

# Twisted symbol

*Historical facts show original intent of ancient sign was not hateful*



**AARON COOPER is a senior English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.**

In Hartford, Conn., after Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime came to power in Germany, the entire floor of a synagogue's vestibule was torn out because its craftsmanship exhibited numerous depictions of the swastika.

After World War II, the swastika came to symbolize genocide and hatred toward Jews and other diverse groups. It still remains a symbol of hatred and racism in much of the Western world. But it wasn't—and isn't—always so. In both history and modern times, the symbol has diverse meanings.

Just a few years ago, when Nepalese citizens went to the polls to vote, they expressed their choice of leaders by stamping a swastika next to the name of their preference.

In Tibet, it is customary for farmers to place a swastika on the doors of their homes with the belief it will protect them from evil. A similar custom is practiced by Irish farmers, who call the swastika a Brigit's cross.

Navajo medicine men use colored sand to create artistic swastikas on the floor while they perform their curative rites.

Cuna Indians in Panama often place swastikas in designs on colorful blouses.

Indian boys, in parts of the world, paint swastikas on their shaved heads as a benediction.

The swastika is an important symbol to practicing Buddhists and Hindus—a symbol that is prominently displayed in huge lanterns that hang from the Senso-ji Buddhist temple in Tokyo's Asajusa district.

According to the Friends of the Swastika, a modern grass roots movement, the swastika was

the very first Christian symbol and can be found in catacombs in Rome.

In America, Coca-Cola came out with a swastika-shaped lucky watch fob in the 1920s. Swastika, Ontario, a name that remains today, was named so in 1911, after a lucky gold strike. Many children there attend classes every day at Swastika Public School.

Indeed, the swastika is commonplace and not offensive in many parts of the world.

Though it isn't hard to understand why the symbol carries horrific connotations for us, the origin of the word far precedes the swastika-touting regime responsible for the Holocaust, a slaughter of 6 million Jews.

The term was derived from the Sanskrit word Svastikah, which means "being fortunate."

Striking gold certainly qualifies as being fortunate. It seems the U.S. Capitol is fortunate, too.

A close look at the Capitol building in Washington, D.C., reveals several friezes, or cloths similar to banners, which are formed out of swastikas. A number of pieces in the Metropolitan Museum in New York show them as well.

A painting found in Mawangdui, China, in the 1970s depicts the swastika on a silk tapestry that was scientifically dated around 300 B.C.

Some sources claim the swastika has been around for as many as 10,000 years.

For too long, the inhumane connotations of the Nazi movement in World War II Germany have caused the swastika to be, more than anything else, a symbol of hatred and pained memories for much of the Western world. We associate it with the Nazi party, genocide, suffering, persecution, racism and the threat to civilized order as we know it.

For many who lost loved ones and relatives in the Holocaust and in other brutal acts of intolerance, this attitude toward the swastika is justified.

But for rest of us, we allow the symbol's use for hate and hate crimes to continue as long as we let its negative meanings massively outweigh the positive ones.

Hitler and the Nazi movement of the 1930s and '40s have held the swastika hostage for too long. They have used it for such horrific acts that we cannot begin to erase it as a mark of human

cruelty.

Still, the Nazis and the neo-Nazis have no registered copyrights on the use of the swastika. We allow them this exclusive privilege through our blind censorship and ignorant associations as long as we continue to see one meaning—one gruesome face attached to one of humankind's oldest known symbols.

We must cast out the inhumanity and gross acts of terror that have plagued our understanding of the swastika for so long and recognize the true meaning behind a symbol that our ancient ancestors intended as one of peace and healing.

Granted, it is easy for me to say we should forget what happened more than 50 years ago and concentrate on what is happening today.

For the relatives and family members of deceased and living victims of the Holocaust, this is an impossibility.

Maybe the answer is not to forget. Maybe the answer is not to cast out the negative with the positive. It seems the only realistic answer is to shift the balance back to where it belongs, to where we have control over the past rather than it having control over us.

To allow the swastika to remain in the hands of the Nazis is the worst disservice we can do to the Indians of North, Central and South America.

It is an act of cowardice toward the peoples of India, Tibet and China.

It is a letdown to the Basques, to the French, to the Greek, to the Swiss, to the Japanese and to the Irish—all of whom have deeply rooted traditions and beliefs involving the use of the swastika.

As long as we let Hitler's ugly power determine the worth of the ancient symbol, it will continue to be a disservice to the Ashantis of Africa, to the Tlingits of Alaska, to the Hopis in the United States and to the Cunas in Panama.

The swastika was created by ancient people who intended it to mean the opposite of what many of us still believe it to mean. They intended it as a symbol of friendship, laughter, good luck, joy and a symbol of the act of human kindness, not to be overcast by acts of human cruelty.

In America, communities are still confronted by recent controversy about the swastika. The city of Glendale, Calif., has 1,000 light poles in city

limits that bear the swastika and have offended many residents and non-residents.

Jewish Defense League National Chairman Irv Rubin argues that the swastika is decisively nothing more than a symbol of hatred toward Jewish people. The city argues that it is in fact an ancient symbol of Buddhist tradition.

Beyond the First Amendment rights, which religious symbols in public are subject to, Rubin was quoted as saying, "I don't buy this insane logic that these twisted crosses are ancient Eastern good luck religious symbols. The swastika is an insult to the memory of millions of people who suffered at the hands of the Nazis. It is an insult to the survivors of Nazi brutality. It is an insult to Americans of all political and religious persuasions."

I have to disagree with Rubin on the issue of it being "an insult to Americans of all political and religious persuasion." It is not an insult to me. It should not be an insult to any of us, even those who are Jewish, unless we allow it to be.

A swastika, as far as the Holocaust is concerned, is nothing more than a symbol misused for hatred, murder and violence. And we are letting it stand for exactly what Hitler wanted it to stand for—Aryan supremacy.

What if Saddam Hussein decided to take the Christian cross or Star of David as his symbol? Would we then hate that symbol and tear it in disgust from our churches and synagogues forever?

An ignorant kid spray painting or drawing a swastika on a bathroom stall or a warehouse wall shouldn't cause us pain. It can be a symbol of prosperity and good luck. If we take a moment to consider its historical worth, it can be a symbol of people coming together and not being torn apart.

*Cooper's Law: Ignorance is only a weapon if you allow it to be.*

For those who haven't suffered injustice by the former bearers of the swastika—choose to be educated as to the swastika's original intent.

Tell your friends. Instill this knowledge in your children so that they will not grow up to be the products of history books that teach us half-truths.

Though I don't advocate the use of the symbol, let's recognize all of its historical uses instead of focusing on its period of misuse.

# Neverending story

*Completion of union renovation is long overdue*



**MATTHEW EICKMAN is a senior finance and economics major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.**

I've been having some weird dreams lately. They're not sexual and they're not exciting.

Instead, I feel as if I'm Marty McFly stuck in a "Back to the Future" movie.

I wake up in a daze, and some woman who looks like my mom is comforting me. She says, "Everything is okay. The union expansion was completed yesterday. Your college days will now be peaceful."

Just when I start to relax, she says, "Yes, you're fine here in the year 2010."

Maybe these dreams wouldn't be so scary if they were not realistic. Unfortunately, nobody knows when the Nebraska Union will be done.

Never mind that we have already shelled out \$20 for a hazard. A nuisance. A student-financed public relations trophy that the administrators can brag about.

Maybe you enjoy paying student fees. Maybe you think your \$20 has been wisely used when you realize that you probably have financed one day's breaks for one worker. How do you think Sally Struthers started sponsoring children internationally? She

too has sponsored a construction worker.

So, when will the union be done? A simple look at the expanding timeline doesn't answer that question.

When students voted in approval of the renovation and expansion in 1995, they were told that the construction would be completed by mid-1998 with a deadline of Aug. 12.

In May, Nebraska Unions Director Daryl Swanson said the plaza, recreation room and north entrance would be accessible by fall. He also stated that the central construction will not be finished until mid-October.

Well, we're here, in the fall, and those areas are not accessible.

Unless you sneak across campus in the middle of night and crawl through the embarrassing north side of the union, there is not an accessible north entrance.

If you do decide to search for this imaginative north entrance, let me know if you cross a clear plaza on the way.

Inside construction is now set to run through the spring semester. Rumor has it that many are fearful of another construction-filled semester. If enrollment is not high enough, there won't be enough \$20 payments to

sponsor all the workers.

So, let's place ourselves in a hypothetical situation. Pretend we are in the year 2010, and the union is completed. What now? What will be in this glorious new union?

There will be no dry cleaning station, no barbershop, no video-rental store and no pizza parlor. But there will be Burger King, Amigo's,

chairs. Most of us already have chairs in our rooms at home. Is that all I bought with my money? I'm afraid so.

Now my friends argue with that thought. They point out that my \$20 has also bought me the headaches I get every time I look at the north side of the union. I have bought the backtracking walk it takes to get from the few union entrances to my home.

While the wood chips in my sandals and the mud on the bottoms can be overcome, I don't know how to get by the emotional duress undergone with every pass of the union.

If they're going to take forever, tell us. If they aren't going to be done on time, tell us. But don't make us pay for it.

We're not here to pay for our brothers' and sisters' education. We're also not here to pay for their union.

If you are graduating this year, I thank you for the donation. I'm sure it will be appreciated by the Class of 2010. Unfortunately, you got screwed.

If you are going to be in school for a while, you may luck out. You may eventually be able to walk about the union peacefully.

But this doesn't mean that we have been treated fairly. We need to be sure that the decision-makers on campus

understand that they affect our lives with their verdicts.

We are represented by the Committee for Fees Allocations. Get hold of the chairman, Paul Schreier, through the ASUN office. Tell him we don't need to pay for something we're not even using.

Daryl Swanson may think that the union is "being used" because people are sitting in the chairs. Well, you could fight the battle of semantics with him and lose. Or you could track him down and remind him that you're not happy with the constant mess.

Swanson may want the new union because it will be an uplifting part of everyone's day. People will be happy and comfortable when they hang out in the union.

Well, considering the mess we've faced for the past two years, it may take a Ferris wheel to make the union a place of fond memories.

You may read this and think "Eickman needs to quit whining." Yeah, it's only \$20 each semester. It's only a small pain to walk out of my way every day for class.

Well, it's not about the dollar amount. If I had paid \$5 for a never-ending construction project, I would want to know where my money went.

It's the principle of the matter. We are college students. If we are shelling out money, it would be nice to know it is for something useful. The extra money is for your movies, pizza, beer, TV dinners and Chef Boyardee.

So, as you wait patiently for the expansion to be completed, I wish you good luck navigating around the plaza, the bikers who try to squeeze onto the trails and your own construction worker.

Just watch out for falling objects.



Imperial Palace Express and Subway. At least our fees will finance a bunch of new chairs for the same old food places.

I think my student fees are high enough already. I think more than \$200 per semester plus \$4 per credit hour for technology fees is enough. I don't need \$20 each semester to buy