

EDITORIAL

Aggies don't steal

Kappa Alpha thefts inexcusable

The punishments given Kappa Alpha fraternity, including probation, service hours, and a \$1,000 fine serve as an appropriate and timely response to the thefts perpetrated by Kappa Alpha pledges.

The Interfraternity Council Judicial Board again acted quickly to sanction a member fraternity for its misconduct.

However, one wonders what would have happened if the police had been unable to locate the stolen property and to identify those responsible for the theft.

It seems unlikely that Kappa Alpha would have paid for or returned the stolen property, let alone apologized, without the intervention of the police and the University.

It will never be known how long the Kappa Alpha leadership would

have continued to tolerate, if not encourage such activity among its pledges.

Furthermore, the whole incident serves as another black eye for the reputations of the Greek system and Texas A&M University.

How far the trust of the community in A&M students and organizations can be stretched remains to be seen.

It is hoped that this incident is not indicative of the behavior of other fraternities at this school. The KA thefts should not be used as a blanket condemnation of the Greek system - but at least the situation will serve as another warning to its member fraternities and sororities.

For when any A&M organization falls in the mud, the University tends to look a little dirty as well.

Even hate speech is free speech

Speech codes and censorship don't just affect bigots

About a month ago I wrote an article lamenting what I termed the atmosphere of enforced conformity at Texas A&M. I didn't suggest that there wasn't enough protest going on here. I did point out that when one engages in exercising one's right to free speech on this campus one is likely to be suppressed. Implicit in my argument was the idea that you pretty much had to be a liberal to get censored around here.

Well, my column earned a personal letter from a more conservative community member who felt his right to free speech had been suppressed at A&M. He calls himself Thorz Hammer, and he was particularly angry that The Battalion would not run an ad promoting his book entitled WHAM! Confession of a White American Man. The ad contained the headline "Attention White Aggies," and The Battalion chose not to run it.

I haven't read Thorz's book, and frankly I don't intend to read it. His major premise, that white culture is in danger, is laughable. Thorz's fliers are anti-homosexual, anti-feminist and anti-everything but white male. I tend to take an opposing position on these issues, so Thorz Hammer and I probably wouldn't have much in common if we happened to meet. However, I do feel strongly about his right to express himself even though I personally despise the things he says. At times, we are all pretty lucky that the First Amendment does not discriminate on the basis on intelligence.

Thor's claims set me to thinking about the controversial hate speech codes that a few colleges and cities have enacted. These codes create a new category of legal transgression loosely defined as speech (and sometimes graffiti, signs, etc.) motivated by prejudice against a particular group on the basis of sex, race, color, creed, religion, or other beliefs. Such codes are intended to punish bigots, homophobes, sexists and other such unsavory miscreants. While I find bigoted, homophobic and sexist speech to all be pro-

foundly disgusting, I also find codes against such speech to be dangerous encroachments on the First Amendment.

After considering the issue I find I'm an absolutist when it comes to the First Amendment. I value my own right to free speech too much to suggest curtailing anyone else's rights. I agree with Wisconsin Chief Justice Nathan Heffner who wrote, "A statute specifically designed to punish personal prejudice impermissibly infringes upon an individual's First Amendment rights... The legislature may not subvert a constitutional freedom - even one as opprobrious as the right to be a bigot."

As a liberal, I am firmly opposed to conservative attempts to legislate morality, particularly morality of the fundamentalist Christian variety. However, as a thinking individual I must also stand opposed to liberal attempts to legislate morality in the form of hate speech codes. We must by all means punish any crime committed by a bigoted, homophobic or sexist person; however, we must allow his or her speech to remain uncensored in order to protect our own right to free speech. Inflammatory speech cannot be considered a crime in and of itself if we are to preserve the First Amendment.

So, back to Thorz Hammer and his own free speech gripe. Personally, I believe he has a point. Rules were probably selectively enforced, and his right to free speech was likely restricted by campus officials. Playing devil's advocate, I might also suggest that The Battalion should have run his ad. Inflammatory ads are a complex issue that newspapers across the country must confront. Though advertising does not exactly fall under the rubric of a First Amendment right, the ugly word "censorship" is often used when an ad is refused.

Thorz' problems aside, any gay bashing, anti-woman, white supremacist speech is small-minded, backward, moronic and constitutionally protected. Such speech usually condemns itself with its own logical incongruities. However, I am still going to do my best to protect my own right to explicitly condemn hate speech here on this page using the most inflammatory words possible.

Ralston is a graduate student in English



SHAWN RALSTON
Columnist

Tradition at A&M: a false name for blind adherence to status quo

In about two weeks, we at Texas A&M will once again have our little tree sacrifice and drunken disorderliness party. As a graduating senior, I'd like to say, "enough."

Enough with tradition. Do you really think the fact that we cut down a bunch of trees and set them on fire makes this a great university? If you do, you need to re-evaluate your values. People have died building that thing. What kind of sick place is this where students give their lives in the name of tradition?

And what is tradition, anyway? Basically, it's just repeating the same thing over and over. We do it because our ancestors - or in this case former students - did it. That doesn't sound like a very compelling reason to do anything. In fact, it sounds a lot like mob mentality - not what you really want in an institution of higher learning.

This is a university, people. Outside of the narrow-minded confines of Aggieland, Texas A&M excellence depends on the quality of education given to its students. No one cares that we build the world's largest bonfire. Really, no one cares. And yet so many Aggies think it makes us great.

Take a good look at this place - a good, cynical look. We have been indoctrinated with tradition. It's practically a religion. Fish Camp? Pretty much brainwashing. Bonfire? An outdated ritual. Standing up at football games? Ooh, Harvard is really impressed.

Yes, I know we don't care what those at Harvard think, but then that's

GUEST COLUMN

KEN FONTENOT

our problem. We tell ourselves that this is a great university no matter what anyone else says. We make it easy for ourselves to go along blindly, like so many sheep. Baaaah. I use "we," not because I include myself, but because my voice is not heard in the mob, in the us, in the "Aggies are we." And neither are the voices of many others - a lot more than 2 percent, believe it or not. Why is that?

The answer is insecurity. We are so insecure - and this is a problem throughout the South - that we have to pump ourselves up with this false pride in dubious things and permit no dissension. Why can't Clinton supporters show their signs at Quayle's speech? Why can't a student wear green combat boots without having someone pour nacho cheese on them because she looks different? Why can't women and minorities expect to be treated with the same respect as white males? What are we afraid of? Diversity is a strength, not a weakness. That's why America is still strong. That's what will make America great.

Highway 6 runs both ways? That's about the most un-American thing I've ever heard. And yet we are the first to wave our flags proudly in times of crisis.

Where are our true American values of freedom, tolerance, respect for the individual?

This is a university, people. It's supposed to be a place of ideas. Instead, we have fascist traditionalism - the death of ideas. Look around. Racism is a tradition. Sexism is a tradition. If you celebrate tradition, these are your baggage. Do things because they are right today. To hell with the way it was done before. Become a free thinker. That's what will make this university great. That's what we're here for.

Fontenot is a senior English major



MAIL CALL

Newspaper inserts deface A&M campus

I would like to issue a challenge to the Battalion staff to come up with some other method of distributing advertisements to students within your newspaper.

I am very frustrated in seeing the A&M campus littered with advertisements that are loosely inserted into The Battalion (called drop-ads).

These drop-ads simply fall out when The Battalion is picked up by faculty and students. While observing students in the Commons lobby last Friday afternoon many students would see the advertisement fall out of the paper, but would walk away, leaving the advertisement where it fell.

In the Commons lobby, the floor literally becomes covered with these discarded advertisements, only to be swept up and thrown away by our custodial staff.

Please encourage the printers of The Battalion to look at some other way of packaging and/or distributing these drop-ads to the public. I know that advertisers consider drop-ads to be a highly effective method of selling items to the public, as you see thousands of drop/adds falling out of magazines every day.

I very often see articles, editorials, and letters from students and Battalion staff talking about the pride they have in tradition and the beauty of the A&M campus, but everyone seems to look the other way when The Battalion is the cause of the campus being trashed.

I know that The Battalion has to be run as a business in order to continue, but I would hope that you and your staff are a little more interested in supplying students with important information and in keeping the A&M campus litter-free, rather than in making a buck.

Rick Turnbough
Department of Student Affairs

Find a real problem to complain about

This letter is in response to Tammy Brown and the 1992 Traditions Council letter on Nov. 10. about "Ags leaving the game early and some even sitting toward the end of the game."

I'm not writing to antagonize or of-

ferend anyone. I simply want to point out the absurdity and thoughtlessness in accusing someone of ignoring the traditions of Aggieland.

Come on Tammy, I think there are more important things to worry about than "bad bull."

You don't know the circumstances behind someone leaving the game early or even sitting down.

Could it be that they had a more important engagement than the football game?

What if a student were to leave a game early to study for an exam? Some students actually come to A&M to get an education and not to participate in its traditions.

Why do they have to have a valid reason to leave early anyway? Tammy, if you think leaving a game early or sitting down is an atrocity, imagine this:

After three years, I have yet to attend fish camp, yell practice, football games, or even Bonfire!

What is even more appalling is that I don't say "Howdy," but "Hi" or "Hello."

Now, should such blatant defiance of tradition be allowed to continue at Aggieland?

Perhaps other "two percenters" and I should be banished from the University and forced to attend the wretched University of Texas at Austin while wearing a large, scarlet number "2" on our chests!

To avoid this, maybe the University should add a provision to the applica-

tion process whereby prospective students should take an oath swearing to uphold and respect the many great traditions here at diverse, tolerant and worldly Texas A&M University.

Dedrick Gerod Walker
Class of '93

Wrongful ticket bill caused great hardship

An open letter to Parking, Traffic and Transit Services:

You asked me last spring to pay a bill that was not mine. You blocked me from graduation for a parking ticket even though I do not own a car. You actually purposely billed me with the intention in mind that I would pay, until you found the owner of the car, my roommate.

By barring me from graduating, you dangerously jeopardized my visa status in the United States; this could have cost me more than just a few phone calls. In court, this action could be called harassment, and in the future, if this happens again, you will be sued for it.

My discontent comes not only from your outright power over scholastic achievement, but also from the fact that it could not have happened at a worse moment.

Besides the visa constraints, every graduate student knows the endeavor

of obtaining chairperson signatures on the front page of a thesis, thesis clerk deadlines, corrections, and the other thousands of things that come just before graduation.

Your procedures need to be revised, to say the least. The saddest thing of all was that I never got an apology.

Is this incident happening that often? Can we expect such behavior from an outgrowth of a University that is setting standards in knowledge and ethics for future generations? I don't think so. Do you?

Igor Carron
Doctoral student

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