

Parker Comments On Decline Of Excellence In State Education

Editor's note: The writer is editor of the Fayetteville Times. He wrote the following letter in response to a column by Vermont Royster, former editor of The Wall Street Journal, that appeared on this page last Sunday. Royster had criticized A. Craig Phillips, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, for his reaction to a national report that charges the public schools with mediocrity.

By Roy Parker Jr.

Dear Vermont,

Nothing makes me grind my teeth more than reading screeds by ol' buggers who, not having been in a public school classroom since Hoover's day, nonetheless pontificate about what goes on there.

I suggest that ol' Craig Phillips is probably right.

The rising tide of mediocrity has many causes. But by and large the public schools have been trying mightily to hold it back, calm it down, turn it. They are not so much part of the problem as the mirror of it.

You recall with great affection when you were a lad at old Raleigh High School in the year of the big crash on Wall Street, when there was Greek and Latin and calculus to be learned, and great mountains of homework that you no doubt attacked with gusto.

I know the feeling. Forty years ago, it was easy for a few white boys in the classes of Ahoskie High to wrestle with calculus or even Greek, because over on the other side of town, dozens of black kids

were being taught 60 to a room by a teacher who was only marginally less ignorant than her charges.

Only half the black children in Hertford County ever even went to high school in those days, so it was comparatively easy to marshal the resources for Greek and Latin, and an English teacher with a degree from Columbia, over at Ahoskie High. Raleigh High wasn't much different.

If you think those are the days of the long ago, you are wrong. As late as 1971, there were still pretty much two separate and very unequal systems.

By then, however, the provisions of civil rights legislation of the 1960s were beginning to be felt. The country embarked on a really new educational effort, to educate everyone to the same level in racially mixed classrooms.

And that is when most assessments date the beginning of the so-called "tide of mediocrity."

To me, that says the statistics that purport to show declines and a wasting away of quality are more the measure of the chemistry of mixing a very badly served system with a more richly served one. Until the mixture is given more time, more money and more effort, the statistics will continue to be distorted toward the "mediocre" end of the scale. If only us white boys from Ahoskie High, and only us, were taking the SAT these days, oh how impressive the national average would be!

The evidence of recent studies is that while this

chemistry has been at work to distort the statistics, the really important measures of achievement in public schooling are more hopeful.

The National Assessment of Education Progress reported in February that over the past 10 years, fourth graders, especially black fourth graders, had breached the tide and turned in dramatically improved performances in reading, writing and ciphering.

I hope you notice that period embraces those years when Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" program poured federal dollars into local systems to force them to pay more attention to basics for children of handicapped homes.

That being said, I don't argue with you that the tide of mediocrity is at flood on the campuses of the higher educational institutions.

Is that the fault of the public schools?

No. The universities have turned away from basics, and they did it on their own. In pursuit of big trucks, they have become giant factories grinding out thousands upon thousands of pegs to fit career holes.

If there is academic muddleheadedness abroad, it surely is on the campus at

Applications Available

Continued From Page 5-A
General Educational Development (GED) tests for the high school equivalency certificate.

Participants receive academic advice and career, personal, and social counseling. According to Lucy Gordon, program director, the services tend to motivate students who complete each cycle to continue their education by enrolling in one of the occupational or college transfer programs offered at COA.

Applications will be accepted from June 1 through June 17. They may be obtained from 10 A.M. until 3 P.M. each day in Room A-113 at the college.

A reading and math inventory will be given at the time of application. For complete information, contact Gordon at 335-0821.

UNC, where "business administration" and "Naval Science" are classed as learned disciplines on a par with Greek or Shakespeare or American History.

Higher education, rather than public education, has sold out for a mess of pottage mediocre pottage.

It shows in the Journalism School, which can be considered a learned discipline only by stretching the classic definition that you so revere.

You complain about the low level of spelling and grammar skills of entering journalism students.

Tournament To Be Held

Chowan Golf & Country Club is sponsoring a tennis tournament this weekend. The Men and Women Doubles Round Robin will be played Saturday. The deadline for entry is today (Thursday).

Registration begins at 9 A.M. and play will begin 30 minutes later. To enter, call Lucy Mead Harless, 482-2371 or Ann Edmundson, 482-2813. The club's Tennis Committee is also planning other activities for the months ahead. Included is the July 17 tennis and pool party. Other events are set for August 6, September 17, and October 1. These will be club championship events.

"He who has begun his task has half done it." Horace



Of course. By and large, those who go into journalism are, like those who go into public school teaching, in the lower range of intelligence, and ambition among high school graduates.

Where are the best and brightest? Because they in their native canniness realize that the financial rewards of journalism are barely comparable to those in public school teaching, and because society has taught them that

Attend Food Conference

Five members of the Edenton-Chowan School Food Service Association attended the North Carolina School Food Service Association annual meeting in Raleigh, June 16-18. The local residents joined over 1400 fellow members for the three day event.

During the meeting at the Raleigh Civic Center, school food service personnel had an opportunity to explore a variety of subjects. Topics included management and production, fitness, leadership skills, and legislation. Participants heard two North Carolina keynotes speakers — Mrs. Jeanne Swanner Robertson, nationally recognized professional speaker from Graham, and Dr. Dudley E. Flood, Assistant State Superintendent of Support Services from Raleigh. One notable event was the Industrial Seminar on images in the marketplace conducted by national business leaders. Etta Hathaway, Director of Child Nutrition and four of the Cafeteria Managers attended.

this peg factory exists mainly to "maximize our earning power," to quote the latest assessment of the supposed rewards of a university degree, they are over in business administration or some other such area.

Moreover, as sometime employer of the graduates of the school, I certainly join in your attack on Phillips for his defense of teacher-training, which, as you say, puts "too

much stress on educational methods" as opposed to so-called "content" ("more English for the English teachers," et cetera).

A cursory check of the catalog of courses in the school reveals that, by charitable definition, perhaps two out of the 30-odd courses could be considered "content", as opposed to method.

Meanwhile, graduates of the school who arrive in the newsroom must often be retrained in the methods, so-called "monkey training".

But so many of these same graduates go out on their firsts beats abysmally short-handed in their intellectual understanding of American local government, or of the fundamentals of the free market system. Their

knowledge of history often does not go back beyond the age of Woodward and Bernstein. Many cannot read a map or tell the difference between a Rothko and a Rembrandt. And as for Greek and calculus, don't make me laugh. Or is it cry?

Don't get me wrong. I do not despair of them and this is not a screed against them. I was one of them. Long ago.

I do hope, however, that as I show charity for the Journalism School and the campus, a charity not always merited, that you will show more charity for the public school effort, an effort that on the evidence of performance rather than mere nostalgia does merit it.

Devotedly,
Roy

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Albemarle Mutual Burial Association
Notice is hereby given that the meeting of the Albemarle Mutual Burial Association will be held at the Williford-Barham Funeral Home on June 28th at 10:00 A.M. for the purpose of submitting for the vote by the members and question of dissolving of the Burial Association and the purchase of life contracts on lives of members.

Marvin S. Barham, President
Albemarle Mutual Burial Association

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