

Opinion

The Battalion

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Absence of balance

Memorial Student Center's Political Forum is bringing "A Panorama of Republican Perspectives on the State of Texas" to Texas A&M Monday afternoon. We can only hope this panorama doesn't turn into a one-sided political rally the day before elections.

Scheduled to appear are Vice President George Bush, Sen. Phil Gramm, Republican gubernatorial candidate Bill Clements and Rep. Joe Barton from Ennis. No Democrats are on the panel, although Political Forum did try to get Gov. Mark White to join the ranks.

Although the program is a means of getting different views about the state, this partisan political perspective makes an organization that has prided itself on its non-partisan stance appear biased.

Political Forum's effort is not in question — it is the outcome of those efforts that creates a problem. Stacking the panel with Republicans — even unintentionally — doesn't give voters an accurate "panorama" of all perspectives. (Small wonder White didn't trail along.)

Although the speakers are to address specific topics and avoid endorsing any candidate or party, their mere presence this close to election promotes the Republican Party. Divorcing these leaders' views about the state from their political affiliation will be difficult, especially since politics in the '80s is largely cosmetic.

This is one case where the appearance of the presentation is as important — if not more important — than its content. Unfortunately, the appearance suggests all-out Republican hype.

By sponsoring such a program before elections without any opposing views, Political Forum has tainted its non-partisan image, perhaps endangering its credibility. The committee should concentrate on presenting balanced programs, and let the politicians politick on their own.

Witch hunt 'solutions' not a cure for AIDS

Since I visited Salem, Mass., this summer, I've thought often about how fear can control our lives, about how we dread most of the things we can't control, about how love for life makes us shun those who have the remotest chance of securing our deaths.



Cathie Anderson

I still can hear the voices of the recorded lecture at the Witch Museum in that old New England city.

"Witch! Witch!" they shrieked in the eerie light of the place, which once served as home to a holier spirit.

The building now functions as a museum where tourists or townfolk can learn about the intricacies of the witch-hunt hysteria — a hysteria that, in 1692, took the lives of about 20 inhabitants of Salem.

Historians believe the fanaticism in Salem began after a young girl was said to be possessed by the devil. Apparently the child had fever and seizures for which the doctor could find no cure. The blame fell upon a black slave from the Caribbean who professed to be well-versed in black magic.

Although the slave worked in a household other than this child's, she often told tales to young girls who visited her.

After the first child fell ill, other girls began to act strangely, and soon the townspeople blamed the slave woman for the girls' insanity. The children testified at the trial of the old slave. They writhed on the floor and spoke gibberish, all the while saying the slave was causing their distress. The slave was found guilty. She was not executed but was imprisoned.

And when others tried to convince the town that the girls were playing pranks, the children said they were witches or warlocks. (Often, witchcraft was an expedient means of imprisoning people whom you disagreed with or wanted out of the way for some other reason.)

The mass hysteria became so preva-

lent that convictions and executions became a common occurrence. Under the Spanish Inquisition, as many as 100 people were burned for practicing witchcraft in one day.

Although I know about the effects of such blind fear (The atrocities committed at Auschwitz and other World War II concentration camps cannot be forgotten.), I'm always amazed that these things keep happening, that few people seem to realize such persecution when it's happening and that we have to wait — sometimes several years, sometimes forever — before the injustices that were perpetrated can be righted.

Years after the imprisonment of the reputed witches and warlocks in Salem, they were released. Some had died, and others were deprived of seeing their children or other family members for years. And the people who were executed for the children's pranks and the unreasonable fear of adults could never be recompensated.

Unfortunately, the phrase "witch hunt" comes to me more often now that I've come to associate it with another phrase that's frequently in the media. That phrase is acquired immune deficiency syndrome or its acronym, AIDS.

This deadly disease is panicking people throughout the United States, and many Americans have persecuted and shunned sufferers of the disease rather than try to help them.

The National Academy of Sciences on Wednesday urged the federal government to create a National Commission on AIDS to study the disease, and the distinguished academy says the 1986 research funding should be doubled to about \$1 billion by 1990. The group says this funding should not be redirected from other research efforts but should be newly appropriated funds.

Such funding, such understanding is needed in the battle against AIDS. We will not conquer this disease by imitating the people of Salem.

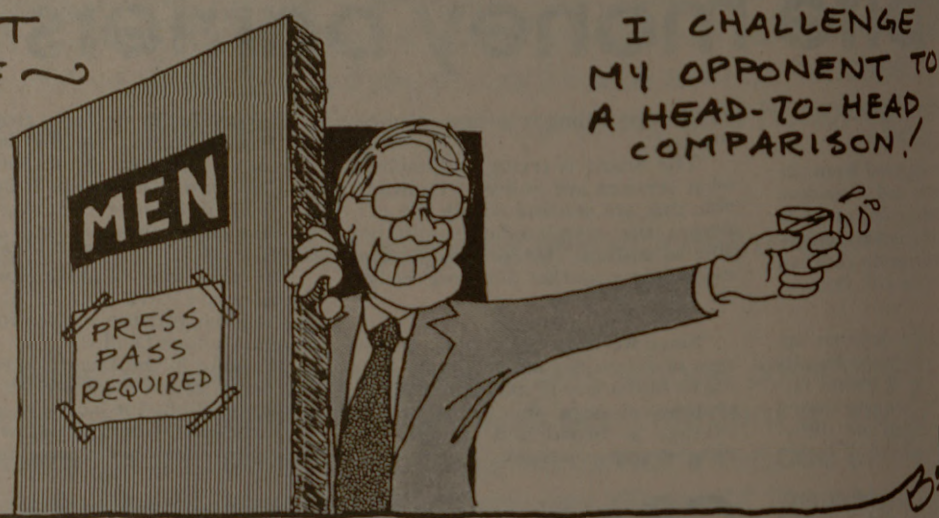
Cathie Anderson is a senior journalism major and editor for The Battalion.

CORRECTION — In last Friday's column, I said Kirk Whalum would be appearing at Texas A&M Nov. 7. Although Whalum initially had been approved for this date, the committee changed the date to Nov. 13.

IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS, POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS WERE CONDUCTED WITH TASTE AND DIGNITY...



BUT NOT ANYMORE ~



Immigrants ultimately enrich, not destroy English language

My grandmother, an immigrant from Poland, spoke hardly a word of English and almost no Polish. Yiddish was her language and for her it was sufficient. She used it in conversation with her family and friends, listened to the Yiddish-language radio and would have read the Yiddish press if she could. As I like to say, she was illiterate in three languages.



Richard Cohen

My grandmother's daughter, my mother, was also an immigrant from Poland. She speaks both Yiddish and English, the latter without any accent whatsoever. And her son — that's me — speaks no Yiddish, understands just a bit and makes his living writing in English. As for my son, he knows a few choice Yiddish words. His second language, at least the one he studies in school, is Spanish. His Espanol is pretty good.

I have gone through the recent linguistic history of my family for a reason. There is something of a panic in this country about the fate of English. We are told the survival of the language is at stake and that, in certain parts of the country, the language of both William Shakespeare and Rodney Dangerfield is endangered: it don't get no respect.

California soon will decide the fate of Proposition 63, which would make English the official state language (what about Valleyspeak?), possibly gagging

with a spoon such practices as bilingual ballots where they are not required by federal law. Six other states have passed similar although less consequential laws, offending non-English speakers, but accomplishing little else.

My own unexceptional family history suggests that these laws are, to quote either Shakespeare or Dangerfield, much ado about nothing. The Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe settled in neighborhoods where it was possible to thrive without speaking a word of English. The community was so linguistically impenetrable that Henry James, slumming on New York's Lower East Side, observed of the language he heard, "Whatever we shall know it for... we shall not know it for English." A generation later, the children of these people were winning Pulitzer Prizes for their writings in English, and even grandmother was not unaffected. When she was stumped at checkers, she would pronounce herself "fa-stumped" and quit the game.

More recent immigrants will follow the same pattern. Indeed, the forces of assimilation and acculturation are more numerous today than ever before. Radio, television and movies — unknown or unavailable to the immigrants of yesterday — are both attractive and ubiquitous. The children of today's immigrants may speak Spanish or Korean at home, but they probably will speak English on the street. Inescapably, it is the language of the larger culture.

Indeed, it would surprise many of the world's peoples to learn that Americans fear for the future of English. In many countries, English has become a second language. The one-two punch of British colonialism and American predomi-

nance in both commerce and popular culture has made English almost a universal language — the one a Russian pilot uses when speaking to a French traffic controller. So pervasive is English, so innovative and so vigorous throughout the world, language purists decry its inroads into their own language — for instance, *le druguier's* French.

Of course, the real issue is not English, but the people who cannot speak it — immigrants. Ironically, today's English speakers probably will enter the language. But language aside, immigrants will wind up enriching our country and these laws, either proposed already on the books, are what they meant to be — an insult and rebuff to them.

Those brave and industrious emigrants to wade the Rio Grande or set off boats from Vietnam are real national assets. America's most valuable natural resource always has been its people — many of them immigrants. They are as finished products, ready to work and brimming with industriousness. The Korean greengrocer, the Vietnamese fisherman or the Hispanic merchant are not threats to our way of life but caricatures of it — a babble of Hispanic Alger characters.

Our language, part John Milton and part Milton Berle, will weather the current immigration wave as it always has — by thriving. We will have new words to play with, new terms and, in the new English speakers who will use the language in new and inventive ways. Given the history of English, to the otherwise is mind-boggling. To get one of those inventive immigrants "fa-stumped."

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Mail Call

Thank you for your support

EDITOR:

I would like to give a BIG Texas Aggie thank you to Coach Jackie Sherrill for his recognition of the fans for their support and enthusiasm at the Texas A&M vs. Baylor football game Oct. 18.

His recognition was shown by waving a Twelfth Man towel to the student section of Kyle Field, which made all my screaming and yelling worthwhile.

I take this time to thank him because no other recognition has been given to the "fans." I realize we didn't win the game ourselves, but we gave the team so much support during that game, and to me it kept them going when things were down.

The Bryan/College Station Eagle said nothing about the crowd's enthusiasm, and I am sure that many of the other media didn't either. I hope in the future we will be recognized by other media (thanks, *Battalion*, for your recognition), but if not, that doesn't mean that my support will end!

Janie Pluenneke

PAW's point missed

EDITOR:

As a rule, I read Loren Steffy's opinion column in *The Battalion* with great delight. His work almost invariably is informed, insightful and carefully considered.

Thus I was somewhat surprised to see that he had missed the point of the position that People for the American Way has taken with respect to the treatment of religion in public school textbooks. He suggests that they fear that "the slightest mention of religion, even in a

historical context, will bring the temple of religious separation crashing down on our heads."

As a member of PAW for some years now, and as a regular recipient of their press clips and position papers, I can assure Steffy and his readers that the official position of that organization is anti-censorship, not anti-religion.

The central issue in the current textbook debate is whether religion will be discussed. It is rather whether religious indoctrination will take place at the taxpayer's expense, and whether a narrow band of religious extremists in Tennessee or Alabama or Texas have the right to limit the full access that school children must have to information about a full range of religious viewpoints if they are to be truly educated.

It is Vicki Frost in Tennessee who objects to textbooks that mention religions other than her own and believes that the imaginations of her children must be "bounded" not the People for the American Way. And whereas her opponents have called for an excision of information about the evolutionary hypothesis from school texts, People for the American Way has never called for deletion from those texts the information that some people, in fact, do believe that the world was created in seven days.

People for the American Way does not stand for "theological abstinence," as Steffy suggests, but for the free flow of information regarding religious beliefs and practices of every type.

Larry Hickman
Associate professor of philosophy

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The 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 be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.

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