

EDITORIAL

A DIFFICULT CASE TO MAKE

The inability of Andrea Yates' defense team to acquit her on grounds of insanity has brought Texas' ridiculous insanity law into the mainstream media once again. Yates is indisputably mentally ill, yet the Houston jury was unable to deem her clinically insane under the definition set forth in the Texas Criminal Justice System.

It is time to reform our state's overly-strict insanity defense law because it is out of touch with information associated with mental illness, as it is only concerned with the defendant and his awareness of their conduct as wrong.

The insanity defense in Texas should be revamped because its apparent simplicity is anything but. Many times even a mentally ill person can discern right from wrong, but rather than delving into the important complexities associated with the various kinds of mental illness, Texas' insanity rule asks a relatively simple and useless question.

This is a poor understanding of mental illness which is not in line with today's knowledge of mental illness, understanding of the brain, and workings of the mind. Andrea Yates should spend the rest of her life in a mental hospital, not a jail.

The current standards for insanity defense have been in place since the 1982 assassination attempt on president Ronald Reagan. The law made at the time were very much reactions to an understandable fear. However, policy must be based on facts, not emotions, as the Texas insanity defense is.

Texas's insanity defense is behind the times and out of touch with science. It would be insane not to reexamine this defense.

THE BATTALION

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MAIL CALL

ACLU right to fight state-sponsored religious signs

In response to Dharmaraj's March 18 column:

I found *The Battalion's* column against the ACLU to be inexcusably closed-minded and filled with doublespeak. In it, the author complains that the American tradition of separation of church and state promotes "ideological disparity." This is utterly evasive language for allowing people to hold opinions that are different from your own," another cherished American value.

The author also justifies using state money to print Christian propaganda by saying "popular opinion in Franklinton is that a non-Christian religion is wrong. Whether of these statements can be rationally construed as offensive, particularly because both of these implied statements are very true." Contrary to what he seems to believe, just because an opinion is popular in no way makes it right, and certainly does not make it offensive.

It is inherently wrong to force non-Christians to pay with their tax money for signs that condemn their own deeply held views.

Casey Foster
Class of 2005

Adventure in cooking

In response to Lindsay Leifeste's March 18 article:

I found the article describing People's cooking experiences

quite interesting and would like to share my own. I am an international student from India and I am purely vegetarian. As a result, I am forced to cook my own food. When I first arrived in the United States last fall I had similar cooking experiences while making my own food for the first time.

One day I decided to make the sweet rice that we call "kheer." I boiled some milk and put "sufficient" rice in it and did not bother to stir it. Ten minutes later, when I came back, I found that the rice had settled to the bottom and had been burned. In addition, there was a foul smell because some of the milk had spilled onto the burner.

Since then, neither my roommate nor I have dared to cook that dish again.

Saurabh Gupta
graduate student

Bible verses do not belong on fliers

I am offended by AggieCon for using Bible verses on its fliers. It is wrong for AggieCon to use the Lord's words to promote its own goals.

AggieCon is in no way connected with anything Christian. This could lead unsuspecting Christians to participate in something against God's will.

AggieCon should be forced to take down these fliers and apologize to those who were offended by the corruption of the Lord's Word.

Barry Ward
Class of 2004

A LACK OF PRIVACY

Makers of implanted chip lost sight of original goal

Now here is something that is sure to get under one's skin — literally.

Last week, Applied Digital announced its plans to produce implantable microchips, or the VeriChip, for humans. VeriChip is rather innocuous — no bigger than a grain of rice. Encoded with specific information, the chip is placed under the skin. A scanning device is run across the skin, and the data are promptly displayed on a screen. In response to the overwhelming criticism Applied Digital has received for the VeriChip, it continues to promote the chip for medical purposes.



MELISSA FRIED

At first, the VeriChip was to hold only medical information. It would eventually replace the need for hard-copy medical files because the patient's entire history would be stored within the chip. Ideally, it would also have made emergency situations easier. Should a patient enter a hospital unconscious, all the information the doctor needs to know — medical history, allergies and past hospitalizations — would be on the chip, and no time would be wasted trying to call relatives of the patient. This is a great idea and a true scientific breakthrough.

But Applied Digital raises eyebrows in its attempt to merge the implantable concept of VeriChip with another one of its products, the Digital Angel tracking device.

After the murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, Applied Digital has found its soapbox. If Pearl had had an embedded chip that could have relayed

his position and location at all times — with the use of the most advanced GPS technology — his fate could have been drastically different. This is the finest piece of "security propaganda" since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, and with such propaganda it is our responsibility to consider the other side of this compelling argument.

Americans are constantly dispersed around the world. They are members of the military, diplomats, businessmen, foreign correspondents, and their safety is a great concern for our government because of their profession. But to "chip" them is a temporary solution that only invites more trouble.

On the one hand, Americans' whereabouts could be monitored should they encounter any trouble. But the other side is that the chip cannot be "turned off." Once the workday is over, their position and location is tracked and they are remotely followed home, to dinner or the movies. There becomes no distinction between public and private life as one slowly merges to become the other.

Something else to consider is who is monitoring whom. Intelligence officials of this country and other countries can easily intercept radio messages, satellite-beamed information or hack into computer systems. So how long will it be before they tap into the tracking system?

Suddenly, not only will the United States know the strategic location of its CIA agents, but so will other "rogue" nations. Who is to say that our overseas brethren will not become the target of intensified international scandals?

Or in a more extreme situation, what if this technology falls into the hands of oppressive states, as is the concern of many bio-ethicists, who require their citizens to "get chipped" to promote regional stability? How very Orwellian.

Applied Digital needs to focus its energy on the advancement of the VeriChip with its original purpose in mind — to aid the medical community.

However, Applied Digital is also in the business of making money. Shame on Applied Digital for playing on the fears of Americans in the hopes of turning a profit. And shame on Americans for allowing them to.

Melissa Fried is a freshman international studies major.



RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION

Lower speeds make Texas safer

In an age where time is money, every minute counts. At least that is how it appears on the daily commute, as cars race to their destinations.

Reducing the speed limit on many Texas highways may be an inconvenience to drivers, however, it is necessary to ensure the safety of travelers.

Earlier this year, many Houston freeways experienced a speed limit reduction from 70 to 55 mph. Heavily traveled Houston roads such as North Freeway, Gulf Freeway, Katy Freeway and the West Loop were among those reduced first. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, the new speed limit is part of a state plan to reduce Houston's severe smog problem and to comply with the federal Clean Air Act. Safety concerns brought on by the large number of daily travelers have propelled the new limits.

The decision to reduce the speed limit is an attempt to improve the safety conditions on freeways. Speed limits are set at the speed that is considered safe and reasonable for travelers, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation Website. The Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) Website reported that when many freeway speeds were raised

to 70 mph in 1996, the number of automobile accidents also increased. TTI said the number of fatal crashes increased by 28 percent following the increase in freeway speed limits. CNN has

reported that cars are made safer, but they are not meant to withstand an impact at 70 mph.

Personal vehicles are not the only ones on the road: large trucks shipping merchandise and goods to stores share the roads. Drivers have a difficult time controlling and maneuvering eighteen-wheelers at high speeds. The *Houston Chronicle* reported that reduced speeds can improve freeway safety by giving truck drivers more control in emergency situations.

Road construction is also an ongoing problem. Workers are either adding new lanes to accommodate heavy traffic or repairing roads worn by constant use. Lower speed limits reduce the amount of wear and costly repairs on roads, according to CNN. Roads that last longer are more practical for drivers by eliminating construction that forces them to use alternative routes. Potholes and damaged roads cause wear on vehicles and add risk when drivers attempt to avoid them. CNN said that while roads are being

built safer, they will only do so much to improve safety.

Reduced speed limits are an inconvenience to travelers, however, as roads become increasingly crowded, there is a need to regulate speeds. The most difficult part of lowering speed limits is enforcing them. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, police officers report that most drivers ignore the reduced speed limits. New speed limits go into effect as soon as a new sign is put up.

Enforcing the speed limit is difficult — there has been no additional state or federal funding to pay more officers. The *Houston Chronicle* also said ticketing is expected to increase and there will be little leniency for speeders.

Police officers said conditions can become serious if there is a large difference in the speeds of drivers on the same roads. Drivers should not jeopardize their and others well-being to shave five minutes off their commute.

While many drivers will be impatient, reducing the speed limit is a safety procedure this state needs to make. Drivers have an obligation to comply with the speed limit to protect themselves and others.

Andi Baca is a senior journalism major.