

Opinion

Monday, April 13, 1992

The Battalion

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The Battalion Editorial Board

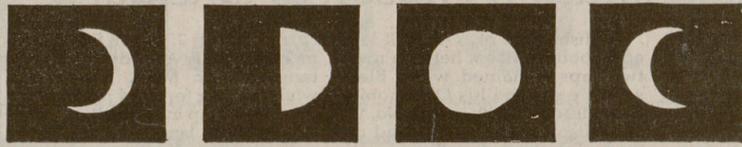
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Phases of the Moon:



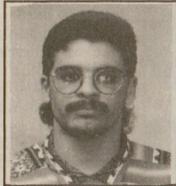
Phases of the Moonbeam:



Panhandlers

Should cities stop them from begging?

PRO



Anas Ben-Musa

Thank goodness. Houston's City Council has decided to do something about the problem with overly aggressive panhandlers! The council is considering an ordinance to curb the aggressive tendencies of the panhandlers in the city limits. The ordinance passed by the City Council was named a "bubble" ordinance because it created a safety zone of eight feet between the panhandler and the citizen. This is a great relief to many Houston residents. With the rate of crime climbing each day, many people do not feel safe walking down the street. Panhandlers only add to the problem because the civilian never knows the intentions of the panhandler. It is not the panhandlers' fault that they have to beg, but no one can blame Houston residents' fear of strangers walking up to them and panhandling. Furthermore, the proposed ordinance would not only protect the residents' right to be left alone but also create a safety zone in which the panhandlers' rights are not violated. Some citizens are so paranoid that the panhandler's life might be endangered.

City Attorney Benjamin L. Hall III has considered putting even tighter restrictions on panhandlers by requiring them to register with the city and wear photo credentials whenever they panhandle.

Registering panhandlers is a wonderful idea. Some might think this is a way to police beggars; however, locating panhandlers or trying to get them off the street and into a warm bed is difficult when there is little documentation or information to locate the individuals. Registration and photo credentials can help job placement programs, more efficient housing or shelter programs, and counseling to get panhandlers off the street.

Many legal authorities consider the "bubble" ordinance and Hall's plan as a violation of the First Amendment; yet, these authorities are looking at it from only the "beggars" point of view.

What of the rights of each citizen who is approached by the panhandlers? These citizens have a right to their own space without someone in their face using aggressive tactics to convince them to give money. In addition, the ordinance never restricts the panhandlers' right to free speech, it only restricts panhandlers from getting too close to the person.

Would any authority question a business or home disallowing solicitation? Panhandling is not any different. Citizens have a right to tell a person soliciting or panhandling to stop.

Panhandlers are not a disease to be restricted or wiped away. There is a need to help these unfortunate citizens. Yes, they are citizens, but many are without a home or job. They are unique in that aspect and also difficult to accept or help. It is society's fault for their situation. Many Americans consider the majority of panhandlers to be drug users and alcoholics, but a great many are mentally sick or simply broke and homeless. No matter what the reason, society has a responsibility to help these individuals. The "bubble" ordinance, registration and photo credentials are steps to help panhandlers in a positive way.

Ben-Musa is a sophomore history and journalism major

CON



Jon DeShazo

The Houston City Council must have been really bored last week. Bored or blind.

In lieu of the city's rampant homicides, rapes and drug problems, the City Council has decided to take actions against panhandlers by considering an ordinance which would require panhandlers to register with the city in order to beg for money. The law would force beggars to wear an identification card.

It comes in response to complaints that some beggars are becoming violent around people who do not wish to hand out any money. The ordinance will create an imaginary "bubble" around citizens who do not wish to be solicited.

In other words, kids are shooting each other in Houston schools, and the powers that be have nothing better to do than make vain attempts at curbing what they call "aggressive panhandling."

The new ordinance defies common sense in several ways.

It requires that a beggar must not come within eight feet of a citizen he solicits, or he may be fined up to \$200. Assuming the City Council does not create panhandler vigilante groups to make up for shortages in police manpower, this law is virtually unenforceable. An aggressive panhandler simply has little chance of getting caught in the act by police officers and would be virtually impossible to find after the crime since most of the offenders don't even have a permanent address.

But even if a panhandler is caught and incarcerated, the law gets even more ridiculous. A fine or jail time for begging for money seems a little nutty. The offenders are begging for money; they are not out stealing or mugging people. Our court systems have enough problems with real crimes without having to deal with panhandlers.

Besides, fining the offenders seems to be a contradiction. I doubt beggars would be out on the streets bothering other citizens if they had any money. The courts would likely drop the fines, thereby rendering the ordinance meaningless. Or, the courts could hand out jail terms which would likely displace real criminals in the jails.

The ordinance treads on sticky First Amendment problems. City Attorney Benjamin L. Hall III said the ordinance was created to comply with the First Amendment, but already the Texas chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union is on the case.

The ordinance, then, faces the problem of how to be strict enough to be useful but not too strict to keep the ACLU from getting bent out of shape.

Neil McCabe, a constitutional law professor at South Texas College of Law, presented a possible case scenario. For instance, if a beggar criticizes the government while begging for money, he could be protected from prosecution by the First Amendment. And if the ACLU is involved, a challenge to the new ordinance is almost a sure thing.

Houston has innumerable problems with which it must deal, real problems that are presently being ignored. The Houston City Council should have better things to do than create ambiguous laws to pacify complaints of overbearing panhandlers.

On the other hand, maybe if the citizens of Houston begin complaining of overbearing muggers, rude drive-by shootings and uncouth assaults, the City Council will be coerced into developing real laws.

DeShazo is a junior electrical engineering major

Mail Call

Readers support, criticize homosexuals

Rob Sherrard, you obviously have no understanding of what homosexuality is. Being heterosexual, I can't say that I completely understand it myself, but I know that these people are not harming me. Therefore, it is none of my concern whether they want to "put the round peg into the square hole."

The homosexual community is not trying to cram their beliefs down our throats nor are they telling us that we're wrong, so why do you feel compelled to do this to them?

Whether it is natural or not, it's not your business. They aren't asking you to become gay, they're just asking you to grow up.

Bryan Smith
 Class '95

Dear Rob Sherrard. So you are sick and tired and nauseated of hearing about the "demented lifestyles" of the gays and lesbians. I agree with you that "man was made for woman and woman made for man." That is how we are able to reproduce and to ensure our existence. However, you also wrote that the "demented lifestyles of these hideous people... is plain and simple not normal." Please answer something for me: what is "normal", and who are you to define for us what it is to be "normal"? I am sorry, what was I thinking? You have one and a half semesters of "world class" education here at Texas A&M under your belt, so you must be qualified. Again, I am truly sorry.

However, in today's society of individuality, please let me leave you with this thought:

"You are who you are, I am who I am; that's the tragedy, that's the joy."

Oh, before you start to form another opinion about me for writing this letter, I am a "normal" heterosexual male who also thinks that a "female body is truly a beautiful thing." Furthermore, I also think that a male body is "truly a beautiful thing." After all, we are all God's creations, aren't we?

Nguyen H. Le
 Class of '92

Concerning the April 8 letter on what gays miss, I agree fully.

Gays choose their lifestyle, regardless of what they say. For example, some say, "I've always been gay, but I just didn't know it." At any note, this "choice" to be gay opens themselves to all the criticism and hatred that America's free speech and thought can throw at them. I agree fully, Rob. Why should we even think to consider obvious deviant behavior acceptable and a "fact of life"?

As long as I'm writing, I'd like to discuss the fact that being gay and being a racial or a gender-based minority are two completely different things. It goes back to the choice argument. For example, blacks didn't choose to be black and whites didn't choose to be whites, but gays sure had a choice to either be gay or - how shall I say it? Normal.

George L. Bradley
 Class of '92

I am writing in response to Rob Sherrard's "Gays Should Look At What They Miss." So, Rob, what shall we do? I mean, if gays make you nauseous, let's lock them up so straight people like us don't have to look at them. We'll just pick some place, say San Francisco, and build a brick wall around it. That way, we can forget about them and they can do whatever they want to with whomever they want. While we're at it, let's take all the blacks and put them somewhere, too. I'm sick of them trying to be our equals. Who are they trying to kid? Slavery is the only way! (Tell that to Bill Cosby or Aretha Franklin, who have more talent than you'll ever have in your life, or Rock Hudson or Martina Navratilova while you're at it). Where was I? Oh, yeah, so we give them the South. OK, now let's take all those Jews and put them on the east coast. Who wants to look at their noses and watch them eat Matzo anyway? Now, let's take everyone who wears color contacts and put them on the West Coast (except San Francisco, of course). I mean, why are we born with eyes of one color if people are just going to change it? Hawaii and Alaska go to people who don't recycle. I don't want all that trash anywhere near me. OK, that leaves the Midwest, right? We cool people who are normal and perfect in every way can live there.

Our country, the people-who-know-everything's country, wouldn't be much fun, would it? So few people exist as wonderful as you and me. I mean I'd probably be stuck hanging out with you someday. Nauseating, isn't it?

Sarah Jensik
 Class of '92

Rob Sherrard. I believe you are the one with the problem. Your ignorant and sexist letter regarding gays, lesbians, round pegs and square holes (whatever that means) and the "incredible" women at the Treehouse Village swimming pool stunned me. I am certainly not homosexual, nor do I agree with or condone that lifestyle. I am, however, very close to two people who have a homosexual relationship. They are two of the most gentle, kind and loving human beings I have ever known, and neither of them would dream of hurting another person. Yet, their home has been vandalized many times, and they were finally forced to get an unlisted phone number because of the closed-minded people like you invading their privacy with obscene and threatening phone calls. And trust me, making them sit around and stare at a half naked woman will not change them. This is probably good, because they treat women with much greater respect and dignity than I imagine you ever will.

Of course, you are entitled to your opinion, Mr. Sherrard, but I believe that your letter was completely unnecessary and unprovoked. What has any lesbian or gay ever done to hurt you? In my view, your narrow-mindedness is much more detrimental to society than these

people who only want to be treated equally.

Emily Bacon
 Class of '94
 David Lenihan
 Class of '93

This is to Rob Sherrard and others who share his feelings concerning gays and lesbians. I am one of many who are outraged at hearing from closed-minded individuals like Rob who want and try to impose their unfounded beliefs and ideas on others. I am a heterosexual female, but this does not mean that I would like gays and lesbians to stop protesting or just go away. I feel just the opposite. These people should have just as many rights as we do. But they do not, because of people with attitudes like those of Rob. These are the same attitudes that have for years oppressed women, blacks and other minorities.

I respect Rob's right to express his ideas even though I don't agree with them.

Liz Simmons
 Class of '93

This letter is in response to Rob Sherrard's poorly articulated attempt at gay-bashing appearing in The Battalion Mail Call Wednesday. Although I personally am as straight as a flagpole, I'm tired of hearing from hypocrites who purport to be politically correct yet still feel the need ostracize gay people.

The only problems the Gay and Lesbian Student Services need, and are making efforts to deal with, lie in the opposition to their mere existence from people like Sherrard.

And what naivete to think that gay men have never fixed their eyes upon a beautiful woman. Sherrard has it ever occurred to you that they might even appreciate such beauty yet at the same time feel no desire for intimate companionship with them? Perhaps, you are unaware of recent scientific research suggesting inherent biological differences within the brain that may account for such differences in sexual preference.

It seems surprising to me that Sherrard isn't content with their existence which might otherwise hinder his efforts even further at scoring with one of those "pool-side babes" he speaks of.

Mack E. Shippen
 Class of '92

Have an opinion? Express it.

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Letters must be signed and must include classification, address and a daytime phone number for verification purposes. Anonymous letters will not be published.

The Battalion reserves the right to edit all letters for length, style and accuracy. There is no guarantee that letters will appear.

Letters may be brought to 013 Reed McDonald, sent to Campus Mail Stop 1111 or can be faxed to 845-2647.