

just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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COMMENTARY

BY MARTY DAVIS

Why was Kendra killed?

We need honest answers to some hard questions

Who killed Kendra James is not the question people need to be asking.

We know who killed Kendra James. Kendra James was killed, at best, by fear, at best by errors of judgment, at best by the yet-to-be unskilled reactionary responses of a very young police officer.

And at the worst? Well, that now is the question to be asked instead.

"Why was Kendra killed?" And beyond that... what's going to be done about it? Will there be answers? Who deserves the blame? Is it the fault of the officer, or do we go right to the top and in reactionary anger blame again Portland Police Chief Mark Kroeker? Will there be honest answers, a thorough investigation? Will the police bureau protect its own before protecting the community?

"Why was Kendra killed?" should be only the starting point. Next we all should be asking ourselves, and those around us, a lot of hard questions. Hard questions such as: "Why should I care about Kendra James? This shooting, her death, this is not a gay issue. Why should I care?"

Why, because we're all people first and gay and lesbian second, and this death is an issue about matters far greater than being gay or lesbian. The answers to these questions affect us all. Because we're all part of the community that looks to the police department for protection. Straight, gay, black, white. This death should bring us together as we join in the search for answers. "Why was Kendra killed?"

No, the death of Kendra James is not a gay issue. It is far bigger and more important than that. It is an issue of our greater community and of our values and integrity and the very ways in which we look at and treat each other. Indeed, this death has nothing to do with issues of sexuality. But it has everything to do with loaded shots of racism, classism, elitism and everyday acts of judgment and condemnation.

I did not know Kendra James. I can't imagine any circumstances under which I might have ever known her. And to be honest, from what I've read, I don't think I would have liked her or ever even wanted to know her. This very apathy in and of itself is an act of judgment and condemnation. I take no pride in this statement... other than having the honesty to admit it.

And that is what is bothering me the most about the death of Kendra James.

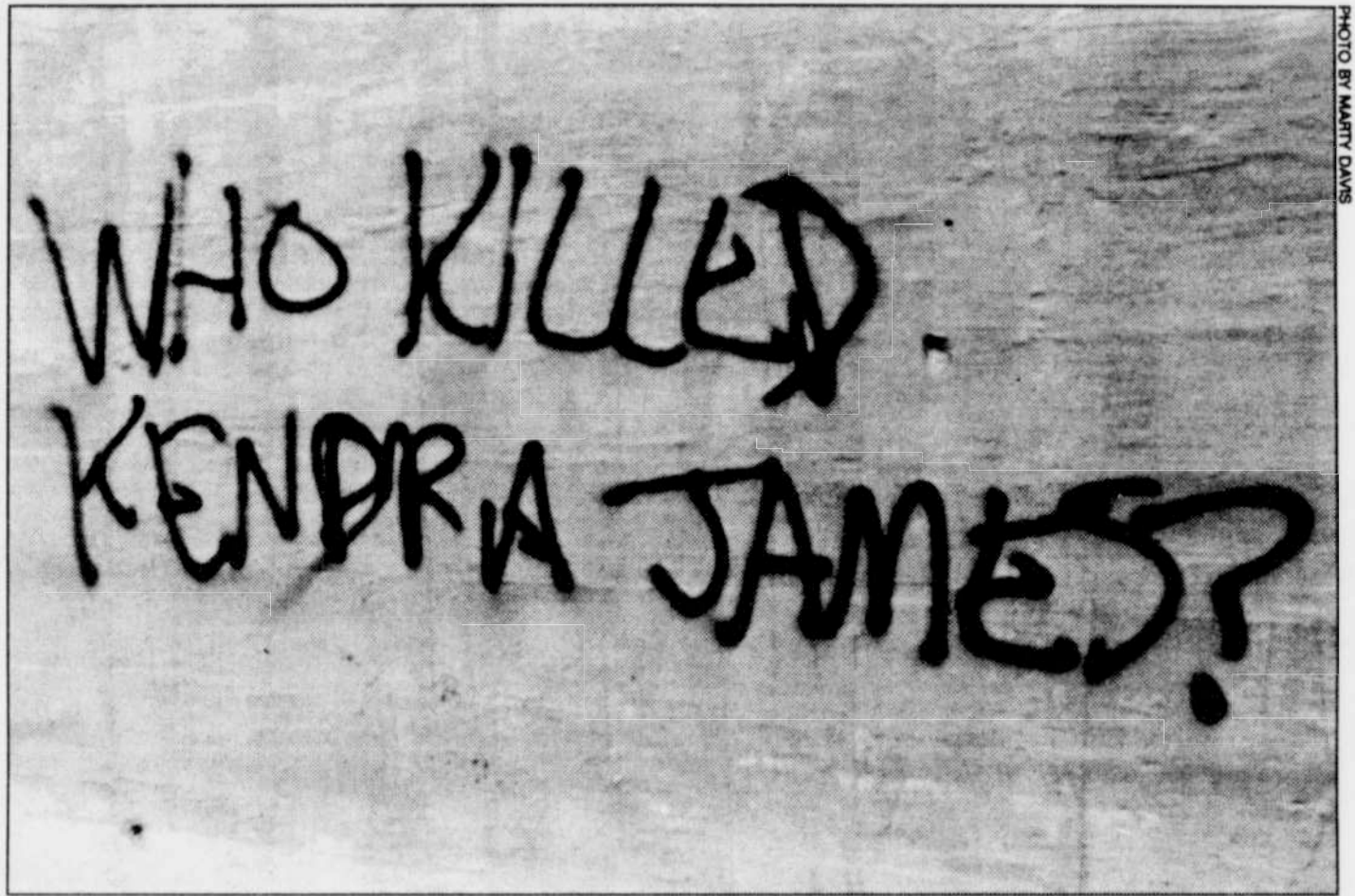


PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Because the truth is that I don't find myself caring about the person at all. I trouble at the circumstance of her death. But I do not mourn the person. I question the probability of disconcerting factors that caused her death. I wonder why this happens, seemingly over and over. But the worry is outward, not inward. Because I know it's not going to be me who is shot next. Because I'm not like Kendra James, and it seems to be people like her who get shot. Not people like me.

I trouble about the death of Kendra James because it's easy to dismiss. Because our ability to feel for others is being numbed by televised wars and deaths. We daily view murders and casualties that no longer seem real. I trouble because there are too many deaths and they no longer touch us, and as soon as that happens we are lost souls indeed.

Yes, I will have the shamed courage to admit that the person killed means less to me than the circumstances of the killing itself. How about you? Can you be honest with yourself? Do you care about Kendra James? Do you know when she died, how she died? Do you feel anger? Do you feel sadness? Do you rage, do you blame, do you care? Do you demand truthful answers? Or do you, do we, wait a few days and then forget all about it?

Until the next Kendra James? ☐

PLEASE NOTE: May has five Fridays, so the next issue of Just Out won't hit the streets until June 6—an interval of three weeks rather than two.

REFLECTIONS

5 years ago in



• A handful of city officials and friends gathered May 1 to kick off the Keeston Lowery Meditation Garden project by planting several shrubs and flowers in the proposed spot. The plot will encompass a 50-by-40-foot area in the City Hall courtyard at Southwest Fourth Avenue and Jefferson Street. The garden will brim with perennials—Lowery's favorite—as well as pathways, a bench and a watering system.

• This month Portland lawyer Mark Johnson becomes the president-designate of the Oregon State Bar. In September he will assume the presidency, becoming the first openly gay lawyer to hold the position.

• A few days before Mother's Day, May 10, Portland Public Schools staff received messages in their work mailboxes reminding them families come in many configurations. The missives were crafted by the Sexual Minority Parents Advisory Group, which advises the district on issues related to making schools safer and more equitable for sexual minorities.

• By a 4-3 vote, the Beaverton School Board rejected a proposal to insert the words "sexual orientation" into its existing nondiscrimination policy. The vote, which occurred May 4, was the second such rejection in as many months.

• A lively crowd of nearly 200 turned out for the May 9 grand opening of the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center. The fledgling establishment, located at 424 E. Burnside St. in Portland, is designed as a social and meeting space for queer kids 23 and younger.

• Despite fighting among various national queer organizations, the proposed Millennium March on Washington, D.C., has realized a firm date: April 30, 2000.

• Come to the Prom You Never Had. Prom King and Queen titles and free horse-drawn carriage rides May 21 at the Egyptian Club.

• It's Queer Night at La Luna every Monday! DJs are Aquaman and Brad Vachal. All ages welcome.

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