

Belinda Joy Lathan

May 21, 2010

Common Council - City Clerk's Office
West Allis City Hall
7525 West Greenfield Avenue
West Allis, WI 53214

RECEIVED

MAY 24 2010

CITY OF WEST ALLIS
CLERK/TREASURER

To All members of the Common Council:

Undoubtedly you have each heard in the news about the incident that took place at the Yester Years Pub & Grill in which a bartender of this establishment burnt in effigy the likeness of our president, Barack Obama. It is also reported that there appeared to be a noose around his neck made of duck tape. For any council person's not familiar with this case, I am enclosing a CD with the video of the incident and the written transcript of the report.

I was born and raised in Wisconsin, lived my entire life in Milwaukee. Wisconsin has a reputation which sadly is well deserved, of racial divisiveness and discrimination. We have over the years made great strides toward mending the racial divides of our communities; however we still have a ways to go.

Much of the racial prejudice comes from a lack of empathy and understanding of others. Not just from the standpoint of Whites vs. Blacks, but also Blacks vs. Whites. The blame and responsibility to make the mind shifts that lend themselves toward understanding those who aren't like us, is not just on one side. This incident that occurred at Yester Years Pub not only speaks poorly of the bar, bartender and patrons West Allis and Wisconsin as a whole.

This incident for obvious reasons made national news. Yet again, Wisconsin is receiving national negative press and yet again it is race related. I genuinely believe everyone has a right to their own political beliefs. Can you imagine what this country would be like if we all agreed? So it is understandable (and in my opinion) healthy for social debate and discussion in the area of politics. It is the foundation of "checks and balance"

It would be wonderful if we could as a nation say that the race of our president doesn't matter. That even though he is a man of color he represents the physical representation of how far we've come in overcoming racial prejudice as a country. But as we all know this isn't true. President Obama has been in office for less than a year and a half and has received over 1500 death threats. More than any president in our nation's history.

And it is because of this that the secret service takes any threats against him seriously. They have had to hire additional agents just to stay ahead and on top of all those who want to do him harm. Partly because of their disagreement with how he governs and partly, and sadly because of his race.

The FBI and secret service are now investigating this incident at Yester Years Pub and the actions of this bartender. But again I remind you, the council members of West Allis, as you will see from the video, this bartender did this horrific act because of a belief he could. He was emboldened in doing so by the climate in which he works. The customers that he serves. That is not to be ignored.

Do you think a bartender at John Hawk's Pub in downtown Milwaukee would feel comfortable and at ease in pulling out a bust of President Obama, tying a noose made of duck tape around his neck and then setting it ablaze on top of the bar? During service hours, customers present, music playing in the background? The answer is a resounding no.

And it would be no, not just because the bartenders may or may not agree with the politics of President Obama. Not just because they may or may not be racist against people of color. But they would not do so because they would 1. Know that the management of their pub would not tolerate such behavior and 2. The clientele of their establishment would not condone such behavior.

Karen Schoenfeld's website for her pub (see attached screenshot) features a not so subtle glimpse into her mindset as it relates to race. You will see several White women and a prominent (supposed) Black male sporting an oversized afro and broad nose. What message was she trying to send to those that view her site? What comes to your minds when you view the homepage of her website? This is not an instance of "you see what you are looking to see" this is an instance of a woman attempting to convey a bias and seeking those of like mind to join her in getting back to the "yester Years" of the way things use to be.

Should she lose her liquor license because of this incident? Yes. No ambiguity on my part about stating my opinion on the matter. When you take into consideration the severity of the incident, the national negative attention it drew on West Allis and our state which impacts on how we are perceived, which affects our possibility for new businesses in our area, etc. etc. this was not an innocent incident. This was not a political stand as many are trying to paint it. You tell me, what does a noose (clearly visible on the video) have to do with a political objection?

And again council members, ask yourself why Ms. Shoenfeld's employee AND patrons felt at ease in engaging in such an act? Are downtown Milwaukeeans more politically open minded and racially tolerant than West Allis residents, more than each of you that sit on the Common Council of West Allis? Are you each backward, narrow minded ya-hoos speaking for the best interest of other backward, narrow minded ya-hoos? Or could it be you have now been apprised of a bad apple in the bunch.

One person who owns an establishment in your community that is drawing negative attention on the good people of West Allis who don't want to be defined by the actions of Ms. Shoenfeld, her bartender and the patrons of her pub.

I encourage each of you to vote no on renewing her liquor license. Send a message to her that this type of behavior steps outside the boundaries of exercising one's free speech as it relates to political freedom. This was an act of hate speech. It was an act of implied violence against our president. And it was something that as those put in place to oversee West Allis's community standards, will not be tolerated.

She may indeed be punished legally for this incident, we'll see. However I say you should punish her where it will hurt the most, in her wallet. When she can no longer serve alcohol to these patrons who behaved as less than patriotic in my opinion, let's see if she will then take her role as a business owner more seriously.

What is done in the dark will always be brought to the light. We as Americans must do our part to protect our president against real or implied harm, whether we agree with his politics or not. It is what being a true American means. By remaining silent on incidents like this and biding our time, hoping the furor will die down, we fuel more and more of this type of behavior. But by speaking up and taking a stand against it when we are confronted by it, we send a resounding message it will not be tolerated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Belinda Joy Lathan". The signature is written in dark ink and has a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Belinda Joy Lathan

Enclosures: Screen Shot of Yester Years Website
Video of incident
Copy of report on incident

NEWSRADIO

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TODAY'S TMJ4 Exclusive: President Obama Burned in Effigy at Bar in West Allis

By Mick Trevey
Story Created: May 19, 2010
(Story Updated: May 20, 2010)

WEST ALLIS - A bar owner could be in serious trouble with the federal government. A bartender was videotaped burning a statue of President Obama.

And the whole thing was video taped. **Click Here** to watch raw video of the incident.

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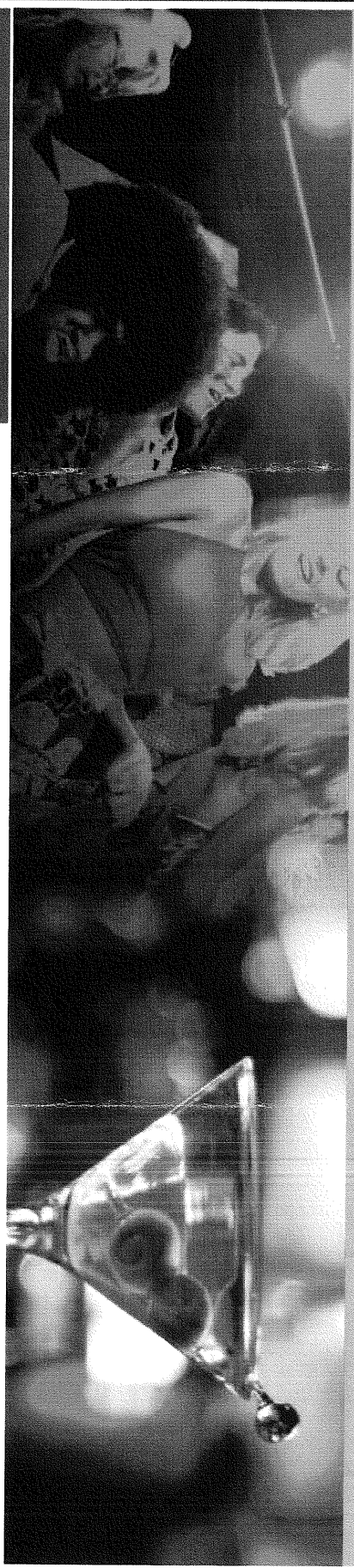
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Yester Years Pub and Grill Inc. 9427 W. Greenfield Ave., West Allis, WI, 414-476-9055



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Milwaukee's Gathering Place

Yester Years Pub and Grill is Milwaukee's favorite place for your party needs, great food, drinks, music, sports, and atmosphere. We feature several plasma T.V.'s, banquet hall, dance floor with light system. We feature live music and DJs every weekend. Our size allows us to cater to your every need, holidays, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, and last minute gatherings. Milwaukeean's have been coming to Yester Years Pub for 30 years, for our great food or to play a game of darts, shoot a game of pool, or dance



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Obama Effigy Burned In Wis. Bar

Owner Says Incident Not Racially Motivated

POSTED: 3:23 am HST May 21, 2010

UPDATED: 4:12 am HST May 21, 2010

WEST ALLIS, Wis. -- The owner of a West Allis bar said she's getting death threats after customers recently burned an effigy of President Barack Obama.

Karen Schoenfeld told Milwaukee TV station WISN the incident at Yester Years Pub & Grill has been "blown out of proportion" and was a case of "Cuervo gone wild."

She said some customers set fire to a small plastic statue of Obama while they sat at the bar early Saturday morning. Another customer took video.

Since the video was released, Schoenfeld said several people have threatened to burn down the bar and her home.

"I have to take full responsibility because it did happen at my bar," she said. "But it was not racially motivated."

The Secret Service was looking into the incident as a possible veiled threat against the president, but that investigation has since been dropped.

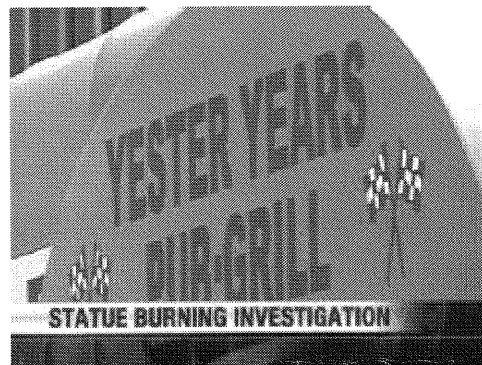
West Allis police were trying to determine if any municipal ordinances were violated.

Mayor Dan Devine said the city has never had any problems with the bar, but added effigy burning doesn't belong anywhere.

"It's never good to have any reaction to a president that way, whether it's George Bush or Hillary Clinton," he said. "It's been done before and it's, I don't think, the most effective way to channel your political discontent. That's why we have elections every four years, and if you don't like who's in there you work against them when they're up for re-election."

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Video: Obama Effigy Burned In Wis. Bar