

BEACH BUZZ

Spring – Summer 2003

Volume 3, Number 5

a publication of B.E.A.C.H.E.S. Foundation and its Chapters
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“Keeping Our Beaches Bare”

Naturists: Torchbearers of Liberty

Nudity, individual rights, and religious freedom

Many readers of the Beach Buzz enjoy nudity solely as a harmless recreational pleasure. Yet, for others, nudity may also carry deeper social or religious implications. It may be emblematic of one's perceived unity with nature or with God. It may be an attempt to strip away the status and the pretensions that come with clothing – from the tailored suit of the corporate executive, to the designer jacket of the inner city youth - to relate to one another more openly and honestly. Or it may be an expression of freedom, liberty, and individual rights.

Nudity has frequently been used in social protest. Some may ask what it adds to the message. Is it merely an attempt to shock and gain attention? No doubt, this element is present. Is it a defiance of the social order? Yes, but the defiance of the nudity taboo is in this case linked with protest against some perceived injustice in society. Nudity in protest also has great symbolic value. The very vulnerability implied by nudity in American society says of nude protesters, particularly if they are not naturists, that they are so concerned over their issue, that they are willing to bare themselves, body and soul,

to the scrutiny and the possible ridicule of the public. The courts have consistently upheld the right of citizens to include nudity in the exercise of their First Amendment rights of speech and petition. How could they do this if they judged that nudity was an evil in itself, in all circumstances, and harmful to society? Certainly, one could never imagine the courts would condone physical harm to persons or to others' property as an acceptable element of the exercise of Constitutional rights.

What about the freedom of religion? If Naturism is a part of one's religious belief system, is nudity in that case also a protected right? Speaking of religious freedom, Thomas Jefferson said: "...our civil rights have no dependence on our religious convictions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry.... to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous fallacy...it is time enough for the rightful purposes of civil government for its officers to interfere when principles break out into overt acts against peace and good order." And just what is a religion, in the

view of the courts? Bill Martin's article in this issue presents an insightful introduction to this subject.

The opponents of Naturism often accuse us of asking for "special rights". Rather, we are asking for the "right to be left alone" - an important principle inherent in the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and the political thought of many of the Founding Fathers. If the practice of Naturism cannot be shown to pose a real, demonstrable, imminent, and automatic threat to the general public, we feel this is clearly within our rights as citizens of the Land of the Free.

This issue of the *Beach Buzz* also marks the 4th year since the incorporation of B.E.A.C.H.E.S. Foundation. Our 4th annual Board of Governors meeting, held April 25-27 at the Radisson Deauville Resort and at Haulover Beach, was expanded into a Naturist Leadership Conference. Joining our board members were representatives of The Naturist Society, The International Naturists Association, Naturist Christians, and a number of Free Beach Groups. The main topic, as always, was How to Keep Our Beaches Bare. ☆