Facebook. I must admit that I enjoy it as equally as I loathe it. Consequently, if it didn’t exist tomorrow, I wouldn’t care. There are two reasons why I continue to play with this fading fad in social media: (1) I have a strict 100-friend rule. I accept only up to that number of fellow high school and college alums, family members, friends, and workmates, and (2) I hide most of their comments and postings about FarmVille and other such nonsense from my view, as I assume they do mine. After Osama bin Laden was killed, one of my “friends” circulated a picture you might have seen. It showed the Statue of Liberty (I presume the one in New York, New York, and not the one at New York–New York) holding the head of Osama dripping huge splotches of Photoshop R: 255. Perhaps it was because I was sitting in a waiting room of a doctor’s office and in a feisty mood that I commented using my iPhone, “I do hope that most Americans understand that this country stands for more than this crude example of bloodlust. Yes, it is a good thing that Osama can no longer make threatening videos, but to use the Statue of Liberty this way belittles us all.” Needless to report, my view was not appreciated. The response was the modern version of the 1960s’ anti–anti–Vietnam War message: “America: Love It or Leave It”; “If you don’t like what you see, change the channel.”

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I usually trade between two hats that I wear for the university that astoundingly gives me the time to work on outside projects that I love, like this editorship. One is a sweat-stained baseball cap when I teach my large-lecture visual communication/media literacy class. The other hat is an Irish tweed I bought several years ago from a specialty hat store in downtown Cincinnati. I wear it backward, of course, when I teach mass media ethics. Every year I teach three sections of undergraduate students and, on occasion, one graduate seminar. For the kids, I use Media Ethics: Issues and Cases by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins, now in its seventh edition. For the grown-ups, Journalism Ethics: A Philosophical Approach, edited by the ever-thoughtful Christopher Meyers (even though the title is much too close to my first published book, Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach—which was admittedly a clever way to try to cash in on Ken Kobré’s success with Photojournalism: The Professionals’ Approach) and A Very Bad Wizard: Morality Behind the Curtain, a collection of conversations with philosophers by Tamler Sommers.

Throughout history there has been a vigorous debate concerned with the nature of morals and ethical behavior among philosophers, social critics, educators, and reformers, among others. Are morals and ethics innate within the gene pool that gets passed along to each subsequent generation? Are we instead created and guided by a spiritual or supernatural force? Or do experiences and persons teach us during our lives, regardless of how short or long we live? If this issue interests you, you might like to read The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values by Sam Harris. Another book I just started is The Price of Altruism: George Price and the Search for the Origins of Kindness by Oren Solomon Harman. Is kindness a development of evolutionary progress in which it helps the fittest survive, or should it be based on an end of competition, where a species learns to work together as a group? The book is an award-winning biography of mathematical genius George Price who sacrificed his life to try to answer the question. Finally, listen to this rebroadcast of a Radiolab program, “The Good Show," which discusses self-sacrifice, altruism, and self-interest: http://www.radiolab.org/2010/dec/14/.

In Spalding Gray’s brilliant 1985 work Swimming to Cambodia, he describes a “war” between his neighbors over the volume of their stereo, and asks, “How do we begin to approach the so-called Cold War (or Now-Heating-Up War) between Russia and America if I can’t even begin to resolve the Hot War down on Northmoor and Greenwich in lower Manhattan?”

Perhaps a little altruism, a little kindness, a little of Rawls’s veil of ignorance will help Democrats, Republicans, and Tea Partiers, assassination lovers and loathers just get along on Facebook without having to hide one another’s comments.