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steppin' out



Lesbian Avengers in action at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago

PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial

A primitive solution

Why do people think that the more people we kill, the more problems we solve?

by Deni Starr

The same day that we, the people of the state of Oregon, killed Douglas Franklin Wright, I read about the slaughter in Rwanda.

A million people were murdered in Rwanda in 1993, most of them hacked to death with machetes by their neighbors. Rwanda is not unique. Such genocide is still going on in Bosnia and Iraq. Genocide—the murder of Jewish people by Nazis, Armenians by Turks, Tutsis by Hutus, Kurds by Iraqis, indigenous people of the Americas by Europeans—is not limited by time, geography, race or level of technological development. Genocide is always sanctioned by the governing powers.

We in the United States look at Bosnia, Rwanda, Kurdistan, and say it cannot happen here. The fact is, it has already happened here. Ask Native Americans about Camp Grant, Sand Creek and Wounded Knee.

Most people believe that killing other people can solve problems. Most of the people who supported the execution of Douglas Franklin Wright believed that killing him solved problems—it certainly keeps him from killing anyone else. But along with that doctrine comes its logical, inevitable, horrifying sequel: If killing people solves problems, then the more people we kill, the more problems we will solve.

Do people in this country really believe that? Consider the fact that recently our Democratic president and Republican Congress changed the law so that instead of three federal crimes being punishable by death, over 60 federal crimes are now punishable by death. The more people we kill, the more problems we will solve.

Pat Buchanan and Lon Mabon have declared a “cultural war” on members of the queer communities. Buchanan challenged people in the United States to “take our country back, block by block.” From whom?

Members of both parties in Congress voted to prevent members of the queer community from being able to marry by

passing the Defense of Marriage Act. The message being sent to the populace is that “these people” are a threat to us, and we must defend ourselves.

Members of the sexual minorities community, welfare mothers, immigrants—both legal and illegal—are being targeted by politicians as the source of our country’s ills. There is no reason to believe that immigrants cause problems in this country, fiscal analysis shows that those who come to our country illegally pay more in taxes than they consume in social programs. This fact did not stop Californians from passing laws to punish them.

It is the nature of politicians to scapegoat. It works. We, the people, buy into these beliefs. There is no evidence that welfare mothers or immigrants have any significant impact on the economy, or that gay men and lesbians have anything to do with the perceived disintegration of marriage. But that hasn’t stopped anyone from casting blame.

Increasingly, our country is being polarized: The rich are becoming richer, the poor are becoming poorer. Our “leaders” are trying to win our votes by passing laws that punish the unpopular.

And now in Oregon, with the killing of Douglas Franklin Wright, we have embraced the concept that killing people solves problems. There are many men on death row in Oregon who killed women, but Wright—who killed men and who molested little boys and who is thus perceived as homosexual—is dead and the “heterosexual” killers are not. Is it a coincidence that a man thought to be a homosexual was the first to die?

The more people we kill, the more problems we’ll solve. Where is this belief taking us? More important, is that where we want to go?

Deni Starr is an attorney in private practice in Portland. Guest editorials are always welcome, please limit size to 500 words.

contents

VOL 13 NO. 22 SEPTEMBER 20, 1996

FEATURE

Homo hoe down

Country western dancing is fun, good exercise, and it can mend a broken heart
(p. 19)

DEPARTMENTS

World news

Ireland proposes national Employment Equity Bill
(p. 4)

National news

National gay and lesbian journalists convention draws 500; DOMA passes, ENDA fails in Senate
(pp. 5-10)

Local news

Oregon attorney general's office opts to appeal domestic partnership benefits ruling; Salvation Army charged with anti-gay bias; motive for arson that destroyed lesbians' home is still unknown
(pp. 11-17)

ARTS

Music

Free at last: Neil Tennant fesses up; country singer Doug Stevens storms Nashville's "no gays" policy
(pp. 31-33)

Books

Two lesbian moms pen a guidebook for queer youth
(p. 35)

Theater

Say it isn't so: Does the magic of Grease work only on celluloid?
(p. 36)

Entertainment

OPB airs fifth season of In the Life in an earlier time slot; there's still time to celebrate the uncensored
(p. 37)