

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

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## CRs were ignorant

### Editor:

From Mar. 31 to Apr. 6, the Coalition to Free the Haitian Refugees has held an encampment on Furnald Lawn in order to raise the consciousness in the community and the country of the atrocities being perpetrated on a group of refugees being held at the Guantanamo Bay naval base in Cuba by the government that acts in our name. During that week the ignorance and zealous reactionism that exists on this campus has shown that it is more than capable of sweeping away all decency and thought. Beginning with a group eating pizza and holding a sign that read "KEEP HIV OUT" at the rally that began the week-long encampment and hunger-strike, this reactionism reached a peak when the College Republicans held a counter-demonstration outside the encampment featuring a barbecue.

It would be impossible to untangle all of the ways in which these

counter-demonstrators displayed their willful ignorance and stupidity, ranging from their choice of meat as the bait to tempt a predominantly vegetarian group to their use of a homeless person to show their magnanimity in giving away food. I have no doubt that those involved have often ignored, if not insulted, the many homeless people in New York, whose numbers somehow managed to increase despite the very best efforts of the Honorable Presidents Reagan and Bush. Incidentally, it was President Bush's efforts that also resulted in the Guantanamo Bay concentration camp.

The most troubling aspect of this event was that the counter-demonstrators chose to specifically target the hunger-strike, as though it is somehow a threat to the welfare of the U.S. for a group of students to abstain from solid food for seven days. Fasting is a means of spiritual and communal growth in most of the cultures of the world, including those of Western Europe. The hunger-strike greatly increased my respect and awareness of others, and the number of perfect strangers who brought hot drinks and fruit juice to the encampment is testimony to the sense of trust and community that our actions fostered. To those who think that a hunger-strike is a threat to the great American values of a barbecue and getting drunk on the weekend, I would like to point out that we acted in solidarity with the Haitian refugees, whose hunger strike is roughly equivalent to the action of a group of Boston businessmen who once threw a cargo of tea into the ocean in an act of opposition to the repressive measures

being used by the British government.

What really bothers Ben Sacks and his fellow Republican ignoramuses about the hunger strike is not that it is un-American but that it is an open acceptance of a different way of life. Most people in the U.S. are raised to believe that three meals per day is the only way of life, and so we tend to mistrust the idea that we could live for any length of time on a liquid diet. By the same token, most of us have grown up without the risk of contracting a deadly virus, and so we mistrust the idea that people who supposedly have such a virus can be admitted into the country safely. It is the responsibility of those of us who are more broad-minded to actively combat those who ignorantly deny the facts and rely solely on personal prejudice.

**Benjamin Cramer, CC '95**