

Status and Symbol

People will like you more if you wear a Polo shirt.

That truth, absurd as it sounds, proves true. Holding other variables constant, little men on horsies make a difference in a person's life. This reality reveals a problem on campus: pretentiousness.

At Homecoming, The Davidsonian observed more sundresses and Vera Bradley purses than signs and face paint. That's not a football game. That's the Carolina Cup. That's also, for those who hadn't experienced this culture before coming here, "distinctly Davidson."

But, of course, Polo shirts aren't the real concern. What bothers us is the "I'm better than you" attitude. Anyone with half a cerebral cortex knows that people judge each other based on appearance. To some extent, this is legitimate insofar as people deliberately choose how they present themselves. But there reaches a point at which judging people based on their clothing becomes a form of prejudice. That people wear preppy clothing is fine, that people wear preppy clothing because they want attention, acceptance or a hook-up is sad though understandable, but that preppy clothing becomes a symbol of superiority, in addition to being a symbol of wealth, is, well, pretentious. (In the words of one professor, "Polo is the new gold.")

It's not just the way we dress; pretentiousness at Davidson assumes many forms. Clothing is simply the most obvious. Perhaps you'll recognize some of the subtler forms of Davidson pretentiousness: the grammar expert (who makes sure that you speak correctly), the I-have-more-work-than-you-do person (who turns crazy workloads into a contest), the self-consciously artistic student (who invents what we said earlier about Polo shirts) and the omniscient person (who thinks he's God). These people—sometimes us, we admit—aren't merely pretentious. They're freakin' annoying.

One might even argue that Davidson, by its elite nature, teaches us to be pretentious. Witness the "safety school" chants at basketball games and the general attitude, in one student's words, of "academic snobbery" that students bear toward other colleges.

Still, if The Davidsonian had to select only one cause of pretentiousness, we would choose the sense of entitlement that often accompanies wealth. Granted, most Davidson students come from privileged backgrounds, but that doesn't mean that they need to flaunt their wealth in the form of namebrand clothing and great prep-school vocabularies. We wrote last year about making Davidson a comfortable place for lower income students whom the new "No loans" policy hopes to attract. For these students, it is not simply a matter of getting into Davidson and paying for the education but an issue of feeling accepted by wealthier peers. If Davidson wants to become more socioeconomically diverse, and not just hold idealistic values in what some might call another excuse for self-righteousness, the College's students must examine their attitudes.

Becoming less pretentious doesn't mean throwing out your Polos, but consider minimizing or eliminating the attitudes underlying them.

*Pity the person who actually wins this contest

Flag sparks discussion between fraternities

ANTHONY BROWN AND ANDREW JOHNSON
Guest Columnists

Much controversy has arisen over the flying of the Confederate flag at SAE; the flag was not the problem—it was a symptom of a much larger problem, a symptom of a community that must force itself to have an open and honest discussion of issues that make us feel uncomfortable. The brothers of Sigma Alpha Epsilon did not intend to offend anyone, but they are men, and men cannot hide from the consequences of their actions behind the veil of their intentions.

To some the flag is a symbol of heritage, to many others it is a symbol of hate, but all too often we become so concerned with proving our own opinion that we forget to recognize the perspectives of others. It behooves us to be aware of how our opinions can hurt others regardless of intentionality or lack thereof.

Our fraternities met together last Thursday to discuss the issue of the Flag. Notice how we write discuss and not debate. The men of Alpha Phi Alpha did not approach the controversy as moral superiors, nor did the brothers of Sigma Alpha walk in on the defensive because either attitude would have caused the meeting to degenerate into an unproductive war of opinions.

One element of this meeting which made it so successful was its informality. It is not necessary to wear suits and shout from podiums every time we have a difference in opinion. We gathered in a basement, sat together on couches, and had a true conversation with one another. The low-key nature of our meeting helped everyone to feel relaxed and comfortable enough to communicate our opinions without fear of judgment from our peers. This is how our fraternities turned a potentially negative incident into a positive opportunity, i.e. the initial step in an inter-fraternity relationship. We all left with a more solid foundation to build friendships upon.

How could this incident have been avoided? One solution is the presence of personal, cross-cultural relationships. We all should fervently strive to build relationships with people different from ourselves. It's not always as easy as it sounds and often requires us to step outside our comfort zone, but it is absolutely necessary.

Genuine cross-cultural relations can give us the ability to understand the world from several different perspectives,

making us more relatable human beings. As one Alpha Phi Alpha said, "We shouldn't have black friends and white friends, but rather friends who happen to be black or white."

We write this as a possible paradigm for resolving misunderstandings and promoting authentic relationships between people of different races, cultures, political ideologies, classes, etc. It is not the magic bullet to eliminate all societal ills but it is a movement towards progress. Better relationships must start with individual initiative. There are impediments to this, but we can overcome these. We can start by being cognizant of our ethnocentrism. No one culture should be the standard for all others. We must rid our minds of stereotypes. Why do we stereotype anyway? Is it because we can't "understand" a person without having to sacrifice precious time and effort to form a relationship?

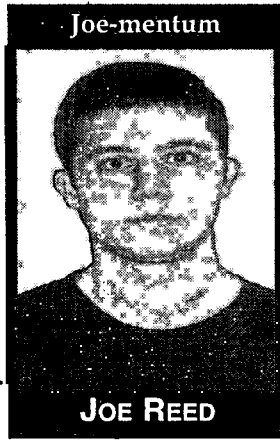
We shouldn't have black friends and white friends but rather friends who happen to be black or white.

Let us discipline ourselves to conquer social lethargy by remembering the benefit these relations will produce—a stronger, more unified microcosm of society. We can do this in a number of ways: by taking the opportunity to hold conversations about divisive issues, dining together one-on-one, by not taking offense at an opportunity to educate people who do not readily understand our own perspectives and by fostering the kind of respectful environment in which these changes may take place.

It will take courage, but it is necessary. We cannot passively expect change. We must become it. Let us not be discouraged by uninspiring guilt, or by a lack of reciprocity toward our reconciliatory efforts, persistent ignorance. Our predecessors have unjustly handed us a cracked and brittle society but we must hold it together. If it crumbles before us, it is our fault.

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Keep Confederate flag off school property



Joe-mentum

JOE REED

Recently there has been controversy on campus concerning the display of the Confederate flag by the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. Let me just get my personal bias out in the open: I'm a proud Southerner, I've lived in North Carolina my entire life, I hope I'll live here for most of the rest of it and I think the Confederate flag is a disgusting symbol of hate.

Whether the members of SAE intend for it to be viewed that way or not—and, for what it's

worth, I'm sure they don't—the simple fact is that is how many people perceive the flag.

Some argue that the flag simply represents the South's heritage. I don't disagree that it represents a part of the South's history; I just think it's a part of our history that we shouldn't necessarily be proud of, what with the enslaving of an entire race of people and all.

But that's beside the point. The debate over SAE's displaying of the Confederate flag should not be in any way affected by my (or anyone else's) personal opinion of the flag itself. This debate is at root a free-speech issue, and if the right to free speech is to be at all meaningful, it must include the right to make statements or to display symbols that others find disgusting and offensive.

It's important to keep in mind, though, that the right to free speech is not and never has been absolute and that Davidson College does have some right to regulate what happens on its property.

Remember, the Confederate flag in question was displayed not on the private property of students but in a house that the College owns and permits school-sponsored organizations to use.

Clearly, Davidson can exercise some amount of discretion to limit students' ability to exercise their right of free expres-

sion while on College property and while participating in College-sponsored activities and organizations.

While this discretion should, in my view, be used only in extreme circumstances it is hard to deny that it does indeed exist. If, for instance, one of the fraternities burned a cross in front of its house, I doubt many people would object to the College intervening to stop such a display (Disclaimer: No, I don't think any of the fraternities would do that; I'm just using it as an example.)

The question then becomes: where exactly do we draw the line between students' right to free speech and Davidson's right not to allow school-sponsored organizations to express ideas abhorrent to the values of the College? Specifically, displaying the Confederate flag a show of intolerance severe enough that the College should prevent it from occurring on school property?

In a word, yes. One of the things so many students love about Davidson is its sense of community, and the Confederate flag is an undeniably divisive and inflammatory symbol. Furthermore, it became very clear at the recent Fall Convocation that a major theme of Tom Ross's presidency will be diversity—a noble goal, and one that is hindered by allowing a College-sponsored organization to display on College property a symbol so understandably offensive to many minorities.

In sum, if a student wants to wear a Confederate flag shirt, put a bumper sticker featuring the flag on his or her car, or otherwise display the flag on his or her personal property he or she has every right to do so.

But the flag should never be displayed on College property and certainly not by an organization that is sponsored by (and thus in some way representative of) the school. Davidson has always been a thoroughly Southern institution—and it should be proud of that tradition—but it must avoid even appearing to condone a symbol so offensive to so many people.

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The Davidsonian is published Wednesdays during the academic year by the students of Davidson College. One copy per student. Please address all correspondences to: The Davidsonian, P.O. Box 7182, Davidson, NC 28035-7182. Phone (704) 894-2148. E-mail: Davidsonian@davidson.edu. Our offices are located in Room 411 of the Alvarez College Union. Opinions expressed in letters to the editors or commentaries do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Board of The Davidsonian. Subscriptions cost \$50.00 per year. Advertising rates are available upon request.

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