

Supporting sweatshops

Clothing with college logos is sometimes produced in deplorable conditions

Texas A&M prides itself on setting an example of integrity and respect throughout the academic world.

While the University has made great improvements over the years, it has overlooked its own support of sweatshops throughout parts of Latin America and Asia. Most Aggies aren't aware that some of the clothes they buy are manufactured under poor conditions.

If A&M is truly a campus founded on high moral principle and a respect for fellow man, it must play an active role in saying no to the corporate interests that continue to profit at the expense of the world's less fortunate.

The Memorial Student Center Bookstore sells clothing with A&M logos made by companies such as Nike and Champion.

According to the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, workers in the Dominican Republic and other countries throughout Latin America make clothing with university logos under these popular brand names, among others.

BJ&B, the company that owns a sweatshop outside of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, often forces overtime work of up to 56 hours per week. The AFL-CIO notes that an average baseball cap sells for around \$20. Of this amount, workers earn around 8 cents, while the university gets around \$1.50 in licensing fees for the product. This is outrageous since the pay at these factories is only one-third of the necessary wages to provide for a family under the Dominican government's own standards.

A&M's Athletic Department might also be sponsoring products made in reprehensible working conditions throughout parts of Asia. According to The New York Times, workers at a Nike shoe factory in Vietnam receive \$10 for the 65 hours a week they were forced to work. An Ernst & Young report in 1997 concluded that workers at that Nike shoe factory, most under the age of 25, work more than 10 hours a day, six days a week, in deplorable working conditions for pay barely enough to feed their families.



JONATHAN STEED

The report also cited dangerous air quality in which workers were exposed to carcinogens that exceeded local Vietnamese standards by 177 times, causing 77 percent of the employees to suffer from respiratory problems.

While A&M might not be aware of these deplorable conditions, certain brands used by the Athletic Department and sold in the MSC Bookstore are made in sweatshops such as the ones in Latin America and Asia. The workers in these sweatshops will never have the opportunity to escape the hell they work and live in nor to attend college at a school such as A&M. Rather, they are locked into a life of low pay, long hours and poor working conditions.

Multinational corporations such as Nike and Champion represent the worst of capitalism. Over the years, these companies have engaged in despicable practices aimed at

preventing workers in sweatshops from organizing and protecting their rights. These workers lack the ability to form unions and collectively bargain for decent salaries, health benefits and better hours.

While the corporate fat cats of these large companies have their henchmen do their dirty work of union busting and environmental exploitation, they reap the profits made at the expense of young, disadvantaged workers. Most of the laborers can only dream of the country club banquets and lavish mansions they help provide for while being taken advantage of.

A&M officials have a responsibility to look into this matter and investigate whether the University is sponsoring and condoning such reprehensible labor practices. Student groups at other campuses throughout the United States have helped influence university officials to ban all products made in sweatshops from the shelves of their bookstores or on the bodies of their athletes, and A&M should follow suit.



Jonathan Steed is a senior political science major. Graphic by Paul Wilson

MAIL CALL

Reasons for leaving early

In response to Sept. 27 mail call:

I am not offering this as an excuse, but rather as an explanation. Aggies do stand by their team win or lose; however, the weather on Saturday really did not allow for it. Standing on third deck, there is no misting system, no upper deck, nothing to block the sun.

Many of the Aggies, including me, who "left" at halftime were just going to sit in the corridor to cool down and come back to watch the second half. Two of the friends I went with had to leave at the beginning of the fourth quarter because they were not feeling well. I'm sure that the medics in the first aid station will tell you that they had a busy day.

Yes, Aggies do not leave the game early; however, it is also very unbecoming of an Aggie to point fingers at people without understanding the situation. For those who left because we were losing, they are "two percenters," but for those of you who tried to stay but left due to the heat, thank you for attempting to keep the Aggie tradition.

Thomas Watson
Class of 2006

Bus drivers are required to leave games early

I would like to speak on behalf of all of the bus drivers who attend and work the football games. We are not "two-percenters." We are required to leave the game when the game clock reads 7:00 in the fourth quarter. This is so we have time to arrive at our buses and have them ready to leave when the final cannon fires.

I am sure everyone who rides the buses would be upset if the bus drivers waited until after yell practice and then went to drive.

While I understand that drivers only comprise approximately 100 persons of the mass exodus toward the end of the game, please be aware of this fact when you start yelling at everyone leaving the game.

Jeff Pack
Class of 2002

Aggies are drifting apart

After reading Monday's mail call, I was left further sickened by Saturday's loss to Pittsburgh. The most shocking wake up call was how much energy many Aggies exert on bashing other Aggies' actions. A&M is a great school and environment. I respect our traditions, and I'm not lashing out at the authors of Monday's articles. As Aggies, our energy should be exerted pulling together instead of drifting apart. I stayed until the bitter end of the game, but only because I chose to. I also chose to yell my loudest the whole game, but I didn't see the point in wielding up more energy to yell at my fellow student body. In fact, I stood next to a few "red asses" who clearly cared more

about my buddy "taking his f'ing hat off" than participating in our traditional yells. I guess it's a lot worse to boo referees than yell obscenities at our student class. Our energy should be spent taking part in our traditions, and not ripping each other apart. Games, win or lose, should bring Aggies together, there's no arguing that. Let's strive to stay the whole game, yell our loudest for the right reasons, and stick together; nothing more, nothing less.

Scott Christianson
Class of 2003
Miles Schneider
Class of 2006

An embarrassment to A&M

In response to Dallas Shipp's Sept. 28 column:

I could not agree more with Mr. Shipp's article regarding the uncover tradition. Aggie football games have lost all that they once were. They are an embarrassment to go to most of the time. From the "die hard" fans screaming "uncover," to those yelling at the refs, and finally those insulting other people for leaving early: I think the ones who call others "two percenters" are themselves two percenters for criticizing and not understanding others. Let's not divide the school, instead let us all be what brought us here.

Thomas Watson
Class of 2006

Academics more important than Aggie Spirit

In response to Sept. 30 mail call:

I hardly believe that when the founders of our University decided they wanted to build an agricultural and mechanical college out here in East Texas, that foremost on their minds was building this thing called "Aggie Spirit." I'm pretty sure they decided to build an institution of higher education, which would suggest academics, and then the "Aggie Spirit" developed over time.

The reason I came to A&M was first and foremost to get an education. What an embarrassment it would be to me and all the former and future students of A&M if our degrees were based on a spirit instead of academics. I'm insulted that you would suggest my degree wasn't based on academics! Why would I have wasted all my time here? We would be the subject of many more Aggie jokes, and rightly so!

Thank goodness though, that people outside of your box, realize that we do stress academics here, and that our degree means that we have successfully completed the stringent academic coursework at one of the finest academic institutions in the world!

Ryan Bednarz
Class of 2003

Leaving hat on is not a sign of disrespect

In response to Oct. 1 mail call:

First off, I hope Mr. Gross understands there is a significant difference between taking your hat off in a Memorial Student Center dedicated to those who died fighting for out freedoms, church and our National Anthem versus a coordinated yell during a football game.

Second, if somebody doesn't want to take their hat off during a yell, so be it. Just yell "Uncover" and be done with it. If they don't, then just go on with the yell. Somebody leaving his hat on doesn't lower the overall volume of the yell nor is it disrespecting anybody. People who go out of their way and yell vulgar words to some visitor are more harmful to the Aggie Spirit than that visitor wearing his hat.

James Holland
Class of 2003

An outsider's memorable uncovering experience

I was at the game with some Aggie friends 10 years ago. I was a student at UT. They didn't tell me not to wear a hat to the game either out of naivete or faith that I would be exempt or who knows what. I soon hear "uncover" for the first time in my life coming from the rear.

I figured I was the intended target when a rabid group of Corps folks delivered the message directly to my ears from five inches away. I had never heard of this tradition. I was not there to mock them.

Well into the second quarter I enjoy this chorus while trying to go along with all other general movements and sways (otherwise you get crushed) and trying to enjoy the game.

Finally, at the friendly urging of my friend's girlfriend and the mass-rage of threats that my hat would go flying, I relented and took the hat off. What I have never been able to take off is the incoherent fanaticism of that one screeching word.

Kevin Gibson
University of Texas graduate

Uncover debate ridiculous

After every football game, the same song is repeated. "Don't tell people to uncover, its un-Aggie-like." Honestly, this is ridiculous.

If you bring someone to a game, warn them beforehand that when people start moving their hands, take your hat off. It isn't a difficult concept, and although some would bemoan it, it is tradition, because tradition is not just something that is widely publicized and advertised. The mantra at Fish Camp is always, "if it happens twice at A&M, it's a tradition."

Would you bring someone to the Memorial Student Center and not warn them to stay off the grass? Would you not explain to them at a

game why we say "off the wood" when a player is injured, even if they are part of the other team? Rather than griping about the people who take it as their duty to tell people to take their hats off, if you bring a friend, tell them yourself.

James Floyd
Class of 2006

Aggies need to remember why A&M stands apart

The Spirit of Aggeland is something that I hold very dear to my heart. Since I am in Washington, D.C., I read The Battalion everyday to stay in touch with all that is going on in Aggeland. These past few days I have been reading the articles in The Battalion and it kills me to see the Twelfth Man ripping each other apart.

Yes, I agree the Twelfth Man should stay until the end of the game. The whole reason behind the Twelfth Man is to stand behind our team and more importantly our fellow Aggies to show our support.

Yes sometimes it is rough, but two weeks ago when I stood as part of the Twelfth Man at the Virginia Tech game, soaking wet and freezing from the hurricane, I could do nothing but smile and cheer to the end because of how much Texas A&M means to me.

It hurts me to see the school that so many people love and admire act like this. Texas A&M stands apart from every other school because we are rich in tradition and known as one of the friendliest schools around. This is something that we all need to remember.

Karen Kier
Class of 2003

Losing sight of traditions

I'm a third generation Aggie, and I couldn't wait to get up here to Aggeland. I grew up hearing about how everyone says Howdy to everyone they see whether they know them or not. So naturally that's what I thought I'd be hearing when I came up here.

However, since I've been up here I can count the number of people that I don't know who have said "Howdy" to me first on one hand. I typically have to say howdy first, which I don't mind doing at all, but I would like to hear howdy back.

Another tradition that has gone downhill among others is the fact that underclassmen can't say certain words. I've talked to seniors who don't even know about this. We cannot say elephant, trunk, zip, button and there are others.

Oh well, I guess we will forget all the traditions that have formed over the past 100 years because we are a generation of wimps who can't take a few pushups. I think we should fight for our traditions.

Lauren Gray
Class of 2007