



The Art of Persuasion Op-Ed Exemplars from the Write the World Archives

The op-ed asks a lot of you, dear writers. You're told to investigate and question, but also to assert your opinion. You're told to write something true to you, while also appealing (and persuading) a universal audience.

We have no doubt that you have powerful, worthy, and heartfelt ideas to share. But if you're feeling daunted by how to pull it off—cinching together your thesis, evidence, anecdotes, quotes, and all the rest into a neat package—then take a look at these memorable op-eds published on the WtW site over the last few years. Consider what forms of persuasion these writers use, how they hook their readers from the first lines, and what sort of structure provides a framework for their thoughts.

And then get to it! We can't wait to read yours.

Being A Sikh in America **Skyrider (US)**

Being a Sikh in a post 9/11 world hasn't always been easy. Growing up, I didn't always feel proud of my religion. Even now, I often find myself forced to choose between being a Sikh and being an American. Am I Sikh or am I American first?

To this day, I remain one of the only Sikh students in my school. My brother was often bullied growing up because of his turban and faith. Passing through airport security, it seemed as though we were always "randomly selected". More than 90% of the time we pass through TSA, my brother and dad are forced to take off their turbans and uncover their hair to everyone. This is an insult to a practicing Sikh. Last year, when the Sikh actor Waris Ahluwalia was put in a similar situation, he took a stance against it, demanding an apology from TSA. His experience as



a Sikh is one of the few that has received media attention and in large part because of his fame. A Sikh Youtuber JusReign documented the incident, and I was pleasantly surprised to discover that my family was not the only one facing racial discrimination and “random selection” at airports.

On airplanes, trains and college campuses, turbaned Sikhs are often met by curious and sometimes apprehensive looks. I remember an incident when Chinese tourists took selfies with my brother. They were excited and curious to see my brother’s turban, but they were also blissfully ignorant about the culture and religion the turban represents.

A year ago, I traveled to New York City for the first time. I was really enthusiastic to visit such an iconic and famous city. Our first day there, my family stopped at a pizza place to eat lunch. A man approached my dad and started verbally attacking him. He had seen my dad and brother’s turbans and assumed we were Muslims. He accused our people of stealing hardworking American jobs, a line I have heard so many times by politicians and ignorant individuals. Somebody called the police and they escorted the man out of the restaurant, but I was very upset and so were other customers. I was disappointed by the incident, but I also knew that it doesn’t help to blame that one man. What I blame is the ignorance that remains unacknowledged in America.

As children, we are taught that America was founded on the basis of hard work, ingenuity and strong will. But, from the perspectives of the Native Americans and African Americans, this mythology ignores the amount of blood spilled and human suffering that built America.

We believe that America is a country founded on the concepts of freedom and equality. The story of America is certainly a great one, and one that has inspired generations of people to value hard work and education. But, right now, it seems that we are forgetting the very ideals that America’s founders once respected. Our country is spiraling downward because people are forgetting America’s heritage as a place where everyone can enjoy individual freedom and equality.

If we come together and start prioritizing equality and liberty, then we can be united again. While the way America was established may not have been completely moral, that doesn’t mean that we have to resort back to old ways like discrimination and racism. Maybe the reason we are not united is because many people return to the old ideas that helped America gain power: racism and white supremacy. People believe that the way to gain control of our country



again is to go back to the events that established America's success. But, it is no longer 1776.

It doesn't help that Sikh representation in the media is scarce. The few celebrity Sikhs there are, often don't wear a turban or talk about their religion. As a result, most people don't even know these celebrities are Sikh. Mainstream media tends to portray us as terrorists or targets of discrimination.

I have often been mistaken for being Muslim with no basis other than my skin color. Too often, I have been forced to say, "I am not Muslim." It is not until I say this that many feel satisfied, and I believe this is the issue behind racism in America. Minority groups in America are pitted against each other, and many Sikhs are forced to respond back to hate by drawing a distinction from Islam. Despite the misconception, Sikhs are not Muslims. However, when we explain that we are not Muslims, it sounds like we are directing the target of hatred from ourselves to another community.

When many people think of Americans, they think of Caucasians of European ancestry. There is a stereotype that somebody that looks like me cannot be an American. With hate crimes on the rise and the incessant drama caused by the recent election, minority groups continue to be overlooked and misjudged. We are a peaceful community that believes in service to others and welfare for all. Our place of worship is called a gurdwara, and they are open worldwide to everyone, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age or religion. Anyone who enters a gurdwara is served a fresh and free meal. Sikhs are hard-working, hospitable and generous, yet we continue to be misunderstood by most of America.

While I have definitely had some racist and hurtful experiences due to my religion, I have also had some inspiring ones. When I traveled to Spain, my family was surprised by the diversity of people in that country. We struck up conversations in our native language with many people, and some Sikhs pointed us to the nearest gurdwara. It was pleasantly comforting to be welcomed by people of the same faith in a completely different part of the world.

According to a study conducted by Stanford University and reported by the Wall Street Journal, 49% of Americans believed Sikhism is a sect of Islam, and 20% stated that encountering a man with a turban would make them angry. Another 35% of people associated a turban and beard with Osama bin Laden (Source 1). These statistics are upsetting yet unsurprising to me.



I am an American-Sikh. My whole life, I have been one of the only Sikh students in my school, and that has never stopped me from doing anything I wanted to. When people ridiculed my brother's turban or told me I couldn't do something like ride a motorcycle, I didn't let it hold me back. Sometimes, it almost seems to me like racism is something that can only be suppressed and never terminated. I believe that being a Sikh in a predominantly white community has made me stronger. It has made me resilient, and I have learned to put up with discrimination. Some of my friends think I am foolish to maintain my Sikh identity even though it comes with some cost. I think it is important to keep your faith and not give in to the mistaken assumptions and stereotypes prevalent in society.

When my dad or my brother walk into an interview room, many will already have a pre-conceived notion in the back of their mind even before they sit down. But, while some will feel apprehensive, others will be impressed and inspired. Sikhs have a proud and brave history. In today's world, Sikhs are tech entrepreneurs, politicians, CEO's, billionaires, GAP models, soldiers, police officers and everything else.

I know that racism is a complicated issue, and I know that ignorance and a lack of education are some of the prime causes behind it. In some places, change is already happening. It may be slow, but even the slightest victory is incredibly significant. Recently, the NYPD altered their policy to now permit Sikh police officers to wear turbans and grow beards. While there are still limitations on the length of the beard and many want the NYPD to go further with this policy, it is a huge step forward in the right direction and will lead to a rise in more New York Sikhs pursuing law enforcement and representing our community.

So, to answer my question: Am I Sikh or am I American first? The answer is that I am both. I go to school, and I say the Pledge of Allegiance. I take pride in my country, and I take pride in my religion. Both are a vital part of my identity and will be for the rest of my life. I will not choose between putting my country or my religion first because I should not have to.

I hope that as Americans, we can learn to combat racism and ignorance and educate society on minority groups and religions. Maybe then, America can be a country proud and encouraging of its diversity.

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Source 1: Davies, Will. "In the U.S., Associating Sikhs With Terrorism." The Wall Street Journal, Dow Jones & Company, 24 Sept. 2013, blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2013/09/24/in-the-u-s-associating-sikhs-with-terrorism/.



Clothes donation? Sorry, but it's not going to work anymore
Junfang Zhang (Singapore)

Perpetually sitting in a corner of my room is a large carrier bag filled with cast-off clothes. As much as I have tried to avoid needless and impulse purchases, ill-fitting jackets, outdated dresses, and cringe-worthy graphic T-shirts accumulate faster than dust can accumulate in my room. These are the cheap, dispensable clothes that I always find myself purging my room of whenever festivities roll around to donate to the local charity. For many of us, this process of purging shouldn't be new. Making charitable donations has become not just the go-to method, but also practically routine for consumers like me who find way too much clothes piling up in our closets but recoil at the idea of throwing all of them out. I always figured that my unwanted clothes will find a second life with a thrifty consumer, or at least go to someone who needs it more. Only recently did I realise that the reality of clothes donations is not as simple or romantic as we might believe.

A quick Google search on how warehouses of many charities look like will bring us to photos depicting plastic bags after plastic bags bursting at their seams with clothes. While it might seem comforting to see so many clothes are being recycled not trashed, that's unfortunately missing the point. The point is that today, there are far too many clothes donated that charities, thrift shops, and international markets combined can no longer keep up. For decades, clothes donation has offered consumers in wealthy nations a guilt-free way of relieving themselves of old clothing. Yet this cycle is quickly breaking down. Fast fashion is thriving, new clothes are becoming as cheap as old ones, and poor countries whom we have donated our clothes to for decades are turning their backs on secondhand trade. There is a need for us to take a closer look at what really happens when we donate clothes today — and realise that on all fronts, our best efforts to resell and recycle just won't work anymore.

Contrary to popular belief, less than 20% of clothing donations worldwide made to charities are actually resold there. This is simply because supply of used clothing now far outweighs demand. Since the advent of fast fashion in the 1990s, our consumption has increased so dramatically that Americans now buy five times as much clothing as they did in the 1980s, and donations to Goodwill increase by 10% each year. As nicely summarised by Elizabeth Cline, author of



Overdressed: The Shockingly High Price of Cheap Fashion, "[With] the advent of cheap, disposable clothing, charities have seen themselves transformed into dumps that accept clothes of varying condition in ever-increasing volumes." As a result, charities which have limited manpower and resources to sell all these items turn away most of the clothes. Instead, 45% of all clothing donations are exported to developing nations across the globe, most prominently, Africa.

Okay, so even though our clothes may not go to someone locally, at least they're going to someone. Indeed, international markets save over a billion pounds of donated clothing each year. However, there is a huge cost that comes with this trade. To put it bluntly, the inflow of Western clothing threatens the stability of local economies by putting textile workers and factories out of work. As imported second hand clothing can be sold for dirt-cheap prices, locally produced clothing become extremely expensive in comparison. For instance, the average cost of an imported second hand garment in Kenya is between 5 to 10% of a locally produced garment. As local textile factories and self-employed tailors struggle to compete, they either close down or face dismal business prospects. As a result, an increasing number of countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda have banned import of second hand clothing from the West to allow their own clothing industry to thrive.

Yet, the declining attraction of second hand clothing in developing nations is but a small part of a larger picture — globally, attraction to purchase old clothes as a whole is dwindling. This is because new items are becoming as cheap as getting old ones. We don't need to look far for a clear illustration of this. In Panipat, India, roughly 200 business there are devoted to recycling clothes into yarn and blankets. For years, these businesses have served as the world's largest recycler of woolen clothing. However, when Chinese manufacturers came in in the early 2000s, their mills using the modern technology raised blanket production productivity so much that a new fleece blanket costs a mere US\$2.50, compared to US\$2.00 for a recycled one. Though this instance is of blankets and not clothing, the idea is the same. Everywhere across the globe, production of new items, new clothing is becoming so cheap, it's more worthwhile for anyone to get a new clothes rather than old ones.

So let's go through all the options we have. We can't rely on local charities to sell all our old clothing anymore because far too many clothes are coming in. We can't look towards international markets either, because our old clothes are costing livelihoods and shutting down local textile industries. In fact, we can't expect anyone to prefer getting our second hand items anymore, because it's becoming just as cheap to get a brand new one. We need to realise that



there just isn't another way to deal with our excessive amounts of donated clothing anymore. The only way to solve this is if we cut down on the amount of clothing we consume altogether. This means choosing to shop less frequently, instead of believing you've done your part for the earth by dropping your clothes off at the Salvation Army. This means making that carrier bag in the corner of your room disappear altogether, instead of you taking comfort in adding more clothes in. Clothes donation was never meant to be a magical pill that cures all our consumption problems. It's high time we recognised that.

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Unlearnt Lessons EAurora (UK)

Last year, I lived the past.

It was a school trip – 5 days in France, touring a mere fraction of the countless sites of World War 1. The battlefields. The monuments. The graveyards: field upon field of stiff white stones, bodies lying cold and unknown beneath them. The ground aching with the weight of the world's guilt and the wasted lives of a million unsung heroes. The scars in the landscape, deep blemishes muddied by years of dust and tears; we stood, stunned to silence, and watched the lives of those who were lost flash by in a cascade of names and plain crosses. I couldn't fathom the thought that in the moment they fell, those myriads of men, they were still alive. Their hearts thudded in their chests, their bodies grew and their fears, their regrets, everything they had done and everything they wished they had done still flew around their minds. I saw then the incredible inhumanity of it, clearer than ever before. They were just people, and they



deserved better. For a few short moments, we were all incredibly humbled and thanked the world, silently, for all that we had, and all we still had to come. And we exclaimed to one another how something like that could never happen again.

But time moved on. The trip ended. Souvenirs were purchased, photos were taken and information booklets were filled in, tossed to the bottom of bags and promptly forgotten. If any one of us were asked the highlights of the tour, we would probably describe the games room in the hotel or the exciting ferry journey. We would giggle at length about how our history teacher's hat had blown off in the fierce autumn wind and he had stumbled after it down the beach. We might mention in passing the interesting nature of the museums and how it was sad to see so many unidentified graves. But as we drove home, the immediate horror of the past drifted from our brains, drawn away on the wind as our minds filled once more with the future: the exams we had coming up, our busy schedules for the week ahead. And when, on the news that night or in the papers littered around the airport, we saw reports of conflict – the civil war in Syria, the conflict in Afghanistan, the mindless fighting in countries all over the world – we attached no real importance to it.

The thing is, it is easy to talk about the horrors of war. It is easy to exclaim at the millions of lives lost in the past through fighting, and to stand at memorials remembering, with sombre words, those who gave their lives in the name of peace. But what is harder is to realise that just because it is no longer happening to us personally, doesn't mean it is not happening. We have to be able to look at conflict in the past – not just to the world wars, but further back, to the Napoleonic Wars, the Crusades, the 100 Years War – and realise that nothing has changed. Over time, humanity has achieved such great things: we have become great philosophers and artists. We have made incredible developments in medicine and scientific knowledge. And yet, we still struggle to settle disagreements in anything but the most brutal and instinctive way... through violence. How can we celebrate peace in some places when all around the world, innocent citizens are forced to flee their homes and the only way to have your voice heard is by gratuitous combat? What use is a day of mourning, a day of remembering all we have lost through war, when at that moment, the very people we are praying for are dying in vain?

We cannot continue to live in a world where we have learnt nothing from the lessons of the past. That day on the battlefields, a group of young schoolgirls learnt a powerful lesson. We learnt the value of a human life, and the dreadful futility of anything that threatens that. And we can't be allowed to forget that. As a society, we cannot continue like this, leaving a trail of conflicts and broken lives behind us. We cannot leave a memorial site and allow the clarity we



have gained, the messages about compassion and the beauty of peace, to simply vanish. They must ripple into the minds of all those who support war until eventually, we can say that the world is a good place, and mean it.

Or else they will fade away unbloomed: like the lives of so many who have sunk, unfulfilled, beneath a war-torn ground.

The Danger of Ethnic Categorization at the U.S.-Mexico Border echoe720 (US)

In November 2018, the horrific picture of a migrant mother and her daughters fleeing tear gas at the U.S.-Mexico border exploded on social media. Tensions between the social-media public and border control officials reached an unprecedented height, inflaming debates over U.S. immigration policy. Even in my small town of Palisades Park, New Jersey--thousands of miles from the border--the public discussion on the border patrol's and ICE's practices became increasingly questioned.

This occurrence became a potent segway to raise public consciousness on the urgency of Southern border issues. However, reactions from both sides have, whether subconsciously or deliberately, overlooked and perpetuated ethnic generalization of immigrants through the use of the term "Latino." While this generalization can serve as a shorthand for the 969 migrants from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua that passed into Ciudad Hidalgo, a reliance on such broad terminology can be misleading, unproductive, and even perilous in falsely shaping public perception of these immigrants and potential solutions to solve migrations crises. There is evidently a wide range of ethnic identities, as well as varying socioeconomic circumstances, that prompted individuals to leave their home countries.

We must question relentlessly the terms we use to categorize immigrants to present a true understanding of the circumstances. In our dialogues surrounding immigrants from other parts of the world, we immediately utilize countries of origin as a defining factor. Rarely do we, as a public, refer to Syrian or Iraqi refugees as Middle Eastern refugees, so why are we so quick to place an overly homogenized label on immigrants from Central and South American?

To fully comprehend why groups from Central and South American are labeled as "Latino," it is essential to understand the historical context in which the label was generated. Examining the



circumstances of Guatemalan immigrants in the United States from the 1940s through the 1960s sheds light on the origins of the term Latino. During this era, there was an unprecedented proliferation in the migration of both Guatemalans and Mexicans into the United States as a result of the Bracero Programs. In 1942, the Bracero Program was developed to permit undocumented Mexican workers to fill labor shortages caused by the United States' involvement in World War II. Concurrently, Guatemala was facing a refugee crisis caused by an unparalleled level of political violence and economic dysfunction. For Guatemalans seeking to flee their country, the Bracero Program presented a life-changing opportunity. But it also meant that Guatemalans had to identify as Mexican in order to enter the United States. Consequently, Bracero employers found it difficult to distinguish Guatemalan immigrants from Mexican immigrants, as individuals from both groups were dominantly indigenous fieldworkers. As a result, the employers typically labeled the former as Latinos, or even as Mexican. To reveal a Guatemalan identity would mean jail and even torture by Guatemalan government officials. Thus, this intricate dynamic created an immense challenge in making correct ethnic distinctions.

The issue of correct ethnic categorization remains today. An overreliance on generalizations in the past has made it seem superfluous to pay attention to such intricacies now.

However, the irony is that the solution to the agreed-upon-problem of undocumented immigration lies in understanding these very intricacies. By evoking such a generalization, we overlook the Venezuelan immigrants who are facing an unparalleled rate of hyperinflation in comparison to their neighbors or the high murder rates that have contributed to the influx of undocumented Honduran immigrants. Such discrepancies between "Latino" countries' immigrants make evident that to solve the larger problem of undocumented immigration, our immigration policy must consider the individual circumstances of a country.

Though broad terms help us express our opinions on social media and can be used as shorthand for important topics, it ultimately does a disservice to our overall conversations. My interactions with the Guatemalan community in my hometown caused me to reconsider my complacency in categorizing groups of people, as I recognized our inclination to maintain racial divisions that allow us to stay in our own comfort zones. We, as an American society, must recognize the reality that our past and present actions will only continue to contribute to the undocumented immigration problem. We, therefore, bear responsibility to address this issue and have a collective duty to understand and address specific migratory circumstances. Elevated social consciousness and collective willingness to put proper rhetoric into practice is



the surest path towards establishing an inclusive nation. The decision of how to handle such an intricate issue caused by our past and present interventions below our Southern border must uphold our shared American values. We must acknowledge our roots and identity as a “country of immigrants”-- from countless backgrounds no less, and stay true to upholding not only our ideals as Americans but also as members of the human race.

Footnotes

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Is Knowledge Power? Sze Ann Pang (Singapore)

It’s two minutes to midnight.

That is, according to the Doomsday Clock, a predictive model that seeks to foretell how close we are to “midnight” — the proverbial end of the world as we know it. In the decades since the Clock’s inception, issues like nuclear weapons, political instability, and climate change have pushed its hands inexorably closer to the apocalyptic end. The future foretold by the Clock is grim. Yet why hasn’t there been a concerted effort to address the realities it reveals?

Against the larger backdrop of our chaotic world, the Clock becomes yet another piece of news



clamouring for our attention. The internet, along with the proliferation of social media, has exponentially increased our access to information about global problems. We can no longer claim ignorance of the disasters and injustices that occur on a daily basis. It seems, however, that knowledge does not necessarily translate to action. This then begs the question: is broadened access to information a catalyst for change? Or does the sheer magnitude of the problems it reveals paralyse us into inaction?

In some cases, the unprecedented ability offered by the internet and social media to discover and disseminate information about global issues has become a force for good. It allows us exposure to problems we would never encounter in the comfort of our safe, stable communities. It forces us to confront inequalities and injustices, and often creates a sense of urgency for change. The internet has become an especially valuable tool for activists of all causes. Movements are no longer constrained by geographical boundaries. Rather, activists can tap upon an increasingly engaged global community to reach the critical mass needed to effect change.

Civic organisation Avaaz, the world's largest online activist network with 46 million members from 195 countries, exemplifies this. From signing petitions to crowdfunding campaigns, Avaaz members have contributed to major positive developments globally. Avaaz has pushed governments of the UK and US to set aside huge marine protected areas, took mere days to raise over \$1 million in relief funds for the Haiti earthquake, and forced governments to repeal archaic laws that trampled upon women's rights.

It seems, therefore, that the increased access to knowledge about the world's problems has proven a powerful catalyst for change. Upon closer examination, however, this does not always hold true.

We have all experienced the same swooping dread of waking up to screaming headlines about yet another natural disaster, another outbreak of violence, another terrible injustice. We have all felt the same sense of futility when confronted with a world filled with strife and conflict. Yet many of us choose to remain within our comfort zones and do little, if anything, to address these issues. Why is this so?

Psychology has some answers to offer. In the age of social media and instant reporting, the barrage of bad news seems inescapable. Bombarded with massive amounts of information about everything wrong with the world, we begin to suffer from information overload. This



grows into a sense of helplessness—if the problems are so massive, and efforts to solve them have yet to bear fruit, is there truly anything we can do to help? We thus fall back on our primitive mental defences— denial of the problem, and suppression of the anxieties it causes us— to cope with situations we are otherwise unable to handle. Indeed, studies by researchers such as Jessica Fritz have shown that exposing people to news about climate change often has the opposite of the intended effect. Rather than compelling people to make a difference, such news often immobilises them with numbness and apathy at the sheer magnitude of the crisis.

Increasingly, research has been suggesting that overexposure to violence and negativity in the media we consume daily is not only ineffective in engendering change, but can be harmful. Today, every major news website competes for viewership — and sensationalism is often a tool of the trade. British psychologist Dr. Graham Davey, for example, has noted that exposure to violence and conflict in the media may contribute to high stress and the development of PTSD symptoms. A recent survey of 342 Americans has linked concern over the climate—often fuelled by online campaigns and news pieces about the plight of the Earth—with higher rates of depression and anxiety. Indeed, it seems increased awareness of the troubles of our world can not only impact our ability to create change, but in extreme cases engenders a form of existential terror—crippling fear of an increasingly bleak future.

The way we choose to frame and process the issues we face today is instrumental in shaping the world we live in. At the individual level, we all have the difficult task of maintaining optimism tempered by an accurate perception of reality. In an increasingly turbulent world, we all have to learn how to process unpleasant information. We have to learn to give ourselves space to think constructively about opportunities for change, rather than allow ourselves to be crippled by the knowledge of what is happening in the world around us.

For this to happen, however, journalists and activists also have a role to play. Our culture needs to move towards a more positive form of reporting, one that celebrates the gains and progress made, rather than overemphasising the blood and guts of the issues just for 'clicks'. Instead of relying on apocalyptic predictions, activism needs to truly empower people by helping them find concrete ways to make a difference—something we must all bear in mind as we advocate for causes we care deeply about.

Doing so is vital— it allows the benefits of the internet and social media—mass mobilisation that transcends boundaries of space and time—to be maximised, and the psychological dangers



of apathy, stress, and anxiety to be kept at bay. Then, and only then, will our newfound knowledge about the world not compromise our wellbeing, but empower us to take action.

After all, it's never too late to turn back the clock.

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What The Tragedy of Charlottesville Can Teach Us About Grappling With a Racist Past Noran Shalby (US)

This past summer, a tumultuous white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, fueled by enmity and prejudice, deeply unsettled the fragile racial paradigm of our nation. The “Unite the Right” rally was organized to protest the city’s removal of the statue of Confederate leader, Robert E. Lee, but quickly developed into a violent dispute. The protesters had initially gathered on August 11 and marched upon the University of Virginia, equipped with torches and chanting fascist slogans, including the notorious Nazi mantra, “Blood and Soil.” On August 12, these white nationalists regathered and clashed violently with counter-demonstrators. Though police intervened almost immediately after violence broke out, one of the white nationalist protesters drove his car into a crowd of counter-demonstrators, resulting in the tragic death of 36 year-old legal assistant, Heather Heyer, who was described as a “fierce advocate for love and equality” by her colleague, according to The Washington Post. For most Americans, this violent



Charlottesville dispute only confirmed the antipathy of our nation, and how our racist past and its implications continue to burden our nation. But the larger challenges transcend the scope of these mere observations; we must question relentlessly the significance of these symbols and how we can represent our history in a way that unifies us as Americans.

To fully comprehend what happened in Charlottesville, it is essential to understand that symbols are paramount to our society. The symbols we use to represent ourselves can be seen as primary indicators of our values. Whether they are in public parks or learning institutions, in many instances, symbols enhance our sense of community by uniting us on a common ground. Our national flag is a perfect example. For some Americans, the flag is a symbol to celebrate and revere because it represents liberty, equal opportunity, and freedom. Yet not every American identifies with the national flag in that same way. Its significance to each American is as different and diverse as Americans themselves. The same logic can ultimately be applied to the controversy surrounding the removal of Confederate monuments and statues because not every American ascribes the same principles to these historical commemorations. However, the ongoing efforts to determine what these statues really represent, and what we could possibly achieve in removing them, offers many truths and vital perspectives we could utilize moving forward.

Charlottesville mayor, Michael Signer, provides one interpretation of these statues' significance. Signer disclosed the reasoning behind his vote against the removal of the city's Robert E. Lee statue in an early May 2017 publication for The Washington Post. Mayor Signer argued that while the "dishonorable" Confederate cause should not be esteemed in any regard, such "erasure" of the brutal reality of the Confederate South will never compensate for the transgressions of our past. He insisted that eradicating these vestiges of racial segregation undermines the African-American struggle for equality. In an effort to secure credibility, likely because, as a white mayor, he realized he cannot convincingly speak on behalf of the struggle of black citizens, he cited the report of a Charlottesville commission titled, "Race, Memorials, and Public Spaces." This report included the contributions of five African-American members of the Charlottesville Blue Ribbon Commission and stated, "Numerous Charlottesville African American residents who have lived through decades of suppression of their history oppose removal on the grounds that it would be yet another example of hiding their experience. For them, transforming the statues in place forces remembrance of the dominance of slavery and Jim Crow white supremacy." The report's main challenge was to assess the manner in which history is depicted in public spaces, aiming to craft an accurate racial narrative that acknowledges the impact and legacy of our painful past. Signer concludes, "[Having witnessed



this narrative], I've advocated for a third path, [one that mandates] that we neither forget the past nor accept its grasp on our present and future."

Conversely, many people believe that these monuments and statues go beyond simply acknowledging these figures in the fabric of our history. Vann Newkirk, political scientist and North Carolina native, in an August 2017 editorial for *The Atlantic* titled, "Growing Up in The Shadow of the Confederacy," argued that the commemorations of Confederate figures legitimize their ideas. Newkirk claimed that as long as these individuals are immortalized in these structures, so are their beliefs. For Southern states, whose Confederate tributes are so embedded into their identity, removing these statues seems "akin to amputation." Yet these tributes, he contended, no matter how deeply ingrained they are in Southern culture, are manifestations of white hegemony, the treasonous battle to maintain the subjugation of an entire race of American people. Rather than validate the struggles of black southerners, they champion Confederate authority, which many believe to be white supremacy disguised as a celebration of nobility, gallantry, and, ironically enough, patriotism. Newkirk concluded that taking these figures off of their pedestals and out of the public sphere are small but notable steps forward in rectifying the wrong that is honoring these oppressors in the first place; to him, it signifies that the era of racial segregation is over.

The Charlottesville dispute and these individual perspectives caused me to thoroughly reconsider my identity as a racial minority in a much broader sense. Racism, for me, is an everyday reality. I am inseparably tied into the reality of our nation's racial paradigm. The tragedy of Charlottesville has only illuminated to me the fact that history is not an abstract concept from which people can simply choose to disassociate from because it has formed the thriving structures of our nation which determine how marginalized peoples in our country are treated. For that reason, I believe history is deeply personal, not only for marginalized peoples, but for every American citizen. By fostering an acute awareness of the challenges we face as individuals and as citizens, I believe we will be able to better facilitate inter-community conversation and identify with one another on a more profound level. For me, empathy is the surest path towards establishing an inclusive nation, unplagued and unburdened by the inequities of our past. In the end, the decision of how to handle the symbols of our past must be representative of our shared values as Americans. Only by enhancing our shared person to work towards a common goal will we demonstrate the progress we are making, as a nation, as a society, as one people who long to be wholly united, with liberty and justice for all.



Op Shops: The Way and the Life. Fyxen (Australia)

The doorbell chimes as a breath of cool air swirls through your hair. The immense volume of clothes is overwhelming; your fingertips tingle with anticipation. The stacks of books and their yellowed pages pervade a curious, yet comforting odour. A sweet lady with silver hair flashes you a toothless grin, and Cornerstone plays softly in the background. You feel more at home than ever.

Too many Australians are ignorant of the bliss evoked by a successful op-shopping expedition. In 2017, approximately 86% of Australians prefer buying second hand to brand new items. However, 83% of second hand items were sold online. This means an alarming one million Aussies are deprived of the ultimate op shopping experience.

Op shopping (otherwise known as 'thrift' shopping) is essential to maintain a lively imagination and unfettered creativity. Whether it be turning an old, crocheted doily into a beautiful dream catcher, or converting a retro tea towel into a pillowcase, op shoppers possess an uncanny ability to see the potential in pre-loved items. Op shoppers also learn to see the beauty and value in old things. Regular op shopping fosters an appreciation of the beauty and privileges in our daily lives.

Op shoppers reap the value of their dollar. Once you become a regular op shopper, you'll never look at retail prices the same way again. As Macklemore wisely rapped, "Fifty dollars for a T-shirt, that's just some ignorant [person]... I call that getting tricked by a business". Additionally, 'impulse buys' are no longer a concern when purchases cost a couple of dollars each. If you wear your op shop pantaloons once and decide they're not for you – not to worry! You are only \$5 worse off. If you paid the full retail price however... that would be a different story. Plus, any items donated back to the op shop means the charity could profit multiple times from the same item.

The most ethical transactions are made at thrift stores. The proceeds of second hand purchases help Australians across the country. Throughout 2017, St Vincent de Paul provided nearly 200,000 meals and \$15 million worth of assistance to families in their local communities. In comparison, wealthy, middle-aged white men pocket retail profits, while disadvantaged factory



workers are ripped off. According to Oxfam Australia, only 4% of the price of a retail garment goes toward workers' wages in factories - this equates to 39 cents per hour. It would cost companies an excruciating 1% extra to provide a living wage to those living in poverty. Retail brands such as Kmart, Big W, and Best N Less perpetuate poverty experienced by factory workers. Op shop charities support millions of disadvantaged Australians. Can the winner be any clearer?

Op shopping is an easy and effective way to preserve the planet, as thrift stores have a practically non-existent carbon footprint. In comparison, retail companies generate large carbon emissions due to the manufacture and transport of virgin products, direct emissions from operations, electricity usage in stores, and waste that is disposed to landfill. Wesfarmers¹ have an estimated carbon footprint of 13, 000 tonnes of CO₂ due to transport emissions alone, and generated nearly 155, 000 tonnes of waste to landfill. Of the 300, 000 tonnes of donations to charitable recycling organisations in 2012, 38% was reused, 12% recycled, 10% exported overseas, and 40% was disposal to waste (24% of which was due to illegal dumping). Op shops are an environmentally sustainable alternative to shopping in retail stores.

Despite the obvious advantages of thrift shopping, there is one more thing you should know. As you begin to visit a range of different thrift stores in different locations, you'll notice they've all got something in common. No - I am not referring to how every op shop seems to have a copy of Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone. Somehow, whether it is by divine intervention or a freak of nature, every op shop smells of dirty socks. However, as you gain op-shopping experience, that distinctive musty smell becomes increasingly nostalgic. After making the switch to thrift shopping, never again will you feel repulsed by the scent of dirty laundry. Instead, you'll warmly remember the times you've spent in a second-hand wonderland - some of the highlights of your human existence.

Quick! There's no time like the present. Grab your hand-me-down wallet and race to the nearest op-shop – before I grab all the bargains!

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Footnotes:

- Wesfarmers is one of Australia's largest conglomerate companies. Subsidiaries include Coles, Target, Bunnings Warehouse, and Kmart.

They Invent Your Opinions Sbaylin (US)

Your opinions are not your own. They are being invented and forced on you daily by big corporations that hide their narrative in the most unassuming place. 'Fake' news is a prevalent issue today as news is becoming more and more narrative driven and opinionated. Even the biggest news companies that call themselves objective impose their personal narrative into their media one way or another. Although it presents itself as impartial, most of what we call 'news' is partial and meant to influence the masses, and it should no longer be classified as news unless it is truly evenhanded.

What classifies as 'fake news' versus real press? The definition of news at its core is a "report of recent events" (Merriam webster). This means that anything that is classified as news should be a report of a story or event that happened. However, most modern media outlets such as Fox or CNN all add distinct narratives to the story to add an element of opinion to it which is more than just reporting an event. Furthermore, because it is opinionated, it should not be classified as news because the title misleads people into thinking that they are getting a factual, unbiased story when they are actually being deceived, and getting a partisan view of the event or story. This is dangerous because people are more likely to believe in something when it is presented as fact. This is why this form of 'fake news' should not be classified as news the same way a truly unbiased form of media is.

One of the most flagrant examples of this phenomenon is Info Wars with their host Alex Jones. On the recent issue of the Las Vegas shooting, Alex Jones 'reported' that the massacre was, "as



phony as a three dollar bill or as Obama's birth certificate" (News Week). This is obviously opinionated and unconfirmed information, but it is presented the same as any other news source that claims to be equitable and factual. This behavior is not just limited to people like Alex Jones, however, which is made evident even by an article about the Alex Jones conspiracy. The article says that, "it's hard to take Jones seriously," (News Week). This shows that even in articles that claim to report on the views of another, there is opinion weaved throughout them that promote their own beliefs and invalidate the other side. Because of this subjectivity, this form of media should not be considered news, as it is not detached from any personal viewpoints of the author or reporter.

Many argue that not letting brands classify their own material is a violation of free speech. This is simply not the case. Classifying these forms of media is akin to putting a rating on a movie, album or television show. The classification would simply warn the reader that the true intent of the media may be hidden and alerts them to make their own judgements and look for the credible information only. A suggestion of how to oppose this argument is to apply a similar rating system to movies. Instead of the piece not being able to convey its point or not being able to self title its own media, there should be an organization that classifies the articles and gives them a rating based on how opinionated they are. For example, a service like the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) reviews games based on their level of maturity spanning from E for everyone to AO for adults only. Similarly, there would be a company that would review the articles and rate them from O for objective to P for partisan. This would not limit freedom of speech and press, and it would let readers discern which articles are right for them and which are non-partisan.

Most media outlets that call themselves news are not in fact impartial and should not be called news. This phenomenon is often called 'fake news' and should be distinguished from other news sources that are actually objective. This should be done by the use of ratings made by an external company that is regulated and unbiased towards the source they are reviewing. This would get rid of the manipulative factors that companies use to control their audiences whether for malicious intent or not.

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