



# EMPLOYEE FEDERATION

of

North Harris Montgomery

Community College District

2700 W. W. Thorne • Suite A-217 • Houston, Texas 77073



## THE ADVOCATE

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### A Nightmare and a Dream

By Allan Hall and Allen Vogt

"First they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out for I was not Jewish. Then they came for the Catholics, and I did not speak out for I was not Catholic. Then they came for the Gays, and I did not speak out for I was not Gay. And then they came for me, and there was nobody left to speak for anybody."

(Anonymous)

*Not a dream but a nightmare. Homophobia, religious bigotry, and intolerance have arrived at NHC.*

Recent weeks at North Harris College have given rise to a new controversy, the creation of GLOSS (Gay and Lesbian Organization of Students in Support). Attack on this organization and its courageous sponsors, Janice Hartgrove-Freile and Don Stanley, has been open, but support, although strong, has been less vocal. It is time to bring the issues out into the open. The Advocate is an appropriate arena for this discussion because the issues involved--freedoms of speech and association--affect faculty and staff. These principles, among others, allow the Employee Federation to exist, so we tend to champion them. Moreover, gay and lesbian people populate the ranks of students, faculty, staff, and administration, all significant interests of the union.

One attack on the formation of GLOSS is that its members will use the organization to lure weak-minded heterosexuals into "converting." Not only does such an event seem unlikely, but in order to exist, all student organizations must abide by the "North Harris College Student Organizations Operating Procedures" which calls for organizations to "recognize the rights and privacy of others." Curiously, no complaint or fear of proselytizing for its own agenda has been lodged against other student organizations--the College Republican Club, the Christian Student Alliance, the Baptist Student Union, among others. Why this one?

Another complaint expressed is that by recognizing GLOSS the college is endorsing or promoting homosexual behavior, again, an absurd claim. "Operating Procedures" emphasizes, "Recognition does not include endorsement..." of any student organization. If recognition were the equivalent of endorsement, the college would have to shut down all but one student organization with a religious agenda, one with a political agenda, and so forth, in order to avoid contradiction. The college recognizes the problems of equating recognition with endorsement and rightly avoids them; after

*"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"*

all, one wonders who would have the authority to make such decisions. Hitler thought he had such authority, but history proved him wrong.

A college should create an environment of free and open discussion where individuals learn about a variety of political, philosophical, and cultural ideas. Investigation and debate allow informed decisions and judgments. Only investigation and debate lead to understanding and communication, which promote tolerance and respect for diversity. Certainly, GLOSS has a place in this environment--its goals include promoting AIDS awareness and discussing homophobia. Repression is the antithesis of a college atmosphere. The union recognizes the right of GLOSS or any other student organization that follows established guidelines to exist.

In fact, a clear legal consensus exists on the specific issue of gay-lesbian student organizations. A general freedom of association derives from the free speech and assembly guarantees of the First Amendment and from the liberty and due process guarantees of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments. Federal courts have specifically ruled that this general freedom of association, and all related benefits (e.g., use of campus facilities and media), apply to gay/lesbian organizations at state-supported schools of higher education and at public high schools. See, for example, Gay Students Org. v. Bonner (1st Cir., 1974); Gay Activist Alliance v. Lomenzo (3rd Dept., 1972); Healy v. James, 408 U.S. 169 (1971); Gay Lib v. Univ. of Missouri (8th Cir., 1977); and Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Community School Dist., 393 U.S. 503 (1969). Thus, although school officials may monitor campus organizations in relation to reasonable administrative rules and state laws, they cannot legally deny official recognition and status to gay/lesbian student organizations simply because they do not approve of the individuals or issues involved. It may get in the way of the Far Right agenda, but the United States Constitution is still alive and functioning at NHC.

In sharp contrast to the legal consensus, there is no clear religious and/or moral consensus on the issue of gay/lesbian student organizations, basically because there is no clear religious and/or moral consensus about homosexuality itself. It is legitimate to wonder why there is a moral/religious "problem" concerning this population segment at all. To paraphrase Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, "Hath not a [gay] eyes? Hath not a [gay] hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food,...subject to the same diseases,...warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is?...If you poison [them], do [they] not die?..." Consider also this poignant perspective sent to Ann Landers by J.C. in Chicago: "I simply do not understand how people who profess to care about their fellow man [religious people?] can spend so much time and energy perpetuating a climate of hate directed at a segment of society [gays] that had no choice." (Old Saying: "Prejudice cannot see things that are, because it is always looking for things that aren't.")

Such rationalism and compassion are alien to the modern Pharisees, who usually prefer conformity to consensus, but for the rest of us, the vast majority who abhor absolutism and intolerance, the situation is not so settled. Consider, for example, the concepts in John Boswell's eye-opening 1980 work entitled Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality. First, Boswell advises his reader to "relinquish the concept of a single book containing a uniform corpus of writings accepted as morally authoritative" (p. 92). The "Bible," for instance, has undergone numerous translations and editions; the religious rationalist wonders which ONE is, or ever could be,

version "perverted," too?) Like the Nazis intended with the Jews, even the memory must be eliminated. They never happened!

But it can't happen here--not at NHC or in NHMCCD. Oh yes it can, given the necessary combination of indifference and abandonment of conscience. As Edmund Burke so aptly remarked, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for sane men to do nothing." The lethal necessities allowed many sad things to happen in 1930s Germany in short order and with three basic steps: first the harassment; second the legislation; and finally the concentration camps. Like America's moral fascists today, Germany's social/political fascists (or Nazis) developed into a coalition which lashed out at all the symbols of contemporary society that evoked resentment and insecurity in them. Nazi fanaticism demanded many victims, including homosexuals. In the concentration camps, inmates were classified by a variety of colored triangles: yellow for Jews, red for Communists, brown for Gypsies, purple for Jehovah's Witnesses--and pink for gay people. Exactly how many gays and lesbians were murdered by the Nazis will probably never be known--certainly tens of thousands, many at Austria's Mauthausen Concentration Camp alone. There was apparently no Oskar Schindler for Europe's homosexuals, but, unfortunately, there was an Adolf Hitler.

Oskar Schindler at least did something. He protected and saved hundreds of Jews, and his memory has been honored in the movie "Schindler's List," the recent Academy Award winner as best motion picture. Tom Hanks did something: his moving portrayal of an AIDS victim in the movie "Philadelphia" earned him the recent Academy Award for best actor. Mr. Conservative, Barry Goldwater, says it's "dumb" for the GOP to oppose gays in the military. Liza Minelli did an AIDS benefit here in Houston on March 19. Diehard Republican Robert Mosbacher has been enlightened by his lesbian daughter Diane, and Republican Rep. Jack Fields reports publicly that he does not discriminate against homosexual job applicants. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had a dream about judging people only according to "the content of their character."

Meanwhile, the Steven Hotze/Pat Robertson crowd pursue the antithesis of the aforementioned attitudes and activities, envisioning something more akin to a "hit list" than a "Schindler's List." There is no mistaking the Rev. Charles Stanley, who said, "We do not want a democracy in this land because if we have a democracy a majority rules." There is no mistaking the Rev. James Robison, who declared, "If necessary, God would raise up a tyrant, a man who might not have the best ethics, to protect the freedom interests of the ethical and the godly." And undoubtedly still ringing in the ears of an Indiana church congregation are the new-low remarks of Randall Terry, founder, Operation Rescue: "I want you to just let a wave of intolerance wash over you. I want you to let a wave of hatred wash over you. Yes, hate is good...Our goal is a Christian nation. We have a biblical duty, we are called by God, to conquer this country. We don't want equal time. We don't want pluralism." (Old Saying: God wants spiritual fruit, not religious nuts.)

"Freedom is indivisible. It is for all or none." The erosion of this simple precept was noted in the last July 4 Houston Post editorial, wherein there is reference to a growing "tyranny of intolerance" which "is slowly but steadily pushing us toward the scornful rejection of the very liberties for which the Revolution was fought." This is a time for the true children of the Revolution and for all people of good will, compassion, and tolerance to come out of the closet! This is a time to remember Lincoln's ageless words



absolutely "correct." (Old Saying: "The student of truth keeps an open Bible, an open dictionary, and an open mind.") Second, Boswell directly assaults Christian-based homophobia by asserting "that nothing in the Bible would have categorically precluded homosexual relations among early Christians" (p. 92). The word "homosexual" does NOT appear in the Bible, possible deliberate mistranslations and/or misinterpretations notwithstanding; the Sodom account in Genesis was understood by most early Christians as an allegory primarily about inhospitality to strangers and not about sexual conduct of any kind; the word "sodomite," even if an appropriate translation, "would not necessarily imply homosexuality (p. 98); the proscriptions against homosexuality in Leviticus "characterize it unequivocally as ceremonially unclean rather than inherently evil" (p. 102); the writings of Paul, specifically in 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, and Romans, if properly translated, contain "no clear condemnation of homosexual acts" (p. 110) (The phrase "against nature," for example, referring not to abstract nature but to someone's personal nature); Jesus, apparently indifferent to sexuality generally, "said nothing which bore any relation to homosexuality" (p. 115).

Third, and finally, Boswell employs an historical perspective to reveal that gay people have not experienced unrelenting hostility, even from devout Christians. Roman society displayed no apparent discrimination against homosexual interests. The early Christian Church and its theology do "not appear to have opposed homosexual behavior per se" (p. 333); Catholic Europe embraced gay bishops and even canonized some gay people. Gay literature and culture were visible components of most Middle Ages urban centers. Only around the twelfth century did a "virulent hostility," aided and abetted by the Christian Church, begin to develop. In fact, the first ecumenical ("general") church council officially to proscribe homosexual acts was Lateran III in 1179, and, even at that, Lateran IV, thirty-six years later, retreated somewhat from these rules. Ironically, "no specific Christian theology" produced this metamorphosis; instead, it primarily resulted from general philosophical arguments, even non-Christian pagan "proofs," personal prejudices, and hostility to nonconformity (pp. 310-311). This latter factor--hostility to nonconformity--is particularly relevant when one considers that anti-gay virulence was a part of an era and a process including the Crusades, virulent anti-Semitism, the Inquisition, the slave trade and slavery, and the executions of thousands on vague charges of heresy and witchcraft.

Boswell, then, reveals not only the lack of a clear religious and/or moral consensus about homosexuality but the clear modernity of anti-gay hostility and the ever-present bigotry and intolerance which drives it. BIGOTRY IS BIGOTRY, whether derived from racial prejudice, gender bias, religion, or any other factor not related to the basic nature, character, and potential of the individual human being. Religious bigotry and intolerance are especially dangerous; at various times in American history, they have claimed victims among Catholics and Protestants, Jews, immigrants, blacks, and many others, now including gays, who do not fit into the religious fanatic's narrow patterns of religious/moral absolutism. They let no stone go unthrown.

Religious bigotry and its attendant fanaticism are what delude individuals like Michael Griffin into murdering an abortion doctor in Florida; motivate teenagers into gaybashing and even murder of decent people such as Houstonian Paul Broussard; cause ministers, even in Houston, to call publicly for the execution of all homosexuals and the total abandonment of those with AIDS; lead to a gay counseling program in Los Angeles to be attacked for "recruiting" students to "the homosexual cause" and to an

age-appropriate Maryland school instruction on AIDS to be denounced for "teaching about homosexuality."

Further testimony to this "Let Us Prey" or "Religiously Correct" (RC, as opposed to PC, "politically correct") syndrome is amply supplied in the larger world. The horrors in Northern Ireland, the Bosnia region, and the Middle East underline modern religious man's inhumanity to man. Thus, Dr. Baruch Goldstein murders helpless Palestinians praying in a mosque. Proud Iran is converted into an Islamic "Star Chamber," and the author of Satanic Verses becomes an assassination target. Of course, typically, the religious fanatic disclaims any responsibility for the "excesses" of others. But the ghost of murdered Becket will not down; can we not still hear the irresponsible but lethal words of Henry II: "Will no one rid me of this man?" Someone heard then!

Simply put, the RC behind these trends has no place, elsewhere or here; religious bigotry, homophobia, and intolerance of any kind have no place at NHC or in NHMCCD. The entire community college movement has been idealistically predicated on the principles of student diversity, equality, and toleration. Appropriately, the theme of the recent (February, 1994) TJCTA convention was "Strength in Diversity." Certainly the NHMCCD catalog and policies manual contain explicit commitments to diversity, equality, and toleration. And we are supposed to abandon, categorically and completely, these sacred educational ideals to satisfy the bigoted homophobia and unprofessionalism of the RC minority?

That bigotry is the main player--and not religious grace and understanding--becomes most blatantly evident in the use of epithets like "queer's club," "pervert," "faggot," "fairy," pansy," etc. These epithets are exact parallels to, and as unacceptable morally and professionally as, "Nigger," "Polack," "Gook," "Greaser," "Chink," etc. (Old Saying: "What many churchgoers need is fewer platitudes and better attitudes.") And professionalism is a legitimate concern here. How, for example, can an instructor, deeming gays "queers" and "perverts," possibly act professionally and fairly towards identified or even suspected gay/lesbian students in his/her classes? Can such a teacher maintain a "learning environment free of harassment or intimidation?"

And what should be the logical outcome of this bigoted homophobia and questionable professionalism at NHC or in NHMCCD? It would mean, first, the expulsion of all current gay/lesbian students and a prohibition against any future gay/lesbian students. This follows directly from the prejudiced assumption that the NHC gay/lesbian student organization--GLOSS--is a collection of "perverts." Do not, therefore, the gay/lesbian members of GLOSS remain "perverts" as individuals outside of the organization? Does it not follow that, even with a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" rule, gays and lesbians would still be at NHC "perverting" the campus and causing resident homophobes to remain "associated" with this perversion? Clearly, then, they must go--all of them!

Also to avoid contamination, the hundreds of LRC holdings dealing with homosexuality should be removed. All textbooks, particularly in the fields of sociology and psychology, which mention homosexuality should be purged. All discussion of the issue--and related matters like AIDS--should cease. From the history books and classes we should expunge Americans such as Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, and Tennessee Williams and Europeans like Alexander the Great, Hans Christian Andersen, Frederick the Great, and King James I. (Yes, that King James; mercy goodness, is that Bible

at Gettysburg, "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom," and Dr. King's March on Washington dream "that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self evident, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL'...and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and ALL FLESH SHALL SEE IT TOGETHER." Not a nightmare but a dream.

### **BOOKS STOP**

At the end of this month, Mike Webb's long association with NHMCCD as its official textbook vendor comes to an end. Whatever prompted the Administration and the Board to take this action is beyond the focus of this piece. My purpose instead is to thank Mike and his staff for the fine service they have provided this institution over a span of nearly twenty years. In my ten years at Kingwood College, Mike has always taken care of my business requests. Whenever I wanted to make a last-minute change in an order or there was difficulty in locating enough copies of a title to cover my classroom needs, I simply called Mike Webb or his assistant, Mike Szoeki, with the confidence that they would respond positively. The books we assign and the assurance of their availability to students is utterly crucial to the success of our classes. Mike handled his end of this process extremely well and therefore deserves some credit for the academic success of this District.

In addition, Mike has on a number of occasions, quietly helped students and employees in need. The History Department could always count on him at the time of its annual symposium to provide copies of speakers' books for sale, even though there was no chance of profit in it for himself, given the hassle and the small volume. Of course, Mike could afford to be generous, as apparently his business was quite lucrative. But nothing dictated such altruistic behavior. If all the successful capitalists in this country could act so decently, what a much better society this would be! Mike will soon reopen in locations close to Tomball College and NHC. While no longer officially tied to the District, at least his school-related business will continue. Perhaps students will benefit from the more competitive arrangement this will represent. Whatever the outcome, Mike Webb deserves a public salute and wishes for continued success.

Steve Davis

### **JOIN THE AFT!**

If you agree with the union's stances on educational and workplace issues, then it's time for you to join the Employee Federation. No other organization or publication at NHMCCD takes our kind of independent, critical approach to District affairs. If you want that effort to continue, then show your solidarity by becoming a member. All faculty and staff are eligible. Monthly dues rates are \$20.25 for full-time faculty, \$13.10 for full-time staff and adjunct faculty, and \$10.00 for part-time staff. Discuss membership with **Alan Hall**, District President (443-5544, 353-8634); **Marilyn Kron**, District Staff President; or any other member (Tony Foster, Bob Locander, Mel McFadden, Greg Mitchell, Patricia Plunk, Velma Smith, Allen Vogt, Steve Davis) of the Federation executive committee. Also, please consider writing for this publication. Submissions should be sent to the Editor, Steve Davis, at Kingwood College.