

Bonfire serves to unite students in many ways

Texas A&M, fall semester. It is a time rich in tradition, when football players take the field and trees start falling down. For the freshmen, it is a new and exciting time. Fresh from Fish Camp, they are on an emotional high ready to carry on the Aggie traditions another year.



JIM PAWLIKOWSKI
COLUMNIST

If you have been here before, you've heard the "Bonfire is what makes Texas A&M unique" versus "Bonfire represents the dumbest, most ignorant and regressive Neanderthal attitudes that a group of people can possess" debate.

If you are a new to Aggieland, you might be wondering what all the fuss is about, but you will know soon enough. For those unfamiliar with the arguments, let me offer a brief summary.

The pro-bonfire crowd will tell you that Bonfire is the essence of the Aggie experience. From every scratch you get from a thorny vine entangling a tree you just felled, to every blackened "bonfire booger" you pick from your nose, your tired, dirty body indicates that you have made a contribution to the most visible expression of the Aggie spirit. All of the sweat, blood and sleep deprivation are worth it to watch the 55 foot high pile of wood that was constructed by your own hands burn in a fiery blaze.

The anti-bonfire crowd has two principle factions. The environmentalist camp is opposed to Bonfire on the grounds that the wanton destruction of 10,000 trees for the sake of a big fire at a pep rally is unconscionable.

The other group is composed of liberal, "free-thinker" types who oppose the conformist mentality fostered by the traditions surrounding bonfire. This group is generally critical of all traditions because traditions encourage doing things the way things have been done in the past.

While many of us are sick of the same arguments being thrown around every year, the debate should continue, since it brings out some important issues that merit public discussion.

The environmental issue is a concern, especially in today's eco-sensitive era. We need to re-examine whether burning 10,000 trees for the sake of school spirit is a responsible thing to do.

However, most of the trees would be cut down anyway to clear farmland. Bonfire has also prompted the creation of Replant, a springtime event where over twice as many trees as the ones that were cut down are replanted on former cut sites.

While Bonfire is not the best thing we can do for the environment, the overall impact of cutting down those trees and burning all that wood is not significant enough to require the immediate termination of the tradition.

Others criticize Bonfire participants as a bunch of crude, mindless followers afraid to think for themselves. They demand that you challenge the establishment and refuse to follow the crowd.

However, they fail to recognize that something can be worth doing. One can choose to be red-ass without sacrificing his individuality. Just because a large group of people chooses to unify for a common purpose does not mean that the individuals stopped using their own minds.

There is no room, however, for the racist and sexist attitudes that have surfaced in the past among Bonfire participants. If Bonfire is going to continue, women and minorities must feel like they are a part of the tradition.

The best way for this to occur is for women and minorities to become more involved. The presence of a more diverse group of people prevents offensive comments from slipping out and forces people to confront their prejudices and stereotypes.

Bonfire is a unique opportunity for all Aggies to unite and show their school spirit. Those who choose to participate in Bonfire will find it a fun and worthwhile experience.

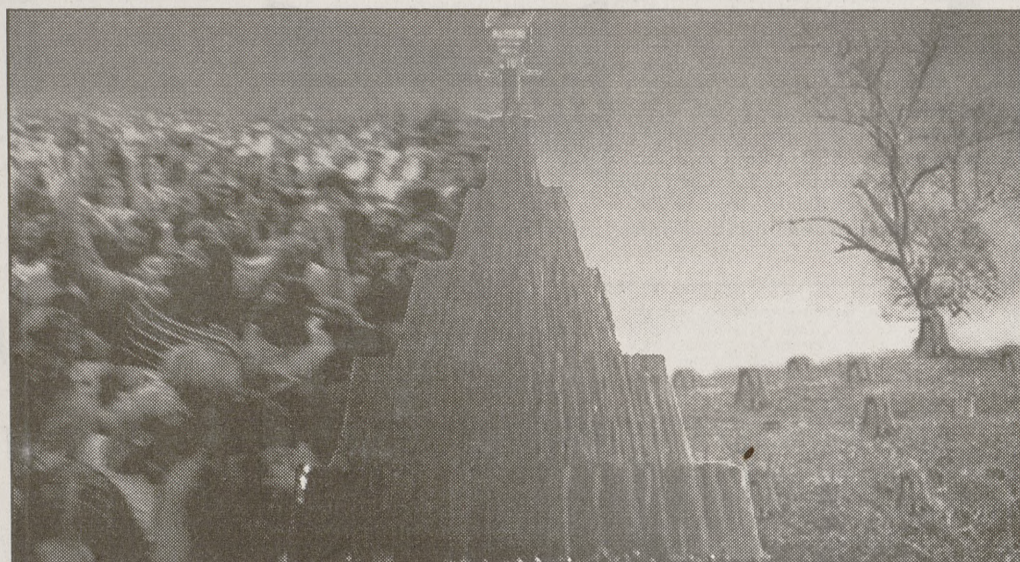
Those who choose not to get involved are no less an Aggie. They are simply missing out on a lot of fun.

Jim Pawlikowski is a senior chemical engineering major

Pro-Con

Bonfire:

To burn, or not to burn?



"Bonfire is a unique opportunity for all Aggies to unite and show their school spirit. Those who participate will find it a fun and worthwhile experience."

"Bonfire's original intent of unity and spirit has disappeared and been replaced by antagonism and obsession. Bonfire is an overdose of spirit."

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EDITORIAL

CRACKING THE CODE

A&M is on the right track by taking steps to eliminate academic dishonesty.

Most people would agree that copying the answers from another person's test or having someone else write your research paper constitutes cheating. But other instances are not so clearly defined.

However, today, through teleconferencing, Texas A&M students, staff and faculty will convene with representatives from universities across the country to discuss academic dishonesty and hopefully find ways to address these very problems.

The Aggie Code of Honor is familiar to most students, but many professors and students are not agreement as to how to define the term "cheat."

In fact, according to Sandi Osters, assistant to the vice president for student affairs, A&M policy standards on the subject of scholastic dishonesty are quite vague.

University guidelines do not specifically address such issues as note trading and group study, leaving these matters to be resolved between students and professors. This can become a source of frustration and animosity to both parties.

The teleconference, which will link 100 universities across the country,

hopefully will provide the University with insight into different methods of prevention and punishment of academic dishonesty.

Although it is impossible to eliminate academic dishonesty completely from the campus, A&M is taking an important step by addressing the issue head on and cooperating with other universities.

A&M's involvement in such a wide-scale conference is indicative of the concern the University has about issues that directly affect the students.

In order to prevent and discourage cheating, the University should first develop clearly defined guidelines, explaining what exactly academic dishonesty is and exactly what its consequences are.

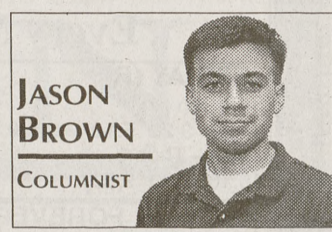
The ambiguity of A&M's present policy can be problematic for many students and professors, perhaps causing more problems than solving them.

Academic dishonesty should not be tolerated, and the University should be commended for its efforts to tackle this problem.

As much as we like to tout our Aggie Code of Honor, sometimes the solutions to our problems aren't so simplistic.

Bonfire does more harm than good for students

It all begins this Saturday — the first cut. In two months, all of the hard work that thousands of Aggies are about commence will be celebrated as we join together to watch Bonfire fall.



JASON BROWN
COLUMNIST

Here we go again.

As difficult as it is to admit, Bonfire is a tradition run amuck, and a tradition that does more harm than good.

Unfortunately, the most vocal opposition to Bonfire has been represented by the biology professor who posts signs in his office windows saying things like "Bonfire: Dumb as Dirt." While such childish rhetoric may qualify him for an executive position in the College Republicans, it hardly makes him a credible opponent of Bonfire.

Still, even rational people can see that the tradition is ablaze with problems and that it is time to bury the ashes of Bonfire — for good.

Dr. Bill Kibler, assistant vice president for Student Affairs and Bonfire adviser for ten years said, "the point of Bonfire is it is a long-standing tradition that stands for unity and spirit."

However, you could replace "Bonfire" with "Silver Taps," "Muster," "Big Event," "Midnight Yell" or "football game," and create a sentence that is more accurate. Sadly, Bonfire's original intent of unity and spirit have disappeared and been replaced by antagonism and obsession.

All you have to do is look at last year to see what kind of unity Bonfire invites. The racist music played at stack and the woman who was called a "bitch" (and worse) by several men, reveal that in the eyes of many Bonfire participants, white males belong — and no one else.

Although the majority of the people involved in Bonfire would say that everyone is welcome to help build it, a sizeable minority has suggested otherwise. This is sending a strong negative message that will persist for a long time.

Bonfire's overdose of spirit is easy to see. Many students here skip classes for days at a time and avoid studying on the weekends and during the week to help build Bonfire.

Consequently, thousands of students find that they have to make-up their low grades from the fall in the spring semester, unless they fail out of the University altogether.

As a freshman, I saw the most avid Bonfire participants lose their scholarships or even get kicked out of the University. This was hardly what the University expected of them when it offered them the scholarships.

Dr. Kibler countered that he is "of the opinion that students who would neglect their studies because of Bonfire would neglect their studies anyway." This may be true, but the University administrators should be the last ones condoning and exploiting this kind of behavior. Besides, it is hard to imagine that many students would disregard their studies to the extent they do now if it weren't for Bonfire.

Granted, the Bonfire Advisory Committee is looking into some of the problems that exist in Bonfire, but it is difficult to believe that a small committee can alter individuals' behavior, especially since the behavior is as ingrained as the tradition itself.

The fundamental problem with Bonfire is that it is too big to control. Although there are thousands of responsible and well-intentioned students who work to build Bonfire, there are too many others who are successfully tearing it down through their words and actions.

If Bonfire is supposed to stand for unity and spirit, it collapses under its own standards. A tradition that has come to represent what Bonfire does now is a tradition that should be extinguished.

Instead of engaging in this self-destructive activity, the Bonfire participants could channel their energies toward something more positive, such as volunteer work at a hospital, an elementary school or Habitat for Humanity.

Working together, they could build something stronger and more permanent than a heap of logs.

Jason Brown is a senior economics major



MAIL CALL

Pay respects to lowered flag

In the recent flag debate, the real issue has been overlooked.

The attitudes displayed during the lowering of the flags were inappropriate. I have been taught to stop what I was doing and pay my respects when a flag is raised or lowered — particularly the American flag, the symbol of our great country.

The issue is not that someone — whether Greek, Non-Reg, or Cadet — is or isn't a patriotic citizen. The issue is that all Aggies should respect and honor this country and the flag that represents it.

The commotion surrounding Bid Day while

cadets lowered the flags showed a certain lack of consideration (not lack of patriotism) by the Greeks.

We are not asking that you necessarily stop to salute the flag, but for everyone to show courtesy and to show that they embody the ideals of an Aggie.

Tim Evan
Class of '96
accompanied by
117 signatures

A bit of sound advice for CRs

To the "College Republicans": You have the right to remain silent, too. Just something to think about.

Brian C. Murrell
Class of '95