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(Author's Note: This column does not necessarily reflect the author's opinion of all telemarketers — just his roommate.)

"How can you stand living with the Antichrist," she asked the young man in the leather jacket.

"Well, it's not *the* Antichrist," he said to the young woman he was having lunch with. "More of an Antichrist. He's really not all that bad once you get to know him."

"Still, he's one of them," she hissed.

"Them?"

"You know," she said, her voice dropping into a conspiratorial tone, "telemarketers." The word came from her lips like a vulgarity, almost spat out, as if it were too vile for her lips to bear.

"You make it sound like a crime to be one," he commented.

"It should be," she said as she took a sip from her pop.

"Why?" he asked, "They're just trying to make a living, same as anyone."

"How can anyone do it? That's what I want to know."

"He actually loves his job."

"You're serious?"

"Yep."

"In God's name, why?"

"To quote him, 'I get paid bundles of money to call up people I'm never going to meet and harass them. What could be better than that? It's the ultimate punk job.'"

"So he enjoys calling people up and annoying the piss out of them?"

"Not *per se*, but the end point really is the money."

"How much do they get paid anyway?"

"An obscene amount."

"How much?"

"Nearly \$10 an hour in some instances, I believe."

"You're right," she said, "that is obscene."

"The scary part is that there's a reason for that."

"What reason? What possible reason could there be for these people to get paid obscene amounts of money for doing something despicable?"

"Because it's profitable," he said.

"What?"

"I'm serious."

"Who the hell buys anything from a telemarketer?"

"Thinking, rational people."

"I can't believe I'm hearing this."

"Why would a company pay obscene amounts of money out for something that didn't work?"

"Well . . ."

"The business has to be profitable. Otherwise, these telemarketing outfits would close up shop due to bankruptcy."

"I guess, but . . ."

"There are people out there who actually pay for the things telemarketers are selling."

"Come on, are you telling me people actually stop and listen to those idiots?"

"Not just listen to," the young man in the leather jacket said. "Buy from."

"Intelligent people?"

"Yep, as smart as you or me."

"That's not saying much."

"Seriously. Normal people buy from them."

"Why?"

# Just makin' a buck

## Telemarketers not spawned from hell

**"You have to understand that this is these people's job. They get paid for it. They get paid for not taking 'no' for an answer . . ."**

"Because they're interested in what they're selling. Because good telemarketers are persuasive. Because sometimes they really are offering good deals."

"My ears must be deceiving me." "My roommate tells me that there are lots of people who buy from them. They're just the ones who stop and listen to what's being offered."

"So what about those of us who don't buy things over the phone?"

"You have to understand that this is these people's job. They get paid for it. They get paid for not taking 'no' for an answer, because people have this instinctive urge just to say 'no' without even listening to what they're being offered. So telemarketers have to go one step beyond that. They have to keep asking, until they're fully convinced that you've considered what they've offered you and reached the conclusion that you really aren't interested — or until you hang up on them."

"It isn't rude to hang up them?"

"If you're not going to listen, no," the young man said.

"Why waste your time and theirs?"

"I suppose I just consider it an invasion of privacy."

"Then hang up. You toss junk mail in the trash."

"But these are people."

"That's what they're counting on, that you'll listen and consider it."

"I still think it's an evil way to

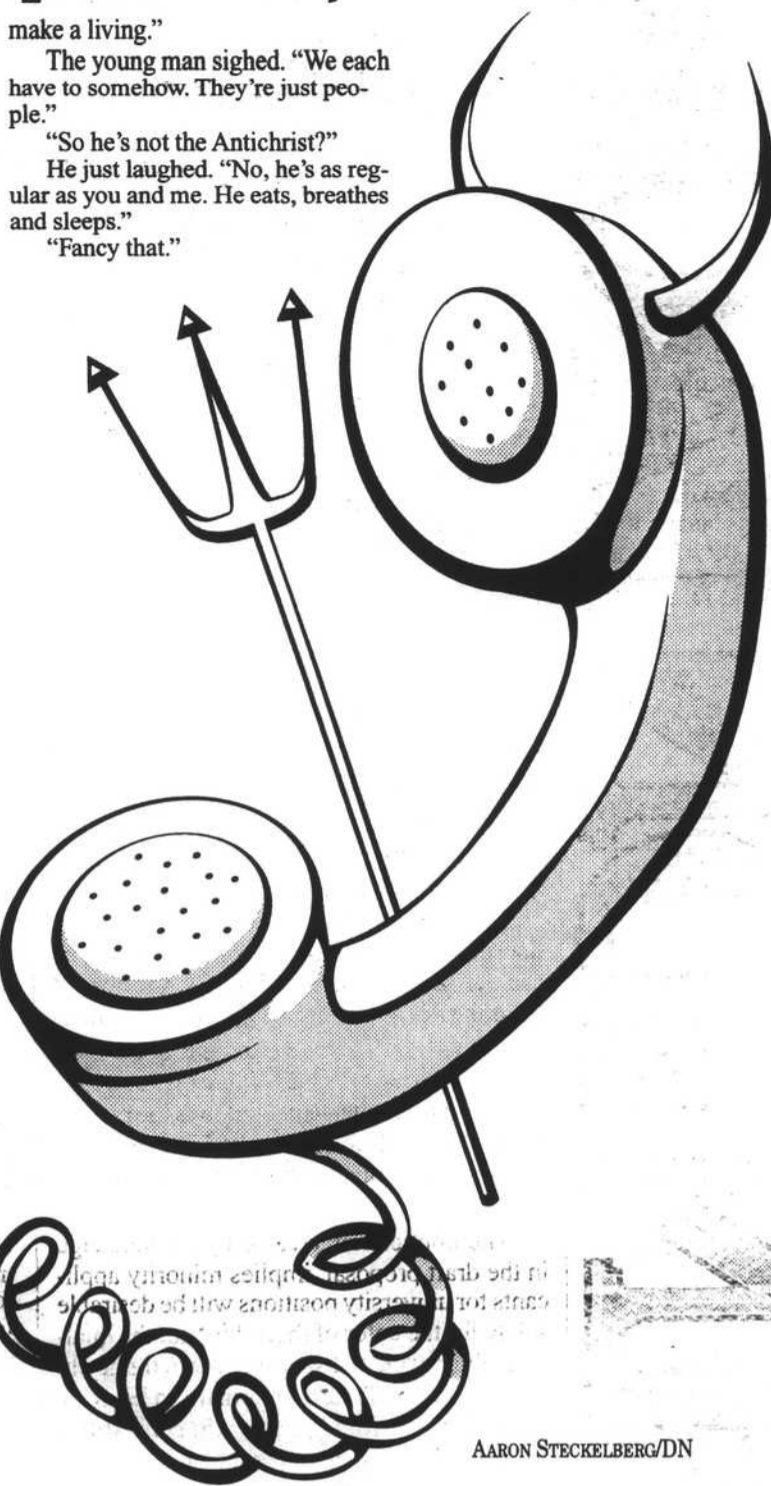
make a living."

The young man sighed. "We each have to somehow. They're just people."

"So he's not the Antichrist?"

He just laughed. "No, he's as regular as you and me. He eats, breathes and sleeps."

"Fancy that."



AARON STECKELBERG/DN

### Guest VIEW

## Thank you, but ...

*Americans have much to be grateful for, but plenty of problems*

**TIMOTHY P. MCCARTHY is a columnist for the Columbia Daily Spectator at Columbia University.**

(U-WIRE) NEW YORK — The Thanksgiving holiday is never an easy time for me, for despite the prevailing tendency to think that things are just fine in America, I maintain that there is still much to criticize and much work to be done before unconditional thanks are in order.

Recently, in the wake of debates about everything from Ebonics to desegregation in Little Rock, Ark., to affirmative action, it seems like everyone is assessing the value of integration. Civil rights organizations like the NAACP are engaged in an internal debate, one which has long raged within the rank-and-file of African-American communities, about whether integrated schools truly benefit black children.

Conservatives, whites as well as some blacks, are arguing against affirmative action on the grounds that it promotes a feeling of inferiority among minorities, and, moreover, that it violates America's constitutional claim — never a reality! — of color-blind individualism.

Whites think they've done enough for civil rights; and blacks, having put up with racism for a lot longer than whites have been engaged in civil rights struggles, are losing faith (and ground) as they grow more and more convinced that white power and black

power are mutually exclusive.

Bowing to the sympathies of racists, nationalists and pessimists alike, Americans seem to be abandoning hopes of a truly integrated society. We cannot afford to lose this hope.

But neither can we afford to be blindly optimistic about the commitment to integration.

Historically, "integration" has meant using law and public policy to grant black people, especially, admission to institutions previously the exclusive provinces of white people. The Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction Amendments, Brown vs. Board of Education, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 were all "top-down" policies that opened up portions of white society to blacks.

Underlying this national movement towards integration was the belief that any form of segregation or discrimination was unjust, that for a society to be truly democratic, every one of its institutions must be available to all its citizens.

Also present, however, was a more subtle contention that "white society" would be "good for" black people. It would help them to get up to speed, the argument goes. Or, to use an earlier language, it would help "civilize" them.

How might we maintain our commitment to a society in which discrimination, in all its forms, is resisted, a society in which integration means more than allowing blacks access to whites? First of all, we must reject the

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*... Americans seem to be abandoning hopes of a truly integrated society."*

notion that "whiteness" is the superior standard against which everything else should be judged. "White society" is a historical construction whose very existence relies upon a consolidation of economic and political power with notions of supremacy.

For integration to work, "white society" must cease to exist through a combination of radical economic and political redistribution, full cultural and educational exchange, and a bold willingness to grapple with the "ordeal" of integration in both public and private spaces. If there is anything the last 30 years taught us, it is that integration cannot work if power remains concentrated in the hands of a few white men, if private and public spheres are subject to different sets of rules.

Finally, we must realize that a full engagement with people from different backgrounds is, however difficult to sustain, absolutely essential for its success. We can take pride in norms and customs we call "our own" without granting fear and anger and hate the dignity they do not deserve by refusing to share the best of ourselves, humbly, with those around us.

Over the break, I was fortunate to experience the "ordeal" of integration at its best, when I got together to play pick-up basketball with friends from back home. Black and white, middle and working class, we are now teachers and lawyers, factory workers and students; some of us are preparing for marriage and for fatherhood.

Despite our many differences, we still talk a "big game," even if that game has changed since we played together back in the 1980s. After the game, four of us — two black, two white — went back to my house for lunch. As we fought for the turkey and shared the potato salad, we slipped back into the "slang" of our childhood days, cracking jokes about past girlfriends, reminiscing about the games won and lost, dreams attained and deferred.

For over an hour, we laughed so hard we almost cried, remembering as well the times we had cried with one another — and for one another — when trouble with school, the law, or relationships left us deeply uncertain about the future.

In the midst of it all, I recalled a comment made by another friend of ours

some time ago: that we were an "unlikely" group of friends, divided as we were along lines of color, class, and creed. And yet, as "unlikely" as we might seem, we had, together, helped each other to figure out things like color, class and creed for nearly a generation. It wasn't always pretty, and it sure as hell wasn't easy, but it was everlastingly worth it.

And so last weekend, away from policy and ideology and inequality, I rediscovered my space for hope, a place in which integration and affirmative action take the forms of endless personal jokes, moves to the hoop that embarrass the guy who's trying to guard you, and an unshakable faith that where — and whom — you come from still matters.

As Baldwin says: "If the word 'integration' means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it."

For this version of integration — and for those childhood friendships that remain "unlikely" even as they give us strength and hope in these troubled times — I do give thanks. And yet I wonder if our children will be able to do the same.