



The State of Things

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In recent news we have seen the murders of two different members of the LGBT community. For those of you unfamiliar with the acronym, LGBT stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. It is heart rending to read about these slain youths; people should not have to face violence and hatred for simple expression of their gender and sexuality. People have become complacent about gay rights and have pushed harder to dehumanize us as of late.

Lawrence King was a 15-year-old student in Oxnard, California. On February 12th, another student shot him while he was at school. King was declared brain dead on February 13th; his family opted to donate his organs saying that he would have wanted it that way. By his family's account he was a caring young man with an affinity for animals. He was also a gifted singer whom a friend of the family thought should try out for American Idol. However, his life was ended. I'm forced to wonder whether the student who shot him knew all of this about him. Or was his focus only King being gay?

According the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, King was harassed on a daily basis for his gender and sexuality expressions. The Task Force also noted that the adults at his school "did not stop it." Now one of my brothers is dead.

Simmie Williams was a 17-year-old cross dresser in Florida. On February 22nd he was seen arguing with three men on a street corner in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Shots were fired and the men took off running. Williams was transported to Broward General Medical Center where he later died. There has not been a great deal of news coverage on his murder. I for one mourn his loss; I hurt every time a member of my family is taken.

When this type of hatred happens I am forced to look for a cause. Hatred is not innate, it is learned. But who is teaching it? There are obvious answers. Even though it may not seem like it is time for finger pointing, there are sources that need naming.

The Task Force released a report on Hell Houses run in America. According to the Task Force these houses originated at Jerry Fallwell's Liberty University in the 1970s. Later, these houses were, essentially, packaged and sold to religious groups around the country; to date 800 have been sold. One of these houses exists in Cedar Hill, Texas. "Operated primarily by evangelical Christian church youth groups, Hell House tour guides dress like demons and bring participants to rooms where youth depict scripted scenes of damnation for a variety of 'sins,' including homosexuality." These houses often depict gay couples getting married while a demon presides over the ceremony. A later scene will involve one of the men dying of AIDS in a hospital room followed by another scene towards the end showing him burning in hell with other sinners. These houses also depict a woman dying after having an abortion. The Task Force found that this type of attraction "literally demonizes LGBT youth, fueling the harassment and violence many experience on a daily basis."

LGBT youth also have very high suicide rates. In addition to the harassment that they face by their peers and ignorance by administrators, they have to deal with their religious officials and their families. The Task Force reported: Anti-LGBT rhetoric from the religious right can also have a powerful effect on young people's emotional well-being. When he was 16 years old, gay high school student Bobby Griffith wrote in his journal: I can't let anyone find out that I'm not straight ... And my family? They've said they hate gays, and even God hates gays, too ... Am I going to

hell? ... Please don't send me to hell. I'm really not that bad, am I?" Four years later, Griffith committed suicide by jumping off a bridge. His mother later realized that her efforts to save her gay son from "hell" were a factor in his suicide.

The groups that put on Hell Houses hope to dispel the "myth" that people are born gay. However, they are causing severe harm to gay youth because they convince their congregation that being gay is a choice. Therefore, in the mind of their congregants, gay people choose to live a "life of sin." This can have terrifying consequences. "For example, a 2001 study published in the Journal of Psychology found that "the belief in an active Satan [is] directly related to intolerance toward gay men and lesbians."

This article is not meant to be a diatribe against religion or people who do not like LGBT individuals. Rather, it was written in the hope that people would stop and ask themselves, "What is the true motivation of my prejudice?" Before judging someone try and find out who they really are.

It is easier to pass judgment and feel hatred than to try to understand, and compassion goes a long way toward healing. Right now the LGBT community is hurting. Our family has lost protections and rights at an alarming rate. The Federal Hate Crime legislation that was passed recently did not protect members of the LGBT community. In my mind, this is a complicit approval of hatred toward my brothers and sisters.

The time has come for a new civil rights movement and I daresay it is long overdue. We are people just like everybody else. Even if you do not believe that we are born the way we are you cannot deny that we are human beings. If all men are created equal why are we not treated equally? I can't marry my partner; I can't inherit his worldly possessions should he pass on, and in some cases I can't even visit him if he's sick in the hospital. Why? Why am I so different simply because I'm gay? I hope my brothers and sisters who read this do not take it lightly. I hope that friends of our community continue to voice their support for our cause. I do not think people who seek to deny my family equal rights have considered

the terrifying slippery slope they are dancing on. If we are denied our equality, who is next? Recently, Oklahoma congresswoman Sally Kern was speaking to a small group of constituents and was unaware that her remarks were being taped. She said, "The homosexual agenda is destroying this nation, okay, it's just a fact ... According to God's word it is not the right kind of lifestyle ... Studies show that no society that totally embraced homosexuality has lasted more than, you know, a few decades ... I honestly think it's the biggest threat ... our nation has, even more so than terrorism." She also says that gays have shorter life spans because we tend to get diseases or kill ourselves. She goes on to claim that homosexuals are learning Early Childhood Education so that we can get to the nation's 2 year olds and indoctrinate them into believing that homosexuality is acceptable. I never knew teaching tolerance was indoctrination that sparked fear. So, because I was born with a different sexual orientation I'm a threat to this nation? And children? Just to share a little about myself, I work for Child Protective Services. I wonder what her explanation for heterosexuals who abuse children would be? It's their right as parents? She has refused to apologize for her remarks. If our legislators are using this kind of misinformation and these kinds of lies to incite their constituents into supporting them, I honestly fear for my future.