

# Editor: Lawsuits a growing threat

By WINSLOW M. MASON Jr.  
Collegian Staff Writer

The nation faces a growing problem of libel lawsuits involving newspapers and private citizens amid a climate that offers no immediate solutions, said Gene Roberts, executive editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

The increase began a few years ago after actress Carol Burnett sued *The National Enquirer* for defamation of character and won, prompting America's public officials and private citizens to seek court action against derogatory remarks appearing in the media, he said.

These court actions have forced many newspaper editors to temper their news coverage, initiate fewer investigative news stories and print fewer letters to the editor that accuse public officials of wrongdoing.

But while many of the larger newspapers can afford to fight the lawsuits, the smaller ones are being forced out of business, unable to contend with the million-dollar courts fees involved in most libel cases.

The problem is forcing newspapers' coverage of news events to be shallow and not as critical as it could be, Roberts said. He said many newspaper editors are adopting a popular attitude: "If there is any question at all, we tend not to print it."

Roberts spoke to about 100 students and faculty of the School of Communications last night as part of the school's first Media Awards program for media criticism.

School of Communications Dean Brian Winston, along with Vice President and Vice



Gene Roberts

Provost Ken Mortimer and other School of Communications faculty, invited the winners of the award to a presentation, held at Kern Building. Honored for their outstanding media criticism were Norman E. Isaacs, author of a book titled *Untended Gates*, which explains how to improve the media through libel law and ethics, and

Anthony Marro, managing editor of *Newsday* in Long Island, N.Y. Loren Ghiglione, editor and publisher of the *Southbridge News* in Southbridge, Mass., and *Bristol Press* in Bristol, Conn., was presented a special citation for his contributions to constructive analysis of the media.

Winston said at the awards ceremony that the winners share the philosophy that "a free press should be a responsible press."

In expensive libel cases, Roberts offered no immediate solutions for smaller newspapers. But he said that when libel suits can be brought only by those who can sue themselves, the media will come to "an enlightened position."

A 1964 Supreme Court ruling in the case of *New York Times vs. Sullivan* — which allows public officials to win libel cases involving actual malice or "reckless disregard" for the truth — began as a good intention by the courts but has turned into a "weapon aimed at the heart of criticism," he said.

By publishing stories on libel cases, Roberts said, the media have made lawsuits an attractive profit-making move by citizens. To some extent, this is to blame for the situation today, he said. Isaacs added that the media's arrogance helps contribute to the increasing number of lawsuits against them. "We're too goddam big for our britches," he said. But Roberts said "the chill goes on" as newspaper editors single out letters to the editor that take on certain public officials and refrain from publishing editorials that could be controversial. "I submit that people of your generation can play a useful role when you move into a world of professional communications," Isaacs told students gathered at the talk.

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## Student loan defaulters' payments up

## Photos offend 'Zone' lawyer

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) — Federal collections on student loan defaults during the last fiscal year are expected to total \$222 million, more than twice the previous year's collections, the Education Department said yesterday.

"This is bad news for defaulters," Education Secretary William Bennett said in a statement. "When loans are paid back, the integrity of the federal loan program is preserved."

In fiscal year 1985, which ended Sept. 30, 1985, federal collections totaled \$84 million. Bennett attributed the increase in fiscal 1986 — which ended three weeks ago — to the Federal Income Tax Refund Offset Program, a two-year pilot program that began last year.

Under the program, debtors were warned by mail to pay up or face the loss of their 1985 income tax refunds.

By LINDA DEUTSCH  
Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — A defense attorney complained yesterday that the Twilight Zone prosecutor has turned her office into "a grotesque chamber of horrors," displaying pictures of decapitated victims for witnesses to see.

Attorney Harland Braun asked Superior Court Judge Roger Boren to order Deputy District Attorney Lea Purvin D'Agostino to remove the pictures from her office wall when trial witnesses are in the room.

"I think this is a barbaric thing to do," Braun said. "She admits she brings witnesses into a room with pictures on the wall of Vic Morrow and the children in life and death and also pictures of their body parts."

D'Agostino ridiculed Braun's complaint outside court, saying: "They've got to have at least one complaint a day about me. It's back to persecute the prosecutor."

Before attorneys left court for the day, Braun raised his complaint about the pictures, which depict the

deaths of Morrow, 33, Myca Le, 7, and Renee Chen, 6, in the helicopter accident which led to manslaughter charges against director John Landis, associate producer George Folsey, and the children's mother, Dawn Staley, production coordinator Dan Allingman and pilot Dorcay Wingo.

A helicopter, flying through special effects explosives in a mock Vietnamese village, crashed on top of them in the early morning hours of July 23, 1962. Morrow and the Le child were decapitated by the helicopter blades and the Chen girl was crushed.

complaints against a single company were selected from about 30 received from parents since the law was passed in 1983 and sent to the Justice Department for possible criminal prosecution.

Smith said he sought prosecution of the company, which he refused to name, because it was not making an effort to keep youngsters from hearing the messages.

If the government decided to prosecute, Smith said the next step would probably be to ask a judge to order the company to stop letting children hear the sex talk.

Enforcement of the law has been postponed while the FCC searched to find a way to keep children from hearing the messages without infringing on free speech guarantees in the Constitution.

Jack D. Smith, the FCC's general counsel, said nine

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## 'Sister! Sister!' portrays women of world

By ERIC SCHMIDT  
Collegian Staff Writer

She is a modern woman talking with her old-fashioned mother on the telephone. She is society passing judgment on a 14-year-old girl who has committed infanticide, as well as a traditional African woman who does not understand the modern advances her husband brings home, and a feminist explaining what a man can do about women's liberation.

She is also a performer named Vinte Burrows.

Burrows, the veteran of seven Broadway shows, performed last night at the Paul Robeson Cultural Center in the first of a series of programs on the interaction of racism and sexism. The series is co-directed by the Office of Minority Programs and the Center for Women Studies.

The program, called "Sister! Sister!," is a conglomeration of several vignettes showing women from around the world facing their problems.

"I don't make a deliberate effort to send a message," Burrows said. "I just present the truth of women and hope that people take away their own message."

Burrows said she conceived "Sister! Sister!" 10 years ago. "It started at the beginning of the United Nations Decade of Women," Burrows said, "and I've added more and more women to it."

Burrows, a New York City native, received her prelaw degree from Yale University — something she said her mother wanted — before entering the theater at a very young age. "I was in a Broadway show with

Helen Hayes," Burrows said. "That got me on my feet, and I liked it."

Burrows said she has seven one-woman programs, the three biggest including "Sister! Sister!"; "Walk Together Children," a show about the black experience; and "African Fire," a show about African folk legends and myths.

Burrows is also a permanent representative to the United Nations representing the Women's International Democratic Federation — a non-governmental group formed in 1945 by European women.

The organization is designed to promote world peace and to ensure another conflict like World War II does not happen again, Burrows said. The organization has 127 affiliates in 116 countries.

As a representative, Burrows said she provides expert advice on the

condition of women worldwide to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women.

Burrows was also a part of a recent U.N. fact-finding tour of the African "frontline states" — those countries bordering South Africa, including Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique — sponsored by the U.N. ambassador from Ghana.

Burrows said she looked at health care facilities, housing and education at refugee camps in these nations.

"There are thousands of people — mainly young people — moving across the 1,000-mile South African border," she said. "Where do they go? Angola?"

It is because of that movement into Angola that the South African government is attempting to destabilize the Angolan economy and is conducting a war in its southern province, Burrows said.

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