

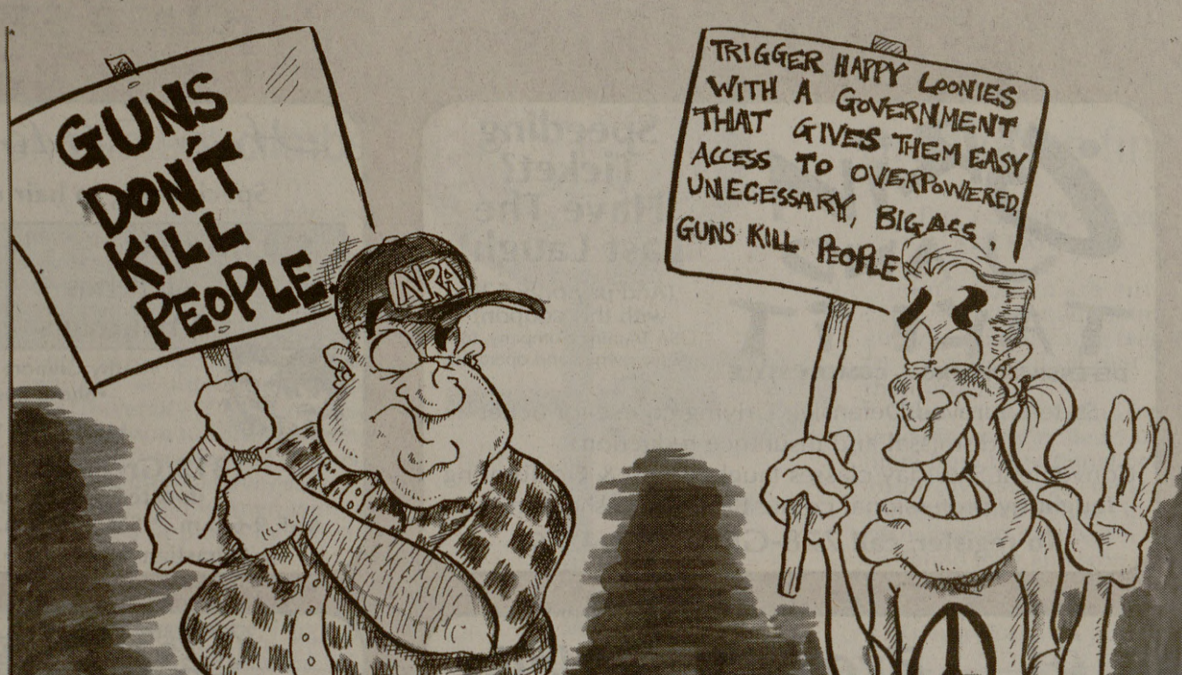
United States shoots itself in the foot

A quick survey of the evening news will reveal to anyone what most Americans already know: Violence in the United States is at an all-time high. A local anchorperson won't be much to say about knife-wounds or deadly fistfights, because guns are the source of our violence epidemic. Guns annually claim an average of 35,000 lives in the United States. Thanks to the tireless work of groups such as the National Rifle Association to keep guns readily available, thousands of U.S. citizens are dying needless deaths. Despite the best efforts of those who favor stricter gun control legislation, guns may still be purchased easily and fairly quickly. The right to own a gun comes, so most of the tenets of our society, from English common law, to the Second Amendment, to the Constitution, "that the subjects ... have Arms for their Defence ... according to their Condition and ... Laws."



Bryan Goodwin
 Junior English major

So the right to bear arms in the United States descended from England. In the process, it was translated into American law. The Second Amendment has been interpreted as guaranteeing citizens the right to own guns. Not so: The Second Amendment was written to keep guns in the hands of militiamen, so they could defend the state from attack, and defend the people from the state, should the need arise. However, the contro-



versity today lies in the balance between self-defense and the omnipresence of guns. For the uninitiated, the Second Amendment reads, "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Clearly this amendment applies only to minutemen. Since militias have evolved into the National Guard and the Reserves, one might assume this antiquated piece of legislation has been quietly neglected for quite some time. This hasn't happened, though safety-minded organizations like the NRA have conveniently relieved us of half the wording. All they ever quote is, "The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." Let's pretend for a moment that really is the law. It could be

taken one of two ways: Either the government may not have a say in telling citizens what arms to keep, or citizens may have only some arms, as the government sees fit. Under the first rationale, you could install your very own nuclear missile silo in your backyard, and tell the government where to go when they get nervous. That clearly is not legal, though a nuke is the mother of all arms. So it must be the second possibility: The government decides what weapons are acceptable for our ownership. They could legalize nothing more threatening than Swiss Army Knives. This would be great for our personal safety — if it had been done in the first place. America's dilemma is that guns are already here. Do we outlaw handguns, saving the lives of children whose parents

would no longer have guns with which their kids could shoot themselves and their friends? Or do we pass more concealed handgun legislation, keeping law-abiding citizens empowered against the criminal element? The answer is that if we want to curb and hopefully end this epidemic, we must attack it on both fronts. Legislation can only do so much in preventing people from obtaining guns. Criminals often get their weapons from the black market. If we outlaw handguns, we must crack down on the dealers with far greater determination than we show in fighting the war on drugs. Until we do come at the problem in an all-or-nothing manner, arming oneself will remain the choice of millions of Americans. And the vicious circle continues.

EDITORIAL

THE BATTALION
 Established in 1893

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SELLING SHORT

The University should take another look at on-campus vending policies.

Students are being sold out. Recent policy changes seem to have an adverse effect on every campus organization with the curious exception of the Barnes and Noble's MSC Bookstore. Recent changes to the concessions policy restricts the kind of relationships student organizations can have with independent vendors. Today the University Concessions Committee will hear final appeals in objection to the revisions. Before the changes, student organizations made healthy profits by joining forces with vendors. The alliances served as fund-raising efforts for the organizations and provided the MSC Bookstore with some much-needed competition. But the committee's decision ends these benefits, squelching students' fund-raising efforts and purchasing freedom with one blow. University officials say the changes are justified. Dennis Busch, a member of the committee, said, "In a fair market sense, [the competition from vendors] was not right." Not exactly. A fair market means the free, unregulated competition of vendors. The committee's decision does not defend the fair mar-

ket; it crushes it. It preserves Barnes and Noble's monopoly and exploits students' already strained wallets. The MSC Bookstore's prices are legendarily stratospheric. For years, outside vendors and student organizations offered comparable products at a convenient location for a much better value. Now, students will have to buy the hyperinflated products from Barnes and Noble or shop off campus. The ruling also says that only students may be present at vending tables. In the past, representatives of the vending company have been allowed at the tables to serve as mentors for students. Now, students trying to learn about salesmanship will lose the mentors' valuable instruction. The Battalion Editorials Board challenges the committee or Dr. Southerland, who accepted the committee's recommendations, to defend this policy change in a letter to Mail Call. If there is something in these changes that will benefit students — anything at all — it should be included. But as the revisions stand, it seems that A&M is looking out more for the profits of Barnes and Noble than the interests of students.

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Gee, thanks, Mr. Greenspan!
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Tragedy shouldn't end tradition

Last Wednesday I did something no college student should have to do — I attended the funeral of my friend and fellow Aggie. Greg White died Sept. 22 as a result of a truck accident while returning from Bonfire cut site, a place he loved. Some have suggested Bonfire be canceled because of the tragedy that occurred. Not only is this a bad idea, it is a dishonor to those involved in the accident. Greg was a quiet young man, but when I got to know him, I realized he was the type of person who placed others above his own interests. Moreover, Greg was one of the most gung-ho Bonfire advocates I encountered in my dorm. He was always helping in any way he could to build Bonfire. And he would never want us to cancel the tradition he loved.



Jon Appgar
 Sophomore journalism major

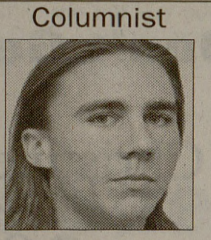
What the Bonfire accident should teach us is that life is not always fair. Sometimes terrible things happen to those who least deserve it. However, life must go on. Retreating into our shells and wallowing in our sorrow will only make things worse. Bonfire must and will go on. A special characteristic of Texas A&M University is the sense of unity and family that all Aggies feel toward each other. This feeling is fostered through traditions such as Silver Taps, Muster and Bonfire. To cancel the tradition of Bonfire because of this accident would not help us recover from the tragedy. It would only hurt us. We must all come together and support each other as we build the hell outta Bonfire this year. By doing so, we will strengthen not only the tradition but the ties that bind all Aggies together.

Only an idiot would think that Bonfire cut is without danger. Both the long drive to and from cut site and the fact that a large number of people are chopping trees in close proximity to each other makes it an accident waiting to happen. We all recognize these dangers and do our best to be as safe as possible. But our best is sometimes not enough to prevent the unthinkable from occurring. Although accidents of any sort are neither expected nor welcome, they should not destroy our spirit and motivation. If any activity that resulted in a tragedy were discontinued, there would be no airplanes, automobiles, swimming pools, football games or yell practice. Greg's death should teach every one of us to enjoy the present, work hard at those things we wish to accomplish, and live life to the fullest, as an individual and as an Aggie. This year's Bonfire will be a testament to our strength and courage. More importantly, it will be built in memory of Greg and the others injured in the accident. Bonfire will show that none of the victims is forgotten. On the night Bonfire burns, we should all feel proud at the task we have managed to accomplish through our pain and sorrow. And I am certain that when Bonfire burns this year, Greg will be watching, and he will be proud of us as well.

Although accidents of any kind are neither expected nor welcome, they should not destroy our spirit and motivation.

Guilty by reason of appearance

Look at the mug shot that accompanies this column. Can you tell strictly from appearance whether I'm a red-aggie or a two percenter? Okay, lucky guess. I don't have Ol' Army goaded across my back. But a correct prognostication like that reinforces the assumption that you group people by some common factor — be it appearance, age or background — and from that grouping predict person's behavior. Such predictions, if made often enough, may turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. How would this happen? Take teen curfews for instance. The shouts of "Get 'em off the streets!" imply that all young people turn into satan-worshippers after 11 p.m., with several results. Those determined to get into trouble have such a restricted schedule they're now forced to skip school to accomplish their daily objectives. Also, the multitude of good kids get the notion early in life that society expects them to misbehave and that they have no capacity for self-regulation. Paranoia takes root. But if troublemakers choose to skip school, at least they won't have to wear the school uniforms that have become all the rage lately. Apparently since dress codes weren't enough for school administrators to control the thoughts and stifle the creativity of today's youth. Enter the uniform. Proponents say uniforms will save parents money because they don't have to keep up with clothing trends. These supporters obviously forgot about weekends and weekends — though curfews have gone a long way toward reducing the former. They also say it will cut down on kids being killed by their shoes (shoe jacked). Although the instances of this happening were disgusting and tragic, they were also rare and overemphasized by a fear-mongering media.



Mason Jackson
 Senior marketing major

The issue at hand is that some people think the way a person dresses goes a long way toward determining their behavior, as exhibited last week when the undergraduate business lemmings got dressed up in suits to convince recruiters they were dependable and driven. But just because a kid wears his pants with a sag, in the style of the original gangster-plumbers, does that mean he is more likely to get into trouble? No. But many people think so. They look over their shoulders. And the person who's being looked at now has a chip on their already paranoid shoulder. In a good attempt to make matters worse, Governor Bush (Jeb's brother) has proposed that we institute "random" frisks. If police with nothing better to do see someone they deem suspicious, they can detain him or her, find out who he or she is and run a check to see if that person has had any run-ins with the law. If so, the detainee can then be frisked to "make sure as to how they ain't up to no trouble." Ignoring the fact that this sounds like a police state, it is troublesome to think about those who are detained, but have no record. What made them look suspicious? Was it color? Maybe. Was it hair length? Yes, for me. I can't tell you how many times I've been approached by narcs doing a bad impression of Sean Penn from *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, and I don't think it was because of my charming personality. So if you fall into a suspicious grouping, watch out — society is convinced you're going to screw up and that they'll be there to catch you. Obviously you've got to prove them wrong. There are two options. Either don't misbehave, or don't get caught. Unfortunately, in a paranoid society, "Big Brother is watching" isn't a deterrent, it's a challenge.



Fitzgerald ignores the real problems

Regarding Erin Fitzgerald's Sept. 30 column, "Bad bicyclists should hit the road." I am neither a moron, a nuisance nor a hazard on this campus. I wish your column had discussed the dangers of using the bike lanes on campus that, despite the no parking signs, are constantly blocked by vehicles, forcing me to ride on the sidewalk for safety reasons. Pedestrians must also take responsibility for stepping off of the curb in front of a bicyclist where there is no crosswalk in sight. Deal

MAIL CALL

with the real issue — designate bike paths that are maintained for bicyclists only — and the rest of the problems will disappear.
 Gregory Salata
 Ph.D. Candidate
College expands ignorance
 Regarding Thomas Meriwether's Sept. 24 Mail Call, "Homosexuals don't deserve equality." I was dismayed to see another Aggie fighting diligently to make A&M the most homogeneous campus in the nation. Every time people

express an opinion that contrasts the popular majority, they are fed the highly-revered cliché, "Highway 6 runs both ways." Since Meriwether just joined us at this fine University, maybe he doesn't realize that some of the best lessons he will learn will be outside the classroom.

Tonya Lee
 Class of '98
 The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or fewer and include the author's name, class, and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:
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