

Natural born killers found where least expected – at home

As I was leaving the theater that looks like Beetlejuice's warehouse, three guys in a jeep drove past and shouted, "Don't see Natural Born Killers."

WILLIAM HARRISON

Guest Columnist



Maybe small-town residents never saw anything as senseless to them as actors Woody Harrelson and Juliette Lewis playing two viciously screwed-up inhuman beings as real life cartoon caricatures. But killers are mostly experienced secondhand, via CNN, Time Magazine or an Associated Press story in a local newspaper.

They don't have to be any more real than just black print on a gray sheet of paper. Gruesome crimes usually don't happen down the block. And don't often happen across town.

I felt plagued by haunting memories after watching the movie. I had been reintroduced to Woody and Juliette's Mickey and Mallory. I had met senseless sensationalism before.



I first met them at Sharpstown High School in Houston. When the Sharpstown subdivision opened in the 1950s, it was hailed nationally as the blueprint for a perfect neighborhood.

Texas Monthly magazine wrote an article in their 25th anniversary issue on how much Sharpstown had changed since those times.

In the film, Mickey and Mallory kick off their relationship by murdering Mallory's parents, who had abused her. They bludgeoned her father with a tire iron and set her mother on fire.

One day in Algebra II class, a voice on the public address system announced that a guy from my

neighborhood had been killed by his older brother. I knew the two. They grew up with some of my best friends, and we had hung out together.

The younger brother taunted the older brother when the older said he was going to get Dad's gun to kill the younger. The younger brother said he didn't have the guts. After killing Kenneth, Charley turned the gun on himself and fired into his abdomen.

When Kenneth's friends called 911, Charley and Kenneth's father answered the phone.

Their father was the 911 operator. That story made the front page, not the movie screen. Kenneth died, Charley survived.

Months later, I saw Charley in a group on the handball court at the high school, sitting on a bench with a scar running the length of his belly. Although I could not say whether he was enjoying himself, there was a smile present on his face.

I pretended not to know who he was. I just walked on by.



While I was waiting one morning to travel to Dallas to attend my grandfather's funeral, I looked at the front page of the newspaper. A story stood boldly underneath a big headline with a mug shot of a football player I had played with. Brandon Elledge's face was the only thing I could see.

My first thought: "What the hell did he do?" Brandon and I were not friends, and when I first met him, I hated him. He was a football prospect from a football family. He was bigger than I on the football field, and he held a certain

amount of disdain for me and my size. He picked fights, and when they were with me, all I could do was hold ground and hope he didn't get mad enough to kick my ass. At his worst, Brandon was a braggart and a bully.

Later, Brandon softened up around me, and we could laugh at the same jokes, even carry on a conversation.

He transferred to Clements High School for his senior season. Clements had a much better team than Sharpstown's and Brandon, at around 6-3 and 230, stood a better chance to attract scholarship offers at a winning program.

One day after a spring practice session, Brandon gave two younger football players a ride home. After the two turned him down a secluded road, they had him stop the car. One drew a gun and shot him in the head. The other helped throw his body in the back of his truck.

The two tried unsuccessfully to pry Brandon's \$5,000 stereo from his truck. They gave up, and witnesses saw them run off. The newspaper I read said the family of the 16-year-old who planned Brandon's murder and pulled the trigger could and would have given their child the stereo if he had asked for it.

Apparently, he just wanted to earn it.

I think of Brandon every once in a while and see his face smiling, hear his laughter one day after I cracked a joke during a break of football practice. I know he didn't deserve to die, no matter how much I hated him. I grudgingly but honestly miss him.



In an interview with Mickey in "Killers," I became reacquainted with how pliable the rational mind can be; how rationality is the license of criminality; the justification of insanity. In Mickey's

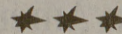
mind, he and Mallory stood as a purer, better species than the interviewer and the duo's victims.

Everybody's got to die; everybody's got sins they should die for; everybody is part of the natural order. Natural born killers live and thrive in a same-species food chain; praying mantises eat their young; spiders eat their mates. Murderers take loved ones away from their families. It's logical at the least.

Oliver Stone's familiarity with the dark side of human nature has served him well in past movies, but he places the media and the power brokers – the establishment – as the true villains in the film. Stone offers sympathy for the Mickeys and Mallorys, for those that commit murder not as an act of their conscience's transgression, but as a natural impulse.

Stone does not blame "the purer breed" who commit murder – his obtuse moralizing instead blames the scavengers that feed off evil deeds. This is surely a grievous, flamboyant oversight on Stone's part – after all, Stone himself is feeding off these deeds by portraying and glorifying them on screen.

I hope movie viewers consider what they have seen after leaving the film, especially those who push aside the film's implausible events and horrific imagery without a backward glance.



After a lot of thought, I recommend people see the movie, not to agree or disagree with Stone's arbitrary statements, but merely to experience an uncomfortable film. There are people out there who kill "in bulk" and without thought.

Maybe you're close to them. Maybe you've even met them, shaken either their hands or their victims'. Or maybe you will later.

William Harrison is a 1994 journalism graduate

Should the U.S. government admit the Cuban refugees?

No. Immigrants are the power behind this country.

JOSEF ELCHANAN

Columnist



Without the influx of new people with new ideas and drive, America, like many other countries, would have become stagnant long ago.

Being able to immigrate to the U.S. is a privilege and honor, not a right. It is a gift given to peoples of both sexes, all religions and all ethnic groups from around the world that are perceived to have something to give to this country in trade for its freedoms and values. It is not, never has been, and never should be a right demanded by any country for any reason.

Many times America has allowed more political refugees in than the quotas allowed, not always employing the proper background checks. Many times catastrophe struck when the United States refused people, and they were left to suffer or die because of it. This is not the case with the Cuban refugees.

The United States has been trying to control the Caribbean, Central America and South America for decades. Sometimes there were truly valid goals for these activities, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis. Many times, however, reason was tossed away in favor of passions. The current Cuban situation is one of these times.

Yes, Fidel Castro is a dictator who has logged a poor record for human rights, but does that mean that the U.S. should run over and start letting in every single Cuban who wants to immigrate? What about the Rwandans, or the Bosnian-Serbs, or the Ethiopians, or the Afghans, or the Somalians? What if the President had ordered that all black South Africans could immigrate to this country? Would anything have changed? Would the majority of the population of South Africa have finally pushed the government into accepting them if they all had left?

For a country to mature into a democratic or free society, there must be some sort of unhindered opposition. Without this opposition, a country has not become free, but simply homogeneous. Castro and his minions cannot control the country forever, especially if people of opposing viewpoints stay in their country and prod the government for change. Leaving changes nothing.

It must also be mentioned that America must maintain its own security and well-being. Letting in every Cuban that can get a boat together constitutes a security risk for this country. As we all saw from the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, U.S. immigration policy is too lax as it is. Allowing the Cubans to skirt around even the most basic immigration checks could allow undesirable elements into our society.

Lastly, there is an argument concerning fairness. Circumstances in Cuba may not be great, but compared to many other places around the world, anywhere on the two American continents looks good. There are people that are literally going to be shot to death in the streets if they cannot get to the U.S. These people must be allowed to enter this country before those who are simply uncomfortable in their surroundings.

The Cold War is over, and with it, our dispute with Cuba. As long as Castro continues to violate his people's civil rights, America must take steps to show its disapproval, but allowing free immigration is not the answer.

Josef Elchanan is a senior business management major

Yes. As if the American government's dealing with domestic problems weren't enough, here come a bunch of Cuban refugees.

FRANK SCHROEDER STANFORD

Columnist



This statement seems to be the general consensus among isolationists and many staunch conservatives in our society regarding the recent influx of Cubans to the United States. It is an understandable concern, but, it is espoused primarily by those who also shout, "Americans first!" (concerning employment) and "we don't need other countries' problems – we have too many here at home." If these thoughts are similar to your own, I urge you to consider this:

Although intended as a noble sentiment, "Americans first" is a very self-interested and primitive way to shape immigration policy. It has the same ring to it as, "White people first" or "Catholics first," etc. If "Americans first" is the way this country should be run, Chief Sitting Bull and his elders would have run the United States government instead of being run over by it. Ninety-eight percent of Americans' ancestors either jumped a border or landed on a shore somewhere. So the traditional meaning of "Americans first" has usually been, "Me first."

As for other countries' problems – OK, I agree, no one NEEDS other people's problems – but are Cubans really a problem? No. The situation is quite the contrary. South Florida, the home of most Cuban Americans, has had a very positive influence from its Cuban population through politics, big and small businesses and culture. I witnessed this influence firsthand when I lived in Miami. I was commonly told that Floridians consider Cubans to be a very hardworking, prosperous asset to the state. Almost all of these Cubans were refugees at some point.

Obviously, the government doesn't want to just throw open the door and allow anyone who wants to be an American do so. At the very least it would be chaotic. And we can't discriminate against certain nations regarding immigration policies while welcoming others, can we? But we do.

The U.S. allows individuals from officially undemocratic governments to seek what we've all heard called "political asylum." Because America has always hated Communism so much, Uncle Sam gives special privilege to those wishing to leave a Communist nation. Not Mexicans, however, or Haitians either – they're just poor – they only qualify as "economic refugees" and are immediately deported. Even though these governments are ridiculously corrupt, we still regard them as democratic and therefore okay-dokey. Lucky for the Cubans, Castro is a communist.

Now, however, Cubans are coming over in droves – risking their lives on rafts in the open ocean for days – only to be told America has changed its mind based on, "Gee we didn't know there'd be THIS MANY of you." The irony is that Florida can always use more hardworking people; so can America for that matter. Cuba and Castro are expected to fall soon and Cuba will begin to rebuild itself. Allowing the refugees sanctuary isn't going to be a losing battle.

And all that stuff about taking "our" jobs is a crock. These people are begging for work – doing anything. This country has always had PLENTY of jobs for those who really want them.

Let the Cubans in, and they will HELP the economy.

Frank Schroeder Stanford is a philosophy graduate student



MAIL CALL

Principles establish value of life

Julia Stavenhagen wrote on August 2 in support of couples who choose to remain childless; her most salient arguments being that the world is overpopulated and that it is full of pain and suffering. We vehemently reject her position and offer the following principles in response:

1) Human life is sacred, neither to be destroyed nor rejected. This includes abortion, artificial birth control, euthanasia and capital punishment. (Too difficult? Refer to principle 4.)

2) Remember that life includes joy as well as suffering. Human beings regularly transcend suffering and evil and live to lead upright and joyful lives. For many, suffering is even made a vehicle for moral growth. We must allow our children the chance to work through adversity rather than assume they are incapable of doing so.

3) There are many ways to reduce suffering in the world. Not overpopulation but evil political regimes cause famines in many nations (e.g., Rwanda and Somalia, China under Mao, the Ukraine under Stalin, etc.); reform these systems. The environment is important; consume less and teach your children to do the same. Address overpopulation while keeping the previous principles in mind; practice the discipline of periodic or total celibacy if you decide not to have children.

4) Once we determine the good, we must be willing to work toward it. We must not try to escape responsibility by setting ourselves apart from those who work courageously, even heroically, toward goodness. These people are not superhuman or different. We can do the same.

These principles strive toward a better life for every person. They lead us to a life of challenge and hope.

Jean Lavery
Class of '93

Amy Tremblay
Class of '94

Longhorn cattle deserve respect

Each year hundreds of tacky jokes are made up suggesting that Aggies are dumb. While in most cases I feel that this is just a mean-spirited t.u. plot, in one instance I fear that there may be a grain of truth in it. Aggies generally ridicule Texas Longhorn cattle (in spite of the fact that the A&M yearbook was called "The Longhorn" up into the 1950's).

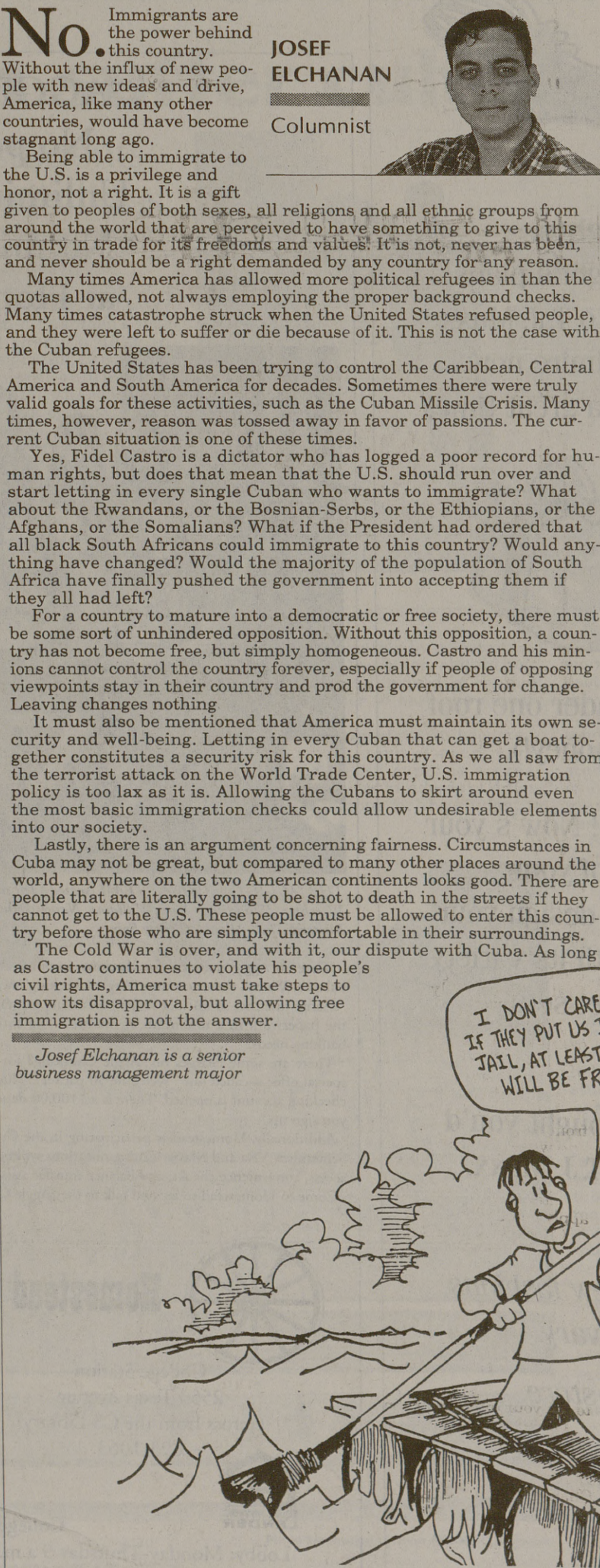
During the economic collapse following the Civil War, Texas' only source of new capital was the endless herds of cattle that roamed the state. Out of the era of the Trail Drives, our Texas cowboys, Mustangs and Longhorns wrote pages of history that have made this state an international legend.

Today our pure blood Texas Longhorn cattle are still the lowest in saturated fats, highest in fertility, highest in disease and parasite resistance and least expensive to raise of any cattle in America. Texas Longhorns are the living symbols of the Lone Star State and have earned every loyal Texan's respect; though the pure bloods are getting rare again, sad to say.

The confusion that some Aggies seem to be suffering from is between our great native breed of cattle and a poor old steer over at t.u.'s Austin campus. One steer does not a breed make. It's not even certain if Bevo is a true Longhorn, or a Longhorn-Hereford-Brahman cross. Either way, he's just a steer (and for you city-slickers, a steer is a former bull that's had the things that make male Aggies MEN chopped off). Considering what Bevo was forced to give up in order to fairly represent the other eunuchs at t.u., I feel that he deserves a lot more sympathy from Aggielanders than he gets.

Anyhoo, I do hope that in the future Aggies will remember to separate our fine old Texan breed of cattle from one SOB (Sad Ol' Bevo). Squeeze 'em hard, 'cause Bevo can't anymore.

Mike Leathers
Bryan



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