

Pot calling kettle black

A few weeks ago Atlanta City Councilman Dozier Smith startled his fellow Council members by announcing he had devised a method to curb crime in Atlanta, "improve the morals in the city a little bit, and upgrade womanhood."

Jim
Harris



His plan?

Require Atlanta's nude nightclub dancers to wear pasties and G-strings.

Great idea, right? Economical, too. Just plaster a few teensy bits of fabric on the city's go-go dancers, and Atlanta will undergo a wondrous moral transformation.

If that idea strikes you as less than brilliant—not to mention meddlesome—you're not alone.

In fact, Smith's brainchild was not at all well received by the public and the media. In a word, Smith was roasted.

The Atlanta newspapers jeered and mocked him. Letters to the

editor denounced him as a dunce and a busybody. Even some of Smith's fellow politicians snickered at him.

Myself, I enjoyed Smith's flaying immensely, having long been a foe of government vice crusaders. When it comes to government versus sin, I am four-square on the side of sin.

Indeed, I believe that much of the progress of the human race is due to our becoming, over the ages, more tolerant of sin. The freer people have been to conduct their lives in whatever peaceful manner they choose, the better off the world has been.

When governments—in direct violation of the word of God (**Exodus 22**, verse 18)—became less inclined to shishkebob old women for being witches, the world became a much more pleasant place. When our society began to tolerate heretics and unbelievers, instead of breaking them on the rack to save their souls, then mankind in my view took a quantum leap forward.

When it became legal in the United States to read the works of D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce, when it was no longer a crime to take a drink or to disseminate birth control information—when these and a hundred other once-forbidden sins became legal, our standard of living rose and life became

more pleasant for all but a minority of shrill and unpleasant fanatics.

I am pleased and encouraged, then, at the lambasting Smith has received. It is a small but significant sign of human progress. I hope the public continues to make him sweat.

However, I can't help but think that some of Smith's critics appear equally absurd, if not downright hypocritical.

Take Councilman Archie Byron. Byron denounced Smith's scheme as an attempt to "legislate morality" in Atlanta—as if that were some shocking, unthinkable concept for the City Council to endorse.

Yet the Atlanta government, like local governments all across Georgia, spends much of its time and resources doing exactly that—and no doubt with Councilman Byron's hearty approval.

In fact, the American Bar Association estimated a few years ago that the average cop on the beat spends fully 50% of his time enforcing victimless crime laws—laws that prohibit gambling, prostitution, pornography, the use and sale of drugs, and other non-violent activities. In other words, laws that legislate personal morality.

In this respect, then, most of Smith's critics inside and outside

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government aren't actually much different from Smith himself. On the one hand, they self-righteously condemn Smith for trying to "legislate morality." On the other, they themselves firmly support numerous laws whose sole purpose is to force their personal mores, prejudices and moral beliefs upon everyone else.

Considering this, it's hard to say who is the most ridiculous: Smith—who is at least willing to stand up in public and declare himself a moral authoritarian—or his critics, many of whom, while laughing at him, all the while embrace laws far more restrictive and intrusive than Smith's inane proposal.