

OPINION PAGES

Our VIEW

Virtual viruses

Melissa incident shows computer awareness

Back in 1992, the Melissa virus would have passed by mostly unnoticed except by a handful of people concerned with computers and some members of the media, trying to get America to care. Don't laugh and pass it off as impossible, because it happened, more or less.

In 1992, in the middle of February, the whispers began rippling through the computer geeks, a word on their lips, a name: Michelangelo.

On March 6, Michelangelo's birthday, the virus would systematically erase the entire hard drive of the infected computer. On that day, thousands of computers lay unpowered, as their users fretted nervously that their machines might be infected.

For one day, much of the computer world lay silent.

Days later, a disinfectant would slowly begin to seep around the Internet and the Michelangelo virus would slowly fade into anonymity. Its name would be forgotten by many, and many of those whose lives were not touched by computers never even knew of the virus' existence.

Fast forward to 1999, as a virus known as the Melissa virus combs over the 'Net like wildfire, infecting computer after computer after computer. Servers are shut down and the virus distributes itself to 50 people if certain conditions are met.

And the media is going to make sure you're aware of it, and what you can do about it.

In 1992, the Internet was still growing, just in its toddler phase, taking its baby steps if you will. Now, in 1999, the Internet is running like a teen-ager whose just gotten the keys to the car for the first time. Where once the Internet was something almost no one used; now if you're not on the 'Net, you're out of touch.

The former realm of hackers and nerds has been opened up to soccer moms, single parents and upper-class business folks who are still learning that there isn't an "Any" key on a keyboard, and with the influx of people comes a new breed of students.

It's good to see that the media is catering to the people who use a tool they barely understand, simplifying it down and helping them see into the basic premise of the problem. Computer awareness is going up. People are learning that a computer is more like a car than a television.

People are no longer afraid to learn about the machines that once intimidated them, and that's the first big step. Sure, the computer world isn't as simple as it could be, but the more you know, the more dangerous you are.

That's one lesson the hackers will be more than happy to share.

Branch's VIEW



DN LETTERS

MY view, though

Naturally, I should expect to see a letter like "Not MY view" in Thursday's DN, written by a man who represents the Federation of College Republicans. Though not an important, or really even significant letter, it deserves our scrutiny as a community.

Why would anyone, especially someone with a political science background, complain about student fees being spent on a newspaper simply because its editorial staff supports a different view than his own? Does this man feel that he has "bought" the loyalty of our newspaper with his hard-earned money? I would assume, for future reference, that the title "Our View" refers to the view of the opinion staff. It would, after all, be impossible to represent the mind-set of the entire student body in one column.

The author of this particular letter has also unwittingly opened up his entire viewpoint on the function of government by the way he expresses his vehement opposition to gay rights. He calls protesters lazy by his statement that they accomplish things not through hard work, but rather by "crying victim." Let's read between the lines here. This is not about gay rights. It's about the extreme right-wing belief in the current system's ability to sort itself out without having to enact any legislation to correct existing problems. It is also about disparaging victims, because extreme conservatives such as Anthony J. Ferate believe that the victims would not be in such a lowly position if they just worked a little harder. This is a typical wealthy man stepping on the heads of the less fortunate to further his personal agenda. I realize money was not directly mentioned in the letter, but his statement about "crying victim" applies to more than mere civil rights activists. It applies to anyone who receives any sort of help from the government, including welfare, social security and affirmative action. The idea is that if we leave our hands off of the current system, then everything will even out in time. In this particular case, I assume Mr. Ferate hopes to rid society of homosexuals by failing to acknowledge their existence, much the same as this century's "trickle-down" economic theory hoped to cease the maldistribution of wealth in our society by pretending that there are no areas in our country where people are simply born poor.

Naturally, extreme conservatives oppose any legislation which does not specifically and directly benefit themselves. The humorous part is that the gay community has not asked for any "special" rights. They have simply demanded the same treatment you and I take for granted. What, exactly, are the

Republicans afraid of?

The attitude here seems to be that "fringe" groups should behave more like wealthy, white, male Republicans if they want their rights to be upheld so badly.

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A civil desire

I am proud that a portion of my student fees go to a campus newspaper that supports extending civil rights to all people, regardless of sexual orientation.

The key phrase is civil rights. Recognized marriage, access to health care for family members and job protection are not special rights. It is legal in 40 states to fire someone because of their perceived sexual orientation. Notice that this does not exempt straight people. These rights are being denied to the gay community in America. They are being denied by a political movement hiding under the guise of special rights and family values, and the sup-

porters of this political movement fear anything that does not conform to rigid heterosexual role stereotypes.

I invite everyone who believes that every person should have equal opportunities regardless of who they love to stand up for the rights of all members of the human race.

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