

Tim Merle
Fundamentals of College Writing
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Professor Costal

Professor Skube,

In the interest of brevity, I will keep my analysis and response to your August 24th, 2006 commentary in *The Press of Atlantic City* short and to the point. I believe what you have done, maybe even unknowingly, certainly unbeknownst to the public at large, is simply diagnose some of the symptoms of a much larger public infection. This problem affects all high-school students, college students of any level, pervades and penetrates them on societal fronts beyond that of education. It is a multi-headed monster straight out of Greek mythology, and while I, personally, cannot propose a way of solving said problems, I can at least attempt to pick up where you left off and identify the source(s).

The DaVinci Code may be mediocre when compared to *The Grapes of Wrath*, but is nonetheless known by today's youth because it was made into a Tom Hanks movie (*Grapes* became a film as well, but it is in black-and-white: a medium that might as well be cave paintings to today's youth), and more importantly the book, the film, and the supposed "controversy" that surrounded it were heavily trafficked by all forms of news media. I would go so far to argue that this sensationalism is similar to the hype that attached itself to *The Divine Comedy* or *The Canterbury Tales*, or the kind of ad campaigns that led to success after resounding success of Shakespeare. Kids today are raised with that kind of invasive advertizing: running scrolls during news programs, corporate logos during television shows, Internet pop-up ads, and so on. This is a kind of advertisement even I, who went to high school in the 90s, did not experience, and certainly members of any previous generation did not live through. It is a great irony of the Information Age that, as more information becomes available, the less actual choice one has in selecting which information is valuable, and eventually such a skill becomes recessive, as it has today.

In other words, there are five hundred cable channels, and still nothing on.

Vocabulary has been attacked on all sides, from laxness in reading classes to the poor and politically correct nature shared by almost all high school texts, and from the popularity and linguistic

utilitarianism of on-line chat and text messages. The Internet has also allowed the regional phenomena of slang to become national, even global, so spoken oddities once confined to one or two zip codes are now beamed directly into a teenager's bedroom, all at once. The use of slang and text-speak in advertizing also contributes to this problem, creating the mentality in a teenager that, "Well, they do it, so I can do it too." Slang such as Ebonics has become a sort of identity in rebellious teens, the same way George Orwell's New Speak twists language to serve Big Brother, or how the menacing Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* speaks a dialect of 70s British punk slang and Russian. And for the worse, these kids are not growing up in otherwise "normal" households and subsequently becoming exposed; they are now born into a failing vocabulary.

Which, to round things out, begs the question of how much say these teens and college students really have in their own education. After all, one cannot fault a Jehovah's Witness for thinking the world will end any day if that is all she has been brought up to believe. How much can one fault a child for being a racist when both of his parents are card-carrying members of the Ku Klux Klan? In this climate of underfunded public schools, constant media bombardment, youth apathy, and a university system where four to six years of education for a bachelor's degree, to most, is little more than job training, it does not surprise me in the least that this myriad of problems exists.

Lastly, there is an issue which you touch on multiple times, in your words, the "gilded GPAs" of incoming freshmen. A high school GPA has never really been a good indicator of one's actual intelligence, but now it is to the point of absurdity. This, too, is merely a symptom. The public school system needs to keep up its federal funding under No Child Left Behind (which I disagree and do not believe it addresses the problem, only in a way to cut public education funding), so the GPAs are fudged. High schoolers are given as many attempts as possible to get an A, and the standards for titles such as Honor Student are lowered further.

Of course, the individual student is still at fault. One of, if not *the*, mark of maturity is understanding that one's own destiny is controlled by the self, and to give up such control to any entity, be it parents, school, or government alike, is to surrender one's fate. And of course, this point is not

stressed to students in any fashion, because here in America, we simply equate intelligence with obedience, dropping all students in the failing public school system to the level of domesticated dogs. As long as the class follows directions, a good grade is given. This is obviously a poor preparation for college, but for the reasons previously described, it serves the school's purpose. Students should be encouraged to think for themselves, to truly know the value of high school diploma, and when they are not, it is the students' responsibility. It is the student's responsibility to not pay attention to advertizing, or at least recognize when a product is being sold. It is the students responsibility to become literate, even if the practical applications of being literate have nothing to do with making sending a message to a friend easier.

Of course, if the students actually knew there was something to question in the first place, maybe you would have more of them who understand the function of an advocate.