

When the Dust has Settled

It's coming -- the writing is on the wall -- a day when all Americans will be granted equal protection, by law, of their fundamental rights. You may be inclined, at the present moment, to blind yourself to the plight certain classes of people who are at present not allowed to marry or serve in the military. You may simply refuse to believe the fact that many are unjustly imprisoned, denied medical care, or even tortured or killed because of sanctioned prejudice and hateful ranting against the value of members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered community.

Ironically, there are even members of this community -- typically those who have never personally felt the sting or persecution -- who are angered by what they perceive as an unnecessary plea for equality.

After the Second World War, everyone who was either directly or tacitly involved with the Nazi party wished to distance themselves from wartime persecution, yet we now recognize that everyone who played a part in the dialogue of hate, also played a role in the physical violence associated with it. When will we learn that it is NEVER ok to treat people as less than people? Even if the Nazis had won the war, and even if the concentration camps were still open and fully sanctioned by our government, they would still be wrong. The winners of a war may own the privilege of writing their history to suit their agenda, but they never have the privilege of truth. Truth transcends political agendas.

But the Nazis didn't win the war... anymore than the religious right will win the war against human rights and equality. The writing is on the wall, and the days the US military can legally send gays and lesbians to prison is numbered, as are the days a transgendered woman can be legally sent to a men's prison (where she is certain to be murdered), as are the days when a judge can split up a happy family simply because the child's parents are homosexual.

So the question remains... which side are you on? And when the court decisions are finally made and the dust has settled -- when all Americans are finally granted the most fundamental rights (the rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness), how will you be remembered? Will you be like Jerry Falwell, who used biblical references to justify the continuation of segregation in the 1960s, or will you be remembered as the lone voice in the wilderness who shouted from the mountaintops, "enough!"

In 1992, I was a decorated Air Force captain who had flown many dangerous missions, putting my life on the line and even getting shot at in Central America in the line of duty for my country. I thought I was lucky, when the jury in my court-martial decided that I should simply receive a dishonorable discharge, rather than the nine years in prison the prosecution was recommending. Little did I realize my conviction for being gay would be a death sentence, however, when, years later, my lack of VA medical benefits would result in my being denied the healthcare my peers were able to take for granted.

Then, in Florida last November, Superior Court Judge John Lee Parrott was originally supportive and encouraging of the adoption he was preparing to grant, until he discovered, while skimming the home evaluation report, that the parents were a lesbian

couple. Suddenly, “the judge’s mood shifted, and he began ‘acting really disgusted.’” The adoption was denied, though the couple is still appealing the case.

When the dust has settled. When all Americans are legally allowed to live and love, free of persecution and free of imprisonment – free to raise our children and free of fear of sanctioned violence, how do you want to be remembered? Will you be the prosecuting attorney in my case that asked the jury to send a homosexual to prison for nine years? Will you be the judge who splintered a loving family? Will you be the preacher who used the bible to justify segregation? Or will you even be the gay or lesbian person who’s apparently unaffected experience lead you to say nothing – or worse, to say that our fight for equality is unnecessary or embarrassing?

When the dust has settled, when all Americans are allowed to be who they are without reprisal – when hate speech has fallen out of vogue – when it is no longer accepted or popular to demonize a person because of who or how they love another... how will you be remembered? Will you be like the former Nazi Party member who grows silent and fades into the background, hoping against hope that no one will recall all the hateful things you said? Or will you continue the fight even after the war is lost – joining a supremacist group and frothing hatred at a remote private military camp?

When the dust has settled, when the courts have finally ruled, when we have finally remembered that “Christianity” is supposed to be based on the teachings of Christ – will you be proud of where you stood during the uncertain times, or will you simply crawl into a hole and hope no one remembers who you are, or what you said or who you hurt?

When the dust has settled, will you like yourself?

-- Troy Carlyle
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