

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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Speak your mind

School infringes on students' free speech right

Freedom of expression received another blow Feb. 17, when a junior at Dearborn High School in Michigan was asked to either leave school or change out of the antiwar T-shirt he had on. The shirt, worn by student Bretton Barber, had a picture of President George W. Bush on it with the words "International Terrorist" underneath the picture. Barber chose to go home rather than surrender his freedoms, according to The Detroit News.



SARA FOLEY

Although the message Barber was conveying stirs up controversy and breeds discontent, that is not a reason to ban him from expressing those views. At a time when people are beginning to explore their own political opinions and preparing to become active voices in the community, discouraging them from communicating those beliefs could stifle other students' opinions for fear of the same treatment, as well as preventing the censored individual from further political activity.

Barber's opinion may go against the American majority, but it should not be ignored.

A topic that arouses such controversy and scrutiny as war demands analysis and criticism to insure that the best decision is made. Without the percentage of the population that will undoubtedly question the nation's entrance into war, haphazard decisions could be made by the Bush administration. It is not only beneficial, it is absolutely necessary for the public to question the government's actions and express whatever sentiments it might have. Barber was simply exercising his rights and, although his opinion may not represent all Americans, his right to share that viewpoint is a part of what makes him an American.

School spokesman Dave Mustonen told The Associated Press that "emotions were running high" and he felt it was easiest to eliminate the problem at its source by banning the shirt. Although the atmosphere was probably intense, the feeling of

discomfort felt by those who are closed-minded should not be a basis for censorship. The teachers' fears were simply unfounded, according to one student who spoke with The Detroit News, Lindsey Hoganson.

"I didn't hear anybody say anything about the shirt until we heard the administration was making him change it," she said. High school students are at a point in life where their characters are formed, and the faculty of Dearborn High School taught them to not question mass opinion or the government.

Students will be discussing the potential war with Iraq with or without one student wearing a T-shirt to class. Barber gave students an alternative perspective from what the majority of Americans believe. He didn't ask them to agree or make a scene; he was making the point that other countries may see the United States as a terrorist nation, just as we see others as terrorists. The legitimacy of his argument is not the basis for debate, but simply the fact that he has a right to make an argument.

Furthermore, Barber told the AP that he had done a presentation earlier that day on comparing and contrasting Bush with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, and had worn the shirt for that purpose.

The issue of a looming war with Iraq is not one that can be neatly explained by propaganda T-shirts or one student's opinion. Barber most likely does not understand the level of political complexity involved in the decision to go to war. However, he does understand that he has a right to disagree. Denying any American the right to express his sentiments about a probable war, sensible or unfounded, contradicts the ideas this country was founded upon.

Sara Foley is a sophomore journalism major. Graphic by Ruben DeLuna.



EDITORIAL

SAVE THE DAIRY

University may lose a tradition

In the midst of financial struggles, Texas A&M is losing a part of its history. On Feb. 20, it was announced that the Dairy Science Center would be closing its doors after 50 years of serving A&M and its students. The University is making a mistake by closing the Dairy Science Center. Instead, the University should work to maintain the center and continue the tradition of educating A&M students about the work involved in dairy farming.

This University was created to educate the people of Texas, and by closing the doors of the center, future Texas dairy farmers will lose the ability to gain hands-on experience that they would have otherwise received. Without this center, A&M loses a part of its connection to the history and future of Texas farmers. The 'A' in A&M used to stand for agriculture, but with tighter budgets, the 'A' is in danger of losing its meaning.

Students who are passionate about the center and all its positive effects on their future need to join together and find a way to save it. This is the time when the future of the University is decided. On one hand, there is an average university without the center, and on the other hand, by keeping the center, A&M remains a unique and distinctive institution of higher learning. A&M cannot lose the traditions that set it apart from everyone else.

The opportunities that the Dairy Science Center provides cannot be lost. This is not only the maintenance of a tradition; it is the protection of future possibilities for students who can gain valuable experience by working at the Dairy Science Center.

THE BATTALION

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Do not be afraid of what is discussed here

Public need not shy away from topics addressed in 'The Vagina Monologues'

"I bet you're worried. I was worried ... I was worried about what we think about vaginas, and even more worried about what we don't think about them." So begins Eve Ensler's "The Vagina Monologues," which was performed this week at Rudder Auditorium. It created quite a controversy last year when it was performed for the first time on the Texas A&M campus, and this year has proven to be no different. There remains to be a large, underground, anti-Vagina Monologue movement coupled with those who are too ignorant to look past the "V-word" in the title and appreciate the production for its raw display of femininity, sexuality, self-appreciation, or lack of it.



MELISSA FRIED

Don't be ignorant. As far as many are concerned, anything with the word "vagina" flagrantly displayed for the public to see is too crude for an ordinary person's taste. The word is immediately associated with sex, and since many do not like to openly discuss sex, using the word "vagina" is just as taboo as talking about sex

itself. There cannot be a more perfect example of an invalid hypothetical syllogism than the one above.

From the title alone, there are a million and one assumptions to be made about the actual premise of the play. In reality, there is only one principle behind "The Vagina Monologues." This is not some raunchy, vulgar outlet to promote sex, but rather part of Eve Ensler's crusade to wipe out the shame and embarrassment that many women still associate with their bodies or their sexuality, as The New York Times wrote in its 1999 review of the play.

While many of the monologues are funny, such as the one that asks different women what their vaginas would say if they could talk, there are also those that deal with more difficult topics such as rape and subjugation.

A particular monologue, entitled "My Vagina was My Village" was written for the tens of thousands of women in Bosnia who have been raped as a "systematic tactic of war," according to Eve Ensler's introduction for this piece. It is littered with imagery, sexual and violent, yet is done in such a manner as to convey the underlying significance of its theme.

For those who say this piece is vulgar and distasteful, they

are doing nothing more than blatantly ignoring the vulgarity of rape itself, as well as the physical and emotional scars left behind after the crime is committed. Other monologues are pure shockers. Ears will burn, cheeks will flush, and a few may even avert their eyes. Why is it that we can discuss politics, religion, and even sports without thinking twice about it, yet blush at the mere fact of discussing our own bodies? We know our bodies better than we will ever know about the intrinsic workings of today's political systems, but we refuse to talk about them.

"The Vagina Monologues" ends with a powerful piece called "I Was There in the Room." It has nothing to do with sex - not directly, anyway - and everything to do with vaginas. It describes an account of a woman witnessing childbirth in all its agony and glory. "The heart is able to forgive and repair. It can change its shape to let us in. It can expand to let us out. So can the vagina." It adds a tender touch to an edgy production and makes us think about the overall role of the vagina beyond a sexual connotation.

Get your ticket for tonight's show and enjoy.

Melissa Fried is a sophomore international studies major.

MAIL CALL

Portrayal of after-party incident wrong

In response to Sarah Walch's Feb. 24 article:

I am upset at the way The Battalion is dragging out the events of the after party from this past weekend. First of all, the main story was very opinionated. Sure there were 6,000 people present, but not each and everyone of those 6,000 were causing a disturbance.

As for this being ironic to the so-called "ghetto party," there is a difference between a "ghetto party" and a party described as ghetto. There was not any intention on the part of many students at this school for the events to happen like they did, but that does not mean that we are playing into the stereotypes.

People chose to place stereotypes on things that they have seen through the media, but until you experience it, you will not know. And as for this being a diversity issue, you should thank your

lucky stars that other African-Americans want to grace this campus for an event that brings everyone together because of the 7,000 plus attendees, most of them were not A&M students.

Disagreements don't just exist within one group of people; just look at the diverseness of our country and the disagreement we have with a foreign country. Is this a racial disagreement?

There are people who believe that one group may lack social graces, but there is no evidence that anybody will not retaliate when provoked, regardless of race or gender. One incident does not make or break a standard for social behavior.

Tyechia P. Williams
Class of 2005

Reading the recent articles and mail call letters printed in The Battalion concerning Greek Olympiad, I am amazed at how the media is portraying this as a negative, life-threatening event.

If the writers of these articles were at the Greek Olympiad show, then I would

not question their credibility. Though one student that was interviewed, Melloy Baker, other students that were in attendance were not questioned to get a more general consensus of how the party went.

I was at Greek Olympiad and at no point in the hours that I was there did I fear for my life and I didn't see bullets flying in the air at all. All the 6,000 people who were in attendance weren't under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol like the newspaper portrayed it.

Yes, maybe some fights broke out on the dance floor because someone stepped on another person's foot, but that should be expected if more than 5,000 people are on the dance floor at the same time.

I ask that everyone who wasn't at the Greek Olympiad hold their negative comments. The best thing to do is to ask the attendees, if at any point in their Greek Olympiad experience, feared for their lives.

Ebun Akindele
Class of 2004



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THE BATTALION
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