

## On rejecting hatred at Millersville University, and fearing endless sorrow in our nation

November 9, 2018

Millersville University police are investigating three cases of racist and anti-Semitic graffiti found on campus: anti-black graffiti in a men's bathroom in the Student Memorial Center; the words "I hate Jews" written on a men's bathroom partition in Gordinier Hall; and a swastika drawn in a men's bathroom in the McNairy Library and Learning Forum.

Imagine being a college student, living away from home — maybe for the first time — and encountering a vicious, bigoted scrawl attacking your very identity.

You're supposed to be in a place that values you for what you have to contribute, that's challenging you to be the fullest version of yourself. And some hateful person has just targeted you — and others like you — for being who you are.

It is just so terribly wrong.

Sickening. And infuriating.

We're not sure what's wrong with some people, what causes them to convey such hateful sentiments. Some sort of sick prank? A terribly misguided dare? Or were these the angry scribbles of a twisted and small person?

Whatever the intent, we hope the students of Millersville University know that Lancaster County has their backs. Hate is not welcome here. And those aren't just words on the yard signs you'll see outside of homes around the county. That's a rock-solid sentiment here, where racist demonstrations are countered by rallies many times their size, where refugees of color — and of diverse religions — are welcomed.

Because we feel so strongly that expressions of hate must be faced head-on, we were gratified by the response of Millersville University Police Chief Pete Anders.

After police were informed last week of the "I hate Jews" message found in the Gordinier Hall bathroom, the university sent an email alert informing students of the incident.

As LNP's Lindsey Blest reported, the email was sent as a "timely warning" under the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Crime Statistics Act of 1990. That act, Blest noted, "requires communication of crimes reported to campus or local police that may pose a threat to the campus community."

University spokeswoman Janet Kacskos noted in an email that the university wasn't required to send a timely warning about this case.

But Anders “wanted to be as transparent as possible and emphasize that these incidents will not be tolerated at Millersville University,” she said. He sought input from the office of President Daniel Wubah, and the university's communications office.

Anders determined that the “hateful words ... written in a common bathroom may reasonably cause fear in our community in light of the Pittsburgh Tree of Life Synagogue massacre,” the email alert stated.

A college official elsewhere might have decided to keep the incident quiet, lest it cast his institution in an unfavorable light.

Indeed, that’s exactly the thinking that makes the Clery Act reporting requirements so necessary.

But Anders clearly had another priority: to reassure students that the university took this kind of incident seriously, to reassure them that it would work to protect them against hate crimes and acts of discrimination and harassment.

We believe strongly in the First Amendment, in the right of Americans to express their beliefs.

And it’s true that in the 2017 case, Matal v. Tam, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed that even hate speech is protected under our Constitution.

“Speech that demeans on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, or any other similar ground is hateful; but the proudest boast of our free speech jurisprudence is that we protect the freedom to express ‘the thought that we hate,’ ” Justice Samuel Alito wrote for the majority.

But whoever was responsible for the graffiti at Millersville damaged university property, which is a clear violation of the student code of conduct, and so that person is subject to university discipline.

This kind of expression is abhorrent. We should reject it, and teach our children to reject it.

We were similarly appalled by the signs that appeared outside Manheim Township’s 17th District polling place on Election Day. The signs were captured and tweeted by LNP photojournalist Dan Marschka.

One was a digitally altered image of an MS-13 gang member being embraced by Democratic House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi. Another showed photos of Mollie Tibbetts and Kate Steinle and the men in the United States illegally who were charged with killing them. Remember “all the murdered Americans, and the illegal aliens that the Democrats care about more than they want to protect you,” that sign read.

Our hearts broke for the families of Tibbetts and Steinle. But as a Cato Institute policy analyst has pointed out, immigrants in the U.S. illegally “are less likely to be incarcerated for crimes in the United States than native-born Americans.”

These signs were meant to make voters afraid of immigrants of color. And they were disgusting.

We have to call out bigotry wherever it rears its ugly head. We have to understand that hateful expression sometimes can lead to violence, as we so painfully and recently saw in Pittsburgh.

So we have to be vigilant, and emphatically reject words and images that are meant to divide us. Whatever our politics, we need to make it clear that such words, such images, are not acceptable.

### **Another mass shooting**

Twelve people were killed in a mass shooting at the Borderline Bar and Grill in Thousand Oaks, California, late Wednesday night; 18 others were injured. Police say the gunman was found dead at the scene.

The bar was “hosting line-dancing lessons for college students as young as 18 on Wednesday night,” the Los Angeles Times reported. “Crowds of young people, including parties for two women celebrating their 21st birthdays, were drinking and dancing when the crack of gunfire echoed through the cavernous room about 11:20 p.m.”

Among the slain was Sgt. Ron Helus, a 29-year veteran of the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office, who was shot inside the bar as he tried to save the lives of others.

Police say the gunman used a Glock 21 .45-caliber handgun with an extra-capacity magazine.

We are running out of words to convey our horror over the mass shootings that so frequently afflict our nation. Someday — someday — we hope our elected officials finally summon the courage to act on sensible gun regulation. Until then, we fear, there will be sorrow after sorrow.