

Editorial

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Censorship

Film cancellation shows lack of backbone

"Censor: One authorized to examine films and printed materials and suppress what is objectionable."
— Webster's Dictionary

The Sheldon Film Theatre's cancellation of the film "Hail, Mary" deprives UNL students, faculty and Lincoln residents of their right to view a piece of art — despite its controversiality — and is censorship.

While the film has been condemned by the Catholic Church and Pope John Paul II because of its portrayal of the Virgin Mary and Catholics worldwide have picketed the film, it also has received praise and several international awards.

Godard, a leader in the French New Wave film movement, is a well-respected artist whose first feature film "Breathless" stunned the cinema world.

Sheldon Director George Neubert said one reason he cancelled the film was to protect Sheldon from outside supporters who might try to cut the gallery's budget because of the showing.

Denying people access to any art — to judge for themselves the value of its contents — is outrageous, and to do so for the sake of protecting finances shows complete lack of backbone — especially from a man who has made the arts his life.

Past experience proves that film should be shown and viewed for its aesthetic value, not censored because of possible negative community reaction. To censor because of fear of denied

financial backing of future gallery projects would be plain blackmail on the supporters' parts.

Controversy is not new to the Sheldon. About three years ago Sheldon displayed a photography exhibit that focused on the lives of homosexuals. Sheldon supporters protested, the exhibit went on as planned and Sheldon did not suffer because of it.

Sheldon officials reacted inappropriately to another false alarm last year when the film "The Gods Must Be Crazy," by a South African filmmaker, was not shown because some considered it racist. The film later was shown at a downtown Lincoln theater without incident.

It's doubtful that "Hail, Mary" would create much controversy in Lincoln. The city's residents are not predominately Catholic, and many of those who are Catholic are open-minded enough to find value in the arts — even those that are controversial.

Godard is a film legend whose career spans more than 40 years. Most critics consider him one of the 10 most influential and important filmmakers of the 20th century.

One of the saddest parts of the cancellation is that Neubert did not view the film before cancelling it.

Ours is a country based on freedoms. We deserve the right to view this film — all films — and decide for ourselves whether it deserves praise or criticism.

This time, we won't even get the chance.

Sentencing

Reforms needed for fair system

Federal and state criminal justice systems need a major overhaul. Our prisons already are overcrowded. The U.S. is plagued by one of the highest violent crime rates among Western nations. At the same time criminal sentences vary greatly across the nation, and injured victims remain uncompensated.

The new U.S. Sentencing Commission hopefully will provide a firm impetus toward solving this potpourri of prison problems.

Our most basic sense of fairness is offended by wildly different sentences. A crime that merits a sentence of six months in Alabama cannot merit nine years in Oregon. The commission is expected to draft enforceable guidelines reducing the indeterminacy of current sentencing practice. States should be encouraged to follow suit.

This change most probably will increase the average length of criminal sentences served. More criminals serving more time means more overcrowding. Thus, a serious look at alternative sentencing approaches is mandatory.

The first step needed is to eliminate prison sentences for non-violent offenders.

The alternative sentencing approach addresses this problem by requiring community service or mandatory restitution — punishment more befitting the nature of the offense.

The commission is reported to be very interested in what U.S. District Judge Warren Urbom of Lincoln has done in pioneering prison alternatives at the federal level.

U.S. District Judge and Commission Chairman William Wilkins indicated a widespread interest in incorporating "meaningful alternatives" to prison within the sentencing guidelines the commission will be establishing. He also said that the commission wants to integrate restitution into the alternatives.

We can only hope that the commission will be successful in balancing justice for the victim as well as justice for the criminal. Too often the criminal is thoughtlessly sentenced to prison while the victim is forgotten. Our current imbalance serves the purposes of society neither in punishing the criminal nor in dealing with the impact of crime upon the victim. Reform is desperately needed.



Gays need protection of rights

Incident at Union College brings discrimination home

My friend Linda (not her real name) is an extraordinary woman. She's intelligent, talented, quick-witted, attractive and always a pleasure to be around. She is a business major who has managed to maintain a high grade point average throughout her college career, but the future looks dim for her because she is a woman and a lesbian.

Even with a college degree and an arsenal of ability, Linda will invariably have to deal with low pay because of sexism in the work world. If her future bosses ever discover her sexual orientation they will have the right to legally fire her if they decide that "dykes don't belong in business."

And even if she finds a job in a business run by open-minded, liberal people, discrimination could follow her home after work. If her future landlords decide that they can't "rent to some homo," they'll have the right to legally deny her living quarters.

To date, there is no nationwide law that protects citizens against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Some cities like Los Angeles, Seattle, Minneapolis, Chicago, Atlanta, Honolulu, New York and Detroit and states like New Mexico and California recently have enacted gay civil rights laws that make it illegal to discriminate against gays in employment, housing, schools, public facilities and banks.

But elsewhere, including Nebraska, there are few or no laws that protect gays from being denied employment, living quarters, credit, use of public facilities and admission to most educational institutions. Nebraska Wesleyan University, run by the Methodist Church, is the only local institution that has enacted a gay civil rights law. In places where there are no sexual orientation laws, gays can be legally subjected to the pious wrath of every bigot around.

You might think that that sort of unjust treatment never occurs in this all-American city in this fantastic, "free" country, but it does. In fact, a case of gay discrimination recently occurred in Lincoln. This case undeniably rivals South Africa's abysmal apartheid prac-

tics. According to an article in a local gay magazine, The New Voice, Union College's administration recently discovered a student's lesbian identity. The woman was given an "alternative" concerning her situation: she would be forced to go through a "gay rehabilitation" program designed to cure her "immoral" desires. If she didn't she would be expelled and receive no credit for the courses she was taking. She was also coerced into revealing her sexual orientation to her parents and the names of her sex partners. The administration also asked her to produce the names of any other gays she knew on campus.



Scott Harrah

As the author of the article eloquently puts it: "The Union College Seal of Office proclaims, 'They Shall Be All Taught of God.' Isn't it a shame what some do in the name of God?"

True Christians love all people, as the administration at Wesleyan can attest. If the purported "Christians" at Union College think homosexuality is some "curable" illness, they may as well eradicate their art and English departments too.

They can "cure" homosexuality by cutting out an English department that properly teaches literature written by such "immoral homos" as Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein, Willa Cather, Tennessee Williams and Byron. And they'll certainly have to get rid of art history classes that teach the works of an "immoral homo" named Michaelangelo, who indulged in such activities as the painting of churches. If the students are exposed to art created by homos they might, alas, turn out to be dangerous or perverted.

It nauseates me when I hear about people using a warped sense of moral-

ity to discriminate against human beings. Many psychological studies have shown that homosexuality is merely a sexual preference, not a mental illness. That is why anti-gay psychologist Paul Cameron was kicked out of the American Psychological Association. But whether homosexuality is an "immoral illness" or not is not important in this issue. What is important is that gays can't change their orientation. Any gay I have ever met has said, "I was born this way and I'll die this way." They are also human, and all humans need to work to support themselves, have a place to live and a place to learn. When we discriminate against gays, we are denying them the basic rights every person, male or female, black or white, straight or gay, needs to survive.

Part of the problem is caused by gays themselves. They have inaccurately labeled their civil rights "gay" rights. A better term would be "human" rights, for that is exactly what they're asking for: the right to be treated like everyone else.

Society looks at gays with contempt, so when we see gays lobbying for "gay" rights, we immediately misunderstand and think they are asking for special treatment. And when gays engage in such politically inept travesties as "gay pride parades," our understanding is thrown off track even more.

We should learn to ignore the stereotypes and fundamentalist fallacies about gays and accept all humans as individuals with rights. The time is now to enact a national gay rights bill and strive for an androgynous, open society where gender, race, sexuality, creed and social class have no bearing on the qualities and traits of individuals.

If we don't, we may as well abolish the celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, because we're certainly not standing up for what he taught us. King would turn over in his grave if he was aware of the sexual version of apartheid still being practiced in America today.

Harrah is a UNL junior in English and speech communication.

Inclusive maternity policy needed

Our friend is at the end of her last, lumbering trimester. At lunch, toasting the imminent birth of her first child with club soda and lime, we wish her well. In return, she tallies up her vacation time and maternity leave. She will be out of work six months; that should just about do it.

Later, the three of us who are already mothers walk back across town together. One, whose two school-age children have been through a winter of flu and measles, laughs sardonically and says, "You know, I think I could use maternity leave, too." Another, whose son has had a tough time launching himself into high school, seconds that motion.

I tell them about my own fantasy. While our pregnant friend was counting up her days, I wondered what it would have been like to have such a

fine pool of days to draw from slowly. What a luxury for parents who might use those months of leave, one day at a time, over several years.



Ellen Goodman

Our friend is lucky. Her company is, by many standards, generous with leave. And yet, we already know, it isn't enough.

It occurs to me as we go back to our separate offices how much attention there is on infant leave these days. The world that we all work in is being wrenched into reality. Today half the pregnant working women will be back on the job within a year. There is much

talk of birthing and bonding.

A bill in Congress proposes that we grant new parents a minimum of 18 weeks of unpaid leave with job protection. A Yale study recommends child-care leaves of six months with 75 percent pay for half that time.

And yet even those who lobby, even those who fashion these vast improvements, know they won't be enough.

I wonder sometimes whether, in a subtle way, the current emphasis on parental leave creates another special class in the work force. Will the attention focused on those with newborns allow employers and legislators to pretend that the conflicts between work and family are temporary, limited to the earliest months of life. "Six months should just about do it."

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