

## Diamonds, drugs and al-Qaida's cash

(U-WIRE) PHILADELPHIA — Remember that TV ad, the one where they show kids talking and saying, "I just wanted to have a good time" interspersed with pictures of the World Trade Center crumbling and large shipments of weapons being moved? The ad that suggested — no, stated — that drug use leads to terrorism?

It was a powerful ad. And to a certain extent, it is truthful. Drug money may have been used in the Sept. 11 attacks, especially considering that Afghanistan is the world's leading producer of opium. But then again, considering that the Taliban banned the growing of opium in 2000, it may have been less of a factor than suggested by the ad.

Interestingly, the same TV stations that show this patriotic message have no qualms about airing commercials advertising diamonds.

Currently, and over the past decade, Sierra Leone, along with a number of other African countries, has been in a state of political and social strife as bloody civil wars have left thousands dead.

Many can be seen walking the streets without hands; slicing them off is a tactic often used by rebel groups to deter people from voting in elections.

The fighting in Sierra Leone has destroyed countless families, as parents are slain and children taken and forced to fight in battle, some as young as eight years old, forcibly drugged to eliminate the pain and fear.

And at the center of this fighting is the diamond trade.

Diamonds can be seen operating in two ways here. On the one hand, they are the ultimate prize at the end of this civil war, a mighty valuable export that Western companies gobble up as part of a \$7 billion dollar industry.

On the other hand, diamonds are also prolonging the war. It's through the sale of diamonds that rebel groups are able to keep themselves armed. These "blood" or "conflict" diamonds make up about four percent of the annual worldwide diamond trade, roughly \$250 million dollars deposited directly into the hands of these fighters, who in turn use it to continue financing their wars.

Along the same lines of human rights violations, the diamond miners used by rebel groups are often prisoners of war used as slave labor. What's more, major diamond buyers, including companies like De Beers, knowingly participate in this trade that promotes such grievous behavior.

In 2000, the United Nations mandated that diamond traders obtain certificates stating that their diamonds are not conflict diamonds. The certificates were to be issued by the state, hypothetically ensuring their legitimacy.

However, when the West doesn't trust many of these corrupt governments to distribute humanitarian aid to their people, certificates from such nations is little more than an attempt at placation.

Recent surveys suggest that up to 40 percent of the diamonds coming from these African countries may in fact be of blood diamonds.

So while in clear view our politicians and other moral leaders point to drugs as a source of financial backing for terrorism, they quickly and succinctly neglect to mention a more open, and legal, method of funding terrorism — the diamond trade.

And whereas the links between drug smuggling and terrorism are necessarily unclear, due to the underground nature of the drug world, the link between diamonds and terrorism is much more definitive.

With al Qaida members acting as middlemen, the diamond business continues to flood money into terrorist coffers in addition to the unthinkable abuses of human rights the trade encourages.

In the end, the drug ad is not really about stopping terrorism, but rather about implicating drug users in an act to which they can be at best loosely tied.

At the same time, there is no campaign decrying the sale of diamonds, only the "A Diamond is Forever" ads.

You would think that a country so primed to stop terror might take a slightly less hypocritical attitude, but we can't break the age-old tradition of diamonds as the ultimate romantic token — a tradition whose origins lie in a 1940's ad blitz by none other than De Beers.

Garrett Kennedy is a columnist at the University of Pennsylvania.

## SGA butchered election

### Results should have been verified before release

Sometimes, after attending a Student

Senate meeting and listening to a congregation of student leaders using the most protracted language they know, it is hard to take the Texas A&M Student Government Association (SGA) seriously.

It is even more difficult to take it seriously following its inability to correctly report the results of its freshmen elections.

The computer program which produced the erroneous results was run through Measurement and Research Services, and was not under the direct control of SGA. However, it was the responsibility of SGA to announce legitimate election results, a responsibility which SGA failed to meet.

According to the election commission, the initial results reported 452 abstentions out of 795 voters, resulting in more than twice as many abstentions as votes for the announced winner. For nearly 57 percent of the voters to abstain would be an exceptional situation.

Although such a high number of abstentions is not impossible, it is certainly a situation that would require further review. The SGA should have recognized a problem upon reviewing the data it received.

There was no genuine need for SGA to report the election results immediately. The freshman election results are important to those close to the election, but are not a terribly important event to the majority of those on campus. Waiting an extra day to double-check questionable results may have inconvenienced an impatient candidate, but it seems likely that Venton Jones, the student who was announced as the original freshman president, would prefer to have had the correct results announced the first time.



RICHARD BRAY

Even worse than the appearance of incompetence is the damage done to the individuals involved in the election.

Jones was willing to place his reputation on the line when he entered the election process, and for SGA to unofficially announce him president and subsequently relinquish the title violates the trust Jones placed in the system.

Mistakes happen when trying to report news to the public. However, SGA was not in a position where it needed to release the information immediately. If it had chosen to wait until it received more credible data rather than hoping the questionable data was correct, it would have been able to save face.

Bobby Tucker, election committee adviser, said the commission will consider delaying the announcement in the future.

With luck, the organization will make the necessary change. Although mistakes are inevitable in an organization, when SGA cannot even conduct a relatively small election, it makes it difficult to trust in its leadership.

Richard Bray is a senior journalism major.



SARAH FOWLER • THE BATTALION

## 10-year-old suspect deserves no mercy

(U-WIRE) SAN JOSE, Calif. — I'm befuddled and disturbed by what happened in Milwaukee last week. Thirty-six-year-old Charlie Young Jr. was killed by a mob of youngsters ranging in age from 10 to 18.

The incident happened after one of the children hit Young with an egg. Young proceeded to chase the group of kids down the street and punched a 14-year-old in the face, knocking out a tooth.

The group of children then grew in numbers, grabbed weapons, including baseball bats, broomsticks and pipes, and they chased Young back down the street.

Young then ran to a house where he was beaten on the front porch. He died in the hospital two days later of injuries sustained in the beating.

Seven boys have been charged with first-degree reckless homicide, and the youngest of the mob, 10 years of age, was spared from facing adult charges that could carry a term of up to 40 years in prison and 20 years of supervision.

Instead, the 10-year-old was charged with second-degree reckless homicide and could face a two-year jail sentence at a juvenile prison.

The crime was obviously a heinous one, but the thing that upsets me more than anything is that this 10-year-old boy is not facing the same type of charges his peers are.

District Attorney E. Michael McCann told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* on Thursday that the decision to charge the 10-year-old with a second-degree charge, rather than the first-degree charge, was because of the boy's age and his ability to demonstrate "moral reasoning."

McCann said he looked over the case of 13-year-old Latasha Armstead, a Milwaukee girl who in 1999, became the youngest child to be sentenced as an adult in a homicide case in Wisconsin, before deciding on the charges for the 10-year-old.

"I can find nothing in that literature that says a 10-year-old is capable of adult moral reasoning," McCann told the *Journal Sentinel*.

Adult moral reasoning?

Are you telling me that this boy doesn't know the difference between right and wrong?

Are you telling me that when someone is 10 years old that he doesn't know what a savage beating will do to someone?

Granted, this McCann is probably trying to save the boy's future by not trying him as an adult, but this is ludicrous.

It wasn't a single blow that took this man's life, it was the brutal attack

by a mob of boys, which included the actions of this 10-year-old boy.

So why should he be spared?

This 10-year-old boy, just like the other kids, knew when they were bashing this man in the head with a shovel that the blood was real.

And when Young stopped fighting back, it was because he was unconscious, not because he was enjoying the thrashing.

The decision continues to fuel a debate about a child's responsibility in crimes.

When does one become responsible for his or her own actions?

Some argue that the children are not old enough to make their own decisions and that they should be tried as a juvenile until the age of 18, or 17 in Wisconsin.

I'd agree if we were talking about stealing a CD from the local music store, but we are talking about an attack that took someone's life.

Whether the boy can think like an adult, or in this case, whether or not he had an utter disregard for human life is a moot point.

He was part of a mob who knowingly was out to injure Young.

I wholeheartedly think that anyone who attacks someone and leaves them with injuries that lead to death should be charged as adults, regardless of age.

It's not like he accidentally attacked him or unexpectedly shot him with a gun he was playing with.

I know this child has a future ahead of him and that he has probably already learned his lesson, but who's to say the other juveniles haven't learned a lesson as well?

It's semantics.

It's because this kid is a whole 24, 23 or 22 months younger than some of the other juveniles who are being tried as adults.

The entire group was in on the beating, and they all deserve the same treatment.

If you ask any of the participants what they did that night, they're all likely to say the same thing — beat Charlie Young.

I think it's time that we use this case as an example and show the rest of the country that no matter how old you are, if you have a part in someone's death, you are going to pay and the punishment will fit the crime.

Ben Aguirre Jr. is a columnist at San Jose State University.

### MAIL CALL

#### Students have right do do as they wish with sports passes they have already paid for

In response to an Oct. 9 mail call:

- Tuition: \$2,500.00
- Books: \$500.00
- Sports Pass: \$150.00
- Parking Spot: \$130.00
- Bottled Water: \$4.00
- The opportunity to make a little money back selling my sports pass: priceless.

Adam Clark  
Class of 2004

I congratulate Mr. Brendel for having the most history-filled letter this year in the mail call of *The Battalion*.

I think if Mr. Brendel will remember correctly, we all pay for those sports passes at the beginning of the year.

Some students, for whatever reason, have things come up and cannot attend some games. Why shouldn't they at least try to make up for some of that loss?

Students who sell their sports passes are not trying to disgrace James Ear Rudder, Sullivan Ross

or E. King Gill. Simply put, they're trying not to waste the money they spent on tuition.

Quite frankly, I find that using the names of this University's most important historical figures essentially as red herrings is in extremely poor taste.

Brendel did a good job in telling about these men's contributions to Texas A&M history.

Too bad that has no real bearing on a poor student who pays his own way through college and is trying to get a couple of extra bucks from a sports pass.

James Holland  
Class of 2003