

The Daily Tar Heel

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Carl Apollonio

Books And Colleges

The following letter was sent in reply to a form query from the past President of the National Councils of Teachers of English, who is "engaged in a study of the status of the teaching of English in American Schools." The letter is reprinted here because in the opinion of the editors it is a coherent and perceptive criticism not only of this university, but of higher education in America; and, by implication, of our culture. This seems a healthy note on which to end the school year.

Mr. Apollonio offers the following biographical note in preface to his letter: "I have been in retail book business since May, 1953 and spent five years in a small New England town, Brunswick, Maine, where my shop was the principle outlet for books. A major part of our trade came down from Bowdoin College (men's liberal art, 800 hundred student, very high quality.) For the past year and a half I have been here in Chapel Hill as manager of THE INTIMATE BOOK SHOP, the only retail bookshop in this area. As you know, the University of North Carolina is quite large (something over 7500 students) and includes a medical and law school, so I think we can give a fairly accurate indication of reading tastes at a large educational institution." —Ed.

There is little doubt in my mind that students are buying more books now than they did even as recently as six or seven years ago, but the reasons for this are hardly as inspiring as it might appear at first glance. The paperback revolution has made it possible for faculty members to require students (especially in English Courses) to buy as many as 10 or 12 books per semester, each book costing little more than a dollar or so, whereas formerly the practice was to require only one or two books, say a general anthology of the period under study, plus a basic reference grammar book. Today, the fat anthology is on the way out in favor of the cheap (in price, not quality) paperbacks, so that a student will read basically what he once read in an anthology, but will now read it in ten or more books.

Obviously, if the student buys a dozen books, picked by the professor, he will be "buying more of the quality non-fiction books than before." But I would have to emphasize that in my opinion, most of these purchases are under duress, so to speak. There is no doubt that more students are being "exposed to quality literature by having to enter a book shop in order to get what the professor has required. Unfortunately, in too many cases the attitude is "Give me the cheapest and thinnest book with the largest type face." I really wonder how many students are developing serious reading habits in the modern American University.

With the pressure of athletics, social events and ROTC, the atmosphere is distinctly ungenial for the introspective, curious and brooding type of student. The young person of strong basic character who has received an early grounding in his home is going to continue to read. A small minority more will develop this love of good books as a result of chance contact with a good teacher who somehow manages to find time to encourage the student. Too many faculty members, however, are involved in "research" or administrative work (committees on parking problems, etc.) and more and more of the graduate students who themselves are preoccupied with getting their own graduate degree. This leaves the student precisely nowhere. I think the real tragedy in our educational system is that no one seems to recognize that first-rate classroom teachers, who care only about aspiring students, are our greatest asset, and yet very few universities that I know of are in any way recognizing and encouraging this kind of teacher.

Overwhelmingly, the emphasis is on the Ph.D. degree and on the published article. The phrase "Publish or Perish" is far from a joke or cliché. If we expect to judge our society critically, then we must stop looking for cheap and easy yardsticks with which to measure our students and teachers. We must stop the commit-

tee form of idolatry and get back to the realization that solitude and lack of pressure are essential if we expect to develop keen intelligences. We must also face up to the fact that a man can write 500 pages and fill the pages with impressive looking charts, graphs, statistics and footnotes is no measure of his true worth. Thomas Jefferson, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Albert Einstein did quite nicely without recourse to these sometimes useful, but too often misleading, aids.

There is no question that quality paper-backs have had a tremendous impact on buying habits, but, as outlined above, the reasons are not what they might appear at first glance. One of the most insidious developments in recent years has been the growth of the bling, colorful, college "bookshop" with its tremendous stock of "Student Aids" — fancy plastic notebook covers, slick pen and pencil sets, colorful outline series, guaranteed to reduce the wisdom of two thousand years to 96 neat, topical pages, well sprinkled with slick maps, illustrations and "tips" on how to study. The "merchandise" manager with his ability to exploit the student with his "plus sales" of tee-shirts, beer-mugs, fraternity decals and jock strap straps has moved in in force.

The serious book, outside of the required text book, has almost vanished because of the relatively low profit margin. College students today are big business and every season shows more and more clever sidelines to be sold to the student, promising him more shortcuts so that he can finish the assignment in half the previous time so that he will have more free time for the football game, the student paper, the fraternity rushing program, the dance committee and ad infinitum.

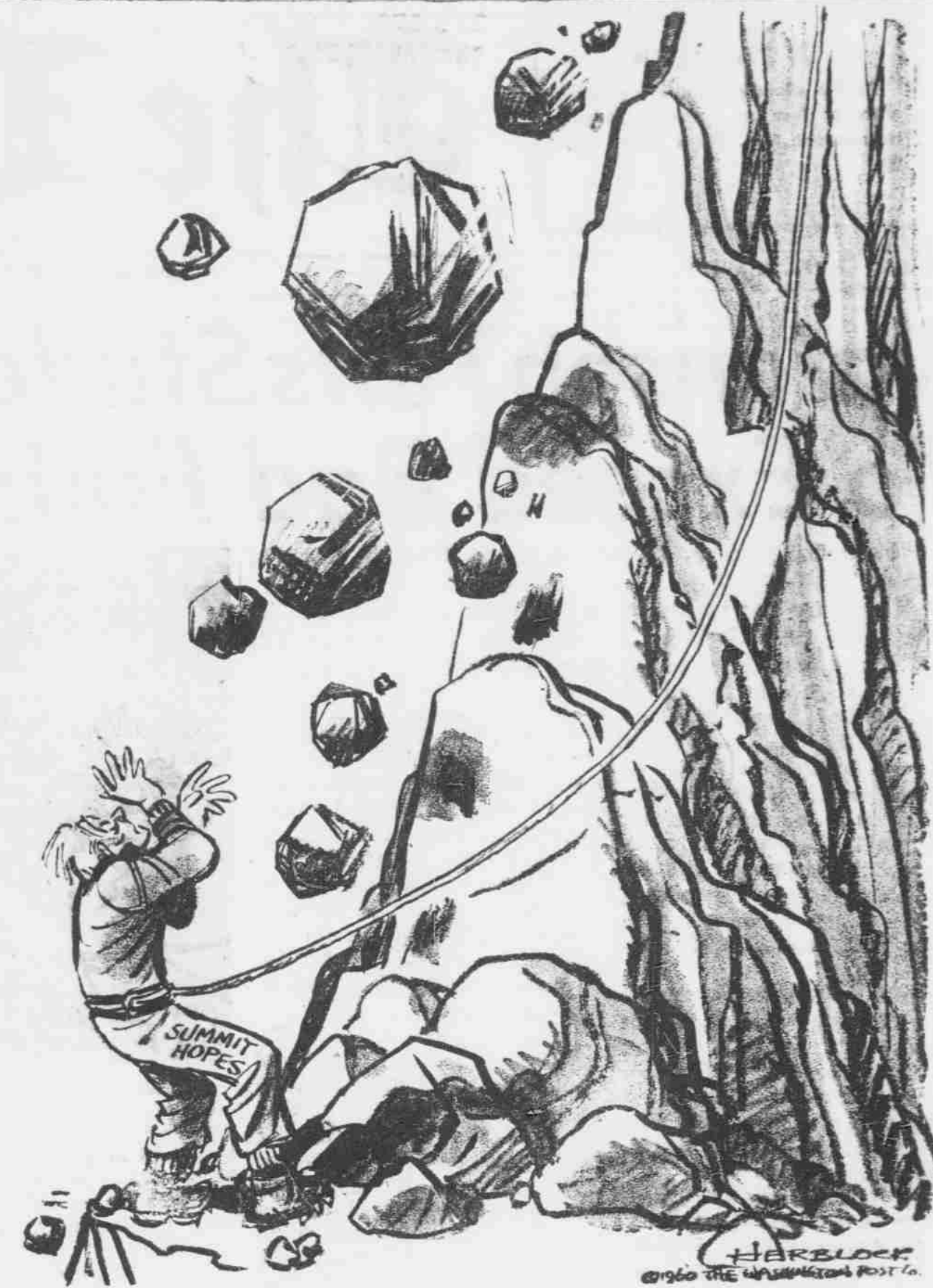
Worse yet, the profits (and they are huge) from these "Super Market-Type" operations are too often diverted to non-scholastic purposes—athletic scholarships, improvement of parking facilities, etc. Still worse, the managers of these operations are often on a salary-plus-commission basis with the result that more profitable sidelines are constantly encroaching on the serious reading material.

I am afraid that students today do not "have better tastes in reading than before." To begin with, I don't know what "taste" is supposed to mean. I suspect that taste is too often dependent upon what Madison Avenue decides it ought to be. Witness the multiplicity of advertisements every week in the various "literary" supplements, promoting Fine Bindings (for \$1.98, postpaid), Great Art Course for only \$2.95 (you paste in the stamps yourself.) Witness the TV courses which promise to teach one to handle the Russian language after 12 half hour sessions.

More and more students get to college without having learned even the rudiments of the English language, without being able to write legibly, without the slightest conception of the difference between Algebra, Calculus and Geometry.

They have, however, had plenty of course in Life Adjustment, Group Cooperation and Social Adjustment, plus innumerable hours on Practical Arts for Express Living, History is now Social Studies, English is now Language Arts; mathematics is Number Skills. I encounter co-eds every day who are "majoring" in Education. They will go out to teach Language Arts and will be totally ignorant of Charles Dickens, Milton, Moliere, James Thurber, William Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, A. A. Milne, John Stuart Mill, Plato and all the rest. Worse yet, more and more of the teachers of Education are themselves ignorant of these, whom I call in my supreme conceit, "basic writers."

"The better things of life" which you mention is a phrase which is open to serious differences of interpretation. My wife, a high school graduate, is devoted to the music of Beethoven and Mozart. The wife of my closest friend is a college graduate, she is devoted to television and watches it for several hours every day. Her husband, a fine young architect, is devoted to science fiction and TV Westerns. There are not a dozen good books in the house. Their "taste" is as legitimate as my own, which runs to non-fiction, model build-



ing and any kind of music from rock and roll to classical.

You ask if students are developing life time habits of reading good books, etc. The American Bookseller's Association, I am sure, will be happy to supply you with statistics concerning the reading habits of American adults. As I recall only about 7% of us read even one serious book a year. This society is a mobile and restless one, dependent, it seems to me, on noise in some form for its "relaxation." The outboard motor, the power lawnmower, the social club in any of its manifold forms, the vicarious athletic contest etc. Practically nothing in our society is oriented so as to encourage the individual to isolate himself from his "group." While I would hesitate to take an hysterical approach to this, I would say tentatively that people who do isolate themselves even for a matter of a few hours a week, are looked upon as slightly eccentric, else we would not have the pervading mass-picture of the "absent minded professor" harmless, but useless. Albert Einstein himself fitted



this popular image to the Nth degree — long hair, thick glasses, ill-at-ease socially. He even played the violin — long the butt of jokes for politicians and radio comedians. Stangely enough, Mr. Einstein somehow found time to formulate the most significant and devastating natural laws of this universe.

I think that the popular magazines, with their shallow and half-way approach are as guilty as any other single definable entity. The content of 95% of these magazines is condemnation enough of the reading habits of this nation. At present, there is a trend toward more serious reading matter in the popular magazines. I would like to think it indicated an awakening to the problem, but I doubt it. There is an emphasis on "science" — even little children are taught to blow soap bubbles in the classroom so that their teachers will be able to show the parents that they are "scientifically oriented."

In summary, as I have written this, the conviction has been growing in me that the questions you ask me are not really relevant to the issue. You ask for "Statistics" as if the problem could be reduced to several neat tables.

Unfortunately, there is a widespread mis-belief (which is fostered in the educational system) that knowledge can be reduced to a series of numbers. When a Physicist, Mathematician or Chemist uses this approach with reference to certain limited physical problems, he may be justified, if he has the intellectual training which will enable him to recognize the dangers involved. When the Psychologist, Sociologist, Educationalist or Anthropologist uses it he is in great danger of attempting to reduce the human brain to the level of an electronic computer. If the vital truths of human existence could be handled in this fashion, then I doubt that there would be any need for you to ask your questions because we would not be humans, but merely machines.

What has been lost in this century is an understanding of what was once meant by the term "Humanism." I can't define it here, but I would suggest that anyone who is concerned with these problems should read (or re-read) Revolt of the Masses by Jose Ortega y Gasset, Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited by Aldous Huxley, The New Class by Milovan Djilas, The Federalist Papers, Hamlet, The Republic, the poetry of John Donne, Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, Robinson Jeffers, the writings of John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, and all the other books which at one time were considered important in the great universities of the western world, before these things were supplanted by the textbooks in the many schools of education, business administration and psychology.

A very fine professor of English at Bowdoin College once said to his class, "No poem was ever written by a committee." I submit as well that no great novel was ever written by a committee, nor did Sor William Osler, Leonardo Davinci, Sir Isaac Newton, Rembrandt, Albert Schweitzer, Ghandi, Stalin, Albert Einstein, Ernest Hemingway, or Mozart ever need the help of a committee for their contributions to the world.

Until we are willing to stop crucifying the very men and women who have, in solitude, anguish and introspection, made it possible for us to drive air-conditioned Cadillacs, there is little point in compiling more statistics to elucidate the obvious.

Yours very truly,
Carlton L. Apollonio

Letters on Wolff

Open letter to A. Wolff:
Mr. Wolff,

RE your latest creation, "Oedipus At Carolina". Allow me to extend to you my deepest sympathy. There are those of you, pseudo angry men, who unfortunately never see anything beautiful in life. It is truly a pity. You should write for "Time." People like you must live in a special hell. Please spare us your hyperbols.

Sincerely,
Herb Poole

To the Editor:
In re your recent "review" of OEDIFUS: I would suggest that you acquire a critic who is mature enough to know the difference between fair appraisal and vicious contempt.

Kai Jurgensen

A Case With Some Serious Overtones

Last night three students went before the Student Council on a charge of violating the Campus Code by raising a flag on the University flag pole without authorization.

This case, as most students know, is one of the strangest that has arisen in campus judicial circles in quite some time. It challenges many existing precedents in judicial rulings, and it poses a new and extremely difficult problem.

The first problem that the Council must face is whether or not the physical act of raising the flag was a violation of the Code which asks that Carolina students conduct themselves in a manner that befits gentlemen at all times.

Is it an ungentlemanly act to raise a flag on a pole that customarily is used solely for the stars and stripes? Would it be ungentlemanly to raise a Confederate flag? The Union Jack? The North Carolina State Flag?

If the Student Council maintains that to raise any flag without authorization is a violation of the Code, then it is within its bounds in censuring these students for their actions.

But if it rules that the flag itself must be in some way antagonistic to the better interests of the student body and the University in order that the action be considered a violation of said Code,

then it has stepped from the realm of the concrete and tangible into the vague and unsure.

To try these students on the basis of the meaning of the flag is to try them on their ideas, and American tradition and the American Constitution do not allow this. And to do so would be to concede to the limitation of thought in an academic community which we so bitterly oppose.

We do not feel that the physical act committed was a violation of the Campus Code. If raising a flag is a violation, then many acts which heretofore have been passed off must be construed as violations.

And we do not feel that the Council—or any court, for we are not singling the Council out for damnation — has the right to censure anyone for the jist of his thoughts.

Joseph McCarthy did this, and while he was in operation the nation was in sad shape. And the end results were not good.

We do not agree with the method these students used to express their views, although we know that many of the things they were trying to say have much validity.

We suggest that these students are not guilty of violation of the Campus Code. Perhaps Mort Sahl would stum up their error by saying they are "guilty of bad taste."

Working Toward A Better World

The aftermath of the summit conference has been almost as unpleasant as the conference itself.

Nikita S. Khrushchev, Premier of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, has used the results of the meeting as a springboard to international attention and the furtherance of the Soviet propaganda cause.

He has flown into fiery rages against the United States, using the U-2 incident as the major battling ram. He has compared the President of the United States to a thief, called him a "fishy" friend, accused him of torpedoing the meetings, and charged the United States with making overtures to international warfare.

Many American observers have suggested that a remark that slipped off the Premier's tongue, in which he referred to internal Soviet troubles, may contain the clue to the meeting's break-up.

This seems both possible and impossible.

The free world has long prided itself on the assumption that it has the better system of government, and has felt that the peoples of the Communist world have great desires to rebel from the yoke of tyranny and join the free nations.

And while we have prided ourselves on this assumption, there have been no rumblings from Russia or her satellite since the Hungarian revolt. Khrushchev has not been a bad leader, and he has undoubtedly been better than a Stalin.

Under Khrushchev the Russian people have steadily gained small, but significant freedoms. They have been doled out like Christmas presents, few and far between but appreciated when they arrive. They have been little things like American travelling shows, wider selection in women's wear, and similar innovations.

These are things we take for granted, but to the Russian people they are manna from heaven. And they serve to raise Khrushchev's home support.

Yes, it is possible that the small amount of information that has reached the Russian people unadulterated has convinced them that they should overthrow their dictator. But it is more likely that the only trouble Khrushchev is facing is within the confines of the Communist Party itself or within the government.

The point is that what Khrushchev really seems to be doing is to egg the free world, and particularly the United States, into a position in which it will look bad to the uncommitted nations and the Soviet People. A great propaganda victory is needed by the Soviet dictatorship to follow up the U-2 incident.

There is little defense for the United States as far as the spying is concerned, but we can and must continue to conduct ourselves with the integrity and dignity that the President displayed in Paris. If we do so, there will be no charge levelled against us that is valid, and the rest of the world will understand this as well as we do.



POGO

PEANUTS

by WALT KELLY

by SCHULZ