“Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward. They may be beaten, but they may start a winning game.”
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Editors’ Corner

Mission Statement

The Chessboard is a student-run publication that seeks to stoke campus-wide discussions about a host of social, cultural, and political issues. This goal is best embodied in the quote from German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe that has inspired our name: “Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward; they may be beaten, but they may start a winning game.” We ask students to use this publication to move their unique ideas forward so they may be contemplated, discussed, and challenged in daily conversations. This “winning game” of considering ideas is a pillar of the liberal arts and critical thinking, and it is a value that we at The Chessboard hope to further at Luther College.

Editors’ Note

As our Mission Statement notes, our goal is to allow students to voice their opinions through The Chessboard so that they may be discussed and challenged. This means that The Chessboard contains a wide variety of opinions that are informed by a wide variety of perspectives. Therefore, the views expressed by Chess Piece authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or the Center for Ethics and Public Engagement.

Call for Contributors and Responses

The Chessboard is always looking for new writers and new artists. If you are interested in writing a Chess Piece or drawing a sketch, please contact us at: chessboard@luther.edu. We also welcome written responses to previous Chess Pieces. Feel free to e-mail us if this interests you.
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Editors
Karl Badger ‘19
Editor-in-Chief
Kelao Charmaine Neumbo ‘22
Managing Editor

Artists
Alex Aakre ‘19
Evan Anderson ‘21
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Casey Weber ‘19

Writers
Alex Aakre ‘19
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Charlie Treat ‘21

Cover Art
Casey Weber ‘19

Cover Design
Libby Morton ‘19
In January, Malcolm Gladwell wrote an article in the New Yorker cautioning against widespread pot promotion before we know more about the drug’s impacts. His article and the book on which it is based—Tell Your Children: The Truth About Marijuana, Mental Illness, and Violence, by former New York Times reporter Alex Berenson—drew a fair amount of fire. Vox, Rolling Stone, The Nation, and others quickly published pieces in response, suggesting that Berenson is “trolling us with his anti-weed book” and that the new book is “essentially Reefer Madness 2.0.” According to Berenson, even an NPR show canceled his scheduled appearance, telling him they did not believe in the conclusions of the book.

I wasn’t following any of this closely at the time, but it came into my orbit this past week when a friend sent around a link to an episode from Joe Rogan's podcast called “Pot Debate,” which featured a conversation with Rogan, Berenson, and Dr. Michael Hart, founder of a medical cannabis clinic in Ontario. What struck me as I listened was how calm all three were in their discussion. Not only that, but they were actually listening to each other. And that’s not to say they were couching their opinions in niceties. Quite the opposite: there were plenty of back-and-forths where one person began with something like “I completely disagree with that” and then went on to calmly and clearly explain his viewpoint. Only in listening did I realize that it had been a while since I had heard a discussion—a true dialogue—like that.

It's the kind of dialogue that my friends Mike Kientzle, George Shardlow and I had in mind when we started up the Gadfly in the spring of 2009—a Luther publication that aimed to provide a forum for discussion on all things political, social, and cultural, both within the Luther bubble and far beyond.

But “started up” isn’t quite right, because we were really just retracing steps that another group of students forged four years earlier in the creation of the Luther Review. Tim Lundquist, Jake Torgerson, and Mike Flaherty were the true “starters” of the Gadfly, pulling together the very first edition of the Review in February 2005, with a mission to “spark constructive dialogue” about “ideas important to the Luther College community.”

And if you flip to the masthead at the front of this paper, you'll find a mission statement written in very much the same spirit (though now complete with a smart reference to a German philosopher I had never before read). While this is the second issue of the first volume of the Chessboard, you might also call it the third draft of a project that students at Luther have been working on since 2005.

Discovering new ideas and improving upon them is an important element of any college experience. If that means a publication like the Chessboard (or the Luther Review, or the Gadfly) shows up in slightly different forms over the course of a 15-year period, then so be it. While the publication has outlived any one group of students’ tenure, there is one person who has remained constant: Professor John Moeller.

If you were to stack up all the issues of the three publications since 2005, John would be the binding that holds them all together. He was there at the beginning, when Tim Lundquist and his friends first dreamt up the idea of a publication where students could discuss burly, bubble-bursting ideas in an open forum. “John was always very encouraging, and he played a key role in helping support and sustain the publication beyond just that semester,” Tim told me over the phone the other week. After all, Tim was a senior when the Review published its first issue; John nudged it along even after Tim left.

By the time my junior year rolled around, and when John was the inaugural director of the Center for Ethics and Public Engagement, he was more than willing to allocate some Center funds to stir the Review from its slumber, this time under a new name. By setting aside office and meeting space for the Gadfly, not to mention a brand new Mac, John ensured that we could execute our vision of a revamped Luther Review. Thanks.
to John, Mike and I were free to spend many late nights in the back corner office on the second floor of Campus House fretting over copy edits, layouts, artwork, and obscure literary references we might bury throughout that month’s issue—time that would otherwise have been spent hawking ads in downtown Decorah.

Since I graduated in 2010, I’m not exactly sure of John’s part in the rebirth of the Gadfly, this time as the Chessboard—a more intriguing name with significantly less legal baggage (that’s a story for another time). But I imagine it’s quite similar to the role he played in the previous iterations of the publication: the constant listener, supporter, and encourager.

So I wasn’t surprised when Victoria Christman—the current director of the Center for Ethics and Public Engagement, which continues to fund this publication—emailed me last month to ask if I would write a piece about John’s involvement in the Chessboard for the March issue. John has sat quietly in the background of the publication for over a decade; he’s the literal spine of this magazine that has, at times, sparked some of the more vigorous debates on campus.

It only seemed natural for me to start my research for the article by talking with John himself, and since I love any excuse to hop on the phone with him, I gave him a call to hear his side of the story. Unsurprisingly, he brushed off any credit, saying only that the Review, the Gadfly, and now the Chessboard all allow for a type of writing (and, I would add, a type of thinking) that you aren’t necessarily going to do in a lot of classes. He then went on to tell me that I needed to talk with Tim Lundquist, because a story about the history of this publication was incomplete without Tim’s perspective.

Which is how I ended up in a brewery near my house in Boulder, Colorado, sipping on a stout and talking with Tim on the phone while he recounted the very beginning for me: how he and a fellow Chips columnist came up with the idea for the Review after stumbling across a series of archived letters to the editor that followed long-running debates about campus- and city-wide topics. How they wanted to bring a dialogue in that spirit back to the campus community. How they woke up their other housemate the next day with a declaration that it was time to start a publication (he quickly agreed). How they sold ads to fund the endeavor, and then ended up needing to reprint the first issue because the cover featured a misspelling of “advocacy” in uncomfortably large type (the second “c” was missing). “We call that one the collector’s edition,” Tim said with a laugh.

Ultimately, the Luther Review began as a student endeavor. And over the past 15 years, whether it’s shown up on campus under the name of the Review, the Gadfly, or the Chessboard, it’s continued to be a place where students initiate and engage in conversation. As Tim explained: “I just think it speaks well of the college that there continues to be group after group of students who find their way to this idea, and it implants strongly enough that it becomes a passion for students—that they want to talk about things and discuss them in their community, and that they want to do it in the most open way possible, which is through writing and inviting critique, criticism, and engagement. This is what dialogue is supposed to look like. I hope that as long as Luther College is around, there will be students who engage in that.”

Here’s to those who made the first 15 years of this publication and ongoing dialogue possible. And here’s to the many more conversations, discussions, and debates that the next 15 years will bring.

Brandon Reed graduated from Luther in 2010. He lives in Boulder, Colorado.
In today’s political climate, gun control in the U.S. has become a contentious issue, dividing the left and right. Each side has varying ideas on the main causes of gun violence. Many on the political left associate violence with a lack of gun access regulations. Many on the political right associate violence with the country’s mental illness epidemic. Not surprisingly, the media often sensationalizes both sides of this debate by covering high-profile shootings—shootings involving assault weapons and high body counts. Yet this tends to perpetuate the unproductive debate between the political extremes.\(^1\) Consequently, progress is not being made on reducing gun violence, particularly in schools, and a solution is unattainable until we transcend political boundaries. To do so, we must look at the issue more holistically, address all factors contributing to school shootings, and challenge our conventional understandings of gun violence.

For example, severe mental illness is often considered the main cause of gun violence. Yet this argument leads to a misidentification of who shooters are. According to data from the National Center for Health Statistics, only 5% of gun-related killings were perpetrated by those with diagnosed, severe mental illness from 2001-2010. Interestingly, a report from the *American Journal of Public Health* indicates that the mentally ill (in this case, those diagnosed with schizophrenia) are 65-130% more likely to be a *victim* of gun violence than the general public. The misinformation spread about shooters in the media is problematic because it distracts from looking at the issue objectively and analyzing where the real problems lie. Data also suggests that being intoxicated and/or male are better predictors of whether one will commit gun violence than being mentally ill. In fact, use of drugs and alcohol has been correlated with a 7-fold increase in violent crime, even for those without a history of mental illness. Overall, the idea that reducing gun availability for mentally ill people will reduce gun violence is flawed and not supported by evidence.\(^2\)

Having an informed discussion about gun violence also requires a close look at the data surrounding different gun control policies. For example, a study in the *Justice Policy Journal* in 2011 analyzed the effectiveness of Australia’s assault weapons ban and gun buy-back program, which were implemented in 1996. It did so by comparing Australia and New Zealand, two countries that are socioeconomically similar but had different approaches to gun legislation. The Australian policies aimed to reduce gun violence, and this

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Indeed occurred. However, a similar decrease was also seen in New Zealand, which had significantly less regulation in place, particularly on assault weapons.

The authors suggested that higher rates of male unemployment in the 1980s and early 1990s in both countries accounted for the spike in mass shootings (which resulted in legislation in Australia). Therefore, it is questionable whether the reduction in gun violence in Australia was due to the weapons ban or rather an increase in employment rates and economic stability in the late 1990s (seen in both Australia and New Zealand). In addition to this study, many other contemporary studies have been inconclusive about the effectiveness of gun control legislation. Despite this lack of consensus in gun policy literature, much of the gun violence conversation is focused solely on legislation, particularly in light of recent school shootings in the US.

In gun violence discussions, it can be challenging to find a balance between blaming the shooter and blaming society for these tragedies. While the shooter is ultimately to blame, part of the solution to gun violence lies in shifting the culture around masculinity and providing children with the tools to overcome perceived threats to their identities. As we have seen, gun control legislation in the current cultural climate has had mixed effectiveness due to the complexity of the issue. School gun violence is a multifaceted problem that requires a multifaceted solution. This means looking beyond gun availability to wider societal concerns such as emotional resilience of youth and how masculinity is perceived throughout our culture.

“It is not that the political left and political right are completely wrong in their understanding of the gun control debate. However, data suggests that their primary foci are not the only, or even most important, solutions.”

Nevertheless, from the perspective of school shooters, the issue goes far beyond their access to guns or their mental health diagnoses. In an analysis of 10 US school shootings from 1996-2001, the manifestos of the shooters each cited anti-gay or homophobic bullying as a motivation. Each of the shooters were of middle school or high school age, and their described body types fell outside the societal view of masculinity. In their manifestos they cite being called things like short, fat, pudgy, small, skinny, scrawny, etc. Their exact motivations also cited homophobic slurs from peers and included their desire for revenge on those who bullied or rejected them. Luke Woodham, who shot 10 people (including his ex-girlfriend) in 1997 in Pearl, Mississippi, said “I am not insane, I am angry. I killed because people like me are mistreated every day.” Attempting to compensate for a perceived lack of masculinity can lead to a vicious cycle of bullying and violent response. This plays a significant role in the persistence of school shootings, but is often excluded from conversations about school gun violence solutions.

It is not that the political left and political right are completely wrong in their understanding of the gun control debate. However, data suggests that their primary foci are not the only, or even most important, solutions. While the full scope of what drives school shootings goes far beyond what we have suggested in this essay, we hope that in understanding another aspect of the issue, you are compelled to dig deeper. Obviously, it is important to recognize that almost everyone gets bullied at some point in their lives. However, not everyone becomes a school shooter. Bullying cannot be cited as the sole or even main cause of school shootings, but it is evidently a factor that must be solved hand-in-hand with other facets of the gun violence issue. The time is now to challenge preconceived ideas of the gun violence issue and identify it as an extremely complicated issue that requires a creative, holistic solution.

In November of last year, John Chau was killed on the North Sentinel Island while attempting to conduct mission work. North Sentinel Island is inhabited by an “uncontacted” Sentinelese tribe (I use quotation marks as contact has occurred off and on for a century) and is currently closed to visitors—guarded day and night by armed patrol boats. Chau had made two previous visits to the island, having hired fisherman to take him within a canoeable range of the island. These visits both ended with him fleeing. On this visit, Chau instructed the fisherman not to wait for him, indicating that he intended to stay on the island long-term. Although no account is certain, authorities believe John Chau was shot and killed with arrows during his last visit, and was eventually buried on the beach.

After the news broke, people made jokes, snide remarks, and even memes on Facebook. Clearly people, including many Christians, had largely negative views about John Chau’s attempts to convert the Sentinelese. I would not go as far as to say that anyone was glad that he had died, but I would say that there was a widespread feeling that “he got what he deserved.” I even remember thinking, “Why didn’t he just leave those people alone? They clearly didn’t want to hear it!” But as soon as I thought it, I stopped to question it.

Why did I initially cringe at the thought of mission work on that island? Why was I not troubled by the death of a fellow Christian? And why did so many other Christians have the same exact reaction? It was not because John Chau had violated Christian teachings. Actually, he was doing exactly what Christ called us to do in the Great Commission. For those unfamiliar, the Great Commission comes in the Gospels, as Jesus is ascending to heaven. He says to the disciples,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20, Revised Standard Version).

A careful reader will note that Christ did not make the distinction between nations who do and do not “want to hear it.” He commanded that we go to all. After all, my own ancestors, “did not want to hear it.” Actually, pretty much every Christian’s ancestors “did not want to hear it.” Those who first brought the Gospel to foreign lands were met with similar fates to John Chau. Saints Paul and Peter were crucified, St. Denis was beheaded, Saints Olaf and Boniface were stabbed, St. Jude was sawn in half for gosh sakes.

All did exactly what John Chau did: spread the Word of God. Yet at a distance, we celebrate
them. I cannot cross the Mississippi River without thinking of Father Marquette, spend a J-term in Hawaii without hearing about the New England missionaries, or even imagine going through the month of March without celebrating St. Patrick. We do not dwell on the fact that the people they preached to “did not want to hear it,” we just celebrate that they had the faith to suffer for what they believed in, and in the process, changed the globe.

So what changed? How did we go from naming towns and dying rivers green in missionaries’ honor to lamenting that they should have heeded the law and stayed away from uncontacted people? Scripture has remained the same—clear as ever on our Great Commission. However, the culture of hearing God’s Word and refuse to pass that message along.

Mission work does not mean forced conversion. In the past, missionaries and colonial governments often arrived together. This is an inescapable fact in the story of mission work. But coincidental arrivals do not mean a shared vision for the future. Missions spread literacy, shared new farming techniques, cared for the sick, and offered stability to those whose worlds were disrupted by foreign powers. Mission work means giving people a choice. People should be able to choose which religion they want to follow. But for that choice to take place, for that freedom to be instilled in them, we can no longer be ashamed of our Commission. Showing others a new way

“Mission work means giving people a choice. People should be able to choose which religion they want to follow. But for that choice to take place, for that freedom to be instilled in them, we can no longer be ashamed of our Commission.”

in which it is read has changed dramatically. We live in a society that discourages people from talking about religion and most definitely from attempting to convert one another. It is a trend of secularization that is so strong that I now have to question where our “Christian” values come from—society or the Bible?

It is easy to see how it happened. The United States is a predominantly Christian country and so the need for domestic mission work dissolved, and so did our sense of responsibility to the unconverted. We worry a lot less about Christ’s Commission knowing we will see our neighbors at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church this Sunday. It became easy to shrug off the responsibility that we have as Christians—to spread the Good News. In its place came the secular notion of “minding one’s own business” and the notion of religious silence. But the story of the cross is one that we cannot keep silent. We cannot reap the benefits of thinking is an ideal that is driven into us in Paideia; but it is one that we increasingly limit in regards to our religious beliefs.

You may disagree and be of the persuasion that we as a society should no longer proselytize uncontacted people. But Christian values rarely align with societal ones and the commandment laid out in the Gospel compels us to ignore society’s expectations. That’s what John Chau did. He ignored what society instructed and instead listened to Christ. He attempted to introduce the love of Christ to people that have not heard of it. I wonder if those who greet visitors with death are not those most in need of Christ’s teachings. Those are the people Christians have always sought out and the people we should continue to seek.
Back in October, I lost someone to whom I was very close. I saw this special person as a mentor, a role model, and another mother figure. She worked at my high school and had to retire early because she was diagnosed with throat cancer. When she was on her journey fighting the cancer, we became very close. I visited her in the hospital, watched the Hobbit movies with her, and did other fun things together. On October 16th, she told me she was going to have surgery on her left ventricular assist device, which is a pump that doctors use for patients who have reached end-stage heart failure. Before she went into her surgery, I told her I loved her, and she told me she loved me. It was a very difficult death to deal with. On the same day as the news broke of her death, her widowed husband asked me to speak at her funeral. He said that he wanted people to remember the kind of person she was, and because of our special relationship, he thought I was the best person to give a eulogy. I happily agreed to speak at her funeral because I wanted every person to know what an amazing human being she was.

On the day before her funeral, I practiced the speech I had written for her over and over again. I wanted to make sure it was perfect. As I was in the middle of editing my speech, I got a call from her husband. He frantically told me that the Pastor was not going to let me speak. I asked him why. He said, “The Pastor does not want you to speak at his church because you are a Muslim.” I did not know how to respond to that. After a couple of minutes of silence, I asked, “If he doesn’t want me to speak at the pulpit in the church, can I at least speak at the lunch in the church’s cafeteria?” He said he would talk to the Pastor. After a couple of minutes, he called me back and said, “The Pastor said he doesn’t want you to speak anywhere in his church.” He went on to say, “I disagree with his stance. I am so sorry. Let me know if there is anything you’d like me to do.”

The widowed husband had spent almost an entire week begging the Pastor to let me speak, and in my heart, I knew that no matter what anyone might say, this Pastor would still refuse. The husband was grieving and I did not want him to spend all of his time worrying about me. I thanked him for speaking up for me and hung up the phone.

I spent the rest of the day lying in bed with pain in my heart. I simply could not believe I was prevented from speaking at a funeral based on my religious tradition. This incident was also racist. Even though Islam is not a racial group, those who stereotype Islam tend to associate Muslims with one race. This racialization of Islam makes it easier for Islamophobes to treat Muslims as a dangerous “other”, which leads to the type of actions the Pastor took. In my personal experience, whenever I encounter a racist and Islamophobic incident, the pain that comes with it is too great. My heart hurts. My head hurts. My soul hurts. To be denied this opportunity was a punch to my gut. The Pastor was robbing me of my chance to say goodbye to one of the most precious people in my life.

As I lay in bed, I had so many questions running through my head.
Why is the Pastor behaving like this? He has been Pastor of this church since 1990 and should know better.

Why are people so hateful?

Why do people choose to be blissfully ignorant?

Why does racism still exist?

If the Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) was in my position, what would he do?

If Dr. Martin Luther King was in my position, what would he do?

Why is this happening to me?

Based on this incident, it was clear to me that the Pastor was unfamiliar with or ignorant about interfaith work. I wished the Pastor would do his research to realize how wrong he was. Many Muslim and Christian leaders engaged with interfaith work during their time on Earth. The Prophet Muhammed (PBUH), in a famous hadith (saying of the Prophet PBUH), said “Reconnect with the one who cut you off.” In this hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) is not talking about Muslims connecting with each other. He is talking about human beings, as a whole, making connections with each other. It is our duty as Muslims to make connections with other faiths.

Dr. Martin Luther King, the famous Civil Rights leader, was a Christian Pastor. During his time in the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King often worked and walked alongside Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, and many other faith adherents. When Dr. King was a seminary student, he was taught the philosophy of Hindu leader, Mahatma Gandhi. Dr. King was not angry or bitter studying someone from a different religious tradition. Instead, he sought to find resonances between Gandhi’s Hinduism and his own interpretation of Christianity. It was Gandhi’s movement in India that provided King with a twentieth-century version of what Jesus would do. Dr. King had such a deep respect for Gandhi that he called Gandhi “The first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force.”

Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) and Dr. Martin Luther King are two significant figures in the world. They led their people with their hearts and used their time on Earth to spread compassion, empathy, and love. After researching this, I began to ask myself the same question again: Why does this Pastor hold such a negative view of Muslims and Islam? Then I discovered the answer. The enemy was not man himself (being the Pastor), but “discrimination, dictatorship, greed, hatred and violence, which lie within the heart of man”.2

I did not know at the time of my ordeal, but I know now. I was not at fault for the Pastor's actions. It is and never was my fault that the Pastor (who has been a Pastor for nearly 29 years) is ignorant. The issue lies in the Pastor’s heart. He can overcome his bias through education and interfaith work. It is the job of us all to educate and encourage citizens to be the best version of themselves that they can possibly be. Last month was Black History Month. During this month, we are honoring and respecting the elders who came before us and used their lives to educate and encourage human beings to be better. Now is the time to use our power and intellect to have these difficult conversations concerning race and religion to overcome the bias in our country and in the world. I would never wish the pain I felt on October 23 on my worst enemy. Instead, I use that pain to motivate myself to continue doing interfaith work and to be what Dr. Tiffany Patterson (Luther College’s Spring 2019 Convocation speaker) called for: an intellectual activist.

I long for the day my little sisters can proudly wear their hijabs without getting dirty looks. I long for the day my brother can say he is a Muslim and not apologize for the actions of a few. I long for the day when I can go into a gas station and not hear a customer calling me the n-word. I understand that for that day to come, I must engage in interfaith work and do my duty as a student and as a human being to be an intellectual activist. After all, change is hard. However, without hard work, there can be no change. I am ready for change and I promise myself, my parents, and my siblings that I can and will do everything in my power to make the world a better place for at least one Black, Muslim human being.

1 King, Martin Luther, Jr. “My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence.” The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute. September 01, 1958.
During the fall my first year at Luther, my Paideia professor Dr. Amy Weldon held up a copy of *The New York Times*. The front cover had a young Syrian boy washed up on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea near Turkey. It was like nothing I had seen before. I recognized in that moment how personal the news can be and how we as Americans have become detached from the human stories we read. Now as a senior at Luther, I have finally become attuned to how little the public knows about America’s presence in the world—specifically regarding civilian casualties caused by the United States. In the last decade US citizens haven’t held themselves accountable for what happens in the world. They have lost touch with the people outside of the US—their intimate stories and their lived experiences. Since 2015, the number of civilian deaths and injuries due to US weapons and airstrikes has drastically increased, yet the general public has done nothing about it.

US airstrikes affect not only those who are killed, but also those who become seriously wounded. When reading about a wound, an average American may think of a minor scratch, burn, or maybe a bruise. For me, I would think of the burns I would get while working in the CAF at the pizza line. Occasionally the burn would be bad enough to put cream on my “wound,” yet I have been able to live the rest of my four years at college without any further limitations or burdens. Meanwhile, a wound for a civilian victimized by an air strike in the Middle East could be a spinal cord injury, loss of a limb, maiming, and so forth. Outside of the US, the contrasting definitions of a wound are critical in understanding civilian injuries and the legacy an injury may have.

That being said, context plays a role when any American is reading the news. It is critical to examine and understand how the lives and experiences of others differ from our own. We as Americans must stop constantly thinking in terms of our own life experiences while reading the news and hearing about what occurs outside of the US. We instead must seek answers regarding our involvement in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, and so forth. Every day the number of civilian casualties increases, and we do next to nothing.

Second, there is little widespread knowledge of the impact of US-led airstrikes in the Middle East. Currently, the US government has only confirmed 1,190 civilian deaths from US coalition-led airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, yet Airwars (a non-profit organization based in London that reviews airstrike credibility and civilian casualties in Iraq, Syria, and Libya) has estimated between 7,508-12,085 civilian deaths.¹ The US government confirms far fewer civilian deaths than other sources, and this must be challenged. These conflicting statistics of civilian casualties is just the beginning of examining the problematic reality of US-led airstrikes.

It is clear that our government, our

representatives, and our political leaders are not stepping up and seeking accurate information. Our elected officials should be challenging the government, and we as constituents can raise awareness by contacting our officials. This means that we as citizens must push for accurate information. We must seek credible sources when examining our own country’s policies and the impact they have in the world, including in the Middle East. We must also get involved in campaigns, like the EWIPA campaign (Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas) to raise awareness and support efforts to stop bombing civilians in populated areas.

Additionally, the US has only confirmed 249 injuries in Iraq and Syria, while Airwars has found a number between 5,563-8,602. Within that number, 3,257 injured people have been named. After examining the contrasting numbers of casualties, we should be shocked and frustrated at our government for its lack of care about our impact in countries such as Syria and Iraq. Credibility is essential for Americans’ awareness of our government’s global actions, and we mustn’t put up with misinformation.

Currently, the U.S. government has only confirmed 1,190 civilian deaths from U.S. coalition-led air strikes in Iraq and Syria—yet Airwars (a non-profit organization based in London that reviews airstrike credibility and civilian casualties in Iraq, Syria, and Libya) has estimated between 7,508-12,085 civilian deaths.”

Going forward, we must demand a more thorough review of civilian casualties by US authorities. The last keyword is confusion. Despite what the current administration is telling the general public, US-led airstrikes are not perfectly precise. The nature of weapons is to destroy. Regardless of accuracy, US weapons have harmed and are harming thousands, and the fact that the leader of our country is blatantly misleading our public only makes matters worse.

The only way to move past misinformation or lack of information is to inform ourselves and others, especially our politicians. We must challenge Congress to seek out information on US-led airstrikes. We must know the consequences of our actions. The American public should stop allowing casualties to rise without keeping air strikes in check.

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2 Airwars, “US-Led Coalition in Iraq & Syria”.
Africa’s Last Colony

Rabab Mohamed Nafe (2022)
Art by Alex Aakre (2019)

In the barren desert, far away from cities, in a sea of fabric tents and mud-brick houses, thousands of people have been living as refugees. They have lived in a place where temperatures in the summer can exceed 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit), without electricity or clean water. Particles of the eastern sand scorch their skin, making it impossible to go out in the daytime. These people are the citizens of Western Sahara, and they have been living this way for decades. For more than 40 years, they have endured war and occupation, yet few have ever heard of them or their suffering.

The cause of this tragedy dates back to 1975, when Spain decided to give up its colony, Western Sahara. Its authoritarian government was becoming too weak to manage the colony. Ruling the territory had become especially difficult for Spain after the POLISARIO Front (Popular Front of Liberation of Saguía el Hamra and Río de Oro) was founded in Western Sahara. This liberal students’ movement aimed for the independence of the Sahrawi (the people of Western Sahara), and frequently clashed with the Spanish occupiers. Shortly after Spain gave up its colony, Mauritania and Morocco agreed to occupy and divide Western Sahara. In 1979, Mauritania recognized the sovereignty of the Sahrawis and abandoned the territory. A significant amount of this land would then be annexed by Morocco.

As this was unfolding, war broke out between POLISARIO and Morocco, and the Moroccan military attempted to exterminate the indigenous Sahrawis. This forced thousands of Sahrawis to leave their land and flee to refugee camps in neighboring Algeria. In 1982, the Moroccan government built a long wall of sand and land mines that divided and separated the occupied territory from territory controlled by POLISARIO. The wall is known in the Sahrawi community as “the Wall of Shame,” because the wall not only divides land but separates families from each other. Today, two-thirds of Western Sahara is under Moroccan control, and one third under POLISARIO control. More than 500,000 Sahrawis are currently living under Moroccan control, while around 165,000 are living in the refugee camps in southwest Algeria. An entire generation has been born and raised in refugee camps.

These Sahrawis live each day in the hope of going back to their homeland. “We were born here; we live here. But we do not want to die here in the desert, because this is not Western Sahara,” says Ilbu, a young Saharawi refugee. Both rich and poor live in the same conditions: under a tent or in handmade brick houses. Yet, because of these circumstances, the community is very connected and supportive. They agree that, as one refugee camp teacher notes, “No one deserves to be born as a refugee, live as [a refugee] and die as a refugee.”

Through all of this suffering, the UN has failed to adequately help the people of Western Sahara. In 1991, after 20 years of war between the POLISARIO and Morocco, the UN brokered a peace deal between the two parties. The agreement claimed that the Sahrawis would be able to hold an independence referendum. Yet this referendum hasn’t occurred, as numerous UN-sponsored talks have failed to set up any such vote. This failure is despite the fact that the UN claims to uphold dignity and human rights. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” If all human beings deserve equality in dignity and spirit, why did the UN and the world virtually stay silent and continue to watch the Sahrawi people suffer?

The people of Western Sahara and POLISARIO are simply asking for a referendum to allow the Sahrawis to choose between becoming a part of Morocco or becoming independent. As a Saharawi myself, it is painful to be born as a refugee while knowing that your homeland is elsewhere. No one in the world deserves to be labelled as a refugee. The international community and UN must do more, and we must all support the Sahrawis in solving this decades-long conflict.

5 Habib, Salima. Interview by Author, September 16, 2017.
6 “Western Sahara Profile.”
The Real Role of Allies

Ben Seavey (2021)

During the summer of 2016, a young couple with kids moved into my neighborhood. I met the new neighbors through my sister, who is an avid babysitter. They were a nice family, but what really stood out was how their children interacted. Their two kids were three years apart and fell into the classic hierarchy of sibling power. The oldest was loud, in charge, and a ready-to-take-action sixth grader. She was a compassionate kid who cared about her brother, but sometimes she got carried away. She constantly spoke on behalf of her brother, thinking that she was speaking for what he wanted. Yet this wasn’t always the case.

Late in the summer, my sister was babysitting the new neighbors’ daughter. The little girl asked for ice cream. My sister served the kids ice cream, asking each child individually what flavor they wanted. The girl said they both wanted mint chocolate chip. For the first and only time that entire summer, the little boy spoke for himself and said he wanted chocolate. Despite all of the girl’s good intentions by trying to speak for her brother, it was not her choice to make. She was sympathizing with him, caring about him, and trying to do what she thought she was right. Yet in the end, she hadn’t had the same experiences as him and needed to let him use his own voice to make his needs known.

Good intentions by caring people can have negative consequences. Unfortunately, these negative consequences happen frequently and on a large scale at Luther and across the country. Well-meaning allies of the LGBTQ+ people, people of color, the poor, disabled, women, and otherwise marginalized groups often try to do too much. In an attempt to further the causes of these communities, allies can drown out the voices of the people in the same way that the girl did to her brother. An ally’s goal is to help these voices be heard, not to speak for them. The experiences of someone who has and continues to face discrimination are unique and varied. Allies can sympathize with these experiences, but can never truly understand them. No matter how big a heart an ally has or how well-intentioned they are, they can never speak from the position of those who have lived through discrimination and intolerance. It is the voices of these people that deserve to have the space and opportunity to speak out. It is time for allies to realize that they cannot speak for those who are discriminated against.

So, what should allies do? The obvious answer is to start with fundamental respect. Respect other people as human beings, respect their experiences, and respect their identities. Understand that some experiences are impossible to truly understand unless you have experienced them firsthand. The individuals who have experienced these pressures know what is wrong and understand what needs to change. Secondly, allies need to confront any intolerance that they encounter. This includes participating in public events like marches, signing petitions, and volunteering. But confronting intolerance can also take place in private by talking to family members, colleagues, or friends about discriminatory acts. This can be awkward, but this is where allies are the most effective. Using personal connections to tell someone firmly and respectfully that what they did is wrong may not seem significant, but it is inherently good. These conversations cause reflection in these folks—reflection that will lead to change. This action is critical for allies, since they cannot speak for disadvantaged populations. What they can do is stand up to hate and intolerance, be respectful, and provide safe places. That is the real role of an ally.

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The Rhetoric of Job Security

Faye Lee (2020) and Iju Regmi (2020)

Authors’ Disclaimer: This article is merely meant to provoke critical thinking of the system that we live in today. We have no intentions of trying to undermine the importance of education or excellence in an academic field to pursue certain careers. In fact, the critical thinking skills that the Luther education provides drive us to question the system we live in today. We also have no intentions of belittling the career choices of our readers. Rather, this article seeks merely to explore and interrogate the contemporary system of income generation.

We invite you to take a moment to ask these questions.

Why do we pursue an education?
Why do we try our best to excel in our academics and classes?
Why do we strive for an outstanding resume?

When most of us were younger, our parents challenged us to stand out among our peers. Growing up in households with this mindset pushed us to be better, faster, and stronger than others. Everything was always a competition—us versus them for a better chance of survival.

We were pushed in this way so that we could attain a comfortable, secure lifestyle. Security holds a very high value in our lives. We prioritize insurance, pensions, consistent income, and so forth. We tend to pick paths that ensure stability in our lives. We do this because we are raised to think that choices which do not ensure stability will not guarantee us a safe and comfortable life. But what is stability? Is the pursuit of “stability” shaped by the environment we live in? Will it guarantee us a “good life”?

In today’s economy, job security is one of the most common marketing methods used for profit maximization, promising a means to a “good life” if you work for a given company. This assurance is a powerful guarantee for commitment from the employees. Moreover, when benefits and promotions come along with this commitment, we inevitably fall into a job trap. By “job trap”, we mean a cycle in which stability and security are exchanged for our loyalty and time. In the beginning, it feels like the right path, as we are introduced to a new world of professionals. We make connections and think about the endless possibilities of how high we can climb up the ladder. But the higher we climb that ladder, the harder it is to break this cycle. This happens even though we may have the means to pursue what we want, such as starting our own business or foundation.

As students, it’s easy for us to overlook this cycle because we don’t have the same experiences (yet) as those in the working world. However, according to Robert T. Kiyosaki’s book, Business of 21st Century, 72 percent of adult Americans would rather work for themselves than for someone else, and 67 percent think about quitting their jobs “regularly” or “constantly”.1 What is holding them back from doing so, and why did they get into this situation in the first place?

To start, our perspectives are heavily shaped by the circumstances in which we grew up. This causes many of us to think of modern employment as normal. Far from being historically “normal”, the concept of being an employee is a recent phenomenon. In fact, it was during the Industrial Revolution that modern employment—based on a contract between employers and employees—became so prevalent. Before that, we were more entrepreneurial. Artisans and tradesmen were more common.2 We once used a barter system, in which we created products and exchanged them with one another to fulfill our basic needs.

Despite these differences in the nature of work, we continue to pursue modern employment without questioning the origins of that idea. We think we

need to lead a life that prioritizes “stability” and “security,” but those concepts are closely related to this new notion of contractual employment.

Nevertheless, we have been made to believe that we need a constant nine-to-five job to securely start on our ventures. Next thing we know, we have been working a nine-to-five job for decades, regardless of our initial aspirations. Many of us remain stuck in a job that was only meant to provide temporary security. The more we sink into this security couch, the more hesitant we are to get up. From the perspective of the employers, feeding the rhetoric of job security is needed to fuel the company’s profits. How can a company function without an army of employees ready to dedicate themselves to its operation?

“In today’s economy, job security is one of the most common marketing methods used for profit maximization, promising a means to a ‘good life’ if you work for a given company. This assurance is a powerful guarantee for commitment from the employees. Moreover, when benefits and promotions come along with this commitment, we inevitably fall into a job trap.”

The pervasiveness of these job traps has even caused some to argue that working for a salary is comparable to a modern form of slavery. In Charles Bukowski’s letter, The Slavery of 9 to 5, he brings up an old saying: “Slavery was never abolished, it was extended to include all the colors.” His letter resonates with the nature of modern employment as he also says, “They never pay the slaves enough so they can get free, just enough so they can stay alive and come back to work.” Many of us dedicate ourselves to working for a company our entire lives and building their wealth. In return, we receive a salary that is just enough to feed us, buy us a house, and keep us coming to work. But in the process, we may sacrifice our freedom to pursue other ventures.

Job traps are multifaceted. They may come in the form of opportunities that we always thought we wanted. For example, a lot of students believe that getting a PhD is the final step towards success. But, while a PhD might be the perfect opportunity for some of us, a lot of us fail to recognize that a PhD is pushing us further into the irresistible temptation of financial and job security. Let us assume that after 5+ years of postgraduate education, we go into the job market with our degree. Yes, we may land great opportunities, but are those really the opportunities we wanted? Or do those outstanding resumes just give us a “comfortable” life, all while we sacrifice our true aspirations in the name of job security?