

# OPINION

## CULTURALLY INEPT

### A BI-MONTHLY PONTIFICATION

By **OSCAR BEISERT**  
Columnist  
ODB102@PSU.EDU

This being, most probably, my final analysis (for The Capital Times) of culture and all the possible details that abound the all-inclusive subject matter, I will implore your recollection of my first articles, which were published a few months short of two years ago.

In opening, what, incidentally, became a two year endeavor: I rendered an overture of my first impressions of Harrisburg, and, in several instances, its surrounding area. In closing, I will perform a, hopefully, more thorough generalization regarding our locale.

For those more intrigued by the negative notes of life, bear with me, because I shall begin with a few positive observations.

Harrisburg, in its frontal exposure, gives the impression of a small, but yet imposing, European municipality. Its westward entrances (the bridges) are, for the most part, archiformed in their foundations, refining the structures in a Gothic manner—the foregrounds or riverbank, a narrow park or greenbelt, is a velvet-like and verdant vista for those inclined to take afternoon walks or evening runs—the houses, mostly connected, tall, and narrow, and close in location to prominent workplaces, are equally private or divided depending on one's needs.

and are some of the finest specimens of small-town architecture: some even emulate the Second Empire's Mansard roof or even the brick and stone mixtures of Romanesque cathedrals—the religious institutions, although not overbearing in inflicting their doctrine, are numerous in denomination, diversified in size, and usually cloaked in architectural mastery—the eateries are numerous, affordable, and diverse, and in all most cases are particularly tasteful in their own style, while always occupying and reusing historically significant structures characteristic of the city—the employers, although deficient in providing wealth to all, remit professional salaries beyond the town's cost of living—the local policy, while contrary to any in Central Pennsylvania, is progressive and inclusive of all its citizenry—and the most notable edifice is the capitol, which, in its own way, brings the Grecian or Roman temple to mind, including American taste and perfection. All of these attributes—which even include a farmer's market and independent film theatre—are most appealing because of their appearance. The mixture of architectural styles and the low height of the structures are what call to palette a European flavor.

However, in singing the city's praises, the most primal advantage is its urban-like atmosphere and low cost of living that is within a few hours of travel from great

metropolises such as Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York City.

But let us not sing too loudly, for, unfortunately, there are greater issues that detain this place from wholly exemplifying the principles of democracy, the pride of homestead and ownership, and, probably most hurtful to itself, the hope of progression.

Remember the praises of great architecture? Well, about a mile from the capitol are communities of people who, rather than exonerate, assert themselves to deface and defile the formerly great residences and streetscapes of Harrisburg. For others who do not take residence in the city, they do not mind earning their salaries from letting rooms, even in their capitol city, in fatally divided mansions, to the most despicable characters furthering destruction of the beauty once enjoyed in all parts of town.

And what about the employer that was previously given laud? Do we see a want of talent and ability in government jobs? Absolutely not, for if one has been reared or educated elsewhere, they are given less of a chance than the under qualified natives.

And as for progress, we must thank Mayor Reed, but, unfortunately, he is among a minority of natives working to elevate this place. When such acts are being performed, it is usually the foreigner—from another the city,

state, or country—capitalizing from making improvements rather than by causing harm as have tasteless slumlords.

Furthermore, attention must be paid to the lack of diversity in regards to popular culture when it comes to vendors and arbiters of modern taste and grandeur. Yes, there are three malls; however, the place remains devoid of high-end fashions or even the more moderate tastemakers. Why is this the case? Is it perhaps not justified by the same circumstances that have caused the aforementioned mayor or so much toil in rehabilitating—with next to no funds—a much distressed capitol city?

Can a lack of fashion and the disability of a town have a close connection? Perhaps, it is the lack of such a link that is behind the lack of progress.

Now, please call mind the number of cities, townships, and boroughs one encounters when leaving Harrisburg in any general direction. In the blink of an eye the identity—and, most importantly, the government—will change when in the midst of travel. Because of this, what the postal service regards as Harrisburg is really a disjointed, endless number of places all as far away from cohesion as a pile of untouched puzzle pieces.

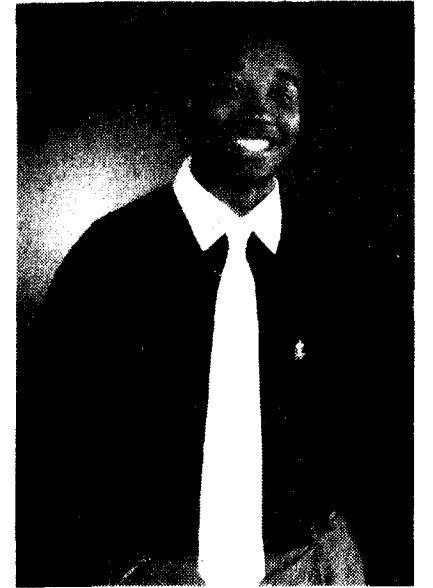
Yet we see the diversity of locations due to their name and nature all about us—most noticeably, in Philadelphia. However, unlike this great city, the capitol region has not

adopted even the legal cohesion, much less the mentality, of a much need conurbanization—a juncture of locality that might give rise to a tax base supportive of a capitol city; a city in which many work, but do not support in regards to its upkeep. It is the same lack of cohesion that divides what could be a great shopping place into three segregated, separate malls—only hurtful those who frequent them and long for greater modern fashions.

But I will not belabor the point. In fact, I will close my labors by posing a few questions. Does a desire for an Abercrombie—or even a Nordstrom—not understandably accompany other means of progress? And does that progress not usually involve an all-inclusive junction of persons? Is it not the mentality of a place—whether that be a great pride or lack there of—that can really

make or break an environment's attractiveness? Can it not be said that one with no confidence in his or herself will be as far away from success as an aimlessly wandering vagrant? And can these same principles not be applied to greater topics such as the progress of an area—and, most importantly, the culture it embodies or invokes? Will Harrisburg, remain—at-large—a place between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh? And wouldn't the departure from such a demoralizing identity not start with its own residents?

## President's Corner



By **MARQUES STEWART**  
SGA President  
MES5169@PSU.EDU

HEY PENN STATE'ERS, HOW IS EVERYONE DOING? All is well in the NEW Student Government Association (SGA), and we are at your service.

My name is Marques L. Stewart and I am your newly elected Student Government Association President for the 2007-2008 academic years. I am currently a second-semester freshman majoring in Nursing and Health Policy and Administration. I wanted to run for the position of President to promote change in the Student Government Association, other clubs and organizations, and Penn State Harrisburg community as a whole. I want to personally invite you to come into the office anytime to meet with your Senators, your Student Court, your Executive Board, or just chill out. Once again, remember the student government office is open to everyone.

Your Student Government Executive Board is comprised of myself, Marques Stewart, as your President, Salar Salce as your Vice President, Stephen Williams as your Chief of Staff, Sheila Ongeri as your Treasurer, Kristin Gillead as your Community Liaison, Amanda Basile as your Communications Director, and Joseph DeOliviera as your Acting Webmaster. Your newly appointed Senator for School of Division of Undergraduate Students is Maalik Murray, a second semester freshman. Your newly appointed Senator for the school of Business is Joseph Richardson, a second semester junior. Your Senate Leader for the new Student Government Association is Dustin Holler.

We have so many great ideas and goals for everyone at Penn State Harrisburg to accomplish. Some ideas that we want to implement are to promote change, are to maintain a full senate and encourage a full court, to unite the campus as one by promoting diversity, to have clubs co-chairing events, to increase student participation in events, and to increase school spirit. In addition, we thought of an idea to create an Inner-club council, which would be lead by your vice president.

These council meetings are going to be bi-weekly every month and all active clubs must attend one of these two meetings. The meetings will take place of the mandatory SGA meetings clubs have to attend. Next, for clubs to stay active they must hold one fundraising event, one community service event, and one on-campus event per academic year. A big goal the Student Government wants to accomplish is for every club to participate in the Fall Club Fest. This will give the students of our school the opportunity to get involved. Do not forget we have over 350 new freshmen coming to our campus next semester.

I want to take the time out now to thank everyone on behalf of the Student Government Association for showing your condolences for the Virginia Tech University tragedy. I urged all of you to attend the Emergency Response open forum sponsored by Chancellor Madlyn L. Hanes and the Community Action and Response Team (CART).

GOOD LUCK ON YOUR FINALS!

## Celebrate Life

By **HILARY ISLEIB**  
Staff Reporter  
HDL111@PSU.EDU

This semester, since the very frigid first days of January, I have been training to run a half marathon in San Diego, California to raise money to fight leukemia and other blood cancers. The theme of my run has been "Celebrate Life," because my race coincides with my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, and rather than celebrate the big day in ways in which I would probably never remember, I wanted this birthday to be unforgettable. After April 16, though, when my hometown was the site of the terrible tragedy at Virginia Tech, my life has changed forever. And, like most people, I am still trying to figure out how I feel about everything, including my birthday celebration.

While shopping at a local bookstore recently, I noticed several books on wine and thought of how I would spend the actual day of my birth since my race is still a few short weeks away. But tears bubbled to the surface of my eyes as I thought of the nearly dozen students who lost their lives at Virginia Tech who never reached their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. I feel fortunate and guilty at the same time. I am able to experience so much that none of the victims ever will. Does my birthday even matter? Feeling bitter, I wonder what reason there is to celebrate at all when all a birthday really means is a passage of time-time that can never come back and time that can be so easily and so cruelly taken away.

Since that black day, I have not cared much for any other social or political cause either. Relay for Life has come and gone, the local Humane Society dog wash has come and gone, and nothing seemed as important as remembering the victims of April 16. But, I was painfully reminded recently how life and death still go on even after such a terrible tragedy. I wrapped up a 24-hour treadmill walk at my local grocery store to raise money for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society where my teammates and I started at 3 p.m. on Saturday, April 21 and continued until 3 p.m. Sunday. Some of us sold baked goods

and barbeque sandwiches while another team member took their turn keeping the treadmill going for 24 hours. (To find out more about the fundraiser and cause visit my website at <http://www.active.com/donate/ntva/ntva/HilLeib>). Until Saturday, I was very nervous about the treadmill walk not knowing how to successfully grieve and move on, but my teammates and I kept the victims in our hearts and a Hokie-colored ribbon on our shirts.

Almost at the end of the very long day after most of us had worked through the night, a mother stopped by our table. I didn't even have to tell her what the treadmill was for or why we were raising money. She read the sign and shoved a \$20 bill into my hand saying,

"My four-year-old has Leukemia. Thank you."

She walked away as I stared after her. Her words, the Hokie ribbon, my birthday, the half marathon, everything seemed to collide in my head at once. When I still feel like grieving and missing life the way it was on April 15 before everything changed, I have to remember that time does not turn back and all that is left is what lies ahead. The four-year-old Leukemia patient still celebrates her birthdays, although her mother doesn't know how many birthdays her daughter has left. But, then, nobody does. The point is that they celebrate her life. The last week has also been a week of memorial services and funerals for lives lost at Virginia Tech. Each service was also intended to celebrate the life of a loved one. Around the world, the Hokie nation is celebrating life.

Celebrating life is not just about milestones or overcoming adversity. Life is what we make of every minute of every hour of every day. Age does not matter as much as I once thought it did. Old or young, young or old, the gift of life is the same-precious. We are all affected by different things. Some face leukemia; others face something entirely different. But, each life is just as precious as any other.

Do not let any time be wasted time. Do not wait for your next birthday. Do not wait for the next holiday. Celebrate life, today.

## VT remembered through student's eyes

By **HILARY ISLEIB**  
Staff Reporter  
HDL111@PSU.EDU

On April 16, 2007, I was preparing to start writing my honors thesis.

I had put in for time off work and planned to spend all week at the library with my laptop, canteen of coffee and no distractions. This semester I have been living at home in Christiansburg, Virginia finishing up my degree online, and I was looking forward to finishing up the last of my coursework. On that Monday morning, my mom woke me up before she was leaving for work as I had requested, so that I could get an early start. I gathered my research together and sat down to eat breakfast before I left for the library. The longer I sat, however, the less I wanted to go to the library. For 10 minutes, I debated with myself the virtues of being a good student and how I should follow my plan to go to the library... the library at Virginia Tech's campus just 10 minutes from my house where I had spent nearly half the semester researching for my honors thesis.

Finally, I relented and chose to stay home. I curled up with a few of my books on the sofa in front of the TV until about 10:30 a.m. By then, I had been researching for almost three hours and I was ready for a mid morning break. *Will and Grace* reruns are on around that time, so I turned on the TV to take a quick half hour sitcom break. The TV was on the local station, so when I turned the TV on I immediately saw the breaking news of the massacre at Virginia Tech.

At that point, only the first student had been reported killed. The next two hours passed like half a minute, that is until the press conference was aired and the death toll was updated. The Blacksburg Chief of Police stated very calmly right before my unbelieving eyes that

20 students were confirmed dead. I wondered why my face felt cold until I realized that I was crying and crying hard. I called my mom in tears angry that someone could be so senseless and heinous, angry that life had no meaning for whoever was responsible, devastated that this tragedy occurred in my hometown, and worried sick for friends I hadn't even seen since I graduated high school.

By mid afternoon, I had heard from everyone I could think of to contact. I was fortunate; I didn't know any of the victims. But in such a small community, I know people who lost a friend or family member or who were in Norris Hall or Ambler Johnson. The magnitude of the effect

be those who scream at the top of their lungs that guns are responsible and gun safety needs to be a higher priority in government. There are those who will shout back that guns had nothing to do with the deaths of almost three dozen innocent kids and teachers at Virginia Tech. But, what leaders and citizens have seemed to neglect even after Columbine and other atrocities is the subject of safety in schools. For a few weeks after the tragedy, school safety is a sexy issue. Then the whole issue gets rolled up in the "education" package and ignored. We cannot change what happened in Blacksburg, Virginia, and we may not be able to ensure this will not happen to another town or another school. But I am going to



that this tragedy has taken not only on this area but also on the nation is incomprehensible. Ten minutes from Virginia Tech's campus, my younger brother's high school was also in lock down for several hours. Students were not permitted to leave their classrooms. When I finally picked him up at the end of the day, we hugged and he told me he was worried that I'd gone to the library at Virginia Tech. I told him I had not gone and had to reassure him over and over that I was okay. He's been asking questions about the shootings ever since, wanting to know why someone would hurt so many people for no reason.

I don't know if I've answered any of my brother's questions, because I don't have any of the answers. Why do people seek to cause so much pain and sorrow? Could anything have been done to prevent this tragedy? Can anything prevent parents from having to bury their kids in the future as a result of murder in schools? There will

do my part to make sure that school safety is an issue that never goes away.

No matter what side of the gun safety fence people fall on, we can all agree that we need to find ways to protect our schools. If we can find ways to secure banks and courthouses and other public buildings, can't we find ways to safeguard public schools and universities? Lockdown or no lockdown, I could walk into my brother's high school and have him leave with me before anyone knew he was gone. I shudder to think what would happen if someone had malicious intentions... but then I guess the world realized the results on April 16, 2007, at an innocent, unpretentious, farm-country campus. I will never buy into the argument that public places are too difficult to protect. If an issue is important enough, someone will find a way, and I think the lives of at least 33 innocent kids and teachers is important enough.