

EDITORIALS

National Service plan

The right idea at the wrong time

President Clinton's plans for a national service program that would offer money for college students in exchange for public service is the right idea at the wrong time. In theory, the policy looks like a clear benefit for people who are trying to pay for the exorbitant expenses of higher education. Participants would serve in a number of public service areas such as teaching in schools, helping with medical care in clinics, counseling kids to stay out of gangs, and fighting pollution and other environmental hazards. In return, students would work off existing loans or gain credits for future college and job training opportunities. Not only would this increase the potential for more people to attend college, but it would allow for peo-

ple to help solve some of the problems that are afflicting our communities today. The American people, however, have begun to argue for deficit reduction. Clinton has insisted that "shared sacrifice" and increased "contributions" from taxpayers must take place so that a dent can be made into the astronomical federal debt. If that is the case, then why does Clinton pick this time to increase the burden by another \$7.4 billion for the price of a national service program? If the national service program could find a way to utilize private funds, then it could become a useful tool to restoring America. But if government is serious about trying to trim the deficit, then it must keep from adopting expensive initiatives such as these.

Promiscuity defense

Ban use of outdated tactic in court

Last week, the Texas House passed a bill barring the use of the "promiscuity defense" in most cases of statutory rape. Such a rule change is long overdue, and the Texas Senate should be encouraged to quickly approve the bill and pass it on into law. The bill was introduced by Rep. Sherri Greenberg, D-Austin, and deals with "statutory rape" — cases in which someone is accused of having sexual intercourse with a victim aged 14 to 17. Under current law, defendants accused of statutory rape can bring evidence of the plaintiff's past sexual history into the courtroom. In effect, this ability often amounts to a portrayal of the victim as "cheap" or "promiscuous." Rep. Greenberg's bill, as amend-

ed, would disallow the use of this defense except in cases where the defendant is within two years of the victim's age. This exception removes concerns about a "14 year old with a 16 year old" scenario, where recent sexual history might seem relevant. The promiscuity defense was barred from Texas courtrooms in standard rape cases back in the 1970's. It is high time that the same consideration be given in statutory rape cases. Allowing defendants the ability to use sexual history as a defense is an open invitation to drag the plaintiff's name and reputation through the mud. The Texas Senate should quickly approve this bill and send it to Gov. Richards to be signed into law.

Generation X: the generation gap

Thirteeners appear to lack cause, goal, direction

The Thirteeners. If you're in your 20s right now, pay attention to that term. The great-and-mighty-mystical-name-givers-in-the-sky have decided that's what our generation is to be dubbed: The Thirteeners. I know I'm excited. The reasoning behind our collective name is the fact that we are the thirteenth generation in these United States since our founding fathers — not including the Native Americans of our generation who should perhaps be The One Hundred and Fifty-Fivers.



TONI GARRARD CLAY
Columnist

"Generation X," a generational name competing with the term "The Thirteeners," is derived from the title of a popular book. Not having read it, I can't precisely determine the significance of the term. Given that the book came out before Spike Lee released his latest movie, it's a safe bet that the term bears no relation to Malcolm. I would wager the "X" is significant for it's mathematical equivalent to the unknown. Hence, we are a generation with no defined goals in search of the truth. This idea is certainly worth pondering. What do we, as a generation of educated youths, stand for, and how do we define ourselves? A friend of mine in her 40s spent several weeks last summer in China teaching English to university students. While there, she was asked by her students, some of whom took part in the Tiananmen Square protests, what American students thought of the Chinese plight. She told them that, to the best of her knowledge, we were really not informed well enough to hold much of an opinion. After some reflection, I asked her, when she returned to China this summer, to please tell her students that we indeed are very sympathetic to the plight of the Chinese. For most Americans, and students in particular, the Tiananmen Square Massacre is still a haunting tragedy. I say students especially, because I believe there is a very real bond that unites everyone of our generation beyond the boundaries of country and continent. You and I are old enough now to realize that people and politics are not the same. We are young enough to insist that of the two, people are always the most important. We American students so admire the Chinese students because they have a cause — a cause so important to them that it was and is worth their lives. Perhaps, if the truth be

told, our admiration is mixed with envy. We are envious, not of their situation or their sacrifice, but of their cause. What is it that this generation of American youth — offspring of the "me decade" — can say we fought for or against as a collective whole? Yes, there are plenty of issues that call for and deserve our attention. The environment is an issue for many of us. But how many environmental sit-ins have we been a part of? "Recycle!" is no rallying cry, important as it may be. Freedom of speech is always an issue. But, how unified can we be over such debates over whether Madonna's book "Sex" to be in public libraries? Women's rights are ever in need of attention, but the feminist movement has suffered greatly of late with so many conflicting agendas. The word feminism has taken on negative connotations, and many young women are left confused and somewhat apathetic. Even the civil rights movement seems to have lost the intensity of its original fire since the loss of such diverse leaders as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. The list goes on and on. So many things are worth the dedication of our vitality and youth, and yet, it seems that in the collective consciousness of our lost generation, we are without a cause. As a result, the history of past generations has become glorified. As evidenced by its constant presence in our culture and fashion, there is no generation we youth are more envious of than that of the 1960s: flower power, black power, peace marches, sit-ins, freedom rides, bus boycotts, JFK, MLK, Malcolm X and "Hell no, we won't go." Yet, when asked, almost anyone who can actually claim to be part of that generation will tell you that it was a time when this country seemed to be falling apart. None of us want to be doused by high pressure water hoses, chased by police dogs, beaten by bigots, cramped inside a building to sit for days or enraged by the reality of Vietnam. What we do seem to lack, however, is a common cause or causes that so compels us to action that it marks our entire generation. Any great work of literature, any momentous time in history is testament to the fact that our finest hours are simply reactions to outside forces that must be overcome. So, do we — do I — want war or persecution as a means of obtaining some elusive communal cause? Certainly not. It just seems a shame that we are, in fact, a generation so unremarkable that "The Thirteeners" and "Generation X" are the best anyone has come up with.

Clay is a junior speech communication major.

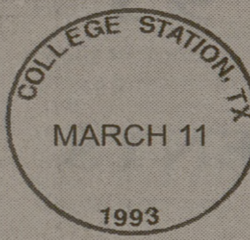


When is too close too much?

Back Talk

Last week, Back Talk asked readers to offer their opinions concerning how closely the media should be allowed to a crisis situation in order to cover the story accurately. The media has been criticized for its role in the current standoff with the Branch Davidian cult in Waco. Some say that news personnel have obstructed the progress of the operations. Media proponents, however, argue that the public has a right to know. We would like to honor our sole participant with the coveted "Reader of the Week" award which includes a free ice cream cone with the Battalion Opinion Page Staff. Congratulations, Kyle. Back Talk will be back after Spring Break.

• In a crisis such as the Branch Davidian Cult standoff, the news media should not be criticized for trying to be as close to the action as possible, without endangering one of their own or others more central to the action or crisis. But how close is still safe? In an event such as the "cult standoff," common sense would tell us that a safe zone would be one out of the range of gunfire. If this rule were obeyed, the media would be less likely to hinder any type of operation. However, the news media has recently set all-time precedents concerning the intensity and thoroughness of news reporting. Whether this should be applauded remains a controversial issue. An example of this dangerous type of coverage is the Gulf War; journalists endangered themselves and almost jeopardized military operations with their "exclusive" coverage. But the ultimate absurdity occurred at the beginning of the U.S. mission to Somalia; during the night, soldiers approached the shores of Africa to be confronted with the worst of enemies, the camera flash. Kyle Littlefield
Class of '95
Journalism major



MAIL CALL

Be kind to animals over spring break

I'm writing before spring break to ask everyone to prevent unwanted cat and dog pregnancies. In addition, I encourage them to find homes for unplanned litters or to take them to the shelter. People often abandon cats or dogs, telling themselves that the animals will learn to hunt and gradually adjust to their "natural environment." The abandoned animals will do nothing remotely like that. They will die slowly — physically miserable, repeatedly terrified and broken-hearted at the loss of their human friends. I've worked with animal rescue for years, and the typical conditions in which I find abandoned animals are emaciated, eating scraps of rotten food

from dumpsters, drinking from puddles coated with motor oil, limping on unsplinted broken bones. In the case of kittens, I find their remains after they have been eaten alive by dogs. If, like survivors of nuclear warfare, the animals spend more than a few weeks in the position of envying the dead, they may breed more animals to experience similarly long, agonizing deaths. A cat's or dog's chances of survival at large are maybe as good as your odds of surviving all alone in the Amazon Basin without a Swiss Army knife, a match or a stitch of clothing. Dogs and cats have so long been bred for domesticity that their natural environment is now your living room and your fenced yard. Janet Bellwether
Class of '93