

The Dartmouth Review

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"Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win great triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

—Theodore Roosevelt

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I fear nothing.

Cover by Andrew Grossman and Steven Menashi

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Editorial

Chilling Free Expression

Over the weekend, a few students objected to a "lu'au" party that was being planned (see story, page 6). Omar Rashid, president of Lambda Upsilon Lambda, the College's Hispanic fraternity, called the party "bigotry" and "racism." Alpha Chi Alpha, the fraternity that organized the lu'au, immediately apologized for "harm our actions caused." Not only that, but Alpha Chi intends to "host a forum about the misuse of culture and ethnicity on campus."

"It is inappropriate for any organization to refer to an event using ethnic or cultural terminology unless the event in question is truly based on that culture," says Marissa Harris '02. "I am bewildered by the inability of the members of various Greek organizations to recognize the disrespect communicated by referring to an event as 'Cuban,' 'Ghetto,' or 'Hawaiian,' encouraging guests to 'dress up' like members of these groups, and then belittling and misrepresenting our cultures by hosting events which mock us."

Of course, guests at the lu'au weren't encouraged to dress like Hawaiians. They were asked to dress "Hawaiian style," like silly-looking American tourists with floral shirts and straw hats. No one was mimicking any ethnic group; they wanted to replicate what goes on at Club Med.

Alisa LaVelle, Editor-in-Chief of *Ka Leo O Hawaii*, the campus newspaper at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, says that, at her campus, "Most of us love luaus and think of it as a time for gathering. Even the cheesy tourist kind are fun for most of us."

The lu'au was harmless fun. Most students, understandably, dismissed the allegations of prejudice as frivolous, the latest example of a small group of students looking for racism where it wasn't. So many people were surprised when Alpha Chi decided to apologize.

"My initial reactions were similar," Eric Kelley, President of Alpha Chi Alpha, told one student. "But unfortunately on this campus when accused it seems you have to roll over otherwise you are implicated even more."

That's the real significance of the lu'au party. Charges of racism or "insensitivity," however ludicrous, are always taken seriously because people are afraid to dispute them.

The result is a hostile campus environment, where students are unwilling to express themselves, lest they be condemned

as bigots. The victims here aren't only the students who are demeaned as racists. Liberal education cannot exist where students are unable to freely express their ideas and opinions.

Last November, amidst the controversy over the "ghetto" party, *The Dartmouth Review* warned readers about a chilling effect on free speech. Students, even if they believed the ghetto party to be harmless, were intimidated into condemning the party and its sponsors.

They weren't convinced it was racist, mind you. They were intimidated by protests, posters, rallies, letters, and campus activists who chastised as racist all dissenters.

The lu'au itself, like the ghetto party, was harmless and ultimately unimportant. The actual threat is a predominant ideology that forces students into silence when a privileged few object to their language or presentation—no matter how absurd the objections may be.

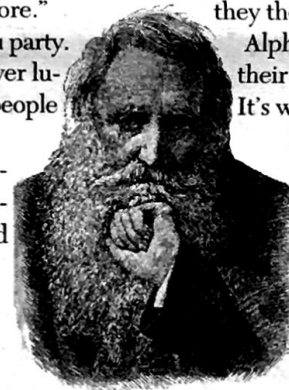
"It doesn't matter if I think an event is offensive or not," says Jorge Miranda, Summer President of the Student Assembly. "It matters if others are offended by it. And in this case, it seems like members of our community were offended and that offense should be treated accordingly."

This is a silly claim. One can just imagine Dartmouth Students for Choice releasing a public apology after offending Catholics. If claims of offense are to be taken seriously, they must correspond to some standard of reasonableness. When students cannot evaluate claims of racism and insensitivity, and instinctively apologize whenever minority groups object, liberal education—not to mention rational discourse—suffers.

Upon hearing the news, the Coed Fraternity Sorority Council, supposedly the voice of Greek society members at Dartmouth, immediately sent a message to Greek presidents condemning AXA and supporting the charges of racism. They didn't believe a word of it, of course. It's what they thought the College wanted to hear.

Alpha Chi Alpha doesn't really believe what they said in their apology: that the lu'au was harmful and offensive. It's what they thought the College wanted to hear.

Holding a lu'au isn't an act of racism. The students who called AXA members racists are wrong. Everyone knows it, but no one seems willing to say it out loud.



Steven Menashi

