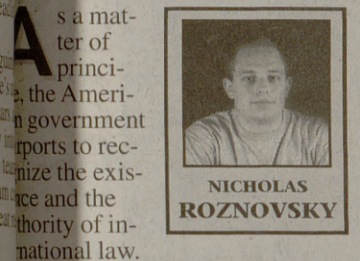


OPINION

THE BATTALION

Long arm of the law

United States violated international law by executing Germans, should pay reparations



NICHOLAS ROZNOVSKY

As a matter of principle, the American government reports to recognize the existence and the authority of international law. Throughout its history, the United States has signed countless political, economic and military treaties with other nations, each guaranteed a respect for the process of law on both sides of the table. Now, America's reckless abandonment in executing criminals shows a lack of respect for other countries. America is going back on its word. Two weeks ago, the United States admitted it violated international law by executing two German citizens in Arizona without allowing them to contact German consular officials.

The United States denied the German government's claims that the United States should be held responsible for the violation and pay reparations.

In short, the United States expects to get away with violating international law.

If America wants to continue being the leader of the free world, it will have to play by the rules.

Under Article 36 of the 1963 Vienna Convention, citizens traveling abroad are guaranteed consular access if arrested or put on trial.

It is a right America vehemently defends for its citizens.

In fact, the ongoing trial of an American businessman Edward Poe in Russia has become an international relations nightmare, with the United States adamantly protesting



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the lack of consular access Russia has allowed Poe.

Yet, American officials failed to notify German authorities about the arrest, trial and conviction of two German citizens on murder charges in Arizona in 1982.

The citizens in question were two brothers, Karl and Walter LaGrand, who were involved in a failed bank robbery that resulted in the bank manager's death.

In fact, German officials did not learn about the LaGrand brothers' convictions until 1992, eight years after they were placed on death row.

Despite protests by the German government, Karl LaGrand was executed in February 1999.

One year later, his brother was executed, despite an order from the International Court of Justice to delay the execution so a hearing could be held.

If an American citizen was arrested, tried, convicted and executed in a foreign country and denied access to the local American embassy, there is no question the U.S. government would be outraged.

Now that the United States has denied international rights to a pair of German citizens, it refuses to accept the sanction of international law.

This double standard cannot continue.

The LaGrand brothers' case is not isolated. According to figures from the Death Penalty Information Center, 89 foreign nationals are on death row in the United States.

Not surprisingly, Texas leads the list with 27 foreign citizens slated to die for their crimes.

None of those cases were reported to the criminals' respective consular agencies as required by the Vienna Convention.

On June 18, 1997, Texas executed Irineo Tristan Montoya, a Mexican national sentenced to death in 1986.

Following his arrest, Montoya underwent a lengthy police interrogation without the presence of an attorney or the assistance of the Mexican consulate.

He then signed a four-page confession in English, a language he did not read, speak or understand.

Despite being 18 years old and having only secondary involvement in the crime (Montoya was charged as an accessory to murder), he was condemned to death.

The actual killer received a prison sentence, not the death penalty.

Texas authorities were fully aware of Montoya's nationality but failed to inform him of his right to consular access, saying that Texas did not sign the Vienna Convention.

If the United States cannot enforce the Vienna Convention's provisions in its own states, then its signature on the document is worthless.

If the United States expects other nations to respect the rights of its citizens, it must do the same for theirs.

There is no question that criminals should be punished for their crimes, regardless of national origin.

The United States cannot allow foreign citizens to run rampant across the country committing crimes.

At the same time, state and national governments must allow for the due process of law, including consular representation, when trying foreign nationals.

Nicholas Roznovsky is a senior political science major.

Two thumbs down

Movie critics

should consider level of audience approval in rating films

For some, Thanksgiving means food and football. For others, it means shopping and school holidays.

The avid moviegoer, however, considers Thanksgiving to be the beginning of the holiday movie push.

These movie fanatics are probably more focused on which multi-million dollar releases will open that weekend.

Many open the newspaper, anxious for the their local critics to tell them which movies will sell and which will take a Water World-like dive into the mediocrity of home video.

What does not make sense are the ratings these critics give some Hollywood blockbusters.

Whether they are taking the acting, cinematography or editing of a film into account, critics often overlook what is may be the most important aspect of Hollywood films today: their effect on the audience.

Perhaps when judging a movie's worthiness, critics should take this into account.

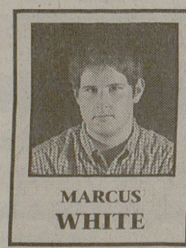
Critics often review movies in screenings, which are showings of films before the release dates.

During these screenings that critics decide what they will write about the film. Apparently, many critics have lost a taste for simple fun at the movies.

Movies like American Pie and Tommy Boy are designed to appeal to a certain demographic. The magic of many of these movies often is lost on the stuffy critics.

A growing trend has arrived in the business of reviewing films. It seems to much of the public that film critics gauge a film's merit based only on who stars in it or who directs it.

Sometimes, movies with typecast



MARCUS WHITE

actors like Julia Roberts and Sylvester Stallone are pigeonholed as lower-caliber films.

Critics do not anticipate the effect movies with such actors have on the movie-going public.

Perhaps, instead of judging these movies, critics should sit back, relax and enjoy the movies for what they are: entertainment.

Many critics will uniformly describe certain movies as atrocious.

One such movie, Star Wars: A New Hope, was jeered by critics across the country.

Star Wars went on to become one of the world's top-grossing movie series, spawning the famed trilogy and eventually becoming a six-part series spanning three decades.

How can one explain the popularity of a film so quickly rejected by critics?

The simple fact is that critics often get disenchanted by lackluster acting or plot development, thereby losing the overall effect a film will have on the average moviegoer.

Critics did not greet The Matrix with the same scrutiny upon its arrival. The movie was rewarded for its unique technological effects with an Academy Award.

The media did not praise the acting and story line. The Matrix, however, enjoyed tremendous success, mirrored by impressive box-office, DVD and video sales. The sequel to The Matrix, which will become a trilogy, has begun shooting.

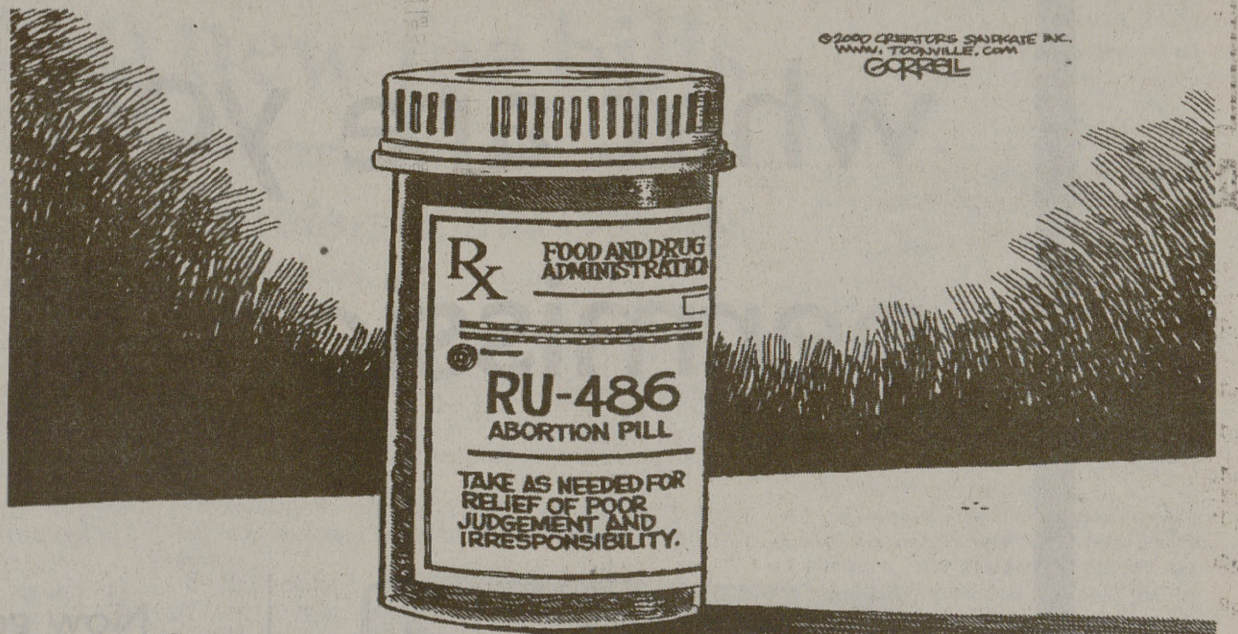
American movie critics need to set aside their cynicism when judging films.

Popular films like X-Men and Nutty Professor should be judged with a certain amount of respect for

the way the public will respond.

After all, just because a movie features the Adam Sandler or Keanu Reeves does not make it inherently bad.

Marcus White is a sophomore general studies major.



Mail Call

Minority coverage applauded, needed

In response to Arati Bhattacharya's Nov. 29 article.

I am pleased to see *The Battalion* addressing minority enrollment here at A&M.

When I came here from Milwaukee, I was surprised at how white this school is.

I understand some people's concerns about affirmative action and reverse discrimination, but this University is way off from representing the demographics of the population of Texas.

Also, I believe that the lack of diversity on this campus has a negative impact on something just about every Aggie holds dear: football.

Have you noticed lately that we have not been recruiting as well as the University of Texas?

I do not believe that we will ever bring talent to win a national championship unless we become more racially diverse. The majority of top recruits are African American and our lack of black culture leaves us at a disadvantage.

I find the vast majority of Aggies to be friendly and polite, and I believe the students are the best part of the university.

Finally, I would like to stress to Rasheeda James and all other non-caucasian students to not let one or two jerks spoil your outlook.

No matter where a person goes in society, you are always going to find a few knuckle heads. Most Aggies are real cool.

Geoffrey Tweedale
Graduate student

Death penalty change a bad idea

In response to Reid Bader's Nov. 29th column.

Bader would have us believe that justice would best be exercised by ensuring "a process ... without errors." Fuzzy logic.

I do not believe that a lack of responsibility is being shown on the part of the states.

The Supreme Court has ruled that the death penalty is at the discretion of the individual states.

Calling on President Clinton to ignore this decision and extend the reach of the federal government over the will of the states is a severely unconstitutional recommendation.

New technological advances, such as DNA testing, are huge steps toward a totally accurate justice system.

But I respectfully ask — should we simply stop all incarceration of criminals simply because some there may be "flaws" in the system?

Just as Americans bear the responsibility of living under the law,

our system of justice has a duty to carry out the law.

This cannot be subverted.

Chris Elam
Class of '02

Littering a nuisance

Perhaps you should print a message on the front page of *The Battalion* from now on, modeled after the ones you find on fast food receptacles.

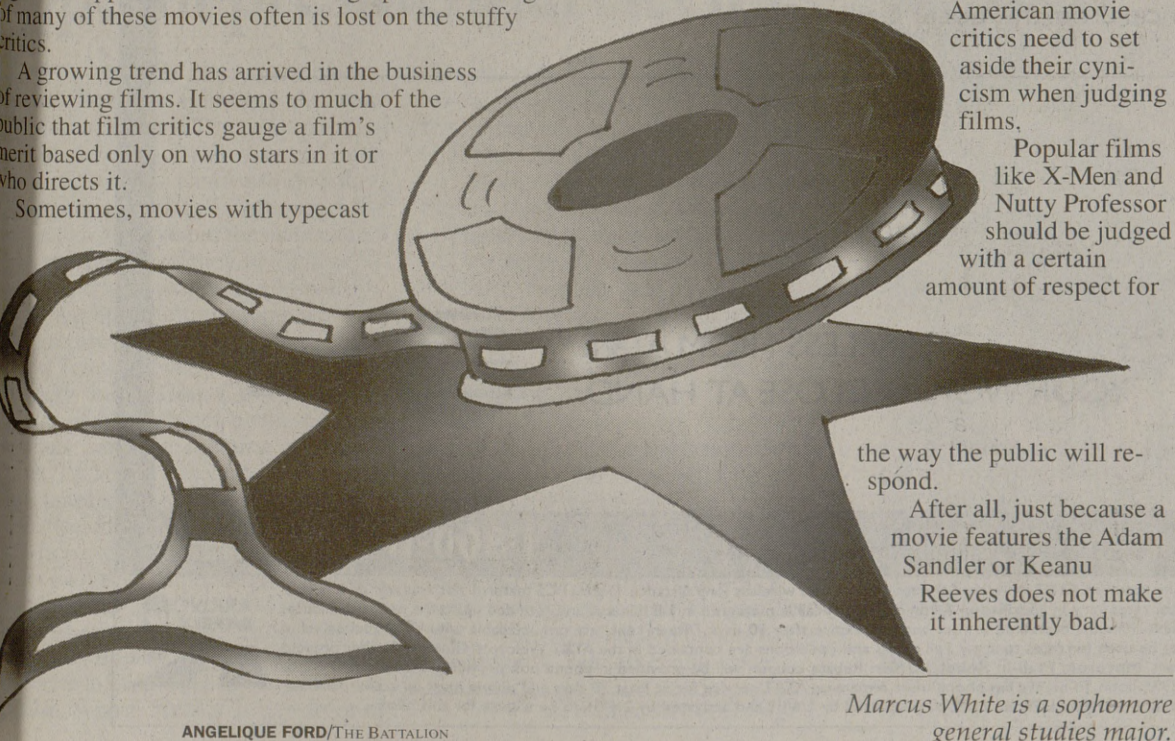
"Please dispose of this *Battalion* in a proper manner."

The disorder students leave in classrooms around campus is shameful.

Trash has its place — no one I know appreciates tripping over scattered newspapers, empty bottles of Coke and sticky candy wrappers.

Elva Rodriguez
Class of '03

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 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to: *The Battalion* - Mail Call 014 Reed McDonald Texas A&M University 1111 TAMU College Station, Texas 77843 Campus Mail: 1111 Fax: (979) 845-2647 E-mail: battletters@hotmail.com



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