

First Amendment decision misguided

Just one day after thousands of gay men and lesbians paraded through San Francisco, the U.S. Supreme Court permitted them to be banned from doing the same thing in Boston.

The Court ruled unanimously that the sponsors of Boston's St. Patrick's Day parade could bar an Irish gay and lesbian group from the event because being gay is "inconsistent with the message" parade sponsors want to send.

While the ruling may be an accurate interpretation of the First Amendment, the problem lies in the assertion that being gay or lesbian is somehow in opposition to being Irish.

The parade, funded and organized by the South Boston Allied War Veterans Council, has been a bone of contention between parade organizers and gay community members since 1992, when the Irish-American Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Group of Boston (GLIB) applied to march in the event and was rejected.

The problem lies in the assertion that being gay or lesbian is somehow in opposition to being Irish.

Because the parade is privately funded, organizers can decide who marches and who does not, even though the event takes place in a public forum. The First Amendment protects that right. Even organizers of San Francisco's gay pride parade have excluded groups that presented messages seen as antithetical to the gay rights movement.

However, the parade is an Irish celebration, not a veterans' or Catholic event. Regardless of who sponsors it, the event is an opportunity for Irish-Americans to celebrate their heritage. To insist that being gay or lesbian — and wanting to declare it — excludes someone from membership in a racial, ethnic, religious or political group is ignorant and discriminatory.

At the heart of the matter is the perception of the parade sponsors and the Court that homosexuality is an ideological rather than biological distinction.

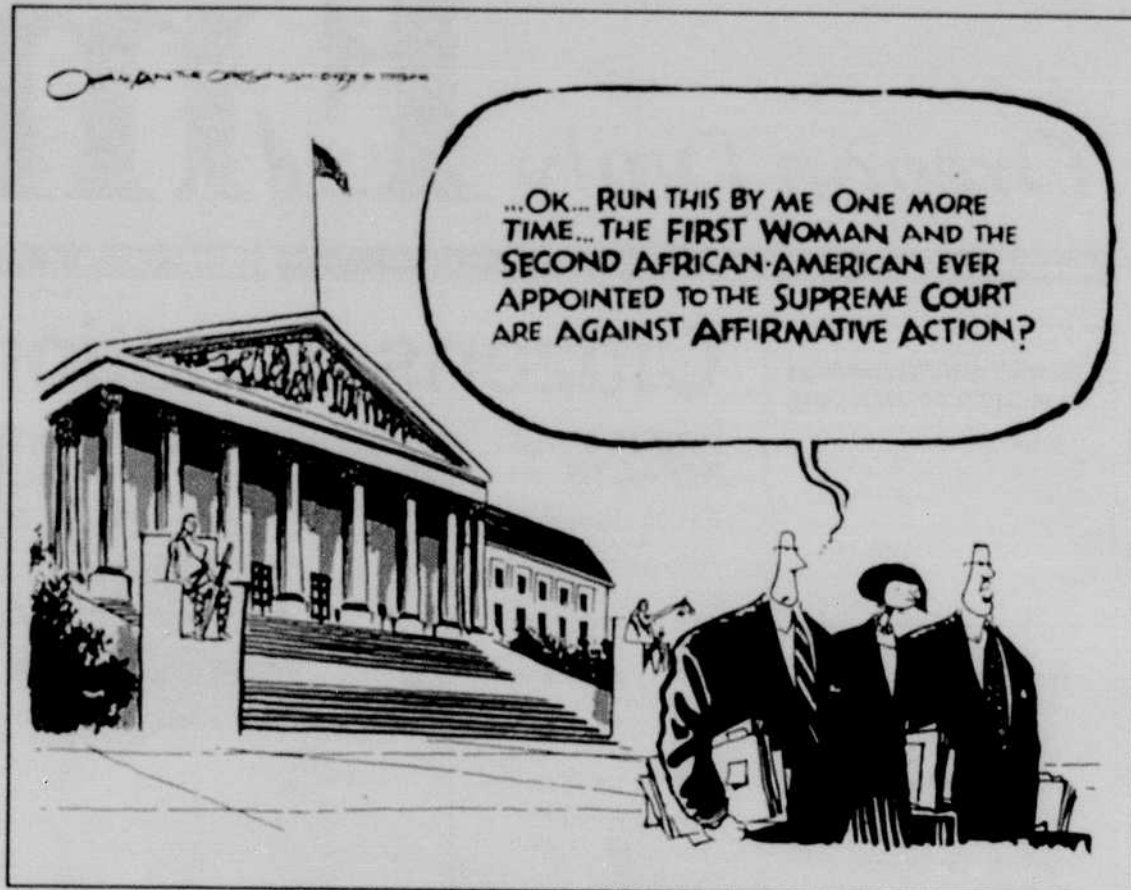
The ruling permits groups to exclude people whose views conflict with those groups. It does not allow an organization to reject a participant because of their race or ethnicity. Thus, Catholic organizations can exclude atheists from their activities, but they cannot deny access to African-Americans. As it should be.

But being gay or lesbian, or being a member of a gay organization, does not imply a certain political or moral position. Gay and lesbian people are liberal, moderate, and conservative. They are devout Catholics, Buddhists and Jews. They are members of every country, every race, and every city. Being gay or lesbian should not prohibit them from celebrating all of the other aspects of who they are and participating as full members of all the groups to which they belong.

Sexual orientation is only a part of self-definition. Gay men and lesbians are an integral part of every community, and they should be allowed to openly declare and celebrate all of who they are without fear of rejection.

The Court's error lies not in its interpretation of the First Amendment, but in its assumption that homosexuality is a belief system in conflict with the veterans' rights.

It may be good law, but it isn't justice.



■ OPINION

Gangsta rap kills truth for profits



JESSE I. BOHRER-CLANCY

If you were to ask someone his or her opinion of rap music these days, you would probably get two answers: "It sucks!" or "I like it." It is the rare answer: "It depends on the artist."

Usually, those who hate rap have either never given it a listen or derive their opinion from the few songs they have heard without giving it a chance. Then, there are those who have listened to it and simply do not like it aesthetically, just as many people hate the twang of country or the jackhammer pace of metal. Those who do listen to rap would most likely say they listen to it for the beat, the rhythm or the message.

The aesthetic rhythm and beat of rap is dependent on the listener's taste. The message, however, is another point entirely. It differentiates "good" — albeit sometimes hard to come by — rap from the more commercial "gangsta" rap that gives the genre a bad name.

Gangsta rap is supposedly the message or truth from the ghetto, whether it be from the streets of South Central Los Angeles or the alleys of the South Bronx and Chicago. It glorifies violence and objectifies and demeans women. Apparently, according to gangsta rappers, their music is "the voice of the streets," and the truth from the ghetto. While violence is prevalent in the inner city and the ghetto, gangsta rap is a far cry from an accurate depiction of the streets.

Gangsta rap is about making money — pure and simple.

For example, if you took a cross section of "hard-core" gangsta rappers, you would find that hardly any of them still live

in "the hood" — if they ever lived there at all.

"Snoop Doggy Dogg," whose real name is Calvin Broadus, is a self-professed gangsta rapper and the poster boy for the Parental Music Resource Center (PMRC), a conservative organization that watches the music industry like a hawk in an attempt to make music "safe" for the consumer. Mr. Broadus is also from Brentwood, Calif. — hardly from the "streets" he claims he is from and that he raps about.

Some would say that his upcoming murder trial gives him street credibility. But Mr. Broadus is not accused of shooting someone. He allegedly drove the getaway car after his bodyguard allegedly shot the victim in the back, making Mr. Broadus an alleged accessory to murder. Does being accused of a cowardly murder glorify him and the gangsta rap genre? Unfortunately, in the eyes of those who purchase and listen to this type of rap, the answer is yes.

The typical gangsta rap messages are to shoot anyone who disrespects you and that women are useful for only one thing: sex.

Gangsta rappers frequently refer to women as "bitches" and "hos," and like to give lengthy accounts of their sexual prowess and the size of their genitalia. While the latter is nothing more than arrogant posturing because the rapper feels he must make up for a shortcoming or inadequacy, the former is nothing but pure nonsense. It is impossible to believe that any woman, much less a black woman, would stand to be degraded in such a manner so frequently.

Next, of those who primarily buy and listen to gangsta rap, 75 to 80 percent are suburban, middle-class, adolescent, white males. This leads to the curious conclusion that suburban blacks are rapping about something they have never experienced, and white males are buying this product so they can live out a fantasy vicariously.

However, the truth of urban life is missing, thereby making gangsta rapping not an art, but a carefully crafted, fictitious product, which is then marketed. The more violent and explicit, the more it sells. In fact, gangsta rappers are not artists at all, but very shrewd businessmen. They sample music from other sources and rap about subjects they know nothing about. Nothing they do is original.

However, the desire of conservative groups such as the PMRC to censor music, and gangsta rap in particular, usually does more harm than good. Many rappers wear the Parental Advisory label like a badge of honor, and in some cases, the presence of the advisory label is the primary factor in motivating someone to purchase an album.

But the responsibility of censorship does not lie with the government or with the ranting and raving of conservative watchdog groups. It rests with the individual consumer who, we hope, has the wisdom and intelligence to discriminate between art and a prepackaged product.

This is not to say that all rap is bad. In fact, a lot of rap is quite good and original — from the humorous Pharcyde to the bizarre Justin Warfield to the socially conscious works of The Disposable Heroes of Hiphopriety and Basehead.

Being a young, black man in the ghetto is not about "bustin' a cap is some punk's ass" who disrespects you. It's about providing for your family, being a father if you have a child and rising above the violence that permeates the inner city. It's about respecting women and building community rather than tearing it apart with violence.

Perhaps people need to realize that gangsta rappers are motivated only by greed and have no desire or ability to spread the truth about what really occurs in everyday urban life.

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