

WHEN 'MEH' TURNS DEADLY

Two weeks ago, HarperCollins dictionary added "meh" as an official entry for its 2009 edition. Etymology: Murky. Possibly the Simpsons, a response given by Bart and Lisa when Homer suggests a day trip in a 2001 episode. Definition: refers to an apathetic response. It really has a striking similarity to "eh," used for the same purpose. I suppose the "m" at the beginning added just that scholarly touch that HarperCollins needed.

We seem to violently not care about a lot of things, as illustrated by the expletives we use to show the degree of our un-caringness when "meh" won't suffice: "I don't give a shit," or "I don't give a fuck"... even "I don't give a flying fuck." (Can you imagine the visual that would be produced in a non-native speaker's mind when first hearing that someone doesn't give a flying fuck?)



**Ariela
Rutkin-Becker**

*Dude, Where's
My Karma?*

Caught in the Obama fury, one might easily not think of this year as a particularly "meh" one. Especially since this apathy — normally associated with our generation — was arguably rebuked by the efforts poured out by our age group across the country.

But as this is my last column of 2008, and my last column during Mr. George W. Bush's presidency, I took a few minutes to ponder the idea of caring.

Violent apathy might seem like a contradiction, but in the past four years, President Bush's inaction has been as dangerous as his actions. Over Thanksgiving break, CNN ran a program about civic-nominated "heroes." The hero of the year, Liz McCartney, completely changed her course after Katrina to co-found St. Bernard's Project, an organization devoted to rebuilding families' homes in St. Bernard's Parish in

New Orleans. Due to the efforts mostly undertaken by this organization, one-half of the pre-storm population has been able to move back into what were declared previously as absolutely uninhabitable homes. While the broadcast left me feeling overwhelmingly inspired by this woman and others, I also felt infuriated: where in the world was and IS our government in this?

At the same time as not caring about people's basic material rights in New Orleans, former political leaders have interestingly enough equated caring about the country to consumerism. Caring, Country, Consume. This alliterative triumvirate has carried over to today, so that when we do care, we care about the wrong things. The best episode to epitomize this occurred in Valley Stream, Long Island, where a Wal-Mart employee was trampled to death in the rush for shopping deals on Black Friday last week.

Let's think about this for a second.

Thomas Friedman wrote in last week's Times that he is tempted to run over to people he sees eating out and warn them to save their money: "You don't know me, but I have to tell you that you shouldn't be here. You should be saving your money. You should be home eating tuna fish. This financial crisis is so far from over. We are just at the end of the beginning." Clearly, Friedman's warning has not been heeded so far. So many people were in a rush to buy from Wal-Mart (one notorious for its low wages, as a side-note), during a time where we should (if anything) be thrifty, that a man died.

We've got to stop acting like animals boarding Noah's ark before the flood. We've got to stop thinking that the holidays would not be the holidays without their materialism. It's no coincidence that the economic crisis is tied in with this year's Morbidly-Black Friday. We live in a society that tells us to measure our worth based on what people give us and what we give others. Perhaps Black Friday represented what many



perceived to be their last shot at normalcy — an attempt to cover up the grim truth of this nation's sinking economy with gift wrap and sparkles.

The problem is, that the morning after 12 or eight (or zero, or however many nights you celebrate for) arrives, we will be forced into giving a shit. We'll be giving much more than a shit, actually — many will forfeit future plans, future expenditures, and for our generation especially, immediate professions that have always seemed somewhat safe.

We can no longer afford, both literally and metaphorically, to be "meh." Here's to making 2009 a year of pathos — a year of not just caring about our world, but of actually taking better care of it too. A sense of genuine caring is not one which could be imposed via governmental policy or a writer's sense of urgency, but frankly, I'm afraid of the alternatives if we don't care a little bit more. At the very least, if we all run and hide from fear of this economic crisis, we could care a little bit more as to not literally trample one another on the way. Meh?

Ariela Rutkin-Becker is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences. She can be contacted at arbecker@cornellsun.com. Dude, Where's My Karma runs alternate Tuesdays.

MARRIAGE AND UNCLE SAM: A DIVORCE WAITING TO HAPPEN

The fury over Prop 8 involves two equally strident, equally passionate camps; one that wants government to define marriage to allow people of the same sex to marry and another that seeks to restrict marriage to mean a legal union between a man and a woman only.

I confess, there may be a lot of sound,

always been.

This is hardly the end of the discussion, but it makes for a fine beginning. To trace how far off the correct path we are, I think it is useful to consider what the fundamentals of marriage involve. Let's consider the day of the wedding itself. Generally, it finds two people (usually a man and a woman, but I digress) making a binding promise before their peers and before their god. In legalistic lingo, marriage might be reduced to a simple contract where the pastor or priest is the officiator and the family and friends are the witnesses.

But amid the general sweet loveliness of it all there lurks a shadowy, uninvited guest. This offender is a government bureaucrat and he, though a complete stranger to all assembled, has the deciding say on whether or not the blissful pair's union will enjoy the auspices of being an "official" marriage. Until this cheerless bureaucrat makes his ugly little mark with his crude little stamp on that useless little shred of paper, all the love in the world, all the well-wishing of family and friends, and all the sacred rituals combined, cannot make the marriage official. What an insult to marriage, what an insult to love!

I don't know about you, but this bureaucrat fellow seems like an unpleasant and perfectly needless interruption to an otherwise dreamy day. What right does government have to restrict the consensual contracts made between two competent individuals? Is it not true that a vast number of legal contracts are made every day without the intervention of government? But, I'm told, people are protesting in the streets, clamoring for this misunderstood privilege of having the government recognize their marriage as official.

It seems we have it all backwards. Aren't those most directly concerned with the definition and validity of marriage those who are actually being married? Furthermore, it would seem that the best one could hope for is that the government would simply step out of the marriage business and leave people free to live as they see fit. Nonetheless, many seem convinced that something as important as marriage is best entrusted to the government's safekeeping.

Now, I don't mean to marginalize anyone's strong convictions whatever they may be, but I have to point out how laughably naive it is to trust something that one holds dear to the government. Need elaboration? Just look what the government's done with your tax dollars lately. Liberals, do you enjoy financing the Iraq War? Conservatives, how fond

are you of funding abortion?

So what's the solution? Strangely, it's the same whatever your stance; disregard the government when it comes to marriage. You want traditional marriage? Well, marry your reproductive opposite and stick to the churches that respect your definition on marriage. (For consistency's sake, avoid that one where the pastor turned out to be engaging the services of a male prostitute.) If you advocate a more liberal marriage, well, obviously, you shouldn't entrust your individual rights to the most egregious and consistent abuser of said rights. Why support the absurd notion that the government has any job legitimizing your marriage at all?

Lately, there's been a grim search for a final solution that has sparked animosity on both sides. But look, people throughout time have managed (albeit with splotchy success) to carry on peaceably while holding differing opinions on matter of tremendous import. Once you recognize that government is the common enemy to your definition(s) of marriage, you may enjoy a moment of solidarity. And when you can accept anything that's peaceful, you may enjoy a moment of peace.

Lauren Rabaino is a student at Cal Poly and writes for the Mustang Daily. College Exchange appears periodically.



**Lauren
Rabaino**
*College
Exchange*

relevant arguments on both sides and there may not be. I'll not bother with the finer points. Instead, the burden falls on me to illuminate what is missing from the debate which, as often happens, is painfully obvious: what role does government even have in defining marriage?

This question might appear out of the blue to many, but then again, most people never really give the blue adequate consideration. To these people, government is legitimately involved in marriage for the simple reason that as far back as living memory goes; that's how it has