

## Mission Impossible: Liven up the debates

Talk amongst yourselves. Here's a topic: The presidential debates are neither presidential nor debates. Discuss."

And with that, a verklempt Mike Myers — dressed like a middle-aged woman in costume jewelry — walked from the podiums and mumbled something in Yiddish about Barbra Streisand being like butter.

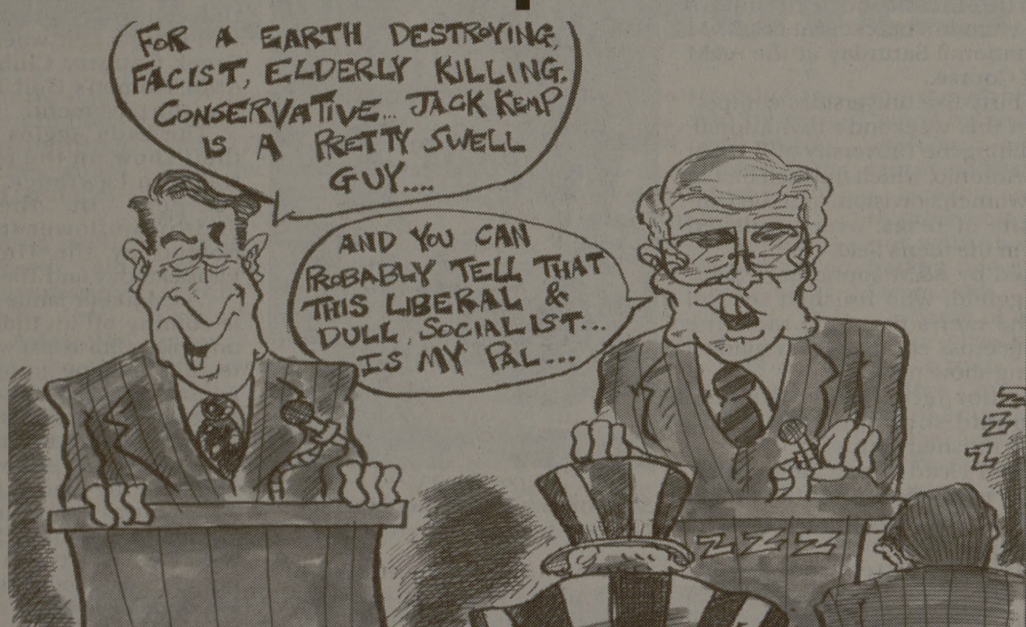
So it didn't really happen. But if "Coffee Talk" ever collided with the candidates, the cross-dressed comedian would be right. Never have such long-anticipated, over-hyped events been so disappointing.

Well, OK, Brooke Shields' new sitcom *Suddenly Susan* wasn't as funny as those NBC "See TV" commercials promised, but another column in itself.

Anyway, these so-called debates wasted the time of even the most uninformed voters.

Why? To put it bluntly, the Dole/Kemp and Clinton/Gore campaigns agreed to avoid any debate before the debates even started. They agreed to stand behind their podiums, smile and politely answer the soft questions posed by the moonlighting moderator Jim Lehrer, who regularly hosts PBS's *News Hour*.

The result was just what the candidates ordered. But it was disastrous for the American public. Instead of lively debate, we saw the presidential and vice-presidential candidates continually tell television audiences how much they respect each other. This nauseating civility was followed by the election-year game known as the Skirting of the Questions, "where candidates desperately avoid anything of substance. Millions of God-fearing, red-blooded, flag-waving Americans simultaneously reached their remote controls. Desperation led them to pray that *Suddenly Susan* was on the other station. Their frantic efforts were in vain. *Suddenly Susan* didn't come on until Thursday, and the debates were on Sunday and Wednesday nights.



Surfing the channels only revealed countless other networks broadcasting the debate from various camera angles. It was rumored that Ted Turner did an abrupt about-face and actually decolorized the debate transmissions being sent via TBS, his flagship cable station in Atlanta.

The channel and format are not important, though. Any real estate agent could explain how to improve the debates by offering the generic real estate answer to every real estate question — location, location, location.

With that in mind, Dole and Clinton should have carried on their happy little exchange in a more appropriate, relaxed environment. A bar, perhaps? Americans could have seen the two men with beers in hand trading old war — and draft-dodging — stories. Bob would tell us how he saved the life of a fellow soldier back in World War II ... again.

Bill would propose a toast to the waitress. Or maybe he'd just propose she visit his hotel room. Then the president would talk about the time he went to Moscow during the height of the Vietnam conflict to protest our involvement.

Of course, that was a long time ago. And it shouldn't matter, right? Well, uh ...

Wednesday's vice-presidential debates left a lot to be desired, too. And it wasn't just the location. Al Gore hugged a few trees and recited answers like he was reading them off a teleprompter. Jack Kemp avoided the questions altogether and discussed the finer points separating capitalism from socialism. Thanks, Jack.

The only thing that could have saved the 90-minute disaster would have been a cameo appearance by that sage of sages, Ross Perot's 1992 running mate, Admiral James Stockdale. It was four years ago that "ol' Gridlock" stumbled through the debates until he remembered to put in his hearing aid. His rusty performance didn't matter, though. The decorated naval officer had already spiced up the vice-presidential debate during the introductions by posing the philosophical questions, "Who am I? Why am I here?"

Both the Republican nominees, the incumbent president and vice president — and Brooke Shields — should ask themselves the same questions. The American people deserve answers. And we'd like them some time before November 5.

### Columnist



Michael Heinroth  
teaching certification

## Crosses don't cross line between church and state

started out as a simple memorial to a man killed by a drunken driver. If the Harris County attorney's office has its way, however, a commemorative cross will be yet another unnecessary brick added to the wall of separation between church and state.

In 1994, Robert Wayne Shinn was killed by a drunken driver in Copperfield, a west Houston housing subdivision.

Upon the request of his widow, a commemorative marker, a small white cross, was erected by Harris County on the site of the accident on April 4, 1994.

Nine days later, the cross was removed from the site because it was a depressing reminder to residents of Copperfield. It also caused a problem that property values might be lowered.

After Harris County Precinct 3 Commissioner Steve Radack received numerous calls and

complaints about the cross' removal, however, a local opinion was sought from the Harris County Attorney's Office. According to the attorney's road laws

and a state statute, there was nothing illegal about the county erecting the marker.

### Columnist



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So back up it went. And 10 hours later, down it came again. But this time, it wasn't because of a depressed resident.

The issue at hand was expressed in a letter sent on Sept. 25 from the Harris County Attorney's Office to the state attorney general. In the letter, the question was raised as to whether or not the county's use of a Christian cross as a marker violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution.

It is tragic that Robert Shinn had to die such a senseless death in the first place, but what is even more tragic is that his life will not be honored according to his family's wishes because of a small yet powerful phrase that has been over-applied and misconstrued: the separation of church and state.

In the case of Robert Shinn, the cross was one of many that has been erected upon the request of family and friends for accident victims across Texas.

Those who question the constitutionality of a county law permitting a Christian cross to be erected should examine the U.S. dollar bill, which bears the phrase "In God We Trust." Or perhaps they could attend the opening session of Congress, which begins with a prayer.

Does the county's use of a cross promote

Christianity? Some would say yes, because rather than putting up a symbol of another religion such as Judaism or Hinduism, a cross is put up.

Those who are against the use of a cross are concerned that it could offend people of other religions. They also wonder what the county would do if it was an atheist who had died. The bottom line, in their opinion, is the constitutionality of displaying a religious symbol.

But in a country where freedom of religion is guaranteed, all too often it is freedom from religion that is enforced. Rather than being the tolerant nation that we claim to be, any sign of religious activity on the state's behalf is considered unacceptable.

The Harris County Attorney General's Office needs to lighten up. This is not a case of government establishing a religion. If it were, then county officials would run up to accident sites as soon as they occurred and post crosses, proclaiming Christianity right and left.

But the county erected the cross upon request of the widow, not upon their own religious convictions. And what is now at stake is her ability to poignantly remember the husband she lost, and for her government to help her to do so.

Harris County officials may fear erosion of the wall separating church and state, but it is their sensitivity to the mourning of citizens that has crumbled.

As they ponder the constitutionality of a small white cross, the marker will sit in the county attorney's office and Robert Shinn's death will continue to go unnoticed.

## Rock 'n' Roll fails to drum up Dole's campaign

Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman wouldn't give many people to vote for a presidential candidate — or would they? Bob Dole has mainly assumed he can use the music of the era so he has opted for rock music on the campaign.

Trying to gain uncommitted votes, he's gotten himself into some hot water by attempting to portray himself as someone he is not.

Artists and record companies are turning up the heat, questioning the ethics and legality of using the two songs "Soul Man" and "Born in the U.S.A." But Dole doesn't deserve all the heat. To anyone with half a brain — it's obvious Dole did not select the music. How many people can blame Dole in Levi's with a sleeveless T-shirt jamming to Bruce Springstein? And he surely can't get down with the Blues Brothers singing "Soul Man."

Someone on the Dole campaign made a big boo-boo when

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making the musical selections: Dole's fabricated image to appear cooler doesn't make him more appealing — it makes him appear that much more artificial.

In addition, the unfitting songs were used illegally. These kind of errors emphasize how hard Dole is trying to keep treading in the waters of mainstream America.

Dole might have believed he was in the clear when he used the song "Soul Man" by Sam and Dave. Although Sam (one of Dole's few African-American supporters) stood nearby as the lyrics were transformed to "Dole man," Dole's staff forgot to ask Sam if he owned the copyrights. Apparently Dole's staff should have consulted with Weird Al Yankovic about the technicalities. Randor Music soon sent a cease and desist letter to the campaign. Now Dole may be looking at a lawsuit for "illegal public performance without a license."

Bruce Springstein reacted with a

little more kindness than Randor Music, choosing not to sue Dole's campaign for their use of "Born in the U.S.A." Instead of waging a legal war, Springstein simply sent a fax stating: "Just for the record, I'd like to make clear that (the song) was used without my permission, and I am not a supporter of the Republican ticket."

Duh. Bruce Springstein represents the epitome of blue-collar America. Not many unions support republican capitalist philosophy.

But perhaps Springstein reacted rather mildly considering his past experiences. This is the second time Springstein has had to slap the wrist of the GOP: Back in 1984, Ronald Reagan also attempted to use "Born in the U.S.A."

Somebody should inform the Republican political strategists that rock artists generally do not support the Republican ticket. And they usually would not agree to having their songs used to promote ideologies in which they do not believe.

Dole has wasted his time attempting to tap this resource, anyway. With the publicity of MTV and support from many celebrities, Clinton already has this area under

## EDITORIAL

### THE BATTALION

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## BUILDING BONFIRE

### Redpots succeed at paving the way toward a better, safer Bonfire.

The Redpots should be commended for making a concerted effort toward improving safety at Bonfire cut.

Last week's changes in Cut regulations show the Redpots have gone out of their way to ensure the safety of students.

Changes in safety regulations were made after a Sept. 22 accident. One student was killed and nine were injured when a pick-up truck returning from Cut rolled over.

The most crucial change made was deciding to turn away any student who arrives in the back of a pick-up truck. In addition, local law enforcers were asked to regulate the roads going to Cut.

Last year, students in residence halls were awakened as early as 5:00 a.m. and now cut site does not even open until 7:30 a.m. and closes earlier.

Accidents have and will con-

tinue to occur at Bonfire, but that should not be an excuse to attack Bonfire, especially if the Redpots continue to enact and enforce safety regulations.

Safety is not the only area in which Bonfire is cleaning up its act.

Last year, the Redpots refused to allow the racist and sexist music that had been played at Stack in the past.

Such actions understandably make a larger percentage of the student body feel comfortable. By making Bonfire more inclusive, increased student participation will truly make Bonfire a tradition that everyone can contribute to.

Moreover, increased participation will hopefully allow the "fanatical few" to no longer have to sacrifice their grades.

The Redpots should continue to build on a more-inclusive attitude and continue to increase safety at Cut.



MAIL CALL

## Transgender story crosses the line

Regarding Marissa Alanis' Oct. 10 story, "Former cadet discusses transgender issues":

This is the last straw: For three years, the Batt has subjected me to newsless papers, an editorial page that I find disagreeable at best and offensive at worst and an unspoken attitude that I'm too stupid for my opinions about this paper to matter. Fine. Collect your award for being the best college paper in the country. Insist that you run a good paper and I just don't know it.

And while you're at it, return my student fees. That's right, I'm demanding a refund of my portion of the student services fee that pays for The Batt. I'm canceling my subscription, just like the Battalion was a real newspaper run for profit.

I encourage all you other morons who can't recognize the quality of the Batt to do the same. Landauer and company — print what you like. But don't expect us to pay for it any more.

to have had the civility to print such an article without having to associate it with the Corps of Cadets. Such feats are closer to tabloidism than journalism.

Jose Diaz de Leon  
Class of '98  
Accompanied by 34 signatures

## Uninitiated should not be trampled on

I heard something distressing from my girlfriend that unfortunately I've heard before concerning the grass at the Memorial Student Center.

She visited the A&M campus when she was 15 years old and not knowing any better, walked on the Memorial Student Center lawn.

Within a couple of seconds, somebody was screaming at her to get her "@#!" off of it!

She says the episode left her not only shaken and humiliated, but also with a deep resentment toward Aggies in general.

When a child walks on a grave, the parent doesn't scream at him to get off, she calmly explains why you shouldn't do so. The child understands, and isn't made to feel at fault for being ignorant of yet another of the rules society presents it.

Aggies are too good a people to use one of our finest traditions to lord it over the uninitiated.

Use the opportunity to educate visitors on our traditions and show them what being an Aggie truly means. They can only respect you the more for it.

Todd F. Miller  
Class of '86

## Corps shouldn't be dragged into rucus

First and foremost, I am unhappy with what the leadership of the Battalion was intending to achieve by publicizing, so prominently, a person who underwent a sex-change operation that was a former member of the Corps of Cadets. Was it because they feel that this article merits more attention than more relevant subjects? Or was it because the Battalion's Powers-That-Be wanted to see how the Corps, as a traditional Southern military institution, whose members are generally known to have rather conservative values, would react? I suspect the latter is a compelling reason for which the Battalion decided to promote the article in such an obvious manner.

Second, I believe that if alternate lifestyles was the primary concern of the Batt's article, it would have been a lot more tasteful as expected from a newspaper that represents a world-class University and the Keepers of its Spirit,

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