

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

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## Food fight

With a few bags of charcoal and plenty of raw meat, the College Republicans took campus discourse to a new low on Monday afternoon. The College Republicans set up a barbecue directly across from students participating in a hunger strike to protest the U.S. detainment at the Guantanamo Bay military base of more than 250 Haitian refugees who may be infected with the HIV virus. The cookout was in appallingly poor taste, and the day's events served little purpose other than to dramatize the lack of respect and communication on this campus.

While the College Republicans certainly have the right to debate the Coalition to Free the Haitian Refugees, the method they chose was inappropriate at best. Their attack was aimed not so much at the issues surrounding the protest, but at the students themselves. The barbecue seemed directed at taunting the fasting students with food, rather than delineating arguments about the U.S. policy. If the College Republicans did have legitimate reasons for objecting to the political views of the protesters, they should have set them forth in a reasoned forum. Their barbecue was not, as they claim, a form of protest; it was little more than a childish, mean-spirited prank.

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of the cookout is the fact that it took place in violation of campus rules. The College Republicans, who argued for a stringent application of the rules in the B-C STAC hearings, seemed to take a cavalier attitude toward those same rules in holding their barbecue. While their violation was certainly not as serious as that of the B-C STAC members, the fact remains that they abandoned the principles they had championed only a few weeks before.

The insensitivity of the College Republicans' actions does not, however, excuse the behavior of the protesters, who rushed the College Republicans' table and spat on their

food. Confronted with the barbecue, the protesters could have stood their ground and held their temper; instead, they only echoed the childishness of their opponents.

The day's events highlighted the increasing insensitivity and hostility on this campus. As the College Republicans taunted the protesters and the protesters confronted the College Republicans, it became increasingly apparent that the respect and communication essential to order on campus are in a steep decline. If anything is to be accomplished on this campus by any student group, that mutual respect must return, and students must learn to interact in a constructive manner and create a dialogue rather than a shouting match.

The College Republicans' barbecue was not just another cookout. It was a flagrant attempt to provoke a campus group, for little more than the vicious thrill of doing so. The barbecue accomplished nothing, except to further divide a campus that was not very cohesive to begin with.