

Cambridge City Council
795 Mass Avenue
Cambridge MA 02139

April 28, 1999

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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Mr. Mayor, Madam Clerk, Members of the City Council. I write about D-E-N-I-A-L by public officials in Cambridge. On the bottom of the front page of the Hearing Schedule for the City of Cambridge each week it is printed, "City of Cambridge does not discriminate on the basis of disability." There is a sign in the main branch of the Cambridge Public Library that says the same thing.

But saying that there is no discrimination does not mean that there is none. In her column on April 27, 1999, Arianna Huffington described the analogy between the film *Pleasantville* and Littleton, Co. Indeed it was Gary Ross, the Columbine HS student who said, "The people of Pleasantville don't listen [to] or see one another. And when communities are in that much denial, there is a greater chance that terrible things will happen."

At Littleton, the principal said of the neo-Nazi involvement of the students, "We did not see it at Columbine HS."

A probation officer did not see what did not fit his vision of the two students who conducted the military assault.

A Jewish student complained about being harassed because of his religion. The school ignored him until he threatened a lawsuit.

When a black woman was called a "nigger" and her brother threatened, a school administrator told her "racism does not exist at Columbine."

A spokesman for the school district said, "Harassment is not allowed."

"In *Pleasantville* the movie, the powers-that-be forbid the use of umbrellas because they deny the existence of rain. And in Littleton there was no racial harassment."

For more than a year I have made written complaints to the Cambridge police and to Cambridge city agencies about racial harassment and discrimination due to disabilities. I complained about treatment by psychologists at Harvard University without consent and experimentation without consent.

I filed complaints with the Cambridge Human Rights Commission. I spoke with Michael Muehe at the Commission on Disabilities. In the *Cambridge TAB* April 27, 1999 a front page story was about discrimination against persons with physical disabilities. There was no mention, not one word about non physical disabilities. Not a whisper in the entire article.

I spoke with Mr. Muehe earlier this year. He did not return my calls as promised. Five years ago I spoke with someone at the Cambridge Commission on Disabilities on several occasions. I was told that the commission only helps people with physical disabilities.

Mr. Muehe mentioned a man who did speak about such discrimination. I never met him. Nor have I received a letter or a phone call from him. I hope that Cambridge is not like *Pleasantville*. I pray it is not like Littleton, CO.

Letter to Cambridge City Council from R Bercaw April 28, 1999

On Tuesday, April 27, 1999 I went to the Cambridge police station to file a complaint about a violation of the Massachusetts Civil Rights statute. I wrote a bill, H2334 "Protection of Human Subjects in Experimentation Act," filed with the Health Care Committee of the Massachusetts House of Representatives. I lobby for its passage into law.

I am harassed daily by Harvard psychology students who conduct the activity I address with my bill. They interfere with my rights to petition the state legislature. At the police station Officer Regan asked me what I was there for. I explained, "to file a complaint." Another officer who gave his name as Leary spoke with me and read my written complaint. He suggested I go to the Cambridge City Hospital. He said to me, "They have a lot of that there." He asked me, "You don't trust Harvard?" I said I did not.

He was reluctant to take my complaint and did not fill out an official report form. Nor did he give me a file number as previously done when I filed complaints.

I said to Officer Leary, "You may think I am crazy, but you are obligated to take my complaint." When I mentioned that I have four complaints with the MCAD pending against the Cambridge police for discrimination he said to me, "We have to answer to them also." He took the written complaint and rolled it up. I left the station.

Last week I spoke with the Office of the Inspector General of the US Department of Health and Human Services in Washington DC. The woman there told me, "It is a police matter." I told her that the police refuse to stop this project at Harvard. She said she could not help me.

On Tuesday, April 27, 1999 a lawyer for the Massachusetts Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee told me that what I complained of were indeed crimes as I said. He also said he could not help me.

I present my request again to the City Council to end this criminal activity by Harvard students. The police refuse to act because they believe I am mentally ill. The Cambridge Human Rights Commission and the Cambridge Commission on Disabilities refuse to act for the same reason. Yet the City advertises that they do not discriminate. Are city officials facing reality?



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NEW YORK POST

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P. 29

The Serpent in Pleasantville

I THOUGHT we lived in Pleasantville," said Josiah Pina, a senior at Columbine High School. "I could see it happening in other places, but not here. Nothing ever happened here."

But beneath this facade of normalcy and order lay a different reality, one that echoed the denial and disengagement that Gary Ross captured in "Pleasantville," the movie. There was a lifelessness in the idyllic black-and-white family of the movie. And only a profound deadness can explain how the stable, comfortable, two-parent families in which the killers were raised so completely missed the chaos around them.

There were gun parts and pipe bombs in one bedroom, shrapnel being made in the garage, a diary documenting the year-long preparations for the massacre. And every day injects another dose of reality that had been ignored because it did not fit into the pristine pictures of the Littleton community.

"The people of Pleasantville," Ross told me, "don't really listen [to] or see one another. And when communities are in that much denial, there is a greater chance that terrible things will happen." In "Pleasantville," when something brings the characters to life, they burst into full color. In our real-life, tragic Pleasantville, we watch a community deal with its grief, but we still hear a great deal of denial from people trapped in their monochromatic

world. The school principal is one of them.

"As far as their involvement with the neo-Nazi Party — we did not see it at Columbine High School," said Frank DeAngelis, who also said he never even saw a black trench coat. To him the "trench coats" were "just a group that had common interests" and that "loved technology."

Teachers, students and counselors — even a probation officer who gave Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris glowing recommendations after their arrest for stealing from a van — refused to see whatever did not fit their assumptions about their Pleasantville.

When Stephen Greene's son was taunted by jocks for being Jewish, he complained to the school but was ignored until he threatened a lawsuit.

When Michelle Shoels was called a "nigger" by the trench coats, and her older brother Isaiah was threatened by them, their parents wrote a letter complaining to school officials. But the administrator told Michelle that "racism didn't exist at Columbine."

This complacent — and complicit — denial was echoed by the spokeswoman for the school district: "Harassment is not allowed." In "Pleasantville" the movie, the powers-that-be forbid the use of umbrellas because they deny the existence of rain. And, in Littleton, there was no racial harassment.

There was a serpent even in paradise. Simply pretending there isn't one in Pleasantville only allows it to gather strength and wreak havoc.



ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

Consent Communication #8 3325

A communication was received from Roy Bercaw, transmitting concerns regarding racial harassment and discrimination due to disabilities in Cambridge.

In City Council May 3, 1999

PLACED ON FILE