

Composition Program

Before coming to orientation, please read the following statement, and consider the implications of formally acceptable outrages in our society. During Orientation you will be asked to discuss this topic in groups, and perhaps write a few paragraphs about it.

AN OPEN MIND – EXAMINING YOUR WORLD VIEW

It is important to be aware of where our views come from. Cultures, subgroups within those cultures, and families within these groups tend to share what is called a **world view**, a set of assumptions about the world and the behavior of people in it. Without acknowledging that we hold such views, we may harbor prejudices about groups that cloud our thinking and restrict fair judgment. Many of these attitudes group from the contexts of our lives that we take for granted – the options of parents and friends, our ethnic and religious backgrounds.

In the words of Professor Louis Menand, “ideas are produced not by individuals, but by groups of individuals – that ideas are social...ideas do not develop according to some inner logic of their own, but are entirely dependent, like germs on their human carriers and the environment.” Knowledge and ideas are not absolutes but subject to time, place, and circumstances in which they are expressed.

For instance, up until the twentieth century, women were considered incapable of making rational decisions on political issues and thus were denied the vote. Today, most cultures recognize that such a view was socially constructed, not inherently true. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., professor and director of the W.E. DuBois Institute of African American Research at Harvard, sees history as “a chronicle of formally acceptable outrages.”

“Once upon a time, perfectly decent folk took it for granted that watching two gladiators hack each other to death was just the thing to do on a summer afternoon,...that making slaves of Africans was a good deal for all concerned...What were they thinking? You could say that posterity is a hanging judge, except that sooner or later capital punishment, too, will turn up on that chronicle of outrages.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Can you think of a formally acceptable outrage that has not been mentioned?
2. Can you think of an acceptable practice in today's society that will one day become an outrage?