

THE BATTALION OPINION

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Jurors' decision had little to do with Simpson

We live in a strange world where things aren't always what they seem. I liken it to those fun-house mirrors at carnivals. When standing in front of such a mirror, you appear different than you actually look.



KYLE LITTLEFIELD
OPINION EDITOR

When you walk away from the mirror, things are back to normal. When you see your reflection in a window, you look as you always have. Yesterday, the O.J. Simpson verdict provided a similar mirror to play with our senses. It's like a long, impassioned game of Clue: You catch Col. Mustard in the study holding the candlestick. It seems pretty cut and dry, but later you find it is actually Professor Plum who is guilty. Similarly, blood belonging to Simpson is found smeared all over the crime scene, O.J. flees from his arraignment, a recorded 911 phone call testifies that Simpson had a history of beating his wife. However, Simpson was found "not guilty."

The decision seems surprising until you realize the trial was basically an illusion. First of all, rid yourself of the notion that Simpson's guilt or innocence was at issue. This trial had little to do with Simpson. It could easily seem that way — the setting of our little allegorical drama was a courtroom. A crime had occurred. Simpson was the defendant. Yet, there was something greater acting itself out than the surface plot.

The jurors, whether they realized it or not, were not deciding Simpson's innocence.

Rather, they were voicing an opinion — providing social commentary — on the conditions that exist in Los Angeles, Calif. and many other places around the nation.

L.A. is a hotbed of racial tension, so racism was an obvious but brilliant card to play in the Simpson trial.

The decision to question Mark Fuhrman's validity as a witness was poetic because Fuhrman represented the L.A. police department,

both physically and symbolically. After all, it was racism that prompted the riots after the police officers accused of beating Rodney King were acquitted.

And because of its poor track record and unpopularity, the LAPD was the symbolic defendant in this trial.

It may seem surprising that Simpson was found not guilty because of all of the evidence that hinted otherwise. But the residents of L.A. — represented by the jurors — were simply sending a message to the LAPD.

The big problem is that this is not what the justice system is supposed to do.

The verdict of a trial should not be a reaction to anything except the testimony heard in the courtroom. This is why trials are relocated when the proposed environment is too emotionally charged for a trial to be considered "fair."

The people of the United States should ask themselves, "Is this an isolated incident?"

It very well could be. O.J. Simpson was definitely not your ordi-

nary defendant. But if this verdict is more representative of the state of the criminal justice system as a whole, we are in trouble.

Whereas you can always walk away from a fun-house mirror if you don't like what you see, the state of our justice system is not so easy to sidestep.

In 1970, the trial of Charles Manson was touted as the "trial of the century." In retrospect, this was a premature assessment.

However, it is now 1995 — with five more years until the turn of the century — and it is pretty safe to say that the trial of O.J. Simpson is definitely the "trial of the century."

Not because of the personalities involved, but because of the greater meaning attached. Law enforcement agencies, the criminal justice system and to some extent, the government will never operate or be perceived in the same way.

So you can be thrilled or disgusted at the thought of the jurors' verdict, but understand that O.J. was never the real issue.

Kyle Littlefield is a senior journalism major

Egos too often dictate ethics

Schools shouldn't always allow students to decide their own values

A girl I know used to worry consistently about receiving perfect grades when she was in elementary school.



ERIN HILL
COLUMNIST

One semester, things didn't go as she had hoped, and she received several B's. She snuck into the bathroom and changed her grades with a pen. With revised report card in hand, she marched out confidently to show-off her "A's."

Of course, she was caught. Her naivete in believing that a teacher wouldn't notice a large "A" scribbled in a child's hand still makes her laugh.

She learned an important lesson, too, after she had to write an essay on not altering report cards.

Not to mention enduring the disappointment of her parents.

Everyone probably has at least one childhood experience that taught a similar lesson in the "rights" and "wrongs" of life: stealing a piece of candy from the corner store, swiping a new Barbie Doll outfit from a playmate, taking someone else's baseball card.

When we got caught, we also caught the huge parental lecture on property, possession, stealing and honesty.

It seems that too many of us, however, didn't listen hard enough when our parents spoke. Those childish behaviors have stuck with us, and we still do what we want when it suits us.

Now, however, there aren't necessarily

any parents to make us return those stolen baseball cards.

Every one of us, to some degree or another, is convinced that our perception of the world is correct.

This leads us to believe that the conclusions we draw are accurate, and the actions we take are acceptable.

Deep down, or sometimes not so deep down, we believe ourselves to be right on target concerning just about everything. We start to trust our own instincts too much. We believe our own hype, and our egos swell.

When we trust our instincts too much — instincts that exist to protect ourselves — we stop believing in Right and Wrong and start believe in Right and Okay For Now. Or, even worse, we believe in Right and Right for Me.

This philosophy is reinforced at every turn by our schools. "Good values are what each person values" is a myth that is too much with us.

Our parents may have told us it was wrong to do whatever we want without thinking about the morality of our actions. However, schools, in an effort to not instill specific values in students, avoid teaching values at all.

They teach, instead, a strange brand of moral relativism which encourages students to keep looking out for #1.

"Teaching the Virtues," by Christina Hoff Summers, is a stinging essay on the pervasiveness of moral relativism in our schools and in the larger society.

Summers, an ethics instructor, tells the story of an instructor who believed Summers' commitment to teaching private morality to be off-target. Then half of that

particular professor's class cheated on the take-home final, and she came begging for Summers' advice.

Summer's counsel: If you don't want students to become ethical creatures, let all students believe that their feelings and personal perceptions are inherently good or worthwhile.

Let them feel that "... one's personal preferences in [all] instances are all that matter." This way, "students' ability to arrive at reasonable moral judgments is severely, even bizarrely, affected," and ethics won't matter much at all.

The following comments are from one of Summer's colleagues: "You are not going to have moral people until you have moral institutions."

You will not have moral citizens until you have a moral government."

But it is actually the other way around. We will not have moral institutions or a moral government until we first become moral people.

If our pool of potential leaders is filled with toads, there's no way that Princess Charming is going to hop out of the swamp and hop into the Oval Office.

And there's no way that we are going to hop out of the swamp of moral relativism and egotistical ethics with moral common sense unless we are guided.

As children, we didn't always know that stealing candy was wrong, so our parents told us. As students and adults, we are still in need of help.

If we are left to our own egos, there's sure to be trouble.

Erin Hill is a graduate pursuing a teaching certificate



THE BATTALION

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EDITORIAL GOOD YEARS

A&M should continue to grow positively as it has in the past.

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

As Texas A&M celebrates its birthday, a look back to the University 119 years ago reveals some remarkable similarities between the struggles A&M confronts today and those A&M faced in 1876.

According to Henry Dethloff's "A Centennial History of Texas A&M University," A&M "incurred the enmity of politicians, the derision of the press and the rejection of classical and religious educators."

Not only has Texas A&M always incurred hostility from the outside, but internal conflicts 119 years ago also bear a resemblance to those we face now.

Money shortage was a problem, and departments fought over what little existed.

Faculty and administrators argued over curriculum; some thought the emphasis should have been on the new concept of vocational education. Others thought that A&M should focus on the arts and sciences like a traditional public university.

Meanwhile, administrators and parents worried about the excessive drinking among the

student body. Today, money shortages, drinking and the curriculum are still hot topics at A&M.

However, the University has changed — for the better.

What was a provincial college with six students now is an internationally renowned University of over 40,000 men and women from various backgrounds, cultures and races.

Riding the information superhighway into the 21st century, A&M no longer limits itself to teaching students how to manage the family farm, but how to compete in virtually every field all over the world.

Still, Gov. Richard Coke's vision of providing a quality education at a low cost, as he expressed at A&M's inauguration on October 4, 1876, remains intact.

Over the past 119 years, Texas A&M University has weathered many storms, but commitment and resolve have made this University a stronger, better institution.

Hopefully, the next 119 years will see the same kind of growth at the University.

Happy birthday, Texas A&M.



MAIL CALL

Commentary on Jesus as a liberal

A thought on Shannon Halbrook's column: What Jesus was opposed to was people putting money before God and ignoring the problems of the poor.

What the early church did and, I think, what Jesus expected, was voluntarily giving money away and selling goods.

To sell goods you have to own them first, and to give money, it helps if the government's not taking it out of your hands.

This isn't charity, this is taxes. If you want to be compassionate, that's good, but do it with your own money. Don't take it from others by taxation.

It's easier to be generous with other peoples' money than with your own money.

*Robert Jackson
Class of '96*

I am ecstatic that Shannon Halbrook spoke out on the contradictory coalition of Christians and conservatives.

Jesus taught his followers to love all others and that this love was to be placed above all material things — even the deficit.

In my opinion, Jesus Christ was the greatest liberal that ever lived.

Ditto, Shannon!

*Jeffrey Cranor
Class of '97*

not around during the time of Jesus. I would like to point out that the Roman Empire was a capitalistic economy.

*William Zipf
Class of '94*

'Quack Shack' strikes out again

A friend of mine was in a car accident the other day. The impact was severe enough that it destroyed the left side of her huge Chevy blazer, knocked it over the curb, and set off the air bags in the other car.

She thought she was ok — no cuts, no broken bones — but she still wanted to see a doctor.

Emergency rooms are expensive, plus we pay our student fees for when we need an inexpensive medical opinion. So, she went to Beutel. The doctors' response was startling.

"Hold your hand in front of your mouth." My friend shakily complied. "Do you feel your breath? If so, you can go." Seemingly without a choice, she left.

It turned out to be nothing serious, but that doesn't change anything. She could have ruptured her spleen, been bleeding to death, and showed few signs, unless someone saw them.

This is what we pay our fees for? To see if we're breathing? Is this out of the ordinary for our health center or merely par for the course?

I honestly don't know and I don't want to find out.

*Marcum V. Brooks
Class of '95*

Bus Ops rains on students' parade

This past Thursday, a little after 5 p.m., I stood in front of the MSC in the rain with approximately 75 other students

for over half an hour. In all this time, not one bus came by.

Strangely enough there were nine buses parked across Simpson Drill Field. A group went over to see what was going on.

What we found was our route buses with most of the nine drivers sitting on one bus talking.

The dry bus drivers then informed us umbrella-carrying, shoe-soaked, wet people that service had been suspended indefinitely due to road conditions.

When I inquired as to why the people waiting were not told, it was rudely explained to me that none of the drivers were allowed to leave the bus for "safety reasons."

They also had no intention of telling any waiting passengers at the MSC of the delay, even though more were gathering over as we spoke.

I am all for the routes being suspended due to the weather, but it is ridiculous that waiting passengers were not informed.

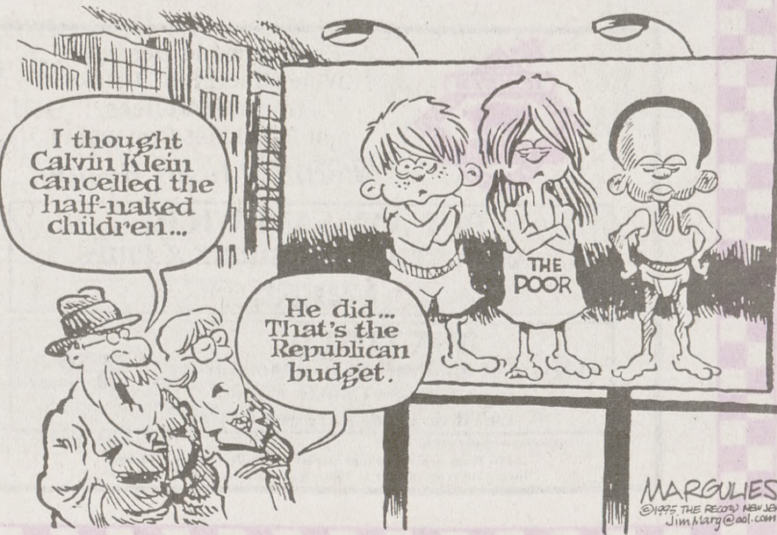
This is another fine example of this University's administration bucking the idea that students are customers and deserve good customer service.

Generally, Bus Operations provides adequate service, but instances of poor service occur more often than they would in a well run business. I used to be an A&M bus driver and this was a blatant display of inconsideration, irresponsibility, and total lack of customer service.

*Scott Emery
Class of '95*

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class, and phone number.

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