

To the Editors:

On Friday, Sept. 14, numerous events related to the theme of national mourning and remembrance occurred on campus. Information relating to a number of those events is now displayed on the College's website. There was one event that most certainly will not make it to the website, nor has it as of the time of this writing received any public attention. In the Department of Sociology the department secretary brought with her that morning an American flag and received permission from the department chair to display it in the hallway. In and of itself this act cannot be construed as unusual, for there were many flags displayed on campus that day. I have heard directly from several students that when they discovered that American flags could not be found in local stores, they drew facsimiles of the flag and displayed those around campus.

The display, though not remarkable in itself, met a quite remarkable fate. Soon after her flag had been displayed, the secretary was informed by members of her department, including the department chair, that her display was inappropriate. They asked her to remove the flag. She refused. Without her assistance they removed the flag themselves and placed it on her desk. She was given no opportunity to display her flag elsewhere within her department on that day. The flag up wound up in our department where it found a home outside our main office. The flag remained on our bulletin board for the remainder of that day. A member of our department subsequently brought in his own flag and, with the concurrence of the department, displayed it in the same location for the following week.

How, then, as they say in academia, shall we understand this episode? We should start with a concept that currently is much in the air on college campuses, including Holy Cross, as well as within the social sciences, especially sociology: the concept of tolerance. Meriam-Webster online (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary.htm>) defines tolerance as "the capacity to endure pain or hardship; sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own; the act of allowing something;

the allowable deviation from a standard."

Let's assume for the moment that the flag indeed represented something to the members of the Department of Sociology that they found inappropriate, an unacceptable deviation from whatever standards are operative within that department. I won't speculate about the specifics of this inappropriateness, ~~the discomfort this display of patriotism~~ must have caused, but on a national day of prayer and mourning let us assume that their discomfort was rather substantial. Nevertheless, would not the standards inherent in the notion of tolerance, particularly in academic settings, dictate allowing non-majority views expression? After all, true diversity in academia is diversity of thought. Almost by definition, in a diverse population much of the thinking must often be non-majoritarian in nature. It is precisely these non-majoritarian viewpoints, including the beliefs and lifestyles that attach to them, that might easily be suppressed by the majority were it not for the dictates of tolerance.

Nothing I've said should be taken to imply that all members of my department were single-minded and comfortable about the display of the flag. Some of them may have experienced a certain discomfort at so obvious a display of Americanism, but, if so, they were gracious on that day in tolerating the flag for the duration of its display. In any event, it is the Department of Sociology's intolerance towards one of its own members that is itself here at issue, particularly coming from a group of liberally-oriented academics for whom the rhetoric of "tolerance," "justice," and "diversity" flows effortlessly.

Social scientists would be quick to point out another aspect of this situation that must be considered to understand it fully - the status differences that attend relations between department chairs and senior department members on the one hand, decidedly male in this instance, and a female hourly employee on the other. These status differences in themselves, we are told, make situations of this sort, in which differences of interpretation are confounded with emotionality, all too ripe for the sort of intolerance that was on display in the Department of Soci-

ology on Sept. 14.

As a way of understanding the hypocrisy of this situation, consider for a moment what might have happened at Holy Cross if a symbol of a different sort, say one more decidedly congenial to members of the Department of Sociology, had been taken down deliberately by someone whose political positions led them to think differently ~~about the value of publicly displaying~~ that symbol. What would have been the consequences? I would not even hazard a guess as to how quickly the college's politically-correct thinking faculty and administrators would have risen publicly to decry the incident. (Rightly so, I might add.) There would most certainly be emotional rhetoric about the shock and dismay at finding that such intolerance and insensitivity - the sure signs of a budding New McCarthyism - exist among us.

We should not hold our collective breath for something comparable to happen in this instance. And that silence is, I fear, perhaps the most shameful and yet most telling aspect of this incident. Some faculty members who are concerned about this incident have advised me to let the incident pass because during the secretary's absence from the College for much of the next week, she together with the Dean of the College and the department chair arranged a compromise in which she was allowed to display a flag on her desk. My comment about this solution - something about freedom of expression being confined to "personal space" was used as the rationale - is to ask whether the College would reach a similar solution if a symbol of liberal ideology had been removed. And, I wonder, would that solution have remained private, or would the incident itself have occasioned the type of public response I referred to earlier? I have heard from other faculty members who have been told that it would not be "good for the College" to have this incident aired. I most strongly dissent. Nothing is more in our institution's long-term interests than to confront publicly all incidents that bespeak of intolerance and hypocrisy, not simply those incidents pre-ordained as worthy of public discourse by the prevailing ideology.

Charles Locurto

To the Editors:

"Mourn the loss. Pray for peace." These words, sewed onto a large banner by the St. Francis Catholic Worker House in Worcester, express the sentiment I believe is called for in our country and on our campus at this time. It is troubling to me that patriotism - and its symbol, the American flag - is being defined as the most appropriate - and almost mandated - response to the horrible events of Sept. 11.

Referring to the Sociology-Anthropology department chair's decision to remove a large American flag that was hung by the secretary over a hallway display case of faculty publications, Holy Cross spokeswoman Katherine B. McNamara assured Dianne Williamson (Sept. 30 Telegram & Gazette, B1) that "Holy Cross is not unpatriotic." She said, "Everyone's wearing red, white and blue lapel pins. This (flag-removing incident) really is an anomaly."

I suggest that the "flag-removing incident" is not an anomaly, but was handled in a way that expresses the best of what Holy Cross is and stands for. As a Jesuit institution, the college mission statement calls on us to "combine a passion for truth with respect for the views of others." When Prof. Singleton removed the flag, he did so recognizing the diversity of opinion that faculty in the department hold about the meaning of the flag. He did so with utmost concern for the feelings of the secretary, whose husband lost a close friend in the attack. He did so with civility, integrity, and following a conversation with the secretary explaining his position. His was not a "knee-jerk reaction," as it was characterized in a previous T&G story (Sept. 28, B1), although I know he is sorry to have upset the secretary and wishes this whole thing hadn't happened.

Had I been in the office the morning of the flag incident, I would have supported removing the flag. As one who was raised in Mexico and studies Latin Ameri-

can societies and politics, I know that many people in other countries view the American flag as a symbol of U.S. aggression and arrogance. I know that some students, foreign nationals, and faculty on our campus and in the broader community, including myself, view the flag as a symbol of support for our President, who, in the days immediately following the attack, was speaking of making war on a country whose citizens had nothing to do with the attack.

At the mass in St. Joseph's Chapel at noon on Sept. 11, the pianist played "Let There Be Peace on Earth." A Bible verse was read calling on nations to turn their swords into plowshares and to make war no more. The prayer of St. Francis of Assisi was sung, calling us to forgiveness and peace and to relieve suffering. These messages should characterize the official Holy Cross response to the attack of Sept. 11. We should reiterate our commitment to a free exchange of ideas, and not, as Dianne Williamson warns, "sacrifice thoughtful dissent on the altar of a new patriotism, one that's defined by some as narrowly as the stripes on a flag."

The College's official public response to the media can have a chilling effect on people, like myself, who believe that in a time when our country is talking about waging war, curtailing freedoms, and closing our borders to immigrants, we need symbols of peace and global unity, not war and nationalism. "Let There be Peace on Earth," not "The Star Spangled Banner," is the song that inspires me to do the right thing at this point in our history. I would be proud if the College were to make a clear statement of mourning and peace, not an ambiguous support for anything red, white, and blue, its official response to the terrible events of Sept. 11.

Carolyn Howe

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