

Mail Call

Hitler cartoon tasteless, offensive

EDITOR:

When I looked at the editorial cartoon printed in *The Battalion* on Dec. 4, I really was shocked.

How can you permit such a caricature without any comment? If this is supposed to be a joke, then it's a pretty tasteless one, to say the least.

If it is not a joke, it shows that you guys are not only poorly informed about Germany, but also lack any respect for other countries.

As a German, I am very offended and I think this borders on insult.

To preclude a future mishap like this, please take the following advice:

Limit the political news coverage of *The Battalion* to unchanged reprints of news agency reports, as you usually do anyway. Instead, focus on such "highly important issues" such as parking tickets, bonfire, etc., because that's what you are qualified to do.

Christoph Beckh '93

Clean-up could prevent bonfire accidents

EDITOR:

On Friday night, 20 minutes after bonfire had been lit, I suffered a preventable injury. By preventable, I mean that if bonfire site had been cleared of small logs and pieces of wire, I would not be on crutches right now.

I feel this is a perfectly legitimate request. I support bonfire, and do not think it should be stopped; however, if this had happened to someone who wants to abolish bonfire, it would be a legitimate case.

The responsibility of cleaning the site could be delegated to someone without much effort. This task could limit the number of accidents at bonfire, and that could help keep the tradition alive.

I'm not at this for sympathy, and I realize that there are many things going through the minds of those at stack, but safety, not only before, but during bonfire, should be top priority.

Please Ags, clean up bonfire site and prevent future accidents. Keep the tradition alive and safe.

Wendy Harrison '92

Have an opinion? Express it!

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. All letters may be brought to 216 Reed McDonald, or sent to Campus Mail Stop 1111.

We must handle problems creating homelessness now

Ronda Shepperd
Columnist

Homelessness, as a social phenomenon, seemed to arise out of nowhere during the early 1980's. At that time, the estimated number of homeless people ranged from 250,000 to 2 million.

In the fall and winter of 1983-84, nearly every American city was grappling with the problem of serving the homeless.

Literally hundreds of coalitions, churches, individuals, voluntary agencies and government offices became involved.

Soup kitchens and shelters were set up; food and clothing were collected; and caseworkers wrestled with the fact that welfare cannot be given to anyone without a permanent address.

This year an estimated 3 million people are homeless in the United States. This is one percent of the total population.

Despite true concern and effort from hundreds of helping organizations, the amount of homeless people continues to increase.

A question still remains: Why? Despite all of our good intentions, those of us striving to help have not taken the time to find out why these people are homeless.

Kim Hooper, a research associate with the Community Service Society of New York City drew up a list of some principal factors leading to the marked increase of homeless people.

1. The massive depopulation of

state mental hospitals without adequate residential planning for ex-patients. (Between the years of 1955-1980, the number of patients in state mental institutions declined from 559,000 to 138,000.)

2. The continuing high rates of joblessness among low-skilled workers, the drying up of spot-labor markets and the slow rise of double-digit unemployment in areas and industries previously considered "recession-proof."

3. A housing crisis characterized by soaring rents, depressed construction, widespread abandonment, arson and deterioration of low-income buildings in particular.

Until these three factors are responsibly dealt with, the number of homeless will continue to increase with families being the fastest-growing segment for these involuntary street-dwellers.

Now is the time to push for better housing legislation.

Now is the time to put pressure on American companies whose products are manufactured overseas in order to get dirt-cheap labor and maximize profits without lowering prices while American workers remain unemployed.

Now is the time to force public officials to re-evaluate and change the blatant mistreatment and abandonment of the mentally ill in our country.

Now is the time to stop accepting short-term solutions for problems that were created over the course of decades.

Now is the time to realistically rally and regroup in order to regenerate and revitalize a lost segment of the American population.

Now is the time!

Ronda Shepperd is a senior journalism major and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

Editorial Policy

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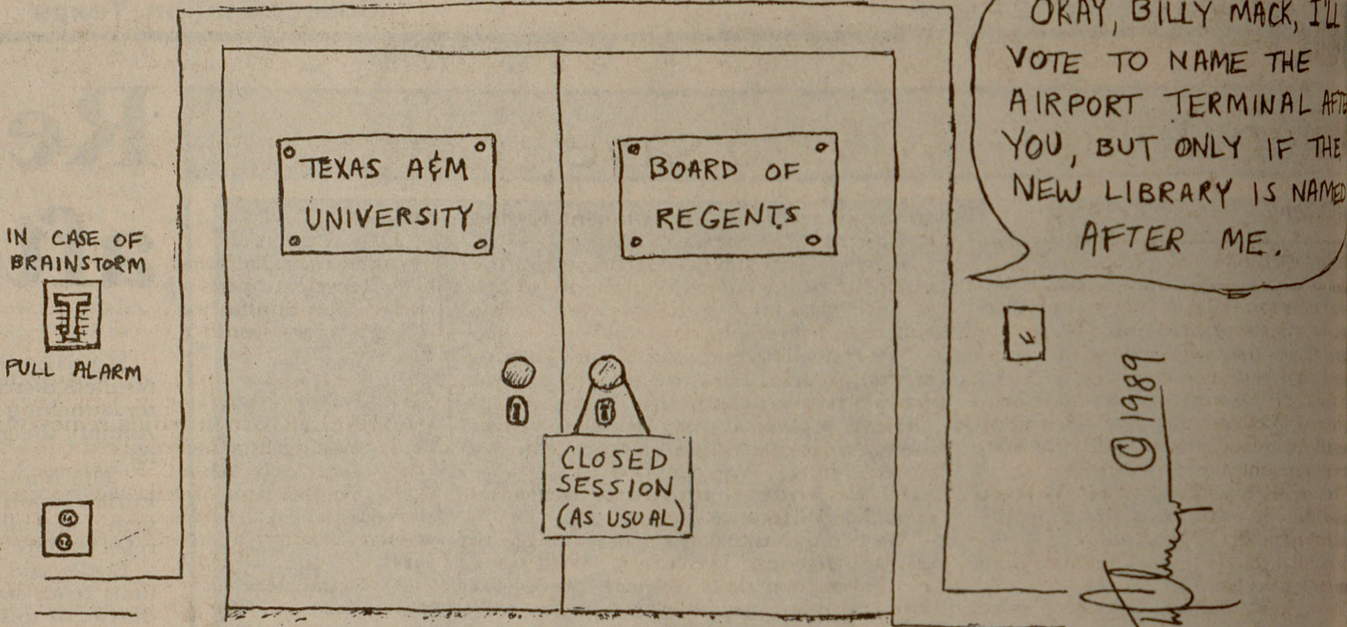
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THE THANKLESS JOB OF SERVING ONE'S ALMA MATER

'Back to the Future II' hides racism between car chases

There was a time in my life when I wouldn't have even noticed it.

This last weekend I went to see "Back to the Future II." It was sort of fun, with the usual Spielberg stuff: Ridiculous plot, too much action, insane car crashes, smelly manure, silly pseudo-science and plenty of shots of Michael J. Fox with his mouth open and eyes bugging out. In short it was a good teenage erotic fantasy flick — brain candy with hormones. I kind of liked it.

I'd like to focus on a particular aspect of this film, because I think it's instructive. I'm thinking about the scene where Marty McFly returns to his neighborhood to find it changed into a run-down, crime-ridden, shabby image of its "former" self. (I won't go into the time travel stuff here.) Of course (like everything in a Spielberg flick) it's overdone; smoking heaps of rubble lie everywhere, the windows are barred, people are armed to the teeth and shooting at one another constantly. And when Marty returns to his own house, climbing in his bedroom window, he finds it inhabited by the worst possible kind of people: Blacks. The lady in bed screams wildly and the man of the house chases Marty around with a baseball bat, demolishing a large portion of his own domicile with violent strikes (it takes three to put Marty out).

What's interesting to me is that these are just about the only black people that I noticed in the film (aside from the band). The movie floats back and forth in time, from the future to the past, and throughout the whole thing it's a film about white folk. Black people appear in this one place, and their race is not

Jeff Farmer
Columnist

incidental; their blackness is exploited as a symbol of poverty and violence. It's a cheap cinematic trick designed to call up the deeply embedded cultural fear of blacks that (let's be honest) most white people in this country have been raised with. Excuse me if I call it what it is: Racism.

Now, I don't mean that the point of the film was racist, or even that there was any conscious intent of racism, or that the people who made it are necessarily racist. What I mean is that the film perpetuates racial stereotypes by using them in a sleazy but (unfortunately) culturally acceptable way.

Some people may say I'm being a bit picky. There are lots of movies about only white people, or only black people, or only rich people. That's not the point. The point is that the only black people in this film appear in this one place, and they are used in a stereotypical way. Imagine the scene with poor white folk instead. It lacks the punch, somehow; it's a quick scene, and an easy way to get the most from it seems to be to use a negative racial stereotype. I'm not saying it isn't cinematically effective; on the contrary, it works well. It's just that it works by exploiting racist sentiment.

Why am I making such a big deal about this? Well, there's been a lot of talk about racism around here lately; some of it focused around the demon-

ishing of the Students Against Apartheid shanty. And a lot of people would like to think that it's not a problem here, and wish it would just go away anyway.

One of the main goals of a serious education is to confront one's own irrationality and overcome it. The first step is to admit its existence. Just because your parents told you that Jesus was a Baptist, or that ironing clothes is women's work, doesn't mean that it's true. That's why people in college study science, literature, art, history and religion: To try and discover what is true and what is not to separate the individual and specific from the general and abstract. Hence, one of the goals of a real education is to confront and debunk the bigotries we learned at our mother's knee (or from silly movies).

This is why it is so disturbing to find racism, sexism, homophobia, and other assorted irrationalities flourishing at a university. The point of the University is to learn about the experience of others, and we don't have time to repeat all their mistakes for ourselves. It's where we are here. I find the racism of the uneducated to be at least understandable, though not acceptable. But people manage to go through five years of so-called higher education with all of their prejudices intact. Something is seriously wrong.

Various flavors of irrationalities (like racism) will probably bedevil human species for some time to come. But if they take over at the University, then we are in real trouble.

Jeff Farmer is a graduate student in mathematics and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

'The King' will live again on TV

Once again, I am the designated "dead day" (the modern equivalent of "dead week") columnist. Taking this into account, I could not think of a more appropriate topic than Elvis.

The King is gone, but he is not forgotten. Elvis has become the most marketable dead guy since Jesus. The hottest news out of Hollywood is that ABC is planning to air an authorized "based-on-fact" television series called "Elvis."

Now Elvis Presley will be seen not only on all the express-lane tabloids, random household appliances, and in the frozen-food sections at grocery stores in Tupelo, Mississippi, he will be appearing weekly in your home and mine.

I am torn between two emotions. To me, this new production ranks right up there with such classics as "Joanie Loves Chachie" and "Man From Atlantis". On the flipside, the American people may adore the show. People have some strange attachment to Elvis. Is it the man, the music or the mystique?

About the man: He was made out to be larger than life. At the end of his life, he was larger than ever. He was rich, famous, eccentric and is dead.

As for his music, it was definitely

Matt McBurnett
Columnist

trend-setting, but he simply happened to be the one to step in at the right time. He was immensely popular and quite talented, but the same can be said to a greater degree about Paul McCartney. Hey, Paul died too, but he cannot hold a candle to Elvis in the eyes of many.

The Elvis mystique must be the answer to Elvis's seemingly eternal life. Immediately prior to his purported death, he was basically a Las Vegas act surviving on nostalgia alone. He was nothing like the Memphis sensation that took the nation by storm with his "obscene" gesticulations and good looks.

In his final days he was into drugs but somehow remained fat. Strange, huh? His death really brought him back to life, but it does not explain the overpowering Elvis mystique.

The preview episode shows Elvis as a child hiding in a storm cellar during

a tornado. His mother comforts him by telling him to pretend that the storm cellar is a theater and the storm is only a movie. At age 19, Elvis draws on that day to aid him when Memphis disc jockey is about to play his first record. Sounds cute enough so far.

With all of the dandy Hollywood embellishments, the Elvis mystique should definitely remain intact. Priscilla Presley plans to allow Hollywood to take "Elvis" up to the time when he entered the Army because "so much has already been done about the period that came after that" including a book by Priscilla herself. Sure, Priscilla. You know as well as I that the Elvis mystique would be shattered by any other period of his life were documented and then you would lose a lot of the money from the Graceland tourists. What a shame.

I am sure that many people will be looking forward to the premier of "Elvis" for some reason. I see it going off like a rocket but ending like Skylab.

Oh, no, I had a scary thought. What will happen when Michael Jackson dies?

Matt McBurnett is a junior electrical engineering major and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

The Battalion

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