

Letters to the Editor... Continued

It was with great concern that I read Dr. John Champagne's letter in the December 8 issue of *The Collegian*, regarding a column about AIDS, HIV, and the late Pedro Zamora written earlier by co-editor Alicia Hartman.

It is not my intent here to comment on the opinions of either Hartman or Champagne regarding these subjects. Both newspaper columns and letters on the OP/ED page are, by definition, a mixture of fact and opinion and represent the rights of each citizen to express himself (or herself) freely. Nowhere should this freedom be more evident than on a university campus, despite Champagne's inference that tolerance and diversity be defined as agreeing with him. Calling for someone's resignation because of a difference in opinion is neither "diversity" nor "tolerance."

Instead, my intent is to seek clarification of a particularly troubling paragraph in Champagne's rebuke of Hartman. I suspect that Hartman may have been more than a little troubled by the wording in the next-to-last paragraph of Champagne's letter. I know I was. I also suspect that, as a student, she may be reluctant to respond to a faculty member.

I am not so reluctant. So that the paragraph may be studied carefully, I offer a repeat of it here.

"How can you possibly feel safe at Behrend, knowing the hatred you secretly harbor against us? Don't hide behind the phony objectives of your newspaper. If you really feel this way, let us see the hate in your eyes so that we might steel ourselves against it."

As I see it, there are two ways of reading this paragraph. Either the writer has chosen to ignore rhetorical mandates governing the need to avoid indefinite reference, or (much more ominously) he is making a threat.

Precisely who is the "you" in the paragraph? If the word is merely an example of empty rhetoric, referring to nobody in particular, then the paragraph is simply an example of sloppy writing. If, however, the "you" is directed at Hartman, then the first sentence could be read as an implied threat against Hartman's safety. Since the second sentence in the paragraph refers to "your newspaper," there is some logic in assuming that the "you" does indeed refer to the co-editor Hartman.

Then there are those other troublesome pronouns -- "us," "we" and "ourselves." To whom do these words refer? Could the words refer to faculty? I hope not. Could "we" be students? Professor Champagne should not be speaking for students. Just who are those undefined antecedents?

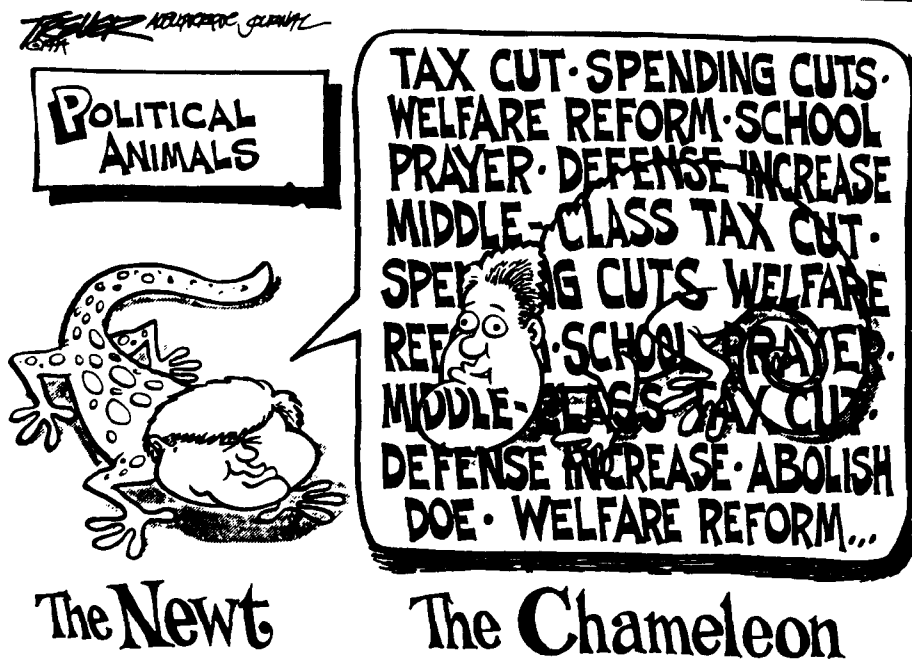
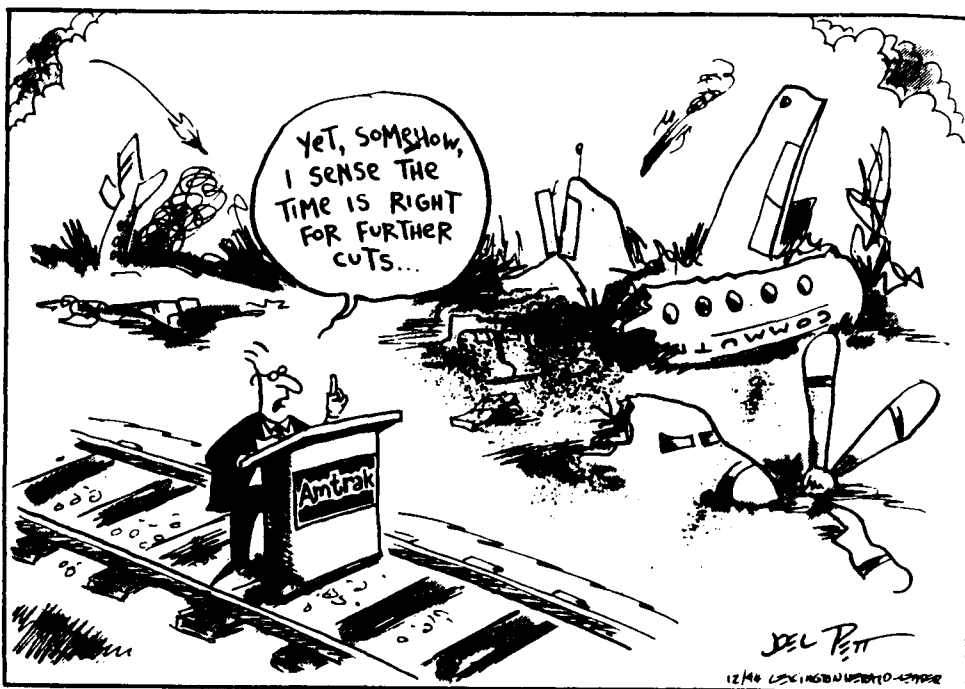
The group represented by these collective pronouns is important given the ambiguity of the entire paragraph and the threatening implications inherent within it. The "we" could be a force of which Hartman should be aware.

And so I am calling upon Dr. Champagne to offer some further clarification of his original letter. He notes in other paragraphs that he has grown sick of "columns that contribute to the climate of ignorance." On that, Dr. Champagne and I agree. However, I have also grown sick of reading shrill, illogical personal attacks leveled by alleged proponents of "cultural diversity" and "tolerance" toward anyone who happens to disagree with them.

Any university community should be above such prattle, and faculty should be leading the way.

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