

The price of money in America

College students without wealth gain more benefits than students with unlimited monetary resources

Ramen noodles, late rent payments and trips to the plasma depository are the distinguishing marks of the poor college student.



GLENN JANIK

While being a poor student may depress some, the state of poverty many Aggies experience is actually a positive force in their education. Students who live in poverty have a competitive edge over the sport-utility driving, sun-tanning hordes of financially well-to-do.

This may sound backwards, but poverty is power. Despite Puff Daddy claiming it is "all about the Benjamins," poor students gain invaluable survival skills by fending for their own food, shelter and financial well-being.

The first skill poor students gain is the art of budgeting. If Mom and Dad drop a grand into Joe Aggie's account every month, the word "budget" becomes simply a term on an economist's test.

For the downtrodden Aggie, however, the budget is a Bible. Allocating money for rent and bills, then trying to squeeze out money for food and gas is a delicate and intellectual process.

University of Oklahoma student Racheal Scholten has developed a Web page to help poor college students construct a workable budget. Unfortunately, most of her tips are as tasteless as meatless Hamburger Helper.

She recommends poor students eliminate soda and frozen dinners to save money. Scholten also suggests saying goodbye to Tide, Mrs. Baird's and Kellogg's and saying hello to generic products.

While budgeting and cost-cutting may sound like a superb skill to possess, it seems that the results — off-brand food and tap water — are hard to swallow. However, when students are forced to live poorly, they learn to live within their means.

All Aggies have seen the Abercrombie-adorned masses waltz across campus, but when Mom and Dad stop the student-welfare, how will rich students adjust to being under-

paid 20-somethings?

This transition period may lead some to max credit cards in order to maintain their college standard of living. However, if a student was poor in college, he or she will already be accustomed to paltry funds.

Being poor in college is also beneficial because it does not allow students to take the easy road. For poor college students, skipping classes and attending tutorial services is not an option, relying on professional review services for getting into medical school is impossible and joining a Greek organization to build a job network is too costly.

Instead, poor students are forced to rely on their own talents and work ethic to break down doors that are held open for well-to-do students.

A lack of money in college teaches self-reliance — a skill needed to move into management, start a business or survive the tough times of the real world.

The final lesson student poverty teaches is the art of being humble. Flaunted wealth in the form of fancy clothes and cars is an inescapable American phenomenon.

Perhaps, if students are able to experience life without money, they will not need to be dressed in gold when they finally do achieve a better standard of living. Their wealth will not need to be displayed in the forms of a fancy house or a \$60,000 car.

While poor college students do face many hurdles that wealthy students can simply avoid; the meek of Texas A&M are gaining a competitive edge everyday they battle to amke ends meet. The setting of budget instead of just buying what one wants is difficult.

Driving a 1985 Toyota Corolla is tough when the rest of the crowd is cruising in \$30,000 Tahoes. But poverty is the force that makes average Americans into great Americans. The lessons that come with lack of wealth are the instructions for becoming successful.

Remember, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Andrew Carnegie and Ronald Reagan were all raised in poverty.

Glenn Janik is a senior political science major.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

MAIL CALL

Media not responsible for decline of society

In response to Dave McManus' Mar. 1 mail call.

I have found in the past sometimes it is difficult to smile when having a picture taken. I would like to send my sincere thanks to Dave McManus, Pastor, Faith Almighty Mission, for alleviating this problem for me for the rest of my life.

"The Battalion is a stench in the nostrils of God?" What a beautiful, eloquent, visual metaphor.

Even if it accomplished nothing else, it makes you sound extremely open-minded, educated and caring; important qualities in any pastor. I am sure that the Almighty enjoys having references being made to His bodily caverns.

Now, I could talk about what a conservative you are by not "loving the sinner and hating the sin" but that is pretty overdone as is. Instead I would like to point out that we, as human beings, have this amazing power ... it is called free choice.

That is right, free choice. If you don't like a certain picture, don't look at it. I know, it seems like a pretty simple idea, I believe even preschool children are aware it exists. So, why did you not grasp the concept?

Oh wait, it is because you wanted to prove that *The Battalion* is an "integral part" of the "lack of decency in society" right?

There is nothing I enjoy more than listening to people try to pawn Society's problems off on the media. Is it because the media really is responsible for these problems, or is it because that person is too lazy and apathetic to do anything about them?

Why don't you spend half as

much time trying to do something about these problems as you spend trying to place blame for them if you really care about society's well being?

Scott Trexler
Class of '99

Accompanied by 10 signatures

Competition should lead to lower prices

In response to Christian Robbins' Feb. 26 opinion column.

This is in reply to the article "Local merchants need to stop taking advantage of Aggies." In it, it says that "students ... are being financially exploited" by businesses. It's all economics.

Businesses will charge whatever price people are willing to pay, be they college student or any other type of consumer. The market is blind to injustice, it simply seeks to satisfy supply and demand.

Why do businesses charge so much? Because they can. That is the beauty of our modified free-market capitalist economy. Businesses compete to earn a profit, and the best businesses survive. Such competition will lead to lower prices.

Luke Bolton
Class of '99

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less 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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Wealth without work just as detrimental to society as work without wealth, both sides need to find compromise

A growing urban myth has it that Bill Gates once thumbed his nose rather rudely at Attorney General Janet Reno.



CALEB MCDANIEL

When warned by Reno that he may be asked to pay a million dollar fine each month for several months, Gates is reputed to have let out a peal of devilish laughter, after which he replied, with a nerdy twinkle in his eye: "A million dollars? I make that much money in two hours."

Whether or not the story is actually true does not matter. What matters is how close to the truth it is.

While it may not be known whether Gates is actually so affected by his wealth, what is obvious is the obscene amount of money Gates and other wealthy individuals make.

When compared to the salary many poor workers eke out from day to day, it becomes obvious that disgusting displays of decadence coexisting with destitution are far too common in the world today. The rich grow richer while the needy stay needy.

Unfortunately, despite the growing disparity between rich and poor around the world, no one seems willing to claim the problem as his or her own.

Until both the rich and poor realize their own unique complicity in the problem, the social gap between wealth and want will never close.

But because most people persist in pointing the finger at everyone but themselves, that gap only seems to widen.

Those who are wealthy tend to blame poverty on a lack of personal responsibility and initiative among the poor. They insist America's wealthy are not account-

able for America's poor.

If Gates worked for his \$18 billion, he should be able to do what he wants to with it. It is his money and his business.

Meanwhile, defenders of the poor lay blame for the situation at the feet of the super rich.

It is absurd, they say, for one man to make millions of dollars more than he needs to live by barely lifting a finger.

Many poor families work long hours and live by the sweat of their brows. Their work ought to be rewarded with fair wages and decent standards of living, instead of letting the really rich get needlessly richer.

In reality, there is truth behind the complaints of both parties. When faced with these two extreme and emotionally charged positions, the answer may be found in the wisdom of the Hebrew book of Ecclesiastes, "It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other" (Ecclesiastes 7:18).

Societies can no longer be divided over the distribution of wealth, because the "look, it's my property" view and the "look at this poverty" view both make good points.

The injustice each perceives in the opposing view comes down to the same problem. It is what Gandhi called a social sin. It is the problem of wealth without work.

How one understands Gandhi's statement depends largely on where he or she stands in relation to others.

On the one hand, those in the top-income brackets tend to believe most poor people have made their bed and now must lay in it. They often unfairly caricature welfare recipients as leeches on the backs of the hardworking segments of society.

To view the poor this way, however, makes a false generalization. There are

surely some who abuse welfare, and these people are guilty of acquiring wealth without work.

But this dishonest thievery does not apply to all needy people. Many who are truly in need are willing to work hard, but because of low wages and few job opportunities, they suffer from the travesty of work without wealth.

On the other hand, it is also unfair to generalize about the wealthy. There are those who revel in riches with little concern or compassion for those beneath them, but not everyone who is well off has a stone for a heart.

Many have worked hard for their fortunes and have a right to it.

However, more and more members of society are beginning to see a deep truth in Gandhi's commitment to wealth precede by work.

Conservatives can no longer paint liberals as selling out taxpayers to undeserving poor, and liberals can no longer paint conservatives as partial to the rich.

Instead, rich and poor, conservative and liberal, must recognize wealth without work for what it really is — society without sense.

The poor must make an effort to work hard to lift themselves out of their plight, instead of relying too heavily on the work of others.

The rich must refrain from increasing their wealth without sharing it with those below them, instead of growing grossly rich off the labor of others.

If the way a society distributes its wealth is going to work, it cannot allow the existence of wealth without work. It is a simple truth that has been rarely observed in the history of the world, but it must be observed in the future.

Caleb McDaniel is a sophomore history major.