

Non Campus Mentis

(Reuters, November 30, 2001) – *Experience history from the Stoned Age to the Blintz Krieg!*

From Middle Evil Times to the Age of Now, from the Land of Milk and Chocolate to the Iran Hostess Crisis and the fall of the Berlin Mall!

Welcome to the wonderful world of *Non Campus Mentis*, (Workman) a book of mangled moments of Western Civilization culled from actual term papers and exams of today's "brightest" students by incredulous college professor Anders Henriksson who, while grading exams, chose to laugh, rather than cry, at his students' most egregious mistakes.

History, after all, is nothing more than "the behind of the present," according to one student, who aptly added: "This gives incites from the anals of the past."

The once-mighty British Empire is in a "state of recline. Its colonies have slowly dribbled away leaving only the odd speck on the map." Chairman "Moo" has passed away, as has former President "Franklin Eleanor Roosavelt," and civil rights leader "Martin Luther Junior" was slain in the 1960s, shortly after making his famous "If I Had A Hammer" speech.

Hitler, a depressed "Nazi leader of a Communist Germany" who spurred a huge "anti-semantic" movement through a terrifying "Gespacho," launched "Operation Barbarella" while the English "vanelly hoped for peas." The war began turning around, though, when the "Allies landed near Italy's toe and gradually advanced up her leg.

Hitler ultimately "shot himself in the bonker."

'Cretinalia historica'

At its best, the 150-page book "illustrates the ingenious and often comic ways we all attempt to make sense of information we can't understand because we have no context or frame of reference for it," according to Henriksson, chairman of the history department at Shepherd College in West Virginia. He began compiling samples 20 years ago at the University of Toronto where he also taught.

Shortly after he began his collection, he published an article in the "Wilson Quarterly" titled "College Kids Say the Darndest Things," which prompted amused colleagues at more than two dozen universities in the United States and Canada including West Point, University of Alberta and McMaster, to regularly send him their own inane prose collections. Last year, when he realized his office overflowed with funny samples of "cretinalia historica" the idea for a book was born.

While Henriksson declined to identify all the schools involved he said they ranged from moderately to highly competitive, about half were in Canada, no Ivy League schools were represented, and that one of the entries came From Oxford in England.

At its worst, the book may reflect a generation raised in ignorance by bad schools and disengaged parents.

“This is not the norm,” Henriksson told Reuters in an interview. What you have here is almost 30 years of my collecting from students’ (works) at various institutions. This really represents sort of the crème de la crème of the creatively inane.”

Did he make it up?

“No!” he said. “Who could make this stuff up except Mel Brooks. I’m not Mel Brooks.” Which prompts the question: Should people sound the alarms and search for an “escape goat?”

Maybe. Hundreds of student contributors received passing grades with such statements as: “When the Davy Jones Index crashed in 1929 many people were left to political incineration. Some, like John Paul Sart, retreated into extraterrestrialism. The New Deal was an idea inspired by Franklin Eleanor Roosavelt.”

(The Boston Tea Party, by the way, was held at Pearl Harbor.)

Gravity of the misstatements aside, the bloopers make a great reference whether one seeks information on the Canadian Missile Crisis, clashes between Israelis and Parisians, or the Gulf War in which, according to one scholar: “Satan Husane invaded Kiwi and Sandy Arabia.”

(No doubt an act of “premedication.”)

‘New incites’

Henriksson said the errors fall into three major categories. Some are simply caused by bad spelling or a lack of proofreading, and come out funny. Some were prompted by a “profound lack of preparation, while others just seem to be “really out at sea,” he said.

“You get the ones who don’t really even seem to understand there’s a line between past and present and they tell you that the first airplane was flown by the Marx Brothers. I had this one kid who wrote that Spartacus led a slave rebellion in ancient Rome and then appeared in a movie about it later.”

The book offers fresh new “incites” on history from “prehistoricle” times through “King Toot” and the birth of “monolithic” religion. (“Judyism had one big God named Yahoo”).

The book goes on to “chronicle” the birth of Christianity (“Just another mystery cult until Jesus was born”) and, his pronouncement, later, that “The mice shall inherit the earth.”

The book sheds new light on the lives of Martin Luther (he nailed 95 theocrats to a church door), “Florence of Arabia,” and General George “Custard” who managed to stand up anyway. (“Martian Luther King’s” four steps to direct action, by the way, included “self purification,” when you “allow yourself to be eaten to a pulp.”)

In its final pages, the book includes students’ geographical misconceptions as represented on several world maps bearing such labels as “The Land of Milk and Chocolate” and “Home of Golden Fleas” (in the Ancient World) to “Bulemia,” “Whales,” “Roam,” the “Eel of France,” and the “Automaton Empire” (as they were known in the “Middle Evil” Times).

And it notes that, yes, there has indeed been a change in America’s “social seen,” over the centuries. The last stage, according to the book, is “The Age of Now. This concept grinds our critical, seething minds to a halt.”

Until then, however, we Americans, “in all humidity” are nothing less than “the people of currant times.”