lives of real innocent people, the American noncombatants who are under a constant terrorist threat, depend on it.

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