

Cynical opinions create hostile conversation



Connor Stangler

With one exception, the Truman calendar of events for this week was comfortably familiar. There was the usual refreshing list of student-initiated activities — the kind that make you feel good about campus and humankind in general.

But amid such admirable and pleasing events as the Environmental Studies Conference, a Peace Meditation and Arbor Day Tree Planting was an inconsistency — the kind that makes you feel horrible about campus and humankind in general.

The event on Tuesday was listed simply as “Welfare is

the new slavery.” Star Parker, a conservative spokeswoman and advocate, spoke on the adverse effects of the welfare system and the movement to reform it. Aside from the fundamental differences between her views of welfare and my own, my issue here is with what Parker and her invective represents: a troublesome trend in American political discourse to rely on the destructive rather than the constructive and the negative rather than the positive.

Parker, as the title of her lecture indicates, compared the welfare system to one of the most barbarous institutions in history. The government invites you to a “plantation” where you must work to stay there. She denounces the shift from an emphasis on personal responsibility to that of dependence on our own peculiar institution. This is a brazenly inappropriate comparison to one of the bleakest periods in this country’s history.

Slavery is still alive today. In the past few years, human trafficking has been evident in Cambodia, Haiti and even Kansas, according to various media reports. The comparison is for effect, I know, but Parker could elicit the same response (or perhaps a more positive one) by outlining her own alternative to welfare instead of committing herself to repulsive and entirely tactless rhetoric.

In another lecture, Parker discussed the distortion of “social justice,” saying that it “does not mean that parents of biblical conviction should have no option but to send their kids to these cesspools we call schools so that they can be indoctrinated by anti-Christian worldviews.” Talk of dreams, talk of expectations, talk of visions yet unrealized, but do not reduce yourself to a vile symbol of American cynicism — it can only get you so far.

But Parker is only a single case in a broader campaign. The

Tea Party movement and others have led a crusade against the federal government. Some of the leaders of the movement have joined conservatives in the Oklahoma legislature to create a volunteer militia that would, according to the Associated Press, “help defend against what they believe are improper federal infringements on state sovereignty.” Promises of violent reactions and dangerous rhetoric have hampered Americans’ abilities to reach peaceful solutions.

Suddenly the goal is to subject society to a hostile crucible with no hope of solution or union. Whoever can invent the most caustic analogy has succeeded in creating a potent depressor and identifying the criminal in all of this. But when the witch hunt is over and the antagonists are left standing, what will we list as our accomplishments?

As leaders of tomorrow, we must not give into this rhetorical vulgarity. Free speech is

a cherished liberty, especially on college campuses. But speech is most effective as a means of persuasion when it is thoughtful. There is a time for criticism. Problems exist, and often the first step toward a solution is diagnosing them. But when all that is spoken and written is negative, there’s a good chance you’re neutralizing your own appeal and destroying the forcefulness of your passion.

If organizations continue to invite speakers such as Parker and citizens continue to reject peaceful, reasonable and positive rhetoric in favor of cynicism, then we run the risk of becoming what we practice. The next time you have the opportunity to attend a lecture like that, go meditate instead.

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AROUND THE QUAD

What kinds of locally-grown foods would you buy?



“I’m anti locally grown food.”

*Tyler Jackson
freshman*



“Definitely fruit.”

*Ashley Welch
freshman*



“I go to the farmer’s market, so I buy fresh foods.”

*Rosemary Melton
senior*



“I bought delicious cantaloupe over the summer at a fruit stand.”

*Jeff Sachs
junior*

Female stereotypes hinder athletes



Brenna McDermott

As a bit of a feminist, it is difficult for me to accept certain gender expectations. We’ve begun to move away from the stay-at-home mom stereotype. We’ve evolved from the idea that a woman can’t go anywhere alone or be anything without a man at her side. But I still feel the weight of society’s expectations of me on my shoulders. I’m a woman. And I’m still expected to be dainty and cute, even when I’m jogging on the streets of Kirksville.

Soffe shorts are an example of that oppression.

I’ve written columns for three years. I’ve covered everything from Plan B to marijuana to condom use. I’m about to move on from column writing, but I can’t move on without saying what needs to be said.

Soffe shorts should never be considered athletic. In fact, as a former athlete and an avid runner, I’m in shock and awe that Soffe labels itself as “the brand to wear whether

you are cheering, twirling, dancing, running, swimming, bike riding, marching, playing softball, baseball, soccer, tennis, volleyball, hanging out at the beach or even sleeping. We have styles to fit your every need.”

Every need, my ass. I’ve tried to run in those suckers. It doesn’t end well. They’re short to begin with, but I’ve seen girls with the elastic folded up two or three times. At this point they cease to become shorts and become something akin to an underwear-type garment. I won’t deny I’ve got a bit of meat on my legs, thighs and hips. So when I’m running on a warm April afternoon you better believe my legs are wishing there was a layer of cool, long basketball shorts between them. Instead, it’s chafe city with those Soffe shorts. When I’m running, I’m not interested in letting it all hang out. I’d be constantly pulling those shorts down to cover my big butt. When I play basketball, I’m not hoping to get checked out. Skin-tight short shorts are not going to help me run faster or shoot a ball better. They’re going to hinder my performance.

What professional athlete wears Soffe-like shorts? The St. Louis Athletica of Women’s Professional Soccer wear shorts that go past mid-thigh. The women of the WNBA’s Chicago Sky wear shorts to the knee. The fact that Soffe shorts are sold in

sporting goods stores next to Nike athletic shorts reinforces the idea that women can’t just be athletic. We also have to look good while doing it.

It’s the double standard in our society that refuses to go away. And while I have a personal and long-festering problem with the Soffe brand, there are plenty of companies that reinforce this idea of female beauty.

One of my biggest accomplishments in life was running a half marathon last year. It took dedication, hard work and all the energy I had. It was one of the biggest undertakings of my life. I couldn’t have run those 13.1 miles in Soffe shorts. All I cared about was crossing the finish line. My body wouldn’t have been very happy with me if I had made my run more difficult because of the short shorts I was sporting.

Being an athlete or even someone who enjoys exercise takes effort. It takes dedication. To expect women to wear shorts that sexualize them or for women to feel like they have to wear uncomfortable clothes simply to look good while taking a jog is another illustration of the old saying that beauty is pain.

Brenna McDermott is a junior communication major from St. Louis, Mo.

Students should think about local food



Tyler Retherford

If my studies in anthropology have taught me anything, it’s that simple decisions have complex and far-reaching consequences, and that’s something we should keep in mind as we celebrate Earth Week.

What we choose to eat is a special decision that deserves attention. Something as mundane as picking up a frozen pizza has serious implications for sustainable living.

Food is one of the most basic elements of life, and it takes up a large chunk of many college students’ budgets, but it isn’t always something we think about. Food certainly isn’t as prominent in the public discussions of sustainability as energy, but it should be. Food, like energy, is complicated, and there’s a lot we should know about it to make informed decisions. We should be concerned about how our food is produced, how it’s processed, how it’s transported, who’s profiting from each stage, what impact the associated land use has and what sort of resources are being used in all these processes.

If we’re attempting to reduce our overall energy consumption we can’t be concerned only with our own personal energy use, but with how much energy is involved with the things we purchase. Frozen foods, for example, not only have to be extensively processed, but also transported a long distance from the processing facility and kept frozen the whole way, all of which requires substantial amounts of energy. Once armed with this knowledge, we can make simple choices to reduce this cost, the simplest of which is to buy locally.

In addition to reducing transportation costs and the associated energy use, local foods are a better decision because they ensure local farmers can stay in business. This, in turn, means that the community has more control over the means of food production, because it’s much easier to influence

farmers in your own community than some nebulous corporation that has to answer to a huge number of shareholders. There are several ways to get your hands on locally-produced food in Kirksville. The farmers’ market is easy to get to and has an impressive array of goods, although it’s seasonal. A local grocery will soon be open downtown (see story, page 3), meaning it will likely be even more convenient than Hy-Vee or Wal-Mart for many people living around campus. It’s also possible to get food directly from some local farms, some of which are listed with contact information and offer products at www.covertecupboard.com, which also offers some baked goods at the farmers’ market.

There are, of course, some drawbacks to buying local foods. Some foods are not or cannot be produced locally. When I get a craving for some Ben and Jerry’s at 2 a.m. there isn’t exactly a local alternative. Using primarily local foods also means you’ll have to do most of your own cooking, because most restaurants don’t use locally-grown or locally-raised ingredients. It wouldn’t be easy to replace your entire diet with locally grown food, but if everyone added a few local products into their meals it would substantially reduce wasted energy.

This Earth Week, I hope everyone will try to educate themselves about how their simple decisions impact the world around them. To make the best decisions we have to arm ourselves with the relevant information upon which we can base such choices. Some decisions are less black and white than the question of whether to buy local foods, such as whether the use of crops to feed livestock, and by extension eating meat, is ethical. It’s far from obvious what the right course of action is, and the best way for each individual to decide what to do is to first learn as much about the dilemma as possible. That’s what Earth Week is all about: learning about the way our choices affect the world.

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Texans rewrite history, reveal conservative bias



John Hitzel

Texas just sent Thomas Jefferson to Guantanamo.

The Texas Board of Education approved a ban on the mention of Thomas Jefferson’s name among other enlightenment thinkers, replacing him with John Calvin, St. Thomas Aquinas and William Blackstone.

They also voted to replace the word “capitalism” with “free-enterprise system,” because the word “capitalism” has negative connotations.

Back in March, James McKinley of the New York Times wrote, “The Texas Board of Education ... approved a social studies curriculum

that will put a conservative stamp on history and economics textbooks, stressing the superiority of American capitalism, questioning the founding fathers’ commitment to a purely secular government and presenting Republican political philosophies in a more positive light.”

OK. History is written by the victors. We get accounts of wars and battles from the sides who won them. I remember my grade school history book telling me that Christopher Columbus “discovered America.” Magical, happy words.

There was, of course, no mention of the brutal abuse of Native Americans in my grade school history text, no mention of Columbus’s enslaving and murdering the hundreds of thousands of Arawak Indians in Haiti — I had to find that out on my own. But I think this is different, unless there’s some other battle going on.

McKinley continued, “In recent years, board members have been locked in an ideological battle between a bloc of conservatives who

question Darwin’s theory of evolution and believe the founding fathers were guided by Christian principles, and a handful of Democrats and moderate Republicans who have fought to preserve the teaching of Darwinism and the separation of church and state.”

So this is an ideological thing. That’s a bit more disturbing, because it means these folks are willing to change our still-researchable account of the very recent past, warts of perception and all, for something that more closely resembles their ideas about how they want the world to have looked, rather than the way it is.

Changing the past alters our perception of the present by changing our ideas about where we came from. “Who controls the past now, controls the future. Who controls the present now, controls the past,” raged Zach de la Rocha, butchering one of Orwell’s maxims from “1984.”

One Texas Board of Education member, Don McLeroy, justified the decision. “We are adding bal-

ance. History has already been skewed. Academia is skewed too far to the left.”

So he knows he’s altering the past. He’s conscious of the fact that history is biased, and seeks to eliminate that bias. Wait, no, he’s seeking to spin the bias needle back toward his own side of the dial, while calling his own spin a return to balance.

I think bias is OK as long as you admit to it. If you have a bias and don’t admit it, instead trying to pass off your opinions and perspective as objective, that’s lying, and an insidious form of it. And the American public, as evidenced by the still-glorious Bush presidency, is bad at detecting lies.

But this guy is an employee of the state. He’s telling you what to think about what he did, and he’s framing an issue to favor ... religion? Conservatives?

McKinley also wrote, “The conservative members maintain that they are trying to correct what they see as a liberal bias among the teachers who proposed the cur-

riculum. To that end, they made dozens of minor changes aimed at calling into question, among other things, concepts like the separation of church and state and the secular nature of the American Revolution.”

So Thomas Jefferson is gone from Texas because certain Texans want to question the separation of church and state? Thomas Jefferson coined that phrase, believed in states having more power than the federal government and founded the Democratic-Republican party. I get it. He also bought, oh, half the country.

They’re disappearing him, like a Guantanamo detainee, a POW.

“If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people that which they do not want to hear,” wrote George Orwell.

RIP, TJ.

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