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The Daily Tar Heel

92nd year of editorial freedom

Rampant redundancies and other beasts

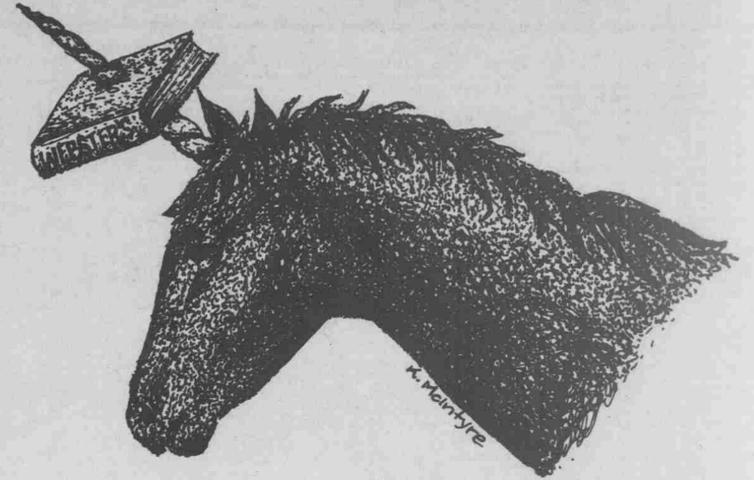
By FRANK BRUNI

Two weeks ago or thereabouts, the Unicorn Hunters at Lake Superior College announced the items on their 10th annual list of words and phrases that merit banishment on the grounds of overuse. The Unicorns, who have been at this business for a decade and are getting pretty good at it, are also getting a fair amount of attention for what they do: The more than 3,000 word nominations, only a fraction of which made the list, included suggestions from Japan and Saudi Arabia. Among those words or phrases deemed unnecessary or unwanted were "bare naked," cited for redundancy; "near miss," a less accurate synonym for "near hit;" and "overcrowded," which in reference to such places as prisons and classrooms is almost always substituted for the less dramatic "crowded."

With reason, many might first consider the Unicorns frivolous and their achievements dubious, but a longer look at the list will convert more than a few. At spotting worn-thin words and obsolete idiomatic expressions, these guys at Lake Superior are peerless. True enough, theirs is not an especially altruistic task nor does it promise to better society in any measurable fashion. They are not from the same mold as less atypical (and, arguably, more important) campus organizations; they do not seek to end world hunger, improve race relations, promote equal rights for women, or pass resolutions to conflicts in Central America. But in lightheartedly mocking the oddities in our vernacular, perhaps they tell us, unintentionally but nonetheless effectively, something about our peculiarities as a people.

Take, for instance, their dead-on-target exile of the suffix "-busters" from the English language. Has any word appendix ever been so quickly embraced, so universally applied? We had, in 1984, "Reagan-busters" as well as "Mondale-busters," "inflation-busters" along with "crime-busters." If nothing else, this legacy of the embarrassingly silly film *Ghostbusters* reflects America's love affair with tidy verbal banners, as well as visual ones, and testifies to our readiness to reduce any problem, task or movement into a terse, palatable phrase. It is much like our preference for politicians who feed us symbols instead of soliloquies.

Rendering the complicated, more identifiable and harmless at the risk of distorting reality also seems the intention of the phrase "Star Wars," which earned a prominent place on the Unicorns' list. Created by some journalist along the line and unflinchingly adopted by every other, the phrase romanticizes and trivializes an important matter. President Reagan himself has renounced it, preferring the more suitably formal Strategic Defense Initiative. When Reagan and his Pentagon compatriots talk about the ostensibly impenetrable defense, the issue is the Soviet-U.S.



arms race, a costly manifestation of mutual paranoia that already threatens to harm irreparably both superpowers' economies and that might only escalate with the preparations for the SDI. They're not talking R2D2 and C3PO. Nor, to be fair to the administration, are they intending "wars" in outer space.

However, these glances into the American character are not really the main point of the Unicorns' annual scavenger hunt; fun and linguistic purity are. In this regard, there is only one element missing from their list — a certain immediacy. The idioms, catch phrases, buzzwords and convoluted or nonsensical phrases that receive Unicorn condemnation are necessarily national, or even universal, in their use. But the most peculiar expressions in America tend to be local. How much poorer might Frank Zappa be today had it not been for a suburban valley near Los Angeles where teenage girls disgustedly chortled, "gag me with a spoon"? To this end, I nominate the following for banishment from the University of North Carolina venacular:

● **The Pit.** How unflattering. Here is the intersection of the two main campus libraries, the student union and the campus cafeteria, and we're comparing it to a hole in the ground. Here is the hub of campus activity, and it bears the same name as the inedible component of a piece of fruit. If a tour guide makes a slip of the tongue and pluralizes the term, he's telling would-be Tar Heels as they stand in the middle of the vast campus: "This is the Pits." "Pit" is furthermore an inaccurate definition of this only slightly sunken brick area; according to my dictionary,

most definitions of "pit" imply a depression somewhat more abysmal. One definition, "area for trading in a stock or grain exchange," might pertain to the kind of scoping that occurs between the sexes in this brick area and thus explain the origin of the label.

● **Greek** (as an adjective for anything or anyone connected to a fraternity or sorority). How flattering to students living and playing on Rosemary Street. How unfair to Homer, Socrates and friends.

● **Fast Break.** So I'm a little late on this one: It closed recently and promises to reopen with a new name. Indeed, it should be renamed. Hearkening back to busier days, I ask: When did you not have to stand in line or wait a significant amount of time for this "fast" food? If the new food stop in this area follows this tradition, let it be called, "Head Ache."

● **Free flicks.** We pay student fees and tuition before receiving the I.D. that admits us to these. They're a bargain, but they're not free.

● **Stranger mixer.** As in an innovative addition to rum, gin or vodka?

● **The Lodge.** Are there slopes nearby?
 ● **Frank Winstead.** After seeing Frank speak at forums for *Daily Tar Heel* editor, student body president, Residence Hall Association president (Have I missed anything?), the name (not to mention face and voice) is all too familiar. Let it henceforth be scrawled in University annals as Frank instead.

Frank Bruni, a junior English major from La Jolla, Calif., is a staff writer and part-time lexicographer for *The Daily Tar Heel*.

"A finer land, a better people . . ."

Few American statesmen are at the same time remembered with such reverence and contempt as Martin Luther King Jr. He inspired the best in his countrymen, refusing to use violence as a way to fight for his cause of racial harmony. Too, he inspired the worst — blind contempt for having close friends who were believed to be high-level communists.

For the most part, though, time has worn well with the Rev. King. His prominent place in history is justly celebrated for more than the obligatory one day per year. As William T. Small, assistant dean of the School of Public Health, put it last week, "People honor Dr. King from his birthday until February."

Having just passed what would have been King's 56th birthday, last Tuesday, the University today has a unique opportunity to pay tribute to this slain civil rights leader. Tonight at 8 in Memorial Hall, former Chapel Hill mayor Howard Lee will speak at the fourth annual Martin Luther King Jr. birthday celebration. Tomorrow, at 3 p.m. in the Rosenau Hall auditorium, the executive director of TransAfrica of Washington, D.C., will speak at the seventh annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Ceremony.

It's enough to make one think that

King has achieved postmortem superstar status. But far from it. Official recognition in the form of a national holiday, which the nation will celebrate every third Monday in January beginning next year, came only after King's name was dragged through the congressional mud by ultra-conservatives. The new holiday did not pass easily through the Senate chamber, where North Carolina's Sen. Jesse Helms tried to persuade his colleagues that King was a communist.

Whether one agrees that the man deserves recognition in the way of a national holiday, the degree to which King made the country aware of its inherent racism must be seen as remarkable. And vital. Accepting the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1964, King said, "Yet when the years have past . . . men and women will know and children will be taught that we have a finer land, a better people, a more noble civilization — because these humble children of God were willing to suffer for righteousness' sake."

That the University and world communities devote such substantial energy this time of year in remembrance of King is no mystery. Blacks and whites alike celebrate Martin Luther King with passion because he represents the highest principles of this nation.

Nature's balancing act

There are some who believe that nature has a way of balancing things out. Evidence over the weekend indicates they just might be right. Tar Heel fans went to bed with deflated spirits Saturday night after a rare loss in Carmichael to Duke. They awoke to find the pain of defeat softened by a dazzling coat of snow that blanketed the state early Sunday.

A North Carolina snow, a creature that rarely appears more than two or three times a year, puts residents in a festive mood as almost all but essential businesses (hospitals, sellers of spirits and the like) close their doors for the event. Long-time North Carolinians know that the snow is best enjoyed at home. Some are even tempted to put up guard rails around their yards to protect against the most dangerous of Tar Heels — those who claim they can drive in snow. Owners of tow trucks and other four-wheel-drive vehicles do a thriving business pulling such "seasoned" drivers out of ditches.

Besides getting stranded in their autos, UNC students could be seen yesterday partaking in those activities unique to a day of snowfall. Some of the more obnoxious members of the student body woke up their late-sleeping roommates with a volley of snowballs. A hearty bunch on Carmichael Field engaged in snow football, a game particularly hard on the exposed fingers and faces of the

participants and one in which a completed pass usually signals victory for the team accomplishing the feat. Lenoir Hall trays saw their best use in months as students turned them into makeshift sleds on a particularly treacherous run near Kenan Stadium. The gourmet minded gathered ingredients for snow cream, a tasty treat, though its nutritive value has been brought into question by the increasing acidity of local precipitation.

Perhaps North Carolinians make the most of snow because it is usually short-lived. If the past is any guide, the blanket of snow will be memory by the end of the week. Unlike stubborn Yankee snows, a Southern snow doesn't hang around like bothersome in-laws; it usually departs well before it has become blackened with soot and auto emissions.

There is also heartening consistency in the midst of our unusual weather. Chancellor Fordham says higher education in Chapel Hill is likely to go on despite the frozen precipitation. UNC is not some wimpy county school system to close at the drop of the first snowflake, though the University did close three years ago, for the first time in decades, when successive days of snow and bitter cold turned streets into glaciers.

If you dare to walk to class this morning, the best advice we can give is, watch your footing and dodge those snowballs!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Giving up a little privacy for the good of all

To the editor:
 Some high school reminiscences make me disagree with your editorial "Search unwarranted" (Jan. 17). My point is that I lived through four years of something like what you fear. So relax: some people even benefitted from the program I'll describe.

I attended an international school in Jakarta, Indonesia. The school administration was very worried about having students arrested for possessing drugs, especially after several kids in Singapore were

temporarily thrown in the clink. (They were nabbed during a raid on their school and were released after agreeing to leave the country with their families. It was a touch-and-go compromise, and everyone had the *Midnight Express* jitters for a while afterward.) The school administrators in Jakarta struck a deal with the Indonesian police whereby our school wouldn't be raided if a strict drug abuse prevention program was followed.

The cornerstone of the effort was mandatory, random (and not so random) urine testing. Hashish was

big on campus, marijuana and cocaine were common; students were constantly getting caught. I was briefly peeing into little bottles, too, not because I was stoned (too chicken) but because a friend of a friend was thought to be a dealer. My privacy was certainly violated, and a few civil rights were put on hold. On the other hand, what would have happened if the cops got fed up and marched into homeroom? So I submitted to that (ultimate?) search and seizure.

Drug abuse partly resulted from poor adjustment to a totally new

culture, not forgetting low cost and easy access. For me and many American and European teen-agers, Jakarta was sometimes a hard place to live in. Some students with drug problems were helped sooner than they might otherwise have been, and more quietly and constructively than if the government had intervened. On balance, then, the program was a good idea and worth the brief suspension of our right to privacy.

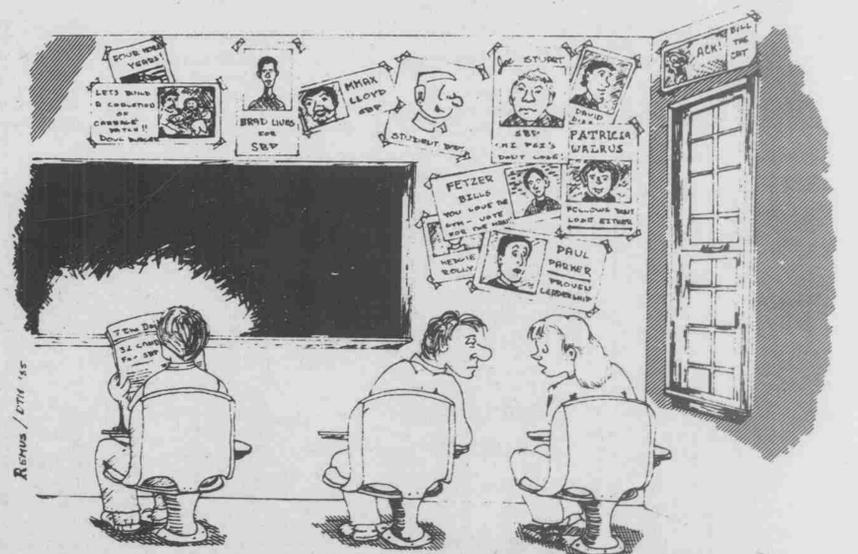
Doug Brower
 Chapel Hill

Unpatriotic

To the editor:
 Every so often we encounter situations that reflect the apparent apathetic attitude of various University employees. One such situation occurred during the final week of exams in December. While walking through the Quad we noticed a University police officer "retiring the colors." We do not mean this in the traditional sense, because in actuality the officer proceeded to wad the American flag like a wet dishrag and to shove it under his armpit.

We feel it is our obligation as conservative UNC students who still maintain a high degree of patriotism to display our outrage at this disrespectful incident. We were brought up to respect the American flag and all that it stands for. At a time when American patriotism is supposedly at its highest in recent years, it appears it is at its lowest on this campus. What does it all mean and where will it all end?

Mike Altieri
 E.C. Boutwell
 Richard Watts
 Teague



Wishful thinking won't achieve arms control

To the editor:
 Dr. Coulter's claim ("Only escape: arms control," Jan. 16) that the American people have a unique responsibility to save humanity depends on one of two assumptions: either one must assume that the American people can influence both the American and Soviet governments' policies or one must assume that the American people can at least influence the American government's policies and that the Soviet Union will respond in kind to a unilateral nuclear freeze or reduction in nuclear weapons. If neither of these assumptions is true, Dr. Coulter's claim is suspect — and possibly dangerous.

It may be fairly easy for someone to accept the idea that the American people can influence their govern-

ment's policies. One may be more hesitant to accept that the American people can influence the Soviet government's policies, however. It would only be necessary to consider the limited effects of Americans' outrage and condemnation of Soviet policies in Afghanistan (the U.S. government's imposition of a grain embargo, our boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics and other countries' reactions notwithstanding) to question the influence of the American people on the Soviet government's policies.

What about the other possibility that the Soviet government will freeze or reduce its nuclear arsenal if the U.S. does so first? Although no exact precedent exists, one might consider the Soviet and U.S. arms buildup during an era of "arms

control" in order to get a sense of U.S.-Soviet interaction. The number of Soviet strategic warheads increased from 1,400 in 1970 (the SALT I negotiations) to nearly 5,000 in 1977 (as SALT II talks neared completion) to 7,900 in 1983-84 (during the START talks). The number of U.S. strategic warheads rose from 2,200 to 7,400 during the same period. One could rather simplistically decide that the Soviet government was just catching up with the United States during this period of "arms control" and would respond to a U.S. stimulus of nuclear freeze in the same manner as it responded to the U.S. stimulus of arms buildup earlier. Still, even Dr. Coulter acknowledges that the fate of humanity "cannot be left safely to the Soviet government."

If one decides that the American people cannot influence the Soviet government's policies and doubts whether the Soviet government simply responds in kind to a U.S. stimulus, what next? A reasonable response is suggested by Dr. Coulter himself: "We must do all we can to know more about the Soviet Union and the Soviet people." If one does investigate the history of the Bolshevik revolution and its evolution through the Stalinist era into the modern period, one might arrive at the opinion that the responsibility of the American people is not to demand that the U.S. government unilaterally take positions which the Soviet Union favors just to achieve "a relationship of 'live and let live.'"

Paul Killebrew
 Department of Economics

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