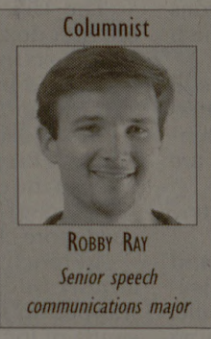


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# How much is that doggy in the window?

## Hollywood film industry adds to animal shelter problems in United States

last winter, Walt Disney blessed the nation with another full-length feature film. This time it was a re-release of one of the company's classics, *101 Dalmatians*. This time the film had a special effect; hundreds of dalmatians were shown up in shelters across the nation. The Disney company should have taken social responsibility for the welfare of these dogs. Last winter, parents and children alike delighted to see the antics of the cute, little puppies. Of course, McDonald's also had to get the act and do the Happy Meal deal with tiny plastic puppies in their boxes. Not satisfied with any of the hand-drawn knock-offs, kids hounded their parents for real dalmatians like those in the film. Faced with the kind of whining only a motivated parent could muster, thousands of parents relented and sought out the real puppies. Several weeks, or perhaps months later when they finally realized that a nuisance an undisciplined dalmatian can be, many of these puppies found themselves on the streets or in animal shelters across the country. The Disney company is partially responsible for the fate of these dogs. They had millions of kids would see the movie and want a cute little puppy. They knew dalmatians are notoriously difficult to train and control. Therefore, Disney officials should have taken steps to prevent this tragedy. This situation is especially hard on small towns. Many of these towns already have difficulty funding animal shelters, which unfortunately tend to be the first things cut when the



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budget gets tight. These minuscule municipalities do not need the additional burden of abandoned puppies. The main problem is dalmatians do not make good pets, especially for families with small children. These families, however, comprise the heart of Disney's target audience. The dogs are energetic and playful, requiring lots of attention and exercise. They also grow to be large animals, sometimes weighing more than 100 pounds, and they are physical and can play rough, enough to knock small children to the ground and hurt them. In addition, dalmatians are prone to health problems such as urinary tract infections and hearing difficulty - one in 12 are deaf. These problems are exacerbated by careless inbreeding by greedy breeders hoping to cash in on the success of the film. Many reputable breeders try to educate prospective buyers and discourage those who are unprepared or might be unwilling to assume the huge responsibility of a dalmatian puppy. Others are more interested in money than the welfare of the dogs or the happiness of the owners. Disney cannot claim ignorance of this phenomenon because after the first release of the animated version of *101 Dalmatians* in 1969, the number of registered dalmatians in the country jumped from 1,785 to 2,291. After its re-release in 1991, the number jumped from 21,603 to 30,225. One could only assume that the trend would occur again. The Disney company should have changed the movie so that people would not have been so inclined to go get a cute little puppy which would

grow into such a huge dog. Granted, 101 Labrador Retrievers just doesn't flow as well as a title, but this kind of editing change has been done before. If that wasn't acceptable, a disclaimer could have been added or lines could have been written into the script to let people know about these difficulties. Since officials didn't take this responsibility seriously, they should help sup-

port the many animal shelters across the nation which have been inconvenienced by the film. This proposal is not as absurd as it may seem at first. There are currently several lawsuits working their way through our legal system in which people claim that the tobacco companies are responsible for the consequences arising from the irresponsible use of

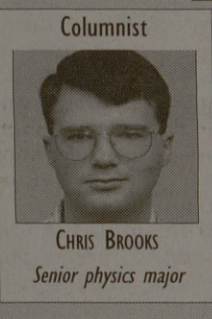
their product. Just as RJR Nabisco never wanted people to get lung cancer, Disney never wanted to condemn hundreds or thousands of dalmatians to an early death on the streets or abandon them in some under-budgeted animal shelter. Both companies and people need to assume responsibility for their actions and start placing blame where faults belong.



GRAPHIC: Brad Graeber

# Americans suffer property ownership woes

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, among these are Life, Liberty, and Property. This is what the Declaration of Independence nearly said. The right to be secure in one's property appears in the Fourth and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution. Since then, however, people's rights concerning property have slowly diminished. One time for this travesty to stop. Once upon a time, a man's home was his castle. Now the various levels of government can, and will, tell a property owner what he can build on his property, what he can do on his property and when he has to sell it. Imminent domain is an old tradition. But today, things have gone too far. Kim Murphy of the Los Angeles Times reported that Herbert Tollefson's pasture became a bog when road construction diverted rain water onto his land. When he attempted to dump wood chips to get his tractor to the fields, the county ordered him to stop - his bog had become a wetland. With one-third of his

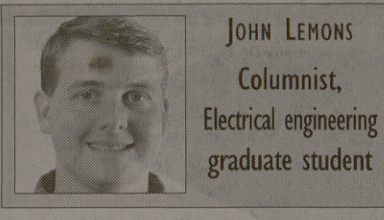


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land protected, Tollefson had to stop farming. "Basically, we've been losing the use of our land, inch by inch," he said, standing ankle-deep in his "wetland." The Houston Chronicle reported that St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church in Boerne, Texas, realized it needed more than 220 seats, so the church filed for a permit to construct a new building on its land. Church officials were told, however, that part of the property fell in the city's historic preservation zone; they would not be allowed to replace their building with one that could hold their 2,000 member congregation. According to the Associated Press, Bernadine Suitum owns a piece of land near Lake Tahoe. She wanted to build a house on her property, but the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency told her the land was a "stream environment zone" and all private building was banned. But Suitum has land development credit which could be used to enhance development rights to other property - how useful. A short trip through a newspaper or a

news magazine is all that is required to find an example of the Environmental Protection Agency, declaring someone's land sacred or, some level of government passing yet another regulation on the use of land. But there is light at the end of this tunnel. St. Peter's has sued under the Religion Freedom Restoration Act, claiming the restriction on its building has affected freedom of worship. The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case. The Supreme Court also has ruled that Suitum has the right to sue for compensation for her unusable land. Eighteen states, including Texas, have adopted statutes requiring compensation to be paid when laws regulate private property to the extent that it is effectively "taken." No one wants dirty water, extinction of animals or loss of our historical buildings. There would be no complaints about the government preventing a person from collecting barrels of toxic waste on his property. But when building a house becomes a crime, there is a problem. It is past time for the government to realize that a person's property should be his to do with as he or she sees fit. Government control should go no farther than the White House lawn.

# Technology enforces language laziness



**JOHN LEMONS**  
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"Euonym, E-U-O-N-Y-M, Euonym." With this word, Rebecca Selson, a 13-year-old girl from Brooklyn, N.Y., won the National Spelling Bee two weeks ago. Most students at Texas A&M University cannot spell "euonym" and do not know its definition. Furthermore, it is unlikely that students will find "euonym" in their word processor's spell checker. Today's Aggies are part of the first generation of students to be raised on calculators and spell checkers. While these technologies can make learning easier for students, they've created some undesirable consequences. The quick and poorly considered application of new innovations within education has left many students inept of basic skills like spelling and arithmetic. But A&M's students shouldn't feel so bad about their lack of spelling skills. They are light years ahead of those in California public schools. The California educational system is in an uproar over the "whole language" system of learning reading and writing which is being taught to elementary students throughout the state. Opponents of the system claim it has left students unable to spell. The system has students learn to read and write by reading textbooks of children's literature. The idea hopes students will expand their creativity and absorb the ability to read and write through reading stories. The written memorization of lists of words and Dick and Jane primers on which A&M students were raised are not part of the system. In fact, when students misspell words, they aren't necessarily discouraged by their teacher because the emphasis is placed on developing their writing and creativity. After all, memorizing lists of spelling words is uninteresting to students; it stifles their creativity. Kenneth Goodman is a leading theorist in the "whole language" movement. In his 1993 book, *What's Whole in Whole Language*, Goodman said, "Young writers simply can't learn to write freely and productively if they're always confined to words they know they can spell conventionally." Unfortunately, no one will read a

writer's work if they are unable to spell correctly. The "whole language" system's problem is that it doesn't work. California has discovered many of its students are poor spellers. This became apparent when a group of 25 eighth graders from Middletown, CA, wrote letters to their local newspaper in response to vandalism occurring at their school. The letters were filled with misspellings, including mistakes like spelling "vandals" as "vanduls" and "vandales." Aggies can attribute their problems with the written word to a dependency on the spell checkers included in their word processing programs. Brian Bleifeld, class of '96, said spell checkers cause students to be sloppy in their writing. "If I didn't know the spell checker was going to catch the errors, I would have gone back to change them," Bleifeld said. But this snake oil for the information age is not the catch-all many students assume it to be. For example, homonyms, words which sound alike but are spelled differently, slip past the careful eye of the spell checker, which could result in a sentence like - Those rotten Battalion columnists right there columns so poorly, it makes me want to pull out my hair. Likewise, students are slaves to their calculators. This convenience, which allows students to avoid the drudgery of arithmetic, encourages students to merely plug numbers into their machines misunderstanding needed mathematical concepts. "When you have a calculator, you're just trying to chug out your answer," Bleifeld said. "But when you have pencil and paper you can check your work." Calculators and spell checkers can be a valuable asset, provided students do not become too dependent on them. It is as if students are trying to escape the horror of their elementary school years, when spelling and arithmetic meant long hours of boring work. While the prospect of returning to writing out lists of spelling words is scary, a world full of individuals who are incapable of spelling or doing arithmetic is even more frightening. Students, throw off the chains of your oppressors. Don't automatically use a calculator or a spell checker. Hone those basic skills which every citizen needs. And remember, new innovations do not always mean instant improvement. As educators are discovering, when the classroom is used as an experimental laboratory, it's the students who get burned.



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