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# Challenging Webster

Removing racial slur from dictionary keeps people from learning about the past



**ROBBY RAY**  
columnist

Language has a responsibility to provide definitions for all words a speaker of the language is likely to encounter. This includes words which are offensive, obscene or even downright useless.

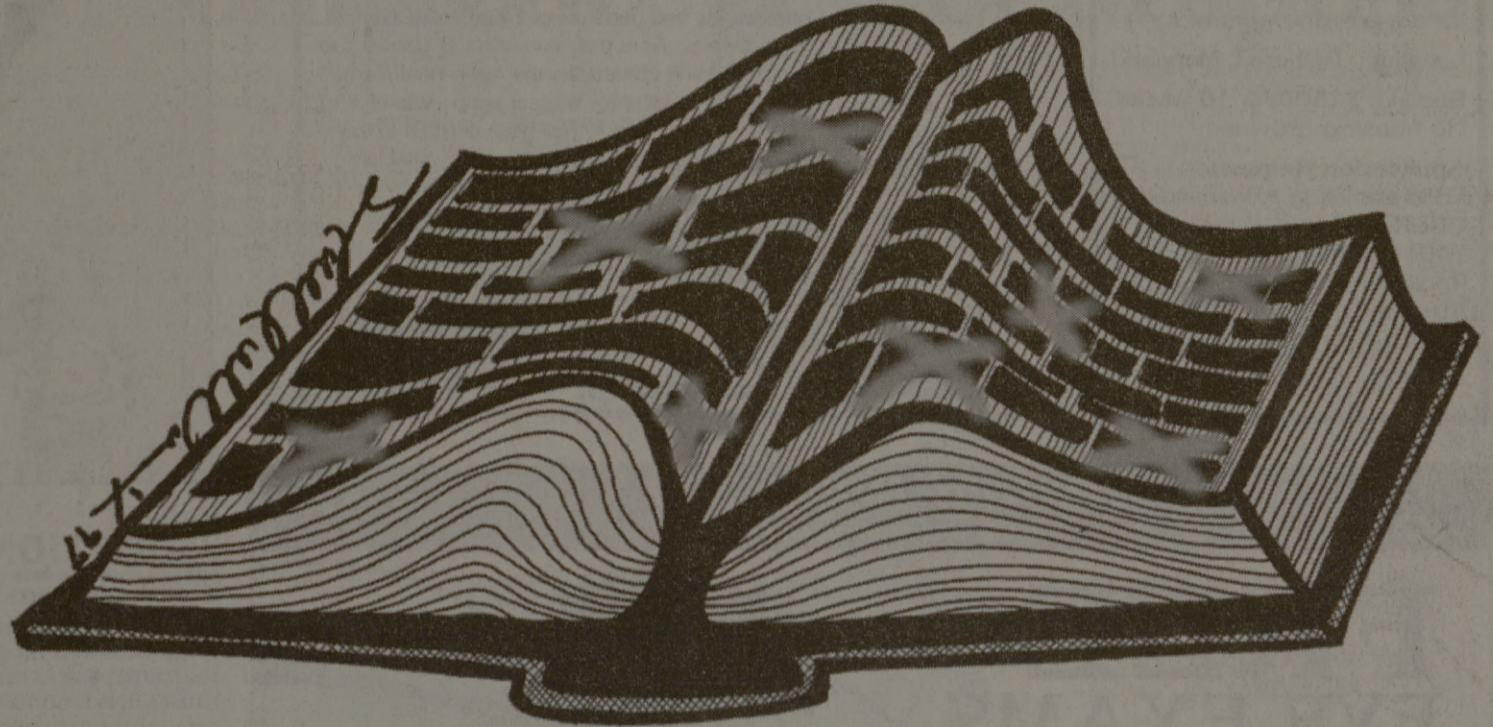
As long as people are likely to come in contact with a word and possibly need to know what it means or how to spell it, it should remain in the dictionary.

This situation shows the lengths people will go to in order to protect themselves against anything that might be offensive or uncomfortable. The reality of the world is that it is still an offensive place, and its inhabitants still have to deal with things which might be offensive or might make us uncomfortable.

The word "nigger" is one of these unpleasant things. It was once a common noun with none of the stigma that now weighs it down like so much sticky mud. It has been used as an insult and a symbol of degradation for so many years that it can never recover its former innocence. But it is still a part of our language.

It is widely used in many great works of American literature, some of which were written before the modern connotation existed, and some which used it precisely because of its offensive nature. This usage is either to make a point about the evils of racism or to accurately portray the deplorable conditions that actually existed in this country.

The crime being perpetrated here is not by the publisher of the dictionary. In a carefully worded statement, the publisher stated "... the use of this word is abhorrent to us, but it is nevertheless part of the language."



There also was a paragraph added to the most recent edition (published before the petition drive), stating that "nigger" ranks as perhaps the most offensive and inflammatory racial slur in all of the English language.

The publisher is living up to the responsibility to provide an accurate dictionary. The real crime here is some people would wish to censor a scholarly work in order to keep themselves

from feeling uncomfortable.

If Americans want to be truly serious about eliminating racism and its accompanying slurs and epithets, there must be a concerted effort among all people to stop using such offensive and divisive words as "nigger," including those who use it among friends as something akin to a term of endearment. It is hard to convince others of a word's offensiveness if it is

known to be widely used among those whom it is supposed to offend.

The bottom line is this: racial slurs are offensive and should be avoided, but if we remove them from our dictionaries, it will be impossible for future generations to learn from the mistakes of the past.

*Robby Ray is a senior speech communications major.*

# Zero tolerance ignores personal responsibility to tame drinking

Do not do this. Do not do that. Does it ever seem to end? Recently it does not seem until an inebriated individual has reached the age of 21, it seems an individual is given an insight of passage and to exercise more over the intimate of his or her life. Only, the state of Texas has a "zero tolerance" concerning minors and alcohol. It is a state Bill 35.



**LEN CALLAWAY**  
columnist

those driving under the influence of alcohol were given citations for simple possession or DWI's for actually driving while intoxicated.

The new legislation makes it illegal for minors to operate a motor vehicle with any detectable amount of alcohol in their systems. This is regarded as a class C misdemeanor, punishable by a fine and temporary suspension of a person's drivers license. Repeat offenders face jail time, community service work hours and alcohol awareness classes.

The worst part of SB 35 is, if caught with any measurable amount of alcohol in one's system, this is now an arrestable offense, and minors may be "detained" at an officer's discretion for a blood or breath analysis.

Officers also have been given the ability to issue a citation to minors in violation if they do not appear to be suffering "actual or apparent impairment of their driving faculties and reactions."

The state does not seem to make a lot of sense at times, but at least it is finally consistent with something. If an act is illegal, then let

it be illegal and enforce the law befitting. This, however, does not mean the law is good, justified or otherwise appropriate. The only factor making alcohol worse than tobacco is the fact that it intoxicates. What would the state do if a 17-year-old had a wreck and confessed to being temporarily unable to drive due to a wicked Marlboro buzz?

Our lawmakers have decided at age 18, young people should be responsible enough to vote, smoke cigarettes, dip snuff and buy pornography. Young people are not responsible enough, however, to have a couple of drinks, make their way home and continue with their evenings.

The State believes young people, as a whole, are not responsible enough to handle the responsibility of drinking. They may be right, but why is that?

Young people must realize if they ever want the laws to change, they must begin to behave in a respectable manner. How many times can one see a student being dragged out of a bar or party so drunk that they are rendered a virtual waste of a human for the night?

Everyone knows where there is a will there is a way, and if one's ultimate goal is to drink in a bar, this feat can certainly be accomplished without too much trouble.

If minors wish to improve their position with the government, they could do one of two things. They could obey the law and be good little boys and girls, or become a little more responsible with their actions.

If a person has a serious designated driver, it is safe to assume, barring complete indiscretion in excess drinking, one could live his or her life the way he or she chooses in relative comfort.

It is the stupidity and naivete of certain actions which make the situation appear worse than it really is. Lawmakers never hear about kids who do what they wish and go home. They do, however, hear about kids who kill families and friends due to sheer irresponsibility. Until minors exhibit the dependability to properly handle themselves, it is unreasonable to expect any other treatment from the state than zero tolerance.

*Len Callaway is a junior journalism major.*

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A&M University

## Column tricks

of research  
John Burton's Oct. 31 sports column: "The devil worship, my column: ..."

his necessary research before writing his column on the "evils of Halloween."

He mentioned something about the public's "... naivete about the real meaning of Halloween ..." and I suddenly remembered, while pursuing his column, when and why Halloween got its start.

It began many years ago, and its concept was an attempt to scare or ward off evil spirits (or "dark forces" as Burton called them) from invading homes, destroying crops and occupying towns. Who's naive now, Burton?

Another holiday that Burton labeled as "satanic" was Dia de los Muertos. This Mexican tra-

dition is familiar to me because of my Mexican heritage. It is not a holiday to celebrate evil, but a celebration to remember deceased relatives or loved ones, and to take time out of busy schedules to reminisce of past fun.

Often, many participants bring food or gifts for the dead and often times, they also dress as skeletons and such which Burton referred to as "grotesque."

Honestly, when was the last time you saw an educational documentary on Egyptian mummies or discoveries of past civilization skeletal remains and said to yourself, "My, my ... what an absolutely beautiful decaying corpse."

The costumes symbolize the dead people are celebrating and are not meant to be grotesque ... well, not too grotesque.

Burton also brought up views expressed by Pat Robertson, such as "... children who accept candy on Halloween will grow up to be sexually promiscuous drug dealers ..." I believe this was way out of line.

I would have to concede that Robertson's statement received about as much research (or less) as did Burton's column.

After all, I would estimate roughly one-quarter of the students on the Texas A&M campus, including myself, have trick or treated at one time or another.

Although I have no concrete evidence of these figures I really do not think there are 10,000 crack-singing whores, male or female, running around College Station or on the A&M campus. I think the number of aforementioned individuals is much lower than that ... possibly 5,000.

Of course, I was merely trying to interject some humor into this entire situation with that last statement, but I also was proving a point.

Burton's column was full of statements that had no statistical backing, such as the one I just made.

I know everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion, and I am overjoyed we live in a country where this is possible.

All I am asking is if we are going to make a statement some people might deem as inane, be prepared to back up the statement with some fact.

*Kevin M. Woods  
Class of '99*

## A&M football players deserve better coach

In response to Len Callaway's Oct. 31 sports column:

I do agree with you when you say we need to be positive about the players. They put their hearts and souls into Texas A&M football.

I also want to apologize to them for being promised a shot at the national championship and that not being fulfilled. The players have worked long and hard all year for gameday. What I do not agree with is the way you make excuses for R.C. Slocum.

When will Slocum win a big game? If you call beating up on Southwest Conference schools a record, then you can have it. I am tired of beating up on small teams and getting "out-coached" by mediocre teams.

I realize that last-minute canceling had a say in our schedule this year, but the scheduling does not get any better until the year 2000.

On another note, how many offensive coordinators will Slocum have to fire in order to have an offense? We change coordinators every year, but the offense still looks the same.

The point I am trying to make is there already are a number of excuses and there does not need to be anymore. A&M will never finish in the top-five because our coach is not a top-five coach.

I wish Slocum would return part of his salary, because we all have been short changed. We have athletes who beat most programs, but we are lacking

the major ingredient.

For the University's sake, I hope Slocum proves me wrong. This way everyone can call me an idiot, but I do not see this happening too soon.

Mackovic may be a bad coach, but at least he knew how to win The Big 12.

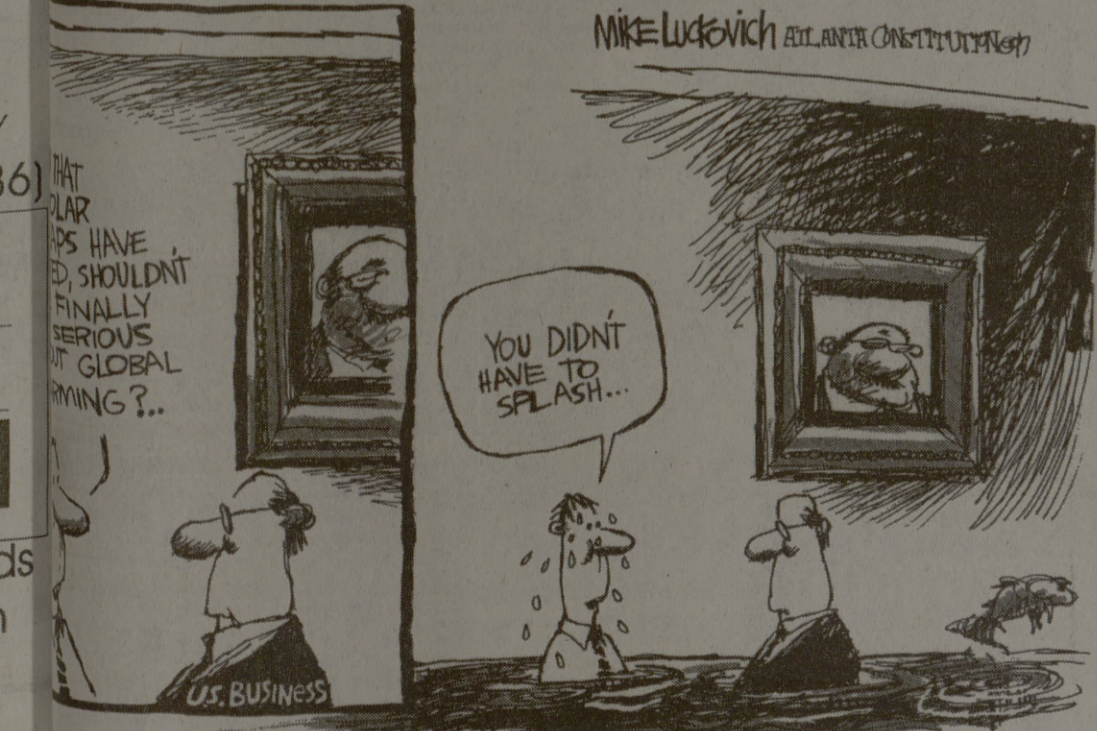
It seems that the A&M Board of Regents could care less about sports and will not pressure Bowen or Groff to do anything.

If you ask me, Slocum should and Groff should be on the next bus out of College Station.

Callaway, the next time you write a column, please include: Slocum's record against ranked teams, his bowl record (before probation) and the combined record of the teams he has beaten.

If any of this changes, only then will I listen to the excuses. By the way, how many timeouts do we get to keep for the next game?

*Ross Brewer  
Class of '97*



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