Dear Editor,

It is a sad commentary on Wisconsin racial relations when an Eau Claire Hmong leader has to advise Hmong hunters to skip the rest of the deer season because of the Sawyer County tragedy. Media reports have unfortunately begun to focus on the suspect's Hmong ethnicity, even though he immigrated from Laos 24 years ago and is a U.S. citizen and veteran. It is no wonder that immigrants from Laos may begin to feel blamed as a community for his actions.

Lest we forget, the shoe was on the other foot not long ago. Wisconsin's other recent serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer, had a Laotian boy among his victims. (In fact, the 14-year-old ran away from Dahmer, only to be returned to his killer by Milwaukee police.) Yet I do not recall the media focusing on Dahmer's race or his German ancestry as the reason for his killing of a Laotian immigrant. Reporters did not call German-American clubs to ask if they disavowed his murders. Wisconsin German-Americans did not have to change their habits out of fear that Laotians would misunderstand or single them out. We should keep in mind that we all saw Dahmer as an individual responsible for his crimes, not as representative of any failings or ignorance within his cultural group.

Northwestern Wisconsin has a history of racial tensions, but also of building bridges between different groups. During the treaty rights dispute, Ojibwe tribal members and white sportsmen were in conflict over fish and game, yet later came together to protect the fish from environmental threats. The Somali immigrants living in Barron initially experienced tensions, yet divisions are slowly being healed, particularly in the schools. Government officials and the media have a responsibility not to inflame differences by widening cultural gaps, but to educate the public to narrow the gaps. They can respond to the recent tragedy by educating hunters and property owners, regardless of race or language, to protect themselves from violence.

--Zoltan Grossman

Assistant Professor of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

ARTICLES (newspapers may require free registration)

Hunter to Hmong: Stay away; Warning offends some at forum (Eau Claire Leader-Telegram, 12/17/04)

Forum to talk about tragedy (Eau Claire Leader-Telegram, 12/13/04)
**LETTERS / EDITORIALS**

**Letter from relative of shooting victims**

December 13, 2004

Hello to all,

My name is Theresa Hesebeck and I am the sister of Denny Drew and wife of Lauren Hesebeck and also friend of all victims and families involved in the shootings. I need to say the magnitude of the grief among our families is beyond what anyone can imagine therefore we are declining any interviews at this time. I believe that what we would like everyone to know is that we do not hold the Hmong community responsible for this act. As any senseless act from any race, they did not pull the trigger. I would like to ask that anyone who is trying to make this a racial issue either white or minority would please stop this and know that is a dishonor to all of our loved ones to continue these acts of prejudice. If you are not of Native American blood, we are all immigrants. Please be sympathetic that the Hmong community who is also saddened by all of this.

Please pray for ALL of our healing and God Bless!

- - Theresa Hesebeck


**Theresa Hesebeck not asking too much**

_Eau Claire Leader-Telegram editorial_ by Editor Don Huebscher (12/21/2004)
As we reflect on the shootings near Birchwood that occurred a month ago today, the victims? relatives and friends continue to struggle through a difficult holiday season wondering if the day will ever come when they can move forward.

For that reason there?is a reluctance to write any more on the terrible incident other than reporting new developments as the legal process churns along. How can those affected most closely try to look to the future if they continue to be pulled back to the past?

All of us should take to heart the strength and leadership of Theresa Hesebeck. She is the sister of Denny Drew and wife of Lauren Hesebeck. Drew was killed, and Lauren Hesebeck was wounded in the attack.

Theresa Hesebeck found the courage to address the racial backlash that has followed the shootings. Chai Vang of St. Paul, who is of Hmong descent, has admitted to the shootings, reports say. Isolated anti-Hmong incidents in the aftermath of the shootings have been reported.

"We would like everyone to know" that we do not hold the Hmong community responsible for this act," Theresa Hesebeck wrote on a Web site created in memory of the victims. "As any senseless act from any race, they did not pull the trigger.

"I would like to ask that anyone who is trying to make this a racial issue, either white or minority, (to) please stop this and know that it is a dishonor to all of our loved ones to continue these acts of prejudice," she wrote. "If you are not of Native American blood, we are all immigrants. Please be sympathetic to the Hmong community who is also saddened by all of this."

The one common thread that ties us together in this tragedy is compassion for others. We've all thought how horrible it would be to go through something so unimaginable. We've all also thought if there was anything we could do to help, we would.

Well, Theresa Hesebeck has given us the cue. Lingering distrust by Hmong or non-Hmong as a result of this incident can only lead to anger, which can only lead to, heaven forbid, another act of violence.

The victims were brought to the woods because of their common bond of deer-hunting. But deer camp isn't that much about shooting a deer as it is about love of family and friends, the outdoors, and all the great times that come from people just being together to share the experience.

Theresa Hesebeck is right. For people to turn their anger over the act of one person into a campaign of verbal insults and other hideous acts of racial prejudice against others not only makes a terrible situation even worse, but it also desecrates everything deer-hunting is supposed to represent.

Speaking of stereotypes, there are people in other areas of the country who think folks in these parts are a bunch of red-necked, intolerant ignoramuses. We know that's not true, but that's the way it is for people who paint with a broad brush.
It's up to all of us to dispel such myths. We owe that much to ourselves and to our Hmong neighbors who are here for the same reasons we are. We also owe it to the families and friends of the victims.

Theresa Hesebeck is a special person for finding the strength to help lead us during such a difficult time.

**Don't let racism taint discussion about killings**


It was probably inevitable.

On Sunday, five people were killed and four were wounded in a rampage after a deer hunter trespassing on private land was told to leave and opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle.

One of the wounded hunters died while a patient at St. Joseph's Hospital in Marshfield on Monday. A story on A3 of Monday's newspaper, the one that also reported on the slayings, was headlined, "Hmong find hunting in United States strange," with a second deck that said, "American rules, regulations very different from Laos."

On Tuesday morning we got this e-mail in all capital letters - the equivalent of screaming, to those savvy in such things:

"I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT THE DAY AFTER FIVE WISCONSIN HUNTERS ARE KILLED, NOW SIX HUNTERS, THAT YOU ARE DUMB ENOUGH TO RUN A STORY WITH THE CAPTION THAT READS, HMOG FIND HUNTING IN U.S. STRANGE. HOW STUPID ARE YOU!!!!!!!! SOME OF YOUR ARTICLES IN THIS PAPER JUST AMAZE ME. DO YOU NOT THINK BEFORE YOU RUN A ARTICLE. THIS IS ONE SUBSCRIBER WHO WILL NOT BE RENEWING HIS SUBSCRIPTION."

To answer the gentleman, yes, we do think. And we think that racism reflects ignorance.

The shooter implicated in the killings near Birchwood in northwestern Wisconsin is Hmong. The people killed were white.

To infer that race or ethnicity makes someone kill six people, and that it's inappropriate to report on central Wisconsin's largest minority group's efforts to be involved the state's deer hunting tradition, is just wrongheaded.

If the defendant, Chai Vang of St. Paul, Minn., is a murderer, he'll be tried, convicted and imprisoned - because he's a criminal, not because he's Hmong. Trying to make it into a racial incident is despicable.
Jeffrey Dahmer was white. And he was one of the worst serial killers in the nation's history. He also was a Wisconsin resident. Do white men in Wisconsin have a tendency to become serial killers? Of course not. That's an outrageous statement.

Chai Vang is Hmong. And he's likely to be charged with at least six deaths. Do Hmong men from Minnesota have a tendency to be multiple killers? Of course not. That's an equally outrageous statement.

It's sad that there are some people such as the e-mailer who cannot understand that a report of killings during deer season on one page, and a separate story two pages later about people who respect the sport of hunting, aren't contrived to give offense.

The alleged shooter in the slayings, by the way, has been in the United States for about a quarter of a century. He was a father with six children. That makes him more a product of American culture than of his native Laos.

Is there an American propensity toward settling disputes with gunfire?

Do Americans tend to react irrationally?

When they read something they don't like, do they say something like, "THIS IS ONE SUBSCRIBER WHO WILL NOT BE RENEWING HIS SUBSCRIPTION"?

If we were to draw that conclusion, we'd be lowering ourselves to the level of all the racists and bigots who judge people by the color of their skin, and not by what's within.

We won't do that, ever.

We will, however, invite all people of good will to be members of the family of newspaper readers, subscribers and advertisers striving to make our community a more hospitable, welcoming place for people of all races and religions and ethnic groups.

Together, we can do great things.

Torn by discrimination, we will surely fail.

It's your turn.

We invite you to comment about the aftermath of the killings of six deer hunters in northwest Wisconsin. Send your thoughts to: Letters to the Editor, Marshfield News-Herald, 111 W. Third St, Marshfield WI 54449. Limit your letter to 300 words or less or it will be returned to you. Include your name, address and a telephone number we can call for verification.