

# Random Musings

By Darryl Richardson  
Editor-in-Chief

"Freedom of speech means that you shall not do something to people either for the views they have, or the views they express, or the words they speak or write." — Justice Hugo Black.

Today's column is going to deal with several topics that may seem unrelated. Please bear with me, this is really going somewhere.

Recently one of my professors conducted a lecture on his personal definition of a hero and those who he feels meet the requirement. He mentioned Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Edward R. Murrow and the "Hollywood 10" as examples of his personal heroes. Each of them stood for something at the risk of great personal danger to themselves and those around them.

This lecture got me thinking about my own personal heroes. I guess, when it comes right down to it, I have three. The first is the group of men who set out to explore the outer limits: the early astronauts. Each of them braved great personal danger to explore new and uncharted areas of our universe. That's a hero to me.

The second is Winston Churchill, as you may have guessed if you've paid attention to the quotes that I start every column with. Churchill was a remarkable man who managed to keep a nation together during the time of their greatest threat. His quiet dignity held the Allied cause together in the early days of World War II until the Americans were drawn into the fray. All of this was accomplished after an earlier, humiliating defeat in his early political career.

But the final hero is someone who didn't face a great deal of personal danger, but he definitely stood for a controversial idea, despite the complete lack of support for his belief. Hugo Black was one of the longest-serving Supreme Court Justices of all time, serving over 34 years on the bench. His major cause was free speech, where he believed that the First Amendment meant just what it says, "Congress shall pass no law...abridging the freedom of speech..."

Now you may be wondering why I'm telling you about my heroes. Well, the definition of free speech held by Hugo Black (see quote above) seems to be under siege here at UNLV.

You may have seen recent reports on Channel 13 detailing alleged racial remarks made by Athletic Director Charles Cavagnaro. According to a former AD employee, who requested that his face and voice be disguised before agreeing to be interviewed, Cavagnaro referred to African-American athletes as "monkeys" and compared one-time recruit Lamar Odom to a "gorilla." Reportedly, these comments were made in staff meetings and in private conversations.

Now, if this is such a big deal, why hasn't anyone else reported on it? Because the school has thrown a big blanket over the issue. Athletic Department employees are required to have a clause in their contract saying that they won't speak out against the department, any of its teams or the university. If they do, they can be terminated. If they aren't terminated, things could be made pretty uncomfortable for them. Consequently, nobody wants to speak about the issue publicly.

This story has been floating around the campus for several months and all of the media outlets in town know about it. We have located a handful of people who will only speak off the record about the situation. These include a current employee and an athletic department booster. Each of them has their own reasons for not wanting their names or their stories to appear in print. We have chosen to honor their request and have not run any of their comments. This explains why we haven't run the story.

We aren't alone. Both newspapers in town, as well as all of the television channels, have the story, but are in the same boat. Nobody, save the single former employee who spoke to Channel 13, is willing to go public, even with assurances that they won't be identified.

So now what? It certainly looks like the athletic department's policy may result in completely covering up what could be a major scandal. If these comments were actually made, then there is no excuse for them. Mr. Cavagnaro should be forced to immediately resign his position, but ideally, he would do the honorable thing and quit on his own. Our athletic department is facing enough troubles right now without having racial epithets being hurled around.

Let's be honest. What African-American athletes are going to want to come to UNLV if they know that the man in charge of the department is calling them names behind their backs? Plus, what about the donors and boosters of the various programs? Many of those who purchase season tickets for Rebel athletics would be shocked and dismayed at the remarks and may cancel their support. So, why not keep the investigation from happening and just cover things up? But rest assured, nobody is going to let this matter die quietly.

This is not a matter of wanting to bring down Rebel sports. In fact, this is an attempt to get the truth out in the open and let the people decide what is best for the university. You might ask, "Why does he care? He's graduating." Well, I'm going to have two diplomas with UNLV written on them and I care about what happens to this school. I'm proud of this school and I wish only the best for it. If someone, the athletic director or anyone else, is making comments of this sort, I care about it. Our school has enough image problems from the past without adding more problems from today. Let's get the truth out and end all of the rumors.

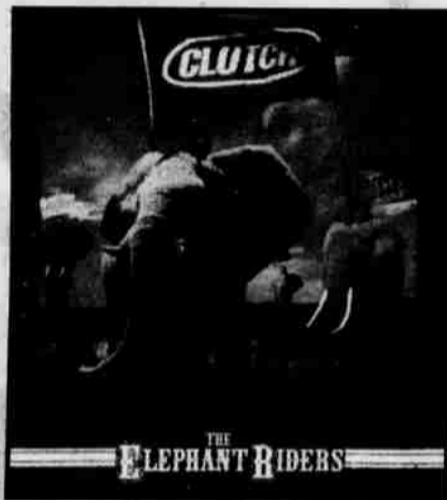
You might be asking what is the relationship between this subject and my earlier discussion of heroes? Well, it's pretty simple. Heroes stand up for what they believe in despite the consequences. My heroes believed in strength, courage, truth and justice. Unfortunately, UNLV doesn't seem to believe in the same things. Instead, it seems to believe in intimidation, retribution and cover-ups.

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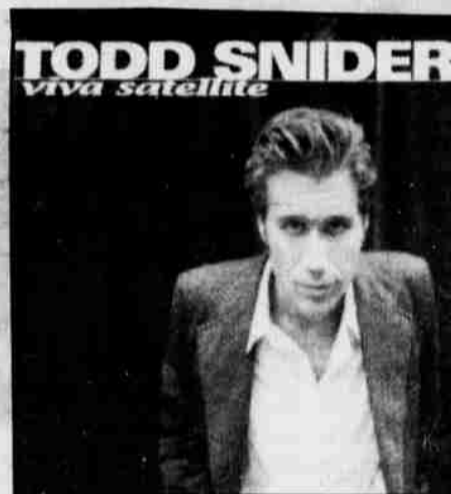
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