

Opinion

The Battalion

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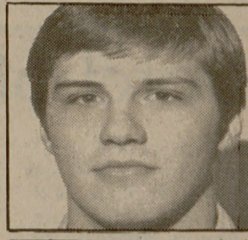
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A school system that teaches students to follow, not lead



Loren Steffy

Thinking scares people. Especially if that thinking leads to learning. Actually the thinking itself isn't as scary as the possibility that students will think for themselves. That's why, in an effort to reform and improve education, we have allowed public schools, and to some extent universities, suffer a severe side-effect — the blanding of the classroom.

To illustrate this point, we need look no farther than A&M Consolidated High School in College Station. Almost a year ago, a petition was circulated protesting the teaching methods of an A&M Consolidated government teacher.

The issue resurfaced in the local school board elections held over the weekend, but the real implication is not political. Who circulated the petition isn't as important as what it said.

The petition claimed "the general atmosphere of (the teacher's) class is that of criticism and dissatisfaction with our governmental institutions and our free-enterprise system." It also claimed the teacher allowed his personal political convictions to bias classroom presentations.

The petition didn't include the other side of the story. During my high school years, I had only a handful of teachers who cared. For the most part, teachers

came in, spewed forth their lectures, assigned homework that was more busy-work than instructional, gave tests and assessed grades. (Who says high school is different from college?) I'm told I received a quality education, that CSISD is one of the better districts in the area. I never would have known if somebody hadn't told me.

One of the few teachers who did care, who put forth the extra effort to actually teach us something, was the government teacher mentioned in the petition. At first, his class started out the same way as all the others: read the text, written by an insomniac in search of a cure, talk about the book in class, answer questions for homework, take a test.

But a couple of weeks into the class, things changed. We had mock trials, mock elections, a trip to Washington and guest speakers. We had what's called hands-on learning. We experienced, we learned, we applied what we learned and, most importantly, we retained.

The only homework I did during my senior year in high school was assembling my legal briefs for the defense in the mock trial. I spent hours working up notes in my room and collaborating with the other mock defense attorneys. My parents thought I was ill.

But what I learned from that class had a more practical impact as well. My freshman year in college, an English prof took an hour to explain how a voting machine works. I was the only one in the class who already knew, thanks to that government class.

Everyone in the school knew this teacher's political convictions, but everyone looked forward to his class. Not because he filled our heads with thoughts of subversion, but because he made us fill our own heads with thoughts. We had to think for ourselves.

But education today is shifting away from getting students to use their own minds. "Educated" thought is becoming prefabricated.

In Mobile, Ala., textbooks recently were pulled from classrooms because they failed to mention conventional religion. The reason they didn't? Textbook publishers are afraid to mention religion for fear their books will be pulled from classroom shelves.

Students aren't given credit for being able to decide things for themselves. By

the time you're a senior in high school you're developing political affiliations and personal philosophy. It's a time to question authority, not adhere to word and whim.

Lauding the benefits of free enterprise is not enough to truly understand it. Criticisms must be studied as well as the classroom is to transcend the rally mentality and move into the realm of learning. Studying democracy without comparing it to other forms of government gives students a limited perspective of government and ignores concepts of workable international relations.

This is not a value judgment or attempted indoctrination, it is comparative education. But such deviation from traditional rote learning incites fear rather than support. Fear of free thought only a panic away from the Orwellian motto that ignorance is strength.

This fear of thought is not limited to high schools. At the college level, we have Accuracy in Academia to deter students too timid to defend their thoughts.

And students do deserve part of the blame. Maybe some of the reason we're not given credit for our ability to decipher things for ourselves is because we'd rather be complacent than disagree with an instructor.

Students who simply swallow professors and teachers spoon-feed them aren't really learning. If they're away from exploring a new perspective because it might be liberal or conservative, they miss the higher understanding that comes from knowing — although not necessarily agreeing with — different views are coming from.

Finding out what others think and why is not nearly as dangerous as trying what others have to say for fear hearing something you don't agree with.

Sooner or later, though, there will be petitions and classroom monitors to protect us. Sooner or later we're going to be out in what is known on college campuses as "The Real World."

Then we will have to decide how to interpret things for ourselves. There will be glad for classes like that government course I took in high school — because they teach what to think, but because they teach how to think.

Loren Steffy is a journalism graduate and editor for The Battalion.

Acid rain dance

President Reagan's "annual acid rain jig" in Ottawa with Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney came up dry. But that's no surprise — hence the name "annual acid rain jig" coined by a U.S. congressman.

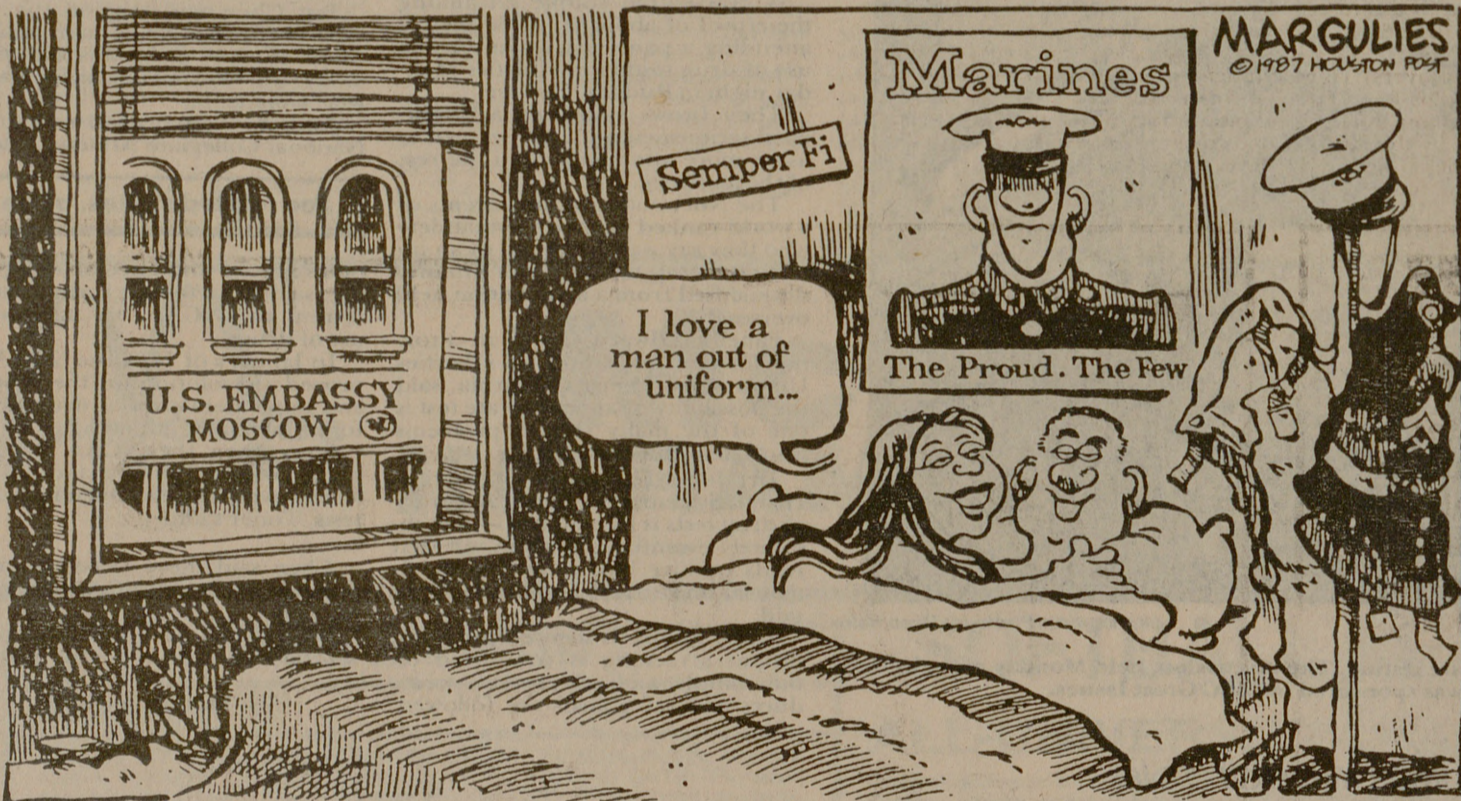
Despite numerous meetings on the subject, the United States and Canada have not been able to reach an agreement about how to stop the problem, which is responsible for the acidification of 14,000 Canadian lakes. As a result of acid rain produced from U.S. coal-burning plants, 14 Nova Scotia rivers are dead — meaning they no longer support wildlife — and 300,000 more Canadian lakes are in danger of becoming acidified, not to mention the historic buildings that literally melt a little more every time it rains in Canada.

Acid rain drifting from the Midwestern United States into Canada also is stunting Canada's forest growth, threatening that nation's largest industry.

So why hasn't anything been done in the United States to stop the selfish practices of our coal-burning businesses?

The answer most probably is that Americans are slow to respond to problems that don't directly affect their daily lives — let alone their country — and the Canadians don't have the means to make the United States develop a social conscience.

It seems the American way is to ignore problems until it's too late to do anything about them. But this is one environmental concern the United States must deal with before it sterilizes natural resources in this country as well.



Once upon a time in Aggieland . . .

Wildcat — Dec. 20, 1920

For several weeks there has been much thought of choosing some animal as an Aggie totem or mascot. Up to date none have been suggested other than "wildcat" and this is the one we are boosting. Colleges and institutions the country over have some animal which represents them and A. and M. has felt this need for many years. That we have had none up to the present serves as no argument, for neither have we had a real college song although it has long been urged that some one write an appropriate one for A. and M. We hope to see this need soon filled. And why not choose our animal totem? We have been called "Aggies" and "Farmers" for forty years, which is all very good. It is not necessary to discard these names. But the animal is needed with these. We suggest and support the "Wildcat." For many years this name has been symbolic of A. and M. in music. Why not in reality. No other animal fits better with the A. and M. temperament. Having talked with numerous students and faculty members on the subject, we have found none to deny that we need such a mascot and that the "Wildcat" is more appropriate than any other. Only one other institution in the United States has this name. This is in the north and refers to entirely different conditions. The "Bat" will gladly publish suggestions of other animals, or approvals of the "Wildcat." Think the matter over. If we are ever to have an animal now is the time to make our selection. Boost the Aggie "Wildcats."

Purifying Athletics — Feb. 5, 1924

It is high time that rumor affecting sportsmanship in Texas colleges be given the lie or definitely established. Too long insidious gossiping has been going the round, discrediting student bodies and alumni of Southern Methodist University and other colleges in Texas, who, of course, want their inter-collegiate teams to win, but never at the expense of violating conference rules regarding "methods" of attracting athletes from the high schools.

These rumors are persistent and continue to gain circulation, if not credence. No less a fairminded man than D. A. Franks, executive councilman of the Ex-Students Association of the University of Texas and editor of that association's publication, the "Alcade," speaking editorially in the December issue of that magazine has fallen a partial prey in these unfounded and perniciously mimical mouthings.

After an able discussion of the situation upon the possible hypothesis that such a condition may exist, Mr. Franks concludes that, "If the charge is untrue, the schools that are accused ought by sufficient evidence prove that they are not guilty, but that they are entirely innocent of any violation of the rules."

For once the Dallas Times Herald feels constrained to differ widely with Mr. Franks . . .

"The burden of proof lies not within the colleges attacked by the malicious and unsponsored reports, but upon those persons who believe that such illegal and unsportsmanlike practices exist . . ." — Dallas Times Herald.

Once upon a time in Aggieland features old columns and editorials that have been printed in The Battalion. The material in the feature is selected by the Opinion Page Editor and are not edited for grammar or style.

Mail Call

Formal invitation

EDITOR:

It is unfortunate, Bob Breene, that you have chosen to ridicule me in some of my strongest suits. As for DNA and genetics, you should have attended our last meeting when the topic of amino acid evolution was discussed and seen to be unfeasible. You could have learned a lot more about protein synthesis and the interplay of gene systems. Furthermore, Breene is for speciation being a basic tenet of evolution, come to our meeting on April 16 to find out what the factual evidence supports.

Frank Lawrence
President, Students for Scientific Creationism

So, you're the scum?

EDITOR:

I am writing in response to the cartoons run in The Battalion March 27 and 30 dealing with the problems of the PTL Club. I find it very sad when we find ourselves preying on the shortcomings of others all in the name of humor. When the news of the PTL Club first came out, I found it very easy to point my finger and say, "What scum!" But what slowly overcame me was a deep feeling of guilt. Who am I to criticize others when realizing the ship of perfection has surely not reached my shores, either? I was the "scum." I say this not to condone the actions of those of the PTL Club. The Bible says in Romans 3:10 that there is none righteous, no, not one. The PTL Club, along with all other Christians do not claim perfection, but only the perfection of God and his son, Jesus Christ.

We all make mistakes, and we all fail, but these shortcomings only make us more aware of our dependency in a greater power which saves us from ourselves and our failures, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through him comes true forgiveness and love, not condemnation in which mankind has become so well practiced.

Sure, some will say, "They're getting what they deserve!" And maybe they are! But who appointed us as imperfect beings to be the mode by which they are prosecuted? This same situation arose in the time of Jesus. The religious leaders brought a woman caught in adultery before Jesus and said that the law said the woman ought to be stoned. Jesus said, "He that is without sin cast the first stone." Needless to say, everyone left.

I would again like to say that I am not trying to justify the actions of the PTL staff, nor did Jesus condone the actions of the woman. But don't you think that if we'd take our eyes off the faults of others and concentrate on the goodness and the love of God that we could do a lot more edifying and a lot less tearing down . . . even if it's in the name of humor.

Brent Steadman '88

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit 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.