

This presidential election season is shaping up to be a hellish one



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By the time you read this, an astounding incident will have occurred. April will have arrived. But what makes this typically ordinary event so amazing you may ask? Simple. There are now only six months of presidential campaigning left.

Though in truth this countdown is leading us nowhere, or nowhere favorable, at least. By the end of this six-month period, our future president will be chosen and all hell will break loose. Variations on hell, mind you, depending on which front runner ends up in the White House, but hell nonetheless.

The hell brought about by Clinton and Obama are surprisingly similar, actually. Most of Hillary's disciples follow her solely because she happens to be female. To many, the fact that she has breasts automatically qualifies her to sit in the Oval Office if only because no woman has yet to do so.

Now substitute "black" for "female" two sentences back and you have the exact same situation with Obama. Most of either candidate's supporters likely could not tell you where either candidate stands on any number of issues. Because, of course, race and gender must always take precedent over how the person will run the country.

Never mind that both primary Democratic contenders have almost the same ideals for this nation. Both want to pull out of Iraq as quickly as possible. Both want to institute universal health care. Both plan to at-

tempt to stabilize the economy in similar manners. And the list could continue.

While some of these ideals sound just fine, it has become less a matter of the issues and more a matter of whether a black man or a white woman is more suited for the job. And the candidates know this.

Even they care less about the issues now and more about slandering their counterpart, and it seems that they expect the rest of us to have the same mindset. But how exactly does smearing your opposition show that you have the leadership skills to run a country?

Not to mention that their ideas for this country will result in near chaos. Health care for everyone sounds wonderful, but putting the government in charge of health care hardly has the same effect. People will be waiting years for surgeries or transplants, and how many will die as a result?

While getting us out of Iraq is necessary, it can't be completed as hastily as the Democrats would have it done without everything caving in on itself. Pulling out in just over a year, which is the plan, would result in catastrophe. There is precious little stability in that area as it is, and while US presence is responsible for some of the calamity, we are also responsible for a fair portion of the stability, and leaving now would upheave what little solidity there is.

McCain, on the other hand, no longer has any opponents to smear. Ron Paul, yes, but truth be told the man has so few delegates that there's really no point in degrading him; he hasn't got a snowball's chance in hell of getting the nomination.

On that topic, McCain's hell would be quite the opposite of the Democratic hell. Whereas the Dems' pit of fiery doom would be based off of ignorance and twisted words, McCain's would feature a perpetual war, a steadily deteriorating economy, and the institution of religion into a government supposedly founded on the separation of church and state.

Though McCain has backed away from his "hundred-year war" comment, he is still intent on winning the war in Iraq. But how exactly does one win a war against terrorists? Terrorists will always exist, and our presence in the Middle East is causing more tension.

His economic stimulus plan's primary feature is tax cuts, and we have seen how well that has worked these past few years.

McCain also plans to attempt to overturn Roe v. Wade and hold to the Defense of Marriage Act with little reasons as to why he would do so, though the video explaining his faith in God on his website, adjacent to the above statements, seems to say something about his rationale.

All in all, it comes down to a few simple things. Both Clinton and Obama would lead this nation down the drain simply because they seem to have disregarded their country already in the hopes of sully the other's reputation. And McCain is going to keep us in Iraq as long as he feasibly can while continuously nudging us closer to his own personal religious values.

But there is one good thing in the midst of all this nonsense. Canada never looked quite as bright as it looks now.

Political attacks fail in aims



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As a history nut and keen follower of the current run to the White House, I can see many parallels between politics and warfare. Both

involve the constant application of strategy, not very many rules, attack, defense, and sometimes deception.

To my mind the most interesting point is the attacking, because in most cases, politicians seem to be horrible at it. If Alexander the Great, Napoleon or Sun Tzu were alive today, you can bet they would all be shaking their heads at this sort of thing.

For example, anyone with any semblance of higher brain function knows that attacks should be planned in advance. Looking at the current political candidates (and many of the past ones), attacks seem to be spouted off in anger. As a general rule, these turn out badly.

Take for example Hillary Clinton's now famous "Shame on You Barack Obama" comment. She positively railed against Obama in a fiery press conference which may have even frightened small children. Clinton insinuated

that one of Obama's mailers wrongly asserted that she believed in the North American Free Trade Agreement. Problem is, her own scheduling documents prove she lobbied for NAFTA's passage.

Sen. Clinton violated the cardinal rule of attacking – never do it angry. And guess what? She paid the price.

Bad political attack strategy seems to be positively running rampant. I still cannot figure out why the majority of major "offense" occurs when a candidate is in trouble. Do these people not realize that any shot fired while they are behind is taken with a grain of salt the size of a Volkswagen?

If Alexander the Great, Napoleon or Sun Tzu were alive today, you can bet they would all be shaking their heads at this sort of thing.

Dropping a few verbal bombs while the attacker is ahead may help them "shut the door," and people will be less likely to see it as a desperation move.

I will give another Clinton example. Lately, the "3 a.m. ad" asking who you would want to answer the White House phone has been getting a lot of attention. Many pundits I have seen say it af-

fecting some voters, but others were unimpressed.

However, what if the Clinton campaign had released the ad months ago, when Clinton was ahead? The ad makes good logical sense, and would have cast serious doubt on Barack Obama's experience in a dramatic way. Instead, it looks desperate. Timing, as they say, really is everything.

I realize some of you may not appreciate my comparison of politics to war. You may think it overly cynical. However, I do not mean to suggest that the people of this nation are mortally divided.

What I am suggesting is that if candidates in elections put the same thought into their attacks as generals did, they would have a much easier time getting their message across.

On the flip side, if generals put the same consideration into their attacks as political candidates often do, the history books would most likely read much differently. Alexander would have probably lost the Battle of Granicus, Nelson at Trafalgar, and Dowding would have been crushed in the Battle of Britain.

Politicians, especially those running for the position of Commander in Chief, really should make good attack strategies a priority.

SAT test takers are doomed



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SAT. Side effects: increased blood pressure, insomnia, failure, disappointment and in some cases, a rejection letter from the college of your dreams.

The test is meant to determine a student's mental capability to move on to college – an honorable purpose.

The process of taking the test poses a problem. Everything about the SAT sets high school students up for failure.

The student is doomed before the test even starts. Between the pressure from parents – who are hoping that the scores might take a couple thousand dollars off the tuition bill, and from the college admissions departments who have stated, through many rejection letters, that only a certain score is good enough to get into college – the stress associated with the SAT can be hard to deal with.

Add on the normal stress level of junior year and the pressure builds to an amount that rivals Atlas' burden.

So those who cannot handle stress can be crossed off of the potential success list.

The time the test is scheduled for is also a massive flaw. Making high school students, who are sleep deprived to begin with, take a test at 7:45 on a Saturday morning is probably the worst idea ever.

Five days of mental exertion leave high school students needing a break, and making them wake up fifteen minutes earlier than a usual school day cannot possibly help their performance.

One of my English teachers – a skilled grammarian – always told me not to be redundant when writing papers. I have, ironically, been told repeatedly that redundancy is bad.

The SAT is five hours of the same questions over and over and over again.

One can only point out a flaw in the parallel structure of a sentence so many times, and if the student does not recognize subject-verb disagreement the first time, the probability of the student recognizing it the ten other times is low.

This test should not be designed for failure, but making it five hours long makes failure that much easier.

Cutting the number of questions in half and thus cutting the time in half, would make the test easier, and the results would probably be closer to the actual mental capabilities of the student, not the result of stress and exhaustion.

Also, with a shorter time, the test could be moved to a later time in the morning and still be done before lunch. Again, allowing the teenage brain a couple more hours of sleep may help its performance.

The SAT may be important, but it has been changed before (the addition of an essay), and it should be changed again.



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How unfortunate it is that I often hear students disparaging mathematics as useless, elusive, and ultimately frustrating! As one enamored by the intellectual nuggets math offers within its brilliant and pattern-laden tapestry, I can only wonder why my peers have no affinity for the rich study of how numbers relate to themselves and experiential reality.

For fear of what individuals may lose by rejecting mathematics, I have come to illuminate what math is and is not, to underscore its usefulness, to laud it as a means for having fun, and to suggest a reason why the education system has failed the numerous students who have graduated with no appreciation for this cerebral blessing.

I would imagine that many students deride math as worthless because they simply have not witnessed what feats it can perform to service humans in directly practical ways. For example, mathematics as a distinct body of thought did not spawn out of an ivory-tower club of sadistic lovers of abstraction who contrived to derive entertainment from viewing others struggle with irrelevant complexities, but rather from inquisitive Grecian individuals whose purpose was to use math as a means for directly utilitarian ends, particularly the use of geometry to advance architecture and engineering. Do the names of Euclid and Archimedes ring a bell?

Throughout history this pragmatic application has only grown ostensibly more abstract when science and technology matured and began to whine for more specific and involved algorithms and definitions in order for themselves to progress. Thus, while engineering and architecture have enlisted as math's primary clients throughout most of history, other emerging sciences jumped aboard and demanded increased complexity during Europe's metamorphosis into a reason-based civilization. Looking at the early 20th century, it goes without saying that without a finely carved and sanded version of mathematics at his fingertips, Einstein himself would have fallen into a snare of limitations that would have stymied a major leap in the evolution of science. We also see this relationship with the genesis of calculus as a prop for the nascent study of modern physics during the days of Isaac Newton.

As for the rest of us who don't have the same IQ and interests as Newton and Einstein, basic mathematics has obvious relevance in a capitalist world saturated with price tags, bank accounts and stock market fluctuations. In terms of education, however, math belongs as part of the core curriculum not only for this reason but also for the same reason why science is also included: the education system has an obligation to acquaint students with these subjects to encourage those with natural aptitudes and interests to follow a course of study most beneficial to themselves and society as a whole.

But enough of why math is practically useful. Since we as students have so much exposure and access to math, why not treat it as a means for having fun? For example, some have found pleasure in memorizing special numbers like pi and phi for the purpose of exploring the power of imagination-based mnemonic devices, surveying the power of the mind.

Additionally, while the obvious patterns of mathematics, such as those involving pi, have their own aesthetic value, many hidden subtle-

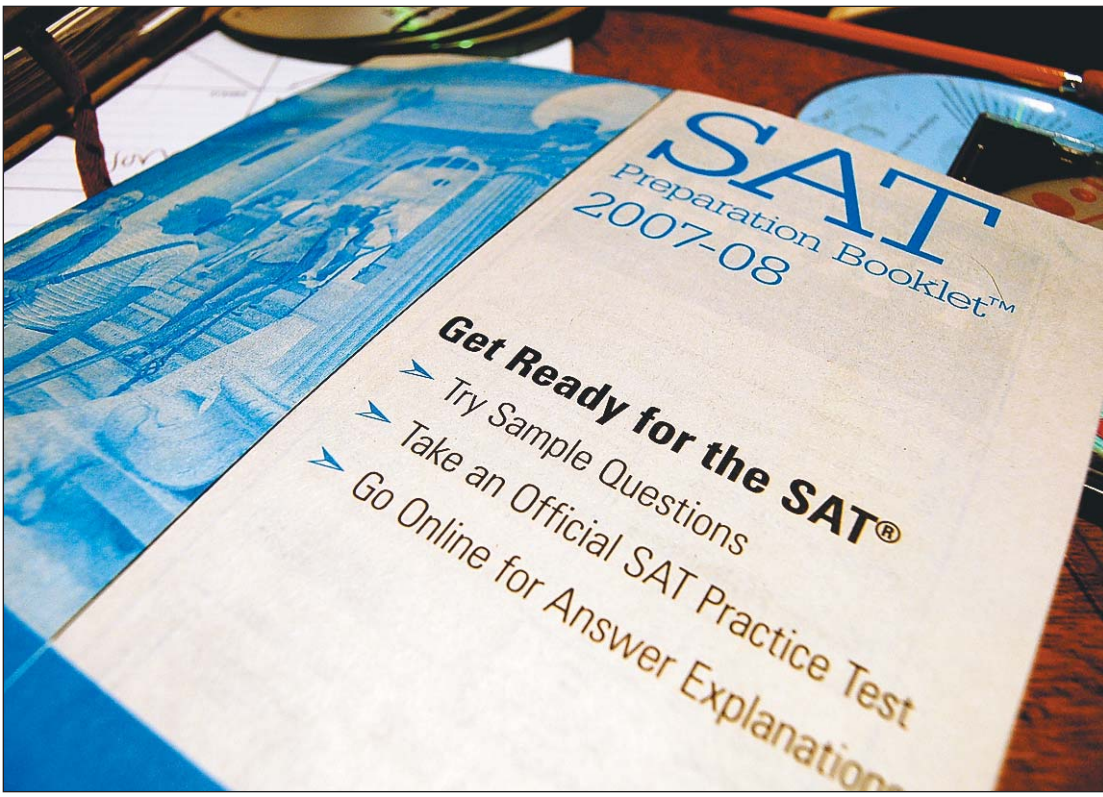
ties possess a level of thrill unrivaled by many other areas of academic study. The epitome of the subtle interconnectedness of several parts of mathematics, as an example, is this succinct and equation involving five very diverse and very important numbers: one plus e to the power of pi times i equals zero.

Mathematics excites the mind not only by presenting such trinkets but also by allowing us to play with the concept of infinity. While the role of infinity plays an integral role in calculus, the aesthetic power of this concept manifests itself most fully in fractal geometry: imagine a shape with infinite complexity, a shape for which you could zoom up on a particular area for an infinite amount of time and never stop ceasing to see new and distinct patterns emerge. Figures of this nature, dubbed fractals, link the seemingly lackluster study of mathematics to the vibrant realm of beauty and art when shades of various colors are assigned to certain areas of the fractal image as determined by a characteristic of the numbers representing those regions; one ends up with a jeweled, ornate, and kaleidoscopic image containing a hypnotic sequence and arrangement of colors.

Sparkling with such gems as these, why does mathematics continue to lose the interests of several students throughout the country? I believe the answer lies in the fact that we fail to see math in the big picture. As a votary of philosophical constructivism, I believe that we have assembled mathematics as an invention for practical purposes, as described above. That is to say that math is like chess: while within a certain mathematical initial rules we can discover necessary corollaries, similar to how various positions in chess can lead to forced checkmates as a result of the game's rules, the basal concepts used to form these rules occur as an act of invention.

Believing that human beings necessarily construct all knowledge from a combination of experience and the cognitive apparatus of the mind, rather than imbibe knowledge like blank slates, I support a teaching of mathematics that tips its hat more towards constructivism, involving classes in which students make math their own. While statistics indicate that most students do not understand the meaning of the processes they undergo in employing mathematics in the status quo, educators can give students a better grasp of the meaning of mathematical concepts by acting as a scaffold to help students construct new knowledge using social collaboration, sometimes concrete (physical/tangible) models, stronger emphasis on the bigger-picture of mathematical concepts and their uses, and novel situations of application that foster exploration. Traditional direct instruction can be incorporated in situations in which students require extra training in specific subskills in order to understand higher-order concepts and when some students need worked examples from the teacher to supplement knowledge of a basic mathematical concept.

One can only hope that a new means of teaching mathematics effectively synthesizing constructivist and direct instruction techniques will emerge to not only ensure that more students will have more appreciation of the complexity and riches within the world of numbers, but also a firmer grasp of mathematics as a concept of their own creation. We will find the value of these skills and interests skyrocket as we move further into our new technological habitat governed by, as Godfrey Reggio of the Qatsi Trilogy describes it, The Primacy of Number.



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