

Opinion

The Battalion

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A U.S. tradition

Let's get something straight about the controversial Frank Vandiver final exam T-shirts. If Traditions Council wants to sell them and you want to buy one, you can — thanks to the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of expression.

And Carolyn Adair, director of student activities understands that she — or any other A&M administrator — cannot forbid the sale of the shirts in the Memorial Student Center simply because of the T-shirt's message.

The Student Press Law Center in Washington D.C. explained to *The Battalion* that because the administration allows other organizations to sell T-shirts in the MSC, it must also allow Traditions Council the same right.

The problem seems to be that Traditions Council did not get a permit to sell the shirts, and, therefore, was forced to stop selling them in the MSC. Legally, however, the council can apply for a permit and can get one.

If the administration refused to issue a permit, The Student Press Law Center said, it would be running serious risk of being sued for First Amendment infringement.

But according to Adair, the Traditions Council has not applied for a permit to sell the shirts.

Adair said that if the council "pushed the issue, I would probably sign a permit."

She said she is most concerned with the tactic used by the council. Adair said the red protest T-shirts aren't consistent with the council's more conservative, "professional" methods and that the shirts will hurt any chances the council may have for attaining its goal — rescheduling senior final exams or elimination of the plan altogether.

Petitions are nice, and door-knocking isn't a bad idea, but so far it seems that nothing the Traditions Council or any other student organization has done has caught the attention of administrators like the T-shirts have.

If students are concerned about senior final exams and want administrators to take note, it seems they have stumbled on to a completely legal and extremely effective means for doing so. All they have to do is get a permit.

So what happens when others die?

In Bergenfield, N.J., four troubled teen-agers pulled into a garage, closed the door and proceeded to kill themselves by carbon-monoxide poisoning. By nightfall, the tragic story was on the evening news and the next morning in newspapers.



Richard Cohen

Instantly, experts were called upon to comment on teen-age suicide — whether it is, or is not a serious problem.

This is what happens when whites die. I do not mean to minimize the deaths in New Jersey. There were four kids in that car and the death of each one is a tragedy. Young lives and all the supposed promise that goes with youth were extinguished. Parents and relatives will mourn, and, inevitably, some will blame themselves. A school and community have some hard questions to answer. One of them is why kids should conclude that they have nothing to live for.

But there is a version of the New Jersey tragedy that is considered the normal state of affairs when it comes to the impoverished black community. In ways we often do not recognize as suicide, blacks and members of other minority groups kill themselves at a rate unknown in the white community. In 1982, the homicide rate (per 100,000) for whites was 9.6. The same rate for blacks was an astounding 59.1.

Sometimes these deaths are caused by what we all recognize as suicide — and for that, the rate for blacks is lower than for whites. But much of the time, the cause of the death is listed as something different — drug overdose, alcoholism or, even the victim of violent crime. Those figures tell a wholly different story.

Some homicide victims, of either race, were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. But if that was all there was to it, the white and black rate would be about the same. The difference is explained by other factors, like a more dangerous environment for many

blacks (inner-city slums) and a tendency to engage in violent behavior — what criminologist Marvin Wolfgang calls "victim-precipitated homicide."

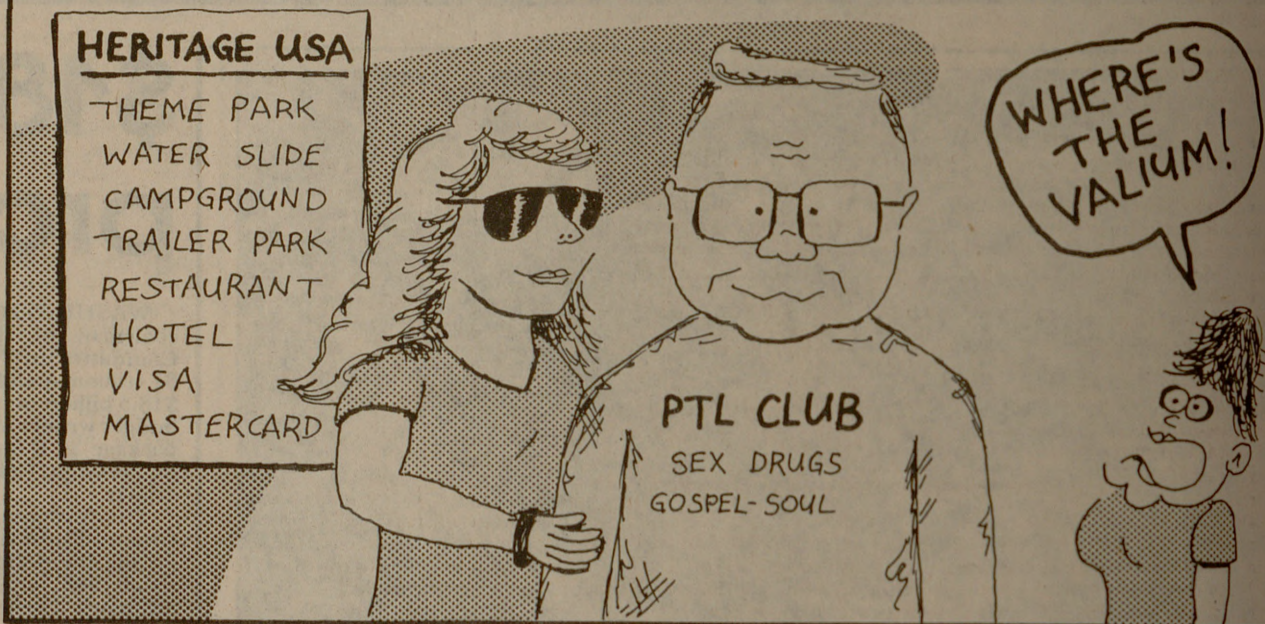
What is true for violence is true also for drug addiction, alcoholism and other forms of what is called "risk-taking behavior." Very often, the same depression, hopelessness, frustration and rage that is associated with suicide contributes to what we consider anti-social behavior.

At the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, both homicide and suicide are considered public-health problems whose causes may be similar. The hopelessness, rage and depression that constitute the unbearable pain of the suicide victim can, in another person, trigger violent behavior. In the end, the actions of a suicidal person and someone who is always picking a fight can produce the same result.

There is so much of this behavior in the poor, urban black community that some demographers think it explains why in some areas there are fewer men than women. (Suicide, like homicide, is mostly a male phenomenon.) In certain inner-city New York neighborhoods, for instance, the gap is 14 percent — and both homicide and suicide are held partially responsible. The true explanation may well be under-counting by census takers fearful of entering certain buildings. But just the fact that homicide and suicide are cited shows the extent of the problem in the underclass black community.

As it has with drug addiction, American society clutches only when the problem spills out into the white middle-class community. Heroin addiction, which has bottomed out as mostly an underclass problem, receives scant attention in the media; that same thing will probably happen when cocaine, as some predict, is abandoned by all but the lower classes. What is commonplace in the ghetto usually goes unnoticed until it threatens suburbia. Then media attention stops are pulled, America waxes indignant, the president appoints a study commission and its recommendations are forgotten as soon as the problem retreats to the ghetto.

GIMMIE THAT "GOOD OL' TIME" RELIGION



This doesn't seem like a party

Only five more weeks and I'll be a former student. I can tell it's time for me to graduate because I am fed up with studying. I remember everyone telling me that college is the best time of your life and to enjoy it. Everyone said I wouldn't have any responsibilities and all kinds of free time. Apparently, none of these people went to college — at least not at A&M.



Jo Streit

It seems I never have a free moment. And I'm sick of worrying about 20 things at once. I can't wait to get a full-time job. After I get off work, the only thing I'll have to worry about is getting up the next morning to go back. Somehow that sounds a lot better than what

I'm doing now. The best part about getting a full-time job is that I'll only be responsible to one company.

In college, you're responsible for a number of things. The most obvious one, of course, is your grade-point ratio. Unfortunately, each professor feels his or her class is the most important one. My boyfriend and I went out to dinner one Friday night and we ran into his biochemistry professor. At the restaurant, the professor seemed nice enough, but the next week in class he commented that he had seen several students from the class out on the weekend. He added that if the students had enough time to go out, then they didn't have enough work to do. Naturally, the professor took it upon himself to correct the problem.

It seems almost all instructors feel their class should be at the top of each student's priority list. I have friends who were given homework over spring break or had to take a test the Monday we got back. And now we have a number of faculty members who want graduating seniors to take final exams.

Recently I read that the early grading requirements for graduating seniors were complicating the faculty's schedule and that this was one reason for justifying final exams. This only seems fair, after all the consideration instructors give to the students' schedule. I'm sure we've all had instructors postpone an exam after finding out we already had one the same week. Any other reasons for making seniors take final exams escape my reasoning. Of course, that's probably why I'm only getting a bachelor's degree and not a doctorate.

However, school responsibilities usually extend beyond the classroom. Many students are involved in campus organizations, and membership in them often requires a large time commitment. A friend of mine is in a singing group

and the time she spends at rehearsals, concerts and fund-raising events is enormous. The organization has sympathy for members who have to work the day after a rehearsal. Some organizations make attendance mandatory and enforce penalties for those who don't attend.

Another large time commitment many students is work. There are students who must work in order to pay for their education, work that can have spending money for things like spring break. And finally, students work because they want career-related experience before they graduate. But working also means giving up time for studying or playing. Work is a commitment and an added stress to an already hectic schedule.

I've often heard the expression "until you get out in the real world" used by people who say this make it sound like college students don't have a care in the world. College is part of the real world and students have numerous demands placed on them by peers, parents, instructors and employers. I'm beginning to think the students who take it easy and aren't involved in anything are doing it the right way. They're the people who grow up and proclaim, "College is the best time of your life."

Of course, my discontent could be a sign of senioritis or spring fever. Then again, maybe it's because I'm in town over spring break. Whatever the case may be, I know I'm ready to get a real job and a more stable schedule. It's almost ironic how busy I've been this semester. I thought I was going to have the whole time. I guess this is the University's way of telling me I've graduated yet. And if I don't graduate, I might be here another semester.

Jo Streit is a senior journalism major and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

Mail Call

Good intentions?

EDITOR:

In response to the letter "Good Intentions" by Mr. Markel L. Simmons in *Mail Call* March 24, I question just who is the benefactor of the good intentions of President Reagan and the U.S. foreign policy in Central America. Yes, I agree with the idea that it is possible to do the right thing in the wrong way, but I personally feel that some of the intentions of the United States concerning Nicaragua are selfish.

In January and February of 1981, I traveled in Nicaragua and saw firsthand some of the problems 18 months after the Sandanista revolution. I also lived on the East coast of Honduras from 1983 to 1986 and worked with Miskito Indians, of which some 20,000 were political refugees from Nicaragua. During my three years in Honduras, I had several encounters with the U.S.-trained and U.S.-backed counter-revolutionary forces (Contras).

Following are a few questions that I would like to share with Simmons, all Aggies, concerned citizens of the United States, and especially Reagan and members of Congress:

1. Were our intentions good when we helped set up the Somosa family as dictators in Nicaragua in the late 1920s?
2. Were our intentions good when we allowed the Somosa family (father and two sons) and a very few other families to exploit their fellow Nicaraguans until the peasants had very little left to live for?
3. Were our intentions good as we exploited the resources (human and natural) of Nicaragua and other Central American countries during the last century through the combined efforts of private business and the CIA?
4. Were our intentions good as the Somosa family butchered ("Butcherer" is the nickname given to the

Somosa family by the Nicaraguan people) thousands who opposed them up until the Sandanista revolution of 1979?

5. Are our intentions still good as thousands of young people die fighting in the counter-revolution when they have very little chance of winning (as the congressional report stated recently)?

6. Are our intentions also good in El Salvador where we presently support a very oppressive government against another group of "Freedom Fighters"?

As per the use of the word communist in the above-mentioned letter, Daniel Ortega has repeatedly stated that the Sandanista government is not communist — nor does it wish to be. Neither do they want to align with the type of democracy that has been shown to Nicaragua over the past 60 years. I agree that the Sandanista government is oppressive, but our press and our politicians are sometimes guilty of pulling these sensational facts out of context. Somosa (whom we supported) was also oppressive.

To make my stand clear, I am not pro-Sandanista, neither am I pro-Contra. If one of my friends is managing his money poorly, does that give me the right to play policeman and take his checkbook away and manage his money for him because I think I can do better? Please don't accept my opinions without investigating more deeply the history of Nicaragua and Central America for at least the past 100 years.

Again, what are our real intentions in Nicaragua? Are there maybe not better ways to encourage freedom?

Ray H. Griggs '81

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