

TRANSFORMING HEARTS AND MINDS



JON W. DAVIDSON

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REMEMBER THE
SONG LYRICS
"YOU'VE GOT
TO BE TAUGHT
TO HATE." IT'S
TIME FOR A NEW
LESSON PLAN.**

I CONSIDER MYSELF AN OPTIMIST.

I usually focus on the remarkable progress LGBT people have made through the years, from decriminalizing sodomy laws to passing anti-discrimination laws to winning greater protections for those in same-sex relationships. But, there are times when the venom and violence that still gets directed at members of our community breaks through and I find myself shocked at how strongly some people still hate us and how far we have yet to go.

That happened recently while I was reading news coverage of the victory Lambda Legal and the ACLU obtained in the *Fields v. Smith* case. That suit challenged a Wisconsin law barring prison doctors from providing transgender inmates treatment the doctors believed was medically necessary. An appellate court unanimously ruled that the law violates the Constitution's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. "Refusing to provide effective treatment for a serious medical condition serves no valid penological purpose and amounts to torture," the court wrote. As a result, transgender people in custody, who have no access to care except from prison doctors, can no longer be denied hormone therapy or surgery those doctors prescribe.

When I read some of the online comments about the ruling, my stomach turned. Some referred to transgender people as "weirdos" and "freaks." One claimed that transgender people are "mentally ill" and have a sexual desire to be "mutilated." Another decried transgender people as "moral decay" that will destroy America. One flippantly wrote: "If they want gender reassignment, give 'em some lipstick."

Shortly thereafter I learned of the murder of Camila Guzman, a transgender woman who was a friend of one of our staff and who had moved

to New York from Chile 10 years ago, because of her fear of not being able to be who she was in her homeland. Her tragic death is a reminder that the kinds of vile sentiments quoted above are too often manifested through mayhem. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs documented the murders in 2010 of 12 transgender women based on their gender identity, which amounted to 44 percent of the anti-LGBT murders last year. A recent survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality further found that 61 percent of transgender people report being victims of physical violence.

Speakers at a memorial for Camila Guzman spoke about the desire of murderers to make those they kill "disappear" and how we need to fight back by keeping their memories alive. "Do not discriminate against your children," added one mourner, the mother of Camila's best friend. I could not agree more.

We can do something by telling the stories of those taken from us—of Camila Guzman, and Sakia Gunn and Ashley Santiago Ocasio and Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado and Brandon Teena. We need to share their humanity and erase the notion that any of us are some "other." And we need to start with our children. We can begin by defending laws like California's FAIR Education that will end the invisibility of LGBT people in the history students learn. Some may remember the song lyrics "You've got to be taught to hate." It's time for a new lesson plan.

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