

The importance of being important

by Dick West

United Press International

WASHINGTON — Many newspaper readers profess themselves baffled, if not completely bewildered, by Central America's sudden appearance in a prominent role on the world stage.

Mention the turn of events in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador or Nicaragua and eyes glaze over, jaws go slack and there is a nervous shuffling of feet.

Probably the surest way to go about understanding Central America is to consider where we would be without it.

For one thing, as you can tell from a glance at a world map, the North American continent would end just south of the Yucatan Peninsula.

Without Central America, the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea would run together, rendering arguments over the Panama Canal moot. Nor would there be a Pan-American highway, unless somebody built a hell of a long bridge. For the most part, anyone going to South America would go by boat.

Had there been no Central America, Columbus might have sailed straight on to India, and there would have been no need for ships to navigate around Cape Horn.

All that poking around in search of a Northwest Passage would have been unnecessary, thus preventing a great deal of embarrassment to such explorers as Jacques Carter, who once tried to reach China by sailing up the St. Lawrence River. Geographically, Central America is

considered a part of the North American land mass. For years, however, there was a tendency in this country to regard Central America as a part of the United Fruit Co.

The main reason for the latter association lay in the fact that Central America was largely composed of Banana Republics, so-called because they produced 13 percent of the world's bananas.

Now, as we know, the banana connection is far less prevalent. To a considerable extent, the top bananas in Central America have been replaced by juntas, which are less nourishing and far more difficult to peel.

Another notion harbored by many Yankees is that Central America is backward. That is ridiculous.

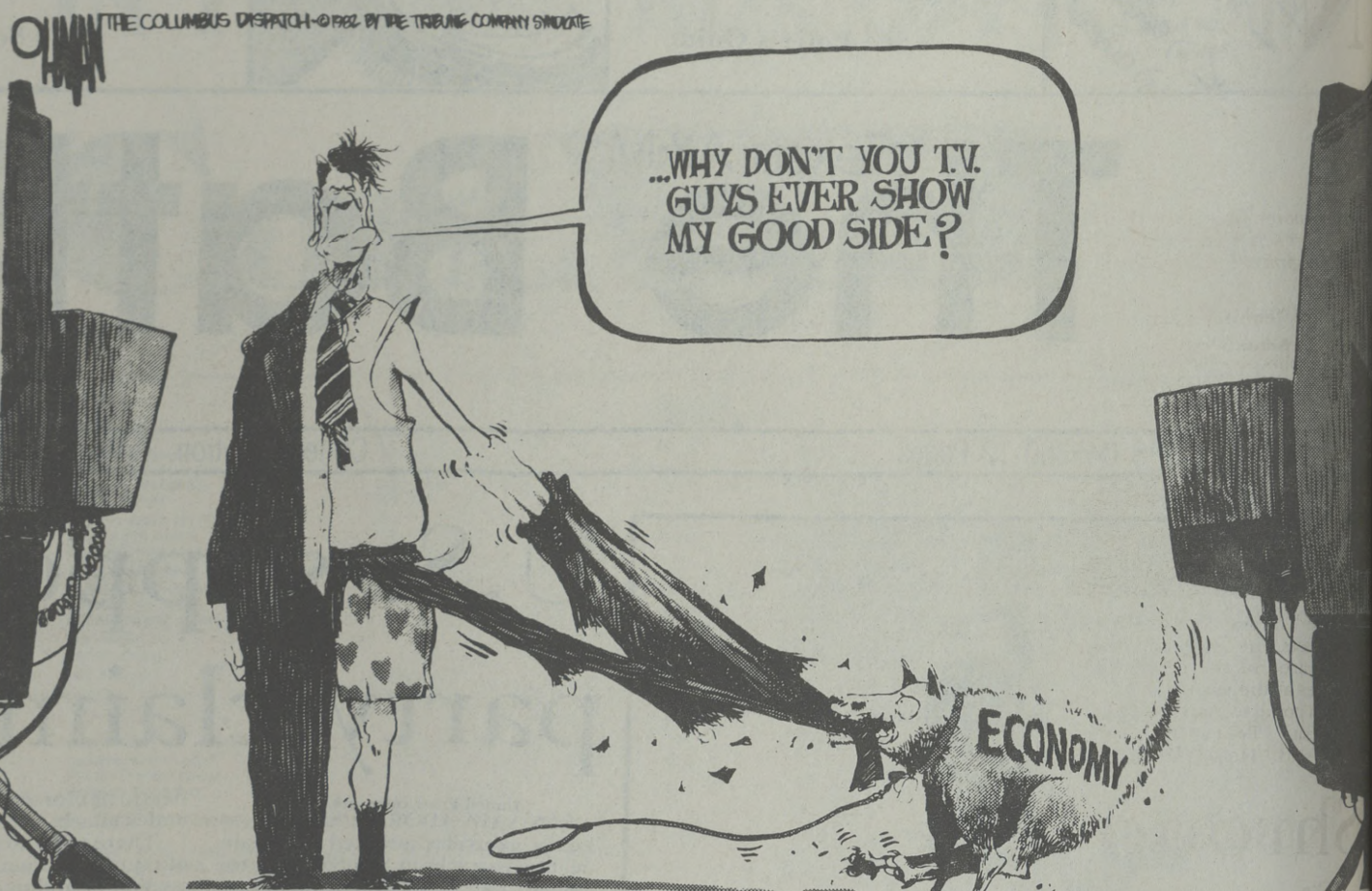
Central America backward is Acirema Lartec.

Indeed, the Maya and Toltec Indians, who were the original inhabitants of the region, thought of themselves as rather progressive, and built many majestic ruins to demonstrate their advancement.

As you can see, Central America has long played a prominent part in shaping the history of the New World. So it is important that we pay attention to what is currently happening there.

Last week, in Guatemala, one general overthrew another general, the stated purpose of the coup being to strengthen the fragile threads of democracy there.

Once you get the motivations firmly fixed in your mind, you are well on your way to comprehending the occurrences.



ERA fight is training ground for powerful political groups

by Clay F. Richards

United Press International

WASHINGTON — If the Equal Rights Amendment dies June 30 without the approval of the three more states needed for ratification, it could unleash one of the strongest forces in the nation today.

For a decade since Congress first approved ERA, the women's movement had dedicated much of its effort and millions of dollars to the ratification drive. Supporters of ERA say if it is not ratified by the deadline, they will start all over again, but the political clout of women will be felt in a much different and wider reaching way the second time around.

The decade-long battle for ERA has been a political training ground for women. Even if they lose the war, they have learned well how to play the game.

The troops in the National Organization for Women and sister groups who have fought for ERA now know how to lobby legislators, run candidates for office, hold news conferences, raise money, stage rallies, and effectively use both the news media and paid advertising to get their message across.

But in the coming decade these skills will not be used toward a single goal such as ERA ratification, but the whole wide range of issues facing women ranging from family, crime, jobs and related economic issues. Most importantly it will be used both to elect women to office and to

defeat those candidates who oppose their goals.

Women's groups will take an active role in the process of influencing political campaigns alongside long established groups ranging from the American Civil Liberties Union to the National Conservative Political Action Committee.

But there will be one major difference: Women represent 51 percent of the American population.

They pose a serious threat in the voting booth to President Reagan and his hopes of keeping the nation on a conservative course for the next six years.

Recent polls show women uniting against Reagan and his brand of Republicanism on three general grounds:

— The perception the administration is anti-woman based on its opposition to ERA, its stand against freedom of choice in abortions and the low number of women appointed to top posts in government.

— A combination of the administration's stand and world and national developments relating to the so called "violence issues" ranging from crime to war that women as mothers and child raisers are more sensitive to.

— The economic issues. In a declining economy, women who were among the last to enter the work force are among the first unemployed, and they make on a

national average 59 cents for every \$ made by a male employee.

Republicans are so worried about the women's vote in the 1982 congressional elections that their campaign managers urge candidates to play up their identification with women's groups wherever possible.

Polls bear out the GOP concern. One shows that among working women, 55 percent identify with the Democratic Party and 30 percent with the GOP.

Another poll by the Los Angeles Times and Cable News Network last week concluded: "In fact, women make up essentially the whole difference between the parties in preference for the upcoming congressional elections."

Most national polls show women's approval rating for Reagan — a margin large enough to turn around a presidential election.

When ERA was initially approved by Congress a year ago, it sailed through the first 25 or so state legislatures and appeared on its way to ratification with very little effort.

Had it done so, it would have become part of the Constitution without much notice. But its failure so far — and likely death in June — may well have created something much more powerful in the long run.

Slouch By Jim Earle



"It's unique, but I think it needs more testing before your umbrella design is introduced to the market."

How to tell 'A' from 'B' students

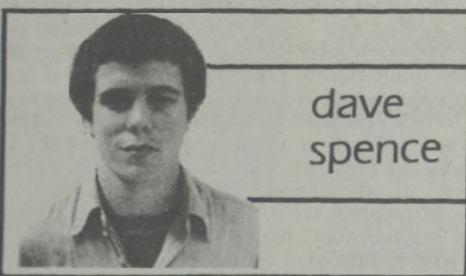
When mid-terms came this semester and I was blessed with a slip of computer paper that told me just how smart I was in easy Arabic numerals (accurate to three decimal points), I concluded that we place far too little emphasis on grades. Also, I realized that here is an effective rating system that we have applied only to education. Why haven't we applied it to many more aspects of our lives? Think how much confusion could be obviated if with just a glance at a slip of computer paper, we could completely size up a perfect stranger. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

First off, there is a real need to revise the grade point system. I think we have the right idea with the A-B-C-D-F (four-point) method, but it is hardly specific enough. Why, anybody will admit there's an obvious difference between an 83 percent student and an 86 percent student. Yet on a slip of computer paper, they appear the same with a B grade.

A scale of ten letters should be sufficient, I'd think — A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J. An A would indicate a perfect 100 percent. A B would indicate 95 percent. A C, 90 percent. All the way down to a J which would indicate that a pupil is competent only 55 percent of the time.

And from now on, none of this "rounding up" nonsense. The gall of some students to think that with an 89.9 they deserve a 90!

Another problem area is the manner in which grades are distributed. Under current policy, in addition to being sent to the student who earned the grades, slips of computer paper are often only distributed to the student's family. The student knows what grades he or she is



making. The family (usually) knows what grades the student is making. So what is the sense of wasting valuable slips of computer paper?

The idea I'm getting at is to make the grades public. It would make a super bimestrial supplement to The Battalion. Most kids on campus never have the thrill of seeing their name in print. (I, of course, always see mine, so there would be no need to publish my grades.)

My last suggestion (and these are only suggestions) is to broaden the scope of grading. We all know the logic of evaluat-

ing our achievements in college with a letter from the alphabet, but likewise could we not evaluate all sorts of aspects of ourselves?

For example, I could randomly pick a person at Texas A&M and go straight to The Battalion grade supplement and immediately know everything about that person. Anybody. Let's see ... Buzz Bright. There's a name from the hat. I'd turn to "Administrators," "Section B" for Bright, the "Integrity" column, and quickly find what kind of integrity this stranger has with an A, B, or C. (Or an H, I, or J.)

Any and all personal traits could be reckoned — handsomeness, taste in clothing, social ease, table manners — all the important factors. Grades could be determined with that most accurate of evaluations, the one-hour, 100-question, multiple-choice exam.

I don't believe the grading system is a perfect way to judge a person's worth by society's standards, but it is a start.

The Battalion

USPS 045 360

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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Communications.

Questions or comments concerning any editorial matter should be directed to the editor.

Letters Policy

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length, and are subject to being cut if they are longer. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must also be signed, show the address and phone number of the writer.

Columns and guest editorials are also welcome, and are not subject to the same length constraints as letters. Address all inquiries and correspondence to: Editor, The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843, or phone (713) 845-2611.

The Battalion is published daily during Texas A&M's fall and spring semesters, except for holiday and examination periods. Mail subscriptions are \$16.75 per semester, \$33.25 per school year and \$35 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request.

Our address: The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.

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