

Soft, Sweet & Southern

Hospitality sometimes viewed as sugar-coated malice

When I went to work in Washington, D.C., I found my speech style and mannerisms with me. On my arrival, I found a polite attitude was met with looks of confusion and bewilderment. My greetings of "Howdy" and "good morning" shocked most of the businessmen. Their usual response was a strange look, followed by an increased pace. During my stay, I was scolded for answering a friend with "Yes, I am." "I'm your friend, not your felter," she said. Ben, my roommate from New Jersey, asked me to talk to his mother, his sister, so they could hear my Texas twang. When I went back to New Jersey with him for Thanksgiving, I came a point of interest for his family. I was introduced to several members of Ben's family. Ben's roommate from Texas, Steve, it was some time before my new friends wore off, but even then I was always asked for a Texan's point of view on any topic of conversation. Of course every stereotype was assumed valid, and they attempted

Columnist



Steve May
Economics
Graduate student

to treat me accordingly. "You're from Texas? Well, let's have a drink of whiskey," Ben's uncle said. "I'm sorry this isn't the Thanksgiving you're used to, but I'm sure you will enjoy it," Ben's mom said, as I surveyed what I considered a normal holiday meal. In the cafeteria of my office building, I received such comments as "Let me guess, you're from Texas," or "What part of the South are you from?" After a few weeks of persistent niceties, I was able to convince the lunch ladies of my sincerity, and they began looking forward to my southern style each day.

"I thought at first it was condescending, but I found that it was the way they actually felt."

Orlando Medina
Senior management major

Such phrases as "Howdy" and "Yes, ma'am" seem normal to us, but some individuals, particularly northerners, find it annoying. Not everyone shares the southern tradition of hospitality and friendliness. Northerners who vis-

it the South find themselves wary of such unexpected kindness. To Aggies, however, it is a way of life.

Walk across campus and one will experience our traditional southern environment. Passers-by issue "Howdy's." Men on buses offer their seats to ladies. Doors are held open for women. It is not unusual to strike up a conversation with a complete stranger.

Where southern congeniality came from, no one is sure exactly. Eleena de Lisser, staff reporter of The Wall Street Journal, gives one possible hypothesis in her Oct. 29, 1996 article, "...the South's mannerly behavior may have had its origins in attempts to smooth out everyday dealings in a highly stratified society. Manners provided something of

a safety valve between blacks and whites in a time of racial segregation," she said. Sociologists say religion plays a part in southern manners.

The South seems to be a modern-day Camelot, where true

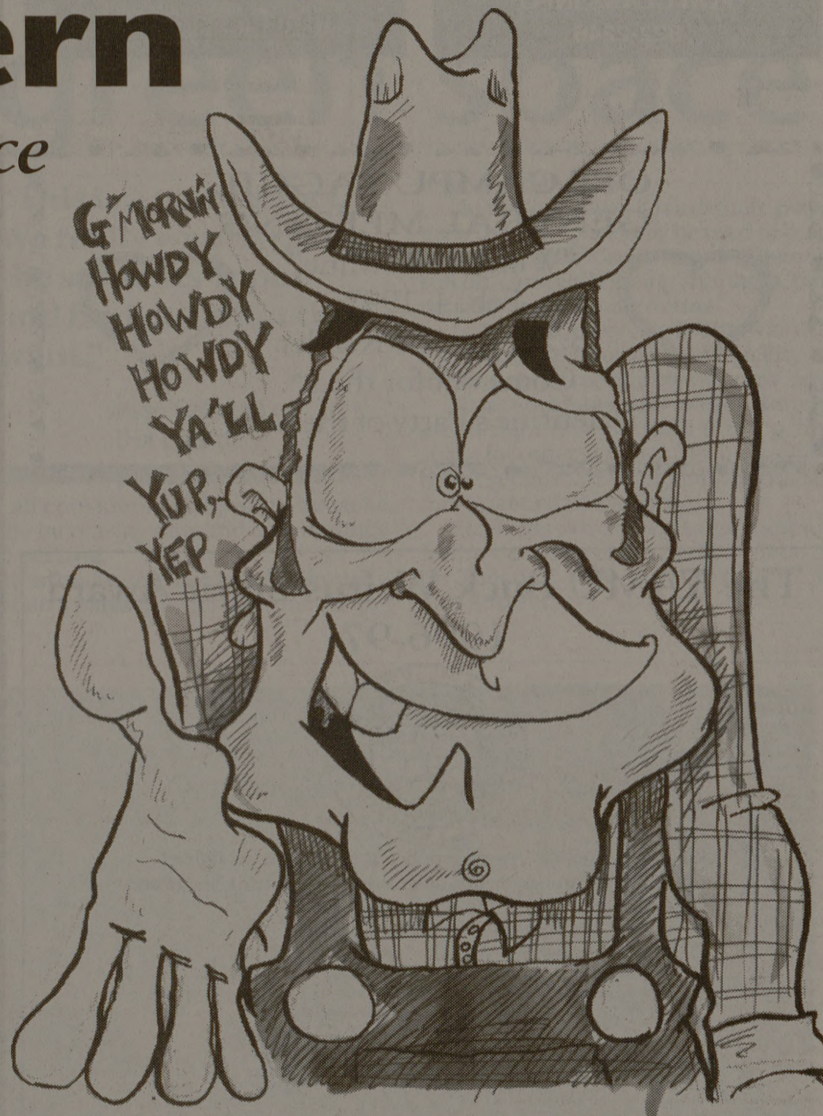
chivalry and gentility are not yet dead. God and womanhood are still revered and defended by some.

Our type of lifestyle is not free from false stereotypes, however, some regard southern manners as a means of manipulation or a way to sugar-coat malice. It is deemed annoying and insincere. Others see it as a sign of ignorance, because of our slow and laxadaisical speech patterns. Racism is yet another charge levied against southerners. In general these claims are incorrect, but unfortunately there are those who fit these descriptions. Bigoted individuals who hide behind claims of southern pride and heritage have done a disservice to all southerners.

Orlando Medina, a senior management major from New York, described the feeling of hospitality he received from Southerners when he first arrived.

"I thought at first that it was condescending, but I found that it was the way they actually felt," he said. "Now I feel more comfortable here than back home."

Southern manners and our general way of life may not be for everyone. This musters a simple response from true southerners: "If you don't like it, go home."



University gets much needed tutoring in finance

The following is a memorandum to all Texas A&M University students and faculty, addressing issues concerning university funding problems.

TO: Texas A&M
FROM: Administrators, Higher-Ups, and other Powers that Be

RE: Funding Proposal

We would like to thank everyone for their suggestions about how we can solve A&M's recent funding dilemma. Among the more popular ideas were mandatory trips to a plasma center, participating in studies about toenail fungus and converting the Reed Arena construction site into a giant Jenga game. Even though all these suggestions are brilliant, we have decided the best course for A&M to take: independent funding. PTTS and the Athletic Department have been independently funded for a long time. Look how well they function. Since they're independently funded, we can all sleep at night knowing our hard-earned student fees are not being wasted. PTTS handles all of

Columnist



Stephen Llano
Senior
History major

its own funding through revenue from parking tag and space sales and the ticketing of improperly parked vehicles. The Athletic Department installed a beautiful grass field with money collected through contributions.

Because of these successes, we've decided to make as many things as possible independently funded so we can get this university back on track.

First of all, academic departments deserve the privilege to fend for themselves. Imagine the joy of a new student conference organized like a career fair where every department recruits students based on their own standards. Glossy recruiting brochures will give all students a great feeling about their new location. Only money from those students in the department will be available for departmental endeavors. At the end of each semester, students with good grades could become free agents and transfer to the department that offered them the most for their academic dollar.

The residence halls also deserve this opportunity. Our financial picture would be much better if we made every hall independently funded. Instead of hall councils, each dorm would have a board of direc-

tors to determine the best room rate to set and which features to advertise in their apartment-style brochure. If a hall wasn't successful, it could be easily subject to a hostile takeover by one of its neighbors, or merge peacefully to create a "megadorm." If these halls feel the need to provide for their own defense from such hostile moves, perhaps they could pool funds to create a strike force or small army. Just picture small, squabbling empires (like the Middle East), and you have our vision of on-campus housing.

For those who may already be nervous about such drastic changes in policy, never fear. We realize things might go wrong, and our estimates may not be as solid as we think. For example, the Reed Arena land sale may have a few people worried about our credibility in estimating the success of fiscal projects. We didn't know land valued in 1985 at \$13 million would be worth only \$1 million to buyers in 1996. But don't worry — University President Ray Bowen has everything under control. According to a story in The Eagle, he said the University has enough money in student fees to cover

the project costs. Nothing is a better example of the high integrity of our institution than our ability to cover our mistakes with money collected for other purposes. It will be a shame if the student body does not have a fancy arena in which to watch basketball. Of course, revenue generated from the arena will make everything just fine. Our current monetary loss

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is nothing compared to the sentiments of congratulation future students will bestow on you, the students, who made it financially possible. Maybe if you're still alive by the time it's completed you can come by and enjoy a game or two.

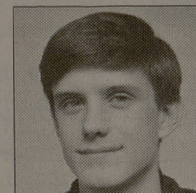
After all of these funding changes go into effect, we can finally ignore those silly educational institution rankings and see Texas A&M where it really belongs — listed in the pages of Fortune 500 magazine with one of the best profit margins in the country. We will be sending out a memo later explaining how you can get your very own Texas A&M, Inc. bumper sticker.

Texas schools need financial fix

Voucher system leads to fairness and quality

Texas' public schools are in a crisis. Currently, the state provides 47 percent of public school funding. This means 53 percent must be raised through property taxes. By the year 2000, most school districts will tax at the highest rate allowed by our state constitution. Even then, schools will be underfunded. Though "Robin Hood" addresses the unfair distribution of funding, it does not ensure adequate cash. Texas' current system of finance earned a "C" rating for adequacy and a "D" for fairness and equity from Education Week magazine. Clearly, Texas' system of school finance must be overhauled.

Columnist



Donny Ferguson
Sophomore
Political science major

digits and still provide better schools. Balancing the state budget grows more difficult because of rising education costs. Texas simply cannot afford not to adopt school vouchers.

School vouchers give the 25 percent of Texas children who live in poverty the opportunity to attend the same schools as more privileged children. The adoption of vouchers would change quality education from a privilege enjoyed by the wealthy into a right for all. Minorities, traditionally the poorest Texans, would benefit the most. Given the ability to choose their children's school, would put Texas' poor on a level playing field with the rich. Professor Ben Chavis, a Native American teaching at San Francisco State, said, "Choice (in education) empowers, and empowerment eliminates discrimination."

School vouchers erase racial, social and economic lines and equalize opportunity. They give the poor and minorities, who usually attend underfunded, inadequate public schools, the chance to attend traditionally white private schools of higher quality, conquering the inherent bias that the current school finance system fosters. Increasing scarcity of education funds and unfair distribution are growing problems in Texas. Our children's futures under the current wasteful, biased system is high unemployment, inferior skills and a growing disparity between rich and poor.

For Texas to compete with the world in the 21st century, we must abolish the current system of school finance, steeped in waste and bias, and adopt the socially progressive, cost-effective voucher system.

School vouchers erase racial, social and economic lines and equalize opportunity.

Last Wednesday, Gov. George W. Bush proposed cutting property taxes, raising the sales tax and creating a business activity tax to pay for it. In reality, no amount of tax-rate tinkering will solve the problem. If school's finance troubles are to be resolved and education in Texas saved, Bush, Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock and House Speaker Pete Laney must add a new word to their legislative lexicons: vouchers.

Under the voucher system, the state's share of education funding is converted into checks, like college financial aid. The vouchers will be distributed to parents, by need, to pay for public, private or parochial school tuition. Vouchers are immensely cost-effective, slashing education expenses. Texas spends over \$5000 on public education per student. Private school tuition averages \$2,000, one-half the cost of public education. Private school students consistently test well in reading and math skills, but their public school counterparts lag far behind. Vouchers mean better results at a lower price. Texas could theoretically slash property taxes (one of Bush's goals), cut the budget by double



MAIL CALL

Lost antique ring cherished by owner

People lose things all the time, sometimes it isn't a big deal and sometimes it is.

At the same time, people are always finding things. I think the phrase "finders keepers" was devised to make it O.K. to keep what you find, especially when there is no way of knowing who to return it to, or how to figure it out.

Many times it is impossible, but this time I hope it's not. I lost a ring. I know what you're thinking, I might as well say adios to the ring because it's gone. But I can't say adios because it has a lot of sentimental value to me.

My grandmother, a beautiful and very special woman, died of cancer just two days after Christmas this year. Some people live for years with cancer, but my grandmother got only a couple of months. I wasn't ready for her to go yet, I never even thought of her as old...she was so full of life. After she died, my uncle gave me her jewelry boxes. One night I sifted through her jewelry, most of it was very old and not something a 21 year-old girl would wear, but I found this silver ring that had a circular design with little rhinestones in it. I

put it on to see if it fit, and it did, like a glove.

Last Friday night, Jan. 17th, I went to a party at apartment 33 in Sundance Apts. off Harvey Road. We weren't there 20 minutes and I realized that the ring wasn't on my finger. I was wearing gloves and I think when I took them off, it fell off without me noticing. I don't know who might have found an antique looking silver ring at a party, please contact me. My name is Carrie and my phone number is 260-3116. If it was any ring, I would accept the loss, but this ring helped me to deal with my grandmother's death. It comforted me somehow. Please call.

Carrie Southard
Class of '98

Meloeny's grief shared by student

After reading Elizabeth Meloeny's column about the death of her twin brother, I couldn't help but feel compassion for her.

I also couldn't help comparing her feelings to the feelings that I had when my older brother, also an Aggie passed away 3 years ago. I just wanted to extend my sympathy to her and her family while

they are in their time of need. When I was in Elizabeth's place, all I wanted was for someone to go through what I had gone through so they would know the pain that I felt. Now that it is 3 years later, I would never wish such a tragedy upon anyone. I wanted to let Elizabeth know that even though I don't know her, I know her sorrow and hurt that she's feeling right now. I even know how she will feel standing in front of Old Sullie at Silver Taps and how she will feel sitting on the gym floor at G. Rollie White for Muster, answering "Here" for Paul. Because I, too, have done those things for my only brother, Jake.

It does get better and things will look up, I promise. Elizabeth, thousands of people out there are praying for you and your family. Just hang in there and be strong, especially for your parents. For there's nothing worse than seeing your own child die before you do. Keep Paul in your memories and he'll never leave.

Heather Adams
Class of '99

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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