



EDITORIALS

Activism or apathy?

A&M's mirror, mirror on the wall

A week after controversial filmmaker Spike Lee visited the Texas A&M campus, normalcy has returned — but did it ever really leave?

Though the national media converged on the University predicting apocalyptic clashes between the outspoken Lee and the conservative campus, Texas A&M offered not even a ripple of racial discord during the visit.

As rumors of riots and rebellion erupted, A&M's history of disharmony was dragged through the mud once again, but this time the University seemed to emerge untarnished. Lee avoided discussing our past problems, explaining that he was too unfamiliar with the situation to comment. He cast aside the role of spokesman given him by the media.

"I am not a spokesman for 35 million African-Americans; I am a filmmaker," Lee said.

Some might argue that the mere fact Lee was even invited to the campus says a great deal about the progress Texas A&M has made dur-

ing the past few years.

In addition, others might claim that his visit, and the film festival itself, focusing on the works of independent and minority filmmakers, attest to the changing face of the Texas A&M campus and its new attitudes.

But, before we commence with self-congratulations and commendations, A&M needs to take a hard look at itself and its vision of progress.

Lee explained that his films are crafted as mirrors of our society in order to invite dialogue and discussion. Perhaps it is time to hold up the mirror of Lee's visit to the A&M community and begin a discussion about our perceived problems and progress.

Though the speculation about racial and ethnic discord was proven wrong, was this because students at A&M have made that much progress — or were we just that apathetic?

That is the question that A&M must answer when it looks into the mirror.

A brand new fee for Sterling C. A&M must straighten out priorities, put library first

Until last semester, a sign stood in the lobby of the Sterling C. Evans Library. It read, "Attention — shuttle buses for the University of Texas Library leave at 7:30 a.m. and noon." Why did we need to run a shuttle to the UT library? Why is the UT library better than ours? Why don't we devote more resources to our library? What are our priorities on this campus?

The Evans Library — like everything else at Texas A&M — has been affected by lean budgets at the state level. The library is partially funded through general appropriations money from the state. The actual dollar amount we receive is determined by a formula that includes factors such as square footage, the number of student credit hours and graduate programs.

In the past few years, the state budget crunch has left the library "formula underfunded" by approximately 50 percent, which amounts to millions of dollars per year. The operating budget is approximately \$9 million, but the library only receives about \$5.5 million from the state. The shortfall is made up through contributions from the Available University Fund (AUF) — the money available to A&M and UT as Texas' original land-grant colleges — and other sources. However, the AUF is subject to demands from all over the University, and last year's contribution to the library only amounted to about \$800,000. The result of this funding problem is reflected in Evans' rankings compared to other research libraries.

Evans has a total of 2,035,896 volumes, which ranks 70th among research universities. Texas, which ranked 5th, has 6,680,406 volumes — more than three times as many. The gap is increasing as well. A&M ranked 47th in number of volumes added, with 76,004, while Texas ranked 8th with 171,565 added. If serials — items such as magazines and other periodicals — are examined, the comparison worsens. Evans carried a total of 24,319 serials in 1991-92, ranking us 45th. Texas carried 52,867, and took 11th place. Looking at serials purchased, Texas bought 29,762 compared to our 13,982.

Finally, if we want to find an area in which Evans ranks highly, look for "items borrowed" — showing how many times one of our researchers or students needed something that we didn't have but another library did. We ranked 9th in this embarrassing category.

Such statistics make the situation sound dire. The numbers only get worse when projected into the future. The acting director of the library, Mary Lou Goodyear, said that the inflation rate for subscriptions was 18 percent last year. This means that it would cost the library 18 percent more this year to maintain the same number of subscriptions it had last year. The result: We cut around 1,000 periodicals from our subscription list, at a savings of \$462,000. With less than 14,000

subscriptions to start with, we lost almost one in 14.

The problems with Evans are huge, and some of them have been quantified. In 1990, the Texas A&M Faculty Senate created the Ad Hoc Committee on Libraries to assess the extent of the resources needed to form a solution. They concluded that the library needed to purchase 10,000 more titles and increase the budget of the collections department by 50 percent. The amount of money necessary to make those purchases is anybody's guess. However, Goodyear stated that she would need at least \$2 million to make an appreciable difference in the collections department.

With the current problems in the state budget, Texas A&M can hardly look to the state for help. This is one problem that students will have to solve for themselves. Using student fees to make-up budget shortfalls is hardly a novel solution, but this need may be one of the most important on campus.

Last year, the University of Houston confronted the same problem and passed a student fee that will provide \$1.1 million per year in additional funding for their library. Here at A&M, we pay fees for a multitude of services. Students pay over \$90 a semester in student service fees. Those fees fund items like Recreational Sports, the shuttle bus system, and Multicultural Services. We also pay \$25 per semester in health center fees, and a \$1 international education fee, which amounts to a scholarship fund for study abroad experiences.

Although I'm not more a fan of fees than the next student, we need to establish some priorities at this school. Next year, students will begin paying \$50 per semester to help fund the new Recreational Sports Complex. I think the complex will be great for A&M, but it makes our values look skewed. That level of funding would provide us with a dynamite library. In order to start solving this problem, students need to take action. In the past 10 years, several fees have been created or increased on student initiative. The money generated by these fees goes to places that students think are important. When you look at the academic lifeblood of a university, few things are more important than the library.

If students want to help the library, we have to demonstrate a consensus on the issue. The easiest way to do so is to place a referendum on the spring election ballot. All that's required to place a ballot item is a resolution of the Student Senate. If you are interested in seeing students express their views on this issue, please let your senator know. The number for the Student Government Office is 845-3051, and aides answering the phone will be happy to take your message and direct it to the appropriate senator.

If students declare their interest in this issue, Texas A&M can take the first step toward proving that the library is just as important as the weight room. If we begin to give the library the funding it deserves, maybe we can start looking forward to the day that there's a sign in the UT lobby.



DAVID BROOKS
Columnist

Brooks is a senior economics major.

'Back Talk' feature to begin Thursday

Beginning Thursday, March 4, the Opinion Page will offer a new feature for our readers.

Every Thursday, Back Talk will pose a question about current events in order to solicit reader opinions. In addition to the question, we will offer a short summary of the problem in order to familiarize readers with the issue.

We will print as many of the responses as space will permit and will ask a new question with each successive week.

Readers are requested to limit letters to 150 words in order to facilitate typing, editing and printing for our staff. Letters can be dropped off at the Battalion office at 013 Reed McDonald Building in the designated Back Talk box.

Letters can also be mailed to the

following address:

The Battalion Back Talk
Mail Stop 1111
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843.

Letters will not be accepted after Tuesday at 5:00 pm. We ask that writers include their names, student ID numbers, classifications and telephone numbers — just like regular Mail Call submissions.

Mail Call will continue to be received at the Battalion office in the regular box.

Again, we encourage reader feedback on all issues and hope that this new feature will provide yet another forum for debate and discussion at Texas A&M.



The User's Guide for the Handicapped Impaired

Being one of the more approachable disabled students on the Texas A&M campus, I've been asked a great number of questions about the needs and capabilities of the disabled students. I've also been asked how able-bodied students, many of whom are uncomfortable dealing with the handicapped, should relate to the disabled. The following is a general list of do's and don'ts made for the "Handicapped Impaired" — that group of able-bodied people who get sweaty palms and heart palpitations when a person in a wheelchair simply says "Howdy!"



MIKE MORRIS
Guest Columnist

Do feel free to call us sexy, silly, dork, jerk, handsome, ugly, pervert, slut, prude, smart, wild, conservative, liberal, stubborn, etc. These words do not label us any differently than they would an able-

bodied person.

Don't call us cripple, invalid, differently abled, physically challenged or a victim of gravity. We find these words offensive and will not respond kindly to them. If you have to label us, use the words disabled or handicapped. They describe our situation without degrading us.

If you plan to talk to us longer than a few minutes, do sit down. It is extremely hard to carry on a meaningful conversation with a large belt buckle or a pair of breasts. Don't feel you have to get in our faces to converse with us. I personally prefer up close and personal for more intimate conversations.

Do feel free to ask us any questions you have about our disability, personal or impersonal. We usually don't mind answering them. In fact it excites me when people ask questions because information helps break down barriers between people. However don't be surprised if you sometimes get a rude response. Just like any other group, there are disabled people with attitude problems.

Don't scold children or adults, for that matter, for asking questions. Childhood is that precious time before prejudices develop, and scolding children for being cu-

rious about "that boy in that chair thing" can cause them to be afraid of the disabled. Do feel free to use phrases like "rolling along" or "I gotta run" because we say the same things. In fact, don't be shocked to hear some disabled people making jokes about their disability just like Aggies tell the best Aggie jokes, we tell good handicapped jokes.

Don't make car noises when we drive by. Our wheelchairs aren't cars. If they were, we would be arrested for DWI after a Saturday night at the Dixie Chicken or The Tap. Also realize that we don't use our chairs out of convenience, but instead out of necessity. Comments from able-bodied people like "One of those chairs would sure make it easier to get around" are liable to draw comments like "I'm sure it would, but so would riding a bike or losing some weight" from a disabled person.

If we turn you on or you think we're cute or sexy, do stare at us. In fact tell us, it'll make our day. On the other hand, don't stare at us from a distance and then look away at the last second thinking we won't notice. Wrong. Just because we're in wheelchairs doesn't mean we're visually impaired.

Do feel free to turn us down for a date if you're not interested. After all, like other warm-blooded people, we're used to rejection. But please don't string us along thinking you're helping the "poor little cripple's ego." Don't hesitate asking a person in a wheelchair out on a date. If you find someone attractive, go with your feeling. The chair may pose some problems, but nothing that can't be overcome. You may actually find out we're real people. Do realize we may have a few limitations so no bungee jumping on the first date.

Don't be afraid to show affection either. There's nothing wrong with a disabled person that a hug or a kiss will aggravate, unless it's a cold or mono. Don't think a handicapped person doesn't think about sex. Our bodies might not work exactly right, but there's more than one way to get the job done. If, however, you're not attracted to the person and don't want to kiss them at the end of the evening, shake their hand, hug them, whatever, but don't pat them on the head. Save that for your pet.

Don't ever assume that a handicapped person can or can't do something. That will usually end up embarrassing both

parties. Disabled people are more than capable of explaining their needs. Also, don't assume that a disabled person sitting alone somewhere is in need of assistance. It is often as simple as they're waiting for a friend or just catching some rays. Feel free to offer assistance, but don't be hurt if your offer is turned down. Most importantly, don't give assistance without first asking. This is an invasion of personal privacy.

Do remember that each disabled individual is still, first and foremost, just that, an individual. And like other individuals, they have different ways of dealing with other people. This list is just a few helpful hints on how to relate to the handicapped. In order to get along, we must try to understand each other. One of the most important things to remember is that it's OUR disability; it doesn't make us nervous. Why should it make you nervous? Most importantly, people should understand that everyone not in a wheelchair is just a TAB or Temporarily Able-Bodied individual and don't ever forget that, but for the grace of God, go you.

Morris is a senior biology major.