

Opinion

Racist At Ease essay merits an apology

The Battalion screwed up.

This probably comes as no surprise to those of you who read us regularly. Mistakes, after all, happen. At *The Batt*, we use a bulletin board to post those mistakes. It currently contains critiqued copies of the past week's papers and a nasty memo from me about a headline that nearly went into print in error.



Sue Krenek

On the lighter side, there's a letter from a former student who says, "Because of Spartan housing accommodations when I was a student, A&M was sometimes called 'Sing-Sing on the Brazos,' but at least we lived in dormitories."

Attached is the headline that prompted his comment, the one that read "Parking garage to house students, faculty."

It seems like a silly mistake, and it is. As always, we try to keep things like that

from happening. But it was a mistake that, at least, could be looked at with humor, a helpful thing when you're trying to stay sane.

Last week we did something that was no laughing matter.

Each week *At Ease*, *The Battalion's* weekly supplement, publishes an essay on its *attention!!* page. Last week's column, titled "Poverty: A culture shock," was a student's account of her trip to the Rio Grande Valley and her reaction to the poverty she encountered there.

We should not have published the column.

Many of you realized that. Many of you were offended by the column. I've talked to some of you, and I've read a lot of letters to the editor saying the writer — and the paper — were way out of line. That's absolutely right.

The *attention!!* essays usually give students a chance to talk about a personal experience. A student becoming enlightened about poverty fits right in with that idea. But last week, the writer demonstrated that although she may have learned about poverty, she had a long way to go in recognizing racism.

Describing a drive through Har-

lingen, she said, "About 50 Mexicans from age 12 to 20 were there hanging out." When she drove through Brownsville, she said, "Swarms of Mexican students, mostly dressed in filthy jeans and ragged T-shirts crossed the street in front of us. I asked Megan if we were still in America."

The Battalion has a policy stating that we don't allow incorrect statements to appear in any opinion material we run. So if you write a letter to the editor and mention that John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1960, we'll run an editor's note correcting the error.

It also means that we shouldn't have allowed a writer to refer to Americans of Mexican descent as "Mexicans." Unless the people she saw were illegal aliens — something she couldn't have known through observation — she should have referred to them as Americans or as Mexican-Americans. That is what they are.

One thing should be clear: If the writer had said clearly that she *thought* the people were illegal aliens or presented some kind of evidence that they were, her assertions might have been allowed to stand. The problem is that she

presented as factual observations some things that simply weren't true.

In other areas, the essay provided a grim reminder of how easily some people accept racial stereotypes even now. "Megan told me that Mexican girls love to have babies — regardless of whether they are married or financially able." "Mexican boys yelled obscenities at us as they drove passed (sic) in their low-riders."

I'm not saying the writer didn't see and hear the things she wrote about. But she didn't use her essay to examine those stereotypes. I'm not even sure she recognized them as stereotypes. Instead of either accepting or rejecting them, she simply passed them along as factual observations.

That's where the column violated another of our policies. We try to get an open exchange of ideas in our opinion material, both on the opinion page and the *attention!!* page. But we want that material to be well thought-out. Careless, unexamined stereotyping is not what we're looking for.

I don't mean to suggest in any way that we have to consider an idea "valid" for it to be published. Printing only col-

umns and letters that agreed with would be unfair to our readers. It would also make for a very boring paper. We have standards that opinion material must meet. Some, such as length, guidelines for letters, are simple. Some such as when a piece becomes too divisive to run, are not.

And so the editors of *At Ease* decided to publish the essay. They recognized that parts of it might offend people, but felt the overall message justified printing it. In a way, they may be right. The letters we've received tell me that they say may have made some of you take a look at stereotypes.

I was offended by the essay. Had I seen it before publication, it would not have appeared. But in the end, I'm responsible for it.

I apologize to anyone — Hispanic or otherwise — who was offended by the essay. You have every right to be angry. I only hope you understand that the opinions were not those of *The Battalion* staff.

We made a mistake. We are very sorry.

Sue Krenek is a senior journalism major and editor of *The Battalion*.

Writer's attitudes ignore rich Mexican traditions

I have just finished reading a column by senior journalism major Jill Galarneau titled "Poverty: A culture shock," which was the *attention* column in the Feb. 4 edition of *At Ease*. It was about her "first encounter with poverty in its purest form." She accompanied her roommate to her roommate's — and my — hometown of Harlingen, in the lower Rio Grande Valley, for spring break.

Charles Schoonover Guest Columnist

In her column, she mentioned driving through an older part of Harlingen and seeing a local car club of low riders hanging out in the K-Mart parking lot where all of the different high school groups, including the kickers and red-necks, hang out. She was amazed to see, in this group of "... about 50 Mexicans from age 12 to 20 ..." that "... two young girls ..." were wearing "... shirts labeled 'baby' with an arrow pointing downward." This is an amazing display of observation on her part.

If her roommate would have driven only one mile north of K-Mart to the Valley International Airport, Jill would have been able to use her powers of observation at the nationally famous Confederate Air Force Museum. She would have also been able to see the Iwo Jima Memorial, which is an exact replica from the original mold of the memorial in Washington, D.C.

She was told by her roommate that "... Mexican girls love to have babies — regardless of whether they are married or financially able." She was also told that at her roommate's high school, "... which is 80 percent Mexican-American, pregnant girls continue to go to school until a few days before delivery."

I grew up in Harlingen, and it is true that "Mexican girls" do love to have babies. Just as much as "upper-middle class North Dallas" girls. I also attended Harlingen High School for three years, and in that time I saw very few pregnant students. But I feel that the few I did see are a credit to all women because they continued to pursue their education even while pregnant.

Further on, Jill says, she saw "... unbathed children playing in the weeds in front of their homes. Their tiny decrepit shacks looked as if a gust of wind would blow them over."

It might surprise Jill to know that out of the 20-odd years that I lived in Harlingen, every person I ever knew bathed frequently. But kids will be kids, and I

do not doubt that Jill did see dirty children. But there is a very big difference between unbathed children and kids playing.

Being so close to the Gulf of Mexico, hurricanes are a very real threat. I have been through two myself. Any decrepit shacks would have been blown down a long time ago.

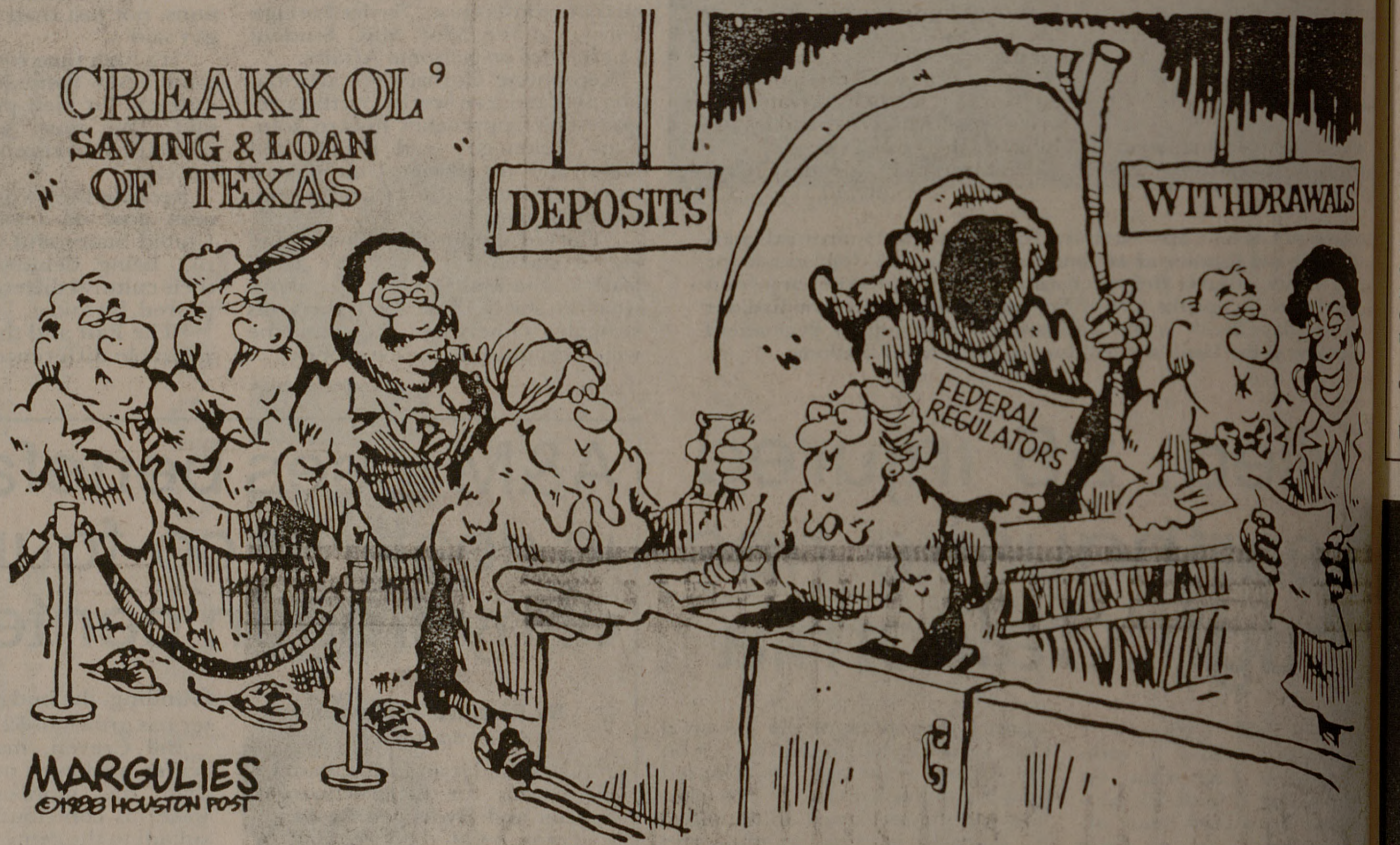
After leaving Harlingen, Jill went to Brownsville only to find that it "... was even more of an education." I will be the first to admit that Brownsville has its problems, but Brownsville is the sister city of Matamoros, Mexico. The two cities' economies are dependent on each other, and currently Mexico is in an economic crisis and Brownsville is also suffering from it along with the rest of the Rio Grande Valley.

Jill and her roommate got to Brownsville just as a high school was letting out. She noted that "Swarms of Mexican students, mostly dressed in filthy jeans and ragged T-shirts ..." crossed the street in front of them. She also noticed that "their school was a group of stacked, portable buildings that looked like a temporary set-up." But her roommate assured her that they were permanent. What her roommate should also have told her is that the Supreme Court of the State of Texas decided that Brownsville is required to educate illegal aliens. That ruling was financially devastating to the district, which is doing the best it can under the circumstances.

Jill finished her article by stating that she "... felt greedy and spoiled and ..." she found herself on the "... verge of tears." She also wanted to "... join the missionary field or the Peace Corps." Well, Jill does not have to go to the Valley to see poverty. I have seen far worse conditions in Bryan than I have ever seen in Harlingen. She does not have to join the Peace Corps either. If she really wants to do something about it, she can start right here in her own community.

But it is my opinion, from reading her article, that she was far more interested in looking at the poor "Mexicans" than at the poor people. And they are poor people with very real problems in a very real world. Jill should have spent more time looking at the people of the Valley instead of looking down at them. If she had, she would have discovered a wonderful culture full of rich traditions that have been around long before any shopping malls went up on the north side of Dallas.

Charles Schoonover is a junior computer science major



Mail Call

We should have a faculty club

EDITOR:

According to a front page story in *The Battalion* on Feb. 9, "Students try to prevent faculty club," some students and anonymous former students are attempting to block the establishment of a faculty club on campus. The objections seem to be, first, that a faculty club would be for faculty members who pay to join and would not be shared with students who would pay no dues. All major universities and colleges in the nation have faculty clubs, and their paying members do not open them up to non-paying members, whether students or former students. Of course, this is yet another way Texas A&M could be unique: no faculty club. Believe me, no paying club member is going to subsidize non-paying members.

Is it possible that student body president, Mason Hogan, and his fellow petitioners do not know what a faculty club is and how important it can be to faculty morale and recruiting? Or could it be they don't care?

The second objection seems to be that state owned property should not be used exclusively by any one group but should be open to all taxpayers. According to the latest information I have, student dormitory rooms are state owned property. Should they be opened to all taxpayers for their free use despite the fact that students pay housing fees? According to Mr. Hogan's logic, the answer must be, "Yes."

If by influencing the governor, or attorney general, former students are successful in destroying the faculty

club, they will have created an interesting precedent that would have to be applied to this board of regents on-campus quarters, which is open to neither faculty nor students.

Manuel M. Davenport
Department of Philosophy

We shouldn't have a faculty club

EDITOR:

Where will it end? Today the tower dining room, tomorrow the parking garage. Let's go Ags — we just can't sit and do nothing while the tower dining room gets converted into a faculty club. We pay taxes. We pay tuition. Some of our family and friends are even financial supporters of this school. If things keep going the way they are, NONE of our friends and/or family will be allowed to use the tower dining room except on special occasions such as graduation. I wonder if the faculty could learn a little from the student organizations here. When we want something special or just something new, we raise the money and build it ourselves. But of course the faculty is much too distinguished. The faculty would rather just take it and hope nobody notices.

David Davenport '88

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.

The Battalion

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by Berke Breathed

