

**OPINION**

# Libel suits are often used for intimidation

Another multi-million dollar libel suit has come and gone. General Westmoreland has dropped his \$120 million suit against CBS.

This time the press agency under attack survived. But what about the next time?

An increasing number of libel suits are being brought against the media. More and more frequently courts are awarding punitive damages to libel plaintiffs.

The first reaction of many people to this recent trend may be positive, thinking the threat of libel suits will keep the press in line and out of people's hair. After all, there is a growing wave of dissension and distrust in the public toward the press these days.

But the fact is libel suits and punitive damage awards are meant to serve as an intimidation factor against the press. And it's working.

Most newspapers, television networks and other forms of media cannot afford expensive libel suits. To them, the threat of a libel case means the threat of bankruptcy. Most smaller media organizations are forced to settle out of court — even when they know they would win — because court costs are just too steep.

The power of the pen is a mighty thing. The effects of the press are far-reaching, and when someone is unjustly treated by the press he deserves compensation. But most libel suits do not involve malicious, unjust behavior by members of the press. Most involve people, whether public or private citizens, who do not like the image portrayed of themselves in the press. The truth hurts.

The purpose of the press is to objectively, honestly report the news, to serve as a watchdog of the government and social agencies. If the government doesn't have to account to the public for its actions, if businesses don't have to account to the public, then how can people know their interests are being fairly represented? How can they be sure the government is looking out for their well-being?

They can't. And when the American public can no longer count on getting the facts, then a huge cornerstone of what this country is based on — freedom of speech, freedom of the press — will have been destroyed.

And when those freedoms are taken away, which of our constitutional freedoms will be the next to crumble and fall?

**The Battalion Editorial Board**

# Reagan's actions don't help generate peaceful feelings

A few years ago I was sitting around a table with some friends playing Dungeons and Dragons. Our bedraggled party of adventurers happened upon a creature resembling an overweight ape who had the ability to speak. The animal, called a quatsch, spoke in confusing little phrases which drove two of our party members completely insane before we could get away from the beast.



**Loren Steffy**

The other day I picked up the paper and began reading an article on Reagan's determination to continue with the "Star Wars" defense program no matter what. I instantly remembered the mind-bending primate from Dungeons and Dragons. Reagan's "quatschism" became apparent when he said

he would continue the development of the space-based defense system, even if the United States and the Soviet Union agree to eliminate offensive nuclear weapons.

Basically, Reagan wants to eradicate offensive nuclear arms and build a defense system to stop the attack of offensive nuclear arms. This makes about as much sense as removing every electrically-dependent item from your house and then installing a circuit breaker.

Imagine how Boris the Russian diplomat will feel when he gets a call from Joe State Department saying America is ready to negotiate nuclear arms reductions. Boris grabs his briefcase and rushes over to Geneva, where Joe is waiting.

"We want to eliminate offensive nuclear weapons," Joe says.

Boris looks over Joe's shoulder and says, "Gee, Joe, looks to me like you're trying to increase your defense budget, build MX missiles and B-1 bombers and develop armed space satellites."

The Soviets can't be expected to believe we want to limit weapons production when we're trying harder than they to increase our arsenals. As I've said before, the "Star Wars" program will serve to transport our terrestrial weapons into space and eliminate the chances of international cooperation. The minute we arm satellites, a space craft will be developed for military purposes as well. Soon we'll be fighting wars outside our atmosphere as well as inside.

Deke Slayton has the wonderful idea of catapulting peoples' cremains into orbit. The endeavor represents the first space effort by a private industry, and other companies will follow Slayton's example.

But isn't one cemetery in space enough?

**Loren Steffy is a sophomore pre-law major and a weekly columnist for The Battalion.**

## Mothers are women, too

# All women deserve equality

Mother. One word can engage all five senses and all thought.



**Cathie Anderson**

The image of a dark-skinned woman with patches of gray in her coal-black hair. Light brown eyes contrast with the skin color and make her gray eyebrows stand out.

Maybe she's combing and plaiting the thick, coarse hair of her daughter. Or she's cutting her son's hair with the aid of a bowl. Mama was good at being a mother. But she could have been just as wonderful at other things if marriage hadn't been the goal of most women of the '30s and '40s.

Mama was over 40 when I was born. I was born the ninth of ten children, the second of two girls.

I was a rare find for daddy and a burden to mama, who had to let me in on all

of life's little secrets. Unfortunately I discovered that life's little secrets usually began with "Ladies don't..."

Fortunately for mother I wanted to be a lady. Fortunately for me my brothers wouldn't let me. And now I know that deep down inside my mother was glad that life's little secrets weren't always true anymore.

Perhaps her gray hair came so early because liquid steel ran through her veins. She was an incredibly strong person. She couldn't bench press 200 pounds or run the 100-yard dash in 7 seconds, but she withstood the day-to-day summer camp atmosphere at our house all year 'round.

It's because of mama that I believe equality of the sexes is necessary. Mothers are outstanding people, especially mine.

My brothers, sister, and I often joke about her, but even my 42-year-old brother stands in awe of her. Mama would have a baby one day and be at home taking care of the kids the next, he said.

But my mother deserved equality of the sexes. Because if she'd had more, she could have had more. No woman serves to think in terms of "could" or "would have."

Showing women sexual equality is a way of showing respect. No, I'm not saying men should never give women flowers or never open car doors for them. These things are trivial.

I'm talking about gestures like one of Vice President George Bush's Geraldine Ferraro. Bush gave her roses after insulting her, and that's wrong time to give a woman the Women deserve respect in the workplace.

A lullaby hummed softly and warmth of her body as she held me soled me. The smell of the outdoor dress she'd just taken off the clothesline.

When I think of the word, mother, I think of images like these and of equality.

**Cathie Anderson is a junior journalism major and a staff writer for The Battalion.**

# LETTERS:

## MSC cinema allows former students

**EDITOR:**  
In regard to a letter that appeared in the Batt this week concerning "discrimination" in ticket sales for MSC movies at Texas A&M, I would like to correct some misconceptions.

Admission to all MSC Aggie Cinema films is limited to students, staff, faculty, former students, and guests of the University. Any proof of one's belonging to any of these classifications is sufficient to allow purchase of two tickets.

One reason we have this policy is that the MSC is partially supported by Student Service fees. The services and entertainment programmed by MSC Committees are provided primarily for people paying those fees. But the main reason for this policy is part of our contract with all of the companies from which we rent our films. This stipulates that we must limit attendance to the above named groups.

Finally, in this letter the writer implied (but never actually stated) that he is a former student. As such, he is welcome to purchase tickets (with proof). If he has been unable to do this in the past, we were clearly in error, and I will try to assure that it does not happen again.

**Michael Gardner**  
Chairman, MSC Aggie Cinema

## Student qualified for C.S. city council

**EDITOR:**  
After all the criticism that the Editorial Board has taken, I would like to praise them for their open-minded opinion of Mike Hachtman. I think it is an excellent idea for Hachtman to run for this position. He is obviously well qualified, and Texas A&M University definitely needs quality representation on the College Station City Council.

**Terey B. Counts**  
Class of '88

## Student response to survey requested

**EDITOR:**  
Student Government Census and Research Committee mailed out a questionnaire to a random 1,000 students. The questions are based on current issues discussed by the Student and Faculty Senate.

If you received a questionnaire, please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope by March 8. These questions affecting students at A&M are important to the Student and Faculty Senate. Thank you again for your time and cooperation.

**Barney C. Natividad**  
Census and Research

## School-spirited Ags a definite minority

**EDITOR:**  
Aggie Spirit, ha!  
Tonight, for the first time in my entire life, I am ashamed to be a Texas Aggie. Not twenty minutes ago our men's basketball team was outscored at the buzzer by those jerks in burnt-orange.

The team is not the cause of my embarrassment. They played a fine game marred only by some questionable refereeing and Lady Luck. They played with a pluck that would make any Aggie proud — they will play, and win, again.

No, it is not our basketball team that's embarrassing. It's the spirit of this place, or lack of it. We pride ourselves on our love of school, its tradition, and how well we support it. Ha! The majority of students only supports football, and to heck with everything else. Now, I don't know about you, but an Aggie Spirit that is brought out only in the fall, dusted off, used, and put back again after the t.u. game isn't much of a spirit. When we're in second place and only 6,000 show for a crucial game against the TEASIPS, for gosh sakes, something is very, very wrong. What do they have to do, win a national championship before they get some attention? I thought A&M was different, that we supported all Aggies, win or lose. Obviously I was wrong.

The way I figure it, 6,000 minus about 2,000 for old Ags, teasips, etc. is about 11% of the student body. Yes, 11% of the "most spirited student body anywhere" showed up for the game against arch-rival Texas. It looks like we have a new name for Aggies who don't support their school in the spring — 89 percenters. Thanks a lot, guys, it's almost time for spring training. As for me, I'm an 11 percenter and damn proud of it. The rest of you are nothing short of hypocritical.

**Glenn Hawkins**  
Class of '85



The Battalion  
USPS 045 360  
Member of  
Texas Press Association  
Southwest Journalism Conference

**The Battalion Editorial Board**  
Brigid Brockman, Editor  
Shelley Hoekstra, Managing Editor  
Ed Cassavoy, City Editor  
Kellie Dworaczky, News Editor  
Michelle Powe, Editorial Page Editor  
Travis Tingle, Sports Editor

**The Battalion Staff**  
Assistant City Editors ..... Kari Flaegel, Rhonda Smith  
Assistant News Editors ..... Cami Brown, John Hallett, Kay Wainwright  
Assistant Sports Editor ..... Charean Wilcox  
Entertainment Editors ..... Shawn Behlen, Leigh-Ellean  
Staff Writers ..... Cathie Anderson, Brandon Berry, Dainah Bland, Ann Cervenka, Michael Crawford, Kirsten Dietz, Pam Felt, Patrice Koranek, Trent Lewis, Sarah Oates, Jerry Oates, Tricia Parker, Lynn Rasmussen  
Copy Editors ..... Jan Perry, Kelley  
Make-up Editors ..... Karen  
Columnists ..... Kevin Inda, Loren Steffy  
Editorial Cartoonist ..... Mike  
Sports Cartoonist ..... Dale  
Copy Writer ..... Cathie Anderson  
Photo Editor ..... Kathleen  
Photographers ..... Anthony, Wayne Grabain, Bill Hughes, Frank, John Makely, Peter Rocha, Ryan

**Editorial Policy**  
The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting organization operated as a community service to Texas A&M University. Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the Editorial Board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M University or the Board of Regents.  
The Battalion also serves as a laboratory for students in reporting, editing and photography within the Department of Communications.

**Letters Policy**  
Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit for style and length but will make every effort to preserve the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and include the address and telephone number of the author.  
The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except during examination periods. Mail subscriptions are \$35 per semester, \$35.25 per school year and \$65 per year. Advertising rates furnished on request.  
Our address: The Battalion, 216 Red Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843. Editorial staff phone number: (409) 845-2611; advertising: (409) 845-2611.  
Second class postage paid at College Station, TX. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.