

# THE MUCKRAKER

THE INDEPENDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL STUDENTS' NEWSPAPER

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## THE MUCKRAKER

### Speaks

Obviously, the big guy (or gal) in the sky does not support THE MUCKRAKER. On Tuesday evening, the paper was complete and ready to be printed when, suddenly, un-Earthly forces caused one of the editors to accidentally erase the entire "Muckraker #7" file. A week's work was re-done in one day, however, allowing for you to now hold in your hands the sweat, blood and tears of one very miserable editor...

Our last issue, THE "MINK" MUCKRAKER, generated an unprecedented level of feedback from both students and teachers. Most of the letters to the editors dealt with Adam Nagorski's (one of the editors) opinion article about student demonstrations. Responses ranged from "I'd like to thank Adam Nagorski for his...well-written and well-researched article...on the strikes at the universities." to a firecracker "letter-bomb" in the MUCKRAKER mailbox. "Education Crisis Not Only to Blame on Students and

System" in this issue is a response to Adam's article. Interestingly, and very generally speaking, most Americans, as well as many people in the faculty, at JFK agreed with Adam's opinions, and most Germans rejected them. On a lighter note, there was also a division between people as we distributed issue five of THE MUCKRAKER, which came with a free condom: girls preferred banana flavored condoms and boys tended to choose the spearmint flavored ones!

THE MUCKRAKER has now entered its second calendar year, and we would like to once again emphasize that even though THE MUCKRAKER has become a much more organized and established activity, our doors are not closed to new journalists! Interested writers should talk to one of the editors. We are especially needy of a sports columnist, who would report on all of the games our sports teams play.

Finally, we would like to wish the Abis (which includes 2/3 of the editors) the best of luck on their upcoming written exams — we all feel for you. Please continue to tell us what you think of the paper, and enjoy the first MUCKRAKER of 1998!

- The Editors

## Smokers Blow It

BY AUBREY CHARETTE  
AND MIKOLA BEKASIAK

The smokers in the smokers' corner must have been very busy puffing away on Monday January 12, as not a single smoker showed up at the first of two open meetings the Schulkonferenz held to discuss solutions towards making JFK a "smoke free school".

During the two hour meeting, the Schulkonferenz came up with a lot of ideas, yet there was a feeling of disappointment as all the ideas were adult and non smoker ideas. Of the fifteen people present, four were students and none of them four smokers. A questionnaire was proposed to find out how many people smoke, and if they want help, but the easiest way would be for smokers to come to the next meeting on February 2. In one of the few Berlin schools that have a smoker corners, smokers should be interested in their future.

To clarify a misunderstanding, a smoke free school is not a "smoker-corner-less" school. First, during a faculty meeting on December 12, the faculty had decided not to terminate the smoker's corner, and second, according to the law there must be an outdoor smoking zone in every high school. The smoke free school idea focuses on getting the smokers to quit their habit, and the meeting was to come up with ideas of how to do this. The most interesting suggestion was definitely for extra curricular sport and music activities to crack down. An example, a former Coach demanded you train harder to make up the handicap in the form of wearing a 10 kg weight vest for a week of training, if he caught you smoking. An former choir teacher was also remembered for having a very strict anti-smoking campaign. Other suggestions included approaching companies to sponsor goods that smokers could use instead of smoking (e.g. gum or patches), encouraging the students to form an anti-smoking group amongst themselves akin to the One World Group or FACE, contacting anti-smoking and anti-cancer organizations for posters and brochures, having seminars held by professionals (who have volunteered to do the job), exposing the 7th and 8th graders to "nasty" films about the results of smoking, and having Smoke-Outs (days when nobody smokes). Further ideas will be collected at the next meeting on February second. The time and place will be announced.

## Education Crisis Not Only to Blame on Students and System:

BY CLAUDIA GUSKE AND CORINA GEHRMANN

Reading Adam's article "Students and the Education Crisis" in the Muckraker's last issue, one gets the impression that higher education in Germany consists exclusively of incompetent professors, undemocratic distribution of financial aid, and, most of all, lazy students unwilling to take the responsibility of "joining the work force." However, although certainly a few of the criticized aspects reveal flaws in the German system, the overall image created here by Adam is wrong.

Without a doubt, the fact that some people spend up to two decades at universities is extremely criticizable and needs to be dealt with, yet not all students studying for a longer period of time are abusing the system. The time of study required for degrees in the different fields of study is often clearly longer than the four years needed in the American colleges. The obvious explanation for this lies, for example, in the difference in international recognition of the German and American degree. While the German "Diplom" is internationally recognized, one needs to acquire an American Masters Degree in addition to the Bachelors Degree to gain this recognition. Furthermore, the different average age of a graduating German (28 years) and American (22 years) student is easily explained by two factors. Firstly, all males in Germany are required to either serve ten months (equaling two full semesters) in the "Bundeswehr" or to do 13 months of social service (causing them to lose three semesters). Many girls choose to participate in a so-called social year to gain work experience that, as one might argue, American students lack even after four years of college. Secondly, in order to receive an "Abitur", German students in most federal states attend school for 13 years - obviously, a year longer than American students. Adam refers to the Abitur critically as "the only criteria for a spot in a German university", underestimating the hard work necessary to gain this degree. Furthermore, the Abitur often is not the only criteria, as there is a "numeris clausus" existing for many fields of study.

The other major issue that Adam pictures one-sidedly is the provision of financial support (BafoG) by the German government. First and foremost, the basic law (Grundgesetz) defines Germany to be a social country (Sozialstaat), meaning that everybody's basic needs are provided for. The BafoG does not equal the American financial aid because it does not assist students with paying for their learning materials, but their living expenses. The article criticizes the BafoG as being undemocratic, as families from all classes finance its distribution. However, one has to consider that the amount of money that families distribute depends on their income, making this principle as democratic as possible. On the contrary, shortening the BafoG and introducing study fees would make it impossible for young people from lower class families to attend universities - only then would Adam's claim of a lack of democracy be justified. As a compromise, universities might consider to demand fees from students exceeding the average time of study for a degree.

The actual reason for the students' strike though is a principal misunderstanding of the government's money-spending priorities. One wonders why the government spends hundreds of millions DM on the Eurofighter, while students are crammed into overcrowded lectures and universities can't even afford to keep their libraries up-to-date. Adam states that the actual amount of money the government spends on education has increased, yet so has the number of students. In a time where the cost of living rises continually, it is the percentage of money that really has an effect. So even though it may appear easy to put all blame on the government, it is just as nearsighted to condemn the students and the entire German system of higher education in general.

## A Last Good-bye

CONTRIBUTED BY BARBARA STEWART

One month ago on December 1, INTERNATIONAL AIDS DAY, Marita C. and Dennis, two volunteers from the "AIDS-Hilfe" organization visited our school at the request of the Peer Helpers Group. They came to talk with students about what it means to have AIDS (see issue five of THE MUCKRAKER, available online or in the new complete collection of MUCKRAKERS in the library). During the talk, Marita told how she had difficulty coming that day because of a high fever, a recurring syndrome of this disease. The same day she returned to the hospital, and from that point on, she never rallied again. She died Sunday, January 4<sup>th</sup> at age 49 from the many severe complications linked to this disease.

I know she would want me to tell you once more that this is a devastating disease, and that it can be avoided through safe sex or abstinence. At the same time, we can learn from Marita that getting this disease does not mean that you must stop living. Until the last moment she was helping all her sick friends and coordinating help for those with AIDS. At her suggestion, the JFK Peer Helpers used funds earned from their school dance to provide a CD

player for the station in the hospital with terminally-ill AIDS patients.

I met Marita one year ago this weekend on January 11th as we said good-bye to another AIDS patient, Nicki Colson, a dear friend and 1992 graduate of the JFK Abitur program. Nicki had been a student at JFK since Vorschule and was in my son's class. I had been friends with her for 20 years because as it so often happens at JFK, kids and parents from a Vorschule class stick together for the rest of their lives. It was heartbreaking to stand by and know that Nicki suffered from serious depressions, but no one would have believed, because of one mistake in judgment on a day when she cut classes, that her young life would end.

Many students who attended the talk by Marita and Dennis told me that they had learned some information they hadn't known, whether about prevention, or about how to behave towards those who have AIDS. I hope that this short article might encourage other students or teachers to learn as much as possible about this disease. Mr. Sterling and Frau Kneer-Werner, as well as peer helpers, stand ready, to help anyone with questions. The library also has up-to-date databases of full-text articles on AIDS and phone numbers of the "AIDS-Hilfe" Organization.



Marita C. 1948-1998

## Homeroom:

### A Never-ending Horror for 7th and 8th graders

BY VERITY OBERG

"Homeroom sucks!" Says one 8th grader after her 20-minute noon doze this Monday. "But were gonna have a pizza party next time!" Says another. Originally Homeroom was founded in 1995 so the Junior High students could get to know each other and the school better. After a couple of Homeroom hours a lot of students were either skipping Homeroom, sleeping or just waiting off the minutes till it is over. Hey, but there are good things about Homeroom. "We get to know each other. Kind of. We would if we wanted to. And we get to order pizza sometimes." So you like going to Homeroom? "NO WAY!! Yuck! Homeroom is so boring. I cant wait till next year when I can go off school grounds, do not have to clean the student lounge and have my Monday and Friday lunches to myself!" 91% of all 7th and 8th graders questioned wish Homeroom would be abolished. Student Council stuff is being done in History, everyone already knows each other, and the student lounge somehow never gets cleaned up. So why Homeroom?

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JFK

PENNY



**Dear Darrell,**  
I slept with a guy without a condom and I hardly knew him. Now I think I'm pregnant. What should I do? Should I tell my parents? They'll be so mad.  
- Distressed

Dear Distressed,  
It's been awhile between my receiving your letter and my answer getting printed, so you need to see a gynecologist as soon as possible. Unfortunately, pregnancy isn't your only worry, there are also diseases you can get from unprotected sex outside of a monogamous relationship. You might want to take a friend or someone you trust with you when you go, no matter the outcome the visit will probably be a traumatic experience and you'll need someone supportive of you. That brings me to your next question: should you tell your parents? You are the only one who can make that decision. Assuming they're basically decent people, it would be best to tell them. Even if they are initially angry, they will eventually get over it; if you are pregnant or have an STD, you'll need their support. Technically, parents are supposed to help their kids learn about making the right choices in their lives. They are also supposed to support their kids when they've made the wrong choices. If you don't think they'll do this, and you're uncomfortable talking to them by yourself, find someone to go with you if and when you tell them. Finally, I want you to think about what you've done. Was the unprotected sex with this stranger really worth all you've been through since then? If not, then you need to analyze why you did it (unchecked desire, too much to drink, pressure, or all three?), and not put yourself in a situation to do it again. By the way, the phrase "put yourself" is intentional; you are the only one responsible for your actions.

**Got a problem? In a dilemma? Write to Darrell! Drop your letter in THE MUCKRAKER mailbox!**

**Dear Darrell,**  
My younger sister read my diary and now everyone knows [a lot of embarrassing stuff about me]. Even the guys know about [it].  
What should I do?  
- Embarrassed

**Dear Distressed,**  
My best friend smokes and takes drugs but nobody knows. We've been friends for five years and I really don't want to break up our friendship, but now I don't feel comfortable around her.  
- Uncomfortable

**Dear Uncomfortable,**  
Are you uncomfortable because the drugs have changed her actions toward you, or because you don't like drugs? Before you talk to her about your feelings, you need to pinpoint the source of your frustration so that you'll know what to talk about. Whether it is her actions or the drugs themselves that are bothering you, think about how much you'd be willing to compromise in order to keep the relationship intact. Obviously, if she refuses to stop talking behind your back and ripping up your homework (just

as examples), then there's not much hope. But if she were to agree not to do drugs around you or lie to you about it, and she'd listen to your concerns about drug usage, then you should stand by the friendship. The main thing is to talk to her about your friendship, or else you'll probably drift apart.

**Dear Darrell,**  
My younger sister read my diary and now everyone knows [a lot of embarrassing stuff about me]. Even the guys know about [it].  
What should I do?  
- Embarrassed

**Dear Embarrassed,**  
Get a lock-up box. You know, the kind that are fireproof and people usually keep cash in? Although this is a bit extreme, it is a solution that helped me (a lot) and wasn't too expensive. Younger sisters generally go through a phase where they are incredibly curious about their older siblings, and they don't know how to express it properly. So they keep on bugging you because of a warped desire to gain your affection. (Speaking as an oldest child, I think they're jealous...) Talking to your parents might help, depending on how well your sister usually responds to their authority. Basically all you can do is wait for her to grow up a little, and keep your private stuff locked up in the meantime. (P.S. I don't know how determined your sister is, it might even be necessary to keep the key with you at all times. Even if you don't need to be that extreme, it will help your peace of mind.)

**Teacher Feature: Mrs. Stewart**  
BY TAYLOR ALDRIDGE  
Mrs. Stewart is the librarian at JFK-HS. What was your first job? I taught girls P.E., health, English, and Basketball at Utely Jr. High in Flint Michigan (a school that no longer exists!)

What are some of your pet peeves? No pet peeves really... probably racism is the thin I spatter most.

**Do you believe the rumors that someone is trying to hack into the JFK web site?**  
I know nothing about that rumor, but I think it's possible.

**What is a favorite memory here at JFK?**  
The graduation of my son, John, with Hillary Clinton as presenter of the class of '94 along with 50000 books donated the next day.

**Why do you like JFK?**  
... It's home. I've been provided with a good job for 20 years... good friends... I have been lucky.

**What do you dislike?**  
I HATE being the policeman, but nobody likes that!

**Zehlendorf Goes America**  
BY ALEXANDER McWILLIAM

On the sixth of December, a little bakery tucked away behind some bushes had opened up, claiming to be the "Taste of America". The word spread quickly and within two weeks everyone knew about it at JFK HS. Opinions ranged from "cool", "soft", and "tastes really good" to "expensive", and "American wannabes." So it was time to investigate. The shop is run by Steve and Anke, although only Anke is there most of the time while Steve attends his job at a computer company. They have a few friends and relatives who help out occasionally but Steve is the actual baker. It's not a profession but rather a hobby, and he says he enjoys it very much. He and Anke took the initiative after he'd left the army and didn't like the idea of being dependent on others. When asked about their prices they had to confess that they weren't what they'd like to offer their customers but their expenses were too high for any generosity. Most ingredients have to be imported from the US or are difficult and expensive to get here. And who would want to jeopardize the Taste of America? Taste of America is a welcomed addition to the JFKS lunch program and shines between the overwhelming variety of supposedly "original American" products. The only thing they forgo are doughnuts!

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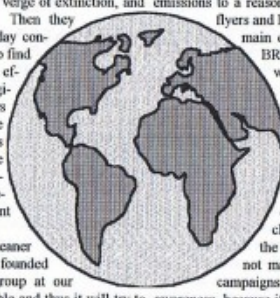
**For A Cleaner Environment**  
BY ANDREA KAPELKE

This planet is a pretty polluted place. People produce piles of garbage, burn down their rainforests, drive animals to the verge of extinction, and contaminate their oceans. Then they arrange highly official ten day conferences, such as in Kyoto, to find solutions to the greenhouse effect, and other critical ecological problems. (As if ten days can really make up for the damage caused in hundreds of years.) But the whole killing and oil spilling continues and no one feels responsible for the permanent damage this does to Earth.

FACE (For A Cleaner Environment) is the newly founded environmental protection group at our school; it does feel responsible and thus it will try to inform students and teachers of current ecological problems and disasters and show ways everyone can make a positive change for their own environment.

FACE's first campaign concerned the climate conference in Kyoto, or rather the way the U.S. wasn't (and still isn't) willing to reduce their CO2 emissions to a reasonable amount. By handing out flyers and hanging up a large banner at the main entrance, saying "AMERICA'S BREATH IS DEADLY, FACE" wanted to raise people's awareness on this issue. Additionally, they collected 400 signatures and together with a letter, they sent these to the Ambassador of the United States in Bonn.

This did not make any difference to the outcome of the climate conference and even all the signatures in the world could not make a significant change. But campaigns like these can start a change in awareness, because it is really us who produce those mountains of garbage and contribute to all other ecological disasters. Maybe FACE can give us some insight into how to prevent further damage to our planet.



**THE MUCKRAKER**  
Komedie Korne!

**From the Book of Jeremy: Why You Fail**  
BY JEREMY YODER

One of the school's ulterior motives is to prevent a nation of narcissists. The system's designed so that victims—I mean students—have no opportunity to inflate their egos. Isaac Hersant, the famous 18th century Puritan educator, once said "For the child to remain humble before God and society, they must be shown the errors of their ways." Teaching constantly develops new methods to eradicate any possible growth of egotistical attitudes among its students.

One such method is to teach obscure and confusing subjects—such as Latin. How many Roman tourists ask Berliners for directions to the Hard Rock Cafe? None. How many Julius Caesar impersonators compete with Elvis impersonators for top billing in Las Vegas? None. What's the chance that a JFK graduate will be appointed Pope? Take a wild guess. Latin has been pushing up the daisies for several centuries now—it's only useful in studying other languages. But since the constant American media and commercial bombardment, Europeans tend to speak a rather fluent pidgin English. Besides, crucial words like "toilet" and "Big Mac" transcend international boundaries. Other important obscure languages such as Hindi, Magyar, Aruba and Swahili are not Latin based. So what's the point? The uselessness of Latin keeps students humble.

My friend "Wolfgang" routinely complains about her Latin course, and wishes that she could drop it. She hesitates from doing so, because she feels that somehow, somewhere, Latin will prove useful. Maybe someday "Wolfgang" will be the sole survivor of a plane crash in the Sahara and the instructions on the survivor kit are printed only in Latin. Maybe someday she'll prevent the annihilation of the human race by some death ray through negotiation with Latin speaking aliens. Maybe someday she'll be appointed the first female Pope. Maybe someday... whatever. "Wolfgang" has been brainwashed to believe that Latin is an important and useful subject, which I have precisely proven is false.

Why is the school bent on destroying our egos? I honestly don't know. It's possibly a cultural hangover from a Parliamentary time when a bunch of grouchy old men in scratchy wigs decided to use the school system to mold the young. The perception that school should transform students into responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens unfortunately continues to dictate school policy. By squashing narcissistic attitudes, the conformist establishment guarantees population by mostly responsible citizens. But my theories don't matter. What matters is that we are continuously being cheated out of a chance to inflate and strengthen our pale little egos. That makes me furious—so furious that it makes me want to communicate some lethal diseases.

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