

OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 11 • Friday, January 31, 2003

MERIT SHOULD COUNT

Student's free speech, not political correctness, important

This week should mark the end of the many accusations of racial insensitivity being hurled at Bellaire High School's presumed 2003 valedictorian, Harry Huang. Bellaire, located in the Houston Independent School District (HISD), was shaken by scandal this past month when Huang allegedly made racist remarks toward Hispanics on his personal Internet profile, according to the Houston Chronicle. Huang immediately apologized and withdrew his statements, but he is still the focus of needless persecution at his school and in newspapers across the country. HISD's repeated calls for political correctness and racial sensitivity counseling, in reality, only serve to compromise the diverse and intellectually free environment it desires to create.

In December, Huang was apparently duped by several Hispanic men posing as mechanics. According to the Chronicle, the men damaged Huang's car, threatened him and demanded money for their "services," which Huang, fearing for his safety, begrudgingly paid. Huang then vented his anger toward the men in the privacy of his home on his Internet profile.

And while there is no way to justify racism, provoked or not, the circumstances



GEORGE DEUTSCH

surrounding Huang's comments deserve consideration. HISD's threats of removing Huang as valedictorian and possibly expelling him reek of overkill and fly in the face of his First Amendment right to free speech. Only last week did HISD withdraw its threats, according to the Chronicle, but an air of impending disciplinary action still seems to be lingering over Huang, and needlessly so.

The fact remains that the position of valedictorian should be based on academic success, and all speech, pleasing or not, must continue to be protected.

To be fair to Huang, his comments were not intended for an audience, nor were they distributed to the Bellaire High student body by him. The student who did disseminate the information in the school was not named in the Chronicle, but it is this person who was responsible for spreading racially insensitive material, not Huang.

HISD spokeswoman Heather Browne told the Chronicle that Bellaire Principal Tim Salem could have suspended Huang, in spite of his First Amendment rights, based on an ambiguous student conduct code provision prohibiting "any activity that disrupts class."

"The fact that what (was written) was copied and distributed was technically a disruption of the educational day," Browne told the Chronicle. If distributing racially insensitive material is grounds for suspension, the student who copied and passed out the remarks is at fault. It is he who should be threatened with suspension.

Adding insult to injury, Huang was made to wear the proverbial "A" on his chest and paraded around his school as a villain. The Chronicle reported that HISD officials mandated Huang stand in Bellaire's halls and distribute a humbly-written apology. Sadly, it is an accurate reflection of society's politically correct saturation when an 18-year-old's bedroom becomes a courtroom and he is held accountable for insignificant remarks made to no one in particular.

Harry Huang is not a racist, but instead a brilliant student who made a mistake which others only compounded. If our society is to ever come to terms with issues of race, we must not wear our emotions on our sleeves or let political correctness guide our consciences.

George Deutsch is a senior journalism major.

MAIL CALL

Race recruitment is still racism

In response to Rolando Garcia's Jan. 28 article:

Racism, as defined by Webster's, is a prejudice or discrimination based on one's race. How the actions and beliefs of Joe Estrada, along with other students and administrators cannot be considered racism is beyond me. Recruiting individuals based solely on their ethnicity, is nothing other than racism. Showing favoritism to minorities, by recruiting them harder than whites, is just as unacceptable as recruiting only whites. There are enough hard working students, both white and minority, trying to do everything that they possibly can to get into this institution; we do not need to recruit certain groups over others. According to Tuesday's Battalion, Estrada and others are intent on giving more scholarship money to certain groups. Their justification is race, and only race. So be it that Texas A&M is not the most diverse school—racism on campus is not the reason. As stated in the same article, most minority students who were accepted and subsequently declined to attend, did not make their decisions based on race. Stop wasting time and energy recruiting students who don't want to be here, and then blaming it on racism.

sarily just women - the right to say no whenever they feel compelled against one's will, as the definition of "force" states - no physical pressure necessary.

Cara Garcia
Class of 2003

Copy Cat isn't the first unique clone

In response Elcia Baker's Jan. 28 article:

I just thought I would point out that the revelation that CC is not an exact copy is not the first of its kind. In fact, the group of cloned pigs that was created at A&M was part of a scientific study which analyzed the variation of behavior and physical traits within cloned litters and compared it to that of the variation of matched control litters of pigs. This was my master's thesis and the results were released in a press release through AGNEWS here at A&M in December, which led to several interviews with reporters from Canada, Brazil, and France. Our research showed that clone litters had similar or greater variation in most of the behavior tests we conducted and in the physical traits we documented. The behavior part of this research will be published in a scientific journal (AABS) in the near future.

Greg Archer
Ph.D student

Travis Moore
Class of 2006

This Democrat is sarcastic, not racist

In response to Jerad Najvar's Jan. 30 column:

I would like to express my sincere apologies to the nation for having "held back progress in race relations." Being a Democrat and a minority my "hypersensitivity" has been the undoing of this country's pursuit for racial harmony. I also urge those individuals that "harmfully" continue to eradicate the remaining inequalities that exist in our society to do what is best for the majority, to embrace silence and just smile. Racism? In the year 2003? How silly is that? I hope you all accept my heartfelt apology. I just wish I had time to repay everyone by clearly defining sarcasm and racism.

Jose Jasso
Class of 2003

Rape column violated reason

In response to Sara Foley's Jan. 28 column:

Foley's column on redefining rape literally made me sick. I'm not sure what kind of world she believes exists that can perfectly define a crime that steals a person's sense of security and murders that person's sense of self. If she truly believes that the abusers of the justice system should define the treatment and protection of true victims, let's hope she doesn't become involved in politics. I certainly hope more laws go into effect that allow anyone - not neces-

Liberal bias should find Highway 6

The number of articles with a liberal bias in the Battalion is getting out of hand. All points of view certainly deserve to be heard and I am not saying that I want all liberal articles taken out. I want them to be balanced out with conservative articles. I'm sure some people such as John David Blakely would be more appreciated at a little school in Austin, where they can all sip tea and badmouth the leadership of this country with other people who actually want to hear it.

David Kahn
Class of 2004

Corps Commandant is a good leader

I recently had occasion to contact John Van Alstyne, Lt. Gen. (R), Commandant of Cadets, on a matter related to members of the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets. I was surprised and heartened by his response to my letter. I have had no other contact with him, but his reply to my letter showed to me that he displays remarkable character and leadership abilities. I write to you to express my view that the A&M Corps of Cadets is indeed fortunate to have a Commandant with Van Alstyne's experience, skills and wisdom. It is my hope that the members of the Corps avail themselves fully of this opportunity to learn and benefit from the wisdom of a leader aimed at taking them into the 21st Century.

Donald W. Pettigrew
Professor of biochemistry and biophysics

Georgia rebel cause no more

A battle is raging in Georgia about whether to reinstate the previous state flag taken down two years ago. Since the flag was redesigned, there have been marches led by men in Confederate uniforms, threats of boycotts, and even an election deciding the issue, according to CNN. It seems ridiculous that such a fuss would be made over a piece of cloth. Georgia should move on, and keep the symbols of the past where they belong—in the past.

The old flag, which prominently featured the Confederate battle emblem known as the "Southern Cross," is considered by many minority and non-Christian groups to be symbols of oppression and hatred, which rightly led to its removal. The Georgia state legislature took the appropriate action in showing its desire for progress, especially concerning race relations, by changing a flag which many believe has a racist history and by distancing itself from the policies the flag symbolizes.

Supporters of the Southern Cross insist they are trying to preserve their heritage, but the history of the emblem suggests otherwise. According to a Georgia Senate research report released in Aug. 2001, the battle emblem design began to take on a racist meaning in 1948 when it appeared at a Dixiecrat convention in Birmingham, Ala., "as a symbol of southern protest and resistance to the federal government." White supremacy groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, whose violent activities began to increase, also began using the symbol during the Dixiecrat period.

The Confederate flag went from being a sign of Southern heritage to being a threat.

Many historians believe the old Georgia flag, with the battle emblem comprising two-thirds of the design, was adopted in 1956 as opposition to federal integration, according to CNN. The state Senate report confirms this. In his 1956 State of the State Address, then-Gov. Marvin S. Griffin insisted "There will be no mixing of the races in the public schools and college classrooms in Georgia anywhere or at any time as long as I am governor." He went on to say, "All attempts to mix the races on terms of equity, peril the mores of the South."

According to the report, in reaction to the landmark 1954 Brown v.



JENELLE WILSON

Board of Education decision, Griffin threatened to close public schools rather than integrate them. In 1956, the Georgia legislature gave him the power to do so. The flag redesign of 1956 was another in a line of clearly pro-segregation legislation. One resolution adopted by the Georgia legislature declared the Brown decision "null, void, and of no force or effect" in the state of Georgia.

The new flag was simply meant to show support for segregation and to intimidate blacks. James Mackay, a member of the 1956 legislature who was opposed to the change, agrees, "There was only one reason for putting the flag on there, like a gun rack in the back of a pickup truck, it telegraphs a message."

It's a message Georgia continued to send for 45 years.

Georgia was not the only Southern state to use the Confederate battle flag to fight integration or as intimidation. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the battle flag was raised in Alabama on April 25, 1963, the same day then-United States Attorney General Robert Kennedy traveled to the state to urge compliance with the Supreme Court's decision in Brown, to desegregate society. The battle emblem flew over Alabama until 1993. South Carolina raised the battle emblem to the top of the state capitol dome in 1962 where it stayed until 2001.

Other states have tried to move on from this shameful and racist history; the people of Georgia need to move ahead, too.

According to CNN, the new Georgia flag was adopted in January 2001 following years of debate concerning Southern heritage and racial sensitivity. Georgia's state seal, the words "In God We Trust" and a ribbon showing Georgia's state flag history—featuring both the 13 and 50 star U.S. flags, as well as Georgia's first, 1920—1956 and 1956—2001 flags—make up the new flag.

This new flag finally sends the right message—that the Southern Cross and the policies it represents are in the past and that the state is ready and willing to progress forward. Hopefully, the citizens of Georgia can let go of this divisive issue and move on as well.

Jenelle Wilson is a senior political science major.

Afghanistan: Tyranny by another name

A new policy in Afghanistan, which went into effect the weekend of Jan. 19, might have some Afghans feeling a sense of deja vu. The law, put into effect by Chief Justice Fazl Hadi Shinwari, has removed cable television channels from Afghan homes, something the recently overturned Taliban had done as well, according to foxnews.com.

Shinwari said in a conference with The Associated Press that his reasons for doing so were based on complaints from outraged citizens who objected to immorality that conflicted with Islamic teachings being projected on television. Although violence, sexuality, and profanity on television has been an issue in the media, the complete censorship enacted by the Afghan government will be even worse if it is a sign of other government restrictions to come.

It is understandable for a government to monitor the content on television, to ensure that the programs do not infringe upon rights or to protect unsuspecting audiences from unfavorable displays. However, a problem arises whenever political policies are intermixed too deeply with religious beliefs. Obviously in a nation such as Afghanistan, where the religion is almost completely homogenous, these beliefs will seep into policy issues, but they by no means should be the sole basis for creating laws that infringe upon the people's freedoms.

By preventing the Afghan people from



SARA FOLEY

being exposed to Western culture through television, the government continues to suppress its country's economic and intellectual growth in the same way that the Taliban did. Although many improvements have come about in Afghanistan since the removal of the Taliban, replacing the restrictions that were only just removed is only a step backwards. Television is not the key to Western thought or a forward-moving society, but the introduction of concepts promoted on television furthers a consumer economy in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, to ensure a democratic government stays in place, steps should be made to remove other laws endorsed by the former Taliban, and laws that correspond with Taliban mentality should be hindered. Many laws from the Taliban regime are still in place, and the process to remove these laws is complicated, according to the U.N. Web site. Even more detrimental to the attempts of restoring order in Afghanistan are new laws that replace the Taliban-era laws with new restrictions. Such is the case in the Herat province of Afghanistan, where a new policy was enacted preventing females to be educated by male teachers. Not only does this law keep Afghanistan from progressing forward, it binds Afghan women to their plight. Most women and girls in this province will no longer have the option for education, since most instructors are male, according to foxnews.com.

When the Taliban first took control of Afghanistan, one of its first orders of business was the restriction of women from education and employment, according to Amnesty International Online. Although the government in place now has done much to alleviate these problems in some areas, such as laws concerning clothing and education, the fact that these former laws are being reinstated should cause alarm. Women's rights issues have been the focus of much of the criticism of the Taliban's regime, and continuing the laws that restrict women will only take Afghanistan back to the state it was in during the Taliban rule.

The laws that are re-emerging, which might seem minuscule at first, warn of further situations that may rise. If the laws continue to be reinstated, Afghanistan could once again be susceptible to more terrorist groups or foreign influence. Although television does not hold the keys to capitalism and small education restrictions in one area does not mean the Taliban laws are back into place in full force, the danger should be noted. Had America paid attention to these warning signs originally, the Taliban may have been prevented from terrorist actions. Afghanistan must continue to be scrutinized to prevent further problems.

Sara Foley is a sophomore journalism major.

