

A PETITION FOR TRUTH

by Claire Zulkey

I've never been much of what you would call an activist. I don't care a lot for politics, I don't sympathize enough with any particular cause to march on its behalf, and I really enjoy me some good meat. Believe me, I caught some flak from all my idealistic, politically-minded young friends when I told them that I thought that 'being involved' was for dorks.

"Don't you want to make a difference?" they implored, waving their signs and fliers at me.

"Not really," I replied. "Things are just fine by me."

How wrong I was.

Things are not fine. By me or by anybody. I have seen the light, and now I have a cause.

It all began when, last week, I was walking through my local mall, and passed by the window of Zany Brainy. In it sat a colorful display for a toy designed to teach infants the sounds animals make.

"How cute," I thought.

Until it hit me.

Our country has been living a lie. We are teaching our children to grow up to become misinformed idiots.

Let me preface my shocking revelation by posing a question: Do we teach our children the correct answers, or what we think are the 'fun' answers? We don't say "3+4=Ice Cream," do we?

No, we don't.

So, why are we teaching children the incorrect sounds animals make?

A hypothetical situation, if I may. You take the average American child and teach him the sounds of the animals. A cow goes "Moo," a dog says "Bow wow," a cat "Meow" and so on.

Now, we let said child loose, in the wild, alone.

What is the first thing that will inevitably strike the child, when he encounters these wild beasts? Of course, that he has been lied to his entire life. He will realize the quick and cruel lesson that the cow does not actually say "Moo"; the bovine creature does not even possess the labial capacity to make an 'mmm' sound. A dog does not have the eloquence to separate the 'w's in "Bow wow," and a cat certainly does not have the ingenuity to say a multisyllabic word like "Meow."

No, phonetically speaking, a cow says "Naah," a dog "Rah!" and a cat "Rew."

(Of course, we are going to have to assume that said child will be placed in the wilderness where he will have the opportunity to come across a cow, a dog and a cat. Maybe in Montana somewhere.)

Consider the trauma the child will experience when he comes across the animal that he recognizes as a cow, only to realize that it speaks an entirely different language. Perhaps the child will attempt to converse with the cow, maybe to ask directions for to partake in some of its sweet, sweet milk, and realize that his information is incorrect. He and the cow (assuming that this particular cow, like most, is illiterate), will be left with no means of communication whatsoever.

This now-feral child will be psychologically damaged beyond repair. And, if, by some luck, he is found by humans again one day and brought back into civilization, he will be unwilling to learn, now suspicious of anything The System has to teach him. It failed him, and he will fear it will fail him again.

Do you see the tragedy?

What is most shocking about our society is how we perpetuate this lie. We *teach* our children these words, and even choose to believe them ourselves. What's the first thing we do when we drive by a field of cows? We stick our heads out the window and yell "Moo!" As if the cows were going to lift their heads and say, "Oh, were you speaking to me?"

Of course not. They ignore us, much the same way most people ignore foreign-speaking people on the bus.

But this reaches larger proportions, as well. Our government is wasting time worrying about other countries' advancement in the fields of surveillance and nuclear weaponry. What we should be concerned about is which countries are more advanced than ours in the field of animal languages. The more accurate their grasp, the more dangerous they are likely to be. Forget the atom bomb; what's going to happen when the bad guys get the animals on their side?

But take, for instance, China. While the United States was swept up in the tension of the Army surveillance plane that was shot down a few years ago, we should have known that there was nothing to fear. How can you expect much malice from a country whose people think a dog says "Wang wang." What is that? There is nothing to fear from a country so backward.

We should be keeping a much more suspicious eye on the Catalan culture, however. They believe a dog's bark sounds like "Bup bup," a suspiciously ingenious translation of the canine call. Or, consider Hungary. While we ridiculously oversimplify and claim a horse says "nay," (is he voting on a Senate bill?), the Hungarians claim it says "nyihaha," something much closer to the actual equine language. (It should be noted that apparently the French think horses are Valley Girls, their sounds being "Hiiii!")

We have been fighting our nation's wars on the wrong front. Instead of using weapons and manpower, we could have been turning their animals against them, since they have an even more tenuous grasp on their languages than we do. The Koreans think an owl says "Buung buung." The Vietnamese apparently think a lamb sounds like a lecherous old man, as it says "Be-hehehe." The Germans consider the wolf a stymied creature, as he bays to the moon his mighty call, "Huh." The Japanese, as they handily defeat us on the technological front, also think a dove says "Poppo poppo." How could any of these countries ever have been threats to us?

Unless I'm wrong, in this country, we pride ourselves on teaching our children the truth, not propaganda. Do we not teach evolution, excepting Kansas at times? Did we not cease calling The Civil War "The War of Northern Aggression," the Chinese "The Yellow Menace?" Do we not pride ourselves on teaching children sexual education at a young age? Then we do we continue to propagate these lies?

People, I rely upon you to stem the tide of these untruths. The next time you hear one of your fellow Americans using the wrong words, be sure to stop him and teach him the error of his ways, in the interest of this great nation. He will appreciate the lesson, although he may not know it at the time. We must teach our children as well.

Please, it is so little to ask.

Hello?

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