

Opinion

Schools torn between religious favoritism, sterility

The Pilgrims came to America because they were bored with Europe and wanted to get away from the hustle and bustle of 15th-century life. Religion, according to textbooks currently being opposed by fundamentalists in Alabama, had nothing to do with it. In the effort to purge the classroom of religious favoritism, education has suffered from total theological abstinence.



Loren Steffy

Such groups as the People for the American Way claim that making texts that cater to various religious beliefs violates separation of church and state. The PAW even has admitted that the texts are bad, but it defends inadequate books because it fears religious encroachment into schools.

On the heels of the Alabama case comes another ruling granting fundamentalists in Tennessee the right to have their children sheltered from reading books they say conflict with their religious convictions. For them, religion and education must be united.

Both are wrong, and both are right — to some degree.

We should worry about one or even several religions dominating the classroom. But we should be

equally concerned with religious sterility in education.

The battle over religion and education is rooted in fear. For one group, the fear is that different theological ideas will lead to damnation. For the other, the fear is that the slightest mention of religion, even in a historical context, will bring the temple of religious separation crashing down on our heads. Both fear the mention of different religions in classroom for different reasons. Both take their fears to an extreme.

The fundamentalists, of course, put their arguments in religious terms — the texts are saturated with "secular humanism." In Tennessee, the court ruled in favor of parents, slamming shut the door to knowledge for the children. The parents are relieved; the children are deprived.

Among the books labeled unfit were "The Diary of Anne Frank" and L. Frank Baum's "The Wizard of Oz." Frank was a Jew and Baum a populist — neither were secular humanists.

The fundamentalists found that Frank's diary was objectionable because it tolerates all religions. If the fundamentalists are going to deem this material "unacceptable," they also must find it difficult to read the teachings of another famous Jew who tolerated other religions — this one from Nazareth.

"The Wizard of Oz," they say, teaches children that such traits as courage, compassion and intelli-

gence are developed personally rather than granted by God, and it depicts witches as good.

Baum wrote the story for his daughter, Dorothy, and in the introduction claims the story is pure fantasy. The group in Tennessee, however, doesn't believe children should exercise their imagination. Vicki Frost, one of the parents leading the fight, was quoted as saying that children's imagination needs to be bounded.

Given this outlook, the attack of Baum's work is understandable, but it shows a lack of examination of the work in question. As is frequently the case with blacklisted books, the protesters didn't bother to scratch below the surface. The lion, scarecrow and tin woodsman didn't "develop" their courage, intelligence and compassion on their own. They had these "God-given" traits all along and just didn't realize it.

By demanding their children be allowed to abstain from such reading, the fundamentalists have exercised their right to religious freedom. But they also are turning their children's education into an academic closet where the light of knowledge is so heavily filtered almost none gets through.

Part of education is uncovering different ideas and deciding which ones to believe. Often such knowledge makes existing beliefs stronger. Sometimes it doesn't. But if these ideas are never known the learning process becomes one-dimensional. Education lapses into indoctrination.

But if these fundamentalists are threatening educational balance by trying to bring Christianity to the head of the class, groups such as the PAW are doing equal damage to educational integrity, trying to make the instruction oblivious to the role of religion in history and contemporary society. Students are getting the events, but not the underlying beliefs and philosophies that caused them.

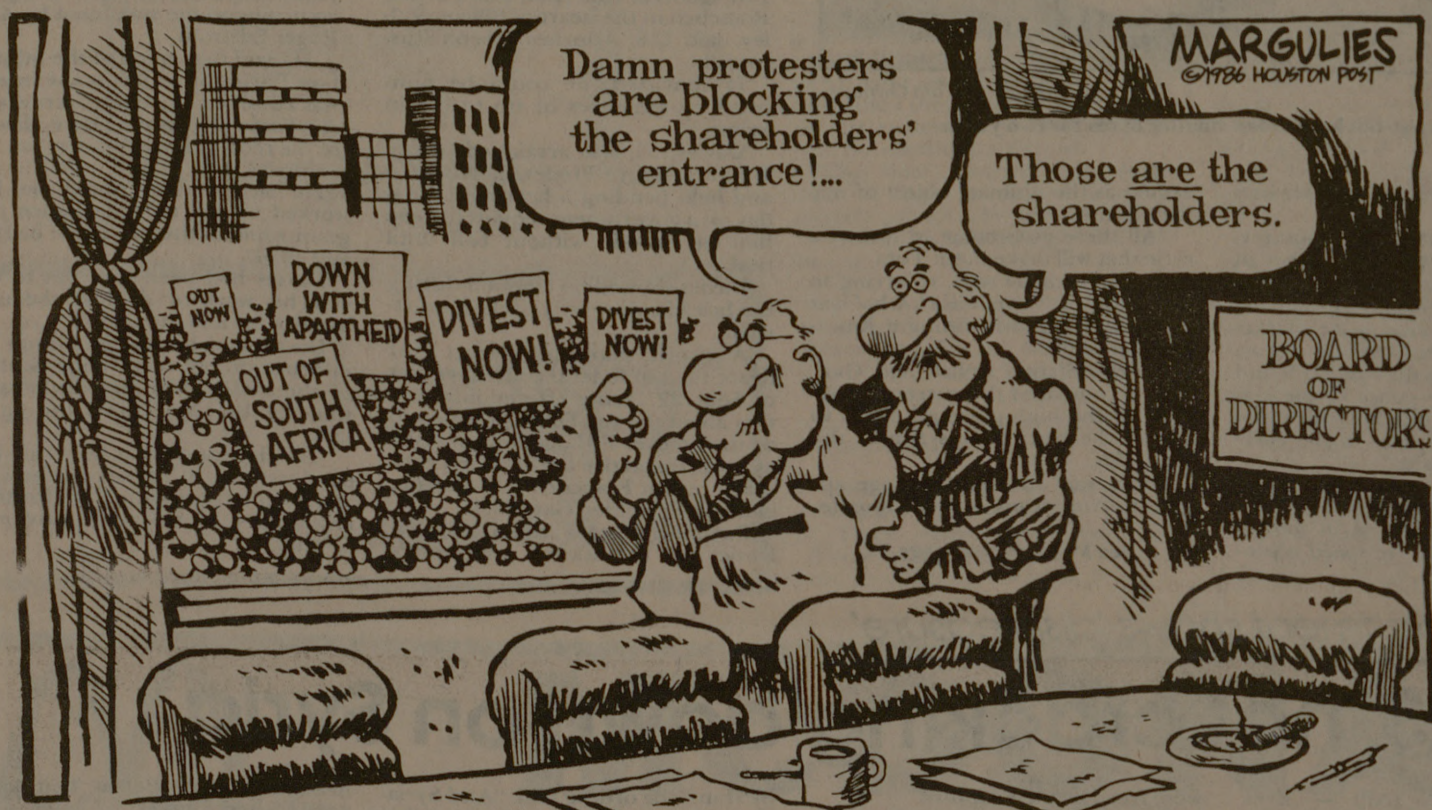
To ignore these roles is to lock a child in the academic closet as tightly as the fundamentalists want only one view to get through.

We love our religious freedom, but, in the name of fairness, we also want to keep it separate from our public schools. We shouldn't be afraid to mention religion in the classroom — it plays an important role in our history. What we need to be afraid of is advocating one religious viewpoint. After that's why the Pilgrims came here in the first place.

Not explaining the role of religion in the Massachusetts colony makes it superficial and incomplete. Secular humanism and separation of church and state don't enter into it. It's just incomplete teaching.

The Pilgrims were deeply religious Christians fleeing persecution. They worked hard, and they prayed hard. Through determination they created a foothold from which grew the United States. That's history, pure and simple. That was the good, now was it?

Loren Steffy is a senior journalism major and Opinion Page editor for The Battalion.



Fighting the wave of a silent invasion

Our roach problem is really getting out of hand. I found out late last night. About midnight I went downstairs — barefooted, defenseless — one last time for a drink just before bed.

Jeff L. Brady
Guest Columnist

I went into the kitchen. I should have known better. Kitchens were designed for cockroaches.

The lights had been off for more than an hour downstairs. A creepy stillness hung in the air. I knew they had invaded. Someone left a stale bag of Cheetos open near the toaster — like bloody tuna in shark-infested waters. I heard the familiar rustlings of hard, slick, spiney legs scuttling across formica. Flipping the lights on, I caught four of them hoisting a bowl of chicken salad over the counter's edge and behind our oven.

"Ah-ha!" I roared. They froze — antennae waving up and down, testing the air — startled by the light. And made their dash. They

shot for the kitchen's four corners, one in each direction. The salad bowl skidded across the counter and into the Mr. Coffee.

I reacted quickly, slamming a bag of Oreos into the nearest corner of the counter. I squished one of them into oblivion and nailed a second against the refrigerator with a well-aimed banana.

Ker splat. The other two slipped into cracks and were gone — into the bowels of inner-earth to eat, breed and plot future raids on the warm-blooded world above them.

My heart pounding like a jackhammer, I stood there panting and came to the conclusion that ours is no ordinary roach problem. For ours are no ordinary roaches.

The Encyclopedia Britannica tells us there are more than 3,500 species infesting God's green earth. Only a few, however, have become pests — nibbling Fig Newtons, lurking behind bath towels, scuttling from shelf to shelf in darkened pantries. The encyclopedia continues that the insect damages more than twice as much material than it consumes and emits a foul, disagreeable odor.

I'll say. Apartment maintenance personnel have fumigated twice and our roaches are thriving. They LIVE for foul odors.

I have a correction for the encyclopedia, however. There are 3,501 species. Ours is a new breed.

Cockroaches are among the most primitive of living, winged bugs — basically unchanged for more than 250 million years.

Why change? Why tamper with perfection? The cockroach is the perfect pest.

They're numerous. We have found six frozen solid in our kitchen trash can, and one in each of our Roach Motel like conventioners at College Station Hilton.

They're quick. Flyswatters are too strategically throughout the apartment for easy access and we still sleep peacefully tops more than the roaches.

They're effective. All a bug has to do is whisk across a loaf of bread or a finished sandwich to render it inedible. Yeesh. Who wants to down a sandwich with roach tracks all over it? Not Bucko.

But now the problem has gotten out of hand. Consider:

- Are you trying to enter the late at night with a sledgehammer and electric cow pats and butane torch?



- Have you abandoned Tupperware and glass cast-iron containers for your food?

- Do you find tiny poker chips and empty liquor bottles outside your apartment after the insects have partied rowdy nights?

- Are you missing any pets? Ones that might have made easy night snacks? That is, hamsters, goldfish, kittens, german shepherds, Gertrudis cattle....

- Do your roommates keep finishing off half-empty boxes of Minute Rice, Sugar Flakes and Vanitasers?

Then, my friend, you, too, are victimized.

I say it's time to take action. Arms, take cover and take it to the Drastic situations call for drastic answers. Enough is enough.

Tonight I'm creeping downstairs about 2 a.m. — barefooted, in the dark — shotgun in hand.

Jeff L. Brady is a senior journalism major

Moving on to middle-age-crazy

I'm 40. It happened sometime in the wee hours of the night. Age should come at night, the sneaking rat.



Lewis Grizzard

So what is the first thing a person should do when he or she reaches the milestone of 40?

Take stock, I suppose. Forty begins life's stretch run, and it is a good opportunity to look around and see where you stand.

I still have my hair while a number of

my friends are bald or are balding. There are a few gray strands atop my head, but not that many for a man who has lived through three marriages, two heart surgeries and one trip to Russia.

Speaking of marriage, I often wonder if I ever will do it again. There are times I want to, but I've been advised against it.

"Don't get married again," somebody warned me, "Just go out every three years and find a woman you don't like and give her a house. It's simpler that way."

I have a good dog and he loves me. He sleeps on the floor beside my bed, he growls at strangers and he doesn't go to the bathroom in my house. What more can you ask of a dog?

I have good friends. They don't seem that impressed when I appear on the Carson show. You need friends like that. They keep you from taking yourself so seriously.

My health, I suppose, is only so-so. I've had two heart surgeries, as result of the fact that 40 years ago I was born, through no fault of my own, with a leaky aortic valve.

Modern medicine can now repair leaky valves, but just how long that repair will last is questionable. A pig's valve was implanted in me, and how many 35-year-old pigs do you know?

If I live long enough, I likely will have to undergo a third heart surgery. I suppose I could take it, but this whole affair really has been tough on the pig population.

I like my job. I always wanted to be a writer and now I am one, although I still dangle a participate every now and then. But I never was much of one for detail.

I've had some great moments. There was the day I saw my first book in the window of a bookstore. There was a time I heard Willie Nelson live and in person in the backyard of the White House.

And I was there when Georgia beat Notre Dame in the Sugar Bowl for the National Championship in 1980, and once I saw my name on the marquee of the only motel in Guyton, Okla.

The bad times include the day my daddy died, getting left by a bus in a Chicago snowstorm, a case of salmonella food poisoning, missing a number of good women, having my stepfather make me eat my English peas and four-putting No. 13 at Augusta National after getting on the green in regulation.

But I've seen California, New York City, Paris, Rome and the Kentucky Derby. I have shaken hands with two presidents, sung on stage with the Gatlin Brothers, drank bourbon with Bear Bryant, and once I kissed a sorority girl from an unnamed Southeastern Conference school when I was much too old to be doing such a thing.

Yeah, I did all that, and I've still got middle-age-crazy to look forward to. Wahoo.

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Mail Call

Living Aggie Spirit

EDITOR:

I was walking with four friends from Skaggs Alpha-Beta to our residence halls, in the rain, with arms loaded. If anyone has ever made this perilous journey, they know of the complications involved. A kind-hearted lady pulled to the curb and offered us a ride. She didn't know who we were or where we were going and she didn't mind that we were wet. She simply wanted to help.

Ruth Bostic didn't have to stop and help us. We would have made it without her. But the fact remains, she did. She displayed the Twelfth Man spirit — the willingness to help. So if you know her, give her a hug and tell her how proud you are of her. If you don't know her, try and meet her. She's a true lady — a humanitarian living out the spirit of Aggie land.

Rusty Fox '90
Accompanied by four signatures

Hurting the home team

EDITOR:

Why do we die-hard Aggie football fans insist on hurting our team? Why do we insist on doing yells while our offensive team is on the field? Why must the band play while the offense is trying to hear Kevin Murray? I think we should save our Aggie enthusiasm and voice it while the other team has the ball. There are plenty of opportunities to express our zeal for our outstanding offense, but let's wait and use it to our advantage.

Kelly Mooney '90

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