

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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Differing opinions needed

On March 31 in Albuquerque, N.M., two Highland High School teachers were told by the school district that they would be suspended if they refused to take down student-created anti-war and pro-war posters in their classrooms. They refused and were placed on leave. School officials removed the posters the next day and the teachers were not allowed to return to their classrooms for one week, according to The Albuquerque Tribune.

The school districts' actions were out of line. The teachers, Geoffrey Barrett and Allen Cooper, should never have been put on administrative leave. They were simply doing their jobs. A school district official told The Associated Press that Barrett and Cooper were suspended "in connection with the district's policy on the presentation of controversial issues." However, Barrett, a history and current events teacher for the high school, told the AP he walked out of a meeting with school officials because they could not point to a district policy prohibiting the artwork.

"Our district policies are that I can't display my own personal opinion, but that is not what this is about. This is about the students' rights and they are too thick-headed to see the differ-

ence," Barrett said.

The posters were the students' opinions, not Barrett's. His students made the posters he was suspended for as part of a class assignment. They represented both sides of an important and prominent world event. As a current events teacher, it was Barrett's job to encourage students to voice their opinions on this topic.

High schools should be a place that fosters discussion on issues, especially issues as dominating as wars. The war in Iraq has permeated almost every aspect of American life. News channels such as CNN and MSNBC have become "All Iraq, all the time" channels. The New York Times has a special section everyday called "A Nation at War." The war is everywhere and it affects all Americans, which includes high school students.

Barrett told the AP, "I think this is mostly a violation of the students' rights to have a voice and express their opinions. Asking me to take down the posters was taking away the voice of the students and I was not going to do

that."

Students should not be stopped from expressing their opinions about things that affect them simply because a school district deems the issue too controversial. Barrett and Cooper put themselves on the line to ensure their students' voices were heard and they should be commended for it, not punished.

Barrett and Cooper were not the first teachers to be suspended because of war posters. Earlier in March, two teachers and a counselor were suspended from Rio Grande High School in Albuquerque for refusing to take down anti-war posters, according to the local NBC affiliate KOBTV. In protest, 45 students walked out of class and four were later arrested for refusing to return to school.

Freedom of speech is the most important tenet in a democratic society. Suppressing speech not only destroys the liberty Americans hold so dear, it is unconstitutional. And yet, across the United States, Americans are finding themselves punished for

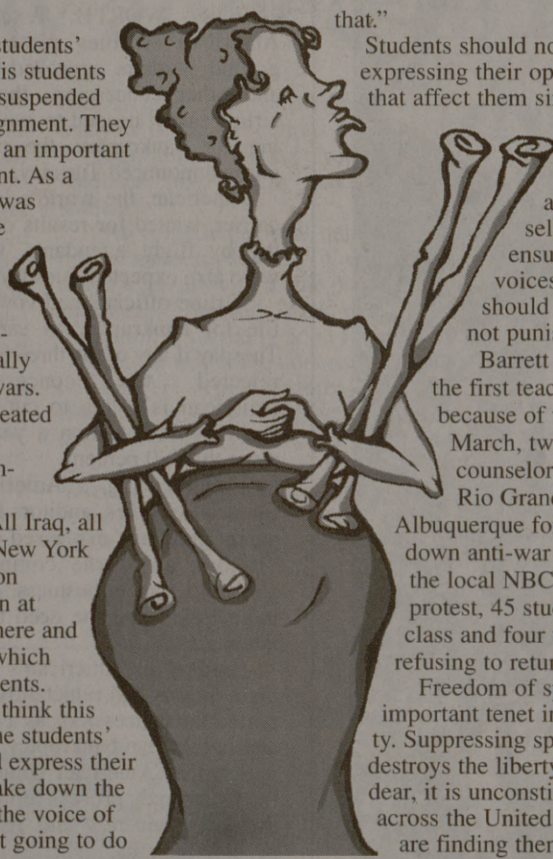
expressing their opinions about a war with which they do not agree.

According to the Pacifica Radio Foundation, a man in Albany, N.Y. was arrested in a mall last month for wearing a T-shirt that read, "Give Peace a Chance." A girl on the basketball team at St. Mary's College in Newburgh, N.Y. was booed off the court for refusing to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner." A high school student in Michigan was suspended for wearing a shirt calling Bush an "international terrorist." A 15th anniversary celebration of the movie "Bull Durham" scheduled to be held at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., was canceled due to the anti-war opinions of Susan Sarandon and Tim Robbins who both starred in the film, according to The New York Times.

This is getting ridiculous. The war may be a touchy subject and anti-war opinions may not be popular, but all Americans have a constitutionally guaranteed right to say what they feel. People have a right to agree with the American government's actions or to disagree.

People have the right to at least discuss the issue. Barrett and Cooper were ensuring this right for their students and should not have been suspended. The students of Highland High are lucky to have instructors who care so much for their opinions.

Jenelle Wilson is a senior political science major. Graphic by Leigh Richardson.



Revisionist theory of history is misguided

Texas A&M remembers its own. We memorialize our fallen Aggies at Silver Taps and Muster. We memorialized Lawrence Sullivan Ross for the prestige and improvements that he brought to A&M. We memorialized E. King Gill for making his legendary stand for the football team that is embodied by the 12th Man tradition today. We memorialized Earl Rudder for his heroics on the field of battle as well as in the position of A&M President. However, tonight, the Student Senate will vote on whether to construct a memorial on campus to honor someone without a direct connection to A&M, or the historical merit to justify it. Matthew Gaines did not earn a statue at A&M, but those willing to rewrite history are attempting to do it for him.

On April 2, the Senate established an ad-hoc committee for the purpose of memorializing Gaines. The following week, the committee e-mailed student organizations on campus with a letter extolling the virtues of a Gaines memorial and inviting them to participate in its creation.

In the e-mail written by the Gaines memorial committee, they wrote that "Gaines was an African American who is responsible for the establishment of the A&M College of Texas...Without his efforts, it is likely that A&M would not exist today and the state of higher education in Texas would not be nearly as strong."

Gaines' actual contribution to A&M is deceptively less than the misinformation distributed by the Senate. Gaines voted for Senate Bill 276 that allowed Texas to take advantage of the feder-



MATT MADDOX

al Morrill Land Grant College Act, eventually leading to the establishment of The Agriculture and Mechanical College of Texas. Gaines' role in the process could not be called anything more or less than what at least 62 legislators, who would have been required to vote for the bill's passage, contributed. Historians generally attribute the authorship of the bill to a member of then - Gov. Edmund Davis' cabinet. As former A&M history professor and author Henry Dethloff wrote in "A Centennial History of Texas A&M University 1876-1976," "The future of Texas A&M was not to be determined by any individual, legislature or administration." While Gaines' vote on Bill 276 indeed furthered the establishment of A&M, it is doubtful that the bill would have failed without his support. Gaines deserves a "thank you" rather than a monument, as do Davis and the other members of the legislature who supported the bill. The Senate later sent out an e-mail saying that they overelaborated about Gaines' part.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of a historical justification for the memorializing of Gaines and as evidenced by the Senate e-mail and the list of supporting organizations, another reason has taken shape: racial tokenism.

In the same e-mail from the Gaines memorial committee, they wrote, "We sincerely hope that your organization chooses to join this progressive coalition to memorialize the priceless contributions of one of A&M's greatest African American heroes."

After the catastrophic loss of several hundred New York City firefighters in the attack on the World Trade Center, there was a movement to memorialize the image of three firefighters raising an American flag over the ruins of the towers. A statue was to be

constructed of the moment, much like the statue memorializing the raising of the Stars and Stripes over Iwo Jima. However, the feelings of unity after the tragedy were cut short when the sponsors of the statue wished to divide the depicted figures into racial categories. Instead of memorializing the three white men who raised the flag, the statue was to be composed of a Hispanic man, a black man and a white man for political correctness sake. That memorial was doomed because of its revisionist view of history and it should do the same to the local memorial movement.

The proposed Gaines memorial, like the scrapped NYC firefighter statue, would be a permanent tribute to race instead of actual accomplishments. Looking at those who are already memorialized on our campus, each walked this campus, fought for our school, and inspired us with his individual stands. To elevate Gaines' contributions to that level would be to trivialize those that came before it.

Also important is the issue of cost. The Bonfire Memorial price tag is an estimated \$1.5 million. Estimates on the Gaines memorial in 1996 were \$200,000. That is enough money to help salvage the Department of Journalism or keep the Dairy Center solvent for a year.

Before erecting a memorial, the Student Senate should consult a history book, and then the student body by referendum. If the Gaines memorial passes both of those tests, then and only then can it claim to be an accurate reflection of the past and campus sentiment.

Matt Maddox is a senior management major.

America has to be aware

For most Americans, Sept. 11, 2001 was a day of shock and devastation, catching them completely off-guard. Some might say it marked America's coming of age. Its youthful innocence was lost alongside the twin towers, sloughed off by its merciless introduction to life in the 21st century. For many Americans, it was a reality check, a tragic reminder that the rest of the world exists too.

The 1990s saw relatively far-reaching peace and prosperity for this great nation, breeding an atmosphere of complacency and self-absorption. Many prominent social commentators, most notably, Washington Post columnist Charles Krauthammer, have dubbed the 90s America's "holiday from history." Yet, while Americans tend to know little about the rest of the world, the rest of the world watches America intently.

Mark Hertsgaard, in his book, "The Eagle's Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World," describes with great insight and clarity how the rest of the world takes cues from the United States — on everything from the clothes worn in Japan, to the music listened to in Sweden and to the movies watched in Brazil. America's political, military, cultural and economic institutions have a decisive influence, he elaborates, on the lives of people everywhere on Earth, shaping the answers to such questions as "Will I have a job next month? Will there be war?" and "What's on TV tonight?" Thus, foreigners must pay

attention to America, whereas Americans have traditionally cared very little about the outside world. In the years leading up to Sept. 11, the stock markets crept higher and higher, birthing countless millionaires every day, so who cared what was going on in the rest of the world?

Furthermore, America receives a disproportionate amount of media coverage around the globe, reinforcing foreigners' sense of always living in "the Eagle's shadow." The foreign press scrutinizes our government and its policies much more thoroughly than our own media do, so outsiders often see things about the United States that natives are blind to. This was apparent to Alexis de Tocqueville even in 1835 when, in his famed "Democracy in America," he mused that we tend to "live in a state of perpetual self-adoration...only strangers or experience may be able to bring certain truths to the Americans' attention."

Hertsgaard, who has spent a good portion of his life traveling the world gauging foreign opinion of the United States, from business leaders to illiterate peasants to starry-eyed teenagers, explains why Americans' lack of interest in the outside world is not surprising. Because the United States is so immense and is protected on two sides by oceans, the rest of the world seems very distant in our consciousness. Americans, for the most part, lack the sense, so common on other continents, that foreign peoples with different languages, cultures and beliefs live just over the next ridge or river.

Consequent to its indifference, America's plunge back into reality on that horrific Tuesday morning was all the more painful and disorienting. As Hertsgaard writes, "one minute we were

enjoying the most privileged way of life in history. The next, terrorists had destroyed totemic symbols of our civilization and inflicted more deaths than the United States had suffered in a single day of combat since the Civil War." Suddenly Americans had learned the hard way: what foreigners think does matter. Hertsgaard is quick to point out, however, that Osama bin Laden and the Taliban are not representative of international opinion; that hatred of America, though intense where it exists, is relatively rare.

Nevertheless, we no longer live in a world that allows blissful ignorance to be our security blanket. It is high time we give some serious thought to the public image we are projecting to the world. The time is now to reassess our values and to take stock in what is important to us. James Madison, referred to as the "Father of the Constitution" and fourth president of the United States, once stated "a people" who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives." If we are serious about preserving our freedoms and preventing more terrorist attacks, we must be aware that abusing the power the greatest military force in history affords us will undoubtedly agitate this whole situation. Only by informing ourselves, by pulling our heads out of the sand and waking up to the world around us, by keeping a vigilant watch on the actions of our government and other nations, and by facing more than a few uncomfortable truths about the new world we now inhabit, will we be able to finally expose the roots of this terrorism phenomenon.

Scott Monk is a sophomore agronomy major.

MAIL CALL

Concerns about Student Media Board are unfounded; controls needed at The Battalion

In response to the April 15 editorial:

While I will wait until reviewing Brady Creel's proposal to vote on its merits, there are several reasons why the Texas A&M community should initially be critical of the proposal.

Earlier this semester, approximately 200 students participated in a forum voicing concerns of the Battalion: accuracy in reporting, misinformation and breadth of coverage. Several students shared specific instances in which The Battalion committed these acts, sometimes in a seemingly deliberate way.

It seems as though these concerns have not been addressed in a substantive way. There are still no central controls to ensure accuracy and no formal repercussions for staff accused of malfeasance. Surprisingly, a news reporter, after being accused of misquoting University President Robert M. Gates and Texas Sen. Steve Ogden, was promoted to news editor. It is my hope that this is not how the members of the Battalion earn their "stripes".

These are serious concerns. This year, Gates, Ogden and Student Body President Zac Coventry had to write to The Battalion to correct the record. In some instances they have had to e-mail the entire student body.

Interestingly enough, as many times as the editors mention the potential for conflict on the board, they never point to an instance of

that conflict. Their reporters should stick to reporting the news instead of attempting to create it.

In writing their article, they attempt to influence the board and student opinion before the board meets to discuss the issue, a move far more political than the charges they level against student leaders.

Brady's proposal represents a view inconsistent with what is in the interest of the community. The Battalion cannot have it both ways — they can either be "fiercely independent" and refuse the \$25,000 in student service fees they receive, the free faculty advising, and the office space they use, or they can follow the rules that all of us in student organizations have to follow.

Whether you are in Fish Camp, Student Government, the MSC or The Battalion, you are not independent of the University, no matter how many articles you write wishing it were so.

Barry Hammond
former MSC President

ED: The Battalion receives \$22,000 in student services fee money yearly, which is used to fund the distribution of the paper, which cost approximately \$30,400 last year. The salary of the Battalion's adviser is paid by the Division of Student Media, which is funded by Battalion advertising revenue.