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Hilltopics Staff

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HILLTOPICS

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Bush bounces back; Kerry stays steady in second Presidential debate

by Gaines Greer and Courtney Underwood

Although the second match-up between President Bush and Senator Kerry, held Friday, October 8 in St. Louis, Missouri, was too strictly regimented to be accurately labeled a "town hall" meeting, as intended, it did come significantly closer to being an actual debate. Instead of the first "debate," where the candidates stayed glued behind their podiums and largely refrained from addressing each other, the town hall format forced Bush and Kerry to interact with the audience and suppress the respective grimacing and frantic scribbling that plagued the first debate. The candidates frequently followed up on their opponent's statements without waiting for his permission to proceed, and while this might have frustrated moderator Charles Gibson, from the standpoint of the audience, the infractions were welcome. Ultimately, in spite of what the political pundits say, neither Bush nor Kerry "dominated" the town hall, and each candidate's presentation included successful arguments as well as tactical and factual errors.

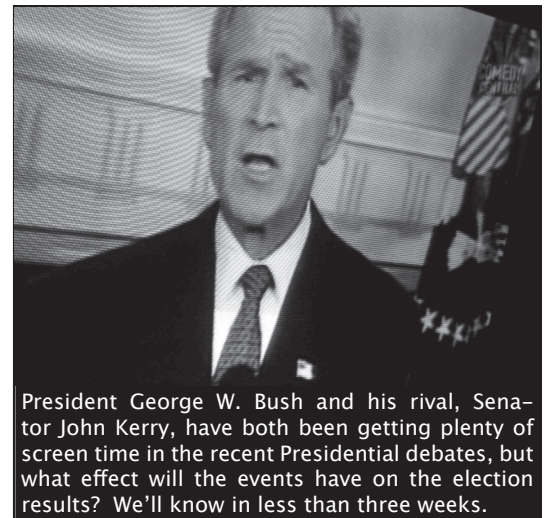
Senator Kerry, who has a history of presenting himself as awkward and wooden, proved himself surprisingly capable of relating to the audience. He spoke in relatively clear, concise statements, and even referred to members of the studio audience by name. But in spite of his improvement from the first debate, Senator Kerry did stumble in a few unexpected areas. For example, President Bush pledged to maintain an all-volunteer army, but his Democratic rival failed to make a similar promise. The only excusable reason for Kerry not making a similar commitment is if he actually does plan to revive the draft. Senator Kerry also stated his intentions to lower the number of abortions in America and lessen the nation's dependence on Middle Eastern oil; both of these ideas are excellent, but unless Kerry informs the American people of his plan to realize these goals, they are doomed to remain in the abstract. With a decisiveness that Kerry does not usually show, he stared into the camera and guaranteed that, if elected, he would not raise taxes on the middle class. Although this intention is commendable, it could also be deadly to his political career if he is elected and a crisis forces a tax increase.

President Bush's performance during the second debate also marked a startling improvement from the first debate. Whether voters regarded his opening demeanor as too angry and aggressive or as confident and passionate, they are all likely to agree that President Bush did a noticeably better job this time around. For example, he made strong points regarding

his willingness to make decisions that are right, despite their lack of popularity. Furthermore, while he sometimes failed to back up his arguments, leaving it at "he's lying" or "that's a bad plan," he did give some strong and impressive answers. For example, his response to the question regarding improvement of our air and water supply was convincing and well spoken, especially considering that he is not a strong environmentalist. However, his performance was less than perfect. He referred to the "internets," and he also had a slight, though largely unnoticed, slip of the tongue when he called Senator Kerry "Senator Kennedy" (what would Freud say?). Bush also completely bypassed the final question by saying that he stands by his decisions, but perhaps a politician outlining his mistakes is analogous to a football player scoring a touchdown for the wrong team—something Bush might actually do.

All in all, this debate was far superior for both candidates in their demeanor and responses. But while the candidates managed to break some of the rules this time, will they continue to spar with each other during the final debate on domestic policy, or will they once again leave the audience yawning? More importantly, as the election quickly approaches, the key question regarding the final debate is the following: are we going to see either of the candidates crash and burn, as Bush did in the first debate, or will both candidates give another impressive performance that precludes a severe shifting of the polls?

*Gaines Greer is a senior English and German major.
Courtney Underwood is a senior psychology major.*



President George W. Bush and his rival, Senator John Kerry, have both been getting plenty of screen time in the recent Presidential debates, but what effect will the events have on the election results? We'll know in less than three weeks.

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On the web: Go to www.smu.edu/honors/hilltopics to read all of the stories in this issue and more. You can also submit your thoughts to hilltopics@hotmail.com.

Shades of gray:

Not all Mustangs see DMSA issue in black and white...

Global tolerance needed at SMU

by Alicia Hills

In 1969, a handful of African-American students took it upon themselves to demand changes on Southern Methodist University's campus that lead to the creation of what would later be the Department of Multicultural Student Affairs. SMU has made great strides and takes great pride in saying we are a diverse student body, but nonetheless, we are still living in a time where the Department of Multicultural Student Affairs is very necessary, and many of the complaints made by those students in 1969 are still unresolved and unaccomplished dreams of the minority population here at SMU and in our community abroad.

Unfortunately, an important part of the DMSA's job is being left out of this discussion and must be addressed to understand why the office is needed, and reality is its name.

The society outside of SMU is an international community that unfortunately still consists of citizens who are judged based on their religion, cultural background, home of origin, sex, race, and other discriminatory factors. In order to be a diverse population, SMU must recruit and retain students, faculty, and staff from this society, and sadly, some of our fellow Mustangs have not developed the tolerance necessary to "be open to daily interactions and friendships with people of other backgrounds." Should they be forced to eliminate their cultural barriers? No, because that's what makes each of us a unique individual. Should they buy into the racial stereotypes ingrained into our cultures? Not at all. We must indeed come to a common understanding, but it is not that we are all Mustangs. The important understanding is that we are all human, and deserve the respect and validation that all human beings are entitled to.

The day that there is no Department of Multicultural Student Affairs is the day that our world can look at what makes us individuals and celebrate those differences dually with the fact that we are all human beings. Until that day, the majority and minority students here at SMU must face the reality of their differences and similarities head on and educate each other. Until then, DMSA's purpose is not yet fulfilled here at SMU, and the diversity education and invaluable cultural support the DMSA staff provides cannot be discounted.

To Mr. Baker and Ms. Jordan, your dream is and has been shared by many, from Mahatma Gandhi to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the minority students encourage you and our fellow Mustangs to continue to believe that a day will come when we don't need a DMSA. Until then, I challenge you to visit the DMSA office regularly and be the example to all your fellow classmates. Converse with the students who frequent that office, and actively experience its purpose by taking the initiative to truly understand how we feel and why we feel the DMSA is a necessary part of the SMU community.

Alicia Hills is a senior management and psychology major.

What is a "typical" SMU student?

by William Nguyen

Here is a little history of my years at Southern Methodist University. I am a junior electrical engineering major. I also often say that I also have a minor in "student activities" for my participation in student organizations ranging from the Asian American Leadership and Educational Conference to Program Council to Student Foundation's Ambassadors.

On a more personal note, I enjoy watching and playing rugby and football. In the past three years, I have been known to go to football games to support our Mustangs. I celebrated when they won a couple weeks back, and I was up in arms when TCU tried to run up the score at the end of the game. Lastly, I am a Vietnamese-American and a student worker at the Department of Multicultural Student Affairs. The question that has been brought to my attention has been: is there anything I have stated above that has prevented me from the "holistic integration of [the SMU] community"?

Is there a true SMU archetype? After last week's article on race relations, I have found myself looking for a model SMU student who is fully assimilated into the SMU community, socially and emotionally. So far, I have not found my muse.

The DMSA plays a much different role than a place of shelter for minority students. The assumption that the DMSA is exclusively a support system for minority students is a misconception. The function of the DMSA is to promote and encourage diversity of culture, not to emphasize differences.

In an age of cultural fusion from PF Chang's to Chipotle, the American culture is about celebrating differences. If one would take out a specific culture, America would be incomplete. This nation's strength is based on the melting pot theory and the culmination of combined cultures. From the hip-hop music in Red Jacket to the salsa meringue dancing in the Samba Room, we are integrated into a diverse world. To state that these activities should not be active just because they do not appeal to everyone is selfishly closed-minded.

The goal of any organization or group on or off campus is to promote a specific culture, ethnic and non-ethnic. One cannot state that these groups discourage from unity within the university. If so, should the University Ministries Department be shut down also? The department promotes religious differences in a Methodist university. Does that office need to close as well to truly be open for everyone? Next should be the Women's Center. After that, the Greek system should be abolished. By the time the domino chain is over, there will be no organizations left and individualistic identity will be lost. The power of a student body is in the diverse backgrounds, schools of thought, and overall personality of each individual. Only by sharing our differences to others will we be able to fully understand who we are as a united SMU community.

William Nguyen is a junior engineering major.

SMU needs to put its scholarship money where its mouth is

by Jared Dovers

"We can tell our values by looking at our checkbook stubs." ~Gloria Steinem

Damn straight, Gloria—and especially here at SMU. Before I get started, I need to clarify what exactly this rant is about. While this could be an opportunity to talk about the questionable moral judgment involved in funneling \$57 million dollars to building Ford Stadium ("possibly the most significant facility addition...since Dallas Hall" according to SMUMustangs.com), it's not. Who am I to question the logic of a bazillion dollars spent annually on the campus flora (those tulips cost, people!) while underpaid year-to-year lecturers teach in lieu of funding more tenured faculty positions?

This isn't about either of those things. It's about something slightly more dear to yours truly—scholarships. We all want them. Contra Princeton Review, quite a few of us actually need them. And while I hold our readers in the highest esteem, I'm betting most of you don't have them—at least any that actually help your parents to sleep better at night. And, even if you are a Hunt or a President's Scholar, you too can still gripe along side me.

Here's why: consider the fact that we pitch the President's Scholarship as the highest academic scholarship at SMU. President's Scholars are usually among the best of our first years, and they continue to be leaders across our campus for their stay here. They represent the university's academic aspirations, and they are students who move this university forward in academic community. Reward? Full tuition, and the chance to study abroad. What about room, board, and books? These things aren't cheap, either. Well, it seems that brainpower only get you so far here.

This doesn't seem like a bad deal at all; and—speaking as someone dishing out tuition dollars—it's not. However, when compared with the fact that every athlete here on full scholarship gets the same tuition waived plus room, board, and books, the deal academic scholars get begins to look slightly second-rate.

Not to take a single dollar away from our mustangs that work hard on the field, but I have to ask the obvious question. What does it say about our values as a university that we don't support our academic stars like we support our athletic ones? Don't take money away from athletics—but at least be fair with our academic leaders. The argument about the questionable \$57 million dropped into a stadium might be debatable—but guys, c'mon. This is a pretty obvious discrepancy between our "values" and our "checkbooks."

Also, where is the logic behind there not being any Hunt Scholarships for upper classmen? I find it hard to believe that students can spend the better part of their lives in the SAC, but because they didn't serve as editor of their high school newspaper or run for student body president, they cannot take part in a program designed to build (and fund!) future leaders.

If Gloria is right—and I think she is—what can we say about SMU? Do we put our money where our values are? Are we paying lip service to "academics first" by not supporting our top scholars like we support our athletes?

Jared Dovers is a senior philosophy and religious studies major.

My grandma is a gay wedding singer in Massachusetts, and I'm proud of it

So she helps gay newlyweds enjoy their receptions. Is this sweet grandmother really contributing to the downfall of America?

by Nick Weilbacher

I've been often to Massachusetts, and it is truly an interesting place. Founded as a haven for Puritans, this state has matured into, arguably, the most liberal in America. The states last execution was on May 9, 1947; the state has strong Green Party presence and is definitely Democratic stomping grounds. Most importantly, it is the first state to allow its homosexual couples to marry. Initially, I was indifferent. That is until I talked to my grandmother, who is a long-time resident there and perhaps the coolest woman I know. She is a wedding singer and grew up in the 60's (a real hippie type). She actually has pictures from Woodstock. A product of wealthy German immigrants, she has been living in a house on the edge of the small colonial town of Hyannis on Cape Cod for well over 35 years. But most importantly, SHE IS A WEDDING SINGER IN MASSACHUSETTS!

Recently, while talking to her over the phone, she mentioned that her business grew to include gay marriages. Earlier this year, Massachusetts, as you all surely know, passed legislation proclaiming that the state constitution cannot legally prohibit gay marriages. "WHO CARES, WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS?" This is a question that has been lingering in the back of my mind. Is it really that big of a deal? Why are so many people, including Bush, so adamantly opposed to this? According to many evangelistic Southern Baptists and other notorious extremists, "Gay marriage is the end to our society, democracy, and the world as we know it." (Pat Robertson 700 Club) Well gracious! When are we expecting the meteors, volcanoes, and firestorms from heaven? I'm being serious when I say that. Can't you see how our lives have so dramatically changed since that cold February's day? My humble old wedding singer grandmother is actually being forced to perform and, in a manner, advocate something that is causing the downfall to the United States and its society. I don't want her participating in such activities. She can't deal with the downfall of the American society; she is simply too old. If the extremists are right, then I fully support a national ban to this so called "plague."

In the many months since February and the first gay marriages in May, it seems that the only lives affected are of those of the gay couples. Furthermore, the only changes in these gay couples lives have been positive ones. Of course, this is a positive development when you are part of a demographic that has been oppressed for so long. Besides being able to be graced by my wonderful grandmother's voice, no one has been struck by lightning or drowned in a mysterious, massive flood. Everything is simply, for a lack of a better word...fine. My grandmother's business is growing and people are happy. So someone tell me please: what is the problem?

Nick Weilbacher is a first-year international studies and German major.

The Dublin dilemma

You, the worst traffic light on Earth, and the law

by Andrew Baker

Time stands still at Airline and Dublin. You've been there, you know what's up. The sun is still a few hours below the horizon, and it's late, very late; so late it's early. Your car creeps north on Dublin to the red light, and you say a quick prayer and hope that the light will change soon. It doesn't.

Time ticks onward. You look left and see no cars. No headlights up ahead, and no cars in the rear. You are all alone, in the black hole, and you cannot escape. Seconds tick into minutes. Your grip tightens on the wheel, and a thought slips into your head.

No, don't run it—whatever you do. Don't break the law. What if a friendly U.P. police officer is just around that corner to the right, hiding behind the University Gardens? Is running the red light morally justified at this moment? No one is near; there is probably no cop nearby this early in the morning. Can you get away with it? Your foot eases up on the brake. It floats to the right and finds the accelerator. You pause, you pray, you pound, and you're running it.

Was it justified? You've harmed no one. No one has seen it. Rolling right along, you tilt your head back and glance into the rearview. Still red. Was it justified?

After a few hours sleep back home, you ponder what occurred the night before. Well, Socrates would certainly say that it was not justified. After all, you wouldn't disobey your parents, so why disobey your state, your guardian? But then again, you've harmed no one. What if your mother were in the car and you had to get her to the hospital? Would you run it then? If you've seen Dave, you know it would be alright.

But why mess with philosophy when an out exists? When faced with the illogically placed light, do what I often have to do: turn right on red, and then turn right on green. Make sure you do it in a fluid motion; this maneuver needs to look almost like a U-turn. You've done nothing wrong here: you've turned right on red onto University Gardens (legal), done an abbreviated U-turn (also legal) and turned right on Dublin when you have the green light (most certainly legal).

Or you could just run the d**n thing. You know you want to.

Andrew Baker is a senior English and political science major.

The same old racial creed?

Campus unity does not mean minority assimilation

by Michelle Wigianto

There have been a lot of words exchanged in response to Ms. Jordan and Mr. Baker's opinion, "Race relations improved, not perfect." They brought up a lot of issues in suggesting that it would mean progress for the students of SMU when the Department of Multicultural Student Affairs Office would close.

Ms. Jordan and Mr. Baker's main argument is that the DMSA's purpose is to work for a day when it will no longer be necessary. They tell us that "the day the doors close is the day that the campus is undoubtedly open to everyone." First, it sounds as if Ms. Jordan and Mr. Baker feel that the DMSA is what keeps minorities segregated and inhibits them from fully integrating into the "Mustang community." I must ask: which department is keeping the "majority" of the SMU community from meeting us half way? Perhaps the authors were too quick to assume it was the minority students being holed away, rather than look at any blame on the part of the majority.

Ms. Jordan and Mr. Baker write about programs that unite the student body, such as athletic events, Mustang Idol, and Mane Event; but what about Harambee Week, Hispanic Heritage Week, or maybe even Asian Culture Week? Sure, people come for the free food or because their roommate told them to tag along, but does that really mean that race relations are improved? Is that when we can "be open with people of other backgrounds"?

No. To me, race relations will be improved when "the majority" stops asking us, "the minority," to assimilate. If the mustang community means we all go to Mustang Idol, but we don't hold programs like a Chinese New Year, if we are "all mustangs" when we're all white—then count me out.

It seems to me that this article represents the same old racial creed: the whites want us to be just like them so that we can together "strive to eliminate cultural barriers." Apparently, one of those barriers is the DMSA, because it promotes appreciation of groups and cultures that are divisive to a holistic SMU community.

Michelle Wigianto is a sophomore political science and journalism major.

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