

OPINION

Baptists goof with Disney boycott City rankings matter a lot but mean nothing

It's not as if Disney's version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is a porno film. But to read the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) censure of the entertainment giant, one would think Disney has become the American family's No. 1 enemy.



JASON BROWN
OPINION EDITOR

Last week, 14,000 attendees at the SBC's New Orleans meeting overwhelmingly passed a resolution condemning some of Disney's policies. Furthermore, they amended the resolution, threatening to "boycott Disney Company stores and theme parks if they continue this anti-Christian and anti-family trend."

Disney struck right back, issuing a statement saying, "We find it curious that a group that claims to espouse family values would vote to boycott the world's largest producer of wholesome family entertainment."

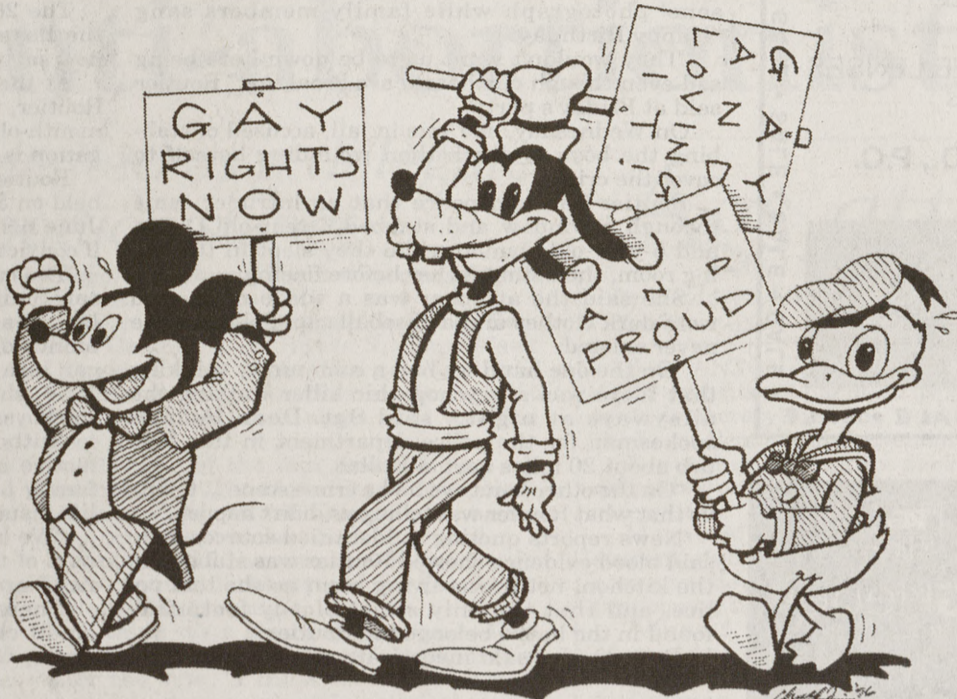
The Baptists' ire centers around Disney's "hosting" of an annual "Gay Day" celebration at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla., and its extension of health insurance and benefits to gay employees' partners.

Although the SBC considers homosexuality incompatible with Christianity, it's hard to understand why it is singling Disney out and why it is so intent on punishing homosexuals.

Disney certainly is not unique in granting benefits to gay employees' partners. Apple Computer, Xerox, Levi-Strauss and Coors Brewing Company all do the same. The Baptists, however, do not threaten to burn their 501s or toss their Power Macs to protest those companies' policies.

The objection the SBC seems to have against Disney specifically is that it is the entertainment company families have always counted on for clean entertainment. As Nancy Victory, the chairman of the resolutions committee, said in a New York Times article, "The Disney Company is not the same Disney that it was years ago when we were growing up."

Still, a successful boycott would hardly contribute to pro-family entertainment. The message the SBC is sending is "If you aren't completely pro-traditional



values, then don't even pretend to be in favor of some of them." Notice there is no proposed boycott for MGM, even after it released that sleaze-a-thon, "Showgirls."

The SBC, of course, would prefer to see its complaints addressed instead of boycotting Disney. But it's difficult to understand what the SBC wants accomplished.

For example, Disney has no control over "Gay Day." Disney does not sponsor it. Gays gather in Orlando and go to Disney World together, buying tickets like anyone else. Disney makes no special accommodations, like doing the Main Street Parade in drag. To end "Gay Day," Disney would have to ban gays from the park — an impossible and vicious task.

As for the SBC's desire to deny benefits to gay employees' partners, that's just mean-spirited. Rather than saving any souls, the SBC seems more determined to hurt some bodies. Not having health insurance will not make a homosexual suddenly become heterosexual, but it might prevent him from getting medical treatment.

Finally, it remains to be seen how a change in Disney's policies will return

Disney to "pro-family" status. Will denying gay couples benefits somehow strengthen traditional families?

Although this proposed boycott seems ridiculous, it definitely is not Mickey Mouse. Over 15 million Southern Baptists live in the United States, and they are a major political and economic force in this country. An organized boycott could wound Disney.

Then again, Disney is hardly teetering on bankruptcy, having raked in over \$12 billion in fiscal year 1995.

But this is one reason why Baptists should realize how silly a boycott would be. Disney's an enormous corporation, and instead of encouraging its many contributions to society — good films, TV shows and books — the SBC is nitpicking at a couple of innocuous practices.

Hopefully, Baptists will disregard the Convention's resolution and end this embarrassing standoff. Already, it has become difficult to determine whose values are Christian, and whose are just plain goofy.

Jason Brown is a Class of '96 economics major

Every city has some claim to fame. Whether it's the home of the world's biggest watermelon festival or the birthplace of some long-dead and much-forgotten historical figure, each American city desperately clings to an identity, no matter how pointless or inconsequential it may seem. Even if the only thing worth pointing out in a city is the road that leads out of it, each town wants to feel superior to the one down the highway.



STEVEN GYESZLY
COLUMNIST

This need for superiority has evolved into some kind of odd ranking system, courtesy of Money Magazine. Each year, the magazine rates the 300 biggest towns in the United States, using criteria determined by readers. When the rankings come out, as they did last week, readers rush to find out where their town ranks — and are inevitably surprised by the results.

However, before local inhabitants question why College Station (No. 45) is ranked behind the paradises of Brownsville (No. 43) and McAllen (No. 41), the real question is why people put any validity in these rankings in the first place.

This year, Money readers chose several factors, including clean water, numerous hospitals and low property taxes, as the important criteria for cities. Granted, these are all valuable considerations, but what about the other intangibles that make a city a great place to live? True, adding factors such as culture and scenic beauty to the rankings would plunge College Station's position to somewhere between Gary, Ind., and the Seventh Level of Hell, but one cannot base the value of a city on something as trite as an impeccable tax rate. After all, a town can have a hospital dotting every block, but if it contains a population that won't visit their neighbors in one, what's the point?

Just as there are problems involving the factors left out of the rankings,

there are even more problems with the factors upon which the judgment is based. Many of the factors do seem quantitative — just look at tax rates or count the number of hospitals and compare. Because each town is unique, however, it is impossible to make an across-the-board comparison.

For example, there are scientific ways to measure the parts of salt, chlorine and fluoride in each town's water supply. Measured as such, many of the cities get high marks in this area. However, the actual taste of the water is something else. There are those who will enjoy the straight-from-the-ocean flavor of our local water while others will prefer the subtle metallic taste of McAllen tap water. If there are differing perspectives on something as trivial as water, imagine the disparity of opinions on more substantial issues.

Another problem with the ratings is the stability involved. This year's winner, Madison, Wis., was ranked 16th last year. What exactly was the drastic change in the other 15 cities that were considered better just last year? And what happened to last year's number one? Could it not live with the pressure of being America's best city?

Town leaders boast about the logic behind the rankings when they are given a high rating. The next year, however, when their rating drops, guess who protest the loudest that the rankings are not based on any rational judgment?

The most glaring fault with these rankings is that they cannot account for the true feelings of a town's inhabitants. Statistically, Madison is this year's No. 1 place to live. But if someone who lives there is basically unhappy, then what kind of consolation is that?

On the opposite side, do the people who happily live in Rockdale, Ill., care that it is ranked dead last? Obviously, rankings don't mean much when it comes to actual environment. But even if they did, there's always room in Brownsville.

Steven Gyeszly is a Class of '99 finance and sociology major

Dole should tap a good friend to be running mate

Bob Dole is going to lose.

Perhaps the biggest problem is that Dole is seen by the electorate as a wrinkly old curmudgeon. Many Americans compare Bob Dole to their grandfather — not the pleasant one who's got a loose wallet and the pull-my-finger joke, but the cantankerous one who talks about war and tells his 11-year-old granddaughter to get a job at the textile mill.

So what can the Republican spin doctors do to revive the ailing campaign?

The only way for Dole to survive is to make a wise and intrepid choice concerning his running mate.

Some misguided element of the Republican leadership thinks that Colin Powell could be the white-knight candidate who reopens the door. Ultimately, however, Powell would be exposed for what he really is — a Democrat in Republican's clothing.

The most logical mainstream choice would be New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman. Although she seems reluctant to sit in the number-two chair, she could definitely help Dole siphon some female voters away from Clinton.

But Dole's never going to survive unless he gets a little crazy. His only hope for victory in November will evaporate unless he picks Jennifer Aniston to be his vice-presidential running mate.

Aniston would bring a new youthful-ness to the campaign and will encourage young people to get out and rock the vote. But her selection would only be the first step in a new, sexier strategy for the Dole campaign.

When Dole secures Aniston's cooperation, his campaign will have to introduce a new type of politicking. The new play would best be described as the "locker room stud" strategy.

Dole should use a carefully timed series of anonymous press leaks and "no comments" to imply that he is having an affair with Aniston.

It wouldn't be true. It would be sexist and puerile, but so what? If you want the truth, watch "Hard Copy." That's what Americans do.

This is presidential politics, and there exists no greater theater of Machiavellian tragedy (well, except maybe our own student body president elections, but it's close).



JEREMY VALDEZ
COLUMNIST

Although allegations and admissions of infidelity nearly derailed the Clinton campaign in 1992, a good scandal could actually boost Dole's chances. An affair would assure the voters that if Dole were ever forced into a pissin' contest with another world leader, he'd remember how to unzip his fly.

Aniston isn't just another pretty face. Her acting career, though predominantly comedic, is filled with performances where she has examined weighty issues and taken an impressive stance.

In one current public service announcement, Aniston works to keep the kids in school, reminding all of us, "Smart is sexier than stupid any day." Last year, by starring in the video tutorial for Microsoft Windows 95, Aniston made two things clear: She is just as ready to get into bed with big business as any Republican, and she knows enough about high-tech issues to supervise the construction of the information superhighway.

And then there was last season's riveting "Friends" episode where Rachel dishes economic philosophy to Phoebe, ranting that government is the major source of economic instability, tariffs keep our industries from having to adjust to the realities of world markets and the high unemployment rate of black teenagers is caused by the meddling of the minimum wage.

OK, those are actually Milton Friedman's theories, but Aniston might agree with some of them. The point is, Aniston is ready to address the issues.

Unfortunately, the conventional wisdom suggests Aniston might think twice about accepting the Republican vice-presidential nomination. Therefore, it might be necessary to sweeten the deal.

One of the best ways to do this would be to allow her to appear scantily clad on this year's campaign posters.

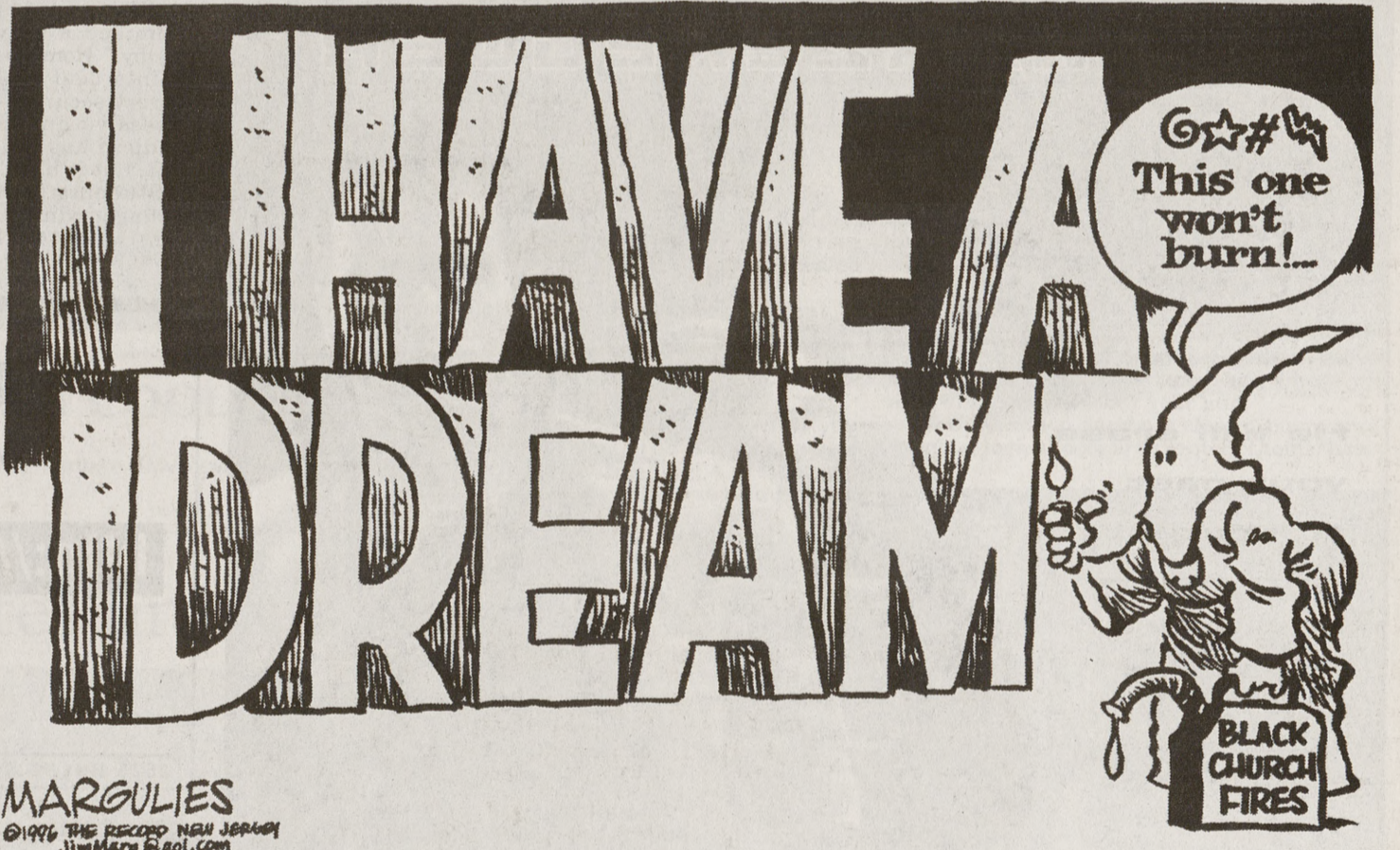
Aniston has displayed an affinity for gratuitous nakedness. In several magazine layouts and publicity posters that feature the entire cast of "Friends," she is the only one who isn't fully clothed.

Also, by pandering to the prurient interests of the male voters, Aniston could encourage a record number of men to turn up at the polls.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, and in order to win, Bob Dole is going to have to try something new. Adding Aniston to the ticket might be just what the Republicans need.

And you can take that to "Hard Copy."

Jeremy Valdez is a Class of '96 chemical engineering major



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MAIL CALL

Buffin gets her facts wrong in column

This letter is in response to Kristina Buffin's column from June 17. I'm not writing about the content, but of this sentence from the column: "A&M is no longer the agriculture and mining school it was when it opened in 1846." Hopefully I'm not the only one who noticed how huge a mistake this is about the history of A&M. In 1846 Texas A&M was not even in the future works yet. It was not until 1862 with the Morrill Act that Texas started laying the framework for the Agricultural and MECHANICAL College of Texas. Later in October of 1876 the college was opened to students. Also, anyone who proudly wears an Aggie ring has the year 1876 under the crest. I do

not understand how someone who writes for the Batt could make such a mistake. Also, the "M" in A&M never stood for "mining" or "military," the other common translation of the letter. I hope that this was also a misprint. With a history of tradition here at A&M, I hope this bit of correct history is not news to those who read it.

Laura Eustace
Class of '95

Some drivers don't have visible handicaps

I wanted to respond to Gina Panzica's column from June 19. I am one of the students on campus whom many accuse of "lying, cheating and stealing my way" into the handicapped system.

I have received some very nasty letters on my car when it is parked in handicapped spots. I am not obviously handicapped to the naked eye, but I do suffer from severe asthma. Because of the enormous size of our campus, I cannot walk from parking lots to classes without ending up in the emergency room.

If you are not handicapped or a medical doctor, then I ask you please not to judge those of us who are. Your letters simply make me feel badly for something I have to legitimately do. If your friends cheat, I am sorry. Maybe you should speak to them, and not accuse the rest of us of "lying, cheating and stealing."

Christi Stiles
Class of '97

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