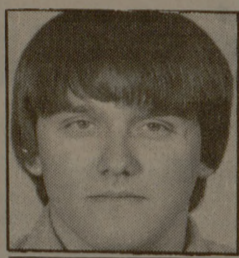


Opinion

Court attacks alcohol, but ignores its abuse



Karl Pallmeyer

There are probably quite a few of you who will read this and remember how it used to be legal for you to buy a drink only two months ago. Thousands of 19- and 20-year-old Texas A&M students were turned into minors overnight by a piece of legislation Texas was blackmailed into passing. The federal government threatening to stop providing highway funds unless the state raised the drinking age. It felt the best way to stop drunken driving was to make sure the drunks had only bad roads to drive on.

Now the Texas Supreme Court has made a decision, also aimed at stopping drunken driving, that is the pinnacle of stupidity. The decision states that drinking establishments can be held liable for traffic deaths caused by customers who leave intoxicated.

Imagine a 21-year-old man, let's call him Fred J. Alpheratz, goes to a bar and starts drinking. Fred downs about a dozen mixed drinks and 47 bottles of beer. At the end of the evening Fred is plastered, blottoed, plowed, wasted, ranked, tanked, totaled, polluted, fizzed and generally whizzed. Fred jumps in his Ford and heads on down the road.

On the way home, Fred runs over three dogs, two cats, 14 children, eight pregnant mothers, 97 ducks, three policemen, a priest, a water buffalo and an entire high school cheerleading squad before he smashes his car into a brick wall. A lot of people are extremely upset when they see their pets, offspring, wives and friends turned into highway pizza by the alcoholic Alpheratz. Fred's upset because his Ford is fried.

Obviously Fred should be strung up by his private parts. I'm sure the families of those who had to be buried in a short, thin box would agree. Just about anybody, except the Texas Supreme Court, realizes that the drunken driver is responsible for whatever happens when he's behind the wheel.

According to the Court, the bar that sold the excessive amounts of alcohol partially is responsible for the massive mushings that occurred under Fred's Ford. The bar sold drinks to an irresponsible person who then went out and killed some people. Alcohol became dangerous because it distorted Fred's ability to function, causing him to flatten folks.

By the same reasoning, the Ford Motor Co. should be held responsible because the car was to blame for several deaths. Fred abused that car, just like he abused alcohol, and several people joined the choir invisible. The architect and builder that put that brick wall in Fred's way should be held responsible for Fred's Ford falling apart. He abused that wall and turned his car into a sheet metal accordion.

Once the legal precedent has been set, Fred can go out and gun down all the families that have been pestering him, claiming that Luger, Winchester and the store that sold him the guns are liable for murder. Since the gunmakers and retailers provided Fred with something he abused and killed someone with, they should be held responsible.

The law is an obvious attempt to stop the sale of alcohol. You get rid of the alcohol abuse problem by getting rid of alcohol instead of addressing the abuse. If bar owners are going to be held responsible for their patrons' alcohol-related accidents, bars will have no choice but to stop serving alcohol. It's almost impossible to tell that someone is going to get drunk until they actually get drunk. By that time it's too late.

Bar owners have no right to detain their customers because they have had too much to drink. Most drunks will not admit that they are incapable of driving a car safely after they have had a few too many. If a bar owner can convince a drunk that he has had too much and will provide him with a way home, that's wonderful. But if a drunk wants to leave, the bar owner can't stop him. There are laws against holding a person against his will.

I understand the need to keep drunken drivers off the road, but the state is using the wrong methods. There is nothing wrong with alcohol, per se. It's only when alcohol is abused that there is a problem. The person who abuses alcohol, not the person who sells it, is responsible for its abuse.

If the state wants to stop drunken driving, it could start with an open container law. It's ridiculous when a state in which it's legal to drink while driving (as long as you wear your seatbelt) makes a law that puts the blame for drunken driving on someone else besides the drunken driver and claims it is dedicated to solving the problem.

Karl Pallmeyer is a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.



The novel that (luckily) never was



Lewis Grizzard

For years, I've been trying to write a novel, but I keep bogging down when it comes to the opening.

First, I thought of:

"It was a dark and stormy night..."

That's not bad, but I seem to remember I've read that in the beginning of someone else's novel. I never steal another writer's material unless it becomes absolutely necessary to do so.

My next opening went like this:

"As the sun cast its warming spell upon Hilda's goddess-like body, Garland searched up and down the TV dial for 'Wheel of Fortune.'"

But I thought, why would Garland want to watch 'Wheel of Fortune' with Hilda acting goddess-like? Vanna White is terrific on TV, but when you already have Hilda right there beside you, what's the point?

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking: no puzzle here, Garland is gay.

You're wrong. My novel isn't going to have gay people in it. I want to write something unique.

Later, I thought to myself, why not write a novel of mystery and intrigue? The first paragraph went this way:

"Agent 009 crouched in the alley as Natasha, the KGB's deadliest operative, searched in the eerie darkness for him,

cries out sensually, 'I know you are here somewhere. I smell the haunting scent of your Aqua Velva. Come out, wherever you are, so that I may kill you.'"

But what sort of secret agent would wear Aqua Velva?

Even that duncie Garland would have more class than that.

Next, I decided on a novel set in some far away, exotic locale, like a jungle. I wrote:

"Startled, Sabu turned around just a heartbeat before a runaway rogue elephant stepped on his head and stomped him flat."

"How many for dinner tonight?" Sir Henry asked Raamad, the cook.

"One less than last night, Sahib," Raamad replied, as he attempted to scoop what was left of his good friend Sabu into a Hefty bag."

Not bad. Not bad at all. Except if you wrote an entire novel about jungles, you would have to think of a lot of jungle

names, and Sabu and Raamad are only two names like that I know.

What I finally decided to do was begin my novel with the best parts of the aforementioned openings. I drafted on this:

"It was a dark and stormy night Hilda and Garland watched 'Wheel of Fortune' in their apartment, which overlooked the alley where agent crouched, as Natasha, the KGB's deadliest operative, thought she smelled elephant."

"Startled, she turned around just as Sabu, who smelled like an elephant, cause he had been so busy tracking down he hadn't had time to take shower for days, hit her over the head with a Hefty bag full of Raamad's Aqua Velva bottles."

In the next scene, Sir Henry Vanna White when she cannot say fully name all five vowels.

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University divestment

Objections don't justify A&M's reluctance to purge investments in South Africa

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a two-part series on divestment of Texas A&M's funds from South Africa.

Some questions frequently posed by those who oppose divestment as a strategy against apartheid in South Africa include:

Larry Yarak

Guest Columnist

Won't sanctions and divestment hurt blacks, the ones we want to help, more than whites?

The South African government and the white minority derive the most benefit from continued American investment. Most blacks realize that divestment could cause them additional suffering in the short run, but see that as the only alternative to the suffering caused by the continuation of apartheid.

A 1985 poll of urban blacks showed that 77 percent of them believed "that other countries are right . . . to impose economic sanctions unless South Africa agrees to get rid of the apartheid system."

Isn't it true that economic sanctions don't work?

Historically, sanctions have worked. In 1970 the United States imposed economic sanctions against the government of Chile, which by 1973 had so contributed to economic discontent in that country that the Chilean military intervened, bringing to an end the regime that the United States had opposed. Economic sanctions rarely work so quickly, and in the case of South Africa it is likely to take some time to produce the desired result.

Sanctions and divestment have to be seen as a long-term effort, one in which the United States can play a leading role, influencing its allies and trading partners to take unified action. Canada, the countries of Western Europe and Japan already have taken some kind of economic action against South Africa. These need to be toughened, coordinated and strictly enforced. By not imposing sanctions against South Africa, we send South Africa's blacks a clear message of indifference.

Isn't the South African economy too strong to be hurt by sanctions?

That the South African government has worked so long and so vigorously to oppose sanctions and

divestment indicates that it fears their impact. Since the outbreak of widespread unrest in South Africa in 1984, U.S. and European banks and corporations have imposed their own form of economic action against South Africa by withholding loans and closing down operations (just a few weeks ago Coca-Cola announced its plans to divest itself of its South African operations, and this General Motors and IBM week announced similar plans). These have had the dramatic effect of forcing prominent South African businessmen openly to break with the apartheid regime and call for negotiations with the black opposition.

Last year the head of South Africa's most powerful corporation, ironically named Anglo-American, traveled to the neighboring black-ruled country of Zambia to meet with representatives of the African National Congress. More and more white South Africans are coming to realize, as we must, that the future of South Africa belongs to the majority of its citizens and that negotiations with the black opposition urgently are needed. Continued divestment will further drive home that message to South African whites.

Won't divestment deprive A&M of vital income?

It needn't. In fact, the experience of those institutions that already have mandated divestment shows that their portfolios often have performed better after divestment. By forcing those who manage investments to make sure that they do not invest in companies that do business in South Africa, they tend to do a better job overall than they did when there was little scrutiny of their work. Supporters of divestment are not calling for

the precipitous selling off of tainted investments. It can and should be done prudently.

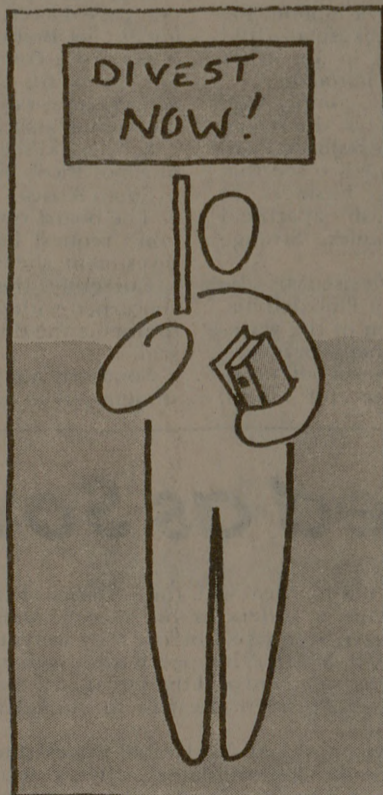
Don't the communists have the most to gain from the ending of apartheid?

If one is concerned about the ideology of the leadership of the black opposition, then one should take the time to read the manifestoes and statements issued by groups such as the ANC and United Democratic Front (UDF), the major opposition groups.

Their program still is based on the "Freedom Charter" published in the 1950s and available in our library. Briefly, it calls for a unitary, democratic, multiracial South Africa, in which the country's wealth is not monopolized by any one racial group. Those who raise the specter of communism aren't objecting to sanctions or divestment. They are making an argument against the abolition of apartheid, and implicitly in favor of retaining apartheid as the supposed lesser of two evils. This objection poses an imaginary future evil that is only one (and for now, the least likely) of many possible outcomes, against a real present evil.

Doesn't South Africa supply the U.S. and the West with vital strategic minerals?

It is true that South Africa is an important source of four so-called strategic minerals: chromium, manganese, cobalt and platinum. A recent study by the Washington-based Center for Defense Information concludes that the potential effects of cutting off these minerals can be countered by stockpiling, conserving and developing substitutes. A full cut-off would not pose any insurmountable security risk.



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