

The Educator's Social Responsibility to Society

(Download Acrobat Reader to read the PDF version of this essay.)

Stephen Lyons

You may at first want to reject what follows. I think I would have when I was a classroom teacher. I would have thought that I was too busy, harried and preoccupied with daily classroom responsibilities to consider anything beyond that point. Thus, I would have been myopic and unable to see the future. Let's change that.

To understand what I'm about to present requires you to focus on the human life cycle; specifically, that part of the life cycle from elementary to the middle range of a professional career. This would be approximately from about the age of 8 to about 40.

Obviously, not all humans follow a professional career path. I will focus on that group because they are the ones that eventually have the greatest effect, both positive and negative, on other humans.

A group I will only mention and not characterize is the one containing career criminals. This does not preclude a human from being both a professional and a career criminal. The vast majority is not a part of either group. The balance is what is sometime referred to as the middle class or the great majority? I hesitate to take this any further because characterizing this group is beyond the objective of this essay and unnecessary.

I am confident that these groups: proto-professionals, proto-career criminal, and the great majority will at sometime passed through someone's classroom, school and perhaps university. (I have not narrowed this to American educators or American institutions. It is rather open to include all educators and institutions of education regardless of their location or affiliations.)

Our failure to accept the educator's social responsibility [Likely most of us never realized that it could exist.] and execute it with determination is mirrored back to us daily in newspapers, television, Internet and occasionally confrontationally. I will give a few examples now and others later: The charlatan that speaks to us from the bully pulpit. The confabulators that speaks to us from the television in the form of a talking head. The liar seated in the highest level of government that will say and do anything to get what he want and the say anything that will rationalize his behavior. As well as the sadists in the legal system and military at all levels as well as surrogate killers numbering into the 100's of thousands and the pumped up 250 pound male that may have been the playground bully that is now motivated by an interest in making a difference in a teacher's life. They all had one thing in common: they were at some time in school where multiple teachers and administrators had daily contact with them. We created these people, failed to identify them, modify their behavior appropriately or we socially promoted them. Remember the song: *Who Let the Dogs Out?* **We did!**

[Minutes before I returned to my word processor. Manny P., a surrogate killing from WWII arrived to talk to my Mom. I could over hear Manny say, "I'm an old warrior . . . we should cut-off their food and starve them . . . kill a few of them and they wont kill us. The sooner we kill them, the sooner it ends."]

The educator's social responsibility requires us to identify students that could potentially later made decisions that endangers or harms others. These students should be identified and their behavior modified or tracked in such a way that they will not later harm others.

Here is one example of how I fulfilled the educator's social responsibility. Christopher wanted to be a deputy sheriff and then the Sheriff of a Michigan county. I have known the family for over 40 years and Christopher since he was a child. I was really interested in doing what I could to help Christopher qualify to be a deputy sheriff and later I would have helped him become sheriff. That changed when he told me about his interest in stalking teachers on their way home from school. Christopher was interest in revenge because teachers had asked him to do what he did not want to do. What he wanted to do was be the class clown. The comedian that makes everyone laughs. That is fine, he can be a comedian but don't expect Stephen to do anything to assist Christopher to be a deputy sheriff. I did the opposite. Consequently, Christopher is not stalking teachers from a squad car. I take credit for that.

In Morris Philipson's novel *A Man in Charge*, there is a disclosure of an education failure of the highest order. (Don't reject the book be cause it is a novel. I am sure the author wrote it as a novel for the purpose of disclosing a chain of events without disclosing the institutions or the people involved.)

The part of the book that is most poignant is that part about the admission process where a father in a powerful position in government and an alumnus forced the university to accept his son even though the son did not qualify for admission. The son was admitted, graduated and then later bragged about being a gentlemen 'C' student that became president.

At this same University, there is a mausoleum on campus where Skull and Bones members [Secrets of the Tomb: Skull and Bones, the Ivy League and the Hidden Paths of Power, Alexandra Robbins] perform rituals involving caskets and human bones. It is these rituals that are condoned by University administration, that is a part the preparing young men to be president of United States. Consequently, we have all suffer the consequences of University administrators' failure to censor their student's behavior

We should willingly accept the Educator's responsibility to cull or modify students that potentially could later cause physical, psychological, social and financial harm to others before they are in a position to act-out. We have a responsibility to everyone to identified them at an early stage of development and modified or tracked them off onto a path were they can do little harm to others. To do otherwise, puts all of us eventually in jeopardy.

We could be ‘beyond the point of no return’ as was stated by Andre Medvedeff, nuclear physics in reference to global warming. In our case, you now have the next generation in our classrooms and an opportunity to change the course of history.

There is nothing now that we can do to modify the behavior of those that have already passed through our education systems and are now seated in a position of power from which they make their nefarious decisions. My hope is that the next generation that will soon replace them will not perpetuate or repeat their nefarious decisions of their forefathers. If we have all accepted our social responsibility to identify, modify and have created citizens that have empathy for other, then hopefully, that will be enough.

Copyright to the Education Resource Group, 2004. All rights reserved



“The photos showed "the unethical and inhuman" conduct of the American soldiers, said the presenter of Al-Jazeera, which opened some of its news bulletins with the pictures taken at Baghdad's Abu Gharib prison.” Source: *205 Regent Business Centre, 291 Kirkdale, Sydenham, London SE265QD, UK*

In Iraq, the numbers of those held, including women and teenagers, in ["16 prisons and other incarceration centers around Iraq"](#), though unknown (possibly even to the U.S. military), are conservatively estimated at ten thousand, and the numbers are likely to be far higher. This week horrific photos (some of which can be clicked to below) were released showing the tortures -- there is no other appropriate word for them -- committed on Iraqi male prisoners by young American guards, male and female, from the 372nd Military Police Company at Saddam's former prison of Abu Ghraib. Smiling and relaxed,

they lord it over naked, hooded Iraqis, looking for all the world as if they were involved in some minor fraternity prank.

One year ago, when our President was quite literally flying high, his handlers planned the now-infamous "mission accomplished" photo-op aboard the *USS Abraham Lincoln* with this November's election in mind. Triumphant images for a second term president. This week, we've seen a very different series of photo releases -- those from Abu Ghraib and those of the American dead on Ted Koppel's *Nightline*. That only a year separates the two linked moments can't help but take your breath away. And, if the most recent reports pouring in are to be believed, on both accounts, there is more and worse to come. In this week's [New Yorker magazine](#), journalist Seymour Hersh reports that there already existed a scathing secret military report ("an unsparing study of collective wrongdoing and the failure of Army leadership at the highest levels") on conditions at Abu Ghraib and the mildest thing that can be said is: "The 372nd's abuse of prisoners seemed almost routine -- a fact of Army life that the soldiers felt no need to hide." The worst: that Iraqis were possibly murdered in the prison; that these acts were part of a criminal interrogation policy that leads right up the chain of command; and that some of the brutal interrogations were conducted not just by military intelligence and CIA operatives, but by "contract" employees -- [private interrogators hired by the Pentagon](#) from two companies linked to the Bush administration, one of which reportedly contributed \$400,000 to Republican Party coffers -- who are evidently beyond the reach of any law.

The Bush administration will undoubtedly opt to deal with the photographed acts at Abu Ghraib as isolated incidents, but they were simply the ones where the participants felt so sure of themselves, so cloistered from any sense of possible retribution, that they evidently wanted snapshots, souvenirs to remember it all by. This is, however, part of a developing system, a global Bermuda Triangle of injustice and such acts, or their equivalents, are likely to turn out to be "routine" elsewhere as well. We must, for instance, now return to [the wildest of the tales](#) of abuse told by British prisoners recently released from Guantanamo with a new respect for their possible validity. (And here's a little indication of where we're headed: Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller, who ran our offshore prison system in Guantanamo, has only recently been reassigned to "overhaul" our sprawling detention system in Iraq.) Source: TomDispatch.com

President George Bush said, "A year ago, I did give the speech from the carrier, saying that we had achieved an important objective, that we'd accomplished a mission, which was the removal of Saddam Hussein. And as a result, there are no *longer torture chambers or rape rooms or mass graves in Iraq.*" ([President Bush Welcomes Canadian Prime Minister Martin to White House](#), Friday, April 30, 2004)

By Luke Baker

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Photo images of U.S. soldiers abusing and humiliating prisoners in Iraq ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) may be just the In hundreds of interviews with former detainees over the past nine months, rights groups say a clear

pattern of abuse has emerged, with the vast majority of prisoners saying they were beaten, hooded, deprived of sleep and often stripped.

In some isolated cases the abuse was much worse, they say, with detainees sodomized or sexually assaulted in ways similar to the pictures of abuse that have emerged over the past week.

One international rights group, Christian Peacemaker Teams, which has been operating in Iraq on and off since late 2002, estimated that around 80 percent of former detainees it interviewed had suffered abuse of one form or another.

The U.S. military estimates it has detained around 40,000 Iraqis since taking over the country last year, although most have been released. Around 10,000 remain in custody.

"Iraqis feel that they have been treated as sub-human by the Americans pretty much since the beginning," said Stewart Vriesinga, a coordinator for Christian Peacemakers.

"If that is what is finally coming to light, then what we're seeing now is probably just the tip of the iceberg."

Vriesinga said his organization had taken depositions from Iraqis who said they had been stripped, made to pull their buttocks apart and been kicked in the rectum. In other instances he said female soldiers had detained Iraqis at checkpoints and forced them to expose themselves and simulate fellatio.

Some detainees have even been killed, rights groups and the U.S. military have confirmed. Vriesinga told of an instance last winter when two young men who broke a curfew were forced to jump off a dam into the Tigris river north of Baghdad. One drowned. Others have been shot.

U.S. Army officials said two Iraqi prisoners were killed by U.S. soldiers last year and 10 other deaths among 25 in Iraq and Afghanistan ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) are being investigated.

PUBLIC INQUIRY DEMANDED

"Are Iraqis being treated with respect and dignity and having their rights respected? Certainly not," said Vriesinga.

"There are very few Iraqis left who feel they have any rights that match the rights of an American citizen," he said. "The U.S. military is creating enemies by the thousand."

Amnesty International has said repeatedly over the past year that U.S. soldiers were abusing detainees, first calling for an investigation last July.

The rights group said it hoped the pictures shown over the past week of military police in Abu Ghraib prison forcing naked and hooded detainees to simulate sex acts and other humiliations would add pressure for a full, non-military probe.

"We are demanding an independent, public investigation into this issue because everyone, Iraqis and the American people, have a right to know," said Nicole Choueiry, Amnesty's Middle East spokeswoman.

"The kind of investigation we're talking about is much more than what the military is so far conducting on itself. I don't know what the military is capable of, but there's no way the full truth is going to come out of their investigations."

The new commander of Abu Ghraib, Major General Geoffrey Miller, apologized on Wednesday to all Iraqis on behalf of America and its military, saying the acts perpetrated at the jail were "appalling and embarrassing" and left him chagrined.

So far, President Bush ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) has steered clear of any apology, saying only that he found the images abhorrent.

As pressure grows on the U.S. administration to tackle the issue more aggressively, the Geneva-based International Committee for the Red Cross said on Thursday it had urged Washington repeatedly to take "corrective action" at Abu Ghraib, a prison once notorious under Saddam Hussein ([news](#) - [web sites](#)).

Some are now trying to minimize this nefarious behavior by pointing to the fact that others have done worse.

The Ugly American

International Education and the Image of the U.S. Abroad

By Alex Neff

In 1959 William Burdick and Eugene Burdick published *The Ugly American*, a novel chronicling the mishandling of foreign policy by culturally ignorant U.S. diplomats in a fictitious South East Asian country. Senator William Fulbright, who had introduced the Fulbright Scholarship in 1946, denounced the book and thereby assured its commercial success. This early link between study abroad and the term "Ugly American" is ironic but perhaps fitting.

In the 1950s study abroad was just becoming a standard albeit small part of U.S. higher

education. Fifty years on many more students are going abroad (120,000 last academic year). However, the U.S. still suffers from a negative image abroad in spite of the best efforts of study abroad professionals.

The image of the Ugly American is unchanged since 1959: someone who is ignorant of and indifferent to foreign cultures and believes the U.S. is superior to other countries. Sometimes this ignorance and arrogance is full-blown, as in the crime sprees by U.S. soldiers in Japan. Sometimes it is subtle, as in the assumption that Americans can always make do by speaking English wherever they travel.

Encountering Anti-American Sentiment

Our students who travel abroad are often surprised to encounter anti-American sentiment, and few students seem to have given much prior thought to the way in which the U.S. is viewed by other countries. Part of America's public relations problem has to do with international politics and, despite Senator Fulbright's high hopes; it is difficult to imagine that study abroad could do anything about it. The U.S. is a relative newcomer to world affairs. High tariffs and an isolationist foreign policy made us a virtual hermit nation for much of our history. We were briefly roused from our isolation in 1917 after three years of war in Europe threatened to destroy Western civilization. But in 1920 we buried our head in the sand once more by refusing to join the League of Nations. Only since the 1940s has the U.S. been consistently at the center of world affairs.

Even now, our commitment to globalization is unclear. Consider the fact that the United Nations has to beg the U.S. Congress to meet its financial obligations -which remain unpaid. Or the fact that the U.S. provides less international aid as a percentage of GDP than any other industrialized country.

America's Self-Perception

Other countries see a certain amount of hubris in the American conception of its role in the world. Compared to many countries, the U.S. lacks experience as a world power and the realism that goes with it. We often seem unaware of the contradictions between our ideals and our actions. When we lecture other countries about respecting minority rights, we seem to forget the injustices against African Americans that we have tolerated and tried to justify for centuries. When we speak about the rule of law, we seem to ignore the fact that we have the highest homicide rate of any industrialized country. And so on. The discrepancies between our words and deeds is not lost abroad, and our students must face them.

When asked to defend controversial U.S. policies the ugly American response is to put ignorance on display and attempt to justify U.S. policy against all attacks. Some pre-departure literature propagates this approach by reminding students to be "cultural ambassadors" of the U.S. It is far better for students to see such encounters as a chance to find out more about their host country and what issues are most important to the people there.

But even if all U.S. study abroad participants heeded this advice, with only 3 percent of all undergraduates ever studying abroad, it would be naïve to think that this could have any significant effect on the conduct of U.S. foreign policy or of the way in which it is perceived abroad.

The image of Americans abroad is also a product of our general lack of knowledge about world affairs and world cultures. According to a recent report by the American Council on Education, only 18 percent of U.S. college graduates have even minimal proficiency in a foreign language, and only 7 percent of students meet a basic standard of "global preparedness."

If most college students graduate with no foreign language skills, no experience studying in another country, and no understanding of the international dimensions of their major is it any wonder that Americans have an image problem abroad?

Who Is to Blame?

At least part of the blame for the failure of study abroad to change our ugly American image falls on the study abroad profession itself. International education is still struggling to find its place in academia. To many professors, study abroad is viewed as glorified tourism. Those of us in the profession are accused of trying to pass off a semester in an idyllic location with a low drinking age as a creditable academic experience.

Unfortunately, brochures from study abroad programs in Australia, for example, show more photographs of beach volleyball and surfboards than they do of classrooms and libraries. Many students are no doubt drawn to study abroad for these reasons. In a survey of college-bound high school seniors by the American Council on Education, 71 percent of students cited their main reason for wanting to study abroad as “seeing other parts of the world.” Only 6 percent said they were mainly motivated by academic reasons such as “learning another language” or “studying things you can’t in the U.S.” (American Council on Education, “Student poll,” Vol. 4, No. 3).

Faced with the challenge of attracting students by giving them what they want, international educators defend study abroad as broadening students’ horizons, fostering global understanding, or creating world citizens. While this no doubt happens, study abroad has engaged in so little self-criticism that such statements are really little more than self-aggrandizement.

Too Little Assessment

The Institute of International Education defines study abroad as any experience outside the U.S. that earns a student academic credit in a U.S. institution. By this definition, the student who speaks no French and takes a 2-week study tour of France with other American students is counted as a study abroad participant. Short-term experiences like these are becoming the norm. In fact, less than half of study abroad participants taking classes taught in another language. Otherwise, students will return from study abroad experiences still confused and overwhelmed by the country they visited and more convinced than ever of the superiority of U.S. culture.

Obviously, the U.S. has a legacy it can be proud of—a form of democratic government that has operated well for over two centuries, the world’s most resilient and strongest economy, and a recognition of the value of the individual. But no superpower can remain one for very long unless it makes it a point to understand the rest of the world, inside and out. To avoid the label of ugliness, our pride must be tempered with humility.

ALEX NEFF is a Program Officer at Brethren Colleges Abroad. Contact him at aneff@bcnet.org.

