

Put your hands on the hood

Report on Texas' racial profiling problem underscores the need for reform

Many black and Hispanic Texans know the frustration of being pulled over by the police not for something they did, but because of what race they are. They know the humiliation of being the recipients of unwarranted searches. They are familiar with the anger of knowing that it is likely to happen again. And now, a report released Feb. 3 confirms what many minorities in this state have known for all their lives: black and Hispanic drivers are more likely to be stopped and searched by law enforcement officers than their white counterparts.



COLLINS EZEANYIM

While this racial profiling report is one of the best tools Texans now have to examine the prominence of racial profiling, there remains much work to be done. As already alluded to, many law enforcement officials deny there is a problem at all. But too many minority Texans would disagree with that.

Even if it were someday concluded that minorities were not being searched at disproportionate rates, the perception of many minorities that police are out to get them is a problem itself that must be addressed.

The report, titled "Racial Profiling: Texas Traffic Stop and Searches," was prepared for the Texas Criminal Justice Reform Coalition, the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, the League of United Latin American Citizens of Texas and the Texas State Conference of NAACP Branches. Although critics of the report have cited problems with the method of data collection and the data itself, the conclusions of the report should lead to reform within Texas Law Enforcement Agencies that eliminates racial profiling.

The research found large discrepancies in black and Hispanic stop-and-search rates when compared to the numbers of whites. Indeed, page nine of the report states, "approximately six of every seven law enforcement agencies in Texas reported higher search rates of blacks and Latinos than of Anglos following a traffic stop."

Black drivers were 1.6 times more likely than white drivers to be searched. Latinos were 1.4 times more likely than white drivers to be searched. Locally, both blacks and Hispanics were more than three times as likely to be searched in Bryan and more than two times as likely to be searched in College Station, according to The Battalion.

It was inevitable that such findings would be contested by law enforcement officials across Texas. Hans Maricic, president of the Houston Police Officer's Union, wrote an opinion piece in The Houston Chronicle stating: "These racial profiling numbers do not take into account the economic and social conditions of the areas where many officers are assigned to work. Every indicator shows higher crime rates in the black and Hispanic sections of Houston."

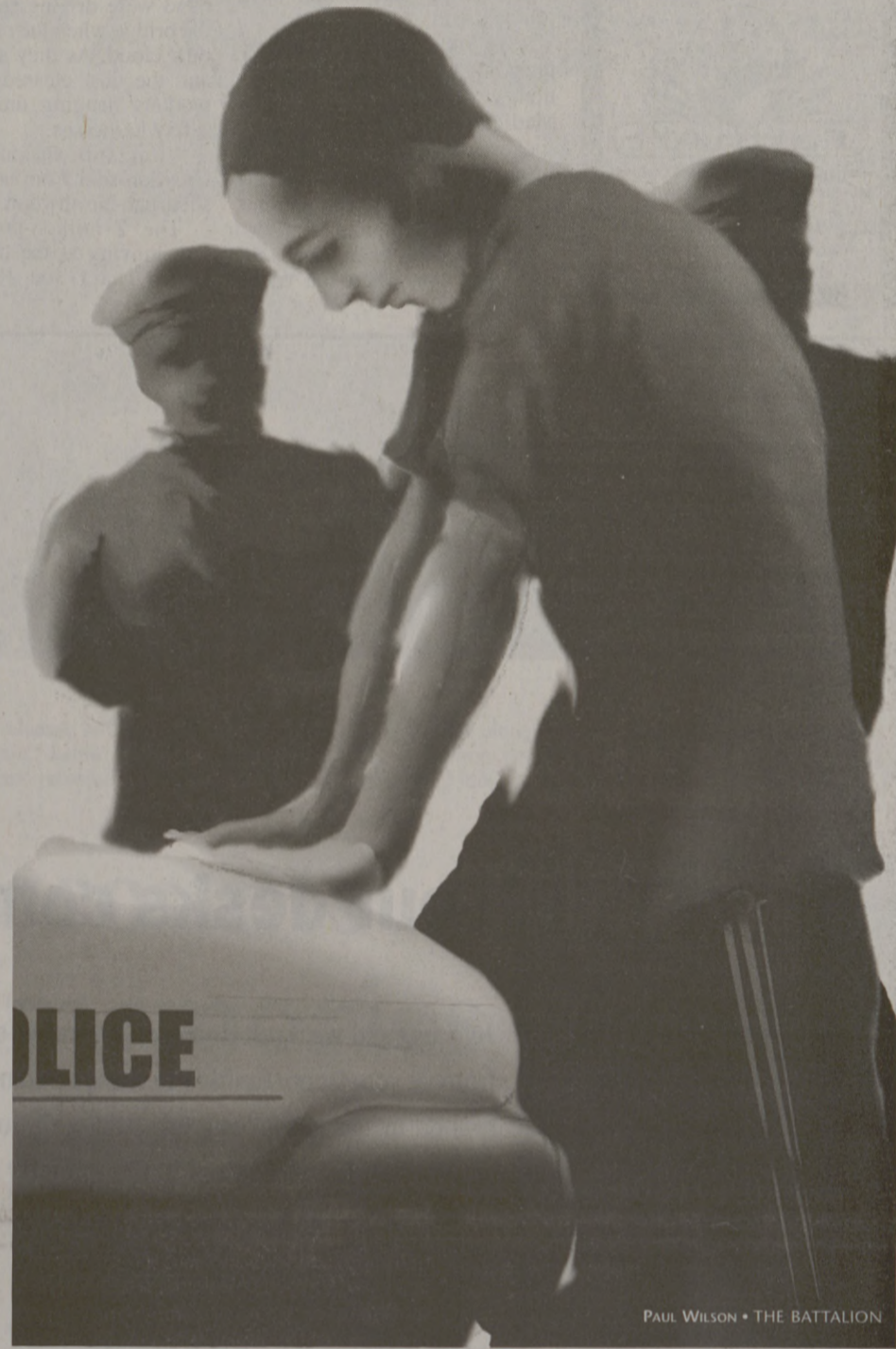
Granted, the lack of economic prosperity in some black and Hispanic communities may lead to a higher crime rate which in turn could lead to more stops and arrests. But this doesn't explain the disproportionate number of stops of minorities in white neighborhoods. Blacks were more than three times as likely and Latinos were 2.8 times as likely to be searched in Alamo Heights, which is a predominantly white neighborhood in San Antonio, according to The San Antonio Express-News.

The issue of data collection must also be addressed. The report mentions the 2001 Racial Profiling Data Collection Law that requires Texas law enforcement agencies that perform pedestrian and traffic stops to collect data on the race of those being stopped. All agencies must submit at least simple but shallow data — known as Tier 1 data — concerning the stop. This data includes the race of the motorist stopped, whether a search was conducted, whether the motorist gave consent to the search and whether that person was arrested. Tier 2 data — which includes whether probable cause existed to conduct a search — is much more comprehensive and allows for more analysis and a better chance at insight into the racial profiling matter.

Unfortunately, many law enforcement agencies are exempted from collecting Tier 2 data because of a large loophole that must be closed. All law enforcement agencies that have installed audio visual equipment in their vehicles are exempt from having to collect Tier 2 data, which should make sense to most. What does not make sense is exempting those agencies that have applied for funding for audio visual equipment — regardless of whether they received it or not.

Since most Texas agencies fall under these two exemptions, the majority of them do not report Tier 2 data, according to the report. This loophole must be closed immediately, and all law enforcement agencies in Texas should be required to collect Tier 2 data. This report should provide the impetus to change certain aspects of law enforcement in Texas. Perhaps these reforms will lead to a day when minority motorists will feel a sense of safety and justice when they see officers approaching.

Collins Ezeanyim is a senior computer engineering major.



PAUL WILSON • THE BATTALION

French headware ban advances secular ideals

Starting next September, children attending public schools in France will most likely not be allowed to wear certain religious garments. This is due to a ban passed on Feb. 10 by France's lower house of parliament which is expected to easily clear the French Senate.



CODY SAIN

The ban is designed to reduce Islamic fundamentalism by targeting women's head coverings, called "hijabs." However, it will ultimately anger many Muslims and incite radical and dangerous behavior. Furthermore, the wording of this ban discriminates against Jewish and Christian children and is nothing more than a way to advance France's secular ideals.

Many Muslims believe Allah commanded women to keep their heads covered, and it is extremely important to them that this rule be followed. For others, the issue at hand is modesty. The regulations on clothing in many Muslim communities exist so that women will not be seen as merely sexual objects. Many devout, traditional Muslim women believe women in America and Europe have sold their bodies for the sexual pleasure of men. The Muslim girls in French schools should not be forced to expose themselves in public. This would be somewhat like forcing American girls to go to school wearing only their undergarments.

Richard Stadelmann, A&M professor of philosophy and religion, said that although he does not consider himself an expert on this issue, he believes the ban is reasonable. Stadelmann said he believes the head coverings might make running the schools more

difficult because it would not be easy to identify many of the female students, especially if the girl is wearing a veil that shows only her eyes.

While it is reasonable to forbid the girls from wearing masks, many head coverings do not cover the entire face. To ban all

types of head covering is discriminatory and takes away the girls' right to peacefully practice their religion. Furthermore, just as it is erroneous to assume that the typical Christian poses a safety threat to homosexuals, it is wrong to assume that the typical Muslim poses a national security threat, even if a sizable number of such people exist in a given area.

"The ban ... will ultimately anger many Muslims and incite radical and dangerous behavior."

The vague wording of the ban can apply to more than just the hijab. According to The Associated Press, the text of the bill says, "in schools, junior high schools and high schools, signs and dress that conspicuously show the religious affiliation of students are forbidden."

Theoretically, this includes Jewish skull caps and Christian crosses too. Ultimately, this ban is nothing more than an act designed to discourage and limit religious practices in France. The culture and government

of France have become increasingly secular in the country's recent history. While there is nothing wrong with that in itself, the problem is that from this secularism comes widespread anti-religious sentiments, and this leads to discrimination. Students have the right to visibly express their religion; the French government should not try to destroy that right.

Our own constitution guarantees us the right to practice any religion we choose. The framers of the U.S. Constitution believed the rights in the Bill of Rights apply to all people; in fact, many men at the time believed it was unnecessary for these principles to be recorded because they were so basic. U.S. leaders should help protect the rights of French citizens and encourage the French Senate members not to pass this ban.

The ban, which has already upset many in the Islamic community, will ultimately increase hatred toward western nations and cause a rise in fundamentalism; this is the complete opposite of its goal. It is quite possible that this will both directly and indirectly cause violence to increase.

Historically, Islam is not a religion of peace. However, neither is Christianity or Judaism. In the past, people have had to use violence to secure their rights and freedoms, religious or otherwise. Hopefully that will not have to happen here.

If French leaders truly care about the safety and rights of their citizens, the French Senate should not pass this ban.

Cody Sain is a junior philosophy major.

MAIL CALL

SGA should choose to support diversity rally

In response to a Feb. 13 news article:

I am extremely disappointed that our elected officials have decided to pull out of the diversity rally this Wednesday.

Every choice that we make reflects our priorities, and the fact that the SGA would rather descend into political squabbling rather than support a general rally for diversity is a sad statement of its priorities.

Perhaps if diversity is as important to the Aggie campus as both sides of the rhetoric claim it to be, we can make it a priority the next time we have an SGA election.

Adam Shriver
graduate student

Watkins cannot compete at the collegiate level

In response to a Feb. 16 mail call:

Being born in Indiana, I was raised watching basketball with the same passion Aggies show to football. While here at A&M, I saw Reed Arena completed and hoped the new focus on basketball would bring the quality I was used to seeing. A conference basketball game at Duke, Kentucky or Indiana has the same energy as Kyle Field does during football because of the quality of their teams.

Coach Watkins has shown he is not able to coach at that level. I have seen Indiana high school teams with better fundamental skills make smarter game-time decisions than our men's team often does.

If our players don't come to A&M with this understanding of the game, then it's up to our coaches to instill these qualities in them. It's a shame our athletes, who play so hard, are not being coached in ways that would give them chances to win in conference.

It's not only about winning. Coach Blair has done more for the women's program in a few months than Coach Watkins has done with the men's team in his whole tenure. The wins will come for Coach Blair, but not for the men until we get a new coach.

Judd Moody
Class of 1999

Aggies should unite and celebrate differences

In response to Jon Steed's Feb. 16 column:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jon Steed of The Battalion for condemning the physical abuse of a fellow Aggie. The lack of outcry about this incident on campus was deafening for those who love peace. I am glad to see The Battalion using its influence to be a positive voice of Texas A&M.

Yet the article only focused on how this was wrong because the victim was homosexual. What was more shocking to me is how Aggies will beat up other Aggies. We are supposed to be part of the same family. Yet to some people, being an Aggie is more about your sexual or political orientation rather than enrollment in the University. It is these harmful and blatantly-discriminatory ideas that are the true threat to the 21st century Aggie Spirit. We must come together as a group and celebrate our differences, or all that talk about being an Aggie family is just cheap rhetoric.

Jonathan Smith
Class of 2005

Not all forms of fashion 'linked to the bar scene'

In response to the Feb. 16 Campus Couture:

I just read an article that makes me feel as if fashion perceptions have moved from creativity to popular sellout subcultures. Your writer for Campus Couture has missed the simplistic meaning of fashion: clothes. I love the way she notes "Texas A&M may not be the most diverse school." Is that fashion she is talking about or culture?

I am Hispanic, and I think my Levi's are OK. Where does she hang out? There are a lot of international students who express true personality fashionably and intellectually. Not all fashion motives are linked with the bar scene or roommates. Where are the pictures of people being real? Not in your article. It's possible that the constant comparison of A&M to Austin is rooted in dissatisfaction. Look at your peers and write about what is real and not what sells. Report on fashion and not the mass-produced stigma which you are feeding.

Moni Briones
Class of 2001