

EDITORIAL REFLECT ON MLK

Sometimes, positive initiatives can emerge from misconceptions. *The Battalion* is optimistic, after meeting with representatives from the African-American Student Coalition (AASC), that the controversy raised over a cartoon called racist will be such a case. The celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday creates the proper atmosphere to reflect on the realities of the racial climate and racial perception at Texas A&M.

Students easily recognize MLK Day as one of the select holidays that merits a day off from classes. Unfortunately, many Aggies do not take the time to consider why the MLK holiday is significant. King was one of the most influential leaders of the 20th century. He led the civil rights movement during its most critical time in U.S. History, and inspired millions of people from all races to seek to understand each other and break racial barriers.

The Battalion maintains that the cartoon was not meant to be interpreted as racist. But in a world where perception is everything, Mariano Castillo, *Battalion* editor in chief, is committed to modifying the factors and criteria that are considered before publishing a cartoon. Cartoons that may lend themselves to misunderstanding will be avoided, as *The Battalion* stands for diversity and equality.

The ideal of progress in racial equality that King fought for resonates strongly at A&M, where great strides have been achieved in the last decades. There is still work to be done, but those who believe that A&M remains an intolerant place or that certain groups feel unwelcome in the Aggie community are simply ignorant and small-minded. As *The Battalion* learned from the cartoon that ran Monday, perception is a measuring stick to judge by. If students and administrators perceive that racism is an ingrained part of Aggie culture, it perpetuates the problem. The climate of equality that King sought is not a lost cause at A&M. It just needs some direction and a clear definition of what the real issues are.

For this reason, *The Battalion* has proposed a forum for minority leaders on campus, where the issues that were brought up by the cartoon can be examined and discussed. What do different groups perceive as racist? What are the biggest challenges our University faces regarding race? How can understanding be fostered among all Aggies? These are the types of questions that the forum will address, and that will be reported by the newspaper. It is unfortunate that a controversy arose over a cartoon, but it is refreshing to see mature leadership seeks out the positive opportunities that may come of it.

We urge all students to reflect about the meaning of MLK Day and how it relates to campus life.

"How far have we come?" was one of the points King often stressed. *The Battalion* honors King's memory by offering an answer in light of the recent controversy: We have come far enough to respect open dialogue and work together to raise the understanding of race on our campus.

THE BATTALION

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MAIL CALL

Cartoon raises more controversy

In response to Jan. 14 cartoon of the day:

I believe the point of the so-called "offensive" cartoon was to criticize airport security. The race, ethnicity or religious beliefs of the characters meant absolutely nothing. For people to totally miss the concept of the joke, and twist it into something racist, is absurd. I guess this means that all forms of humor must not only depict white males so as to not offend anyone, but I don't think that the media's portrayal of every person as "white" is a way to show that A&M is a "truly welcoming place for all people."

Chris Sano
Class of 2002

I write in support of the African-American Student Coalition's contention that the Jan. 14 cartoon published in *The Battalion* deserves a formal public apology. The saddest truth in this and similar incidents that I have witnessed during the 10 years I have taught on campus is that enlightened Aggies cannot recognize, and apparently even reject how such a cartoon can be considered racist - even when that fact is pointedly underscored for them.

Jimmie Hayes
Class of 2002

Education transforms people, that is, we should allow what we learn in class and in what people tell us to enlighten us. If our educations do not change how society encourages some of us to think, what are we doing at Texas A&M? When will formal education begin to show up in the ways we see and treat people who are different from us? Diversity is central to the American dream.

Marco Portales, Ph.D.
Professor of English
Texas A&M University

Bonfire survey receives criticism

This survey is a joke. It's a perfect example of everything that is wrong with the bureaucracy at a large institution. The administration talked at great length about wanting students input. Yet, when one actually attempts to respond to their appeal, it becomes plain that any dissenting opinion is unwanted. The very first question simply asks if you acquiesce to all of the criteria dictated by the "unbiased" review committee. If you actually take the time to read the terms and comprehend their meaning, I find it hard to believe that anyone would get past the first question.

Misguided youth

Suicide plane crash was act of tragedy, not terrorism



KELLY ZIMMER

On Jan. 5, 15-year-old Charles Bishop flew a plane into a skyscraper and drove a knife into the

heart of an already splintered American psyche. This incident was treated like every other news story in the last several months, immediately swinging to the possibilities of terrorism. Beyond the news, the chilling realization with Bishop's actions is the American youth's slide beyond school shootings to a much more visible, unthinkable way of ending their lives.

As Bishop stole and proceeded to crash a small plane into a 42-story skyscraper in downtown Tampa, Fla., news outlets immediately churned out stories reporting the possibility that Bishop was linked to terrorism, and then quickly they reassured the American public that he had acted alone. This was merely a suicidal flight. Bishop's flight opened the floodgates for scrutiny on the security of the aviation system. He effortlessly stole the plane from the private airport and citizens and legislators called for a closer look at the world of private air travel and its security.

Aside from the startling fact that a 15-year-old breached a heightened state of national security, the real devastation of this suicide flight is its illustration of the bleak state of America's youth and the measures they will take to display grief. After the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the logical thought process of Americans was undeniably altered. Unspeakable horrors like this are immediately charged as attempts at terror with grand motives and a larger intent to harm. Bishop and any ties he had to terrorism can be refuted thanks to the fact that Bishop's fatal flight occurred on a Saturday evening, when few people would be in the building. He only hurt himself.

Bishop is thought to have taken controversial acne medication, Accutane, which was investigated under charges that patients can become depressed or suicidal while on the medication. There are conflicting reports as to the personality and mental state of the teen, but in any case it is unfortunate that a 15-year-old has the insight and the will to end his life in such a terrible way.

Rather than focusing on terrorism, the media and the public should reach into the issue and realize what kind of a world has been created when a teen-age boy has the insight and the means to crash a plane to end his life. In the last decade, continuing into this week, school shootings have plagued America and its youth and children live in a society their parents never dreamed they would see. The focus of America must be to save its children, for they are doomed under a black cloud of fear. Unforeseeable events caused the nation to spin out of control and forget what living in America means.

Tragedy does not equal terror. Bishop was a product of America and unfortunately his death was glazed over to ensure the safety and sanity of a country rather than awaken a nation to the dwindling state of its youth.

Kelln Zimmer is a junior english major.



ADRIAN CALCENAO • THE BATTALION

Leggett's morals deserve praise

Formerly jailed author sets an example for all

In a world where marriages are requiring pre-nuptial agreements and there is paperwork to be signed for everyday arrangements, giving someone your word has become meaningless. However, there are still people who believe in having morals and sticking by them - regardless of the cost. Vanessa Leggett is one such person and deserves to be recognized for her superior display of morals and trust.



MELISSA BEDSOLE

In July 2001, Leggett was arrested for refusing to surrender notes she had taken from a conversation with Roger Angleton, a suspect in the murder trial of his sister-in-law, Doris Angleton. Courts subpoenaed Leggett's notes from an interview with Angleton after he committed suicide in jail, and when Leggett refused to release them, she was held in jail on charges of contempt.

The prosecutors fighting for Leggett's notes argue that the laws that apply to journalists should not protect her, since she has not been published. Despite prosecutor's attempts not to consider Leggett a journalist, her position as a writer is real and the responsibility of keeping one's word should apply to everyone. As a journalist, she has a legal responsibility of confidentiality, but Leggett has gone well beyond any legality at this point.

Plain and simple, the person she was responsible to is dead.

Leggett would not be in any legal trouble for releasing her documents; she was protecting her own morals and that is what is so honorable about her situation. In her mind, keeping her word is the ultimate responsibility and she will go to any length to do just that.

It is time that someone stand and applaud this amazing woman. Children and adults everywhere have the chance to learn that being true to yourself and believing in your own morals is worth everything - in this case, even one woman's freedom. Leggett was recently freed after the term of the grand jury expired, but she knows there is a possibility of her notes being requested again. She said she would return to jail if she must. After being released from the Houston Federal Detention Center she explained, "If that's what it takes, that's what it takes."

Leggett has made quite a statement and it is not just her own principles that she is standing for, it is the freedoms that Americans are supposed to have. She told reporters during one of her interviews, "This is not so much about me. It's about the public right to a free and independent press."

Leggett still intends to write a book on the case concerning the murder of Doris Angleton. In the end, this book, or others like it, may reward Leggett for losing five months of her life. However, having peace of mind for her actions and knowing that her morals set quite a standard, Leggett has already received her greatest reward.

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