

ONE STAR LOWDOWN

I am a long, tall Texan

Oprah Winfrey's portrayal of Texans degrades, reinforces old stereotypes

am not a ... hick."



BEVERLY MIRELES
columnist

quote is my own, and e, it is completely true. anyone who watches Oprah Winfrey Show" believe me. For the past weeks, she has been giving me a hard time on my image, age — the whole state's — by making all Texans look like bumpkins on her "in Texas" shows. Maybe I should sue for libel. Wait, that's been done. I am completely honest. I am not a huge fan of Oprah. Her interviews, and I use the term annoy me. It is because she interrupts people when they are trying to make a point. When I met Gandhi it was the greatest mo-

ment of my life. He leaned over and told me the meaning of life. He said —

Oprah: You know, that reminds me of the first time I met Elton John. See, we're really good friends because we both own a lot of expensive things. Let's break for commercial.

Okay, sure, I made that up. But it is annoying, isn't it? Now that she is in Texas, there is something she does that bothers me much more than her tendency to interrupt people.

She makes Texans seem like bronco-riding, boot-wearing, ain't-saying morons with big hair and really slow accents. Oprah might as well start her show by saying, "Instead of having Maya Angelou on, I'll just make fun of millions of people. Is that ok, you all?"

Um, no. I like living in Texas, and I am basically Southern, that is for sure. My hometown of China, Texas, is really rural. "Going to town" rural. As in, "I am going to town to buy some lottery tickets and Jell-O." I have

drunk well water, fed livestock and I overuse the word "y'all." That does not mean that I wear a cowboy hat everyday and have an oil well in my back yard. If I did, I wouldn't know what FASFA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) meant.

Yes, I know how to two-step. And yet, I manage to live my life without two-stepping all that much. I know there are people who actually enjoy going out and country line dancing, the poor, misguided souls. That is just fine for them. Not for me, but for people who enjoy it, it is just peachy.

Line dancing or wearing boots does not mean that you are a second-class citizen or that you are planning to marry your cousin. Only special people like Jerry Lee Lewis and Edgar Allen Poe can pull off stuff like that.

(Non-Texans). Truthfully, I really doubt that Oprah means any of her comments in a derogatory way. And it isn't that she is the only person with a tendency toward

stereotyping Texans.

In February's Vogue, there is a 19-page spread on Texas fashion, with lots of Gucci dresses and a cowboy hat on every head. Well, yee-haw. Now I know what to wear to the rodeo.

The generalizations get really old, really quickly. Lifestyles in Texas, or any other state, do not follow one set pattern.

Some Texans live on ranches, some live on artists' communes and some just live in suburbia. When people attempt to make people in Texas look like one long "Dukes of Hazard" episode, they are doing an injustice to all of us.

So, to Oprah and the rest of the world: the meaningless stereotypes you have placed on Texans grow less applicable everyday. And the next time you feel like ridiculing large groups of people, try people from Montana. They are wackos.

Beverly Mireles is a freshman microbiology major.

TE OF THE UNION

Minimum wage increase poses problems



DONNY FERGUSON
columnist

After an election year of inactivity, the Era of Big Government has officially resumed. In the name of the Union, President Bill Clinton proposed, among other things, a minimum wage increase. No one wants poverty, but as most liberal causes, minimum wage symbolism over-

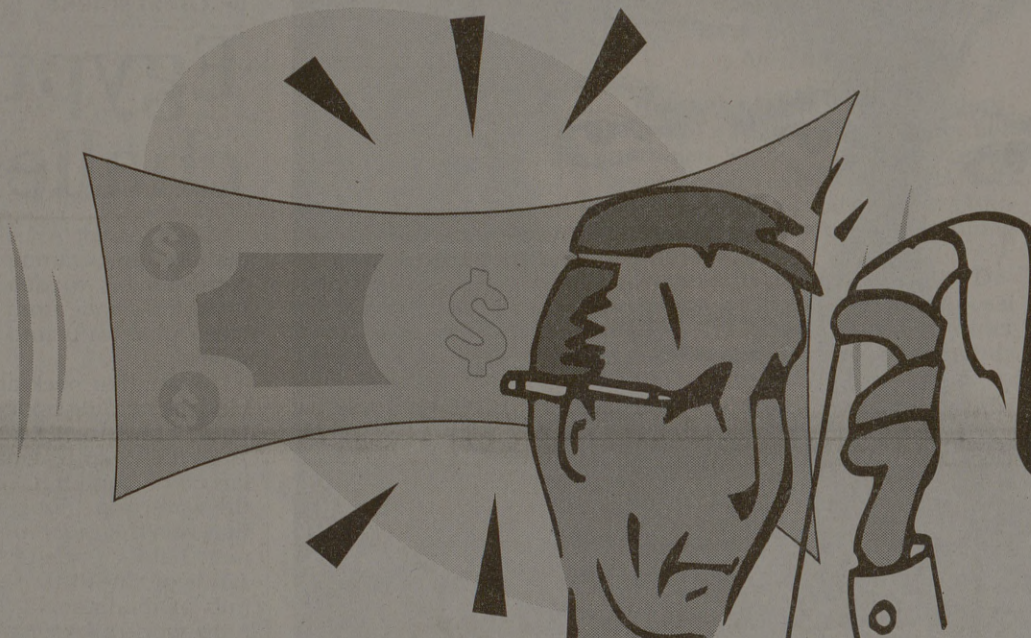
reaches and inflicts pain on whom they show phony compassion. It creates unemployment, raises prices for those who can least afford it and is based on a bigly-packaged bundle of misconceptions. Raising the minimum wage means thousands of jobs and higher prices for food, clothing and medicine. The minimum wage increase is a bad idea for all Americans.

Despite what Democrats claim, a minimum wage increase will not help working families feed their children simply because minimum wages do not feed and clothe children. Percent are between the ages of 16 and 24, and most work jobs part-time and 80 percent of households earning \$50,000 or more.

Raising minimum wage are bus boys and waitresses, whose total income when combined with tips, is as much as \$40,000 annually. Only eight percent of minimum wage earners support a family, and according to the Congressional Budget Office, 63 percent advance to pay levels within a year. Minimum-wage earners are not mothers and fathers dependent on \$5.50 an hour to feed a family. They are entry-level positions, many at their first job.

Minimum wage earners work at fast-food restaurants, mow lawns and work for newspapers, and an overwhelming majority do not support families. As usual, Democrats do not gain political victory by inciting class war and spreading misconception. Minimum-wage increases also have the unintended effect of raising the prices of goods for those who do not enjoy the higher wage (and minimum wage earners are disappointed that their prices rise along with their paychecks). Higher wages mean higher operating costs, higher operating costs force businesses to raise prices or go out of business. Those hard-hit by the minimum wage increase are the disabled and on public assistance, living on small, fixed allowances, now to pay higher prices for essential goods like food and medicine. But actual compassion was the liberals' goal, only the appearance of compassion in an election year.

The most heinous effect of minimum-wage increases is the subsequent unemployment. As government interferes with business and forces wages, business must either raise prices



(hurting consumers) or hire fewer workers. If employers pay more for unskilled labor, fewer jobs become available, forcing many onto the unemployment rolls, and those already there are prevented from climbing back into the work force.

A 1988 Congressional Budget Office study showed proposed minimum-wage increases could result in a half-million lost jobs, and those hurt most are the young, minorities and women. A study by Texas A&M economists Dr. Donald Deere and Dr. Finis Welch, and University of Chicago economist Dr. Kevin M. Murphy show the devastating effects of the minimum wage on those who already suffer economically.

According to the study, "we estimate that during the year of the \$3.80 hourly minimum, 4.8 percent fewer teenage men were employed than would have been if the \$3.35 minimum had been retained. The corresponding reductions for teenage women and teenage blacks are 6.6 percent and 7.5 percent."

Historically, Democrats claim to fight for prosperity for many instead of wealth for a few. Their stance on the minimum wage, which tosses untold numbers into unemployment to give more to a few, is amusingly hypocritical. The difference is, although minimum wage increases hurt the poor, minorities and women, at least they make Democrats sound nice on TV.

Perhaps someone should ask Bill Clinton, since the minimum wage is supposed to be a compassionate, livable wage, why Democrats have not proposed a \$10 or even a \$100-per-hour minimum wage. After all, if Democrats are correct and minimum wage earners are mothers and fathers trying to feed their kids and put them through college, these people should be making a comfortable living, instead

of being forced to live on \$5.50 an hour.

The answer is simple. They know the minimum wage hurts, not helps, workers. To force business to pay unskilled labor the same pay as older, skilled workers would ensure economic disaster. They settle instead for a tiny, symbolic increase, just enough to buy a few votes with the phony compassion synonymous with the Democratic Party, but not enough to derail the economy.

Clinton's minimum-wage increase is yet another election-year attempt to incite class warfare and mislead the public. Minimum-wage earners do not support families. They are not doomed to a life of flipping burgers and writing for college newspapers, and they usually advance within a year. Minimum wage increases do not help the poor, but they create unemployment and raise the prices of food, clothing and medicine.

But then again, liberals have never been interested in actual results. They care only about the sugar-coated symbolism of their actions and how much it pays off at the ballot box. "Let's raise the minimum wage," they say, "and if we can salvage votes from the ensuing class warfare — good job. And if it casts thousands into unemployment and prices the poor out of food, clothing and medicine — to hell with them. At least we meant well."

Government interference in business should be a matter of what is best for workers. Democrats, however, see the destructive and economically devastating minimum wage increase as an opportunity to steal political victory at the expense of working Americans.

Donny Ferguson is a junior political science major.

PERSPECTIVES

Prisons fail to rehabilitate; create violent criminals

The night has come again. The night with its dark, heavy air. Tossing and turning on the lumpy top bunk, you attempt to ignore the catcalls and threats from the other side of the concrete. The dampness and smell of urine invade your nose as the walls again close in around you. Sounds like rehabilitation, doesn't it?

America has found a new industry — a prosperous industry that provides quite a cash cow. No, not computers or nuclear engineering — we're talking about prisons.

The prison system in the United States is booming. People applaud and politicians win elections based on the economic prosperity prison growth creates. However, this revenue comes at a cost. The cost is the failure of the prison system to do its job.

When one thinks of jails, one thinks of violent criminals being locked away, protecting innocent citizens. Although that is an important facet of the system, it is not the most important one. The real duty of prisons is to attempt to rehabilitate criminals.

American prisons are bulging at the seams. This boom should not bring about applause, but instead, fear. American prisons are creating hardened criminals faster than jails can be built to house them.

Take for instance your first-time criminals convicted of possession of narcotics. These people are in jail for taking drugs that damage their own bodies. Under the current system, these individuals have little hope of rehabilitation.

Rather than sentences which focus on drug treatment or counseling, they are shipped off to prisons where they may be sharing space with violent offenders.

The environment behind bars is more violent than most inner-city crime areas. Drug trafficking, assault and rape are only a few of the events common to prison life. Small-time criminals are thrust into a world that forces its inhabitants to swim with the sharks. It is a world where one must be tough or face the consequences.

There is little hope a life like this will encourage rehabilitation. More often than prison officials would probably care to count, jails are on a revolving-door system. Would-be one-time offenders are taught a violent lifestyle for survival behind bars. This attitude, unfortunately accompanies them when they reemerge into society. As a result, repeat offenders are created.

Results such as these could be easily avoided if the American system of justice focused punishment on the crimes they accompany. Instead of teaching people violence, it would be more productive to attempt to understand the crimes committed and take preventive measures to ensure these people do not return to a life of crime.

In Massachusetts, state officials faced two lawsuits concerning a practice of taking DNA from convicts and parolees. An Associated Press story reported the information was used to compile a database of "the molecular makeup of 33 categories of convicted criminals, including prostitutes, rapists and murderers."

A Superior Court judge demanded the practice be halted since the practice allows for the "possibility of wrongful criminal prosecution if DNA sampling is not properly done." Since detailed state regulations for the sampling do not currently exist, the possibility is quite real. The question of whether this practice is constitutional aside, this sampling stands as a slap in the face of the justice system.

The money and time spent implementing a program such as this would better serve society if they were channelled toward crime prevention and rehabilitation. Instead, practices such as this sampling send the message criminals are expected to return to a life of crime.

Legislation in California raises similar concerns. Legislators in that state have decided crime will be curtailed by eliminating weights from their prisons. Additionally, law books will no longer be accessible to prisoners in prisons such as Folsom. These books provide convicts with a mechanism for better understanding of the law.

At the other end of the spectrum is the dilemma of white-collar criminals. These individuals, often high-profile members of the business world, serve their sentences in posh country-club prisons where rehabilitation is equally as unlikely to occur. Instead of being catered to, their crimes should involve financial retribution — a punishment that would hit them where it hurts.

Essentially, it simply is time for the prison system to step up and do its job. Whether it is creating hardened criminals or catering to influential white-collar convicts, it is time for the system to be reevaluated. It is time for punishments to fit the crimes they accompany.

As for Americans, the time has come to realize the economic boost from prison building comes at a cost, and that, in the end, these costs will hit Americans in places even more important than their pocketbooks.



MANDY CATER
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MAIL CALL

concert date shows

of consideration

a senior at this university, I waited for the privilege of wearing my ring for four years. I thought I would attend Ring Dance and would be one of the high-

lights of my life at A&M. Unfortunately, I feel that my expectations of the evening will not be met due to the inconsiderate actions of the Athletic Department, who believes it is above and beyond the rules and regulations followed by the rest of the University.

They do not feel that the Mark Chesnutt concert it is hosting will conflict with Ring Dance, both scheduled for April 25; that simultaneous events occur all the time at A&M. That may be true, but this will be two major crowd-drawing events across the street from each other.

Ring Dance is a tradition that most people wait years to attend. One would think that the Athletic Department could at least respect that. How many other evenings could they have chosen that

would not have conflicted with the one night seniors have to get together and celebrate a great tradition at A&M?

The Athletic Department said that they do not believe the noise from the concert on Kyle Field will be a problem. I am assuming that a concert with an estimated 20,000 fans will be louder than the Aggie Band at halftime which can be heard all over campus. Besides the fact that I didn't realize I might have to walk several miles in a formal because no one considered where 20,000 plus people would park.

Everyone at this university is somehow interconnected and subject to the same guidelines. It is unfortunate that my ideas of Ring Dance may not be met because of the lack of consideration of the

Athletic Department in planning their event

Marissa Schultz
Class of '98

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