

Kansas Resorts to Legalized Discrimination

CAROLINE REN
Editor in Chief

A prominent figure at all times and especially so during Black History Month, Martin Luther King, Jr. is oftentimes celebrated for leading a significant civil rights movement and helping end segregation. Because of the historical importance of his actions, it's a real slap in the face for Kansas to, in essence, attempt to revive segregation for a different group of people at a time meant to be spent rejoicing in how far we've come.

On Feb. 11, Kansas lawmakers passed a bill that would allow government employees and businesses to deny service to same-sex couples, according to Time magazine. The given justification for the law, known as House Bill 2453, is that serving gay couples may violate some workers' religious beliefs. Moreover, any person who denies someone service based on sexual orientation would be doing so legally and would not be charged with discrimination.

Under this new law, employ-

ers can fire employees based on sexuality; hotels, movie theaters and restaurants can deny entry to same-sex couples; state hospitals can refuse

treatment and police officers can refuse assistance. Essentially, any institution or individual operating under the Kansas state government is legally pro-

tected if they choose to discriminate based on sexuality, and any gay couple who sues will lose their case and also be forced to pay attorney fees for the opposing side.

Besides being outright disgusting, House Bill 2453 is a chilling reminder that too many people still hold on to long-ago fears of interacting with those who are different, a remnant of the pre-

60's era when public facilities were blatantly labeled "white" and "colored." By bringing back repulsive elements from a time period rid-

dled with legalized discrimination, especially in February of all months, lawmakers from the Kansas House of Representatives who voted for

this law are

practically spitting on both blacks and members of the LGBT community, and even more so to those who belong to both groups.

From skin color to sexual preference, the central idea is the same: discrimination in any form is unacceptable, and institutionalizing it is downright vindictive and childish, a means for grown adults to tilt society's playing field

in their advantage and to cover their ears and scream until the people they don't like go away. However, House Representatives are not children, and House Bill 2453 is far more sinister than bullying on the playground—it is a callous destruction of the stairway to equality that has been in construction for decades, if not centuries, with nothing to stop other states like Arizona from following suit or from including other minority groups in legalized discrimination as well.

Ultimately, the fact that people are willing to go this far to protect their own bigoted views is ludicrous, and to claim it as religious freedom is blatantly faulty reasoning when so many other elements of lifestyle contradict religious beliefs but only one is singled out and focused on. Civil rights activists fought half a century ago so that what happened then would not happen again, yet it is clear that portions of the land of the free are still overwhelmingly only free to those who fit the criteria.



CARTOONS



Faux Pas Breaches Religious Freedom

JOSEPH NEY-JUN
Staff Writer
SUSANNA AIGA
Opinions Editor

Though it is 2014, religious discrimination is still a rampant problem in first world countries. According to *The Local*, a French news site, a privately owned nursery fired Fatima Afif for wearing Muslim headscarves to work and refusing to remove it on Dec. 19, 2008.

The CEO based his decision on France's official secular policy enforced by its extremely restrictive laws regarding public expressions of faith. According to *The Huffington Post*, in 2004, France banned Muslim head scarves in public school classrooms, and in 2010, the French government passed a law which prohibits wearing "clothing intended to conceal his/her face" in public. Wearing such a veil would constitute fines up to 200 euros. Although there are no laws regulating religious apparel in private institutions, a Paris appeals court still overturned a high court decision, ruling in favor of the Bay Loup nursery school in Nov. 2013.

The French state should not be using its secular policies to justify such blatant discrimina-

tion. As the country with the largest Muslim minority in Europe, it seems that France is targeting this particular group of individuals who are most affected by the "burqa ban." This discrimination—often in the form of fines and identity checks—even provoked riots in July 2013 in the middle of Ramadan, but the French government still clung to its secular laws. To us Americans who enjoy our freedom of religion, this treatment of any community is unjustifiable, no matter what secular mantra political leaders dish out to the people.

Defenders of the ban use feminism to argue their case. For example, French Minister of the Interior Manuel Valls claimed that the ban "must be enforced everywhere" because it is "in the interests of women." However, these women view their traditional garments as essential to their identity. Restricting these women's ability to express themselves seems to be more anti-woman than feminist.

France's recent events of discrimination remind us in the U.S. of the importance of tolerance. An article of clothing may seem meaningless to one person, but to another it could be an important tradition.

Don't Forgive the Freeloaders

CINDY LUO
Staff Writer

Imagine a customer holding a tray full of food, seeking a seat to settle himself into during the intense lunchtime rush at a fast food restaurant. Now imagine the scene in front of him is filled with narrow booths and tables composed of elders chatting and socializing, who have been splitting a small packet of french fries and drinking a medium cup of coffee since 7 a.m. in the morning.

This scenario applies to McDonald's and some other fast food places all over the country, which usually results in annoyed customers and frustrated but helpless staff. Recently, a conflict arose between a group of elders and the management at a McDonald's in Flushing, Queens, New York City. The general manager called the police after the group refused to budge and other customers asked for refunds because there was nowhere to sit.

Although the service industry has the famous "customer first" motto, it is not always applicable to restaurants like McDonald's that rely on a fast turnover of tables and fast service because of their nature—a "fast" food restaurant. The store has the right to remove loafers when facing a shortage of seats for those customers who actually want to finish their meal swiftly. It is understandable that elders feel a sense of belonging by gathering together and hanging out in a public place, but a single purchase is absolutely not a permission for endless sitting.

The plentiful tables, free Wi-Fi, nice environment and familiar atmosphere of McDonald's is not provided for people to indefinitely extend the time they spend in there. Customers, no matter what age, should have more self-discipline and should be more sensitive to the store's needs and more cooperative with the store's demand.



WRITE OR WONG?

Teen Petitions Disney: We Can't All Be Princesses

KAYIU WONG
Staff Writer

As a wholehearted Disney fanatic, I believe that Disney movies never leave us regardless of our age and Disney characters will always be here to captivate and inspire children. However, that does not mean these inspirations always deliver the right messages. The images and body types of Disney princesses for example, give unrealistic depictions to young girls.

There has been criticism before on Disney's paradigm of blonde and stick-thin princesses, and recently, 17-year-old Jewel Moore launched a Change.org petition asking Disney to introduce a plus-size princess. She wrote: "I made this petition because I'm a plus-size young woman, and I know many plus-size girls and women who struggle with confidence and need a positive plus-size character in the media."

Moore's fight for a plus-size princess is uplifting and courageous. She is ultimately fighting for a role model Disney has yet to create. Disney's productions have taught lessons of overcoming obstacles, defeating the villain and living happily ever after, but can we really say that they empower children to know that there is no such thing as a "perfect" image? Disney princesses should, as a collective group, influence diversity. A plus-size protagonist will serve as a positive representation in the media for girls who do not "fit the skinny standard" set by previous films. All children deserve to see themselves positively represented in the media. Although each Disney character is inspiring in their own unique way, a plus size princess will create a positive and magical ripple effect unlike any other before.