

Mail Call

Racism thrives in America

EDITOR:

This letter is in response to Dean Sueltenfuss' column about placing a minority on the Texas A&M Board of Regents.

First of all, Mr. Sueltenfuss, when you wrote that "Racism is close to being eradicated in the United States," you were obviously joking. That is the only explanation I can come up with for such a fallacious statement.

If you had bothered to do any research on discrimination, you would have found that the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence cited that racial incidents have occurred at more than 160 colleges in the last three years.

Furthermore, you would have known that Texas A&M has had its share of racial incidents.

Mr. Sueltenfuss, am I assuming too much when I say I am sure you agree with Congress that there should be equal representation for states in the House of Representatives? Shouldn't the Board of Regents equally represent the students of A&M? Not everyone at A&M is white, like the members of the board.

Also, Mr. Sueltenfuss, your argument that a minority might not "give a damn" about his own people is weak. Very few minorities are ashamed of their heritage.

Even if that was the case, do you think Gov. Clements would appoint someone who would not support his own race? I suggest you re-evaluate your argument.

Diane Bass '91

Making the grades

EDITOR:

Several weeks ago, Georgetown basketball coach John Thompson walked off the court in protest of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Proposition 42. This proposition which would require students attending college on athletic scholarships to score at least a 700 on their SAT and have a 2.0 grade point average in high school.

Thompson and other coaches against Proposition 42 contend that it will deny black athletes a chance to attend college. They also claim the NCAA is a group of racists and that the SAT is culturally biased.

Perhaps.

But the issue remains that countless athletes (mostly black) are being given free rides at colleges all over the nation based only on their ability to run, jump or dunk.

Seventy-five percent of all black athletes fail to graduate from college. Not only is this an insult to hard-working students, but also (and especially) to student athletes, both black and white.

When an athlete receives a scholarship for a sport, he or she is given free tuition, free room and board, and free books, as well as a monthly check for other expenses.

However, I know of cases where athletes have also applied for financial aid or grants. Why? I doubt it's for tutoring.

I realize that there are many distinguished graduates in society who wouldn't have graduated if Proposition 42 had been passed earlier. But a message needs to be sent to the 75 percent who choose to leave early: If they want to play pro ball, they'd better have the grades.

Matt Flanagan '90

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.

English should be official

As thousands of people cross the border and become American citizens, the language of the land is becoming an important issue. There is no official language of Texas or of the United States. I propose that English should be made the official language.

Official English, which has already been passed in 16 states, including Florida and California, would prohibit the government from making bilingual education a general entitlement. It would also prohibit the government from requiring multilingual government publications, including ballots.

A national official English law or amendment to the Constitution would prevent schools from requiring immigrant children to remain in bilingual education, which tends to isolate them within their language. Many studies have shown that English "immersion" helps students learn the language faster. Even an accelerated English lesson with quick transfer to regular classes taught in English is preferable to the separate educations Spanish-speaking students are receiving in Texas and many other states.

Critics of the movement falsely characterize it as "English only." Yet official English merely means that the acts and duties of government will be carried out in English, except for special circumstances. Also, most of the statutes and constitutional amendments already enacted by the states provide for legislatures to make laws that would enforce official English.

Critics accuse the proponents of official English of being racist. Yet racism is an easy, yet weak, defense for those who do not understand the issue, and those who have an interest not to understand it.

Let's try to understand it better by using a hypothetical situation. Suppose a group of reasonable people of this state are deciding in what language ballots should be printed. Most reasonable people would know that more people in Texas speak English than any other language. They would also know our state constitution was written in English, and that Texas heritage is inseparably entrenched in the English language.



Timm Doolen
Columnist

These people probably believe the ballots should be printed at least in English.

Looking at a statistical analysis of the primary languages spoken in the state, these reasonable people would see that Spanish is spoken widely throughout the state, and many other languages are spoken in far less proportions. So these reasonable people might say that the ballots should also be printed in Spanish.

Then one of the reasonable persons might suggest that to have a true sense of democracy in the state, the ballot should be readable by all people who are eligible to vote. (In this hypothetical case, let's disregard illiterates, the blind, and other people who couldn't make use of a normal ballot.) This would require that the ballots be printed in all languages spoken by registered voters in Texas.

Then one of the reasonable people might point out that when the state prints a ballot in two languages instead of one, it almost doubles the cost, and when the state prints a ballot in more than two languages, it almost triples, quadruples, etc., the cost. So the reasonable people might decide that it is only cost efficient to print the ballot in, say, two languages — English and Spanish, as is currently done in Texas.

This leads the reasonable people to a dilemma. How can they print the ballot in only English and Spanish, and not be accused of being undemocratic, and worse, discriminatory, against all the persons who only speak other languages? The reasonable people might conclude that there is no way to be non-discriminatory without making the printing of ballots, and many other official publications, extremely costly to the voters.

But let's say that the voters of the state have provided in their constitution that English should be the official language of public discourse. And furthermore, the language is promoted in the public educational institutions of the state. Then the state can print the ballot only in English (saving money), and not be discriminatory in its actions. For if it is stated in the constitution of the state that the official language is English, and all citizens have access to learn English through the public school system, then the state would not be discriminating against any person when the ballots were written in English.

The complications of a bilingual or multilingual state or nation are compounded when we consider such public occurrences as court proceedings and even simple things like getting a driver's license. Since we have bilingual ballots, are we also going to require that most government officials learn a second language so they can communicate with the people of the state. After all, many of the people who read only the Spanish portion of the ballots also get driver's licenses. Attaining a driver's license is difficult when the government employees don't know the language of the applicant.

A reasonable person would say that in our free country, an employee should not be forced to learn another language to be gainfully employed. Yet there is currently no law in Texas that would prohibit this. And further, if that employee had to learn Spanish instead of another language, that would again discriminate against non-Spanish speakers.

The only reasonable solution is a common language that all citizens can share. Could there be any doubt that the language should be English, the historical language of our country?

An amendment to our Constitution establishing official English may be needed to promote the general welfare, as stated in the preamble. Our country is filled with Anglo culture, including a document that went into effect 20 years ago, which was written in English.

Timm Doolen is a sophomore computer science major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Skin color not the only difference among races

J. Frank Hernandez
Staff Assistant

I do not profess to be a master of physics. Therefore, when someone asks me for help with physics, I send them to my roommate. I do not profess to be a master of law. Therefore, when someone asks me for advice on legal situations, I send them to my father. I do not profess to be a master of engineering. Therefore, when someone asks me about engineering, I send them to my fraternity brother. Being intelligent is realizing what you do not know.

Assuming the above is true, we have a large amount of people here at Texas A&M who are less than intelligent. By that I mean there are many people here that act as though they know what is best for minorities, or majorities, or half-breeds like myself. We should only speak about that which we know.

If you have never been black, if you have never been Hispanic, if you have never been Oriental, and yes, if you have never been white, how can you say what is best for that group of people? If you do not know the struggles that particular group has encountered, how can you be sensitive to their needs? To make it easier I offer this analogy: If you have never been poor, how do you know what it is like to be hungry?

Gov. Clements made a smart move when he appointed a Hispanic to the Texas A&M Board of Regents. To have overlooked such an opportunity would be to tell all minorities: "Sorry, you got lost in the shuffle."

Whether the student body or Texas A&M (and yes, there is a difference) wants to admit or not, the needs of minorities are not being met here at Texas A&M.

A perfect example of someone judging what they do not know was the argument concerning funding for the Multicultural Services Center for this year. From what I understand, the Student Senate didn't feel the center was representative of all races and also didn't see the importance of such a center.

Of course they didn't — the Senate is not predominantly minority, which would have allowed for a better voicing of minority opinions. In short, they didn't understand.

Just recently I read the following statement: "Racism cannot be eliminated until everyone realizes that the only difference between a non-white person and a white person is the color of their skin."

First of all, why were "white" and "non-white" used? I'm not "non-white" — I'm Hispanic. There is a distinct dif-

ference. Saying "white" and "non-white" breaks everyone down to two ethnic groups — obviously a mistake.

Secondly, the statement is a nice thought, but a bit unrealistic. I myself do not think racism can be eliminated. Racism is a state of mind that cannot be changed. It has been a part of our world for ever and always shall be. All we can

do is pray for those who believe in it.

Discrimination, on the other hand, is what I choose to attack. I don't care how you feel about me, just give me the same chance to achieve that you have. Right now, minorities at Texas A&M do not have the same chance. There are few people that we can turn to who will be able to relate to the struggles we have

encountered.

I want to make one last statement. How can you know where I am unless you've been where I've been and know where I'm coming from?

J. Frank Hernandez is a sophomore general studies major and a staff assistant for The Battalion.

Board needs minority member

Anthony Wilson
City Editor

When Gov. Bill Clements announced his selections for the two open positions in the Texas A&M University System's Board of Regents, Raul Fernandez was one of the appointees. A Hispanic was chosen not only because of pressure from the state Legislature, but because it was the only responsible decision to make.

With the inevitable merger of the A&M System and the University System of South Texas, it will be important that minority student needs and concerns are represented in the Board of Regents, the governing body of the entire A&M system. The three member schools of the USST, Laredo State University, Corpus Christi State University and Texas A&I University in Kingsville, have predominantly Hispanic student bodies. Prairie View A&M University, a member of the A&M System, has a predominantly black student body.

A&M President William Mobley said he recognized the need for a minority group member on the Board in an Feb. 17 article in *The Battalion*. Some may criticize Mobley for that statement and argue that it would be wrong to appoint a minority strictly on the basis of race. And they would be right.

However, I don't believe Mobley, or anyone else concerned with the System, wanted Clements to select someone based on his or her skin color. What they did want, and should have wanted, was for Clements to search for and appoint the most qualified minority group member.

That shouldn't have been too difficult. Many qualified blacks and Hispanic Republicans can be found in Texas.

In the Feb. 20 issue of *The Battalion*, Dean Sueltenfuss made a valid point in his column when he wrote that a white man can be sympathetic to the needs of minority groups. However, he goofed when he proclaimed that the only difference between whites, blacks, Hispanics, Orientals and American Indians is skin color. Skin color isn't even the major difference between races.

Culture is. No matter how attuned to minority group concerns a white man may be, it is almost impossible for that same man to be in tune with minority groups' cultures, unless he was raised in an environment in which he was a member of the minority.

For example, as a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, middle-class male, I know little and understand less about the Hispanic and black cultures.

In a hypothetical situation, let's say the Board is comprised of five men and four women, all middle-aged, of Oriental descent. Obviously, their culture is vastly different from mine, or that of Hispanics or blacks. As a student within the System, I would have great concerns

that the Board would not be in touch with my concerns and needs — not because they wouldn't necessarily be qualified, but because they would have little background or understanding about what my needs and concerns would be.

Opponents of naming a minority group member to the Board may argue that it's not necessary, and they may point to the growth of Prairie View A&M in recent years when only one minority member was on the Board.

However, much of Prairie View's growth is directly attributable to its president, Dr. Percy Pierre.

But Pierre, who has done an excellent job in the development of his university, will be leaving his position in May. Anyone who takes his place will have the proverbial big shoes to fill. If Prairie View's next president is not the administrator that Pierre is, that university will need more representation on the Board.

Until the System's Board is a fair representation of highly qualified persons of diverse cultures, the System will be saddled with its good 'ol boy image. Of course, the real losers would be the students without that fair representation.

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The Battalion

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