

Cyclist suffers B-CS traffic trauma

Lack of transportation options forces use of car instead of bicycle or bus

I finally gave up. I am now a slave to a 1,900-pound cherry red tart from Germany named Gwen. It's a Volkswagen. I named it Gwen because I think of it as an American teen: expensive, selfish and equipped with a lot of gadgets.

JULIA STAVENHAGEN

Columnist



I have willingly submitted myself to this slavery due to an abysmal mass transit record in College Station and the lack of bicycle paths. I am still picking gravel out of my palms from the several times I have gone airborne on my bicycle because there were no flat trails that led anywhere but (surprise!) the drainage ditch. Thankfully, there is an effort in town to bring decent bicycling conditions to the Bryan-College Station area. Last fall, Freebird's World Burrito on Northgate launched a campaign to implement bicycle-friendly legislation. The City Council has approved some measures to help people who can't afford cars into the real world — the real world being where people get to work in one piece. These plans should reduce College Station bicyclists' fear of dismemberment by that Buick trying to edge past at 45 miles per hour. I watch the Community Cycling Board in Freebird's hopefully, but, unfortunately, none of these plans will see fruition for a while. This left few alternatives for getting to work right now.

As I sit in rush hour traffic in my smoking car named Gwen, I dream of the day when bicycling and busing will be the accepted mode of transportation.

OK, I was swayed by peer pressure too. Mobile friends could hop in their cars at any moment and go to see a movie without having to synchronize schedules with the bus system. I had to go Greyhound and leave the driving to Gus. Gus goes to Galveston, sure, but it takes him about four hours because he takes a detour around Nebraska. Suddenly, the cost of owning a car did not seem significant. The specter of gas, insurance, parts, registration and other automobile-related bills which had kept me on two non-motorized wheels vanished in a puff of carbon monoxide.

Although I love all three of my jobs, I would prefer to trade one in for sleep; but Gwen calls — belching smoke and fumes — for me to feed her. I have a love-hate relationship

with my car, like most people who realize automobiles contribute to lots of environmental problems. The inefficiency of turning over 1,500 cubic centimeters of internal combustion engine for a trip across town lasting no more than 10 minutes is a crime of which nearly all are guilty. I have turned about three cups of irreplaceable gasoline into toxic fumes. Moreover, I paid about 50 cents to do it. Besides the cost of the car itself, I pay an insurance company for the convenience of knowing that in the unlikely event I plant my bumper in the back of the car in front of me, they will charge me more the next time I drive. I also handed over \$106 to the tax collector's office for the privilege of owning something that will decrease in value over the years.

Most cars are built for five or more passengers. There are cars built for two for the extravagant, but I have never seen a car built for just one person. Why do most cars on the road have only one person in them? Five people stuffed into my car would not be so bad as far as efficiency goes, but how many people are going to the same place at the same time? Anybody want to carpool to The Eagle at 2:30 p.m. on a Sunday?

As I sit in rush hour traffic in my smoking car named Gwen, I dream of the day when bicycling and busing will be the accepted mode of transportation in College Station and the world. Perhaps there will also be a day when every freeway in the country is empty except for propane- or nuclear-fueled buses going the right place at the right time. Stressed traffic shoot-outs on the freeways will be forgotten. I remember a street in Beijing. It had maybe four cars on it, and about 800 bicycles ridden by people who may not have known it, but their air is cleaner than in "the land of the free." The majority of their traffic accidents result in a few bumps and scratches and a broken spoke, rather than hundreds mutilated or killed in cars during the holidays. When the light finally turns green, hopefully, we will all be pedaling in the right direction.

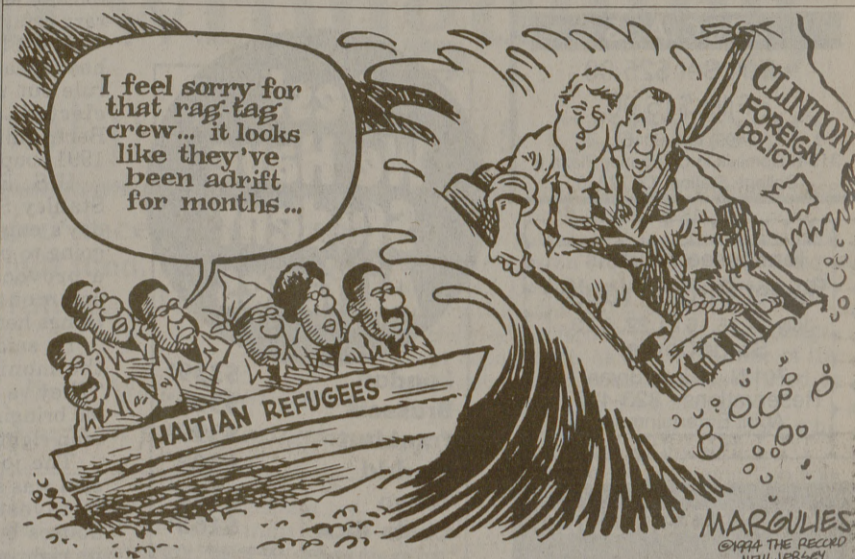
Julia Stavenhagen is a graduate anthropology student

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EDITORIAL



HAITIAN REFUGEES

U.S. must develop consistent foreign policy

President Clinton must develop and carry out a consistent policy toward the crisis in Haiti.

The recent tidal wave of Haitian refugees fleeing from economic and political oppression recently prompted the Clinton administration to revise its stance yet again.

After a modification of the administration's policy in May, Haitians were no longer forced to return directly to Haiti upon being intercepted at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard. Instead they were directed to processing centers where American officials determined which refugees truly deserved political asylum and which were only fleeing economic conditions.

The tent city at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba that was established to house as many as 12,500 refugees is filled nearly to capacity. Although the small Caribbean nations of Grenada, Antigua and Dominica have agreed to help provide temporary housing, the withdrawal of Panama's offer to take up to 10,000 Haitians dealt a major blow to Clinton's efforts to deal with the mass of Haitian emigrants.

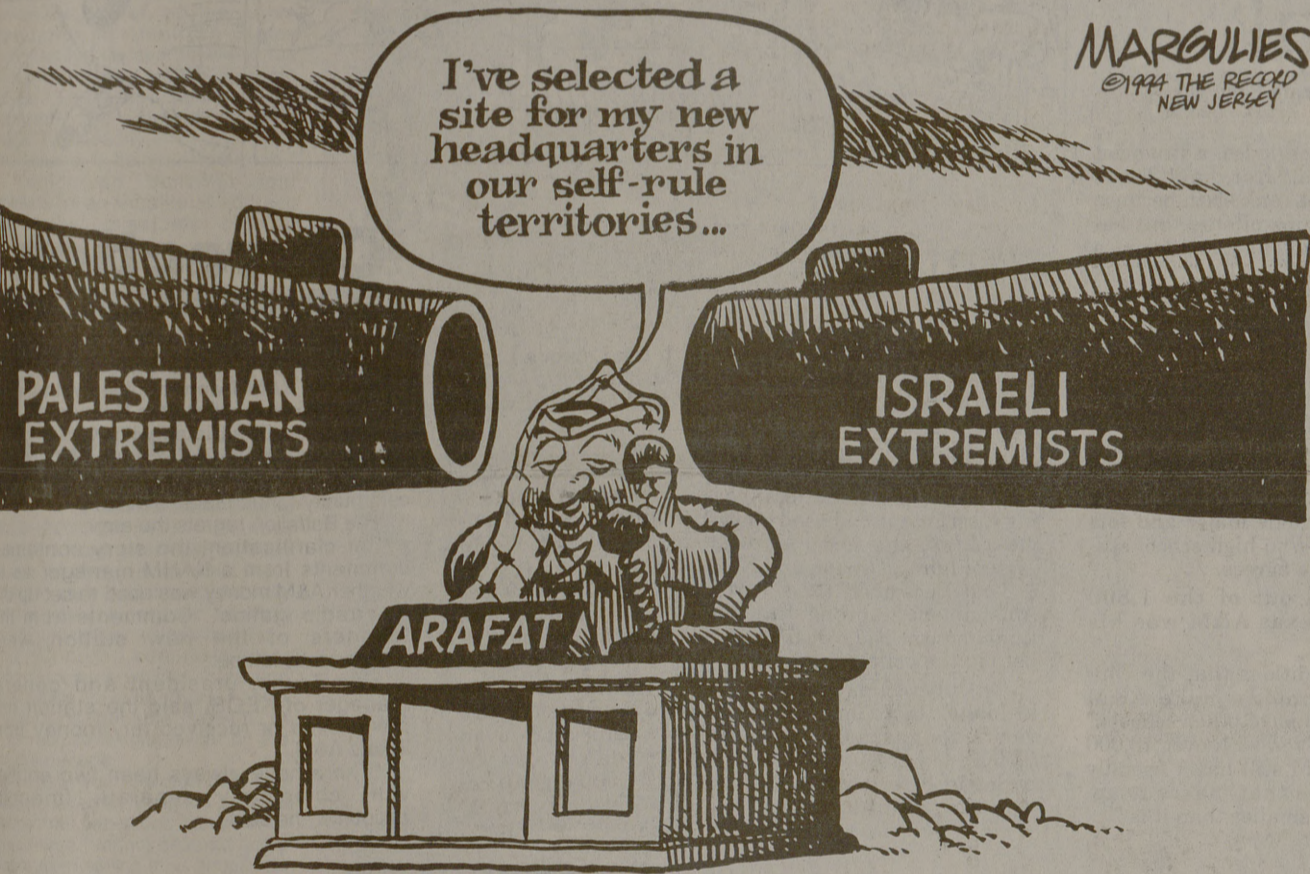
A consistent policy may have averted the current crisis. By not standing by the policy of immediate repatriation of those intercepted at sea, Clinton

gave the Haitians a new optimism which led to the current influx of refugees into the makeshift camps provided by the United States.

Clinton's shift is justified, however, because the old policy was inconsistent with the United States' long tradition of opposing political persecution and welcoming immigrants who seek better lives.

In theory, every Haitian who wants to become a U.S. citizen should have the opportunity. However, practical considerations must outweigh lofty principles. Florida simply cannot absorb a massive influx of uneducated, unskilled Haitians, most of whom will enter this country with nothing and will need significant assistance. Much of this assistance would come in the form of government-provided housing and medical services, the cost of which will ultimately be picked up by the American taxpayer.

This situation justifies an American response, including an invasion if necessary. We must continue our commitment to democracy in this hemisphere and throughout the world. The potential tide of refugees washing toward American shores provides a clearly defined national interest for the United States to restore democracy in Haiti.



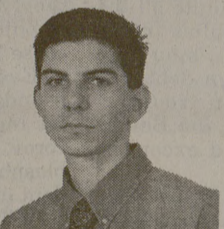
Illiteracy problem continues today

Education efforts need volunteers, funding to guarantee 'right to read'

It is said money is the root of all evil. There are many other things that make up the evil vine attached to that root, and one of them is illiteracy. The most basic definition of "literacy" applies here — the ability to read and write. Just being able to write one's name is no longer enough.

CHRIS S. COBB

Columnist



To a person who cannot read, words on a page such as this one look like: Asafy asfjko mnvniuy rvnviuf oreujrn fju fufutb uiffi.

They are completely confusing and incomprehensible, with no "rhyme or reason."

It seems that the rhetoric of concern for illiteracy comes and goes in waves. The concern is currently at a low ebb, being overshadowed by other issues of the day. These other problems may also be very important, but having more than the basic ability to read and write is of utmost necessity. "There is a direct correlation between illiteracy and unemployment," said Pam Rosynek, director of Literacy Volunteers of America for the Brazos Valley area.

It was December 1975 when the cover of Newsweek proclaimed, "Why Johnny Can't Write." A shower of rhetoric soon followed from everywhere — newspapers, television, other magazines — declaring a literacy crisis and a cry for a movement to go back to the basics.

The federal Right to Read program promised to wipe out illiteracy in a decade. That was 1971.

If even our public servants are ineffective in dealing with this educational shortcoming, what can we as regular citizens do to help? Hasn't all that can be done already been tried? The simple answer is, of course, no. Many people actively combat the problem within this community.

It is easy to see why. Today, one out of three people in the state of Texas is functionally illiterate. "These people cannot read a map, brochures, notes from their children's teachers,

Christmas cards, etc." said Rosynek. "In fact, Texas is 47th out of the 50 states in literacy."

Literacy Volunteers of America for Brazos County, has 190 to 200 volunteers that raise funds, help out in the office, and tutor the 400 to 500 students in reading. This number of volunteers is not enough help because most students need to be taught one-on-one. So many students have such a low reading level that they require this individualized teaching method.

In 1971, the federal Right to Read program promised to wipe out illiteracy in a decade. Today, one out of three people in the state of Texas is functionally illiterate.

Those students who cannot read or write and fall through the cracks of our educational system are the real losers in the "grand" scheme of things. Often they cost us millions of dollars in welfare programs and unemployment compensation.

The stereotype of those who are illiterate is very disturbing. Many believe they are ignorant slackers. The truth is, they work very hard at what they do. They just don't possess the skills to help themselves.

"In the long run, we hope to make these people employable. We teach them reading skills and then job training skills," said Rosynek.

Why should these statistics make us

angry? Don't most of us shut out the numbers of our national deficit? Aren't all those studies just useless statistics anyway? They are too large for us to imagine and therefore, do not hold any meaning for us.

People are more than just statistics, especially if those who were once illiterate tell you firsthand their trials and tribulations caused by not being able to read or write.

Being literate is essential for survival in today's world. Even having a high school education is not enough. Those of us who are graduating soon know from the media and firsthand experience that having a college education is sometimes not enough. What is life like for people who don't have any real education? How can they provide for their children? The questions are endless with this problem.

One way to help deal with this problem is to be sure that programs like Literacy Volunteers of America receive the funding they need, instead of them having to worry about funding. The state government can help here. Instead of arguing out of pride, or trying to be sure that they'll have enough votes to be re-elected, officials should do something that's right. They should do something that the people need.

One question more, a simple rewording of what has come before — what can we do to help? Think about it. Be publicly aware. Volunteer your help, your talents, your education. Here we are in a community that revolves around an upstanding academic institution. And most people who can read have no idea of the immensity of the illiteracy problem and how it really affects us. All of us.

Chris S. Cobb is a senior English major



Cartoon's attack on Corps lacks reason

I am writing in regard to a so-called comic strip writer of The Battalion staff who goes by the moniker "jd". jd's cartoon typically paints an unflattering portrayal of the Texas Aggie Corps of Cadets. I assume, from jd's style and from the content of jd's strip, that this individual is a freshman at Texas A&M. I assume this because I once had the same opinions and feelings toward the Corps six years ago when I was a freshman.

It is easy to ridicule and degrade a seemingly large, faceless organization. This is prejudice, or better, ignorance. Please don't misunderstand me. I find both satire and black humor viable forms of communicating outrage or distaste. Unfortunately, jd's comic lacks even a hint of either. I have yet to even see how this strip might be considered funny or intelligent. Perhaps jd has a reason for this resentment of the Corps.

My suggestion to jd is simple. Rather than continue this seemingly unfounded prejudice while hiding behind some initials, jd should come forward with his reasons for this bombardment of the Corps. Or even better, pick a real topic for his cartoon.

Scott Guttmerson
Class of '94

Health services should stop moralistic lectures

Dr. Kenneth Dirks, director of student health services, says in the July 11 Battalion, that he and his staff recommend abstinence to unmarried pa-

tients until they are ready to start a family. It appears student health services has attempted to deny A&M students the best birth control counseling and technology, based on the moralistic views of some of the senior staff.

Personally, I wouldn't want a paternalistic or moralistic lecture on abstinence, if I went seeking birth control devices or information from a service provided by the University with the use of student funds.

Richard Shafer, Ph.D.
Department of Journalism

Women responsible for consequences of sex

I am writing in response to the editorial in the July 11 edition of The Battalion about the inaccessibility of abortion facilities in the Bryan-College Station area. The editorial stated that this occurrence is a reflection of the "community's irresponsibility."

Excuse me ... who's irresponsibility is it? When a woman takes chances with her body and then ends up pregnant, it is not the fault of the community. Sexually active women should be prepared to accept the consequences of their actions, even if it means driving a few extra miles to have the abortion. The editorial made it sound as if we should be required to provide services for someone else's mistakes. Get real. First of all, the drive to Houston is only an hour and a half. Second, we will not be required to have such facilities until it is included in a national health plan.

If you're going to play the game, be prepared to lose.

Debra Nolen
Class of '97

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