

Opinion

Book bans often serve to protect young readers

This weekend marks the beginning of Banned Books Week, and for a few days schools and libraries will have to endure harassment as they carry out the business of caring for America's children.



DAVID JOHNSTON

A press release from the American Library Association, one of the event's sponsors, said restrictions, challenges or bans on books lead to an atmosphere of repression. This fascist portrayal of book banning is sensational and off target. There are times when public libraries or schools just, in the best interest of their visitors, remove or restrict books.

Banned Books Week is a regular event designed to raise awareness of book bans, when a book is actually removed from store or library shelves, and book challenges, when a complaint is raised and a book ban is considered.

Opponents of book banning claim to believe bans infringe the constitutional rights of American citizens, but such a notion is foreign to our governing documents.

If the government were prohibiting the publication of literature or if the state was encouraging Nazi-style book burnings, there would be a problem. This, however, is not the case. The policies discussed in Banned Books Week literature are mostly

issues of schools debating the removal of books from their libraries, and such a decision could offend American freedoms.

Americans are not guaranteed the right to free books. For that matter, there is no right to a government-underwritten education.

The right to free speech does not ensure schools or public libraries stock everything available.

It is the responsibility of librarians—especially school librarians—to choose material appropriate for their visitors. There is nothing wrong with parents, school board officials or organizations encouraging librarians not to shelve books considered inappropriate for the library's readers.

When a newsstand does not carry tabloids, it is not called censorship. When a grade school library does not shelve the law library it is not an attack on Americans' freedoms. Similarly

there are times when a book's content means it should be removed from a library or its access should be monitored.

When libraries refuse to carry books, the rights of free speech and free press live on. Interested readers can still visit their local book seller or even order the restricted literature on-line in the privacy of their own homes.

When books are banned from a library, it usually means the date-subsidized school or sometimes the city-subsidized public library opts to use taxpayer

funds on reading material considered more appropriate, more educational or sometimes less controversial.

Even the Banned Books Week literature admits books are usually challenged with good intentions. People challenge books trying to protect young people from being exposed to writing either offensive or inappropriate.

Most Americans understand the power of writing. Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, sparked the Civil War, Salmon Rushdie had been in hiding for years after writing *The Satanic Verses* and Kenneth Starr's "Referral to Congress" has excited all of America.

Writing influences people. Books are able to help people form ideas, affect their motivations or drive them to action. So of course some people are concerned about what America's young people may be reading.

It is the role of a caring parent to discourage their seven year old from perusing the Starr Report or the Unabomber's manifesto. Unfortunately, many schools are making available literature just as problematic.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker won a Pulitzer Prize, but still contains scenes that might make Monica Lewinski blush. No one should be required to read such material, especially impressionable teenagers.

Here is the central debate over book banning. Banning opponents argue removing a book from library shelves harms education and tramples freedom.

But there is a difference between government neutrality and government subsidy. American liberties do grant the freedom of speech, but no one has to listen.

No matter how poor a citizen's literary skills, they can still type up a manuscript and try to get it published. Further, they can walk to the local copy store and print their own books.

There is no guarantee, however, anyone will ever read the finished copy. There is certainly no guarantee the taxpayers will purchase a few copies for their schools and public libraries.

Challenging or banning a book is truly harmless. In fact it is a form of capitalistic boycotting.

A concerned parent who challenges a book simply believes the subject matter is somehow harmful to their child at this particular level of development.

Banned book opponents are concerned that this practice will lead to empty libraries, fearing no book will be acceptable to everyone. This is an extreme view and an unlikely scenario.

Americans have been educated for generations without reading graphic sexual descriptions and hate-filled literature.

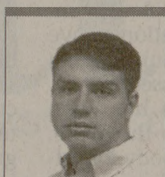
School children should be protected from some material. Schools have the responsibility to make sure students are not exposed to literature beyond their maturity.

Dave Johnston is a senior mathematics major.

BEAUTY OR BEAST?

Disney's public image masks several unethical practices

Apparently, it is easy to hate the wonderful world of Disney. It may be the Magic Kingdom, but a quick search of the Internet reveals numerous Web pages devoted to leading a boycott against the Walt Disney Company or one of its subsidiaries.



STEVEN GYESZLY

Many of these boycotts revolve around truly laughable claims. Some organizations accuse Disney of eroding family values with subtle gestures such as the supposed phallic symbol on the cover of *The Little Mermaid* video or the hidden messages in *Aladdin*.

These accusations are easy to dismiss. Unfortunately, extravagant allegations only serve to hide the real ethical problems with Disney, problems Disney tries to hide under a veneer of moral righteousness.

One of the hidden undersides of the Walt Disney Company is its exploitation of human labor in underdeveloped nations.

Last December, *The Columbus Free Press* reported that the Haitian subsidiary producing Disney-licensed Mickey Mouse and Pocahontas pajamas paid its workers 28 cents an hour, less than the country's minimum wage. It is a dubious honor for any company to be so cheap that the Haitian government looks like Santa Claus by comparison.

Even more criminal is the fact that in 1996, according to the National Labor Committee, Michael Eisner, Disney CEO, awarded himself a salary equivalent to \$6,700 per hour, and that does not even include his hundreds of million of dollars in accumulated stock options.

This is not an isolated incident. A "Dateline NBC" investigation found widespread use of underpaid workers in Disney-licensed factories around the world.

Factories workers in China and Indonesia are paid between 10 and 25 cents an hour, a daily wage that is less than what it costs to buy minimum dietary requirements.

Until public pressure forced them to end

the partnership in 1997, Disney had a licensing agreement with a factory in Burma that was 45 percent owned by the ruffing military dictatorship. This is the same dictatorship that the United Nations has denounced due to its repressive rule.

When other western companies originally considered investing in Burma, Nobel Peace

Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi, who incidentally is under house arrest for attempting to form an opposition political party, said "companies that invest in Burma only serve to prolong the agony of my country by encouraging the present regime to preserve its atrocities."

This blunt statement stopped many other international corporations, but not Disney. Apparently, it is a small world after all.

Other ethical problems that Disney faces are much closer to home. In the last several years, Disney has hit a trifecta of alleged racial discrimination. Recently, Disney faced a lawsuit alleging discrimination in its hiring of African-Americans, a boycott sponsored by the National Hispanic Media Coalition due to Disney's lack of Hispanics in upper-level management positions and protests by the Arab League because of Disney's stereotypical portrayal of Arabs in the company's animated films. Offending one culture is easy, but insulting three different cultures is a record even David Duke could be proud of.

Disney faces such intense scrutiny by society because it professes to be such an icon of



American family fun. Unfortunately, Disney uses its idealistic pretensions to its own advantage. Beneath the kindly, gentle image it attempts to portray to the world, Disney is a corporation that conceals its own major ethical flaws.

So take a closer look at good ol' Mickey Mouse — sometimes it is hard to tell if those are giant ears or merely horns.

Steven Gyeszly is a senior finance major.

MAIL CALL

New bill threatens technology jobs

The House of Representatives is about to vote on a bill which could have a major, long-term impact on your future. The proposed legislation will dramatically increase the number of foreign engineers and computer programmers allowed into the United States to work in high tech industries over the next five years under the H-1B visa program.

This system has been exploited by companies to provide cheap, indentured labor and to reduce salaries and job security for engineers and computer professionals in general.

Technology leaders are telling Congress there is a grave shortage of engineers and computer

scientists, despite the fact hundreds of thousands of layoffs have occurred in the last year.

Industry representatives are lobbying and giving large campaign contributions to congressional representatives who support their position. President Clinton has threatened to veto this bill, but Congress seems to care more about the flood of campaign cash.

Anyone with a future in engineering or computer science should contact their congressman and tell them to vote "no" on H.R. 3736. Let your representatives know you do not appreciate this attempt to manipulate the job market and destroy your career prospects.

Mark A. Mendlovitz, Ph.D. Class of '86

Police protection deserves praise

In response to Josh Maskow's Sept. 18 column:

In the real world, people die every day due to violent crime, police officers, both local and federal, face young urban gang members armed to the teeth with semi-automatic pistols and AK-47 machine guns and, people are shot in the back for a pair of tennis shoes.

Now I realize in Aggie land things are usually calm and peaceful, but try walking around at night in South Central Los Angeles. You might be pleased to see a police cruiser driving down the street.

The midnight SWAT raids you were speaking of are on drug houses that poison citizens everyday. I am personally proud of our

law enforcement personnel. If I were you, I would not slap the face of the person that watches over me as I sleep at night.

Ladd Laird Class of '98

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call 013 Reed McDonald Texas A&M University College Station, TX 77843-1111

Campus Mail: 1111 Fax: (409) 845-2647 E-mail: batt@tamvm1.tamu.edu

Freshman elections rarely deliver

Well, it is that time again, freshman elections. Excuse the upper-classmen as they try to contain their enthusiasm.

Yes, maybe everyone is simply jaded after their many years on campus, and maybe the new Class of '02 makes them feel old. But there is something nostalgic about seeing the eager faces going to class, chatting about yell practice dates and doing the freshman wildcat.

However, nothing but sympathy is evoked by the posters and handouts from freshman candidates touting their ideas for making this campus a better place. Poor things. They simply do not know the truth.

They do not realize they are wasting hundreds of dollars on campaigns that will amount to very little. They do not realize that the trees, from which their flyers were made, have died in vain.

But they will. Every Aggie, at one time,



MANISHA PAREKH

thought the Student Government Association actually did things. Most good Ags actually voted during freshman elections and were excited about the things that could be accomplished.

Then reality set in. After the results were announced and the campaign flyers were covered with Freudian Slip posters, very little happened.

It is time to let the Class of 2002 in on a little-publicized tradition here at A&M: your candidates probably will not end up doing too much once they are elected. Since most freshman candidates claim to be "red-ass," chances are very small that once elected, they would be willing to break such a long-standing tradition.

This is not to say student elections are worthless. The class councils actually do quite a bit for their constituents, like organizing Ring Dance and the Junior and Senior E-Walks. Oh, wait, only the Junior and Senior Class Councils are in charge of those events.

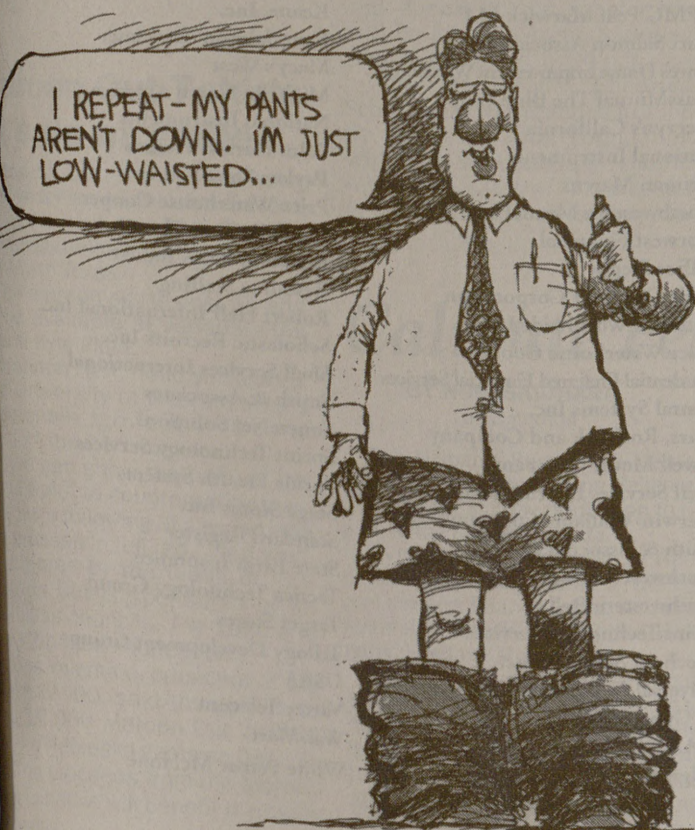
Well, the freshman and sophomore class councils do sell some pretty snazzy T-shirts. Also freshman get to have Fish Ball, or a pseudo-Fish Ball if that is what the

council decides. And they do begin the process of raising money for the class gift. So, class councils do accomplish something. But what about Student Senate?

According to the Elections Office, freshman senators are supposed to represent the freshman class. But what exactly does representation mean at A&M? For those freshmen who do not know the answer, go ask a fifth-year senior about the yell leader runoff referendum. Ask them why Student Government did not allow the runoff to go into effect until a second referendum was passed. Or, better yet, ask a student senator. You might learn something.

Class of 2002, there are many traditions you have yet to experience. Luckily, you do not have to endure the lovely sandwich board gardens that usually spring up during elections. However, unless your elected council and senators actually set their minds to doing more than padding their resumes, the Class of 2002 will be forced to endure yet another Aggie tradition.

Manisha Parekh is a junior psychology and journalism major.



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