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The holiday America forgot: What it's like being Jewish (and left out) during December

by James Longhofer

Weird things happen on the day after Halloween. Whenever I go into public spaces, I start to hear overly cheerful music. Wreaths start appearing in inappropriate places, including on the front of cars. Finally, all the cups at Starbucks change colors from white to red just like the leaves changing from green to yellow. These changes mean one thing: the holiday season has arrived.

Let's get something clear. When people talk about the holiday season, they are only really talking about Christmas. I appreciate the inclusiveness of the phrase "the holiday season," but let's be honest. Kwanzaa and Hanukkah aren't really the holidays that people are referring to. The first thing that clued me in to this was the fact that Macy's didn't do a Hanukkah parade. Even when people mention the other holidays that occur in November and December, Christmas always gets top billing. I've made my peace with this. In a country that is ninety percent Christian, Christmas is always going to trump Hanukkah. However, for a young Jew, it is a traumatizing experience to realize that your holiday is the redheaded stepchild of the holiday season.

The holiday season is the only time of year when I feel alienated from my country. There is always a tension between being American and being Jewish, and this time of year only exacerbates that tension. Christmastime has always made me feel somehow less American than my neighbors because I was unable to participate in the festivities. Who would like to be excluded from the reindeer games? Some of my Jewish friends adopted the Christmas rituals and put a Jewish spin on them. However, a Hanukkah bush or blue and white Hanukkah lights just don't feel authentic to me. While "Chris-mukkah" is a daring compromise between Moses and Jesus, I feel ridiculous every time I say it. Too much of my soul is Jewish for me to assimilate that much and give in to someone else's holiday. While it feels wrong to not take part in the festivities, it feels even worse to muddy the traditions of my people just to feel included.

This wouldn't be a problem if I could get away from the trappings of Christmas. Everywhere I turn, there is always something to remind me of the holiday that I can have no

part in, even though it is the most culturally significant one in the American calendar. In most places tinsel covers every doorway, Christmas trees are always within eyesight, and Christmas carols play in the background. Even worse, television becomes virtually unwatchable during December. Most shows feel obligated to do a special Christmas episode. Just like any other obligation, these shows have a certain formula that must be followed. (Man hates the holidays and is a jerk. He ignores friends'/family's attempts to cheer him up. Man has some sort of traumatic experience and learns a lesson. Man is now grateful and celebrates the holiday with friends/family.) Christmas is the juggernaut of the holidays. There is no escape. Resistance is futile.

However, there is a time in every Jew's life when he accepts reality. That time came for me towards the end of high school. I began to revel in my status as a Christmas-abstainer. I realized that I was freed from the obligations that practitioners of the holiday must endure. I don't have to risk my neck putting up Christmas lights. I don't have to deal with a messy tree inside of my house. (Menorahs are a lot easier to clean up after.) Sometimes, I don't even need to worry about getting Hanukkah gifts until after Christmas. Best of all, I don't feel the pressure to be unnaturally happy. It seems odd that people get so stressed out during this time of year. In the process of trying to create a happy holiday for their loved ones, they only create anxiety for themselves.

Jews are a resourceful people. In face of a holiday that sucks up all the attention, we've developed our own rituals for Christmas Day. Let me tell you what I will do on December 25th. First, I will sleep in, because I will not have to worry about opening any gifts from Santa. Later in the day, I will join my friends at the nearest Chinese food restaurant. After having Mongolian beef or cashew chicken, we will all head to the movies and watch *Harry Potter*. Chinese food and the movies are a time-honored tradition among American Jews, and who am I to question tradition?

James Longhofer is a sophomore political science, economics, and public policy major.

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Be Heard: Got an opinion? *Hilltopics* is always looking for good submissions and interesting feedback. Email your thoughts to hilltopics@hotmail.com.

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It's time to start getting angry about AIDS

by Amanda Wall

I am so angry.

And I'm not just a little angry; I am *so pissed off* and for a very good cause: AIDS. Why get angry about AIDS? There are lots of reasons.

One reason to be angry is that AIDS sucks to live with, it sucks to die from, and there is no cure. People with AIDS can suffer from fatigue, massive weight loss, frequent infections, long-lasting bouts of diarrhea, prolonged periods of coughing, unexplained bleeding, severe numbness or paralysis, an altered state of consciousness, mental deterioration, stunted development, and increased vulnerability to cancers. Though there are powerful drugs available that can greatly increase both lifetime and quality of life, these drugs often have serious side effects and are too expensive for most infected people. Currently, no drug can cure either AIDS or HIV.

But reason that I personally am angry is that nobody taught me about AIDS. I went through twelve years of public school, and there might have been a passing reference to AIDS in health class, but I only came away with the sense that if you weren't a gay male and didn't sleep around a whole lot, it couldn't touch you. AIDS was other people's disease, other people who weren't as moral, as virtuous, or as careful as we were. It was these insinuations and assumptions—these patent lies—that kept many students from learning about AIDS in school and that continue to play a big role in the way our society approaches AIDS. These are also the kinds of lies that retarded our country's response to AIDS in the 1980s. By the time the Reagan administration had seen fit to comment on AIDS, there were some 50,000 cases of AIDS in the U.S. alone. Millions were infected with HIV. Tens of thousands had died. It took us years to get over our irrational fears of the "gay disease" and of simple social contact. Workers were fired; children were kicked out of schools. And when Princess Diana shook hands with an AIDS infected person without gloves on, it was featured in newspapers the world over. We spent that entire decade being terrified into ignorance by this disease, and it is still affecting the way educators approach it in classrooms across the country. *That is why I'm angry. That is why you should be angry.*

Wanting to help humanity or to do something good for the kids are worthy feelings. That kind of motivation wins many volunteers for organizations like Mustang Marathon. But I think anger is the best motivation there is. For angry people, the fight is personal. Their motivation is the sickened turn of their stomachs, the sure and private knowledge that AIDS is *not* other people's disease.

Mustang Marathon is the largest student-run philanthropy on campus, and it is dedicated to raising funds and awareness of pediatric AIDS. Every spring, they hold a 24-hour dance marathon to benefit the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation and Bryan's House. Last year, they raised \$118,000 through corporate donations and student fundraising. Anyone can get involved as a Dancer, a Moraler, or simply as a volunteer. This week is Mustang Marathon Week, so be on the lookout for signs around campus that will give you more information. Spending a weekend dancing for pediatric AIDS won't cure it—won't even make a dent—but it helps. It is what you *can* do. So get angry. Get involved.

Amanda Wall is a sophomore English, Spanish and women's studies major.

Reader feedback: The other side of Prop. 2

by Dawn Jenkins

Although Mr. Stokes' caricature does indeed (unfortunately) describe a number of people in our state, his generalization unfairly links the name of Jesus to a particular policy stance. Is it possible to be a Christian and still support legislation that violates Biblical principles? What responsibility does the religious community have to ensure that its values are held sacred by the government?

To those who supported Proposition 2, I say get your priorities straight. And to those now disenchanted constituents who voted against it, I say get your story straight – not all conservatives are Christians, and not all Christians are bigots, even though it may be convenient for some on the left to label every political loss as a right-wing conspiracy by fundamentalists who have "hijacked" our government. And to everyone I say, exercise your right not to be straight in this great country if you so choose.

As a libertarian who also happens to be a Christian – or a Christian who happens to be a libertarian – I am not an advocate of theocracy. (Crash course in libertarianism: Government should establish private property, a military, and keep out of everything else. Extensive personal freedoms are a must). As such, I have no problem with a same-sex couple holding a marriage license; in fact, I would even encourage it. Campaigning against gay marriage is a disgraceful waste of time and effort, and it does nothing but foster bad blood and animosity between Christians and those that they are called to love and to serve, both straight and gay. The government should not have the right to dictate socially-sanctioned definitions of legal sexual unions, and neither should I. Promoting such lifestyle choices may be the responsibility of the church, but not the state.

There is something to be said in favor of the will of the people to make their own laws, but the United States was not established as a pure democratic rule of the majority, and I desperately hope that the voice of the minority is not drowned out in this trend towards legislation by referendum. I can only imagine what would happen if the tables were turned, and it were my beliefs which were prohibited under law. For example, I am personally against abortion, but what horrifies me more than the idea that a woman can legally terminate her pregnancy is a decree like China's "one-child" policy, which would force me to abort my baby by law.

During Jesus' ministry, many of his followers expected that he would lead a rebellion to overthrow what they felt was a corrupt, morally bankrupt, and overbearing Roman rule of their "holy land." But Jesus defied these expectations, commanding his followers to pay their taxes (even though they were over-inflated and unjust), to obey their government, and to set their sights on a different sort of kingdom (see Matthew 22:15–22, Romans 13:1–7).

The real mission of the Christian community is not to crusade for the overhaul of the government into a theocracy, but to coexist alongside a government and a society which may not always represent its own values, but which hopefully will not outlaw its right to hold them. It is only in this context that Christianity can set itself apart in terms of lifestyle and escape the legalism and corruption of political power.

Dawn Jenkins is a senior international studies and French major.

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HILLTOPICS**Proposition 503: A call for Holiday Reformation***by Eric Johnson*

Problem: Thanksgiving is overshadowed by Christmas, Christmas usually isn't snowy, and the rest of winter is really kind of dull after New Years, Fact.

Opportunity: January and February are basically a holiday wasteland compared to October, November, and December AND they are colder, Fact.

Solution: Imagine, instead of the flash in a pan Christmas Season that steals the limelight from Thanksgiving and even Halloween, a slow and gradual 63 day long glow of Yule-tide mirth and good-will toward men beginning in early December and climaxing in the wintry weeks of late January (when it might actually snow). Ladies and Gentlemen, this is "Proposition 503: New Christmas."

November 30th - as Thanksgiving meals gradually fade from memory we begin the Christmas season with a peaceful and solemn night. Luxes - (pronounced Lucia : Loo-che : Luch : Loozes etc.) The Holiday of Lights. The Christians will use it as a night to gather in darkened sanctuaries to sing Stille Nacht with mini-hand-candles, reminiscing on the star of Bethlehem and the "Light of the World" born the next morning. Meanwhile, the Jewish will likely appreciate seeing the first day of Hanukkah mixed with the rest of the Holiday season in a quasi-logical manner. Upscale sophisticates will place candles in each of their windows while the rest of us will use this as the official date to plug in our outdoor light extravaganzas and drive the streets in pleasant awe. But wait, there's more.

After the quiet and formal Luxes, the flair and charisma would begin with stores opening their holiday marketing. From there on everything could continue pretty normally until late December. Here, as a concession to moving Christmas Day to February 1st. we could attempt to hold a special day on December 25th. Kindermas - The Feast of Children. Epitomizing juvenile holiday energy, Kindermas could be a memorable annual explosion of youthful glee and maybe some toy sales. Imagine mass migrations to the malls by parents and children to take part in the parading of favorite holiday characters and other festive events. After this chaotic day of toy shopping, Families could recline in the evening for excessively frosted gingerbread men and stories by the elderly of how much better the original Christmas had been.

The grand finale of the Christmas season is truly the gem of this proposal. Misselstoff, a family focused end of winter celebration loosely inspired by the Greek Orthodox recognition for the visitation of the three wise-men and their promise that Jesus was to the greatest gift of all. This holiday would celebrate their arrival mirrored through the benevolent three wise men-elfs. Unlike the historically ethnocentric white Santa Clause, this triumvirate of global fraternity would reflect each one of the three races as descending from the sons of Noah (the Semites, the Hamites, and Japhethites) and match each's separate travel route to include their traditional regions of the planet. It really makes a lot more sense than one guy on a sleigh - when you think about it.

Now, the biggest deterrent to extended families reuniting together on Christmas is the fact that "Well, we just saw them on Thanksgiving." Misselstoff, being more than 2 months from the prior holiday, is potentially a reasonable justification for hosting family again. While thus boosting the markets for transportation, this tradition could also mean opening presents in the accompaniment of those that originally sent them. Which seems like a pretty nice thing, I guess.

Now lets contemplate some other logical perks of this move: New Year's is bumped forward to mid-February which means it would be approximate to that whole rejuvenating Spring-coming. This festive January & February would also overshadow any Valentines Day bitterness. The new layout of winter also encourages an alternative to the long Christmas break we usually get between semesters. What seems to fit better is a shorter trimester system, with a fall, winter, and spring session. Thus we could split Christmas break in half and bump 40% of it to the summer, and boom, about 2 more weeks of sun and fun, just like that.

With any luck this new calendar will be approved by the World Court in the upcoming months and we will begin to finally share in the great Pax Hiberna, the Winter Peace.

Eric Johnson is a senior marketing major.



The fight to end facebook photos

A guide to keeping your job, your girlfriend, and your dignity
by Douglas Hill

Everyone has moments of weakness. One such moment occurred for me this summer. I was at a party, and had just finished participating in (and winning) an amateur boxing match. Needless to say, I had had a few cocktails. Celebrating my victory, I had a few more and kind of lost control. At some point during the celebration, I was sitting on a couch in my friend's living room. Dizzy from the room spinning around me, I fell off of the couch. My shirt was still off from the boxing match, and I landed on my hands and knees. Right in front of a five-foot blow-up doll of George W. Bush. A picture was snapped at just the wrong moment and from just the wrong angle, and now there is an image of me floating around the internet that looks conspicuously like I'm being sodomized by our 43rd President.

Whatever. Only a few people had the url, and they were close enough friends that I knew they wouldn't spread it around too much. Enter Facebook photos.

Now it seems like I spend time at least once a week de-tagging the infamous GWB photo from various friends' Facebook photo albums. As soon as one person put it in their album, all of our mutual friends had access and all hell broke loose. Sure, it's my fault for letting the picture be taken, but do I deserve this kind of repeated punishment?

My problem is nothing compared to that of some other students I know. What about the underage R.A. who has to de-tag every photo from every party before a representative from RLSH can see it? Or the guy whose out-of-state girlfriend gets far too suspicious when she sees a picture of her man with someone who is honestly just a friend? Or—worst of all—the normal, average-looking person whose friends think it's funny to tag with his or her name every picture of a hideous-looking, overweight social reject they can lay their mouse on? My GWB experience has cost me some of my dignity, but at least it hasn't cost me my job, my girlfriend, or any chance of ever scoring a date.

Facebook photo albums have got to go. I know how important it is to see those extra pictures of that cute guy from psychology or to double check and make sure that girl you met last night looks okay before the three drinks you had at your pre-party, but it's just not worth the trouble.

If I choose to damage my own reputation (as I do from time to time), that's my problem, and if I choose to make my Facebook profile something embarrassing, that's my right. But nobody else should have control over the content of my profile. I'm an American, dammit, and I'm pretty sure that's somewhere in the Constitution.

Douglas Hill is a junior international studies major. And no, he won't show you the GWB picture.

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Refuse to pay *Rent*: Musical remake a flop.

by Courtney Hebb

Yes, I am a fan of *Rent*. Not necessarily the kind that I have to pay so that I'm not evicted from my apartment, but the musical. I have the soundtrack completely memorized and have seen the staged version three times and counting. So when the previews announced that it was being made into a feature film, I was psyched. Now I wouldn't have to have *Rent* in small installments: once it came to video, I could own! Rock on, rewind, and on, rewind, and on!

Now for those who are new to *Rent*, let me attempt to explain why it's special. It is not your traditional musical, and it's certainly no trite little song and dance number. It is sex, drugs, and rock & roll bursting onto the stage, so powerful that it surges through the audience. It is laughter, tears, and a rainbow of emotions that surfs through the adrenaline of the story. Adapted from Puccini's *La Boheme*, it is about New Yorkers fighting to live, to love, and to pay their rent.

The main problem with the movie is that it wasn't able to transfer the kinetic energy from the stage to film, resulting in a diluted version. Although it maintains all pretences of *Rent*—the story, the songs—there is something missing: the heart...the pulse...the beat. Distracted by the cinematic freedom of shooting on location, it lost its focus. Too much time was wasted on meaningless transitions and panorama shots of the city. Too much of the humor was forgotten in the melodrama. Too much of the music seemed out of place and awkward in the new context. It was stale, long, and boring. There were no seasonings of love for it lacked all flavor, style, zest, and entertainment value.

Now to its credit, what it did not lack was talent. Tony winner Idina Menzel was, should we say, "wicked" in her portrayal of Maureen (after all, she was the original on Broadway). In fact most of the cast originated their respective characters in 1996 and were either nominated or winners of various awards for their work. The problem was in the direction, the lack of vision, the tempo, and the wasted moments.

True fans will feel an obligation to support this screen version, to hear their beloved songs, to slightly sing along, but they will leave feeling empty. For everyone else who decides to see this movie, please realize that this imposter is not the true *Rent*. Go to the actual theater to see, hear, and feel the difference. This version may be the "movie," but the real *Rent* will move you.

Courtney Hebb is a senior marketing and political science major.

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