

Kingly considerations

Professor questions validity of celebrating leader's birthday

Editor's note: Each Tuesday this semester, the Daily Nebraskan will print an opinion column from a university faculty or staff member. Each works at the University of Nebraska or is involved with an issue that affects our campus or our students.

GERRY HARBISON is a professor of chemistry at UNL.

A university like UNL does two main things: scholarship and education. Scholarship is, in essence, the discovery of new facts and truths about the world. Education is passing on these truths, and the methods of their discovery, to students, so that they can make use of them in the real world, or themselves contribute to the process of discovery in the future.

The two great crimes against this academic enterprise are fraud and plagiarism. Fraud corrupts scholarship by contaminating the true with the false. Plagiarism debases education because it robs credit for discoveries from those who merit it, and gains the plagiarist unearned credentials.

Both fraud and plagiarism are grounds for dismissal from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, since they corrode the integrity of what we do.

Martin Luther King Jr., whose birthday we celebrated yesterday, was a serial plagiarist. From his days in

Crozer Theological Seminary to his doctorate at Boston University to his later books — most of the writings to which he attached his name were the work of others.

King's plagiarism was a pre-electronic kind of "cut-and-paste." In the library, he identified useful passages in the work of others, which he transcribed onto index cards. Writing a paper was simply a matter of arranging those cards in an appropriate order, with a few words or phrases of his own to link them together.

When King completed his doctorate, away from Boston University, he took the cards with him, and Coretta Scott King typed their contents into the final version of his thesis, interspersing a few phrases of King's to make the text flow better. King stole from theologians, philosophers, but most unforgivably of all, from his fellow students.

Much of his thesis is cribbed verbatim from the earlier thesis of Jack Boozer, an army chaplain who came back to Boston University after World War II to earn a doctorate.

The Martin Luther King Papers Project has meticulously catalogued King's "borrowings"; I have their annotated copy of his doctorate. There are whole swatches in which not a single word is King's. Moreover, King's plagiarism did not end at Boston University. Large chunks of his first published book, "Stride Towards Freedom," were manufac-

tured in the same way.

America responded to the widespread revelation of King's plagiarism, in fall 1991, in three ways — the same three ways we always respond when confronted by racial issues. The first response was denial. Both the director of the MLK Papers Project and the acting president of Boston University attempted to conceal the discovery, and admitted it only when the facts forced them to do so.

The second response was silence. Even though a reputable British newspaper, the Sunday Telegraph, had reported King's plagiarism a year before the story broke in America, our mainstream media ignored it, and only a couple of fringe conservative publications ran the story.

Even now, as we celebrate King's birthday annually, one can in vain scan the MLK Papers Project Web page, or the American media, for any mention of King's plagiarism.

And finally, and most perniciously, our third response is to lower the bar — faced with the reality that a liberal hero was academically dishonest, we lower our standards of academic honesty.

Already, within a few months of the revelations, Keith Miller, a white academic, was claiming that what King did was not really dishonest, but was an example of "voice merging," a tradition in the African-American Church where, Miller says, one adds originality to the words of others by

repeating them in one's own "voice."

Because black preachers traditionally borrow from each other's sermons, Miller claims, they don't have the same concept of plagiarism as white society. In the same way, rap artists "sample" the work of others.

If we take Miller's view seriously, then academic honesty is a white standard to which it is unfair to hold non-whites accountable. How insufferably patronizing!

Lowering or abolishing standards that are fundamental to the integrity of the university, to accommodate white liberals' patronizing opinions of the inadequacies of "underrepresented" groups, is a theme which recurs again and again at UNL.

We see it in our multicultural curricula, where we incorporate conjecture and downright falsehood into course materials to exaggerate the contribution of these groups to contemporary civilization.

We see it when we set aside faculty positions specifically for members of such groups, fearing that they can't survive open competition with white males.

And, most obviously, we see it when we celebrate our only named academic holiday in the name of a man whose entire academic career was a negation of our most cherished principles.

So, on the one hand, we try to persuade our students what an abhorrent practice plagiarism is, and on the

other, we revere one of the most celebrated plagiarists of all time. What a joke!

When we debase our university in the name of representing "underrepresented" groups, we are destroying what made the university worth entering in the first place.

When the curriculum is a hodgepodge of half-truths and falsehoods, designed to make people feel good rather than teaching substance; when skin color and sex count more than merit; when our academic integrity is something to be shrugged off when it's inconvenient, what have we left to offer any student, white or non-white, man or woman?

The saddest thing I heard during 1998 was in the question-and-answer period after Ward Connerly's lecture in September. One of Connerly's questioners was a young, articulate African-American woman. She had scored 24 on the ACT, and had a high school GPA above 3.7, and was sure she was only at UNL because of affirmative action.

Her "friends" had convinced her that her own achievements (which of course were far above our admissions standards) were worthless, and she owed her education to racial preferences.

On this, the day after Martin Luther King Jr. day, please think about that young woman, and about where our mindless pursuit of "diversity" is taking us.

Justice isn't blind

With a switch of roles, most Americans can spot the truth in court



A.L. FORKNER is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

"Lawyers are like nuclear warheads. I have them because the other guy has them, but the first time you use them it (screws) everything up." — Danny DeVito, "Other People's Money"

Now, I'm not one to randomly bash others' professions (OK, maybe a little), but am I the only one who feels the legal system has gotten a bit out of hand?

Most people feel that the courts are hog-tied by legal loopholes utilized by crafty lawyer types.

Don't believe me? (Normally, not a bad idea.) Let me give you a hypothetical example.

A highway patrolman (let's call him Ponch) pulls over a van for speeding. As Ponch writes the ticket, he notices the driver acting strange.

Upon further investigation, Ponch finds 125 pounds of cocaine, 32 illegal assault rifles and the dismembered body of Officer Jon Baker hidden in the body panels of the van.

Later on, in court, we learn that Ponch never had cause or a warrant to search the van. Therefore, the drug, weapon and mutilation of a sidekick charges are all thrown out.

Granted, the example might be a bit overblown, but it's not that far from the truth.

This columnist is sick of lawyers citing a precedent set back in 1875 in order to determine that I owe a stranger \$2 million dollars because he caught a cold from me.

Hence, my call for legal reform. Who can we turn to in these strange, confusing times to guide us down the road to legal nirvana?

Why, me of course. Strange confusing times require strange, confused people to figure things out.

Let's analyze the system to find the problem.

First, there's the judge. Except for Judge Judy and Ed Koch, there are no real problems there.

How about the jury? Possibly. Twelve people who aren't smart enough to get out of jury duty might be good enough to try shoplifting cases.

However, if it comes down to roasting me rotisserie-style or giving me probation, I want an educated panel flipping the proverbial coin.

Finally, there are the lawyers. Could they be the problem? ... Hmm, could be.

We have people like Johnnie Cochran convincing a jury that O.J. was actually on Star Search at the time of his ex-wife's killing.

Then there's the president's legal team, led by David Kendall. This crew of legal beagles is trying to prove what Clinton did to Lewinsky was not a sexual act.

Actually, they want to show it was just Bill's way of protesting the cancellation of NBC's "Encore! Encore!"

These sharks, and their like, are the reasons I propose sweeping legal reform.

Now, I don't want to totally remove lawyers from the court. God knows I don't want that many over-educated people competing with me for a job.

I just want to flip-flop lawyers and jurors.

We still pay lawyers, but they become professional jurors. That way their legal expertise gets put to good use, without it turning into a game of "Who's Sneakier?"

Then, instead of drafting 12 jurors, we just have to draft two

lawyers.

Of course, we'd have to up the pay scale a bit. What do jurors make now? Three shillings and a shiny rock per day? (I know, I know — people dig the rock.)

I'm sure some of you don't think this would work. You're probably right, but work with me here.

Let's face it, the basic requirement of an attorney is to explain why or why not the accused is guilty. All that's required is a little common sense.

So, let's all get on the little red trolley and take a ride to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe.

A plumber named Joe represents the state. A housewife named Beverly represents the defendant, Chris. The charges are manslaughter and grand theft.

Joe gets up

testing proves the blood belongs to Chris' wife, who was found carved up in the

couple's home. When Chris was arrested, he cackled that his wife

would never yell at him to turn down the TV again.

Joe rests his case. Beverly gets up, then, after a moment's consideration, sits back down to tell Chris he's toast.

Our distinguished and knowledgeable jury considers the case and sentences Chris to a long jail sentence.

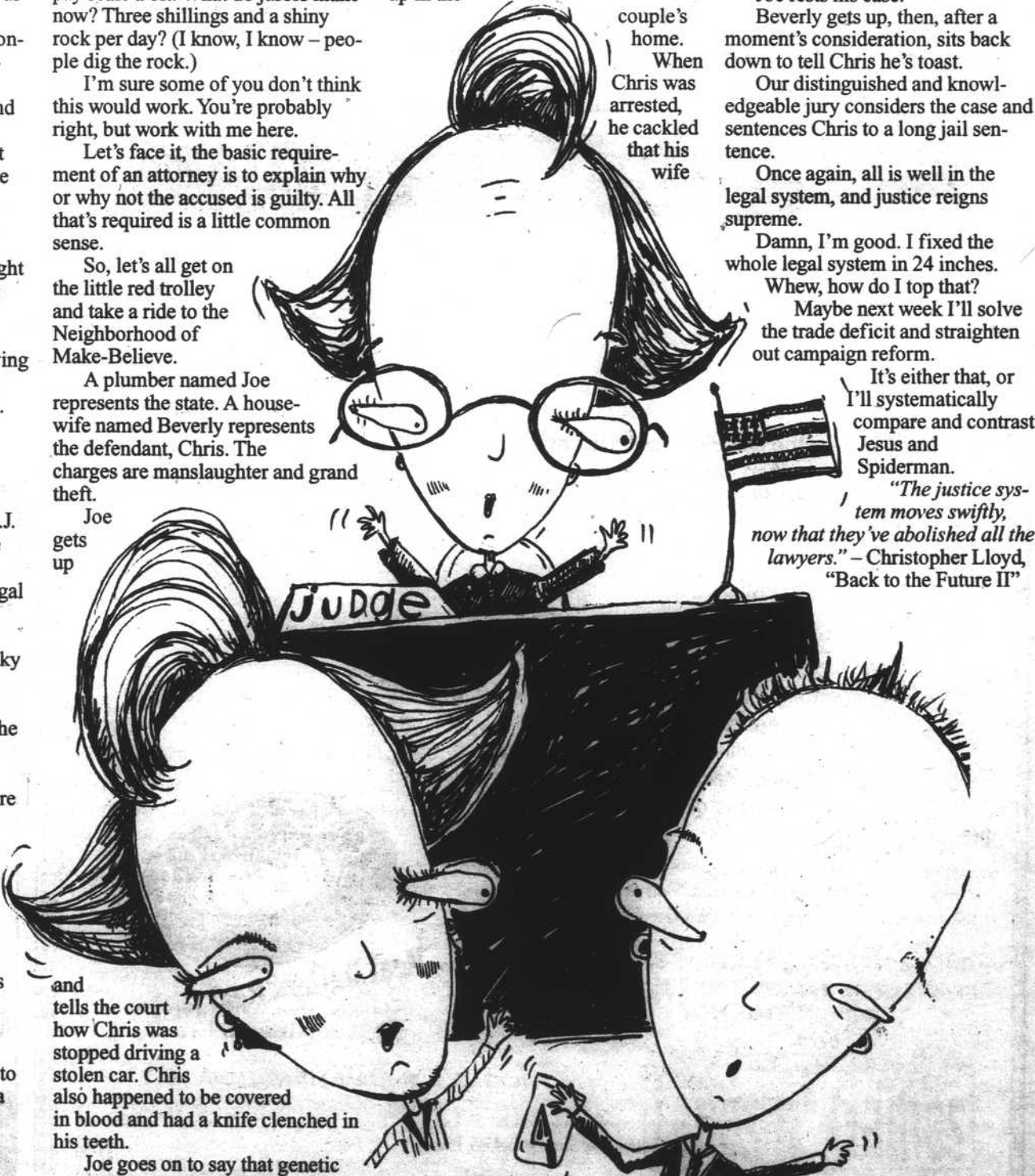
Once again, all is well in the legal system, and justice reigns supreme.

Damn, I'm good. I fixed the whole legal system in 24 inches.

Whew, how do I top that? Maybe next week I'll solve the trade deficit and straighten out campaign reform.

It's either that, or I'll systematically compare and contrast Jesus and Spiderman.

"The justice system moves swiftly, now that they've abolished all the lawyers." — Christopher Lloyd, "Back to the Future II"



AMY MARTIN/DN