

Civil Rights Act b-day gets bashed

It's the 25th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the Supreme Court is celebrating.

They've begun by slicing up Title VII, the part of the act designed to keep racism and sexism from invading the workplace, and handing it out to groups of conservative white males to gobble up like pieces of birthday cake.

Monday's actions in the Court demonstrated a lack of concern by the Court for minority group members and women trying to fight back against discrimination, which, although on the decline, is still prevalent in the United States.

The two decisions made by the Court Monday deal with discrimination in employment. Both decisions make clear the Court's increasingly conservative stand on the issue.

The Court decided that whites employed by the Birmingham, Ala., fire department had the right to step in and challenge an affirmative action plan that had been set up through negotiations between the city and blacks who were fighting alleged discrimination in the fire department.

The court also threw out a lawsuit by a woman who was challenging an allegedly discriminatory seniority system at a private company in Illinois, because they believed the woman should have filed the suit when the plan was adopted, not when the discriminatory effects began.

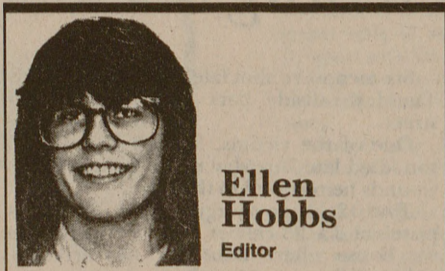
The Birmingham decision is especially interesting in light of the Illinois decision. The white firefighters waited to file suit against the city until they thought they were being denied promotions, while the woman was told she should have filed before discrimination actually began. Though there may be legal reasoning behind these decisions, the decisions aren't necessarily fair.

The Birmingham decision totally undermines the purpose of affirmative action. It not only removes the promise of less discrimination in the workplace, it hampers the ability of employers and their employees to get together and negotiate complaints of discrimination.

Those against affirmative action programs argue reverse discrimination. They say that the programs take jobs away from white men and hand them over to less qualified minority group members and women. This may actually happen once in a while. But not usually.

For example, let's take a look at the Birmingham Fire Department.

The consent agreement made by the



Ellen Hobbs
Editor

black firemen and the city was drawn in 1981. Since the minority hiring and promotion program has been in place, there has been no significant increase in property or lives lost in fires. The quality of the fire department has not decreased since the new black firemen were hired.

And blacks aren't exactly 'taking over the department,' either. It's not all that surprising or unreasonable to hear that, in a city with as high a black population as Birmingham, there are 160 black firemen in a department with 650 members.

What about women? Well, we may have come a long way, baby, but we still have some distance to cover. Even in this modern era, women make only about 69¢ to every dollar a man makes, and it doesn't look like it's going to get any better soon. The Equal Rights Amendment received no support from the Reagan administration, and the Bush administration has made no move to support it, either.

This country is full of people who call themselves 'self-made men.' These individuals claim that anyone can make it big in America if they just pull themselves up by their bootstraps. But let's face up to some facts: Horatio Alger does not come around much anymore. We're not going to live up to our claim of being a free country until equal job opportunities are available to everyone, equal money is given for equal work and equal promotions are given for equal qualifications.

That's what Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act stands for. It is an attempt to help people get used to the idea of placing qualified minorities and women in positions traditionally held by white males.

Maybe someday no businessman will blink an eye at putting a qualified black woman in an executive position. Then affirmative action will have outlived its usefulness.

We are a racist, sexist country. We can't afford to get rid of Title VII just yet.

Ellen Hobbs is a junior journalism major and editor of The Battalion.

Court decision dumb

The Supreme Court just keeps whitening away at the legal remedies for discrimination.

None of the Court's recent decisions has been particularly dramatic — just the shift of the burden of proof here, the insufficiency of statistical proof there. And I suppose most of us who aren't black can't imagine that such decisions will ever make any difference in our lives.

To the 50 percent of you who are women, these decisions damn well matter. And if you're one of those conservatives who thinks all the problems of poor minority citizens in this country would be solved if they'd just get a job, try explaining the new court decisions to blacks who are out looking for jobs.

On Monday, the Court effectively ruled that the fire department in Birmingham, Ala., a city that is majority



Molly Ivins
Syndicated Columnist

black, could go back to the status quo as of 1974, when it had 453 firefighters, 42 of them black, none in a supervisory position.

By ruling that an affirmative action plan agreed to by public officials and approved in court may be attacked even years later in a new suit by workers who took no part in the original agreement, the Court makes consent plans like the one reached in Birmingham vulnerable to challenge by any white supremacist who can find a lawyer.

What remedies are now legal if any white man can claim reverse discrimination because a company or a department store starts hiring blacks or women?

The Battalion

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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

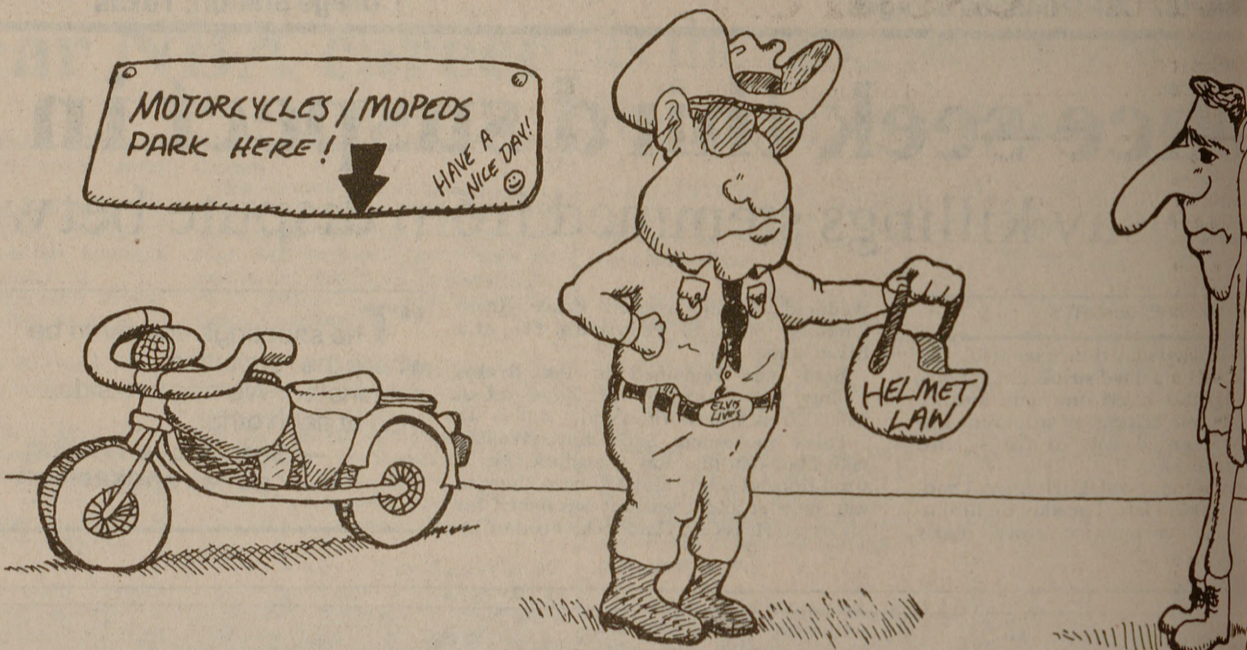
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Mail Call

Batt follows Bill of Rights

EDITOR:

This letter is in response to Troyce Wilson and Alan Wakim's opinions on why *The Battalion* staff placed an ad (which was considered to be in poor taste) for a memorial service for the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

I'll be the first to admit, I thought the ad was kind of funny or rather way out of place; but, hey, you have to remember that there are people here who worship and praise the man and are indubitably entitled to do so even if it deviates from the norm or relates to a tragic past. You might want to refer to the First Amendment which is in this thing we call the Bill of Rights.

I was so prompt in writing this letter because I felt I, too, was the subject of poor taste as seen by others. I receive sneers from fellow Ags whenever I walk on campus

wearing my "Hard Rock Cafe — Matamoros, Mexico" T-shirt which I bought there during Spring Break '88. So guys, next time you can't understand why *The Battalion* staff places an ad for the memorial service of Khomeini, Salman Rushdie, Ted Bundy or Matamoros Ring Leader — take a deep breath and count ten (Amendments). If not, you better watch out. I just might be wearing my Matamoros T-shirt that day.

Michael Custaneda '89

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include a full name, address and telephone number of the writer. Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words.

Nuclear power not solution

Editor's note: This guest column was submitted to The Battalion as a letter to the editor in response to Matt McBurnett's column that ran Wednesday.

Mike Smith

Guest Columnist

Matt McBurnett's column on nuclear power concluded with the statement, "... an informed person is usually a supportive one." I question Matt's lack of factual support in his argument for the public support of America's nuclear energy program.

The major problems of nuclear facilities lie not in large-scale accidents, but in disposal of wastes and small, continuous leaks. Between 1980 and 1985, 6,928 accidents involving radioactive and chemical wastes were logged in plants and dumps. The Congressional Research Team has concluded that nearly one-half of the 1,246 hazardous waste dumps are currently polluting our groundwater. The Office of Technology Assessment estimates that almost 10,000 hazardous waste sites pose serious health problems to the public.

High-level wastes include fuel rods and contaminated materials. The Federal Nuclear Waste Policy Act will have deep-mine disposal of high-level waste

and fuel rods by 1998. What kind of a solution is that? In order to be effective, they'll have to maintain these dumps for centuries. The Department of Energy estimates it takes 1,500 years for high-level wastes to reduce their radioactivity to minimal levels (those they held before being contaminated), spent fuel rods take 10,000 years, and plutonium 239 will take anywhere from 250,000 to 500,000 years to detoxify. In addition, deep-mine sites being built for such wastes are impractical because of the high salinity of groundwater in these mines, which would eventually corrode through the drums.

Nuclear facilities will indeed limit carbon dioxide emissions, but to such a small scale that they would not justify the waste problem they create. Carbon dioxide emissions by non-nuclear power plants make up only 14 percent of U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions, and only 4 percent of global greenhouse-gas emissions worldwide.

Consequently, it is easily seen that clear power is not the energy production solution. The real solution lies in us. We must, as a responsible species, limit this runaway energy consuming trend. The greenhouse effect could be greatly reduced by all of us if we support mass transit, energy conservation and reforestation (which will convert carbon dioxide back to oxygen). Fifty-four percent of carbon monoxide pollutants come from cars. We can ride together. Eighty percent of waste ends up in landfills; 87 percent of these will be filled by 1993. We can easily recycle all this trash. Each year, Americans throw away enough aluminum to rebuild the commercial airplane every three months. When are we going to stop this outrage?

There are no easy solutions, we must stop taking the Earth for granted. Enough concerned people can do something to stop this.

As with all columns, opinions expressed by Guest Columnists are necessarily those of The Battalion. Those interested in submitting guest columns should contact the Opinion Editor at 845-3314.

