

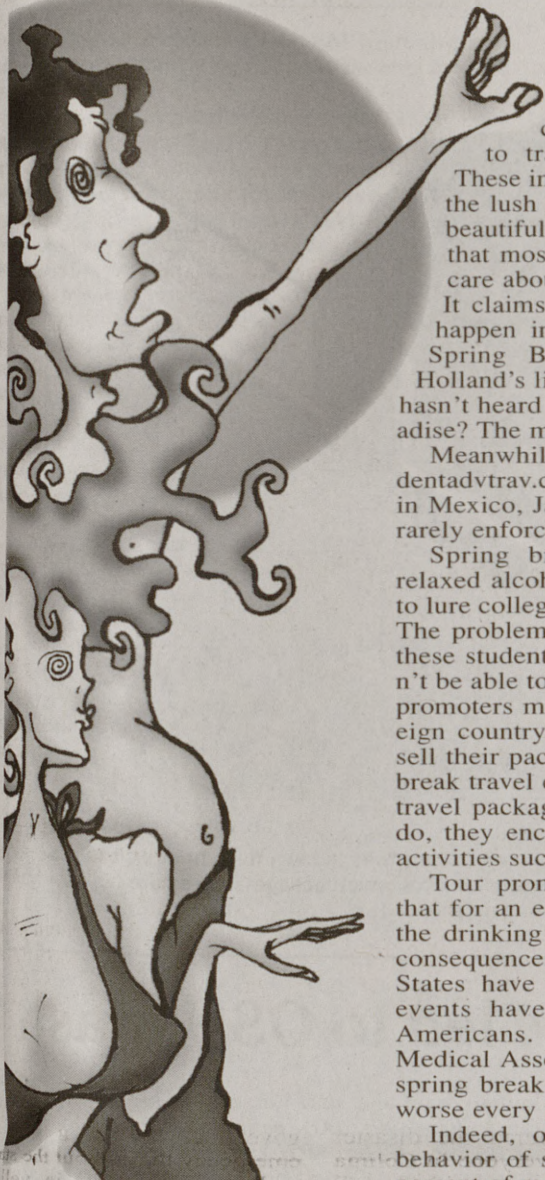
OPINION

THE BATTALION

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A VACATION FROM THE LAW?

Corporate sponsors of Spring Break should not promote lax substance rules



Studentspringbreak.com, a Web site that helps college students plan their spring break travels, claims there are many benefits to traveling to Cancun, Mexico. These include, "the luxurious beaches, the lush jungles, ancient ruins and the beautiful hotels." But the Web site adds that most students who visit will only care about the "abundance of alcohol." It claims, "your yearly intake of alcohol could happen in one small week in Cancun... on Spring Break." The Web site also heralds Holland's liberal laws on marijuana, stating, "Who hasn't heard that Amsterdam is a pot-smoker's paradise? The myth is true."

Meanwhile, another student travel Web site, studentadvtrav.com, tells students that the drinking age in Mexico, Jamaica and the Bahamas is 18, "but is rarely enforced."

Spring break tour promoters are using the relaxed alcohol and drug laws of foreign countries to lure college students to buy their travel packages. The problem is that in the United States, many of these students are considered underage and wouldn't be able to legally obtain these substances. These promoters must realize that although touting a foreign country's lax stance on alcohol and drugs to sell their packages is legal, it is not ethical. Spring break travel companies should stop promoting their travel packages in this manner because when they do, they encourage students to engage in harmful activities such as binge drinking.

Four promoters would like students to believe that for an entire week, students can engage in all the drinking and drugs they want — without any consequences. But health experts in the United States have the opinion that many spring break events have become too hazardous for young Americans. In a press release, the American Medical Association (AMA) went so far as to call spring break, "... a dangerous activity that gets worse every year."

Indeed, one study that surveyed the drinking behavior of students on spring break found that 50 percent of men and 40 percent of women became so



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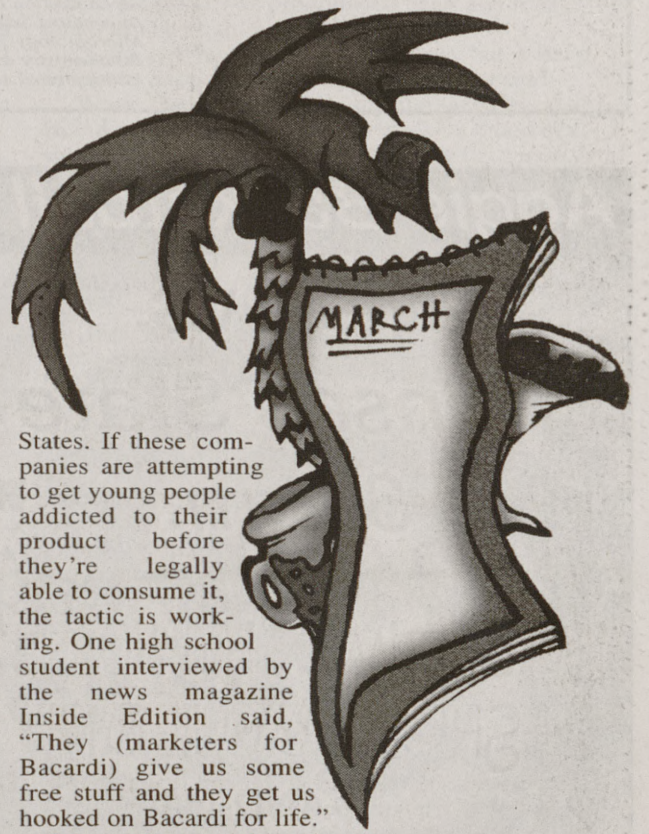
drunk that they passed out. This study was done by the Trauma Foundation of San Francisco, an organization committed to the prevention of traumatic injuries.

Alcohol abuse in spring break destinations has become so prevalent that even the federal government has become involved. The U.S. Department of State warns, "Alcohol is involved in the vast majority of arrests, accidents, violent crimes and deaths suffered by American tourists in Cancun."

Yes, college students are adults who ultimately make their own decisions to engage in possibly hazardous activities such as binge drinking. But they are also young people who may not understand the consequences of drug consumption in a foreign country. Students should be warned by spring break promoters of the possible dangers they face by acting irresponsibly in a land not ruled by U.S. jurisdiction.

And there are many dangers. The U.S. Consulate in Merida, Mexico reports that during the eight-week spring break period of 2002, American students accounted for 360 arrests, 495 reports of lost or stolen property and even two deaths, according to an article in USA Today. The same article reports that in Mexico, students can be charged and arrested for offenses as small as making an obscene gesture and can be held for up to a year before trial. The U.S. Department of State warns "... the fact that someone is a U.S. citizen in no way exempts him or her from full prosecution under the Mexican criminal justice system." It adds that U.S. officials cannot arrange for the release of Americans arrested in Mexico.

Unfortunately, tour promoters are not the only companies that use lax foreign alcohol laws to take advantage of unknowing students during spring break. In an effort to promote their product, beer and liquor distributors often use outrageous promotions to push their merchandise. Probably the most notorious of these events is the Bacardi "rum shower." This involves inviting people as young as high-school age "... to climb into a shower to have Bacardi rum and coke poured into their mouths from a showerhead." Again, the problem is the fact that many of the participants of the "rum shower" and other events sponsored by alcohol companies are considered underage in the United



States. If these companies are attempting to get young people addicted to their product before they're legally able to consume it, the tactic is working. One high school student interviewed by the news magazine Inside Edition said, "They (marketers for Bacardi) give us some free stuff and they get us hooked on Bacardi for life."

It's understandable that tour promoters and other companies want to profit from the annual rite of passage known as spring break. But there is absolutely no need to promote irresponsible and hazardous behavior to do so. These companies should warn American students of the possible dangers when engaging in alcohol and drug activity during foreign travel. Perhaps students who go on these vacations and who overindulge in alcohol will make it back to the United States in one piece.

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Bush should fund foreign abortions

President George W. Bush's proclamation declaring Jan. 19 as National Sanctity of Human Life Day is another in a long line of actions meant to undermine a woman's right to control her own reproductive future. In the proclamation, he claims he wants to protect "the weak, the imperfect and the unwanted," yet many of his national and international policy decisions suggest otherwise, especially when they end up killing people.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) supports maternal and child health care, voluntary family planning, screening for reproductive tract cancers, promoting breast-feeding and preventing HIV/AIDS.

According to the UNPF Web site, since it became operational in 1969, the UNPF has provided more than \$5.6 billion for developing countries to meet reproductive health and pediatric needs to support sustainable development. In July this past year, the Bush administration announced it was withdrawing the \$34 million appropriated by Congress for the UNPF on the basis that a portion of the money goes to perform forced abortions in China, despite, according to the Washington Post, the State Department finding no evidence to support the allegation. The UNPF estimates the lost funds will translate to 2 million more unwanted pregnancies, 800,000 more abortions, 60,000 cases of serious maternal illness, 4,700 more dead mothers and 77,000 deaths of children younger than five years old.

Another example is the global "gag rule," which Bush reinstated his first day in office. The gag rule prevents any international group from receiving U.S. funds if they counsel women about abortion, engage in political speech about abortion or provide abortion services, even with their own funds, according to The New York Times. The National Organization of Women state on their Web site that an estimated 80,000 women will die every year from unsafe and illegal abortions as a result.

Bush's respect for the "sanctity of human life" will actually result in the death of hundreds of thousands of women and children a year.

Unwanted pregnancy is not the only area in which the Bush administration is knowingly failing to protect the health of women and children. In his proclamation, Bush stated that (add) his administration has promoted "compassionate alternatives" to abortion, including abstinence-only programs, despite evidence they do not work. A report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released in April 2002 stated federally funded abstinence pro-



JENELLE WILSON

grams do not have any significant impact on unwanted pregnancy rates or STD transmission, according to Advocates for Youth. A similar Surgeon General report released in July 2001 found that these programs fail to delay the onset of sexual activity or the frequency of sex.

Comprehensive programs, which discuss abstinence and contraceptives, have been found to succeed where abstinence-only programs fail, yet they receive no funding.

The Bush administration is not stopping with American youth — it's taking the failing abstinence-only programs global. This past December at the U.N. population conference in Bangkok, the U.S. delegation shamefully tried to block a measure endorsing the use of condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS. The U.S. officials insist that abstinence is their goal and promoting condom use is tantamount to encouraging sex among teenagers, according to The New York Times. In Asia, however, many young girls do not have a choice when it comes to sex; they are lured away from their families or simply kidnapped and sold into prostitution, according to Human Rights Watch. Not providing them with basic information on how to prevent AIDS amounts to a death sentence, and is in no way respectful of the "sanctity of human life."

The Bush Administration's claim to care about human life is nothing but talk. His actions continually contradict his words. Cutting funding for advanced pediatric training for doctors, programs that coordinate medical care for Americans without health insurance and programs that deal with child abuse and neglect, are all items which Bush took care of within his first 100 days according to political commentator Michael Moore. They are the antithesis of concern for "the weak, the imperfect and the unwanted." Preventing contraceptive coverage while leaving coverage for Viagra intact, as he did with federal employees, will only result in more of "the unwanted."

If Bush truly wants to respect the "sanctity of human life" and prevent abortions, denying funding to reproductive health services, comprehensive sex education programs and contraceptives is not the way to do it. The best, easiest, and most realistic way to prevent abortions is by preventing unwanted pregnancies, meaning women worldwide need accurate information and safe options that allow them to make their own reproductive decisions. To deny women this right, under the guise of a respect for life, is unacceptable and results in hundreds of thousands of needless deaths around the world.

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"Ghetto Party": just the facts, please

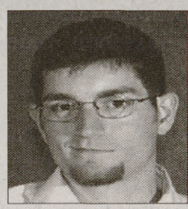
Recall in Harper Lee's novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" the trial of Tim Robinson, the black man wrongly convicted of rape.

Robinson's only crime was that he deviated from societal norms by befriending a white woman in his community. In Robinson's time, a frivolous charge of black-on-white crime was enough evidence to hang a man. Unfortunately for America, little has changed.

Last week, Texas A&M Director of Residence Life Ron Sasse received an anonymous letter claiming that an upcoming "Ghetto Party" sponsored by Walton Hall would include persons wearing black face and dressed in Ku Klux Klan (KKK) costumes.

Lacking anything resembling an investigation, the administration immediately issued written warnings to all Walton residents and sent out a press release that in a few days' time has reached an international audience. The damage done to the reputation of Walton Hall residents and A&M may be irreversible after the administration's brand of justice was used. A&M administration should never have issued a press release based on an anonymous letter.

From the release comes, "Texas A&M University officials have expressed outrage over a reported event that was being planned off campus by students of a residence hall (Walton Hall) to portray negative stereotypes of African-Americans. Planning of the event, which reportedly was to include a 'ghetto theme party,' shows a total lack of respect for others, is destructive to the residence hall community and is an embarrassment to Texas A&M University." Today, the insinuated and vague charge of racism levied by the University press machine at the residents of Walton Hall is another Tim Robinson, where the seriousness of the charge, rather than the facts involved, is enough to find guilt.



MATTHEW MADDOX

"I couldn't believe the University's press release," said Matt Kemper, a senior management major and resident of Walton Hall. "It tried to paint the party as racist, but didn't say how it was. It was as if they were hoping for everyone's imagination to fill in the gaps where the facts should have been." Kemper clarified what the party was about.

"It was just a get together on our day off that was a theme party like 'Go Western' or 'Tropical,'" Kemper said. "Race had nothing to do with it."

Arouna "Boo Boo" Davies, a former Walton resident and the most recent black yell leader, attended the party in years past and agreed the issue was overblown.

"As far as the accusation that KKK costumes were worn, the only student wearing one was an African-American," he said.

He added that despite the University press release, black face was never a part of the parties.

"As a resident of Walton, I always felt welcome there," Davies said. "I trust those guys with my life. They aren't racists, bigots, or whatever some people are saying."

Davies said the party wasn't intended to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday.

Last November at the University of Mississippi, racial slurs including "F-----g N-----r" was scrawled on the doors of two black students in a residence hall. Also found nearby was a hanging stick figure in a tree and sexual vulgarity drawn on windows. As reported by syndicated columnist Michelle Malkin, pundits immediately concluded the suspects were white.

A "Say No to Racism" march was organized by black students, there were calls for protection against white-on-black harassment, and administrators demanded the creation of racial sensitivity guidelines. Leaders vowed that the obviously white perpetrators would face criminal charges. Weeks later, when it was learned that the three vandals were black themselves, the outcry stopped.

According to the Daily Mississippian student newspaper,

Ole Miss Chancellor Robert Khayat said, "it taught the university community that...before we jump to conclusions and start condemning groups of people, we should know what happened." Perhaps A&M administrators should heed that advice.

As reported by The Battalion, Briggs Hall Council President Veronica Garza said she attended the party in 2002 and did not find it racially offensive.

"There were a lot of minorities at the party," said Garza, a Hispanic and sophomore French major. "That's why I don't understand what the big deal is. We are bombarded by these 'negative images' by MTV and BET all the time. Yet when there is a 'thug' party, we are called racist. It doesn't make sense." Interestingly, both Music Television and Black Entertainment Television are stations A&M students receive inside their residence halls.

The oddest aspect of the fiasco is that University officials had seemingly fixed the problem, as they saw it, in house. Since organizers had already received written reprimands and had agreed to cancel the event, there is seemingly no reason for the administration to have advertised a party that wasn't going to happen. What diversity initiatives will be launched and which students will be punished under the auspices of ending future "ghetto parties"?

The A&M administration needs to remember that its career objectives should be to serve the academic needs of A&M students, rather than the personal politics of character assassination. Much as with Tim Robinson, what are whites accused of racism in this day and age able to use in their defense if not the facts? Turn off the University press machine, and start improving A&M for current and future students for a change.

Matthew Maddox is a junior management major.