

People should leave Harry alone ... Despite the black magic, books and movie are no threat to children

Amid the excitement surrounding the debut of the movie *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*, there are a few unhappy individuals lurking in the dark and dusty corners of fictional witchcraft with the audience that made the books an international phenomenon.



JENNIFER LOZANO

A religious group is indirectly promoting its own Harry Potter movie and breed of lunacy. The group's video is titled, *Harry Potter: Witchcraft Repackaged — Making Evil Look Innocent*, and claims that the Harry Potter movie and books are filled with evil and will drive children to the occult. This farfetched idea, held by book police who have attacked classics like John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, robs children of their imaginations and the pure enjoyment of great literature.

The video, created by a Merritt Island, Fla., church pastor, says the book series, hailed by educators and parents for enticing children to read, is also luring children to witchcraft. The video has been shown to hundreds of parents in the Brevard County area, and the creators intend to eventually reach a broader audience. According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, the video says that "children as young as kindergarten are being introduced to human sacrifice, the sucking of blood from dead animals and possession by spirit beings."

These complaints are not the first targeted at J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books. In fact, since 1998 when the first of the four books was published, the fictional orphan and wizard-in-training have been persecuted by nemesis other than the evil Lord Voldemort, who killed Harry's parents in the book and left him with a lightning bolt scar. According to the American Library Association, the books have topped the best-seller lists and the list of books

most challenged. In one year, there were 26 challenges to remove the Harry Potter books from bookshelves in 16 different states.

Unlike other books before Harry Potter that have traveled the well-trodden path to censorship, Harry Potter books are not being challenged for sexual content, racism or violence. Instead they are being challenged for their topic of wizardry, witches and warlocks — a theme of fantasy that has pervaded children's literature for years. According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, the fear-all book fascists have managed to interpret the lightning bolt on Harry's forehead as part of the Nazi swastika and claim that "broomsticks and pointed hats are phallic symbols in Wicca, a pagan religion that worships nature." However, Roger Coleman, a Wiccan minister of the Church of Iron Oak in Palm Bay, Fla., said there is "very little similarity between his religion and the witchcraft in the series."

There is no doubt that J.K. Rowling's beloved book series and new movie do possess a magic all their own, but luring children to the occult is not part of it. Instead, Rowling has achieved a great feat in entertainment

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history. The magic of Harry Potter books, published in 42 languages, has captivated an enormous amount of a predominantly technology-driven youth audience. On college campuses, between organic chemistry and political science books, students tote Harry Potter books and parents read their children's books to join the fun.

Also, despite the dissenting opinions of a few, the first Harry Potter movie has been a great success. According to CNN, the movie has had the best three-day debut ever, grossing \$90.3 million domestically and is sure to break more box office records soon.

More importantly, children all over the world are choosing Harry Potter books over Microsoft's new Xbox and other high-tech entertainment, which leave little room for the imagination. There is no justification for a few select individuals to decide what should and should not be read by America's children. That is a decision that should be left solely to the parents. As stated in the First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or the press." Americans should always respect the right of others to choose for themselves what they and their families wish to read.

Jennifer Lozano is a junior English major.



ADRIAN CALCANEO • THE BATTALION

Students ignore the education of liberal arts at their own loss

At Texas A&M, most degree plans for technical sciences such as engineering and computer science allow little room for curriculum diversity. In fact, students who test out of freshman-level classes may never take an English, political science or history class in their college career.

Some educators may view this system as an efficient process that benefits students. Others claim this system exploits students by cheating them out of a balanced education. As far back as the 19th century, intellectuals amid the Industrial Revolution feared for the future of the scholar and the university. They worried that universities would become nothing more than institutions of technical learning, and that students would graduate with little understanding of anything outside of their specialized field.

This concern continues to grow in the academic community as science becomes more advanced. From cloning to artificial intelligence, conflict abounds between groups that champion all causes in the name of scientific advancement and groups that fear the social impact of the relentless pursuit of scientific advancement.

The concern in the academic community is substantial enough that some universities, such as the University of Texas-Dallas, require engineers and computer scientists to take "Ethics in Technology and Medicine" courses. Even the American Association for Higher Education conducts online discussion forums wherein participants debate the consequences of entrusting the future to scientists who have little historical or philosophical knowledge.

As the first university to conduct a successful animal-cloning experiment, A&M finds itself entangled in these conflicts. Because of rigid degree requirements, most students majoring in fields of technical science find themselves with very few opportunities to take classes unrelated to their majors. Perhaps what is more disheartening is that many of these students have no interest in using their electives to diversify their studies.

History has shown, however, that governments and individuals with questionable motives have employed socially apathetic scientists to reach unethical ends. One of the reasons history is considered important enough to teach is because it exposes mistakes of the past. Students must understand how and why socially destructive things happened in order to avoid repeating them.

For example, American anthropologists have pilaged Indian burial grounds in the name of science, never considering what the effects would be on the Indian people who consider these grounds to be sacred. Ray Hernandez, a council member for the Tapilam-Coahuiltecan Nation, has spoken to an anthropology class at A&M and denounced these acts as disrespectful and unnecessary. The U.S. government recently has made it illegal for scientists to obtain bones and artifacts from Indian burial sites.

Still, many students do not consider history, philosophy or government classes important. "I am not in college for liberal arts. I am here to learn construction science," said Brad Smith, a senior construction science major. When asked to name the current U.S. attorney general, an engineering student was clueless.

Other students who do not see value in art, literature and philosophy simply dismiss all liberal arts degrees as "illegitimate."

Division of labor makes it such that not everyone needs to know higher mathematics and advanced science. Principles of government and knowledge of historical events, however, are necessary in a genuine democracy. Apathy and ignorance profoundly cripple the democratic process, especially when university graduates decide that the state of society is unimportant.

Somehow, the core requirement of political science and history fails to communicate to many students the importance of being informed in a democratic society, and art and philosophy are also rendered irrelevant along the way. For a university that strives to adhere to high standards, A&M must ask itself if this is acceptable.

Christy Ruth is a sophomore journalism major.

Athletes cannot be heroes

In response to Melissa Bedsole's Dec. 3 column:

Mark McGwire may be a great athlete; he could be the greatest ever. But there is nothing noble about swinging a bat or throwing a ball. It is fun to watch. Baseball is sometimes majestic, but it is not what should be praised as a role model. Save your commendation for a sports column. McGwire may be different from other athletes. He may be noble in his family life or respected by his colleagues for knowing when to throw in the towel so that someone more able can win it for the team, but this does not make "an American icon." And no one deserves honorable mention just because they can prioritize their family life before a ballgame, you are supposed to do that.

I find it quite offensive that people would still classify firefighters, EMTs, police, relief-volunteers and overseas soldiers with the same word we've erroneously been using to describe celebrities and athletes. That word is hero.

Every once in a while, Americans are put to the test to show its true colors and reveal the amount of bravery that its people have within them. The night before the attack on America, the sports section of the news raved that Michael Jordan was making another comeback to basketball. Before I lamented for that week about another celebrity's attempt to defy his mid-life crisis and get more attention, I actually found myself chuckling after the terrorist attack because Jordan actually believed he was coming back to be someone's hero again.

I know some are already sick and tired of hearing

about tragedy and terrorism with our fallen heroes getting recognized for their selflessness. But we truly need to articulate the worth of a celebrity from that of a true hero. How many more challenges should America endure before its values are recognized? I thought by now everyone knew what "true hero" meant.

Alan Pontious
Class of 2000

Admissions are not based on race

In response to a Dec. 3 mail call:

In Matt Maddox's letter of response to the A&M law school legal fight, he suggests that the top 25 percent admission idea somehow conflicts with the Hopwood decision that disallowed race-based admissions.

He seems to think that this top-25-percent admission policy would involve "quotas" and "double standards." I disagree with this idea conceptually because the top-25-admission program is not designed to give people advantages based on their race.

It gives school officials the right to target certain areas with a socio-economic disadvantage for top 25 percent automatic admission. This provides enhanced opportunity to those who have shown a desire to achieve despite being from more disadvantaged areas. It is a boost based on merit.

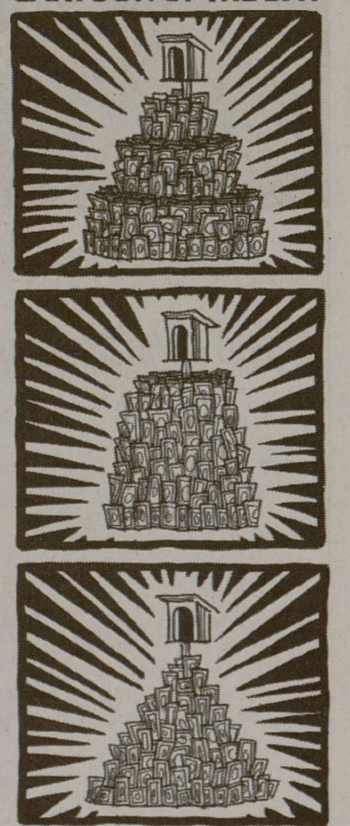
I cannot understand the vehement opposition to this policy I have seen in some people, because it is not a legal handout based on race. It is not even an underhanded approach at a racial handout.

Instead, I think it is a genuine, well-intentioned effort to increase the availability of education beyond the middle and upper classes. This is certainly in the best interest of the state of Texas, so our school officials should not have their hands tied in trying to widen educational opportunity.

If there is any uncertainty about what the law allows, then look for Texas Senate Bill HB 588, which was the legislative response to Hopwood. It allows schools to automatically accept students on a top-25-percent basis as well as a variety of factors, and none of those factors are based on the color of the student's skin.

Matt Criswell
Class of 2000

CARTOON OF THE DAY



THE UN-CARTOONIST ©