

LAW IS A CURIOUS THING

Publisher should sue over use of symbols

Last month, Houghton Mifflin Company filed a lawsuit against a religious organization, Jews for Jesus, for violating copyright and trademark laws. According to Houghton Mifflin, a New York-based children's book publisher, the group violated the company's rights by using the children's storybook character Curious George in religious materials without seeking permission beforehand.

It was inappropriate for Jews for Jesus to use Curious George, a universally recognized children's book character, to sell its religious beliefs. Even worse, Jews for Jesus violated the laws of this country by ignoring the copyright and trademark regulations. They should, therefore, take full responsibility for all negligent actions.

Jews for Jesus, an evangelical group with the purpose of spreading the word that Jesus is the chosen Jewish messiah, created a pamphlet entitled, "Are You Curious?" in which drawings of Curious George were used to appeal to children and young adults.

The pamphlet states, under the likeness of Curious George reading a book is the passage, "One day, George opened the Bible where he discovered that Y'shua (Jesus) is the promised Messiah of Israel." Aaron Abramson, a member of Jews for Jesus and the originator of the Curious George campaign, believes Jews for Jesus has done nothing wrong by utilizing the children's story book character in its materials.

"If you give something out for free, you're within your rights to do it. We've been doing this with a million different topics. We've been doing it for 30 years," Abramson said.

The fact that Jews for Jesus boasts about using other pop icons or events in their religious campaigns is evidence of the nonchalance of Jews for Jesus concerning the infringement on other's rights.

Instead of recognizing the illegality of using copyright material, it is viewing the issue of using Curious George without Houghton Mifflin's permission in its pamphlets as Houghton Mifflin's problem for being lenient with its product over the years.

"It is surprising and a bit ironic that Houghton Mifflin lacks an ordinary sense of humor and as a literary organization cannot detect parody. While Curious George is known

for getting in and out of trouble, we're not looking for trouble. Our hope is that Houghton Mifflin might look to Curious George as inspiration to lighten up, smile and learn to enjoy life," said Jews for Jesus Executive Director David Brickner.

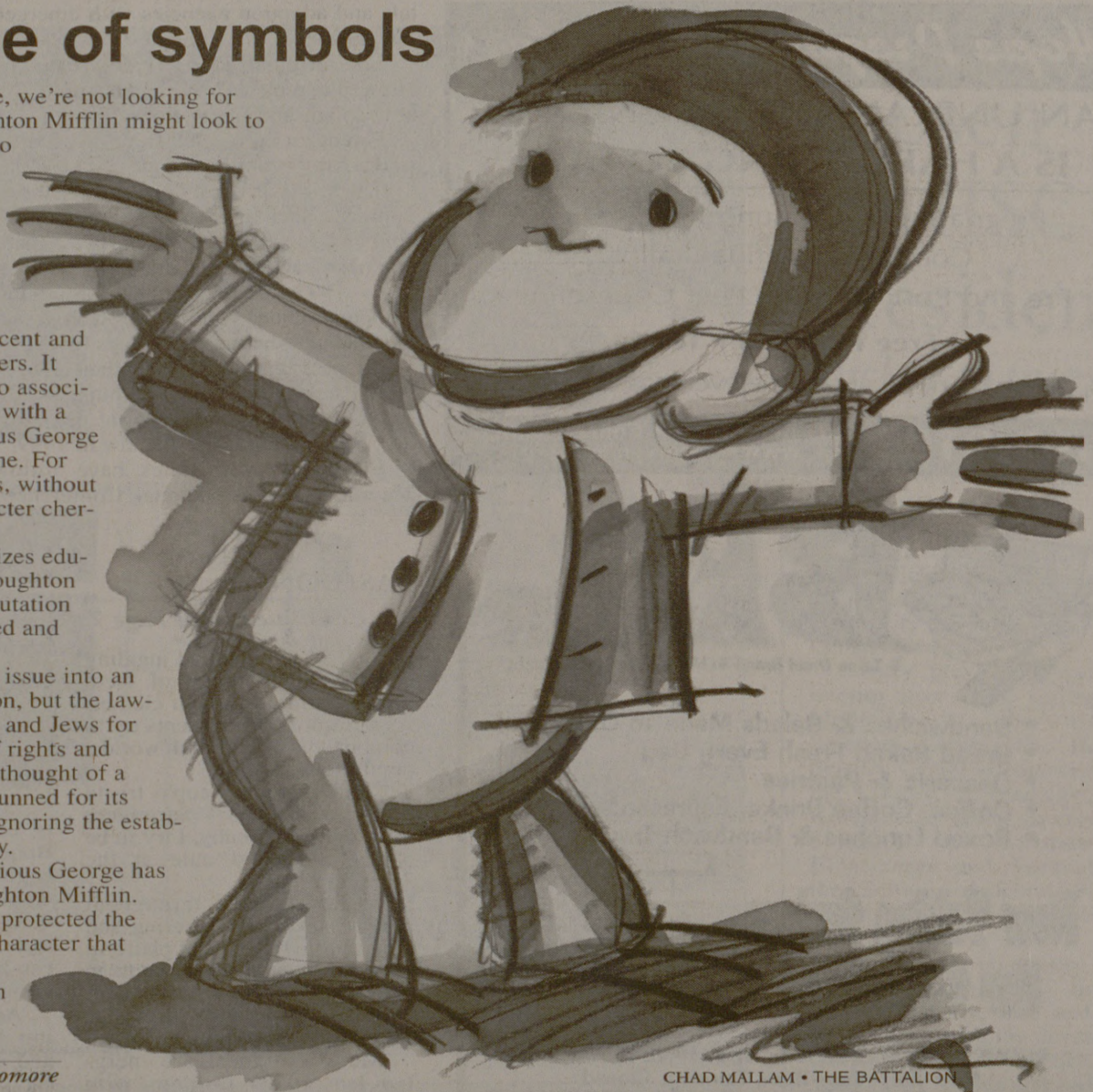
Houghton Mifflin, a top publishing company for more than a century and a half, has good reason to protest the indecent and illegal use of one of its characters. It was wrong for Jews for Jesus to associate a children's book character with a religious stance because Curious George was created to relate to everyone. For one group to use for their goals, without permission, a childhood character cherished by many is unacceptable.

For a company that emphasizes education, it is only proper that Houghton Mifflin move to protect the reputation and symbolism of its most loved and popular characters.

It could be easy to turn this issue into an example of religious persecution, but the lawsuit between Houghton Mifflin and Jews for Jesus is based on a violation of rights and nothing more. It should not be thought of a religious organization being shunned for its beliefs but as an organization ignoring the established rules of corporate society.

For more than 60 years, Curious George has been the responsibility of Houghton Mifflin. Luckily, Houghton Mifflin has protected the integrity of a children's book character that many growing up have learned a valuable lesson from — when you make a mistake, you must take responsibility for it.

Leigh Henderson is a sophomore psychology major.



CHAD MALLAM • THE BATTALION

Parity rules hinder long-term success of professional football

They say that variety is the spice of life. If this is true, no professional sports league is spicier than the NFL. Where else can a former grocery store bag boy like Kurt Warner or a murder trial defendant like Ray Lewis go from complete

obscurity to Super Bowl MVP stardom? Nowhere but the NFL.

Two key rule changes instituted in the 1990s mean that, like Warner and Lewis, teams now are rising from obscurity only to end up there again, and, as a result, many sportswriters and football purists are longing for the past days of the NFL dynasty.

Roughly 10 years ago, the powers that be in the NFL instituted some rulebook changes under the title of "parity." Fans of the game are familiar with these changes — the salary cap, that limits the amount of money a team can spend on its talent, and the scheduling

rules which pit the previous season's winning teams against their fellow winners.

Ideally, these changes serve as a means of challenging the strong teams and strengthening the weak. But, in reality, they make it harder for teams to afford to keep their best players and punish teams for winning games by way of harder schedules.

In all the fuss to keep things evenly matched, the long-term effects to the game were not considered fully, and, as a result, the NFL has become the crapshoot that it is today. Juggernaut dynasties and feather-in-hat coaching legends are relics of a former era. In today's NFL, last year's cellar dweller can become this year's one-hit wonder and then possibly return to the cellar again.

Consider the St. Louis Rams, which went from last place in their division to become the Super Bowl champions. But in their 1999-2000 Super Bowl-winning season, only one of its 16 regular-season games was played against an opponent with a winning record because the Rams had a weak showing the year before.

And though they won the Super Bowl that year, the same changes that helped them win may ultimately have been the beginning of their demise. The Rams did not even make a Super Bowl appearance the following season.

And St. Louis is, by no means, the only team to feel the effects of parity. The NFL's

The NFL's television ratings have been on a steady decline.

push for mediocrity has hit every team in the league. In fact, every NFL team but four has made a playoff appearance in the past five seasons, yet only one team, the Denver Broncos, has won the big game more than once in that same span. As one sportswriter put it, "nobody is truly awful... and for sure nobody is truly good."

Whether parity — the NFL's version of communism — is actually hurting the game or not

is still a hot topic, but no one is denying the change. If television ratings are any indication of how the viewing public is taking to parity, then nobody seems to like it. The NFL's television ratings have been on a steady decline.

Perhaps this should not come as a surprise to anyone. When compared to other sports' ratings-grabbing championship games, fans seem to prefer the allure of dynasties. This is true in the NBA where the two-time champion Lakers are a shoe-in to make it three and all of America seems to be behind them. The same goes for Major League Baseball, in which the New York Yankees are favored to win the World Series year in and year out.

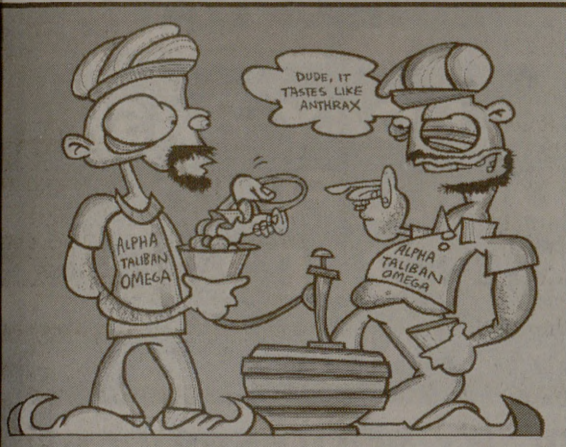
Football, in its purist form, is meant to be played without restrictions like the salary cap and scheduling rules. NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue can either consider rethinking parity or continue to watch his once dominant league's TV ratings continue to decline.

George Deutsch is a junior journalism major.



GEORGE DEUTSCH

CARTOON OF THE DAY



THE UNCARTOONIST ©

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

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MAIL CALL

Surplus should benefit students

In response to Amanda Smith's Sept. 28 article.

Last spring, along with many other students on this campus, I voted for a fee increase that would improve the bus system on this campus for this year and years to come. Because of the \$50 increase, I can now ride any bus, anywhere, anytime that I want.

While this is something I am grateful for, I am not grateful that money I have paid in other fees is now a "surplus" to be used by the University as it sees fit. According to Smith, there are more than \$1 million "up for grabs" left over from student fees paid in the last academic year.

This money previously was given to Bus Ops, but as my newly paid \$50 now funds those operations, the allotment from my student fees now is openly available. The confusing thing is that Dr. Bowen is considering adding additional fees (an "excellence fee," whatever that means) to my bill to cover some deficit that the University has.

Here's a novel idea. Why not use this surplus money to alleviate that deficit instead of charging me more? Better yet, why not cut me a check for that surplus? After all, it is my money, right? I am in no way saying we pay too much for school here. I feel we get way more for our dollar than most schools in this nation.

A surplus that stems from student paid fees should be used to benefit the students, either by preventing future fee increases, helping to alleviate the parking problems, giving us a break on fees next semester or a rebate from our fees for this semester.

Albert Atkins
Class of 2001

Southerland should be commended

I cannot put into words how proud I am of Dr. Southerland, our vice president for Student Affairs. My heart warms whenever I hear his name announced at large gatherings like the last football game. He was received with a deafening cheer and "whoops!" a plenty. Let me give an example of his tremendous leadership of late.

Instead of going along with the recent trend of lowering student fees and making school more affordable for all of us, Southerland has decided to give the surplus from the Student Services Fee to a new retreat center for student leaders.

Before I go on, I should say that I believe with all my heart that the surplus is by oversight only and not design. Surely, our leaders did not foresee that the fee was redundant at the time.

I for one am extremely excited about the prospects of driving by such a pretty retreat center. I am sure it will look just as nice on the inside as it does on the outside.

Michael Emery
Class 2001

Organized religion not all bad

In response to Rich Bray's Sept. 28 column.

The author stated that organized religion "has been a burden to society rather than a help."

Justin Estes
Class of 2005