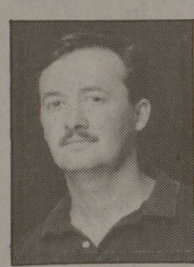


Overpopulation theory overrated Population not necessarily related to world poverty

The intuitively attractive idea that population growth causes poverty is not new. Ever since English economist Thomas Malthus suggested that technology increases arithmetically and population geometrically, the idea that the population growth must inevitably outstrip productivity and reduce everyone to a subsistence level — a world of increasing scarcity — has been popular. The popularity of this theory has been well out of proportion to the available evidence.



MATTHEW DICKERSON
Columnist

A recent survey of studies on population and economics concludes, "it is intriguing that the empirical evidence documenting this outcome (a negative impact on income by population growth) is weak or nonexistent." If population growth increases poverty, increases in population must at least correlate with decreasing income. However, there is no correlation between the two. Efforts to correlate population growth to savings rate, agricultural output, and capital dilution are ineffectual. Population economist Julian Simon writes, "There are not now, and there never have been, any empirical data showing that population growth or size or density have a negative effect on the standard of living". Given the poverty of positive evidence for the theory, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences in 1986 noted that "the scarcity of exhaustible resources is at most a minor restraint on economic growth."

Malthus' theory of increasing scarcity is based upon a vital premise that does not hold: a fixity of resources. However, what a "vital" resource is depends on historical context. At one time the vital resource was agriculture. Today it is oil. Tomorrow it could very well be solar power or fusion. Resources are created in the sense that they were not "resources" until the requisite technology and human ingenuity harnessed them. And tomorrow, they may not be "resources". As demand increases for a resource, prices are pushed up. Higher prices represent an opportunity for profits, profits that will fall to entrepreneurs that "create" new resources.

The idea that population is somehow out of control is also open to question. There is a strong negative correlation between higher levels of income per capita and the fertility rate. For instance, the fertility rate of the twelve European

Community countries is just under 1.6 children per woman, below the replacement threshold of 2.1. Birth rates have been slowing in many parts of the non-industrialized world — so much so that a 1981 Nobel Institute symposium reported that the evidence suggested "hope that the increase in the world's population may finally be arrested." World population growth reached a peak of 2.4 percent in the 1960's and has continued to fall to slightly below 2.1 percent. Gerard Piel writes in the October 1992 Scientific American, "[the] industrial revolution has so increased individuals' material well-being as to bring ... population growth to a halt."

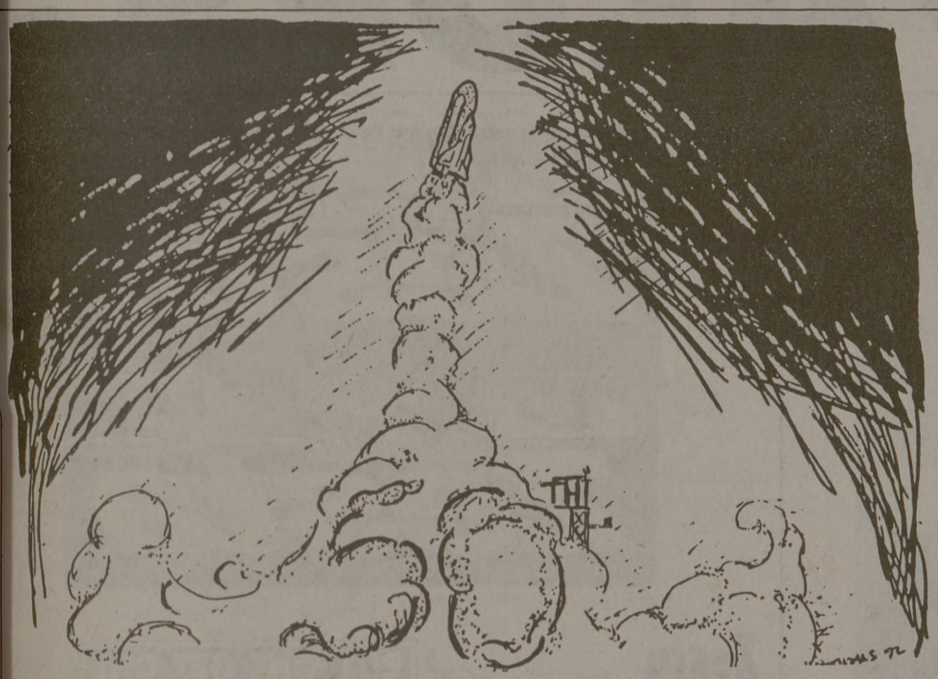
What's going on here? In poorer countries, wealth tends to flow from children to parents. Typically, the cost of having children is far less than the benefits, even in the short run: they offer income even while they are young and security and wealth later on in life. The parents invest little in the education or long-term health of the child. In wealthier countries, however, children represent a huge cost and little income. Tens of thousands of dollars are poured into the education and health of a child from birth through maturity. It might well be said, with caveats, that it is poverty that induces higher population growth, and not population growth that causes poverty. And this initial population growth provides the basis for an extensive division of labor that allows society to begin to prosper.

Further, locking the poorer nations into their present level of economic and technological development would be unmitigated disaster. In 1910, the population of the United States was 92 million. The acreage harvested for crops was 325 million. In 1988, the population was 246.3 million with a total acreage harvested for crops of 297 million. Indur Goklany and Merritt Sprague of the U.S. Department of Interior calculated that if technology had been held constant at 1910 levels, it would have taken a minimum of 1,222 million acres for 1988 production — 925 million more than were actually used. Obviously, this would have been an environmental and economic disaster.

The environmental problems we face today are the product of our legal and cultural institutions and they exist whether or not a population is "high" or "low".

Poverty is not the product of population growth, and the root of the problem is being obscured by the "dust-jacket" science of the popular press.

Dickerson is a sophomore economics major



EDITORIAL

Another shuttle soars

50th flight eases sting of Challenger

As the space shuttle embarks on its historic 50th mission, the time for an analysis of the shuttle program and the direction of NASA in general, presents itself.

For those who criticize the multi-billion dollar expenditures the American taxpayer must kick in to subsidize the shuttle adventures, one must keep in mind that the shuttle stands as an important link for future space exploration programs — including building permanent space stations, colonizing the Moon and conducting manned missions to Mars.

While each and every American can take pride in the accomplishments of NASA and the space shuttle, the watershed of the shuttle's 50th flight also provides us an opportunity to re-examine the darkest moment in the history of the space shuttle and maybe the entire history of NASA — the 1986 Challenger disaster.

Make no mistake, the tragedy of the Challenger was avoidable. In the more than six years which have passed since that fateful event took place, the American public has been presented with a disturbing and well-documented scenario of how the disaster was forecast by several NASA engineers, only to be buried in a bureaucratic web of red tape.

The Byzantine maze of blame goes something like this. While conducting tests on the Challenger

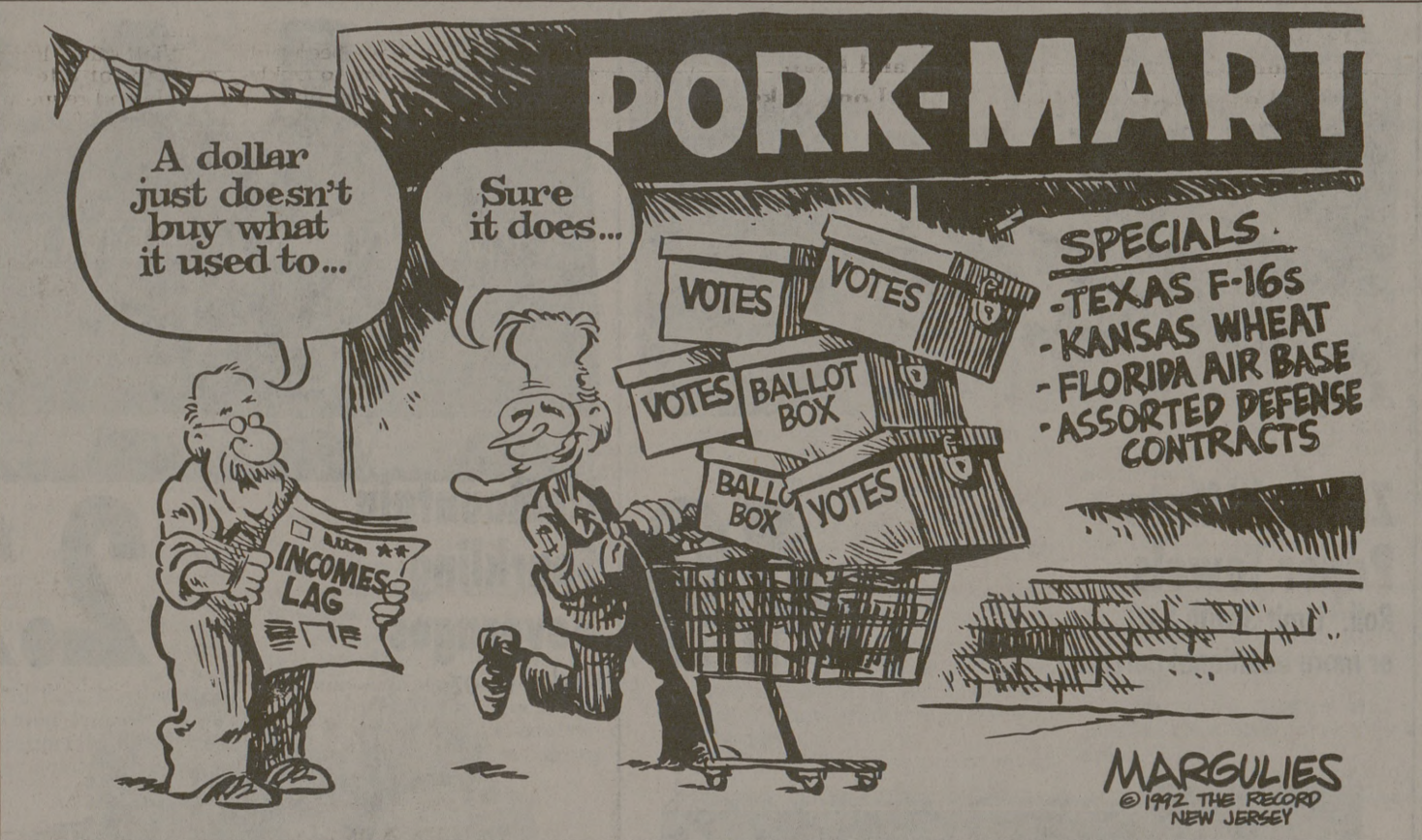
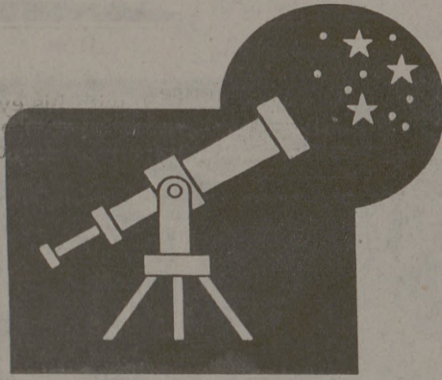
rocket systems, engineers in Brigham City, Utah concluded that the now infamous O-ring seal could malfunction if the shuttle was launched in cold weather.

Despite repeated warnings, NASA officials continued with the Challenger launch that chilly January morning on the Florida coast, calling the potential O-ring problem "an acceptable risk." This decision was no doubt encouraged by the financial constraints and pressures of the space program. We all know the result.

In a segment of CBS' 60 Minutes, the NASA engineers who tried to warn of the possibility of disaster claimed that they have been black-balled by NASA and that to this day the whistleblowers have been unable to find gainful employment. Sadly, it is a song we have heard sung many times before.

Among Americans who dream the dreams of "Star Trek" and hope to see the further conquest of space become a reality in their grandchildren's lifetime, the awe-inspiring sights of the space shuttle launching, orbiting or returning to Earth is enough to raise heartbeats and foster a renewed sense of pride in American technology.

The only things which can prevent such dreams from coming true are the un-American notions of imprudent short-cuts and dishonesty.



Racial slurs don't belong in Battalion

We appreciate the letter by Tim Chang to your paper on August 3, calling attention to a racial slur of the Japanese by sports writer Michael Plumer on his report of the Japanese Olympic volleyball team in Barcelona in the July 29 issue of The Battalion.

As emphasized by Chang, there is no room for such an insensitive utterance in an official news media published at a globally oriented great university like ours.

We, the Japanese mostly born after WWII, are quite ashamed of our nation's imperialistic behaviors before the war and barbaric conduct committed during the war to other nations including China, just as the present German youths feel against their forbears' atrocities during the Nazi era.

We have vowed never to repeat past mistakes by keeping friendly relations with the people of the world.

By coming to A&M we are awakened to know people like Chang who has a strong faith in democratic principles.

At the same time, we are disappointed with the editorial board of The Battalion which allows their sports writer to call the Japanese volleyball team

"Japs" and gave a tacit consent to it.

Hiroko Fujihara
Graduate Student
accompanied by seven signatures

Loss of tradition, respect mar A&M

In these first two weeks of school I've noticed a very disturbing trend at Aggieland.

For example: the Stanford game. Sororities had a rush function until 9 o'clock, therefore no pledges or actives got to see the first half. Bad Bull. Silver Taps: students in the front row were sitting down waiting for the RV's to appear. Others were laughing. After yell practice, an "Ag" told his buddies that he was a true Ag now because he "pissed on Simpson Field." A sorority (I'm not picking on them, just the facts) held a retreat this weekend forcing all members to miss a home football game (the first for many fish).

Now the biggie. Yell Practice. How many idiots do we have at this school that think it would be cool to run across Kyle Field? It's not a Corps thing, the field is a war memorial. The field is for football players, not drunks. By the way, if you see a surgebutt (white belt,

no boots) walking around campus, shake his hand and tell him they did a good job. Before we see letters talking about the "brutality" of the Corps, just remember the stupidity of the ones running across. Even though I am not in the corps and to see Ags fighting other Ags, they did what needed to be done.

Add the fact that someone threw up on Kyle Field (Sully would love that one), and we have some work to do. Many of you say you came to A&M because of the "tradition." So don't just stand by and watch as our traditions get torn apart, get out there and fight for them. Because without our traditions, we're just like any other school.

Martin Carcasson
Class of '94

Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the opinion page staff and editor in chief only. They do not represent, in any way, the opinions of reporters, staff, or editors of other sections of the newspaper. Columns, guest columns, and Mail Call items express the opinions of the authors only. The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows in the Mail Call section. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name. We reserve the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters should be addressed to: The Battalion - Mail Call 013 Reed McDonald / Mail stop 1111 Texas A&M University College Station, TX 77843

MAIL CALL

Silver Taps proves A&M kept traditions

I graduated from A&M in 1985, was commissioned and went off to serve my country. This fall I returned to Aggieland to spend the remainder of my life giving back in any way I can to the quality of student life at A&M. Over the past six years I have always had faith that A&M was continuing to perpetuate the ideals that make it so unique an institution in our society. A few weeks ago as I toured the campus, I noticed buildings which were not here in 1985. The campus had changed. I began to wonder what else had change. Had the time-honored traditions which were so instrumental to the uniqueness of A&M still being carried on? When I returned to campus, I expected change. Change is indicative of creative minds working helping to improve on what is

Captain Darrell R. Pickard
Class of '85