

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

GROUP MENTALITIES

Dividing an Airport Road panel along racial lines is divisive, and it won't produce any helpful results.

In an unfortunate development, members of a Chapel Hill committee are about to stray far from the spirit of a man they are thinking about honoring.

According to the agenda for the panel charged with figuring out whether Airport Road should be named after Martin Luther King Jr., the group will split into separate caucuses of white people and "people of color" at its second meeting. It's unthinkable.

Somehow, it has escaped those who came up with the agenda that it was King who once dreamed of a day when black people and white people would unite rather than divide.

Committee member Creighton Irons told The Daily Tar Heel that sometimes, people try to maintain political correctness in such interracial environments, leading to the stifling of discussion.

But if people need to find themselves in a racially homogenous panel before they are able to express opinions as openly as possible, those individuals' feelings are suspect.

The Airport Road committee is not a forum in which people can air their dirty laundry about race relations.

If members don't feel comfortable discussing a wide range of ideas with people of different races, they might come to the realization that they chose to serve on the wrong panel.

It is unreasonable to expect contentious — yet ultimately productive — discourse among these split sides, because the trend among peer groups is to conform to prevailing points of view.

It would be a shame if each side were to engage in groupthink, allowing for an even higher level of polarization once all committee members reunite.

In this ill-advised format, committee members will not engage in meaningful debate. Instead, they likely will be encouraged to "preach to the choir." Furthermore, there is the distinct possibility that erroneous logic would gain support on either side, because groupthink leads to agreement rolling over dissent and doubt — and, in many cases, common sense.

The renaming of Airport Road is not an issue that merely follows racial lines. To assume that it is would ignore the problems businesses located on the thoroughfare would face if the name is eventually changed.

These companies stand to lose a lot of money if the change occurs. For instance, all people and businesses affected would need to modify building address markers and signs; stationery, business cards and forms; computer files, including Internet-based files; telephone and business directories; and any other materials that store their addresses.

Furthermore, there are business and homeowners who would fall into both caucuses set up by the committee agenda.

This is by no means just a black-and-white issue. And when one mistakenly identifies it as such, the powerful issue of race threatens to overshadow other issues, such as the practical matter of cost — or the lasting legacy of a leader.

Irons told the DTH it is good to look at the issue through "a racial lens, because that is ultimately what it really is about."

Obviously, it would be naive to ignore all cultural undertones and to say this committee has been charged simply with discussing the possible renaming of a road.

However, it is wrong to play the race card to justify a decision to segregate the membership for any amount of time.

It is also wrong to imply that race is the only issue worth discussing, which is precisely what the separation of committee members in this manner is doing. It is clear that the committee needs to cleanse its lens.

The town hopes a consensus on the renaming issue will be reached by Dec. 6. Regardless of whether the committee chooses to support a renaming of the road, if its members want to honor King — a man who dreamed that "we (would) be able to work together" and "to struggle together" — they must be allowed to come to a conclusion together.

The truth will come out, as racial separation will compel people to express themselves more openly.

Dividing people along the lines of race is always a dangerous idea. But in the setting of a controlled meeting, it might make sense to do so to help solve a problem in which race is indisputably a major factor.

According to an agenda created by OpenSource Leadership Strategies Inc., a Durham-based firm charged with facilitating the committee's meetings, the town panel charged with deciding whether Airport Road will be renamed is going to be divided into separate caucuses of white people and "people of color."

The thought of dividing people by race might have some negative shock value, but the town ought to let OpenSource do its job and bring a reasonable end to the controversy of renaming the road to honor Martin Luther King Jr. — a task that hasn't been easy.

It's the firm's responsibility to help pinpoint conflicting ideas and opinions that exist among town residents and to get them to present these thoughts to one another in a positive light.

The charges of racism that have surfaced during renaming discussions show that, at the very least, there are underlying perceptions of race that must be addressed. It's not a stretch to go further and to assert that real racial tension still exists.

That fact was evident enough during the summer, when the Town Council held meetings to deal with the issue of renaming the road.

It's not pleasant to assert that some people might be more inclined to say certain things around members of their own race, but there nevertheless is the reality that some people don't share certain opinions in an effort to be politically correct.

For instance, a white supremacist might feel more free to talk about his or her views on race when in the company of other white people. Likewise, a black advocate of Afrocentrism might be less willing to be upfront about his or her views in the presence of people of other races.

If those particular examples seem exaggerated, there are plenty of other ideas that might not get expressed in a multiracial setting. In any case, conflicting opinions can't possibly be addressed fully if people don't feel comfortable enough to raise all their complaints. If it requires certain settings or conditions to get those ideas out in the open, steps should be taken to put those conditions into effect. People can't get anything done by talking only in politically correct terms and pretending problems don't exist.

That said, officials should be cautious about allowing the committee to be divided along the lines of race. Some danger lies in permitting negative discussion to continue and allowing like-minded people to brood over racist thoughts.

It's one thing to bring up ideas. It's another for caucuses to divide into factions. Town officials should be prepared to step in to prevent discussion from turning into mob thinking.

But the town is paying \$15,000 for OpenSource to do its work. The company should be given the benefit of the doubt in its ability to facilitate discourse that allows individuals to express their opinions without letting negative feelings run rampant.

Of course, race-based caucuses aren't the only means to address the issue — they make up one component of a list of agenda items.

Cordiality isn't the primary goal. It's not the facilitator's job to hold committee members' hands while they come to a decision.

It's clear that racial tensions underscore this controversy. And it's ironically fitting that renaming a road after King might serve to bring out racist concepts.

Regardless, the town undoubtedly has turned the controversy into an issue of race — not just financial resources or history. Maybe that's a good thing.

The words of King himself might work best. "Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up, but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured."

ON THE DAY'S NEWS

"Conversation is an art in which man has all mankind for competitors."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON, AUTHOR AND PHILOSOPHER

EDITORIAL CARTOON

By Doug Anderson, douan@email.unc.edu



COMMENTARY

Personal beliefs should not be the same as national priorities

As I watched the election results roll in Tuesday night, I was struck by a haunting image.

One of the most intelligent, most righteous, brave and caring men I know sat down and cried. I believe that as a gay man in a committed relationship, he was struck by what four more years of the Bush administration might hold in store for him.

Should his sexual orientation keep him from enjoying the same privileges as other citizens simply because it does not coincide with their moral beliefs?

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. stated famously that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

It is a statement that could be used to justify our position in Iraq, but it holds a more important place within our own borders.

As a nation, are we now in a place where a moral agenda holds a higher national priority than the conflict in Iraq, the economy or health care?

Holding moral ideologies above civil liberties is a dangerous trend, one that blindly disenfranchises good, honest and hardworking citizens.

When you believe with absolute certainty that the way in which you live is superior to others, you open a floodgate of potential to violate those people's rights — and their privacy.

It is possible to be a person of faith, to be guided by your convictions and to extend the same courtesy to others.

In a nation that prides itself on its diversity, it is disappointing, to say the least, to watch as the beliefs of a conservative religious contingent pervade both mainstream and fringe America. We



EMILY BATCHELDER WHAT A FEMINIST LOOKS LIKE

are a robust blend of people and ideas, and this factor both divides and enriches us.

We are better people and better citizens for having a wealth of opinions and options to consider in our own lives.

Morality and spirituality are deeply personal. That is how they were intended to be, and that is how they should remain. Although you might be ridiculed or chastised for your beliefs, they are yours, and you are no better or worse for them.

No one has to believe the way I believe or worship the way I worship, but I have to.

It will be a critical challenge during the next four years to make sure that the public and private realms remain distinct, and that the government remains out of our bedrooms and doctors' offices.

This is why I ask — no matter where you stand in the spectrum — is it fair to turn issues of morality into national priorities? In doing this, aren't we promoting the beliefs of some people onto the beliefs of all people?

There is grave danger in this. Think of miscegenation and sodomy laws, the Ten Commandments in public schools, the 1 million American women who died before abortion was made legal and the millions more who suffer while waiting for the possibilities of stem-cell research to become realities.

As we have seen, some of these examples aren't so far off. There are people who still suffer under them or their implications today.

Many of these laws seemed right at the time, to some people who truly believed that they were what the nation needed in order to maintain a high moral ground.

We look at them now as the examples of some of the most grave political decisions of our nation's past.

I respect the beliefs of those on the conservative right. I do not agree with them, and I refuse to be guided by them, because it is my right.

It is their right to act accordingly, as well.

But I ask that they keep these beliefs in their homes and churches, thereby respecting my own beliefs.

I respect the president as a man of faith. But I become deeply concerned when his faith becomes a rubric for the rest of the nation.

There is more than one way to think, act and live.

As an American citizen, you are entitled to follow any path you choose.

Today we have a war in Iraq, a health care crisis and a floundering economy to worry about. Those are national priorities.

My right to an abortion, my friend's right to marry — those are personal priorities.

They should be entitled to us, without fanfare and without question.

I truly hope President George W. Bush and his administration will be able to see the difference.

Contact Emily Batchelder at ebatchel@email.unc.edu.

QUOTABLES

"They can all break that pencil in three and chew on it because we went out there and beat the (No. 4) team in the country when everybody said we couldn't."

JESSE HOLLEY, UNC FOOTBALL PLAYER, ON CERTAIN ESPN ANALYSTS WHO PREDICTED THAT THE TAR HEELS WOULD BE STEAMROLLED BY MIAMI.

"It's simplistic to view President Bush as some kind of unilateralist cowboy."

LEE EDWARDS, HERITAGE FOUNDATION FELLOW, ON CRITICISM OF BUSH'S DECISION TO GO INTO IRAQ WITHOUT UNITED NATIONS SUPPORT.

"It makes me feel all fuzzy inside."

WHITNEY THOMAS, 13-YEAR-OLD STUDENT AT A.L. STANBACK MIDDLE SCHOOL IN HILLSBOROUGH, ON HELPING TO WRITE A LETTER AND DRAW A PICTURE FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN KILLED IN THE SEPT. 11 TERRORIST ATTACK IN BESLAN, RUSSIA.

READERS' FORUM

Position of U.S. president itself deserves our respect

TO THE EDITOR: After John Kerry graciously conceded to George W. Bush on Wednesday, I've been disappointed in the way some people have so ungraciously handled the results of the election. I've seen and heard stories of people doing everything from sending Republicans hate messages to threatening to move overseas.

Bush is president today because of the will of our fellow Americans. Whether or not each person agrees with the majority, each person should appreciate the freedom of the majority to choose and respect the man that we, as a country, chose. Although someone might disagree with the president, which he or she has every right to do, Bush is still our president — and the position itself deserves respect.

We have become so divided along party lines that we seem to forget that we are all Americans. Though we disagree on many issues, we all want the best for our country and value our freedoms.

Expressing our opinions about the government is our right and even our duty. However, we need to support our leaders by expressing our opinions and concerns with respect and trying to help them — not tearing them down by complaining and bitterly criticizing.

I had very strong feelings about this election and did what I could for who I believed to be the right

candidates, and I am happy with the results. But, even if I wasn't, I would have to realize that causing division and strife would not help my country. With an election no longer at stake, we need to come together. We aren't all Republican or Democratic, but we're all Americans — and Bush is not just a Republican, he is the American president, and deserves the support of the people.

Kristen Pope Freshman Journalism

Club teams, such as men's soccer, deserve more credit

TO THE EDITOR: Two weekends ago, the men's club soccer team won the regional tournament in Raleigh. No credit was given to these hardworking guys, much like no credit is given to other club teams at Carolina.

Club teams give so many students an opportunity to play competitive sports just below the varsity level. These men and women might not be able to make a varsity commitment because of jobs or other circumstances, but more often than not they work just as hard.

Practice is typically four days a week, and they too must travel for competitions. Now the men's club soccer team is faced with a huge dilemma. The national tournament held in Texas is fast approaching, and they lack the funds to attend.

Because of a simple paperwork error, these hardworking guys might not have the money to travel to Texas and will not represent our school like they should be doing.

Being a varsity athlete myself, I urge you to be proud of all of UNC's athletes, not just the ones with varsity letter jackets.

So if you see the club soccer guys raising funds on campus, contribute. If you see them working hard to earn their way to Texas to represent you and me, give them a helping hand. They deserve it!

Danielle Baum Junior Political science

Endorsements don't prove a paper's lack of objectivity

TO THE EDITOR: The Daily Tar Heel published Wednesday a letter complaining of the liberal bias of the DTH's election coverage. While the writer might have valid points about the liberal tendencies of this newspaper, he also decries it for publishing an article "stating why people should vote for Bowles and why they shouldn't vote for Burr."

Though the writer does not specify when this article was run, considering that it was published during election season, it is plausible that this article was an endorsement.

Recently, The New York Times published an article stating why people should vote for John Kerry

and why they should not vote for George Bush. Recently, The Chicago Tribune published an article stating why people should vote for George Bush and why they should not vote for John Kerry. Both of these newspapers took partisan stands on politics because that is the nature of political endorsements.

Are we to question the objectivity of these newspapers on the sole basis of their respective endorsements?

The writer of the letter says this article constitutes "an example of partisanship." Of course it is — that's the point of an endorsement. I don't dispute his contention of the DTH's left lean, but a vague reference to an apparent endorsement is no way to prove a newspaper's lack of objectivity.

Sam Dolbee Freshman Undecided

TO SUBMIT A LETTER: The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 300 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarities. Publication is not guaranteed. Bring letters to the DTH office at Suite 2409, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or e-mail them to editdesk@unc.edu.

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