

Speak Up!

Unsurprisingly, this week we've decided to offer our perspective on the Confederate flag debate. (See "Flag forces discussion" in News.) To be honest, we're split on the issue. Some of us view the flag as a cultural symbol, some as a racist insignia. One editor from the North had never until this week thought about the Confederate flag for more than two consecutive seconds but associates it with grits and hoop skirts. Another editor from the South has seen first-hand the flag's repercussions. None of us is African-American, so we really can't understand the deep emotions that the flag instills in those who may view it as a hateful symbol directed toward them.

That said, we need to get something off of our chest. With an issue this important and emotionally charged, why do we have such a difficult time getting quotations? Off the record, we've heard students defend the flag as a cultural symbol, cite free speech and complain about what they view as Tom Ross's ambush tactic. Granted, SAE President Andrew Johnson talked to us in the News section, and both his organization and Alpha Phi Alpha are working to establish a forum for discussion, but the debate reaches beyond the organizations that it directly involves. Students are talking about this issue. Why not in print?

We have a guess. With all due respect, you're cowards. It's not just this issue. Whenever we cover a controversial topic, many people are willing to vent but few to be quoted. Most shy away out of fear: fear that their friends will read what they've said and disagree, fear that they'll sound stupid, fear that they'll offend someone or, our personal favorite, fear that the administration will swoop down on them with repercussions.

The Confederate flag and the issues that it represents require discussion. Candid, open discussion. Remember SGA President Chris Burton's Real Talk Project that encourages students to reflect on issues that matter to them. We also hope that organizations, students and faculty (we've heard your ideas in class. Why not bring them to us?) will bring their ideas to The Davidsonian or at least not refuse to comment.

As for the Confederate flag debate itself, we don't doubt that the parties involved will share their views in next week's paper. We worry, however, that the debate will remain between two groups and not become a forum for campus-wide discussion.

As Johnson pointed out, the Confederate flag has appeared at various places on campus for years, but no one has ever bothered to discuss it before. Clearly this practice matters to many people, so why did it require a member of the Davidson community who has been here for approximately two seconds to call us out before we even started the discussion?

This is a problem, especially on a liberal arts campus where discussion is allegedly the foundation of our education.

The Davidsonian

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Midnight in the garden of good and evil

ALEX HOYT
Yowl Editor

Late last Tuesday night, in an act of impossible audacity, an unnamed member of the Davidson Ultimate Frisbee Folk mustered the bravado to place a cape and a DUFF sign on the Sculpture Garden's marquee acquisition, Antony Gormley's "You." And, for the 45-odd minutes of daylight that it lasted, it was moderately funny—about as funny, say, as the fact that DUFF is the most successful sports team on campus.

Yet somehow this benign prank was misconstrued as an attack on intellectual property, high art and the very sanctity of the Sculpture Garden, inducing several hernias and an ulcer among faculty members of the Studio Art Department alone.

Both the punishment and the identity of the prankster are being withheld from the public, further convincing me that it must have been easier to cyphen information from the Stasi than from our Deans. Based on our most reliable sources, the perpetrator is being detained in a dank Chambers cell awaiting interrogation by the Committee on un-Artistic Activities. It is doubtful that he will ever toss the 'bee again.

"You," in case you have not already been accosted by his unnerving gaze, is the rust-colored monolith lurking between the library and Chambers, the one having a "dialogue" with that boxy black Transformer posing as a statue. Once one gets past its inherent creepiness—for "You" is undoubtedly the voyeur of the library—it can be appreciated as the most visually engaging of the Garden's collection. Gormley, it should be noted, is a sculptor of international reknown, and "You" cost Bobby Vagt several hundred-thousand dollars.

Such a price tag makes me wonder whether ducttape was the most prudent adhesive for the prankster to use on a statue that cost more than his collective teammates' annual tuitions.

Does this statue's high cost and its status as high art mean that we must treat the courtyard as a museum? How much interaction with these pieces is appropriate? I saw a little girl hugging one the other day. Should I turn her in? Can we touch the sculptures? Photograph them? In 20 years will the lawn be strewn with mismatched untouchable masterpieces? Isn't it already starting to look like a pawn shop's back lot?

The faculty have answered a few of these questions. Some

have likened the prank to screaming during an opera. This is a poor analogy for several reasons. When a guy goes to the opera, he dons black tie, skips the ballgame and pays good money for two-and-a-half hours of Gilbert and Sullivan that, presuming he prefers the Panthers to Penzance, he will probably never see again. It is a unique, expensive and surprisingly pleasurable experience, and if some jackass starts calling Mabel, you'll be liable to throw a wingtip at him.

"You," on the other hand, greets all of us several times a day, costs nothing and is going nowhere. There is even some rumor of the garden acquiring Gormley's "Ya'll," "You's" half-dozen ruddy disciples.

Even the Honor Code has been invoked on this matter, the analogy this time being that by draping the cape and slapping on the sign the student essentially signed the statue, thus committing plagiarism.

This claim baffles me, weakens the Honor Code, and should be redirected to the Code of Responsibility. That is, if the act were actually irresponsible enough to merit such attention.

In my opinion, pranks should be crude, more elaborate and not signed "DUFF" by their perpetrators. Give me MIT hacks detonating the 50-yard line during half-time of the Harvard-Yale game. Give me Banksy, Britain's graffiti extraordinaire, spray-painting two male police officers making out on the wall of Prince Albert pub on Trafalgar Square. Or the proverbial mastermind who led cows painted #1, #2 and #4 up the stairs of his school's administrative building, leading to an all-day search for the nonexistent cow #3.

Give "You" an inflatable girlfriend. A prescription for Viagra. Lawn gnomes and pink flamingoes for neighbors. Dress him up as Little Red Riding Hood? Doesn't do much for me.

These sorts of pranks, when done cleverly and harmlessly and without studiously damaging expensive art with ducttape represent an interaction and engagement very much with the spirit of a liberal arts campus.

In high school, when a teacher got pranked, it was usually a sign of acceptance and even a strange, awkward form of affection. A cape and a DUFF sign, while not a warm welcome, are at worst a harmless initiation and about as close to affection as that giant rusty Oscar is going to get for some time.

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Thompson candidacy announcement a letdown

BOBBY DESPAIN
Guest Columnist

At the start of this month, I knew I was going to have a tough time voting in the next presidential election. It was not that I did not know enough about the candidates; it was more that none fit my vision for the next president.

I am not talking about just the Democratic candidates. The Republican field was disastrously disappointing as well. Mr. Giuliani will fight Islamo-fascists but not big government. Mr. Romney cannot be trusted to stand firm on any issue. Mr. McCain seems too concerned about being everyone's favorite rather than doing what is right. In addition, almost all the candidates have been involved in the government far too long.

*I would ask Thompson one thing:
What happened to the popular
image of the man with the red
pickup truck?*

I needed someone different. Ever since the murmurs began in March, I felt Mr. Fred Thompson could be the man I wanted. Finally, on Sept. 6, he announced his candidacy for president.

However, the style of Thompson's announcement disappointed me. His decision to announce his official entry into the presidential race on Jay Leno was disenchanting. First of all, he announced it on a television show—Jay Leno's comedy show no less. There is nothing presidential about Jay Leno or his show. What does Thompson gain by announcing his candidacy via a comedy show? Does he think he will pick up primary votes in that audience? Mr. Thompson's main priority should be obtaining the GOP nomination.

I would ask Thompson one thing: What happened to the popular image of the man with the red pickup truck? The man would have never gone on Jay Leno. If I had been Thompson, I would have driven that red pickup truck right up to the White House gates and announced my candidacy from the truck bed.

Perhaps it would have been better to announce his candidacy in Tennessee. It would not have hurt to add some fuel to the base, especially since Thompson has been in candidacy limbo for so long. The constant question of his candidacy has certainly cooled some of the support he originally garnered at the beginning of the year. Mr. Thompson needs to return to that pickup truck and show voters that he not only wants to be their president but that he is the best person for the job.

Mr. Thompson must recapture the fervor present at the beginning of the rumors of his candidacy if he wants to win the GOP nomination towards the presidency. He needs to continually drive home the reasons that fervor existed in the first place. For example, he should remind voters of his desire to cut government spending and to continue Bush tax cuts. He needs to tell them that he wants to regain the country's sovereignty by securing her borders.

Thompson recently gave an interview to National Review Online's Byron York, who asked Thompson, "What did you make of a statement made by White House spokesman Tom Snow, that with the surge American troops would no longer be fighting with their hands tied behind their backs?" Thompson replied, "The first thing I thought was, 'Why the devil were they ever fighting with one hand tied behind their backs?' That is just what the country needs to hear."

I hope that Mr. Thompson's appearance on Leno is not a sign of a downward spiral. I hope it simply is a detour on the way to the bed of his red pickup truck.

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