

# The Muckraker

English MSA: changes • inside the teacher's lounge • religion: escape for the weak? • bathroom vandalism

## JFKS: Popping the Bubble



*John A. ...*

# The Muckraker

## Speaks

Dear reader,

You are holding The Muckraker's first issue of 2015. Why the first? We are understaffed. JFKS is bustling with stories, but our team of 10-15 journalists – the majority of them seniors – can hardly keep up with what's going on. That's where you come in.

Write a story. What does the student body think of the bench in the blue building? Where did Mr. Klein go? What is our administration's technology plan? How big is JFKS' drug problem really? How justly does the administration distribute misconducts? Is JFKS elitist? Why do we have 30 iPads in the library?

The paper can develop into your next big thing. It is entirely student-run, meaning you can do whatever you want with it. Become a critical journalist, a cover-picture-making cartoonist or photographer, an innovative layout editor, or a dynamic managing editor. And do so now.

Editor applications are coming up. The position does not require extensive experience as a journalist. Send an email to [themuckraker@gmail.com](mailto:themuckraker@gmail.com) and we'll answer your questions.

Sincerely,  
Your Editors



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## Staff

**Founding Fathers:** Mikolaj Bekasiak, Seth Hepner, Adam Nagorski

**Editors:** Kilian Justus, Leo von Kleist, Chaeky Song

**Layout Editor:** Julia Keller

**Journalists:** Matilde Borio, Henry Burda, Aqueena Crisp, Clara Frick, Florentine Friedrich, Juliana Garaycochea, Kilian Justus, Elsa Kienberger, Julia Keller, Leo von Kleist, Simona Koch, Emma Kula, Frederick Leo, Avelina de Ment, Jonas Nelle, Moritz Rappold, Freddie Reed, Antony Roczek, Niko Severson, Anabell Sikes, Malaya Takeda, Lafayette Vanderkin-Jus

**Cartoonist:** Jakob Eckardt

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## JFKS: Popping the Bubble

At JFKS, we are used to high-quality instruction, an enormous campus, and an array of opportunities. Those of us who spend the greater part of our time in Zehlendorf are accustomed to a safe and clean neighborhood. However, what we are used to is not the norm in Berlin.

On Monday, January 26, about ten JFKS Student Council members participated in the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's event "Schülervertretung heißt Schule vertreten." We learned about student governmental rights, discussed student council related matters with other representatives and posed questions to two Berlin politicians. Although the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung intended to improve participants' understanding of student politics, for us, the greatest change took place in our perception of JFKS. As one student put it, we "live in a bubble."

It started during the brainstorm session for the day's discussion topics. Students from other schools suggested conferring about how to "resurrect" a student council, organize student demonstrations or alleviate cell phone restrictions. When a JFKS student proposed topics – how one should go about improving a weight room or a cafeteria – he was met with laughter. Later, the moderator of the event could not resist referring to JFKS' issues as "Luxusprobleme".

As the day continued, it became increasingly clear that she had a point. We heard about schools without bathrooms, about students who frequently walk 800 meters between classes because their campus consists of two parts, about broken windows which had been repaired with wooden boards and nails, and about schools without student councils due to the lack of any support from the administration.

Two ninth graders from the Ernst Haeckel Oberschule in Marzahn explained how a few years ago, students set the sport hall on fire. Although it has been rebuilt, most still cannot take sport classes, as the gym now accommodates asylum seekers.

Neither can JFKS' learning environment be taken for granted. According to Frau Jendretzki, head of our German Department, at numerous Berlin schools, teachers must discipline their classes more than they can teach. Accordingly, teachers who have seen other schools are often surprised when they come to JFKS and realize they can focus on their subjects.

Additionally, JFKS provides an environment in which students can explore their intellectual curiosity and have academic debates without fearing social exclusion.

The twelfth grade math Leistungskurs exemplifies this: the loudest voices are those of three or four students who constantly take on problems far outside the course's expectations. No one laughs when a student cannot explain a complicated concept in a clear manner. Such a learning environment is not the norm at Berlin schools.

At JFKS, many of us are sheltered from the proceedings of other Berlin schools, and hence it is easy to take our school's quality for granted. However, as those of us who participated in the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's event in January realized, we are incredibly well-off at our school. Frequently, our problems – whether a slow wifi connection or broken weight room equipment – really are not problems.

■ *Kilian Justus*

## Secrets of the Teacher's Lounge

The first thing I notice as I enter the room is the smell of bland coffee and stale cookies. Then there are four computers on which one or two teachers occasionally work. A bulletin board filled with flyers about news such as the poetry night decorates the wall on the right. Behind the dozens of shelves, the faculty members shuffle past each other, amiably greeting one another. Some are sitting down, taking a break from grading or planning their next class.

Although the room is frequently used by most teachers it never seems as full as the student lounge during lunchtime. Every teacher has a department office where he or she completes most of the work outside of the classroom.

When asked, most teachers are reluctant to draw any parallels between the student and the teachers' lounge; however, they do agree that there is a certain German-American barrier in these rooms. There are usually a few more German than American teachers in the lounge.

What about gossip and rumors among teachers? One of them says, "Where there are people, there are rumors." Sadly, that is all our anonymous source shared. No one wanted to reveal more than that. The only other interesting piece of information I came across was that once a month on a Friday, some teachers meet to drink beer in the lounge. What do they discuss after a stressful week of handling students? Perhaps we will never find out.

■ *Anabell Sikes*

## The SC Speaks

2014 has truly gone by in a blur – only six more months of school to go! The SC would like to use this opportunity to wish all students much joy and success in 2015, especially to the seniors who are graduating from JFKS this year.

At the Student Council meeting on January 14th, this is what your representatives decided on and achieved:

1) The following announcements were made:

- The alumni event held on January 5 for 10th, 11th and 12th graders was a great success.
- The Student Council has a new Facebook group.
- The John F. Kennedy School homepage now has a link for the SC. Check it out: <http://jfks.de/high-school/hs-student-council-student-newspaper/>
- Musik LK with Fr. Freymadl will take place next year if enough people are interested.
- A Martin Luther King exhibit has been set up in front of the library, in regard to the 50th anniversary of his visit to Berlin.
- The SC will be filming a semester report, and will be publishing a list of projects achieved last semester.
- The Weight Room will be receiving funds. (Update: Since many of the machines were fixed in late January, the SC will reconsider whether this is still necessary.)
- The issue of vandalism in the men's bathroom was discussed.
- A workshop for Student Council members on January 26 at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung was announced.
- Because the debate about who will cater food to JFKS next school year is currently being brought up again, three SC representatives to a food committee have been elected: Amalia, Matilda, and Paula.

2) Each committee reported on its current and upcoming projects.

- The Spirit Committee earned €185 through the Christmas Grams. Its next project are Valentine's Grams.
- The Dance Committee is organizing a Valentine's dance for 7th, 8th and 9th graders. The date is to be announced.
- The Charity Committee announced that the drive for the refugee children's home was tremendously successful, with several hundred items having been collected.
- The Fundraising Committee had two Pizza sales in the first semester. It is planning a waffle sale in February.
- The Career Day Committee is organizing Career day, which will take place on June 30.

- The Management Committee will be hanging up posters on which students can write requests, ideas or concerns for the SC. Additionally the committee is working on an SC Youtube channel in conjunction with the CoCo.

- The Communication Committee (CoCo) has completed the homework survey and is currently in the process of evaluating it. Overall, it was a success, with more than half of the student body participating in it.

3) The SC continued with Representative Reports:

- Among others, the Erasmus program was discussed at a Faculty meeting in December 2014.
- The Educational Directorate Meeting (ED) made a final decision about the MSA. There will be a one year trial in which this year's 10th graders will take the centralized English MSA instead of the PLAN test.
- For more information about the Educational Directorate and the School Conference, find the minutes under "SC meetings' minutes" on the SC page on the JFKS website.

Again, if you have any questions, feedback or concerns, please do not hesitate to approach any of the SC members.

Best,  
Simona Koch and the CoCo



*Student Representatives taking pictures after the event on Jan. 26 at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*

## Wake Up and Smell the Coffee



*This statue in Berlin is called "Politicians Discussing Global Warming."*

I imagine the day my children grow old enough to begin asking questions of the past, of a time when global warming did not dominate our everyday lives. I fear the desperate question, "You knew about global warming; everyone did. Why did you not do anything about it?"

In Germany, it is punishable by law not to help a person in critical need through first aid, for example. But somehow, on a large scale, society deems it acceptable to disregard this obligation when it comes to Mother Earth, who is in dire need.

This isn't a vain attempt to motivate students to ride their bicycles and recycle, but rather some cynical food for thought. Don't be that permissive parent who will disregard his or her child's question, then step into a 6 liter SUV to drive to McDonalds.

■ *Steve*

## MSA Changes

This year, for better or worse, changes had to be made to the MSA. The MSA, otherwise known as the *Mittlerer Schulabschluss*, is an exam administered to all 10th graders in Germany. Each student must pass this exam in order to proceed to 11th grade or to leave school. The MSA is required and approved by the board of education in Berlin. It consists of a German, Math, and English written section, as well as a 20-minute presentation in a chosen topic.

As the standards of the centralized English exam are much lower than those of a JFKS E1 or E2 class, our school has administered an alternative English test in the past: the PLAN test.

The PLAN is an exam taken by sophomores in many US schools and serving as a preliminary ACT exam. Our school used the English and Science parts for the MSA. For D3 and D4 students, the science section of the PLAN test replaced their German MSA grade.

Recently, the PLAN testing company lost large sums of money and stopped releasing the exams. As a result, the Educational Directorate, one of the two most important decision-making organs of our school, decided that this year, JFKS would offer the regular English MSA exam used by schools throughout Germany. Additionally, it was agreed that D3 and D4 students would take a science test designed by the science teachers from our school, with the intention of providing an equivalent exam to the PLAN.

The situation for next year's 10th graders is still being debated. On one hand, it seems only fair that they are given the same test as other German schools, no matter what advantages students might have in the English section. On the other hand though, the MSA serves as a school degree and should be appropriate for the level of the students. For now, these changes will remain until another alternative English exam is available and approved by the board of education in Berlin.

■ *Matilde Borio & Clara Frick*



## A Grain of Salt

“*Sobald das Geld im Kasten klingt, die Seele in den Himmel springt*” was the slogan with which Johann Tetzel opened Pandora’s box. In response to his preaching, a young monk named Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to Wittenberg’s church door and left Christianity cleft in half to this day.

Tetzel was a sixteenth-century friar from Leipzig whose main job it was to sell indulgences, little slips of paper intended to wipe blank the celestial record for those who had sinned, for formidable amounts of money. His occupation later became iconic for the rife corruption and moral decay within the Catholic Church, now typically associated with greedy friars draining ignorant, indoctrinated farmers of their already slim wages to enhance their own already not-so-slim waistlines.

Such a conception is essentially accurate: the greater part of the indulgence money went to the St. Basilica in Rome or helped pay the Archbishop of Mainz’s debt to the Fuggers, and the main discrepancy between contemporary images of Tetzel is his number of extra chins. Far too often overlooked, however, is the role the poor farmers themselves played in the whole ordeal.

“But,” you will say, “all of this took place centuries ago. We have made advances as a species, and starving peasants and one-party rule are sparsely celebrated outside of North Korea.” You may be right; however, there remains the undeniable truth that *Zeitgeist* is not synonymous to human nature, and the same psychological roots that brought about European feudalism are very much present in our contemporary minds. Therefore, allow me to postulate that such poor farmers still exist in our day, manifested in the consuming individual.

Let us, for a moment, juxtapose the farmer and the consumer, call him John Smith.

The farmer leads a life that is essentially determined from his birth onwards, and fulfills a job that fits into the structure of his society and thereby upholds it. Similarly, although the John has more *façons de vivre* to choose from, they all benefit his society in the same way. If he became a painter, his father built a hut in the mountains never to return and his son resorted to spiritualism, their current social structure would come tumbling down faster than the three could cry out “Jack and Jill”. For the sake of simplicity, let us define this archetypal person (the farmer and John Smith) as ‘Citizen Alpha’.

So then, how does Citizen Alpha deal with this pre-destined, bland path of life? There are several habitual ways of tackling the quotidian pointlessness of his exist-

tence. One of them seems to have been manifested in the paying of indulgences during the Middle Ages. Today, the consumer seeks out another one of its many facets: charity and ecology.

This claim may seem absurd, but let us examine both phenomena: charity and ecology (donations, in essence) will, for the sake of argument, be characterized in the following way, as will the payment of indulgences:

- Payment is simple, requiring little time and effort.
- Donations go to a place that is not very “real” to

Citizen Alpha.

The first point is self-explanatory. The conditions for donation John faces are rather agreeable: Most readers will probably recall passing by a poster advertising online or SMS donations by the WWF or some other charitable organization. These are interesting because they stress the simplicity and effortlessness of donations.

A slight flavor of irony accompanies the stark contrast between the images of our phlegmatic consumerist friend pushing a few buttons and the shoot-out between Greenpeace and shady Japanese whale hunters he or she is effectively sponsoring. As for the farmer, he’s got little time to pray to God, or fast, or whip himself, or do whatever else he thinks will secure him a one-way ticket to paradise. Tossing coins into a woven basket, on the other hand, requires negligible effort and will prove a welcome solution to his problems.

The second point is more enticing, but also more abstract: the odds that John Smith will ever visit the rainforest in Indonesia or the school in Uganda whose existence he has secured are basically nil. Our farmer’s chances of visiting Purgatory are even lower. The important thing to understand, though, is the fact that from his perspective it is still a real place, just about as much as the melting Arctic is to John.

Catholicism is synonymous with fact in his milieu, his local church features pictures of heaven, hell and what comes in between on its walls, and religious doctrine in general has been fed to him earlier, even, than baby food. Globalization is far from happening, even Gerhard Mercator’s greatly fictitious projection, an early attempt to capture the earth in its entirety, hasn’t come about just yet.

Meanwhile, John Smith has implicitly never visited Africa. Yes, he has seen an occasional shot or image of starved children on TV (which can basically be seen as the modern equivalent of our farmer’s local church, as both provide a routine-like part of everyday life and establish

## A Grain of Salt

much of Citizen Alpha's perception of the world). However, he lacks an actual, vivid experience of the place. In this sense, Purgatory and China's Bamboo forests are equally real, or, if you like, unreal, to citizen alpha.

It remains, then, to determine the causes of and reasons for these resemblances. I have mentioned before the gross difference between the payments made for each cause and the actual effort that goes into it: preventing the extinction of Silverbacks hardly requires a mere five euros. Similarly, somebody who has committed a lifetime of sins should not be pardoned in return for a comparatively low sum of money.

These facts are painfully obvious not only to the reader, but also to the donator. However, he is the strut that upholds his proper societal order, and lives a life that, in many ways, is molded for just that purpose. In order to ensure his pursuit of such a path of life, Citizen Alpha must be nourished with ideology reassuring him that it is somehow the correct one.

In the case of John Smith, commercials, blockbusters and so on tell him that he is to pursue and excel at a career, marry an attractive woman, die a happy grandfather, and so on (of course, this portrayal of Western ideology is vastly oversimplified and condensed – in order for it to fully unfold itself in all its complexity, an entire separate article, at least, would be necessary). The indoctrination the farmer is confronted with is epitomized in a 1488 sketch by the astrologer Johannes Lichtenberger, in which Christ commands a farmer "Tuque labora" (lat. "You shall work"), making his way of life appear divinely preordained.

Of course, pretty much anyone who scrutinizes these sources of ideology will swiftly identify their purpose. But Citizen Alpha doesn't necessarily want to do so, because it would reveal the fact that really, his existence has little meaning and only serves the cause of supporting his society. And that is not a nice feeling.

It is at this point that the remoteness of the donations' destination comes in very handy indeed – in a sense, it alleviates our individual of his or her responsibility. The fact that he will never lay eyes upon the orphaned child, or salvation-deprived relatives whose suffering he has allegedly ended, makes the actual minuteness of Citizen Alpha's effort, care, donation and overall contribution easy to deny and mentally suppress.

He obtains a feeling altruism, a value that is ironically part of the ideological image he is implored to fit into. The fact that his donation actually did very little is conveniently veiled by his distance from its destination.

Well, what is the implied message of this observation? Shall we not donate, or invest in charitable causes at all? Is doing so really pointless, even hypocritical?

No, of course it isn't. Again, what you give may be the cornerstone to something great. Added to the money of thousands of other people, it could help considerably.

The important thing to realize is that what you're doing isn't really selfless, but rather a weak emulation of actual selflessness, tailored to fit into a designated existence, an imitation of what life should be like, forced upon Citizen Alphas every day with the intent of keeping them docile and productive.

Actual altruism requires effort, and willingness to move out of one's own comfort zone. But it also provides a true feeling of value and usefulness. In other words, you needn't become a painter. Or build a hut in the mountains. Or, in fact, resort to spiritualism. But don't become a Citizen Alpha, either. So please, push away the bland stew of surrogate emotions and values served to you by our society's ideology, or at least take it with, in the truest sense of the word, a grain of salt.

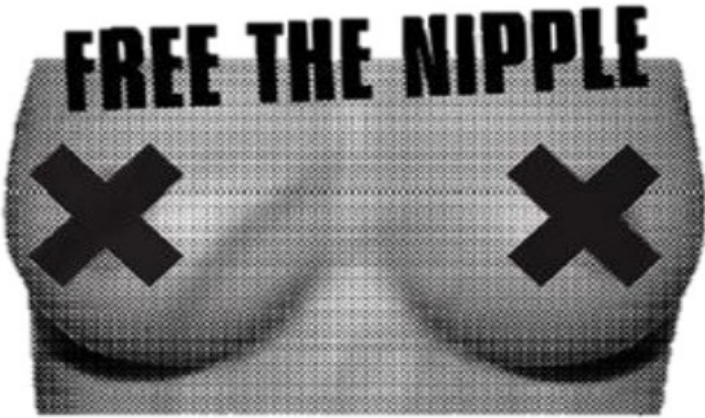
■ *Frederick Leo*



Wikipedia Commons: Johann von Lichtenberger: Prognosticatio

## Your Monthly Dose of Feminism

*A Preface to: Pornography, Pop Culture, and Provocation*



Pornography has been on the World Wide Web since its beginning. Many people watch it all the time, and it has become decreasingly taboo.

Feminism isn't usually associated with pornography. But it has become an increasingly relevant topic on many social platforms, for instance the viral story of Belle Knox, a former Duke student who studied gender studies and paid for her college tuition by taking part in the porn industry.

Queen Bey, also known as Beyoncé, received great media attention as well during this year's MTV Video Music Awards (VMAs) performance, beaming white letters behind her reading "FEMINISM". Beyoncé, a female idol of the pop industry, is widely known for her hit song, *Who Run the World? (Girls!)* Yet she still names her concert tour Mrs. Carter, signing her husband's name on her own work.

Foam finger and butt in the air, Miley Cyrus makes her mark on pop culture too. The self-proclaimed "biggest feminist in the world" has publicly announced her strong feelings on gender equality with statements like, "I mean, guy rappers grab their crotch all fucking day and have hoes around them, but no one talks about it" – and so she surrounds herself with "hoes" instead.

Provocation marks the third subtopic of feminism I will focus on. According to many, mostly conservatives, Miley's tongue waving and nude music videos have had horrible repercussions on young girls. In another recent example, a school in Utah photoshopped the yearbook pictures of some of the female students to make them more "appropriate" and less "provocative."

For many years, women have battled with the concept of provocation. "Free the nipple" is a popular Twitter, Instagram and Facebook trend which fights the censorship of the female nipple in media and aims to diminish the taboo of women without bras.

All three of these topics will appear individually and in-depth in a Muckraker article from here on out.

The pornography article will include an anonymous statistic on JFKS boys' morals, principles and preferences concerning pornography.

The pop culture article will dissect the flaws and strengths of misappropriation and appropriation of labels, i.e. feminism, in the industry.

Lastly, the provocation article will bash all misogynistic assholes who force girls to be less "provocative," whatever that means (we'll find out in the next three editions!).

Keep your eyes peeled.

■ *Malaya Takeda*



*Miley Cyrus, © Ghetty*



## Turtles All the Way Down

When we are carefree and happy, it is easy to dismiss religious ideas as myths for the weak-minded. However, when chaos reigns, the mind abandons all reason to create a sense of order. Religion and superstitious belief go hand in hand when we find ourselves in negative situations. When all earthly aid fails us, it is only natural to wish for a protector, a light in the darkest of times, a God.

It is no coincidence that as the standard of living improves, religious devotion decreases. Countries like Germany, France and Ireland hold the largest demographic of atheists, while Nigeria, Iraq and Ghana lead the world in the most religious. When poverty within a nation rises, so does faith. Faith, a necessary aid when there is little hope.

Indeed, faith can be a useful tool in times of distress, helping us explain the unknown, as the unknown is the most frightening thing we can imagine. No wonder so many turn to religion, an incredibly easy and simple explanation for our existence.

After all, we do live in a universe where, philosophically, every possibility is utterly terrifying. For example, one cannot begin to picture an infinite universe, nor can we imagine a finite one. If the universe is finite, what lies beyond it? Is it turtles all the way down?

Now, you might ask, how can I claim to know all this? Do I think I understand the universe better than any of you do? No. But unlike many inhabitants of this planet, I at least have the humility to admit to my ignorance. Can I prove that your God is false? No. Can you disprove that mine is? If I were to claim that I am God, Jesus or the prophet Mohammed, could you “disprove” my claim?

There is no empirical evidence supporting the credibility of a single religion existing on this planet. Scientific discoveries have disproven, again and again, the fantastic tales of the world’s many cults. Since the evidence for any given religious faith is zero, all religions have an equal possibility of being true. Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Greek religion ... the list goes on.

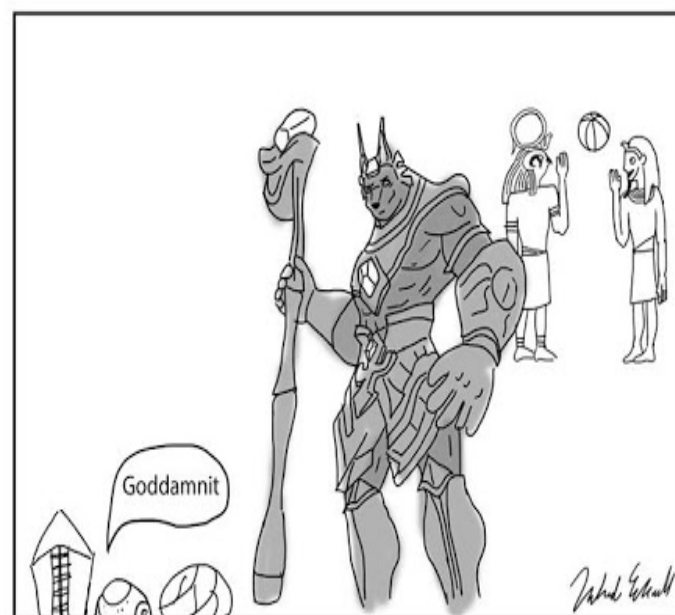
The only difference between the many religions is the amount of followers they have managed to attract. This statistic, however, says nothing of their credibility. It simply means some cults caught on, while others did not. Therefore, if I were to invent my own religion on the spot, it has an equal chance of being the correct one, along with all the others.

At this point, a reader of faith might ask why I am so convinced there is no God. I’m not.

I’m simply convinced that if a sentient being or “God” exists, a creator of our universe, it is extremely unlikely that it would be one of the Gods we invented here on earth. It could be Zeus, it could be aliens, or it could be me. No one can prove or disprove anything.

But since there is an infinite number of possible creators, none of which we, in our current stage of technological advancement, can prove to be real, the odds of your specific God being the right one are essentially infinity to one. One divided by infinity is essentially zero. Type it into your calculator if you don’t believe me.

■ *Niko Severson*



## Vandalism in the Men's Bathrooms

On January 7th, vandalism at JFKS was taken to a new level. That afternoon, the cleaning staff reported to the administration about feces which had been smeared across a men's bathroom.

The next day, on January 8th, the administration received pictures of the vandalization from the cleaning staff and called the Student Council to a crisis meeting. There was hope that this alternative to an announcement to the entire student body would shed some light on what had happened, but the representatives had nothing to say.

Since then, at least three further similar incidents have taken place in men's bathrooms across JFKS. The bathroom at the bottom floor of the Blue Building, the one near the Big Aula and one in the upper floors of the White Building have been affected. Particularly in the White Building, the custodians also found a second form of vandalism as they discovered bathroom walls and floors covered in urine.

The perpetrator's identity remains unclear, but the assumption that it is a boy lies near. Also, according to American Assistant Principal Mr. Edward Anderson, the timing of the acts of vandalism was always such that the reports came from members of the cleaning staff, not from students. Hence, unless large numbers of students ignored the disturbing state of their bathrooms and refrained from informing the administration, the incidents probably took place after school.

When asked for his view of the situation, certified history, psychology and sociology teacher Mr. Daniel Lazar noticed the sociopathic tendencies which might lie at the root of the incidents. A sociopath "lacks a sense of moral responsibility or social conscience" (dictionary.com), and forcing cleaning personnel to scrub feces off walls may indicate such a lack of empathy.

Additionally, Mr. Lazar hypothesized about the role Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) might play in the matter. Children with ODD present "an ongoing pattern of uncooperative, defiant, and hostile behavior toward authority figures" (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry), and, according to Mr. Lazar, will "act out, usually in the most unbecoming and irrational ways".

The teacher concluded that the behavior is presumably pathological, "caused by or evidencing a mentally disturbed condition" (dictionary.com), particularly since it was repeated. Mr. Anderson shared this notion. "When you bring in bodily fluids, you start to think about mental health".

It is also unclear what consequences the student would have to face were his or her identity revealed. According to Mr. Anderson, the actions are a violation to all our

rights to a safe working and learning environment, and accordingly, the person should be held accountable. In any case, there would have to be "some very serious conversation".

However, Mr. Anderson also explained how the psychological state of the student would mark a major factor in deciding upon consequences, as there may not only be a "need for discipline, but also a need for counseling". A confession might lighten the repercussions as well.

The administration encourages students to immediately inform a faculty member if they have any evidence or reasonable suspicions. According to Mr. Anderson, in the light of this situation, it is more important to inform the administration than to protect a peer's identity. Also, students should understand that even if the responsible person's identity were to be discovered, the student body might never find out, as the administration would have to protect his or her privacy.

The situation leaves one to wonder and worry. Is this just the disturbing prank of a disobedient teenager, or are we dealing with someone in bitter need of therapy? The behavior's recurrence and repulsiveness point to the latter.

■ *Kilian Justus*



Zuhl  
Jakob Eckardt

Write Your Own Article!



**WE WANT YOU!**  
**JOIN THE MUCKRAKER.**

We left some space for you to be creative, too!

1. Think of a topic.
2. Write anything that pops into your mind.
3. Contact us at [themuckraker@gmail.com](mailto:themuckraker@gmail.com)...

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Sudoku Problems

Problem #1: Easy

3			4		8			9
2	6	8				4		
		1					2	
1	2	3			4	5	7	
4		5		3	6			
			2			3		4
	9		6	1			3	
7			8	5		2		1
8			7					

Problem #2: Medium

6			8					
		1	9	2	7			8
	9		3				7	1
9	2			7			3	6
		6			8			
				9			2	5
1								2
2	6	8	5	4				
		5	7	1		6		9

Applications for Managing and Layout  
Editor of *The Muckraker* are coming up.  
Prior experience with *The Muckraker* not required.  
Send us an email and we'll answer questions.