

!“(0)\$%&'[]]?—Proves To Be Kind of Boring

By Richard Halbert

One of this year's fads for sun-bathing collegians is obscene words written on their bikinis or sweat shirts. This public display of used-to-be unwritten words started about five months ago at the University of California at Berkeley, where hundreds of students paraded with a four-lettered word on signs. The demonstration was tagged the "filthy speech movement."

Perhaps you have wondered what would happen to you—a University of Nebraska student—if you were to write "smutties" on little signs or all over your sweat shirts.

Maybe you wondered, what would the Lincoln police do? or how would administration react? These are but two of the obvious questions that arise; there are many more, some which center around the question—just what is swearing?

First, if you are going to get involved in a "filthy speech movement" better swallow your pride. Not that you will shock any one by being so avant-garde—on the contrary, everyone will react to you as being naive. You will be treated like a disillusioned child who, having found out the truth, has written "There is no Santa Claus" or "The Easter Bunny is a fake" on his sweat shirt.

An example of this occurred as one University student was checking two books on swearing from Love Library. The librarian, looking at the titles, smiled and said, "Aren't fathers teaching their sons any more?"

People are actually justified in not treating you avant-garde. The "father of our country," George Washington was a fluent swearer upon occasions. But George must not have approved of swearing for he issued at least three general orders against swearing in the ranks.

Swearing goes back much farther than the Washington era. God gave to Moses as one of his Ten Commandments a rule against swearing.

Swearing began with primitive man who swore for two reasons: he wanted to put a curse on his enemy or he wanted to be backed up in his statements by the gods. With an enemy who also believed in magic, these were as effective as clubs and spears. Today there are primitive tribes clinging to those old beliefs. A bystander who happens to come between two natives fighting it out with curses ducks lest a curse might hit him.

Today the supposedly civilized man is trying to get the gods to back his statements when he says such things as "by Jove" or "by God." Many words have become so common place that they no longer seem like swearing, but cliches. Among these cliches which are no longer socially swearing are those based on the attributes of God—"O Goodness!" "By Jiminy!" "O Gracious!" "O Dear!" is invoking Deus Himself.

It would be important for one in a "filthy speech movement" not only to be able to differentiate between socially acceptable cliches and swearing, but, according to H. L.

Mencken in his book THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE, he must also have a natural gift for swearing:

"Swearing, of course, is not the prerogative of all men. Many lack the natural gift for it, and others are timorous. For such teters of inferiority complexes there is a repository of what may be called denaturalized profanity. For spoken discourse there are darn, goldarn, doggone, jiminy, gosh, golly, gee-whiz, holy gee, son-of-a-gun and their congeners, and for written discourse, damnable, famfino, helluva and s.o.b., by the Y.W.C.A. out of the tea-shoppe. All-fired for hell-fired, gee-whiz for Jesus, tarnal for eternal, tarnation for damnation, cuss for curse, holy gee for holy Jesus, goldarned for God-damned, by golly for by God, great Scott for great God, and what'll for what the hell are all Americanisms, but by gosh and by gum are English."

You weren't really speaking in a foreign tongue the last time after swearing you said, "Pardon my French." This phrase probably arose out of using French terms for unmentionable English in newspapers at the turn of the century.

Even the English speaking peoples do not always agree on what is swearing. While many words are swearing in both America and England a disparity does exist for the word "bloody." In England it is indecent with overtures of blasphemy, while in the United States there is no improper significance connected to the word.

Mencken says about languages and swearing in the United States as compared to that of other countries:

"But darn and doggone are hardly more than proofs that profanity is not an American art. The chief national reliances are still hell and damn, both of them badly shop-worn. To support them we have another properly describable as vocabulary of indecency. Our maid-of-all-work in that department is son-of-a-bitch, which seems as pale and ineffectual to a Slav or a Latin as fudge does to us. There is simply no lift in it, no shock, no sis-boom-ah. The dumbest policeman in Palermo thinks of a dozen better ones between breakfast and the noon whistle."

"The term, indeed, is so flat, stale and unprofitable that, when uttered with a wink or a dig in the ribs, it is actually a kind of endearment, and has been applied with every evidence of respect by one United States Senator to another. Put the second person pronoun and the adjective 'old' in front of it, and scarcely enough bounce is left in it to shake up an archdeacon. Worse, it is frequently toned down to s.o.b., or transmogrified into the childish son-of-a-gun. The latter is so lacking in punch that the Italians among us have borrowed it as a satirical name for an American: la sanemagogna is what they call him, and by it they indicate their contempt for his backwardness in the art that is one of their great glories."

"In Standard Italian there are no less than forty congeners of son-of-a-bitch, and each and every one of them is more opprobrious, more brilliant, more effective. In Neopolitan dialect there are thousands."

Even though Mencken may consider Americans as inadequate in swearing, society does not agree, for it has set down rules against swearing.

It is considered not only morally but legally wrong to use the sacred terms of the Christian religion for swearing today. A Nebraska statute states that anyone 14-years-old or over who "profanely swears by the name of God, Jesus Christ or the Holy Ghost, shall be fined in a sum not exceeding one dollar nor less than twenty five cents for each offense." The statute also makes profanely cursing or damning illegal.

The statute concerning profanity is not rigidly enforced by the Lincoln Police Department, according to Captain of Detectives E. R. Henninger. It is not uncommon for a police officer to be sworn at while making an arrest, but usually, unless it is excessive or in a public place, it is ignored. Capt. Henninger pointed out that quite often after the person who has been arrested calms down he apologizes. Of course when there is a complaint or when a person swears in a public place bothering women and children the police do not ignore it, and the law is enforced.

Thus you probably will not get into trouble if you swear privately, while participation in a "filthy speech movement" would no doubt bring public attention to you, resulting in your arrest.

Smiling, Capt. Henninger explained how some men swear about every other word. He recalled, especially after the war, the returning soldiers had a hard time stopping their swearing.

One such soldier is Bill Mauldin, who rose to fame as a cartoonist during World War II. Mauldin wrote in the

"Reporter" magazine that he can turn the atmosphere a fair shade of purple. "Without a conscious effort, that is, it just rolls out conversationally, so that the listener doesn't blink until three or four harmless words later."

"My wife is understanding about my affliction and appreciates how hard I sit on my tongue in mixed gatherings containing female strangers, even though I might let go a little when I've known them for an hour or so."

Mauldin told his then small children when he found them picking up his language that what he was saying when they thought they heard bad words was, "Got down! Couldn't get up. Son of a bit my finger; Helena, Montana, got damaged by fire."

Like many types of movements the "filthy speech movement" could exclaim its healthful effects. According to a University of Manchester, England psychologist, John Cohen, swearing acts as an emotional safety valve for pent-up passions and emotions. This "release of steam" use of swearing seems to be characteristic of all human groups, archaic, ancient and modern alike, according to Cohen.

Swearing can not only be claimed healthful but also a form of protection against bothersome people, as the following story which tells how Harold Ross, the late editor of the "New Yorker," used to manage to stay off radio programs illustrates.

Ross is quoted by Mauldin in his article in the "Reporter" as saying:

"I'm a profane ---- by nature," he said, "and whenever one of those ---- literary round tables or something would call up, I'd say, 'Why, hell yes, I'll be glad

to sit on your ---- panel or whatever the ---- you call it.

"I'd go on like this for a couple more sentences — it didn't take much and the ---- never would call back. The word got around that I couldn't draw a breath without cussing and I haven't been bothered in years."

Now the only thing that is left to know about a "filthy speech movement" at the University of Nebraska is what would administration do?

Vice Chancellor Robert Ross was asked, "What action would the administration take if a student were to stand in front of the Student Union with a sign that had on it a four letter obscene word."

He slumped back in his swivel chair smiling. He then pointed out that:

—Another student seeing the sign might try to take it away.

—Some one from town might see the sign and call the Lincoln police.

—A University staff member seeing the sign might approach the student and ask him to use better judgement.

—The campus police might be called in by someone.

Ross said that if it were reported to him, he would go find out what was bothering the student.

He explained that so much in a situation like this depends upon good taste and whether it would be offensive to other students passing by.

Now that you know what would happen in a "filthy speech movement" here, the idea seems kind of boring, doesn't it?

About as boring as marching behind Terry Carpenter to the Capitol.

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Campus Variety

Continued from p. 3
Cinema '65 "Suspicion" will be shown Monday, July 19, at 7 p.m. in the Nebraska Union Auditorium.

On Tuesday, July 20, the Elementary Education Forum features Mary Scott, an Instruction and Curriculum specialist from the Department of Elementary School Principals, National Education Association in Washington, D.C. She is a visiting professor at the University this summer.

The Artist Series presents the Summer Chorus and Orchestra Concert at 8 p.m. in the Nebraska Union Ballroom on Wednesday, July 21.

Thursday, July 22 is another Cinema International film, "Weekend," which may be seen in the Nebraska Union Ballroom.

With only two weeks left of the summer school session, on Monday, July 26, you may see "Bachelor In Paradise" at 7:00 p.m. in the Union Auditorium.

The Teacher's College Institute will have two afternoon sessions. The first session, Upper Elementary School Demonstration, is Tuesday afternoon, July 27. The second session is High School Demonstration, on Wednesday afternoon. Both sessions will be in the Nebraska Union Ballroom.

Wednesday evening, July 28 will be the Artist Series, "Selected Short Subjects" in the Ballroom.

A barbecue at East Campus is scheduled for July 29. In the evening the Classique II presents "Blue Angel" in the Ballroom at 7 p.m.

The last week of the summer school session presents a special attraction, "The Rainmaker," presented by the University of Nebraska Theatre. This production will be shown Monday and Tuesday, August 2nd and 3rd in Howell Theatre at 8 p.m. For those who prefer Cinema '65, "Across The Pacific," may be seen in the Nebraska Union Ballroom at 7 p.m. Monday, August 2.

The eight week summer school session ends Friday, August 6. The summer school commencement will be in Pershing Auditorium at 7:30 p.m.

Movie Timeclock
Time Furnished by Theater
Varsity: "Fanny Hill", 1:18, 3:20, 5:22, 7:31, 9:40.
State: "The Train", 1:00, 3:24, 6:13, 9:02.
Stuart: "Von Ryan's Express", 1:00, 3:05, 5:10, 7:15, 9:20.
Nebraska: "The Art of Love", 1:15, 3:15, 5:15, 7:15, 9:15.
54th & O: "Cartoon", 8:20, "Cat Ballou", 8:27, "Fail Safe", 10:14, Last Complete Show, 9:30.

Sheldon Gallery Time Schedule

Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery will be open to visitors from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday; 2 p.m. through 5 p.m. Sunday; and will be closed Mondays.

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