

Letters to the Editor

Reader wants Good Friday celebration on campus

Dear Editor:

Good Friday is of the utmost importance to those of the Christian religion. Denial of the right to actively worship during the time of 12:00 to 3:00 when Christ died on the cross is unfair to many students at Behrend.

A celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday recently occurred on January 15, 1990. This celebration is important in the education of Behrend students and the strengthening of ties between different cultures.

To not celebrate Good Friday in the same manner is to suggest that the event which occurred, as many students believe, on this day, is not of relative importance in the strengthening of the Christian Faith.

I am suggesting that not only the education concerning culture, but also the education concerning faith is necessary. A religious ceremony should be held from 12:00 to 3:00, and classes should be cancelled at this time. Mandatory attendance would not be necessary, but as many of the students at Behrend are actively practicing Christians, a ceremony would be a gesture of respect from the campus toward the student majority.

As we celebrate the ending of racial diversity, so should we celebrate the sacrifice made for us all on Good Friday.

Jennifer Rose
4th semester
Biology

Prof finds faults in Spanos' view of ignorance

Dear Editor:

Christine Spanos seems to have the knack of aggravating professors out of their usual stupor and into impassioned letters to the Behrend community. First Professor Hume-George was forced to defend diversity, now I feel impelled to promote ignorance. Because if what Ms. Spanos is attacking is ignorance, than that is what I must defend.

The last ten years have seen an increasing number of books published bewailing and bemoaning the lack of cultural reference points among the recently educated. The authors of these books generally have an agenda of Dead White Western European Males to promote, and I generally don't agree with them. I favor diversity. Now Ms. Spanos comes along and disagrees with them also. She feels that to be educated, one must follow the latest big story on TV. She cites the Iranian Hostage Crisis and The Challenger Explosion as her examples. No longer should one be able to identify Shakespeare, Mozart and Rousseau; now the mark of a well-rounded education is that you know who Marla Maples is.

I, too, have an idea of what constitutes education. To me education should serve two functions: to expose people to those things which are important in living their lives, and to give them the ability to choose the things which are good. The second part steers us into the realm of morality; I'll save it for a later paragraph. The first part really does lead to a need to make lists of standard things to learn. From my field, Materials Science: I can pick a few quick examples of what constitutes a basic education that everyone attending high school should have. They should be able to tell steel from aluminum, polyethylene from polystyrene, and all of those from wood. To go beyond my little field, every educated person should know a triangle when they see one, should know in what country English was first spoken, and should be able to name their three favorites among the ten commandments. (I like the one about graven images).

None of these things can be learned by watching television. In fact, quite the opposite is true. They can be forgotten by watching television, they can be not learned because one was learning something else, but most likely they can be rendered unimportant by watching television, and replaced by the ability to tell Coke from Pepsi. Because if one is a typical 18 year old in North America, one

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Mike Royko

Siskel and Ebert at Cinema World

Now I understand why I haven't been able to trust the judgement of movie critics when they review comedies.

The answer was revealed when a major movie studio said it was banning Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, the country's most influential film critics, from screening previews....

The studio is upset because Siskel and Ebert, while guests on a TV show, ridiculed one of the studio's recent releases.

So for an indefinite period, it will not invite Roger and Gene to private screenings that are held for critics.

That's good. The studio will be doing a favor for Siskel and Ebert as well as those who trust their judgment on which movies they should see. Especially comedies.

For years, I haven't trusted any movie critic when they review comedies.

My distrust began when the Steve Martin movie "The Jerk" came out. Siskel and Ebert panned it. But I'm a Steve Martin fan, so I went to see it anyway. I thought that if it was as bad as they said, I could just get up and leave.

Instead, I laughed from the beginning to the end. So did the rest of the audience.

When the movie was over, I wondered if there was something wrong with me. And with the rest of the audience. Were we dimwitted for laughing at something the critics said wasn't funny? And when I learned that "The Jerk" was one of the biggest hits of the year, I wondered if the nation's movie-goers were all missing a few bricks.

I pondered those questions until I remembered something I learned when I was a teen-age usher, first at the Marshall Square Theatre, then at the Chicago Theatre. During those two years of ushering, I saw countless comedies. And I knew after the first showing whether a comedy would be a box office success or a flop.

It's a simple rule. If a comedy makes an audience laugh a lot, it is funny. Therefore, it's a successful comedy. If it doesn't make the audience laugh a lot, it isn't funny. Therefore, it's not a successful comedy.

That's it. There is no other way to judge comedy. Either it makes people laugh or it doesn't. That's the whole point of comedy.

But film critics bear a heavy mental burden. They must see just about every film that comes out. And it isn't enough that they just watch.

They must also become experts in cinema. (Cinema is what used to be known as the movies.) As experts, it means they must understand the intricacies of direction, production, cinematography, film editing and how to make fake blood squirt out of actors' ears and noses. They have to know about cinema verite, film noir, and whether a movie is of this genre or that genre, and they have to be able to pronounce genre. (No, it isn't Jen-ree, the way I say it; it's zhan-ra, the way the Frenchies say it.) Why the critics can probably explain the duties of the "gaffer," the "best boy," and all those other people listed in the credits, which is beyond most mortals.

In other words, while they watch a movie, they must do more than watch. They must also analyze and think and seek meaning.



Mike Royko

That's fine while watching something profound, such as the Oscar-winning "Chariots of Fire," which they greatly admired, despite its being one of the dullest movies ever made.

But the last thing you want to do when watching a comedy is analyze, think, or seek meaning. If you sit there trying to decide if a comedy is in the Jerry Lewis genre, the W.C. Fields genre, the Abbott and Costello genre, the Woody Allen genre, or the Three Stooges genre, you'll be so busy wading through genres, you won't be sure if the guy slipped on a banana peel or doggy-doo.

So that might be why I frequently think comedies are funny after the critics say they aren't. In fact, if a critic pans a comedy, that's enough to make me see it, and I'm seldom disappointed.

Their problem is that they see comedies at private screenings with other film critics, all of them sitting there thinking, analyzing and sorting through genres. I'm no film critic, but I know that nobody ever busted a gut while fretting about a genre.

But now that the studio has banned Gene and Roger from private screenings, they'll have to go to regular movie theaters to see that studio's movies.

I don't know what effect this will have on their critiques of action movies, or blood-squirting movies, or movies in which everybody yells s--- a dozen times.

With comedies, though, their jobs will be made easier. In fact, they won't even have to look. If they so choose, they can just close their eyes and sit back and listen. If everybody laughs a lot, give it three or four stars. Believe me, that's all there is to it. At least in the funny genre.