The response to the issue of Bentonia being forced to remove the crosses from the water tower has been eye-opening.

I expected a passionate reaction, particulary from Yazoo County residents, but the many vulgar and abusive comments from people with no Yazoo connection was shocking.

After our front page story on the issue and editorial in Saturday's edition, we published a photo of the cross along with an opportunity for supporters to have their name added to a petition protesting the ACLU's involvement in the matter that will be published in The Herald. When I started writing this column 504 people had joined the list.

I also expected, and welcomed, some debate from the other side of the issue, but I never imagined what was to come. I was out of town over the weekend to attend my wife's grandmother's funeral and disconnected from the Internet world. Battling insomnia in our hotel room, I decided to check The Herald's facebook page and see if anyone else had commented on the issue.

The first thing I saw was a private message from a reader alerting me that offensive comments had been posted. Further investigation revealed things worse than I had imagined.

Apparently an organized effort was taking place because all of a sudden there were a number of new visitors from out of state who were aggressively attacking anyone who defended the crosses in Bentonia.

We welcome reasonable debates, and there was a lot of that taking place. But there were also a lot of people who joined just to make vulgar comments about Christianity, negative and ignorant comments about Mississippi in general or abusive comments toward those supporting the crosses in Bentonia.

They clearly delighted in offending Christians, and the only thing they really contributed to the discussion was that it gave Christians a real look at some of the people they're up against today. I spent the next hour deleting comments that were totally inappropriate.

They were also uninformed.

Had they bothered to read the actual news story, they would know that the town of Bentonia has no intention of taking the issue to court and hopes that the crosses can be displayed on private

property. Bentonia Police Chief Edward Ferrell was quoted in the story saying that the town would comply with the law.

In addition to the news coverage, we also gave our opinion on the subject on the editorial page. The response on our facebook page suggests that many of our readers share our point of view, and we were happy to give them a forum to make their stance known.

Those who disagree with us are always welcome to join the debate, but those who merely logged on to make vulgar jokes and hurl insults from afar really should consider finding something productive to do with their lives.

Since they’re so fiercely dedicated to separation of church and state, I suggest ridding themselves of all that offensive currency that states “In God We Trust” on every bill. I’ll be glad to dispose of it for them.