

OPINION

Richmond Times-Dispatch

A Lee Enterprises Newspaper • opinions@timesdispatch.com • (804) 649-6007

KELLY TILL, President and Publisher

CHRIS COATES, Executive Editor

SCOTT BASS, Opinions Editor

To submit Letters to the Editor

letters@timesdispatch.com

Richmond.com/opinion

To submit or propose guest columns

oped@timesdispatch.com

Engage on Twitter @RTDopinions

Editorials by The Times-Dispatch are based on a consensus of the editorial board.

The views expressed in other editorials, columns and letters on this page are those of the authors and don't necessarily reflect the views of The Times-Dispatch.

CREATIVE ATROPHY

AI hasn't led to more cheating in schools. Why?

LZ GRANDERSON

The introduction of ChatGPT did not lead to more cheating in high school. This is according to the students themselves. For 15 years, Stanford University researchers have used anonymous surveys and focus groups to create an environment for honest answers from students about their experiences in the classroom. Those studies include questions about whether the students cheat on assignments.

The bad news from the latest research is that some 70% said they'd cheated within the last month. The good news: It's been like that for years. In other words, the arrival of ChatGPT a year ago did not increase incidents of cheating.

You have to take the victories where you can. Today's students could be using AI to write their papers, but mostly they don't seem to be.

Still, the possibility haunts educators. They fear an arms race between cheating and detection, along the lines of Major League Baseball's struggle to stop players from doping. Cheating persists in baseball because the benefits outweigh the downsides. Perhaps the calculus is different for AI and homework. But will that change as ChatGPT and other systems become easier to use and harder to detect?

I'm sure some Silicon Valley wunderkind is already working on a piece of brilliant technology that is going to take the pain out of writing, which for a lot of people would be welcome news. And even though I'm a journalist who takes joy in writing, I'm not a purist; I would celebrate any tool that helps people express themselves. But to educate their students, teachers need to know whether a paper was written with AI.

As an adjunct professor this semester, I asked my students whether any used ChatGPT on assignments.

They all denied it. We moved on. Or at least they did. That was when I started wondering: How are teachers supposed to know whether AI is being deployed? Given the speed at which technology is moving, none of us should trust our gut to recognize a robot's writing. Teachers will be second-guessing their second guesses.

As artificial intelligence creeps into the classroom, the issue to keep in mind is intent. Are students using AI to express their thoughts more clearly, or to avoid thinking? The foundation of teaching people to write is evangelizing the process itself — a process of thinking, a process that can't be outsourced. When teachers emphasize the final product, they are encouraging cheating, because AI will soon be able to crank out pretty decent research papers.

MLB learned this when it placed a premium on home runs at the cost of integrity.

A writing class should be different from a professional sport. What counts in learning to write is not primarily the final product. It's about creativity, critique and revision, distillation of ideas. Those skills are just as essential when AI gets involved — maybe even more so.

So maybe ChatGPT and its ilk will enter the English classroom much as calculators became a staple in higher-level math classes. Spell check and grammar check were the gateways, and we've embraced their help for decades without losing the ability to express ourselves. We used to have to grab a dictionary to spell "co-incidence." Now we get in the ballpark, and the machine gets the spelling right, so we can carry on with whatever we were trying to convey.

I'm not anti-technology. I support the use of ChatGPT. It has helped me find things to eat on the Mediterranean diet besides olives, because I'm sick of olives.

However, I am concerned about the abuse of ChatGPT leading to creative atrophy.

AMERICAN HEROES

A monument without the chains, or an emancipator

Standing side-by-side with slave masters in an improbable union, free and enslaved African Americans drove independence with no less zeal than foreign allies. Many were rewarded with freedom, pensions and bounty lands, which they used to make America better.

They passed on an unquenchable hunger for liberty and a spiritual arsenal for democracy. They are deserving of the

highest recognition, which is considerably more than they have received so far. The National Liberty Memorial could be constructed on the Mall by July 4, 2026, as a permanent legacy of the 250th anniversary of the nation.

At least 10,000 served on the American side in the Revolutionary War. Six thousand names are connected to 25 states and hundreds of communities, including 600 from Alexandria and Richlands County to Virginia Beach. Tens of thousands fled plantations. Some performed patriotic acts or simply sought a fleeting taste of liberty.

Given its divisive past and growing mindfulness, Virginia ought to eagerly embrace the chance to contribute a share of the building costs. Almost every district of the General Assembly (138 of 140) is shown on our maps and charts to be witnesses to the history.

It may be inconceivable to many why they would risk the little they had to advance the cause of oppressors. But they saw something in it for themselves that depended on their capacity for forgiveness. Each generation renewed the alliance. Whenever democracy and their gains were threatened, they responded, no matter the level of brutality they were resisting at home.

Returning from World War I, Black soldiers faced the same racial hierarchy and disrespect as before. They remained undeterred, choosing to fight for countries that had kidnapped



AP FILE

The Emancipation Memorial in Washington's Lincoln Park depicts a freed slave kneeling at the feet of President Abraham Lincoln. Some members of Congress have called for its removal.

and colonized their ancestors. Twenty years later, they would fight in World War II when fascism threatened the incomplete rights they had earned over three centuries.

Despite believing that African Americans were more property than humans, James Madison, a catalyst for Jim Crow laws, advocated for their recruitment in exchange for freedom. James Robinson, though, a veteran of both the War of 1812 and the Revolutionary War, explains that he was cheated out of freedom twice. Following his service at Yorktown, he was thrashed and forced to relinquish his uniform and medals upon his arrival at a plantation in Mississippi.

During his "seasoning," he descended from human being and American hero to property. When he sought the help of President Franklin Pierce for his pension request, he received this answer, "I was nothing but goods and chattels, like a horse or a sheep." He never received a pension. But at 115 years old, he had outlived his tormenters and become a preacher in Detroit.

Despite what they conceived and achieved, many Americans prefer to view them as victims and passive recipients of freedom, not

engineers driving their own destiny. The actions of 1776's Black patriots, especially Pvt. Robinson, were designated of the highest significance by the U.S. Congress in 1988. At the time, the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial was 26 years away, and the African American Civil War Memorial was over a decade in the future. There had been periodic talks about an African American history museum since the early 1900s.

The Mary McCleod Bethune Memorial in Lincoln Park, near the U.S. Capitol, was added in 1974 to the Emancipation Statue dedicated in 1876. It depicts Ms. Bethune, an educator, presenting a scroll to children while President Abraham Lincoln strikes the chains of a kneeling slave. Standing across from one another, the statues appear to instruct in a lie about how freedom arrived. They weren't just picking cotton and waiting for a benevolent emancipator.

African Americans received the cold shoulder at the 1876 Centennial Celebration of the Revolution in Philadelphia, and the 1976 Commission nearly entirely ignored their participation. The commemoration of July 4, 2026, is fast approaching. Will the presidentially appointed U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission choose to perpetuate the kneeling slave or affirm this unifying origin story?

Unsettling replacement emancipation statues are appearing in the Caribbean and the U.S. By depicting African Americans as half-naked, indifferent and unchained, they give observers reason to believe that they are now the ones in chains. A half dozen members of Congress want Emancipation Statue removed from Lincoln Park.

Frederick Douglass said in 1876, "What I want to see before I die is a monument representing the negro, not couchant on his knees like a four-footed animal, but erect on his feet like a man."

Maurice A. Barboza is the founder and CEO of the National Mall Liberty Fund, DC. Contact him at mbarboza09@gmail.com.

VIRGINIA RELIABILITY PROJECT

Environmental justice remains elusive in Va.

If an international gas company was planning to build a massive pipeline through your front lawn, would you want to know? What if the project was just 300 feet from your children's elementary school? Would you think that you deserve the opportunity to weigh in? Sadly, if you live in Hampton Roads, you probably wouldn't



VICTORIA HIGGINS

by TC Energy or Columbia Gas to discuss the VRP.

Not only are TC Energy and Columbia Gas failing to adequately inform and engage residents, but Virginia state agencies have also been seemingly impervious to community feedback. At its recent meeting, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission decided on a permit for the pipeline before the public comment period associated with the permit had even closed. The commissioners approved the permit 5-1.

opportunities to participate in the full cycle of the decision-making process about a proposed activity that will affect their environment or health and ... decision makers will seek out and consider such participation, allowing the views and perspectives of community residents to shape and influence the decision."

And yet. Short comment periods barely publicized during holiday weeks and then entirely ignored are still the standard for fossil fuel projects. Why can