

# Opinion

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THE REBEL YELL

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## A solemn choice must be made

by Gregory Quinn

Imagine this: You've just graduated from UNLV—summa cum laude. You've done the seminar thing, learned what employers are looking for as well as ways to dazzle them with your inner grace. Now you've got your first big interview. You're psyched. You know you're going to ace it. You walk in with your resume and diploma and a big smile. Only one problem—you're wearing a gorilla suit.

What do you think the response will be? Obviously no one can take a gorilla seriously, so you've blown it.

Now you're probably thinking, "Who would be dumb enough to wear a gorilla suit to an interview? I'd never do that." Well, that's exactly what a recent graduate, a former student of one professor Jim Deacon, thought when he went for an interview. But because he was a graduate of UNLV, "that basketball school with the shift coach," he wasn't taken seriously and never had a chance. Unknowingly, he walked into that office wearing a gorilla suit.

Of course the suit is symbolic. It's the result of an avalanche of accusations and lawsuits and counter-suits involving the basketball team that

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never seem to become resolved. They simply hang above this university like a dark cloud. And like vultures, the media swoops down and heaps upon America what it craves most: a flood of bad press.

Like it or not, our perceptions are shaped by the media. I've spoken to people from as far away as the Philippines who know us, not as the school with the top-notch hotel management program, but as "the school with the great basketball team." No doubt we've earned this distinction, however dubiously. But that doesn't stop people in this community from ramming it down our throats.

"Vegas is basketball and basketball is Vegas," seems to be the battle cry of local boosters, as well as some students. And this sentiment ultimately cuts right to the heart of the problem. If UNLV decides to shut down the basketball pro-

gram for two years, will we lose our identity?

Conversely, what will happen to our image if we don't shut down the program? And, in a worst case scenario, what will happen if Jerry Tarkanian comes back? Knowing the power of the media, what will be the cost for students graduating from a university that chooses basketball over academics? Our reputation surely would be that of a Machiavellian institute, where winning on the basketball court isn't everything, it's the only thing. That's a scary thought, and the future looks even worse. Images abound of opulent "fixers" loaded with jewelry and cash, cruising the campus in their flashy Cadillacs, hoping to put the squeeze on some unsuspecting athlete. Some future!

Noted author/philosopher Robert Fulghum recently spoke about our current crisis, and of the wonderful opportunity giv-



en us. I think I know what he meant. We have a chance to show the world that UNLV, the cultural and academic child of a much maligned city, chooses for itself a new identity, one that embraces academics and strives to reach the top of the college world. Think of it. In Las Vegas, of all cities, we can choose the way of the mind. In so doing, UNLV will gain the respect it deserves, our graduates will

be taken seriously, and we can finally throw off the symbolic ape suit.

Big decisions loom in the near future, for all of us—students, faculty and administrators. The steps we take in the next few weeks will affect our academic careers, and most likely the rest of our lives. And you can bet your booster club the media will be watching.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear editor,

This is the first time I have ever written to a newspaper to voice my opinion, but the article in the opinion section entitled "The Yell did not have the facts" (Thursday edition volume 14, No. 12) was so ridiculous.

The writer uses strawman tactics because she wants the reader to believe that proponents of gun control want to take guns away from those "good enough to fight in Desert Storm, Vietnam, Korea and even World War II to defend this country." This argument is fallacious for two reasons.

1. Gun control is not out to deny the general public from buying fire arms. It is trying to introduce into legislature requirements such as background checks to make it harder for someone with a criminal record to acquire a gun (notice I said harder, not impossible).

2. The firearms those good people used when fighting in Desert Storm were government issue, not privately owned.

The writer proudly states that the group assembled to defend the Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. You defended it well. So well in fact, that your heckling cut short the program thereby taking away Sarah Brady's First Amendment Right and the audience's right to hear what

she had to say.

The Brady's were invited to this campus to speak about a very controversial issue. I don't think by inviting the Brady's, Student Government was advocating gun control. I think they were trying to contribute to the academic process. Nor do I think it wrong to ask your group not to put down the Bradys or their right to free speech. By doing this, Student Government was advocating common courtesy.

Student Government and *The Rebel Yell* took issue, not with what your group was saying, but with how your group said it. Adjectives such as rude and immature are appropriate to describe the actions of a group who think that the only opinion worth hearing is their own.

Your stand on gun control didn't embarrass this university. The way you presented it did.

Norah Nelson, student

Dear editor,

When Jim and I were invited to speak at UNLV this month, we were pleased to have the opportunity to share our thoughts and concerns about the growing problem of random gun violence in America, and hoped to generate some thought and discussion on ways we might work as a nation to reduce the needless death and injury.

Because our comments were cut short — by the few people who disagreed with our position — I'd like to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts with those who had come to hear our point of view. As I said earlier, Jim and I are not "anti-gun." We're pro-public safety and pro-common sense.

As a mother and a former teacher, it troubles me deeply that homicide is now the number one killer of young black men and the second leading cause of death for young white men — and most are committed with guns. Our children today grow up believing that guns are the easy answer to life's problems, and that guns are the means to achieve power and respect. Yet, each day another 10 kids die in hand gun fire.

Over 23,000 American men, women and children were killed by hand guns last year — in homicides, suicides and accidents. 1991 set another tragic murder record in this country. Those aren't statistics we can be proud of.

The legislation Jim and I are working for will not prevent law-abiding citizens from obtaining legitimate weapons. But it will provide law enforcement an effective enforcement mechanism to ensure that criminals can't simply walk into gun stores and walk out with the tools of their trade. Last year, California's sensible waiting period and background check stopped nearly 6,000 criminals who tried to buy guns in that

state — including 34 murderers. Sadly, because we still lack a uniform national law, we'll never know how many crossed into Nevada and made illegal "cash-and-carry" sales.

Las Vegas is not immune from gun violence or crime any more than any town or city in America is. Violent crime is actually rising faster in rural areas now than it is in the big cities. Gun violence is random, striking anyone, anywhere, any time. Certainly the people in the Killeen, Texas cafeteria last October never expected a madman to ram his truck into the restaurant and open fire. Nor did the students at the University of Iowa expect to encounter the angry student who took the lives of their friends and professors.

The time has come to join together to stop the violence. The vast majority of Americans, including 87 percent of gun owners, support common sense measures like the Brady Bill. Every major law enforcement group in the country has endorsed sensible gun laws.

The gun lobby argues that the answer is to "control the criminal." We agree that tough mandatory sentences are important. But alone, they won't solve the problem. What good does it do to lock up a criminal for a long time if the minute he gets out of jail he can simply walk into the nearest gun store and quickly pick up another weapon? Tougher sentences and sensible gun laws