

Colombia needs foreign sympathy

Much media coverage justifiably has been given to crises in Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and East Timor. Wars and ethnic cleansing brought attention to these nations where civilians were caught in the middle. But while all eyes have been on the Eastern Hemisphere, the media only recently has begun covering the atrocities taking place in South America, and their treatment of issues has been poor.

In Colombia, the fight between Marxist rebels and paramilitary groups have caused a humanitarian disaster. Both sides are selfishly driving peasant villagers to abandon their ranches and homes in the countryside so they cannot side with the other group.



MARIANO CASTILLO

How can the battles be fought if America does not know what is going on? The guerrilla-occupied territory is an autonomous province in Colombia with a cocaine-based economy.

If the media would stop shying away from the continent next door and make the harsh realities of war mainstream news, the U.S. government would be able to make an informed decision whether to intervene. And if the United States is serious about its war on drugs, intervention is the only option.

If the rebels holding the land choose to stop negotiations with the government, it will take an all-out war to take back the territory.

If negotiations work, it is more likely than not that rebels will retain control of their area.

The United States, the most effective negotiator in the world, needs to take part to avoid chaos.

Just the fact Pastrana is considering negotiating with the FARC has set off an increase in rebel and paramilitary activity in Colombia.

Other rebel groups such as the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) have stepped up their kidnappings and other crimes to garner attention, which they hope to turn into a chance at scoring a deal similar to that of FARC. Pastrana came off as a hypocrite by not demilitarizing a zone for the ELN.

Pastrana's mistake was a lack not just of judgment but also of common sense.

His negotiations mark the second time Colombia has tried to make peace with the rebels by compromising with them. The first time was under former President Belisario Betancourt, who negotiated with the rebels when they were confined to a small area.

During peace talks the rebels spread out around the country and then turned their backs on peace. Since then, they have had strongholds across the country.

If Pastrana is not smart enough to figure out the rebels do not play fair, he should not have run for president.

Jorge Rojas, director of a Colombia research center, said in Colombia, the situation gets worse each year.

"If we look at the total numbers [of casualties], it's more than Kosovo or East Timor by far," he told *The Houston Chronicle*.

If the world's eyes are not focused on Colombia, they certainly should be.

The civil war is taking a turn for the worst with Pastrana making the calls.

The situation needs attention and involvement from other nations to tame it, just as in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Mariano Castillo is a sophomore international studies major.

Floundering Father

Thomas Jefferson's historical reputation grossly overrated

One of the more interesting things to come out of "millennium madness" are the many polls for person of the millennium.

A&E's popular series "Biography" actually did a poll of select scholars and public figures ranking the top 100 people of the last 1,000 years.

No. 16 was Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence, placing him ahead of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Napoleon Bonaparte. Most people, remembering their high-school history classes, would not have a problem with this ranking.

But closer examination shows Jefferson has been overrated.

There is little question Jefferson was a brilliant man whose impact will be felt around the world for years to come.

Still, Jefferson is guilty of some of the most common of human flaws: hypocrisy and an inflated ego. Those flaws nearly cost the United States its existence.

Jefferson was appointed governor of Virginia after the Second Continental Congress and did not make a good showing of himself.

In 1780, Jefferson refused to help Gen. Nathaniel Greene's army against the British because he feared this military man might usurp the power of the people's official, despite the fact Jefferson was not elected. As a result, Greene's men were deprived of food and horses they needed to do battle.

He also badgered Washington to leave the North to the English and bring his army to free Virginia, while at the same time refusing to aid Washington's subordinate, Greene, in his quest to retake the South.

Jefferson was President Washington's first secretary of state, but what is not widely known is what Jefferson did to undermine his fellow Virginian's presidency.

Washington was opposed to the creation of any political parties, but Jefferson founded the Democratic-Republican party (the Democratic Party's predecessor) while serving under him. Fellow partisans James Madison and James Monroe, while working overseas as presidential appointees, would send coded messages to Jefferson before they reported their progress to the president himself.

Jefferson's refusal to see the French Revolution had gone horribly wrong nearly got the United States into a war not only with England but also with the French themselves. Saying "the Tree of Liberty must be soaked" with the blood of revolutionaries, Jefferson aided attempts to drag America into France's war with Great Britain, against Washington's often-expressed wishes.

During his time as secretary of state, Jefferson



ERIC ANDRAOS/THE BATTALION

son carped that the president held too much power and wrote he feared Washington would make himself king.

Of course, Jefferson was elected president in 1803 and promptly complained the position of president did not have enough power.

The history books note that under Jefferson's administration America made the Louisiana Purchase.

They do not mention Jefferson scrapped the federal army, saying it was unnecessary. This decision, supported by his successor James Madison, resulted in Washington, D.C., being burned to the ground in 1812 as England's professional army brushed aside Jefferson's belittled militia.

Jefferson's most blatant fault has also often been overlooked.

The person who wrote that "all men are created equal" was a slaveholder. While this is

no shock considering he was a large landowner, Jefferson wrote many "scientific studies" which "asserted" the intellectual inferiority of African-Americans.

But Jefferson apparently did not think that African-American women were too inferior to sleep with.

In fact, he took one of his female slaves, Sally Hemmings, as his mistress. DNA testing recently has proven Hemmings bore Jefferson several children.

History has been very kind to Jefferson. He should be remembered positively for the good he did.

Whether he deserves the acclaim this nation — and "Biography" — have given him, however, is another story.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.

MAIL CALL

Isdale has helped Beutel care improve

In response to Chris Huffines' Oct. 29 column.

Huffines' column contained a number of false and misleading statements and unsubstantiated criticism of the Health Center staff. Upon her arrival, Dr. Isdale was required to evaluate management and fiscal practices.

Expenditures were cut, inventory and purchasing procedures were revised and staffing patterns were evaluated.

Isdale increased the number of students seen by doctors and lowered their wait time to about 20 minutes. The most prevalent student complaint prior to her arrival was wait time — it exceeded two hours. She also implemented other changes to enhance student care, including keeping the doors open until 5 p.m. (previously 4 p.m.) and initiating a 24-hour Dial-A-Nurse program.

Seventy-eight persons have left the Health Center since September 1995, but not all have quit or been fired. Fourteen retired, while only six were terminated. Three terminations resulted because of University

rules to reduce over-staffing. Only one employee has been fired.

Of the 10 physicians who left, five retired, four resigned and one was terminated.

Only one physician filed an employment-related grievance.

Patient satisfaction has risen the past three years. Qualifications and experience of staff have improved during that time. The current physicians' experience exceeds 27 years on average. The experience of the nurse practitioners, nurses and unit supervisors exceeds 20 years on average.

Huffines' characterization of the health-care providers as un-

suitable "for a Third World plague ward" is ridiculous. Nothing about the Health Center, its administration or its staff warrants such a derogatory statement.

Fully accredited by the American Association of Ambulatory Health Care, the staff is well-qualified, hard-working, dedicated and committed to quality care.

Everyone is entitled to an opinion, but I believe Huffines owes the Health Center staff an apology.

Dr. Bill Kibler Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs

Evolutionists should engage creationists calmly, constructively

Scientists are not always civil, especially when it comes to a subject they see as a perennial thorn in their side — creationism.

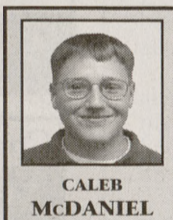
But civility is precisely what is needed in the continuing debate over human origins.

Ever since the successful 1955 play "Inherit the Wind," which portrayed the trial of John Scopes, a high-school teacher indicted in 1925 for teaching evolution in his classroom, tensions between the scientific and religious communities only increased exponentially.

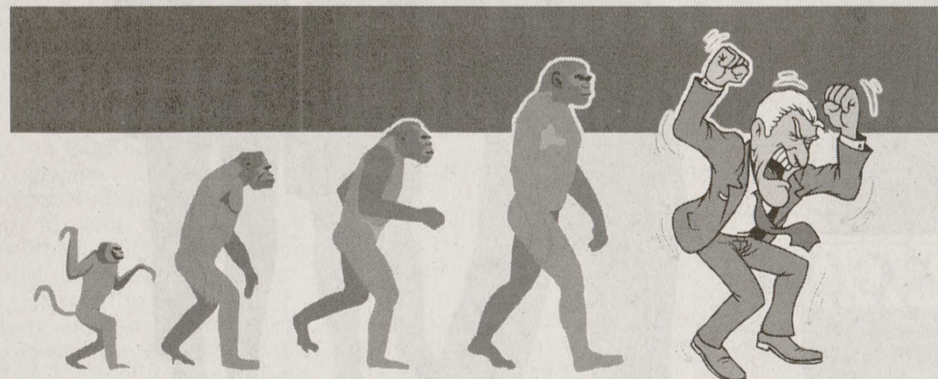
Recently, a decision by a Kansas school board to require the teaching of creationism in state classrooms proved the hatchet has not been buried.

Scientists across the country responded to the Kansas decision with scoffs and scorn, which in turn provoked creationists to vehemently defend the school board.

Convinced believers on both sides of the question have inherited nothing but not air and plenty of fighting. This constant warfare between science and reli-



CALEB MCDANIEL



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

gion has been unnecessary and definitely not nice.

The firing of high-school biology teacher Stan Roth illustrates just how low the quality of dialogue has sunk. The Kansas educator was dismissed from his job after blowing up at a female student who asked whether he planned to teach creationism. According to *The Washington Post*, Roth responded to the question from the "snot-nosed twit" (his own words) by saying "nonscientific crap" had no place in his classroom. Roth has been in trouble with the dis-

trict before for throwing chalkboard erasers at some unruly students and spraying others with a fire extinguisher.

Roth is not an isolated example of an angry evolutionist. Pre-eminent biologist Stephen Jay Gould is guilty of the same lack of charity in his latest book.

Ironically, Gould said the purpose of his book, *Rocks of Ages*, is to establish that religion and science can coexist peacefully. He argues that the conflict between the two has been the fault of confused thinking and advocates a reconciliation of believers and biologists.

But Gould himself does not practice what he preaches.

The end of the book devolves (no pun intended) into an angry polemic against creationists, labeling them as "ignorant" and "stupid."

After spending the better part of 100 pages saying religion and science do not have to fight, page 147 urges evolutionists to "fight back" against creationists. How can Gould call creationists out while calling for reconciliation?

Such adversarial words do a disservice to constructive dialogue.

Regardless of who is right or wrong, evolutionists and creationists stand to gain nothing by lacing their discussions with incendiary epithets.

By casting the debate as a "fight," both sides stand to lose.

In her book *The Argument Culture*, linguist Deborah Tannen criticizes the "pervasive warlike atmosphere that makes us approach public dialogue, and just about anything we need to accomplish, as if it were a fight."

Tannen notes how often headlines blare provocative plugs about the "war on drugs" or the "battle of the sexes," using antagonistic metaphors that impede cool, collected discussion.

"Nearly everything is framed as a battle or game in which winning or losing is the main concern," she wrote.

The controversy between evolutionism and creationism clearly is guilty of this mindset. And Tannen herself, in a book otherwise urging calm communication, characterizes creationists as being on "the fringes of lunacy" within the first 10 pages. She is not a good example of what she advocates in the book.

To be fair, creationists are just as guilty for their Cold-War relations with evolutionists. Some of them historically have branded their scientific opponents as everything from heretics to satanists. Believers in a literal six-day creation should take more literally the words of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers."

But evolutionists sometimes are quicker to zing creationists for their zealotry than they are to see bombast in their own ranks.

The subject of where humans came from requires the utmost sensitivity; it is a serious question. It does not deserve to digress into juvenile bickering. And it surely is a debate worthy of more dignity than words such as "crap" and "twit."

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.