

Be the Change You Want to See in the World

Rita J. King

If you are a person with provocative, insightful or intimate thoughts to share on the state of the union: this challenge is for you.

After five years of writing "Ruminations," I've decided to go interactive.

I'm asking for the participation of everyone interested in exercising their right to free speech who would like to make a substantial statement about current events.

Some of you voted for Bush. Some of you did not. Some of you didn't bother voting at all. For better or worse, President George W. Bush is the leader of this country. We are at war. Climate change, which happens within or without the presence of humans, is becoming an overwhelming force of nature.

We have so much to think about.

Health care premiums are skyrocketing along with education costs. How much security is enough security? Can we ever really protect ourselves from insanity? Apathy is becoming a national habit. We are defined by residence in a "blue" or a "red" state.

How do we want to be perceived in the rest of the world?

What is the true meaning of freedom, and how can it be attained?

It seems clear that the debate about the future of free speech should not be handed over to news media owned by corporations that have made a habit of ignoring the most important stories in favor of those that tend to distract or misinform, or worse yet, cause massive amounts of anxiety.

The corporate-owned mainstream media no longer reflects the truth about America and the world.

It is important to put that power back into the hands of the people. This is a free country in which we are all encouraged to the fullest extent of our potential to engage in spirited, respectful discourse. And yet it is difficult to find a medium in which to express those heartfelt thoughts and feelings.

So here's where "Ruminations" gets interactive.

Those of you who want to share your thoughts about the current state of affairs in the United States are cordially invited to submit an essay of no more than 1000 words on this subject; serious entries only.

I recently interviewed the executive director of the First Amendment Center, Gene Policinski, and he told me some things that would be helpful to us as we embark on this project together. I asked him how "hate speech" fits within the framework of free speech, and he said:

"One generation's hate speech is another generation's moral cause. Ideas aren't extinguished even by the most horrific methods. The

ideas the Suffragettes and civil rights activists were trying to communicate were considered hate speech by some."

While I agree with his assessment, I prefer essays to be respectfully written, no matter the subject matter, and motivated by the desire to truly connect with others, even those who might disagree with your perspective.

Policinski also told me that the mainstream media is "falling out of favor."

The people in this nation have been granted the right to voice their true thoughts and keep democracy flowing smoothly.

What are our core values?

I really want to find out.

"People still hunger for information," Policinski told me, "but more diverse news sources are available. This is not necessarily a threat to the First Amendment. We're in a transition zone. Now anybody can become a desktop publisher. The trick is sorting out who's credible. The First Amendment exists to create a marketplace of ideas. A true marketplace is going to be chaotic, a cacophony. There are going to be a lot of voices speaking in the marketplace all at once."

So let's have that cacophony. Let's have that chaotic marketplace.

Limited to one entry per reader, each essay must be 1000 words or less on a subject that will illuminate your intimate thoughts on the state of current affairs. Be as abstract or specific as you'd like. Email each entry to ruminationsonamerica@hotmail.com with a portrait of yourself, taken by a friend, your child, a professional, yourself, as long as something about the photograph conveys a sense of who you are.

This effort is being dedicated to Kathy Eldon, creative force behind Creative Visions, and Amy Eldon, the peace correspondent behind GlobalTribe, a network of active global citizens. Kathy lost her son and Amy lost her brother, Dan Eldon, on July 12, 1993. He was a war correspondent covering the crisis in Somalia when a mob turned on him in their grief and rage and stoned him to death.

To learn more about Dan Eldon, please visit www.daneldon.org.

The fire of life fills each one of us, and while some say it is a spark between two voids, I believe it is a great mystery, and each of us has the ability to experience it to the fullest, to really be alive. I am hoping to receive enough thoughtful responses to publish a collection of *Ruminations on America*. The fulfillment of that goal depends on each of you taking the time to record and share your thoughts.

Submit your work no later than September 13, 2005 to ruminationsonamerica@hotmail.com. Please include a brief bio, with your name, contact information and age, as well as an introduction to your life, in less than one hundred and fifty words. People of all ages and walks

of life are encouraged to participate and spread the word on this grassroots effort. I look forward to being overwhelmed with responses.

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New York.

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