

# The Public Eye

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## Leaving Some Children Out

### Behind the Right's Attack on Safe Schools

By Jyl Josephson

#### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

One purpose of public schools in the United States is to foster democratic citizenship. On this basic purpose progressives and conservatives agree, although there is great disagreement regarding what type of citizenship should be encouraged as well as what types of activities will promote or foster citizenship. It is in part this politically charged nature of public schools that makes them sites of great social and political contestation.

During the so-called “culture wars,” of the 1980s and 90s schools were certainly a site for confrontation between social conservative and Left/progressive forces. Disputes over the teaching of “values” in schools, and over, for example, the history standards in the early 1990s, are evidence of the ways in which conservatives see schools as a place for preserving their vision of U.S. political life and practice. By the same token, progressive groups have seen schools as sites for political transformation. And, although these disputes are evidence of political disagreements, they are also the result of fundamental disagreements regarding the nature of politics itself. Whereas progressives generally see schools as already political and politicized institutions, where socialization of young people into democratic life occurs, conservatives tend to see schools as neutral sites for the inculcation of basic “American” values and socialization for normalized adult social roles. Thus, conservatives see progressive arguments regarding, for example, gender equality and schools as the *introduction* of

politics into the school curriculum, whereas progressives see schools as already infused with conservative political values and practices.

Of course, schools, collectively and as individual institutions, divide students along racial, gender, and class lines and socialize them to particular social roles. To describe this function of schools, progressive curriculum theorists argue that, in addition to the official curriculum of schools, schools have a “hidden curriculum.”<sup>2</sup> This curriculum consists of the messages that are communicated to students through the school environment and policies; as Julie Webber calls it, the “hierarchically and normatively inspired values policed by the school.”<sup>3</sup>

Gender, sex, and sexuality are all sites and concepts deeply contested in contemporary U.S. political culture. Thus, efforts to change or challenge the reproduction of gender relations in schools have met with controversy and resistance.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, efforts to teach sexuality education in schools have provided a touchstone for right-wing organizing, as Janice Irvine has shown.<sup>5</sup> And, as discussed in this essay, efforts to make schools less homophobic and safer locations for GLBT identified youth have similarly met with organized right-wing resistance. Indeed, Berlet and Lyons note this very trend with respect to the culture wars, when they argue that right-wing populists “redirected the legitimate concerns of parents over the quality of education in the public schools to the scapegoats of modern curricula, sex education, materials tolerant of gays, and AIDS awareness programs.”<sup>6</sup>

Points of social conflict also provide grounds for understanding the nature of the political disputes between conservatives and progressives. This is especially the case in the United States, when conflicts have both local or grassroots elements and national salience. Thus, the programs discussed below, and the organized right-wing response to them, can be seen as illuminating the struggle not only over gender roles and sexuality that plays such a significant part in contemporary disputes between progressives and the Right, but over democracy itself.

#### The Origin of Safe Schools Projects

In response to the persistence of homophobic harassment in schools, many school districts, and some state departments of education, have responded with programs and strategies to address the problem of homophobic harassment in schools.<sup>7</sup> The state of Massachusetts is usually seen as pioneering in the area of making schools safer for GLBT students. In 1989, the Department of Health and Human Services released a report on youth

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# Guest Commentary

*"I was in the fifth grade when the name-calling started with 'cross-dresser' and 'gay.' In the 7th grade, the harassment escalated to words like 'dyke.' My books were thrown out the window, and the really 'smart' students called me 'faggot' and refused to let me enter the bathroom because they insisted it was the girls' room.*

*I came out in the 7th grade to my best friend Ellen. Then I began the process of coming out at school. I didn't want to fight off everybody anymore. This way I could say, 'Hey, you're right, I am gay.' Well that wasn't really a smart move—harassment increased and dyke was carved in my history desk. I was shoved around and beaten up and the worse part was that no teacher ever tried to intervene.*

*What made it even harder was that I was leading a double life. I was out at school and was totally my parents' straight child at home. In the middle of 8th grade I came out to them. They didn't take it very well. The hardest thing for them to deal with was that I was going to have to live my life always having to look over my shoulders at who wanted to hurt me. On my 14th birthday I attempted suicide, but didn't pull the trigger. Eighth grade ended as horribly as it had started.*

*In the 9th grade things got a little better. I was completely out at school and at home, and the harassment had declined, but the truth was I felt like I was dying inside. I hated myself and wanted to die. I abused myself very badly for eight months before my coach noticed and got me help. My entire freshman year was spent playing sports, letting my grades fall, listening to sad music and cutting up myself."*

— Lauren, an LGBTQ youth

Unfortunately, Lauren's story is not just an isolated incident, but more often the norm in our nation's junior high and high schools. In fact, incidents of gay bashing in schools often go unreported because students are afraid of retribution; being ostracized or outed; and because so often the administration refuses to intervene.

Over the past several years, we have seen students chased and attacked, beaten because "they looked like a faggot," and harassed to the point of dropping out of school. Various studies have found that up to 70% of LGBTQ students (or those perceived to be) experience verbal or physical abuse at school. The consequences of this abuse often includes truancy, poor grades, and the need for students to repeat a grade—28% of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth drop out of school rather than remain in hostile classrooms (three times the national average).

For youth who are struggling with their sexual orientation or gender identity and are already feeling alone and isolated, these kinds of slurs can have a dangerous effect on one's sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. When teachers stand-by and allow the abuse to continue and often escalate, these youth can't help but feel worthless and alone.

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suicide that raised a good deal of concern in the gay and lesbian community, since it estimated that youth who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual accounted for about 30 percent of completed suicides among teens. As a result of this report, gubernatorial candidate William Weld promised, and upon election, created, the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth.<sup>8</sup> After hearings held around the state at which many youth testified about discriminatory treatment in schools, the state created the Safe Schools Program, which provided training for teachers and other school staff, resources, and funds for such activities in schools as the formation of Gay/Straight Alliance clubs. This program is the model for other programs that have been created across the country. For instance, the state of Washington began with a statewide study of the problem of harassment in schools, and is now implementing safe schools strategies statewide.<sup>9</sup> Some states have followed Massachusetts' example and taken the step of adding sexual orientation to state education laws that prohibit discrimination against students and staff. In 1999, the California legislature adopted a law that specifically prohibits antigay harassment in schools, and has since adopted procedures to implement this provision.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, these programs have come about in part due to the advocacy work done by gay rights and other civil rights organizations. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (LLDEF), the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), and the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC), have all developed resources for use by local and state advocacy groups for implementation of safe schools programs. The purposes of these

programs are to make schools safe places for all students, to create educational environments that are open to everyone, and to reduce the drop-out rate and other risk factors for self-identified sexual minority youth.

The problem of school safety for sexual minority youth also has not gone unnoticed

campaign to discourage him from speaking at the GLSEN conference. Other national organizations, such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the American Federation of Teachers, and the American School Counselor Association have also addressed these issues in their conferences and publications.

Thus, educators and educational administrators themselves have begun to recognize the importance of addressing these issues in schools.

### Conservative Responses to Safe Schools Projects

Efforts to make schools safer for GLBT youth have met with significant resistance by social conservatives and Christian Right organizations. Certainly programs such as the one developed by Massachusetts are engaged with issues that are central to the social conservative political agenda: education, sexuality, gender roles, perceived threats to religious beliefs, and the proper instruction of children with respect to morality and values. Given that these programs are being carried out in *public* schools, the antigovernment rhetoric that is often part of social conservative concerns regarding religious beliefs also comes into play. After all, ever since the *Engel v. Vitale* school prayer decision in 1962, religious conservatives have seen a need to restore religious values (particularly school prayer) in public schools.

A number of socially conservative Christian Right organizations have developed resources to encourage and assist parents and other conservative activists to oppose the development and implementation of safe schools projects. Focus on the Family offers a set of resources for antigay activists to use to prevent the implementation of safe schools programs and of other measures to make schools safer places for GLBT students and their allies. A checklist prepared by Linda Harvey, who is active in the "Love Won Out" movement

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by national education organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA). For example, in a speech given at the annual conference of GLSEN in October of 2000, NEA president Bob Chase spoke of the necessity of protecting sexual minority students from harassment and including these issues in the curriculum.<sup>11</sup> Chase noted at the beginning of his speech that the right-wing Family Research Council (FRC) had organized an e-mail cam-

among conservative Christians (an effort to “convert” gays and lesbians to heterosexuality), lists a set of 12 activities that “protect and promote homosexuality and sexual promiscuity.” Harvey identifies practices including safe schools anti-harassment programs, the establishment of gay-straight alliances, the adoption of non-discrimination policies, and of safe sex and AIDS education programs that teach that all students (not just gay students) are at risk of contracting AIDS on her list. Also included is the placement of literature about GLBT issues in school libraries.<sup>12</sup>

This list is indicative of the responses of many conservative organizations to safe schools projects. These organizations see safe schools projects as part of the “gay agenda.” For example, the FRC’s Peter Sprigg argues:

A fifth element of the homosexual agenda is the effort to get homosexual propaganda included in the curriculum of public schools. The intent of these efforts is obvious—to ensure that the next generation will grow up with an unquestioning acceptance of all the myths that the homosexual activists want young people to believe.

The American Family Association (AFA) has a similar viewpoint. In response to the resources developed by gay-friendly organizations such as the film *It’s Elementary*, the AFA has recently produced a film entitled *It’s Not Gay*. The film is intended for use with students, and is described as containing both the testimony of “former homosexuals” as well as “medical and mental health experts” who show that “the prevalent view of homosexuality being presented to students is not the whole story.” The description goes on to indicate that the film will be useful for “anyone who wants to present a fair and balanced approach to this challenging subject.”<sup>14</sup> The AFA intends for the film to be used as a tool for those opposing safe schools projects, with the argument that only by showing this film in addition to any film produced by gay-friendly groups will educators be presenting information that is “fair and balanced.” However, the film features

the “exgay” movement as a viable “alternative” to gay, lesbian, and bisexual sexual identity. These “ministries, however, have been condemned as both inaccurate and harmful by numerous major professional health, educational, and mental health organizations.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the notion that showing this film would constitute provision of “balance” is quite distorted. Whether school personnel subjected to pressures by right-wing organizations to show the film will be able to successfully make these arguments is another question.

Concerned Women for America (CWA) has focused some of its work in the area of education on what it sees as the promotion of homosexuality in schools. In her column in the September 2001 issue of *Family Voice*, for example, CWA chairman Beverly LaHaye writes about the California initiative, characterizing this law and its implementation as a “radical” and “elitist” attempt to indoctrinate students with “political or social beliefs,” and as a violation of the duty of schools to “educate children in academics.” Interestingly, this column is one of the few conservative sources that acknowledges that young people might identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. However, LaHaye does so to note the correct response to such students:

The acts of homosexuality are dangerous, and students who are trapped in that lifestyle are susceptible to high rates of suicide, dropping out of school, and serious health risks. These students need the truth, not a program or a poster or the lies of a gender-tolerance police guard.<sup>16</sup>

By “the truth” LaHaye means conservative Christian teachings about homosexuality, and, presumably, treatment through an exgay ministry program. CWA provides many materials on its web site regarding safe schools programs. It was also instrumental in organizing a rally against the NEA at its national meeting in 2001, at which discussion of a resolution on safe schools programs and curricula was sched-

uled. The NEA chose to postpone consideration of the resolution, a decision for which CWA took credit.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to national groups, their state and local affiliates and more local groups of social conservatives have taken up the cause of opposing safe schools programs. The Pacific Justice Institute (PJI) is a conservative legal advocacy organization that describes itself as “specializing in the defense of religious freedom, parental rights, and other civil liberties.” In January of 2000, when the California legislation that included sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories in the state education code took effect, the PJI pronounced that California was the location where all conservative nightmares were coming true, and promised to fight implementation of the law in the courts.<sup>18</sup> PJI, along with several other California-based social conservative organizations, initiated what they termed a “Parental Opt Out Program,” so that parents who wished to could “ensure that their children are not exposed to such controversial and potentially harmful social instruction.”<sup>19</sup> Of course, school districts historically permit parents to request that their children not participate in certain activities, and the legislation contained provisions that specifically indicated this parental option. By disseminating this form, and advocating for parents who make such requests, these groups hoped to “‘save children from dangerous new laws promoting perverse sexual behavior.’”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, going beyond opting out of a specific program, Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family urges Christian parents to remove their children from California public schools. A number of other conservatives echo this sentiment, urging parents to home school their children or send them to private Christian schools.<sup>21</sup>

One of the most well-known incidents of conservative opposition to efforts to make schools safer for sexual minority youth occurred when a group of students at East High in Salt Lake City, Utah, tried to form a gay/straight alliance club in 1995. Because of previous cases interpret-



ing the Equal Access Act, which prohibits schools from discriminating on the basis of viewpoint against extracurricular after school activities, the Salt Lake City school board chose to eliminate all extracurricular clubs rather than permit the gay/straight alliance club to form. After subsequent litigation, the school board has restored extracurricular activities and a similar club has been permitted to meet.<sup>22</sup>

In Massachusetts, a coalition of conservative parents organized against the Safe Schools Program. Jeff Perrotti and Kim Westheimer, two Massachusetts Department of Education staff who each served as director of the Safe Schools Program, note that there was some conservative opposition to the project from the beginning. However, it was not until the decision was made to incorporate sexuality

education into some aspects of the program that conservatives were able to succeed in curtailing funding and support for the Safe Schools Program. Initially, administrators had chosen to separate sexuality education from the program, and focus on the effort to make schools physically safe for GLBT students. As they worked with students, however, they came to feel that an important aspect of safety for GLBT students was the inclusion of HIV/AIDS prevention education. As a result, one workshop at the March, 2000, GLSEN conference was on gay and lesbian sex and sexuality. The workshop was designed to be a safe place for students to receive answers to any questions they might have about sexuality. Illegally, without the knowledge of participants including the youth who were present, a representative

from the Parents Rights Coalition, the group that formed to oppose the Safe Schools Program, taped the workshop. They edited the tape to sensationalize what occurred, released it to the news media, and placed a copy on every legislator's desk. One radio talk show host played the tape constantly for a week. According to Perrotti and Westheimer, the mainstream media did not pick up the story until the Massachusetts Department of Education issued a press release that condemned the workshop and fired the two employees who had led the workshop.<sup>23</sup>

The conservative press' discussion of this series of events is quite different. According to a story on the CWA website "...a number of conservatives uncovered and recorded the truth behind homosexual behavior that stunned the nation."<sup>24</sup> The



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article describes the purpose of the conference as follows: “GLSEN trains teachers and students and develops programs to fight those who oppose homosexual behavior.”<sup>25</sup> And the article notes that the parents who tape-recorded the event had “educated New England on the terrors of homosexual curriculum” but now “face heavy legal costs for a trial in a liberal state that donates \$1.5 million tax dollars annually to gay and lesbian youth organizations.” And, although this article praises the firing of the staff who led the workshop, it also criticizes David Driscoll, head of the state Department of Education, for continuing the Safe Schools Program, and describes the use of “safe schools” to describe the program as “rhetoric to create a victim status for those practicing homosexuality.” The story about the incident printed in the conservative *Weekly Standard* criticizes the efforts of both GLSEN and public officials to prevent the distribution of the tape, only briefly noting that the tape was made in violation of state wiretap laws. This story also raises the concern that Massachusetts may be leading a national trend: “As goes Massachusetts, in time, so may go the rest of America...as the powerful GLSEN organization, with sponsorship money from American Airlines, Dockers Khakis, and Kodak, presses its radical agenda under the innocent-sounding guise of ‘safety,’ ‘human rights,’ and ‘suicide prevention.’” One of the parents interviewed for the story noted that “the point of this activist drive...is to desensitize children to gay sex at a very young age and counteract moral instruction to the contrary given by their parents and religious leaders.” This same parent characterized GLSEN and other safe schools advocates as “bullies.”<sup>26</sup>

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and students hurt by the ‘gay agenda’ in schools,” along with a “report” that purports to analyze the legal liability schools might incur if they provide safe schools programs. The majority of the report contains “assessments” of the dangers of homosexual behavior, along with arguments that any anti-harassment code that includes sexual orientation is a violation of the first amendment.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Structure of the Conservative Anti-Safe School Argument**

One important trope of antigay activism is the idea that gay and lesbian people pose a threat to children,<sup>28</sup> and it is not surprising that this fear shows up in the conservative discourse regarding issues of sexual orientation and schools. As Didi Herman notes, in the early 1990s the Christian Right began to respond more directly to the gay rights movement. She traces the coverage of these issues in *Christianity Today*; where the first article that discusses safe schools programs was published in 1993. This article critiques the use of the idea of tolerance to argue for safe schools programs, seeing these projects as aimed at the effort by gay rights activists “to encourage acceptance of homosexuality among public-school students.”<sup>29</sup>

Among the conservative groups that oppose the safe schools movement, I find no analysis of actual incidents of violent attacks against gay students, and the most common strategy is to deny that such events occur. These groups see even tolerance programs and programs to promote diversity that include discussion of sexual orientation as promoting sexual promiscuity, and silencing people with traditional religious beliefs. Those who advocate for safe schools pro-

grams, and the educators who support them, are depicted by social conservatives as extremely powerful; indeed, as bullies who promote homosexuality, and ignore the objections of parents to creating school climates that are safe for sexual minority students and their allies. Thus, in these arguments the conservatives become the injured party in need of protection.

One of the reasons that the conservative effort in Massachusetts was successful was because the GLSEN Conference actually involved discussion of sexuality. Opponents of safe schools programs generally depict such programs as being about sex, and about introducing homosexual sex into school classrooms. Advocates of such programs argue that such depictions are based on the misperception that any discussion of sexual orientation is necessarily a dis-

cussion of sex. As Herman points out, one of the common features of what she terms the “old” antigay discourse is the depiction of sexual minorities as perverted, “disease-ridden and a threat to children.”<sup>30</sup> Certainly, conservative sources generally depict sexual orientation in this way: the image of sexual minorities as purveyors of a disease-ridden, immoral, and sexually perverted “lifestyle” is pervasive in these sources.

Herman also identifies a newer discourse among antigay social conservatives: a more pragmatic discourse aimed at countering the rights-based arguments of sexual minority advocacy groups. This newer discourse—which argues that sexual minorities are not oppressed minorities in the same way that other groups such as racial and ethnic minorities have been,

and are thus not in need of civil rights protections—is less evident in the anti-safe schools rhetoric, but has been used as an effective wedge issue between sexual and ethnic minorities. Yet, this latter claim is also implicit in the effort to deny the existence of discrimination against students based on perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity. Interestingly, some of the strategies used to counter safe schools programs are based on arguments for a right to conservative religious views, such as the “opt out” provisions for the California safe schools initiative, or CCV’s strategy in Ohio. Social conservatives depict themselves as defending the rights of parents and of children to an education free from any but negative mentions of homosexuality. The rhetoric of social conservatives frequently refers to the innocent



young children who will be harmed by safe schools programs. Thus, the Right depicts itself as the defender of children against “homosexuals.”

Evidently, there is a clear mismatch between efforts by safe schools advocates to document the concrete threat to students and the relatively abstract, fear-based response of social conservatives. The arguments of social conservatives are generally not based on incidents that have taken place in actual schools. Rather, they are a reflection of fears of moral harms or threats to beliefs about the sinfulness of homosexuality that are assumed to result from safe schools programs. Social conservatives characterize any type of workshop on school safety issues or on the value of tolerance and of diversity as an effort to promote “homosexual behavior.” This depiction is used regardless of the actual topics covered in the workshop. Further, any mention of the existence of homosexuality or of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender that does not condemn “homosexual behavior” and the “homosexual lifestyle” is seen as promoting homosexuality. In turn, this “promotion” is considered as harmful to conservative religious beliefs, and conservatives thus become the “victims” of safe schools programs.

One conservative source that does acknowledge that bullying (though not homophobic bullying) in schools is a problem is an article on bullying written for Focus on the Family.<sup>31</sup> Frank Peretti, who was himself bullied as an adolescent, connects the bullying experienced by Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris at Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colorado, to lasting problems suffered by victims of bullying. However, Peretti presents the solution to these problems as a matter of individual action. Peretti cites his own experience, and the teacher who intervened to help him. But the solution to the fact that he was bullied in gym class was to remove him from the class, not to confront the behaviors of his peers that made his life in gym class so miserable. Persistent evidence on the extent to which unchecked bullying

leads to further and more violent behaviors indicates that such individualized solutions are inadequate.

Clearly, the Right’s ideas about gender and appropriate gender roles play an important role in the conservative perception of the threat of safe schools projects. In an article criticizing the film *That’s a Family!* (produced by Helen Cohen and Debra Chasnoff, who also made *It’s Elementary*), AFA news editor Ed Vitagliano argues that the family must be heterosexual or else it is not the family ordained by God. If gays and lesbians can define their relationships as families, then “family really comes to mean nothing at all. It is like a formless, intangible vapor that can enter and fill a jar of any shape.”<sup>32</sup> This is a clear summary of right-wing fears regarding families that have been evidenced in the rhetoric of “family values;” if the family is not nuclear, patriarchal, and heterosexual, then it is not recognizable as family.<sup>33</sup> In turn, if this version of family is not valorized in theory, and is not culturally, politically, and economically dominant in practice, then the social order that the Right imagines and desires cannot be sustained.

A growing literature has examined the ways that schools are places that produce differentiated masculinity and femininity, in ways that differ along lines of class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Teachers, administrators, and students all participate in complex processes that produce “proper” males and females, prepared for their life roles based on multiple aspects of their identity.<sup>34</sup> A number of analysts have pointed out that a common thread in the school shooting cases, for example, is that most of the perpetrators were White, male, and heterosexual.<sup>35</sup> One way to see the problem of violence in schools, then, is as a problem of the cultivation of a certain form of masculinity. In a recent work, Martin Mills explicitly connects the problems of masculinities in schools with problems of school violence.<sup>36</sup>

To address the problem of school safety in a more comprehensive manner, we will need not only safe schools programs but will need to inquire into the ways in which

schools produce a certain (destructive) kind of heterosexual masculinity. And in this goal there is much common ground to be found with, for example, groups such as the American Association of University Women (AAUW), that are urging schools to become less discriminatory places on the basis of gender, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), who similarly seek to make education more equitable on the basis of race.

Of course, this is precisely what social conservatives fear. Clearly, transforming gender roles is not the primary goal of safe schools programs. The primary goal is to make schools accessible and nurturing learning environments for all students through the reduction of homophobic harassment and homophobic treatment of students (regardless of the student’s actual sexual orientation or gender identity). A second and very important goal is to provide support for GLBT students and their allies, through education and through the formation of organizations such as school-based gay-straight alliance clubs. A third, and longer term goal, is to raise questions and help school personnel and students thoughtfully consider their assumptions and perceptions regarding gender, sexuality, masculinity, and femininity. Conservatives are opposed to all of these goals, but, I am suggesting, their real opposition comes from the underlying fear that this last goal will succeed.

### Conclusion

Advocates who seek to make schools safer for GLBT youth and social conservatives certainly have fundamental disagreements over sex, gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. Part of this disagreement is about “proper” sexual citizenship.<sup>37</sup> Part of it is about the necessity of differentiated gender roles for social order. And another part of it, as suggested in the introductory portion of this essay, is about the role of schools in the reproduction of democracy and of democratic citizens, and of what kinds of citizens we wish to produce.

These differences help to explain dif-



ferences in emphasis with respect to safe schools projects. In the early stages of this work, there is a need to emphasize the importance of safe school environments. This kind of work deals directly with the most heinous (and still persistent) problems of school safety. But more extensive efforts at transformation, including curriculum transformation, are also necessary (as GLSEN advocates) to make schools safe places for all learners and all educators and staff. Of course, in doing this work, we need to recognize that, when sexuality is addressed directly, it may lead to consequences such as those in Massachusetts. Thus, advocates need to carefully consider the institutional structure and mechanisms for addressing these issues. But safe schools advocates could also find common cause with other progressives—civil rights activists, feminists, radical curriculum theorists, and progressive educators—who wish to see the functions of schools transformed. Making schools better places for GLBT youth is one piece of this progressive agenda.

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this article are reprinted from Josephson, Jyl. 2003. "The Missing Children: Safe Schools for Some." In *Fundamental Differences: Feminists Talk Back to Social Conservatives*, edited by Cynthia Burack and Jyl J. Josephson. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield. Pp. 174-182. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the hidden curriculum, see Apple, Michael W. 1975. "The Hidden Curriculum and the Nature of Conflict." In *Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists*, edited by William Pinar. Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing. Pp. 95-119.

<sup>3</sup> Webber, Julie. 2003. *Failure to Hold: The Politics of School Violence*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. P. 158.

<sup>4</sup> One example is the response to AAUW reports regarding sex discrimination and sexual harassment in schools. For the latter report, see "Harassment-Free Hallways: How to Stop Sexual Harassment in Schools," <http://www.aauw.org/ef/harass>. Accessed May 20, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Irvine, Janice. 2002. *Talk About Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>6</sup> Berlet, Chip, and Matthew N. Lyons. 2000. *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort*. New York: The Guilford Press. P. 246.

<sup>7</sup> For documentation, see Human Rights Watch, 2001. *Hated in the Hallways*. New York: Human Rights Watch. It should be noted that homophobic harassment, although it is more likely to be experienced by students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, also happens to many heterosexually-identified students because of perceptions regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity. In the interests of full disclosure, readers should be aware that I serve as co-coordinator, along with Dr. Paula Ressler, of the Safe Schools Project, which is a project sponsored by the PFLAG affiliate chapter in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois.

<sup>8</sup> Perrotti, Jeff, and Kim Westheimer. 2001. *When the Drama Club is Not Enough: Lessons from the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Youth*. Boston: Beacon Press. P. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Safe Schools Coalition. 1995. *They Don't Even Know Me! Understanding Anti-Gay Harassment and Violence in Schools*. Seattle: Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment. [www.safeschoolscoalition.org/theydontevenknowme.pdf](http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/theydontevenknowme.pdf). See also the website of the Coalition at <http://www.safeschools-wa.org>.

<sup>10</sup> Eisemann, Vanessa. 2000. "Protecting the Kids in the Hall: Using Title IX to Stop Student-on-Student Anti-Gay Harassment." *Berkeley Women's Law Journal*. Vol. 15, no. 58. Pp. 125-160.

<sup>11</sup> Chase, Bob. 2000. "Speech from 2000 GLSEN Conference", October 7. <http://www.glsen.org/templates/resources/record.html?section=14&record=255>. Accessed January 22, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Harvey, Linda. "A Checklist to Assess Your School's Risk for Encouraging Homosexuality." See Citizen Link: A Web site of Focus on the Family at <http://www.family.org/cforum/tempforum/A0015282.html>. Accessed March 25, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Sprigg, Peter S. 2001. "Defending the Family: Why We Resist Gay Activism." Address delivered at Madison, WI. October 13. See <http://www.frc.org/get/pd0111.cfm?CFID=922322&CFTOKEN=43478426>. Accessed June 30, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> AFA Resources. *It's Not Gay* description, <http://www.afa.net/videos/ing.asp>. Accessed July 2, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> See "Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation & Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel" available at the web site of PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) at <http://www.pflag.org>.

<sup>16</sup> LaHaye, Beverly. "Chairman's Desk." *Family Voice*. September/October 2001. [http://www.cwfa.org/library/\\_familyvoice/2001-09/04-05.shtml](http://www.cwfa.org/library/_familyvoice/2001-09/04-05.shtml). Accessed June 30, 2002. It is notable that LaHaye is using the very statistics cited to argue for safe schools programs to construct GLBT identified youth as pathological. On this subject, see Lehr, Valerie. 1999. *Queer Family Values*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

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<sup>18</sup> Pacific Justice Institute. 2000. "California: Where the Worst is Happening." November 16. [http://pacificjustice.org/articles\\_9.html](http://pacificjustice.org/articles_9.html). Accessed November 6, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Pacific Justice Institute. 2000. "Homosexuality in Schools' Bill to Become Law in Four Days." December 29. <http://pacificjustice.org/pr122800.htm>. Accessed November 6, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Foster, Julie. 2001. "Coalition helps kids avoid 'homosexual curriculum'." *WorldNetDaily*. January 17. <http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLEID=21361>. Accessed October 20, 2001.

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<sup>23</sup> Perrotti and Westheimer, op. cit., pp. 140-141.

<sup>24</sup> McDuffie, Suzanne. 2000. "Parents Battle Homosexual Activism in Schools." July 31. [http://www.csfa.org/library/education/2000-07-31\\_hs.shtml](http://www.csfa.org/library/education/2000-07-31_hs.shtml). Accessed June 30, 2002.

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<sup>26</sup> Dreher, Rod. 2000. "Banned in Boston: Better not complain about the gay agenda in Massachusetts schools." *The Weekly Standard*, July 3-10. P. 16.

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<sup>28</sup> Herman, Didi. 1997. *The Antigay Agenda: Orthodox Vision and the Christian Right*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

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<sup>31</sup> Neven, Tom. 2001. "The Wounded Spirit." *Focus on the Family Magazine*. <http://www.family.org/fofmag/pf/a0017468.html>. Accessed July 3, 2002.

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<sup>36</sup> Mills, Martin. 2001. *Challenging Violence in Schools: An Issue of Masculinities*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.

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# Trial by Fire—or by Ice

By Pam Chamberlain

Jyl Josephson's article on conservative responses to Safe Schools Programs in this issue of *The Public Eye*, provides a national context for various state-based initiatives. An examination of the Massachusetts case is useful for progressive activists and students of recent conservative trends. Several factors related to conservative politics continue to influence the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students since the incidents surrounding the 2000 GLSEN Conference. While not all of them appear to be focused on programs that support GLBT youth, they are part of an orchestrated attempt to promote fundamental conservative goals.

First, a local conservative newspaper uses its daily web edition to maintain the visibility of its attack on "the gay agenda." *The MassNews* labeled the GLSEN Conference "Fistgate" after what it considered inappropriate sexual information delivered in the 2000 workshop Josephson describes in her article. This incident has provided seemingly endless fuel for ongoing public discussion by the paper. Over 100 articles have appeared with references to the conference in the past 3 years, attempting to maintain a continuous level of criticism of the Safe Schools Program.

Occasionally articles describe events that are choreographed for inclusion in the paper's pages and reveal a further agenda. For instance, a story about Alan Keyes, former Presidential candidate, who spoke at a January 2003 meeting of the Parents Rights Coalition, highlights his praise of one of their members who secretly and illegally taped the conference workshop on adolescent sexuality.<sup>1</sup> But Keyes' purpose in doing so was more than just reminding his audience of the sins of homosexuality, and to encourage them to see themselves as Christian victims of a public education system that discriminates against their views. "If state power, state money and state

authority is to be used in order to reach into the family and rip out children from the paths in which they have been in conscience raised and lead them down a path that will destroy their moral being in the sight of the faith of their parents, then this is not about homosexuals, this is about an abuse of the state's resources, and interference in the free exercise of religion," Keyes is quoted as saying. He expands opposition to supporting GLBT youth into an attack on public education as a whole.

Beginning in 2000 the *MassNews* and a local conservative radio station, WTKK, shifted their challenge against the Safe Schools Program to criticize various aspects of public education. They called for the ouster of David Driscoll, the Commissioner of Education, who had been in their eyes too supportive of the Safe Schools Program, sexuality education and AIDS prevention in public schools. While in the main these oppositional elements reflect conservative definitions of gender roles and the substance of curriculum, their content subtly shifted to other educational issues such as inadequate support for school vouchers and the repeal of bilingual education.<sup>2</sup> This "expanding the frame" simultaneously encouraged homophobia in one sector of their audience and welcomed in additional parents and others who had their own concerns about the direction and expense of public education and state government in general.

Although Massachusetts has the reputation of being progressive on social issues and has long been known as a solidly Democratic state, recent voting patterns challenge this image. While its Legislature remains strongly Democratic, at least in party affiliation, the trend in legislation has been increasingly conservative and the past four governors have been Republicans. The Legislature has refused to raise taxes in response to the economic downslide. A state referendum resulted in the successful destruction of bilingual education in 2002.

And efforts to pass a Defense of Marriage law, whether by legislation, ballot initiative petition, or legislation amendment, have nearly succeeded. The Massachusetts Family Institute, a conservative advocacy and grassroots organizing group in the forefront of these strategies, again uses homophobia as the basis for expanding the "frame." "Most people are simply unaware of how close America is to radically redefining marriage, the institution that is the foundation of civilization. Marriage the institution created by God and revered by all cultures for the benefit of children and all of mankind."<sup>3</sup>

In this climate one would imagine that the Safe Schools Program would be again under the gun as a result of deliberate efforts to capitalize on homophobic reactions. But this has not exactly been the case in Massachusetts. Despite repeated attempts by the *MassNews* and the Parents' Rights Coalition to eradicate the Safe Schools Program, social support for the program has remained high. Research has shown its effectiveness by demonstrating direct connections between its programs and the reduction of suicide attempts and school violence directed at GLBT youth. Its more visible activities, Youth Pride every May, participation in the GLSEN Conference, support of the Day of Silence actions and the proliferation of Gay Straight Alliances in schools, receive positive attention and coverage by the mainstream media. Other pieces of infrastructure support are in place. State-sponsored training and support for community-based youth groups and human services agencies continue to expand the web of support for GLBT youth. An active coalition of GLBT service providers maintains a vigilant advocacy profile. And a small caucus of gay and gay-friendly legislators has taken on Safe Schools as a pet program. The Safe Schools Program seems to have survived its challenge left over from 2000.

But the program has been engaged in a

battle on a different front for longer than the 2000 incident. For the fifth year in a row the Safe Schools Program and the other programs advocated by the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth have struggled to maintain their state funding. Serious revenue shortfalls, coupled with an unwillingness by the Governor's Office, the Legislature, or the people in general to increase taxes, have resulted in a series of state budget debates where human service programs fight among themselves for a piece of a rapidly shrinking pie. In some years, the Safe Schools Program has been completely defunded in versions of the budget, only to be restored, at least partially, by the heroic efforts of its allies.

The current Governor, Mitt Romney, elected in 2002, used the image of a broom and the slogan "Let's make a clean sweep" in his campaign yard signs, signaling that his approach to handling budget woes would be to remove extraneous and waste-

ful spending. The results have been what appear to be across the board reductions in health and human services spending. On the surface this seems to be a "bite the bullet" methodology of conservative fiscal policy in the face of revenue shortfalls. And not only Republicans but most Democratic legislators reflect a position that the state is in crisis and massive cuts are necessary.

This strategy is a smokescreen that allows Democratic legislators to blame the budget for difficult choices and offers Republicans the chance to claim credit for successfully shrinking government. What the Republicans initially called "starving the beast"—downsizing government to better reflect a conservative view of the value of limited government spending, with the effect of canceling progressive gains without directly canceling programs. In addition, small programs like the Safe Schools Program, which with its community-based counterparts has had a total budget of \$1.5 million/year (out of a total state

budget of \$22 billion) can be edged out without legislators appearing to base their decisions on the value of supporting GLBT youth.

But somewhere in the budget debates decision-makers must prioritize what will be funded. What process legislators use is undoubtedly influenced by their collective values. And given the pervasive nature of homophobia in American culture, it could very well happen that the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Youth may be eradicated, if not by fire then by ice.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Keyes Says Christians Must Act Like Camenker and Whiteman." *MassNews*. February 23, 2003. [http://www.massnews.com/2003\\_Editions/2\\_Feb/022403mn\\_keyes\\_camenker.shtml](http://www.massnews.com/2003_Editions/2_Feb/022403mn_keyes_camenker.shtml). Accessed on May 23, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, the *MassNews* made 33 references to bilingual education and discussed vouchers and charter schools 44 times between June 2000 and May 2003.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mafamily.org/SameSexMarriage.htm>. Accessed May 23, 2003.

## THINGS YOU CAN DO!

**CREATING CHANGE: the 16th Annual National Gay and Lesbian Task Force "Creating Change" Conference is in Miami!!**

Dear Creator of Change,

Greetings from the Creating Change office!

I wanted to let you know that the 2003 Creating Change Request for Proposals is now available on the Creating Change web site. [www.creatingchange.org](http://www.creatingchange.org)

Please feel free to go to the web site to review the RFP and consider submitting a proposal for the Sixteenth Annual Creating Change Conference program. You will find the RFP at [www.creatingchange.org](http://www.creatingchange.org) along with other useful information about this year's conference.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need more information about this year's conference.

Thanks for the work you do every day to create change in our communities!

Best regards,  
Sue Hyde

Director, Creating Change Conference  
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# YOUTH SUGGEST WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE SCHOOLS SAFE FOR ALL

- **ENACT** anti-harassment policies to safeguard lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth from verbal and physical abuse.
- **INCLUDE** sexual orientation in student and staff non-discrimination policies.
- **MANDATE** LGBTQ support groups and gay-straight alliances in all secondary schools.
- **REQUIRE** LGBTQ sensitivity training in all teacher and guidance counselor accreditation programs.
- **INTEGRATE** positive LGBTQ images and issues into existing courses across school curriculum.
- **DISCUSS** sexual orientation and safe sexual behavior for LGBTQ youth in all family life/sex-ed classes.
- **PURCHASE** LGBTQ books and resources for all school libraries.
- **CREATE** an anonymous system for reporting LGBTQ harassment and violence in schools.
- **PROVIDE** referrals to support organizations for LGBTQ youth and their parents and friends.
- **HIRE** openly LGBTQ faculty, staff, and administrators to provide role models for all students.

In 1997, in a proactive effort to make schools safer, a group of LGBTQ young people from the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL) in Washington, DC, drafted a “manifesto” describing what they believe it will take to create positive learning environments so that all young people can learn. Their important conversations lead to a great deal of tangible safer schools work in the DC Metro area, as well as the launch of a Safer Schools Campaign. The cutting-edge initiative was developed by students and professionals and included: a High School Outreach Campaign, training and education for high school educators and youth, legal advocacy for gay and lesbian students, and the founding of the DC Metro Area Safer Schools Coalition. It was designed to help build the capacity of local school districts to create, support, and enhance learning environments that are free from antigay harassment, intimidation, and violence. In deciding to tackle this critical issue, young people are defining an agenda that is important for all of us — gay or straight, Black or White, rich or poor — who are concerned about the education of our nation’s young people. Once again, it has been our youth who have reminded us [as adults] of our obligations to help protect the rights of their generation — to ensure that classrooms are free of hate and full of learning.

—Craig A. Bowman.

*SMYAL is a youth service agency serving the metropolitan area of Washington, DC, including Maryland and Northern Virginia, with a mission of supporting and enhancing the self-esteem of sexual minority youth—any youth (13-21) who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or who may be questioning their sexuality (LGBTQ)—and increasing public awareness and understanding of their issues.*



# Religion and Politics in the United States

## Nuances You Should Know

By Chip Berlet

In one recent study, about half of the people in the United States in the year 2000 reported they were adherents of an organized religious belief system.<sup>1</sup> Depending on how the question is asked, some 25-45 percent of the population report that they see themselves as either Born-Again Christians, or, in the broadest sense of the word, Christian “Evangelicals.” What does this mean? Why is it important? How do these people influence elections and politics?

About 14 percent of the electorate in 2000 identified itself as part of the “Christian Right,” with 79 percent of this sector voting for George W. Bush.<sup>2</sup> But contrary to the impression fostered by the direct-mail rhetoric of many liberal groups, not all Evangelicals are part of the Christian Right, and some Evangelicals are actually politically liberal or progressive. Black Evangelicals, for example, overwhelmingly vote Democratic, but they are conservative on some social issues: tending to favor a social safety net for the poor and unemployed, but believing homosexuals are sinful.

There are three ways to look at Christian Evangelicals: as people of faith that follow a set of specific doctrines; as an organic network of traditions; or as a self-identified coalition that emerged during World War Two.<sup>3</sup> These doctrines, according to historian David Bebbington, are the belief in the need to change lives through conversion; expressing the message of the gospels through activism; a strong regard for the Bible as a guide for life; and

stressing the importance of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals (ISAE), when viewed as an organic network of traditions, evangelicalism “denotes a style as much as a set of beliefs. As a result, groups as disparate as black Baptists and Dutch Reformed Churches, Mennonites and Pen-

Born-Again implies a specific personal religious conversion experience that involves a powerful sense of being imbued with the spirit of God. Fundamentalists tend to read the Bible literally, reject liberal church doctrine, and often shun secular society. Pentecostals and Charismatics believe they routinely manifest gifts from the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues or being swept up into physical ecstasy by the Lord of the Dance.

In the broadest sense, according to Gallup polls, the number of persons in the United States who described themselves as either Evangelical or Born-Again between 1976 and 2001 fluctuated between 33 percent and 47 percent with a reasonable estimate being 35 percent of the population or just over 102 million people in 2003.<sup>6</sup> There seems to be a small long-term increase in the number of people reporting themselves in this category with 34 percent in election year 1976 and 45 percent in election year 2000. Using a different methodology and set of definitions, Barna Research has found that 41 percent of the population identifies as Born-Again using a broad definition, but only 8 percent accept

all the tenets in a list of strict conservative doctrinal beliefs.<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, Christians, including Evangelicals, do not vote as a bloc, even within specific denominations. In the year 2000, when 45 percent of the population told the Gallup poll they were Evangelical or Born-Again, 84 percent of White Evangelical Protestants voted for Bush and 16

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tecostals, Catholic charismatics and Southern Baptists all come under the evangelical umbrella—demonstrating just how diverse the movement really is.”<sup>5</sup>

The terms Fundamentalist, Born-Again, Pentecostal, and Charismatic denote specific and sometimes overlapping subsets of Christianity, and primarily are found within Protestant evangelicalism. To be

percent for Gore. One study found that 40 percent of the total vote for Bush in 2000 came from Christian Evangelicals, making it the largest single voting bloc in the Republican Party. However, Black Protestants, a majority of whom are Evangelical, voted 96 percent for Gore and only 4 percent for Bush. Contrast this with Jews who voted 77 percent for Gore and 23 percent for Bush; and Roman Catholics who voted 57 percent for Bush and 43 percent for Gore.<sup>8</sup>

When all Evangelicals were polled regarding their Party and voting preferences, the results were surprising. Not surprising is that almost half of all Evangelicals are Republicans, while only one-quarter are Democrats. Yet, the single biggest bloc (among all Evangelicals) in 2000 was non-voters at 52 percent, followed by Bush voters at 37 percent and Gore voters at 11 percent. Even among Republican partisans (comprising 47 percent of all Evangelicals), while 77 percent voted for Bush, 33 percent chose not to vote; making non-voters the second biggest voting bloc in the Christian Right. Independent Evangelicals gave 19 percent and 18 percent of their votes to Bush and Gore respectively, but the biggest bloc for Evangelical Independents was also non-voters at 41 percent.<sup>9</sup> Many Evangelicals are “swing voters” oscillating between the Republican and Democratic Party; and many more simply feel neither Party represents their interests.

While on average older Evangelicals tend to lag slightly behind the average U.S. resident in education and income, there is a “continuing trend toward the GOP, as younger, better-educated, and

wealthier Evangelicals replace an older, less upscale Democratic political generation.”<sup>10</sup> Evangelicals who are politically or socially active, especially conservatives, seem to be increasingly upwardly mobile, suburban, highly-educated, and with above-average incomes, contrary to many popular stereotypes.<sup>11</sup> One group of scholars found that between 1978 and 1988, “Christian Right activism occurred predominantly in rapidly growing—and relatively prosperous—suburban areas of the

duced within the large Christian Right subculture.<sup>14</sup> The most exclusionary and anti-democratic members of the Christian Right are often members of Christian political action groups such as Concerned Women for America.<sup>15</sup> These are groups that regularly spread alarmist and frequently inaccurate claims about liberals, radicals, gays, and feminists. The more frequently a self-identified Evangelical/Born-Again person attends church functions, and the more conservative the theological doctrine and social beliefs they follow, the more likely they are to vote Republican.<sup>16</sup> This especially stands out on the issue of abortion, with 73 percent of Evangelical Bush voters responding that abortion should be illegal in all cases, compared to only 23 percent of Evangelical Gore voters.<sup>17</sup>

Protestant churches with socially conservative agendas, that also require a high level of participatory commitment, are the fastest growing sector of religion in the United States. For example, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) increased its membership between 1990 and 2000 by 19.3 percent to a total of over 4.2 million. Following in order of growth are the Churches of Christ and the Christian Churches, both with 18.6 percent growth rates; the Pentecostal Assemblies of God with 18.5 percent; and the Roman Catholic Church with 16.2 percent. At the same time, traditionally more liberal denominations—such as the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Church of Christ—are losing membership. The Catholic Church is still the nation’s largest single religious belief system, with

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**The arguments from the Democratic Leadership Council that Democrats need to move to the center to attract these and other voters and thus win elections, however, are not based on persuasive factual evidence. Teixeira and Rogers have found that when Democratic candidates offer clear leadership and stress progressive and liberal issues such as economic fairness, health care, education, and the environment, that many voters will set aside their conservative social issue concerns and reject Republican candidates. According to Teixeira and Rogers, many of these voters are part of the White working class.**

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South, Southwest, and Midwest.”<sup>12</sup> Conservative Evangelicals also do a better job at rallying their own forces to vote. In 2000, 79 percent of Evangelicals who voted for Bush had been contacted at least once by a politicized religious group or individual, as compared to 36 percent of Gore voters.<sup>13</sup>

Many in the Christian Right tend to get their information—and thus their political worldview—not from major corporate media, but from alternative media pro-

over 62 million adherents in the year 2000 (some 22 percent of the population), but if all Protestant religious groups are combined, they number 66 million adherents (some 23 percent of the population).<sup>18</sup>

One study has suggested that as the more socially conservative and doctrinaire Christian Right Evangelicals have expanded their control of the Republican Party, members of more liberal major Protestant denominations have backed out of being active in the Party, and many have stopped voting Republican, some going so far as to declare themselves as Independents.<sup>19</sup> They are reluctant, however, to vote Democratic without a compelling reason.

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conservative social issue concerns and reject Republican candidates. According to Teixeira and Rogers, many of these voters are part of the White working class.<sup>20</sup> This is the same demographic group among Christian Evangelicals that tend to vote Democratic or not vote.<sup>21</sup>

While we unequivocally defend reproductive rights, women's rights, and gay rights, we have to leave some space in the public square for those who disagree with

us. Veteran organizer Suzanne Pharr, director of the Highlander Center in Tennessee, urges progressives to find ways to challenge the ideas of the Christian Right while agreeing to disagree with individual followers in a respectful manner that would allow us to trade a cup of sugar with them

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**We need to distinguish between people who believe abortion is a sin and those who attack clinics—a tiny fraction of Christians who oppose abortion. We can challenge both groups without unfairly lumping them together. We need to abandon focus group phrases such as “religious political extremist” that demonize observant Christians by falsely implying they are linked to neonazi race hate groups. Every direct mail letter that raises funds by demonizing Christian Evangelicals in general as “The Radical Right” sets back the movement for progressive social change.**

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if we shared a backyard fence as neighbors.<sup>22</sup> When we ridicule those who have spiritual values and conservative politics, we force them to defend themselves by challenging us. Why antagonize them when our goal is resisting oppression?

We need to distinguish between people who believe abortion is a sin and those who attack clinics—a tiny fraction of Christians who oppose abortion. We can challenge both groups without unfairly lumping

them together. We need to abandon focus group phrases such as “religious political extremist” that demonize observant Christians by falsely implying they are linked to neonazi race hate groups. Every direct mail letter that raises funds by demonizing Christian Evangelicals in general as “The Radical Right” sets back the movement for progressive social change.

In election 2000 in state level races, when Blacks and labor union members turned out and voted for a specific candidate, the Christian Right and conservative candidates often lost the election.<sup>23</sup> This shows that if we build truly democratic progressive coalitions that include Blacks and other people of color, labor union members and other wageworkers, women, people in GLBT communities, environmentalists, *and* progressive people of faith, we can consistently outvote the Christian Right.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Goodstein, Laurie. 2002. “Conservative Churches Grew Fastest in 1990’s, Report Says.” *New York Times*, September 18, 2003; based on research by the Glenmary Research Center, <http://www.glenmary.org/grc/default.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Kellstedt, Lyman A., Corwin E. Smidt, James L. Guth, and John C. Green. 2001. “Cracks in the Monolith? Evangelical Protestants and the 2000 Election.” *Books and Culture Magazine/Christianity Today*. See, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/global/pf.cgi?bc/2001/003/2.8.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals (ISAE). 2003. “Defining Evangelicalism.” See, [http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/defining\\_evangelicalism.html](http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/defining_evangelicalism.html).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Princeton Religion Research Report. 2002. “Describing Self as Born-Again or Evangelical,” bar graph, online. See, <http://www.wheaton.edu/isae/Gallup-Bar-graph.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Barna, George. 2001. “Religious Beliefs Vary Widely by Denomination.” Barna Research Online. See, <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=92&Reference=B>

<sup>8</sup> BeliefNet. 2000. “How Religious Groups Voted in the 2000 Presidential Election.” Faith and Values in Politics section. See, [http://www.beliefnet.com/politics/data/2000\\_religious\\_groups1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/politics/data/2000_religious_groups1.html)

<sup>9</sup> Kellstedt et al., op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, Christian, with Sally Gallagher, Michael Emerson, Paul Kennedy, and David Sikkink. 1998. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Smith, Christian. 2000. *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want*. Berkeley:



## Quick Resource List to help you Combat the Warfare on Welfare

The Welfare debate might have been postponed for now, but the Right's war on welfare is far from being shelved. Here's a quick resource list to get you going in your work against the Right's agenda on welfare.

### From PRA:

Williams, Lucy. 1997. *Decades of Distortion: The Right's 30-year Assault on Welfare*. Somerville, MA: Political Research Associates. [Note: Look for an updated version to appear later this year.]

From the Applied Research Center, 3781 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94611. Tel: 510-653-3415. <http://www.arc.org>

Gordon, Rebecca. 2001. *Cruel and Usual: How Welfare "Reform" Punishes Poor People*. Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center.

Berkowitz, Bill. 2001. *Prospecting Among the Poor: Welfare Privatization*. Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center.

<http://www.ctwo.org/growl/index.html>  
GROWL (Grassroots Organizing for Welfare Leadership) is a project of the Center for Third World Organizing and the Applied Research Center.

[http://www.arc.org/C\\_Lines/CLArchive/story3\\_3\\_09.html](http://www.arc.org/C_Lines/CLArchive/story3_3_09.html) *Colorlines* issue on the New Welfare Rights Movement.

From the Queer Economic Justice Network, c/o SAGE/Queens, 46-09 31st Ave., Astoria, NY 11103. Tel: 718-726-4187.

"Welfare Reform and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community" an informational pamphlet from the Queer Economic Justice Network. Available from Joseph DeFilippis, QEJN.

From the 9 to 5 National Association of Working Women. Tel: 414-274-0925

[http://www.9to5.org/urgent\\_welfare\\_message.html](http://www.9to5.org/urgent_welfare_message.html). Urgent Welfare Message for Our U.S. Senators.

### See also:

<http://www.aphsa.org/reform/timeline.htm> A Recent History of Welfare Reform (Timeline) from the American Public Human Services Association.

University of California Press.

<sup>12</sup> Green, John C., James L Guth, and Kevin Hill. 1993. "Faith and Election: The Christian Right in Congressional Campaigns 1978-1988." *The Journal of Politics*. Vol. 55, no. 1 (February). Pp. 80-91.

<sup>13</sup> Kellstedt et al., op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Smidt, Corwin E., Lyman Kellstedt, John Green, and James Guth. 1994. "The Characteristics of Christian Political Activists: An Interest Group Analysis." In *Christian Political Activism at the Crossroads*, edited by William R. Stevenson. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> BeliefNet. 2000. "2000 Exit Poll Results." Faith and Values in Politics section. See, [http://www.beliefnet.com/politics/data/2000\\_stats.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/politics/data/2000_stats.html); Kellstedt et al., op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> BeliefNet. 2000. "2000 Exit Poll Results."

<sup>18</sup> Goodstein, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Manza, Jeff, and Clem Brooks. 1999. *Social Cleavages and Political Change: Voter Alignment and U.S. Party Coalitions*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Teixeira, Ruy A., and Joel Rogers. 1998. "Mastering the New Political Arithmetic: Volatile Voters, Declining Living Standards, and Non-College-Educated Whites."

In *Unraveling the Right: The New Conservatism in American Thought and Politics*, edited by Amy E. Ansell. Boulder, CO: Westview. See also, Teixeira, Ruy A. and Joel Rogers. 2000. *America's Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters*. New York: Basic Books.

<sup>21</sup> Smidt et al., 1994. Kellstedt et al., op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Pharr, Suzanne. 1996. "A Match Made in Heaven: Lesbian Leftie Chats with a Promise Keeper." *Progressive*. August 1996.

<sup>23</sup> See, for examples of this argument, Americans United for Separation of Church and State. 2000. *The Religious Right and the 2000 Election*. Online report; Gavel, Doug. 2001. "Gun Lobby, Labor Unions Flex Muscle in 2000 Campaign." *Harvard Gazette*. Online, see, <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2001/05.17/08-gunlobby.html>; Hill, Norman. 2001. "The Black Labor Vote and the 2000 Election." *BMWE News*. Online, see, <http://www.bmwe.org/JOURNAL/2001/02FEB/B2A.htm>; *Labor Tribune*. 2002. "Labor Leads Get-Out-Vote Effort in Final Days of Campaign." *St. Louis/Southern Illinois Labor Tribune*. Vol.66, no.13. November 7, 2002. Online, see, <http://ufcw655.com/LaborTribune-11-7.pdf>.

## Books Received

Augusto, Sarah. 2003.

*"In Christian Love: Religious 'Pro-Life' Women's Beliefs and Activism."*

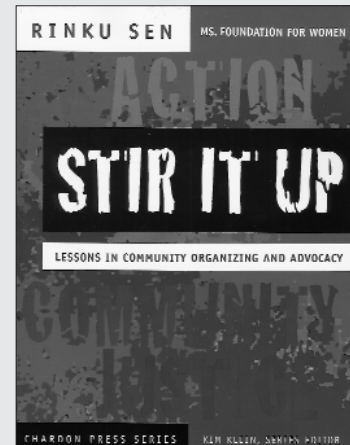
Senior Thesis, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA.



Kim, Jee et al. 2002.

*Future 500: Youth Organizing and Activism in the United States.*

New Orleans: Subway & Elevated Press.



Sen, Rinku. 2003.

*Stir it Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy.*

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Thompson, Cooper et al. 2003.

*White Men Challenging Racism: 35 Personal Stories.*

Durham, NC: Duke University Press.



Guest Commentary *continued from page 2*

Often it is this sense of isolation that becomes desperation and hopelessness and too often results in a young person engaging in high-risk behaviors. Heterosexual students also suffer when this type of harassment goes unchecked because it sends a powerful message that hate and discrimination are acceptable in the school environment.

The emotional and physical abuse that LGBTQ students face at school, coupled with the rejection they face from family and friends and the social isolation they feel from other youth, puts these young people in extreme jeopardy. In fact, studies have consistently found that these young people experience higher rates of attempted suicide, homelessness, and substance abuse, and more frequently engage in unsafe sex.

*"I came out to my classmates when I was in seventh grade. I was harassed, followed home and people threw firecrackers at me.*

*They called me all kinds of epithets. I was harassed every minute of every day that I went to school. One day, I was called into the assistant principal's office when I was in the eighth grade and he said, 'You brought this on yourself.'"*

- Brett, an LGBTQ youth

Many LGBTQ students skip school or drop out because of fear. Still other students suffer as they are rendered invisible in an educational environment which assumes heterosexuality and silences any questioning about sexual orientation or gender identity. Brett's experience with his principal is actually quite common. Even more frequently administrators deny that LGBTQ youth exist in their schools at all.

In Jyl Josephson's lead article describing the Right's attack on safe schools, it becomes clear why so many young people are suffering. It is not because they are les-

bian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning, but because our schools are afraid of addressing the dangerous and discriminatory attitudes and values forced upon them by a minority of conservative parents.

*Craig A. Bowman has been the Executive Director at the National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC) since 2000. NYAC represents more than 130 urban and rural organizations nationwide, including national and state level direct-service agencies, community-based organizations, NGOs, and advocacy and civil rights groups. NYAC can be found on the web at [www.nyacyouth.org](http://www.nyacyouth.org), or by calling 800.541.6922.*

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# Eyes RIGHT

## THE “RIGHT” ICE CREAM

“If you think Cherry Garcia would taste even better if it were called Cherry Falwell, you might be happier buying your ice cream from the Star Spangled Ice Cream co.” Right now, you’re thinking the summer heat has gotten to us. Sadly, no. Here in Boston we’ve barely seen the sun since last summer, but we did see Columbia News Service writer Timothy Jacobs’ article in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*. We’ll let you dip into Jacobs’ story yourselves, since the proof is in the pudding or in this case the ice cream.

“With flavors like ‘I hate the French, Vanilla,’ ‘Iraqi Road,’ ‘Nutty Environmentalist,’ and ‘Smaller Govern-mint,’ consumers are left with little doubt about the causes the founders support. The company boasts that 10 percent of its profits will go to charities that support the U.S. military.

“We’ve determined that conservatives should not cede any ground to liberals, so we’re closing the ice cream gap,” said co-founder Richard Lessner, who is also the executive director of American Renewal, a Washington-based lobbying organization associated with the conservative [Christian Right] Family Research Council.” I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream!

*Source: Timothy Jacobs, “New ice cream is all ‘right,’” Star Tribune, May 30, 2003, p. E30.*

## YOUNG CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN DANGER OF LESBIAN INDOCTRINATION.

Well! It’s not enough that we live in these dangerous times of homeland insecurity, we now have to worry about our young Christian women (not the ones who go to those all women colleges) being indoctrinated into becoming lesbians. You think this is possible? Believe it! The American Family Association certainly does. That’s why the AFA is throw-

ing a hissy fit over Patricia Ireland being chosen as the new CEO of the—yes—Young Women’s Christian Association. Pat is someone they know only too well, as “the former leader of the National Organization of Women (NOW), a radical feminist group that is pro-abortion and pro-homosexual.” What’s worse, Pat is “also an admitted bisexual who has had a husband living in Florida and a female homosexual ‘partner’ in Washington, DC.” AFA chairman Don Wildmon fears that, the YWCA’s “focus will now become homosexual indoctrination among young girls.” And that’s not all. He asserts that, “Lesbianism, cross-dressing, and abortion are all part of Ireland’s history. It will soon become YWCA’s present.” Someone pass the smelling salts!

*Source: AFA Action Alert, May 13, 2003.*

## BOUND AND GAGGED SEPARATELY

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is quite possibly America’s most favorite peeve, whether you’re on the right or left side of the aisle. But for some, it’s a lot more. The IRS has apparently, if one was to drop the skeptical blinders for a second, sadomachocistically bound and gagged churches, preventing them from openly professing their love—of politics and things political.

The Christian Broadcasting Network, which believes that this is not the love that dare not be broadcast, points out that, “Since the earliest days of the church, Christians have challenged their governments to uphold godly values. In the U.S., that often means supporting or opposing political candidates based on their morals and ethics. But for decades, an IRS rule has basically gagged churches seeking to provide spiritual guidance on political issues.”

And so in the tradition of Moses’ exhortation to the Pharaoh to let his people go, Congressman Walter Jones (R-NC), under the able tutelage of the American Center for Law and Justice, exhorted Congress to let his people speak by introducing, “the Houses of Worship Political Speech Protection Act. The bill would amend the IRS code to permit a church to participate or intervene in a political campaign and maintain its tax-exempt status as long as such participation is not a substantial part of its activities.”

*Source: CBN Daily Dispatch Email Update, June 10, 2003.*

## Eye LASHES

“When will we realize that Gay Rights are Religious Wrongs...?”

Rabbi David Eidensohn,  
*National Non-Sectarian Council of  
Pro-Family Activists.*

*Source: “New York ‘Gay’ Schools Bill Threatens  
Freedoms of Religion and Speech.”  
<http://www.cwfa.org/articles/4152/CFI/cfreport/index.htm>*

## **THIS IS ONE FROG YOU'LL WANT YOUR LITTLE PRINCESS (AND JUST MAYBE, EVEN YOUR LITTLE PRINCE) TO KISS.**

Because he won't turn into a handsome young prince but instead provide "truth that sticks in a wishy-washy world." What's more, "Since it comes from Focus on the Family, you can be sure that it will reinforce the Biblical values you are instilling in your children, such as helping them discern truth from deception." And you can "embark on an exciting, faith-building adventure without leaving the comfort of your own home."

Speaking of indoctrination, the FOF Ribbits might just be the antidote for those purse-carrying, triangle-wearing, gender-uncertain alien immigrants from Britain.

*Source: Focus on the Family email May 16, 2003.*

## **COMPROMISING POSITIONS FOR AFRICA.**

Thank God for Concerned Women for America! Their relentless pressure on House and Senate members, and especially, their willingness to compromise, enabled Congress to pass the Global AIDS Bill for Africa. "Despite the fact that the liberals nearly hijacked the AIDS bill, it turned out 'not-so-bad' when it could have been a disaster. The bill went from 'all condoms all the time' to 'abstinence at least every once in a while'—and that happened only because of pressure from voters like you who responded to alerts just like these. Now, the president will sign the bill and genuine relief for Africa will soon begin." Hallelujah!

*Source: CWfA Email Alert, May 16, 2003.*

## **IN THE HEAVEN OF BABYLON...**

Frankly, the Christian Broadcasting Network's story title, "Finding Heaven in Iraq" had us all confused, and a little wary. How could one possibly find heaven in Iraq you wonder? Apart from the fact that the United States bombed it back yet once more to the time of Babylon, isn't Iraq, which is overwhelmingly Muslim, and what's more traces its history to Babylon, the antithesis of anything heavenly?

But CBN News correspondent Paul Strand who was embedded (isn't that un-Christian?) with the Army's Third Infantry Division, all the way from Kuwait to Baghdad was referring to Christian soldiers in the U.S. army. His report, "takes you back to the days when the fighting was more fierce, and faith became a sustaining force for many U.S. troops." So after all, "War is hell, but these Christian soldiers are finding even more of heaven here in Iraq, as they struggle to know God more, to trust Him more and to serve Him better, even out here."

*Source: CBN Daily Dispatch Email Update, May 28, 2003.*

## **MARRIAGE, FAMILY IN DANGER—FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL TO THE RESCUE.**

FRC has fired its latest salvo in the move to save marriage, family, and civilization. It announced the opening of a new Center For Marriage And Family Studies, which will bring together various departments (cultural, legal, etc) under one roof. "With rising levels of cohabitation and divorce, changes in gender roles within marriage, the spread of 'domestic partner benefits', and state court cases asking that civil 'marriage' status be granted to same-sex couples, the work of our new center will be vital," according to FRC

## **LIMERICK**

How horrid, a call for  
safe schools.

It's a plot, do they think  
we are fools?

They're obsessed with  
their genitals.

They want access  
to juveniles.

No way will we play  
by the rules!

*by Chip Berlet*

Vice President for Policy and Academic Affairs Alan Crippen. An important tool in this campaign will be a "resource book containing data, research and public opinion on homosexuality and the gay agenda."

Now, was that public opinion or republican opinion?

*Source: FRC Press Release, June 12, 2003.*

*Eyes Right compiled by PRA staff.*

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