"Why do you keep a loaded shotgun in your hen coop?"
Calves do not get too much sleep when they lie down together with lions.
"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"
Such are my "laws and proverbs," if not for three years in

New Zealand, at least for a Sunday afternoon in Milwaukee, to those who may have wondered about "first and second things," even on 33d and M Streets in Washington or while drinking tea with Boswell and Johnson at the Pelican Inn in Bath, in England.

Tolerance is not Enough

COMMUNICATION RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOLARS IN THE AGE OF BULLHORNS

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HAVE YOU EVER thought about the communication symbol or image that might best characterize our age — the closing years of the 20th century? One which seems to me particularly apt is the bullhorn — or, even better, two bullhorns, one on either side of a wide, deep chasm, directing loud and often obscene arguments at the other side, and never pausing long enough to hear any of the arguments from the other side. Of course, there is an even worse image. In Northern Ireland and many spots around the world, they have advanced — if I can call it that — to the next stage of confrontation; the bullhorns have been forsaken in favor of pipe bombs.

That image of the bullhorn, though, clearly fits the discourse in this country throughout the last few decades, the discourse on every issue about which we have deep disagreements: Operation Desert Storm, the appropriate locus of control for abortions, equal opportunities for ethnic minorities and women. It even fits the talk in many of our academic departments.

Now one could argue that there is no great harm done by those who use those bullhorns, except when they drown out others who wish to be heard. On the other hand, there is no great good done by them, either; I know of no people who have ever been persuaded by someone else wreaking havoc on their eardrums with more decibels than they can stand. What is harmful in all of this is the assumption that those amplified screams have anything to do with persuasion, with communication, or with sharing understandings. What is harmful is the loss of our ability — and even apparently of our desire — to work out our disagreements in a thoughtful way, in a way that seeks understanding, a way that brings others in rather than locking them out, a way that *builds* community instead of destroying it.

Thus, the theme of this convention, "Discourse, Dialogue, and Social Power," is fitting for our communication association, for our field, and for our times. Those terms — "discourse, dialogue, and social power" — serve to remind us of what we who study and teach communication are about and what our responsibilities are. I hope they also motivate us to examine our activities and our society to assess the degree to which we have been successful at fulfilling those responsibilities. Everyone in our field, I assume, knows well what we mean by "discourse" and "dialogue." I sense some disagreement, though, about the concept of "social power." It may be helpful to think about two definitions of the term "social." One refers to "the welfare of human beings as members of society." The other, which I believe is more useful for our field,

is "the formation of cooperative and interdependent relationships." Thus "social power" is that power that comes from such relationships; it is the power of community; it is power from within, rather than power over. And it is the achievement of that power, through discourse and through dialogue, that I want to talk about today.

Franklyn Haiman, in an address to the Speech Communication Association in November 1990, took issue with scholars who have recently appealed "for greater 'civility' in our discourse." He pointed out, in effect, that the First Amendment does not require that speech be civil or even responsible; it requires only that it be free — that it be tolerated. Thus, Haiman condemned those who would prosecute flag burners, who would eject from our campuses those speakers of racist, sexist, and homophobic bile; and those who would ban all expression that some members of society perceive as obscene.

Although I agree with Haiman's condemnation, I believe his solution to the problem is incomplete. It is not enough to say that racist, sexist, and homophobic speech must be tolerated. We have a problem when such speech goes on and we must work for a solution. Tolerance is not enough.

Justice Louis Brandeis, I believe, suggested what the solution must be when he argued that unless there is an emergency, the remedy for obnoxious speech is "more speech, not enforced silence." We in communication studies ought to be encouraging that remedial speech and increasing its effectiveness. We ought to be helping those who oppose racist, homophobic, or other obnoxious speech to develop ways to confront that speech head on, rather than trying to ban it or even tolerate it, just as we ought to help those who *use* such speech to find more civil ways of entering the conversation about race, sex, and sexual preference in our society. We ought to help those who oppose war and economic injustices in the same way. There must be more effective ways to speak against war and poverty than to burn a flag or scream "no blood for oil." Again, those actions are harmless, but they do little good, other than to fool the actors into believing they are doing something that makes a difference.

We who study and teach communication should be able to help people learn how to talk with others with whom they have strong disagreements, to sit down and work out the conflicts that are rupturing our communities. Obviously, reasoned discourse of some problems may not lead to agreement. On the other hand, maybe it will. But even if it does not, in most cases it can help us understand and respect each other's positions better, even if we end up simply agreeing to disagree.

Perhaps we need to return to an emphasis in our field on

discussion, as opposed to debate, on the belief that the resolution of disagreement need not be zero-sum game, that the sort of cooperation engendered by good discussion is more likely not only to ease, if not solve, a problem than competition is. It is also more likely to improve the community. In other words, I advocate the old-fashioned notion that it is better to talk than to fight. And I suggest to you that we in communication have not fulfilled our obligations to not only pass on this value to our students, but to teach them how to channel their social concerns to effective discourse, dialogue, and social power.

I recognize that a major reason actions have displaced discourse for many who seek social change is the belief that they need to speak to an audience beyond the confines of the immediate action, that this wider audience can most readily be reached through the news media, and that the media are more likely to pick up actions than words, violent confrontation over quiet discussion.

Here again, though, I would suggest this sorry fact indicates that we communication scholars and teachers have not been doing our job. Most of those people in the media who are making the choice of actions over words were trained by us. Most of the members of the audience who prefer to watch and read about actions rather than ideas were educated by us. It is time we began creating more sophisticated audiences and more socially conscious journalists. If journalistic norms and audience demands in the 21st Century are no different than they are today, we who teach will be largely to blame.

Not only is our current inability to deal in a constructive way with the divisions in our society a challenge for us as teachers; it is also a challenge for us as scholars. The Speech Communication Association and the Department of Communication at the University of South Florida recently sponsored a conference on Applied Communication Research in the 21st Century. One of the lessons that came out of the conference is that the purpose of applied communication research should not be simply helping industries shape a more productive working force, or finding more effective ways to sell deodorants or political candidates, or even exploring ways to persuade people to live healthier lives — eating better, exercising, or avoiding the use of tobacco. Nor should the major purpose of applied communication research be to help us go out and moonlight as trainers or consultants so we can supplement our academic salaries.

There is important applied communication research to be done on many social problems. Finding peaceful ways to deal with bigotry while preserving the constitutional protections of speech and press seems to me one clear example. We need imaginative theories to guide the research and practice on such problems, and research and practice that help us refine the theories. In brief, we need to put our teaching and our scholarly skills to work in the healing of our society's ailments.

My comments today may sound Utopian to some of you. I assure you that they are meant to sound that way; more, they are meant to *be* Utopian. I say this even though I recognize the risk involved in advocating pursuit of Utopia. For some, the Utopian is a derisive label, a synonym for muddle-headed, unrealistic, foolish, and naive. Let me suggest, though, that it is those critics who are foolish and naive, not the Utopians. We who teach and do research desperately need a Utopian vision — a vision of the kind of society we want ours to be. We also need a vision of the role communication teachers and scholars

can play in creating that Utopia. And then we need to pursue that vision with all of the strength and brain power we can muster.

This is not to say there are no problems associated with pursuing Utopian visions, for there clearly are. One of the most serious is that those who work for a Utopian society are doomed to failure. Such a society, by definition, is not attainable. It is like the journalist's ideal of "objectivity." It is not obtainable, but striving for it results in better, more valid news coverage. So it is with our strivings for Utopia. Even if our efforts move us only slightly toward that goal, our lives will have been worthwhile. A failure to strive — a failure to work for a vision — will inevitably result in a society in which I — and I hope you — do not wish to live.

Ours could easily become a society, like that in Northern Ireland, where the bullhorn is replaced by the pipe bomb. We who teach must do all in our power to prevent that escalation. And we in communication must assume special responsibility for development of the kinds of discourse and social power needed to construct a more Utopian society. We need to act; tolerance of obnoxious speech is not enough.