

Making cents of tragedy Traumatized kids should not be accosted by media

Reporters should use greater caution when dealing with tragic events, such as the recent shootings at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

After the church shootings, some questioned if it was wise for reporters to interview the youths who witnessed the tragedy.

The interviews may have forced the young witnesses to immediately relive an event that could scar them psychologically for years to come.

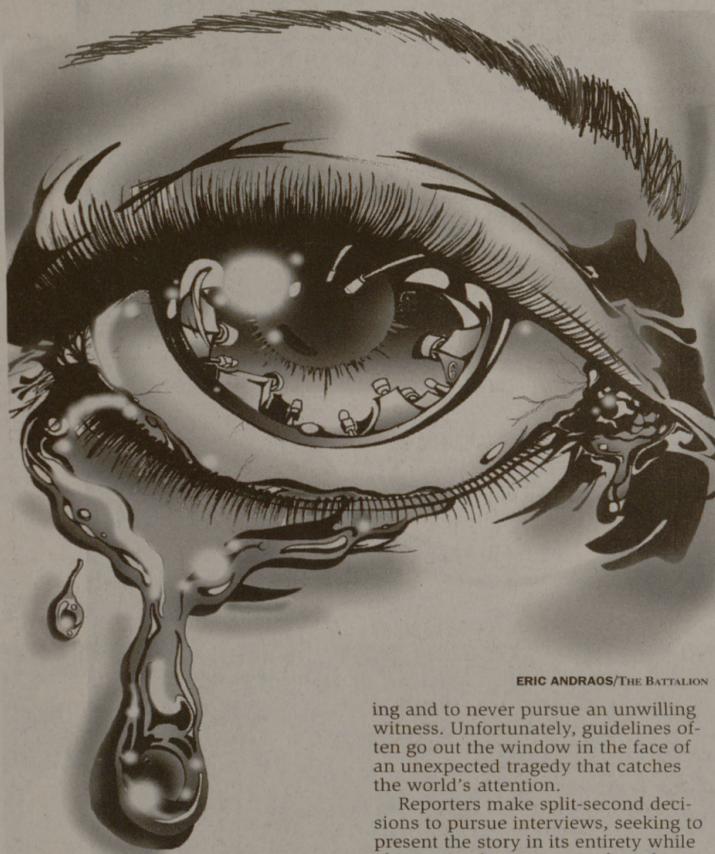
Others questioned the media's decision to constantly replay the incident through television footage and newspaper and magazine articles. In the midst of tragedy, reporters could put aside professional ambitions in favor of displaying compassion and love to those who have just been deeply wounded.

Unfortunately, media competition gets the best quotes and the best photographs often takes precedence. Daniel Bianco, father of one of the youths who witnessed the shooting, addressed reporters camped outside the church the week after the shootings.

"What brought me here today was my concern over the interview my daughter had that was being shown over and over and over," he said in a Dallas Morning News article. "I just had to voice my concern about that because I don't want her to keep re-enacting it. I want her to move forward."

The father's concerns are understandable. Reporters often excuse their lack of compassion by insisting they are only trying to tell the truth.

A basic tenet of journalism is to objectively and accurately report incidents, showing all sides of a story so readers can see what really happened. Dressing up the tragedy would do more harm than good, reporters may say. This drive for accurate reporting is an admirable quality, but sometimes



ERIC ANDRAOS/THE BATTALION

ing and to never pursue an unwilling witness. Unfortunately, guidelines often go out the window in the face of an unexpected tragedy that catches the world's attention.

Reporters make split-second decisions to pursue interviews, seeking to present the story in its entirety while also getting better quotes than the competition.

Hundreds of reporters descend upon one witness who may or may not have a good story to tell.

They ask young teens, deeply traumatized and not really aware of what they are doing, to recount haunting, vivid, details for millions to hear, nev-

er mind giving the teens still in a state of shock a chance to fully comprehend what has just happened.

In situations like these, competition often overrides compassion. Surely these reporters would not want their own children interviewed.

Some reporters may truly believe they are helping the public by urging young teens to share with the world what they have witnessed.

But whatever the media's intentions, sometimes the best response is to just wait.

When a tragic situation has just unfolded, reporters should simply seek authorities and others trained to handle such situations while giving children and their parents time to reunite and regroup.

Later, if a parent strongly wants his or her child to share a story with the media, one or two reporters might conduct a gentle interview at a location safely removed from the trauma.

Finally, interviews should not be replayed a million times, until the child's face is easily recognized by every American.

Once or twice is more than enough to tell a story. A tragedy like the Wedgwood church shooting is devastating enough without dramatizing it with 24-hour coverage.

Compassion for the wounded will not give reporters the ideal quotes and the most eye-catching stories, but sometimes the best story is not the best choice. The best choice may simply involve giving a person who has been deeply scarred a chance to heal.

While camping on church grounds, waiting to get snapshots of weeping Wedgwood teens, reporters should have remembered Jesus' own principle of compassion: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This principle of compassion, established almost two thousand years ago, is never needed more than when children have just seen their best friends killed.

Stephanie Dube is a journalism graduate student.

Not-so-friendly university needs more tolerance

The notion that Texas A&M is the "friendliest university," a place where Aggies can always be found helping Aggies, is simply an unrealistic ideal. In general, A&M is a very outgoing university and its students are usually polite and well-mannered, but to be considered the friendliest university, the definition needs to be expanded to mean the most tolerant and accepting university.

With a history of being an all-white, all-male and all-military university and a current student population that is only 15 percent non-white, A&M suffers from an obvious lack of diversity. In the absence of a healthy mix of multiculturalism, AggieLand is an environment prone to all sorts of intolerance. Many students carry feelings and opinions of racism, sexism and homophobia around the "friendliest university" on a daily basis.

Problems of intolerance undoubtedly are social ills, but by promoting the school as a friendly university, students are just ignoring these issues at A&M.

Minority and international enrollment at A&M continues to improve, and the number of groups and programs aimed at increasing their prominence on campus is increasing.

But demographics do not mean that students are any more accepting today than they were in 1876.

By promoting the school as a friendly university, students are just ignoring intolerance at A&M.

Examples of discrimination are still seen at A&M. However, what is more troublesome are the unseen, subtle displays of ignorance many international and minority students encounter. Most students guilty of these forms of intolerance are not even aware of it. Low-level intolerance is a consequence of living in the type of setting A&M offers.

With such a heavy majority of white students, international students often stand out and draw strange looks.

It is not uncommon for Muslim students wearing traditional clothing to be stared at, or African-American students to be thought of as football players before anything else.

Patterns of ignorance thrive in the minds of many students and in the overwhelmingly conservative atmosphere at A&M.

To be a top-10 university, A&M's stated goal, a fundamental change in the way Aggies of all backgrounds are embraced has to occur. Unfortunately, the continued claim of being the "friendliest university" is standing in the way of such change.

If A&M students continue to support and believe in this claim, all they are doing is worsening an already difficult situation.

Current and former students who have experienced life at AggieLand would be hard-pressed to say A&M is actually a multicultural environment. But no casual observer would know that by hearing students push the "friendliest university" rhetoric found on brochures and advertisements for A&M. To project the image minority students are welcomed and accepted by all students at this school is false. A&M holds itself back by attempting to cover up the continued ignorance and intolerance existing in AggieLand.

The University has come a long way from its monochrome past and continues to make headway toward becoming a truly diverse university, but there is still a long climb ahead.

Lying to ourselves about A&M tolerance levels does not help. A positive first step would be removing the phrase "friendliest university" from A&M's advertisements, but more importantly, students need to understand how inaccurate the label is and stop believing its empty image.

After shedding the "friendliest" label, the next step is for Aggies to question their own ideas and beliefs.

It is easy to recognize prejudice in others, but more often than not a student can find cultural ignorance in their own actions as well. Further, admission advertisements need to continue to focus on the school's commitment to a multicultural environment. This will help diminish A&M's reputation as a non diverse university and to increase minority and international enrollment.

If A&M can increase the prominence of non-white students it will only help foster an atmosphere where students are forced to question their stereotypes and open their minds to other cultures.

Once Aggies quit holding on to A&M's claim of being "The Friendliest University" and open their eyes to their own ignorant behavior and that of their fellow students, then maybe the University will truly earn the title.

Eric Dickens is a junior English major.

For hampered waves of grain

Facing diminishing government subsidies, American farmers see little sense in maintaining a 37-year-old embargo with Cuba.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy levied what has become an incredibly restrictive United States trade embargo upon Cuba and its people.

Cuba, a culture that thrived on tourism and eating from America's breadbasket, was orphaned economically by the United States and, more recently, by the former Soviet Union.

Fidel Castro, Cuba's communist leader, has continued his engorged reign even as his citizens hunger for desperately needed food and medicine from the United States.

For America's agricultural industry, the embargo severed ties with its largest rice export market and damaged the trade of many other commodities.

The trade embargo was sensible at the time of its inception. However, the U.S. agricultural industry may soon find itself in want of currently restricted markets like Cuba. Fluctuations in the global marketplace have brought pressure upon Congress to partially lift trade bans on food and medical necessities to Cuba.

The possible reopening of this market will not be a cure-all, but it will provide an ideological step toward the further integration and unification of the global market.

Despite diplomatic arguments against the embargo, America's farmers have a strong economic one to support it — the United States can supply a Cuban demand. The time to re-evaluate, rethink and restructure the embargo is now.

The past two years have presented the U.S. agricultural industry with three basic dilemmas.

First, the 1996 Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform (FAIR) Act will lower federal subsidies for farmers over the next few years.

Second, the Asian market has been drastically weakened. As the buyer of 45 percent of U.S. agricultural exports, the Asian market is critical for the U.S. industry. But deficit spending, corruption, graft and poor bank-management practices have taken a toll on many Asian economies. Markets in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines

The U.S. embargo on Cuba damages its own farming industry.



JOHN T. BAKER

have fallen 40 to 80 percent against the U.S. dollar, increasing burdens on U.S. producers. Once-growing markets now have little money to buy U.S. crops and are increasing competition by selling them at devalued prices.

Dr. Parr Rosson, an agricultural economics professor at Texas A&M, said these negative ramifications were slightly delayed.

"Even into 1998, the reverberations [from the Asian economic crisis] had not yet arrived in the United States," he said. "Then America experienced a depreciation in commodity prices, falling from record '96 highs to record '98 lows."

Because there are not enough buyers, many crops marked for export remain in storage facilities across the United States.

This surplus has led to a third problem facing American farmers — an increasing amount of carry-over-to-use ratios for U.S. crops.

If a harvested crop does not transfer to market immediately, it must be stored and conditioned to prevent spoilage. The unused crops are "carried over." Since 1996, these carry-over-to-use ratios for wheat, sorghum, corn, soybeans and rice have nearly doubled.

The need for new export markets is becoming an issue of increasing immediacy. The U.S. interdependence with Asian marketplaces for growth and trade has left farmers with a dwindling con-

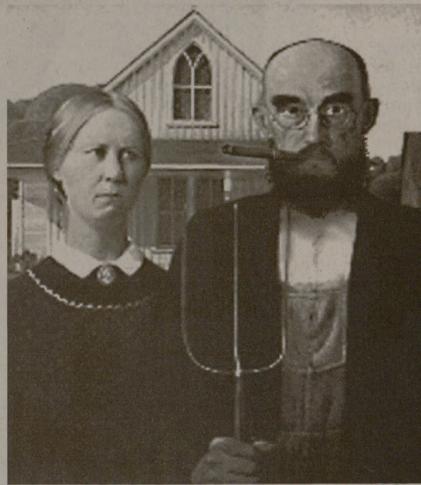


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT HYNCEK

sumer base and an overabundance of surplus crops, Dr. Mark Waller, an agricultural economics professor at A&M, said.

When one's clientele can no longer afford to purchase as many goods, it is time to find new clients.

Farmers currently are recovering from droughts in the East and flooding from Hurricane Floyd on the West Coast, while Texans suffer between droughts and Hurricane Bret.

Increased exportation of crops to Cuba and other markets is the best way to re-establish stable prices.

Despite boasting a population of 11 million people, a majority of whom are impoverished, Cuba will not be a miracle cure-all for the U.S. commodities-export market.

But tapping into this new trade avenue would be an ideological victory and a step toward peaceful relations with the island.

By reopening negotiation channels with Cuba, America can lead the global charge toward economic unification and diversified security.

It is time to utilize business to assist in foreign policy with Cuba and to provide fresh opportunities for a troubled agricultural industry.

John T. Baker is a junior agricultural development major.

MAIL CALL

Reader criticizes Film Society ad

As a recent University of Texas Austin graduate attending post-graduate studies here at Texas A&M, I have learned to turn the other cheek, and even laugh, at the multitude of anti-UT elements on campus.

But it is difficult for me to let a recent advertisement in *The Battalion* slide without at least saying something in protest.

The decision to print the MSC Film Society's tasteless announcement of this weekend's showing of *Blue* goes well beyond a simple rip-off.

The ad shows two women standing over a body saying: "I believe the T-sip killed him!" one said.

Well, they did reopen the towel, the other replied.

This is not funny. In fact, it is tasteless. Perhaps the *Daily Texan* could print the exact same scene with the captions: "I think that Aggie's dead." "Well, we are in a Texas A&M parking garage."

But I'm quite certain no one would be laughing at either of these "jokes." In fact, you would be hard-pressed to find anyone, even a Longhorn, who would find these in the least bit funny.

The *Texan* would never print an ad like that because common decency prevents it.

The death of college kids in the name of their lives is never something to poke fun at. Think about that the next time you decide to print another job at the T-sips.

Mason Miller
Graduate student

The *Battalion* encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number.

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Fax: (409) 845-2647
Email: battletters@hotmail.com