

# Editorials

## Flynt verdict sets poor precedent for libel suits

Anyway you look at it, a lie is a lie. Even little white lies which have achieved a certain acceptance in today's society are small falsehoods that can turn into a web of bigger lies. But even though our culture is very big on freedom and in recent years this attitude has become increasingly more difficult to accept.

This pressure concerning the nature of America's first amendment is perhaps best exemplified by the recent libel trials which have been sweeping through legal court rooms over the past several months.

One such case is last month's trial of Hustler publisher Larry Flynt, who was found innocent of charges that he libeled Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell. The now famous (or infamous) case began after Flynt printed a parody advertisement of a liquor ad that portrayed Falwell as an inebriated drunk. The ad carried a disclaimer, but even so, Falwell was scrambling for his legal defense and filed a \$45 million libel suit. While the jury found Hustler not guilty (because of the ad's unbelievability) Falwell was still awarded \$200,000 in punitive damages for emotional stress.

Since a landmark decision 20 years ago, by a public figure (like Falwell) has to prove libel by proving that the published statement was false, and that it was made with knowledge of its falsity.

This unusual decision in the case against Larry Flynt, has been regarded by legal specialists as a very poor legal precedent, one that could very well damage the first amendment. For example, why couldn't Larry Flynt have come out of the case without having to pay anything at all. The split decision really seems like a "guilty" verdict because Larry Flynt just

isn't the "kind of guy" who is ever found innocent of anything. Hustler magazine is one of the more offensive pornographic publications. Thus Larry Flynt falls into the same category: he is an offensive person. The decision is being appealed, as it should be.

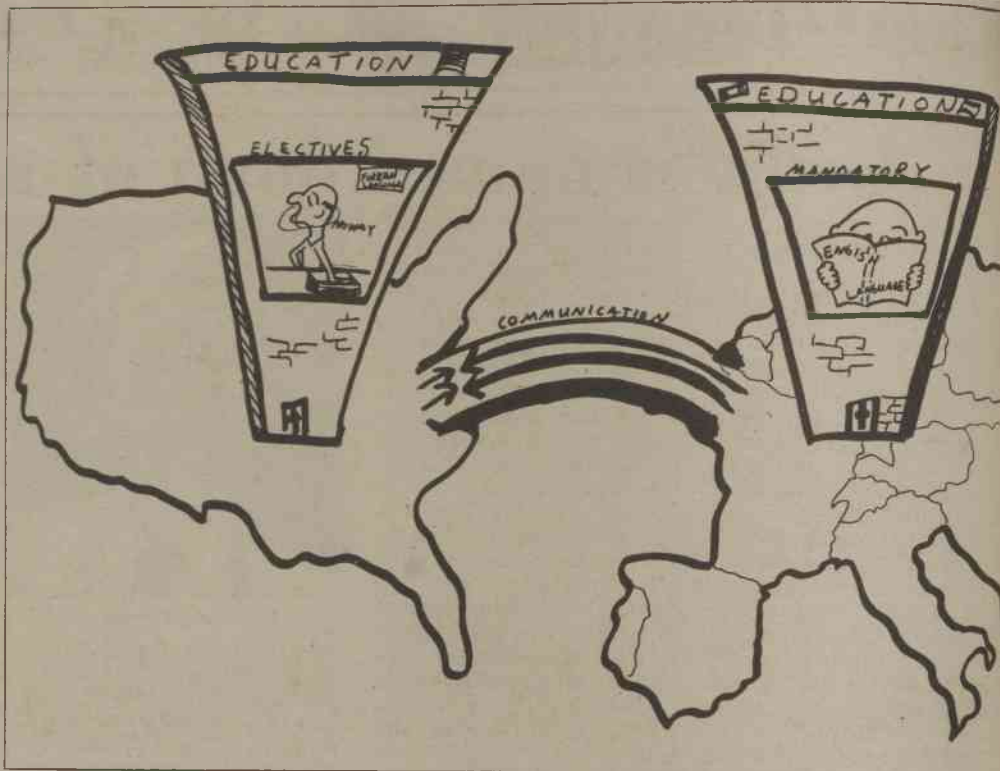
The advertisement was a satire, and satires (i.e. editorial cartoons) are meant to poke, prod and push people, regardless of who they are. The jury claimed the ad not libelous, but still awarded Falwell with a relatively substantial amount of money because Falwell was apparently hurt. It seems as though Falwell took this opportunity to vent his feelings about pornography in general, and not specifically the contents of one particular ad.

All of this is not to say that we support Flynt or his type of print journalism, but rather that since the jury perceived the material as unbelievable, then they shouldn't have still tried to score.

And now, the race is on, the latest of which is the trial of Gen. William Westmoreland against CBS. Under impressive media attention, as well as concern, Westmoreland's libel suit will more than likely be the biggest libel case of our time. General Westmoreland is suing CBS news for \$120 million for accusing him of lying to President Johnson and other officials about the strength of enemy troops just prior to the 1968 Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War.

As the public waits to hear if CBS' documentary was a malicious slam at the general, we will be, as a society, examining the advantages and disadvantages of our free society by tasking a closer look at how the government and the press operate.

By Loukia Louka



## Foreign language study essential

In 1966, 36 per cent of all colleges and universities required some type of foreign language for admissions. In 1982, only 8 per cent required it.

However, foreign language studies apparently are making a modest comeback. Enrollment in foreign languages courses has increased by about 4.5 per cent over 1980, according to the Modern Language Association.

More colleges and universities need to make foreign language a requirement for graduation. A foreign language major was re-established here in October 1983. Students may be admitted with language deficiencies (less than two years high school study), and the present General Studies requirement in "Civilization" requires six hours of foreign language and/or history.

Thus, it is possible for people to get a degree from Elon without studying foreign languages at all. Elon should require at least two courses of foreign

language conversation and perhaps even require courses in foreign cultures.

Students and educators should realize the increasing importance of foreign languages. English may be the language of much of the global economy, as but as American corporations expand into foreign markets, knowledge of foreign languages and culture will prove to be useful in conducting business. Better international business relations could be achieved with more knowledge of foreign customs or languages.

European students have mandatory lessons in English. Many of them are able to communicate with English-speaking visitors, giving directions or selling their merchandise. It too often happens that this is one-way communication because Americans cannot participate in conversation in the native languages.

We cannot expect everyone in the world to drop their traditional languages and learn to

speak English—especially learning all of our slang and colloquialisms. This would be ethnocentric.

American schools should insist on study of the foreign languages interest; to require it for graduation would help. The next generations of students would be better prepared for international relations. Besides, isn't communication a start of understanding between countries?

By Penny Thomas

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