

The OCA believes that it can eliminate a subculture its homophobic members detest through sanctioned government suppression with support of a majority of the citizenry, perhaps initially more subtle than Adolf Hitler's attempt to exterminate a large menu of society's "misfits," most prominently the children of Judah (and including homosexuals), yet parallels are relevant and possible. Hitler began his suppression of German Jewry by first isolating them as an undesirable subgroup, then by ordinances forbidding them this or that, until sure of his power and success of his campaign of ostracism, he stripped the Jews of citizenship and declared open violence upon them.

The OCA demands homosexuals not receive "special rights," but when, Daymon Edwards asks, "did equality become a special right for Americans? We live in a country that gives men medals for killing other men in war, yet shun them for loving one in a time of peace."

The right of the people to live in a manner of their own choice is a crucial tenet of democracy and of constitutional law. We don't have to like or even approve of our neighbors but neither we nor they have the right to trample upon or deny the individual rights and liberties of each other (which also protects the OCA and its virulent allies who attempt to use the law to undermine all it stands for).

"The cold hard fact of the matter is that the OCA doesn't like the power and influence that gay groups wield in this state," Daymon Edwards wrote. "They just do not like the fact that homosexuals are in power in high places across Oregon."

The OCA is a direct heir to the Klaverns of the Ku Klux Klan that were greatly popular in Oregon during the 1920s. Homosexuals were deep in the closet and escaped most of the KKK's wrath. This was focused on Jews, Catholics and aliens, with little activity against blacks because they were fewer in Oregon than furtive or fugitive gays. The Klan's political clout was instrumental in passing a bill which prohibited Chinese and Japanese immigrants from owning land in the state.

"The 1920s Klan provides an example of modern people wrestling with the complex dilemmas of social change," David Horowitz, history professor at Portland State University, wrote for the July 1986 *Times Eagle*. Oregon "Klansmen seemed to be defending religious loyalties, national patriotism, and traditional morality from the threat of a newly emerging mass culture. At the heart of their anguish was an increasing sense of powerlessness before impersonal events and circumstances."

Horowitz provides a solid insight into the bitter motives of the OCA. They mean to strike with the fury of their frustrations as weapons against a traditional target which they have been taught to revile since childhood. Even the loathsome term *queer* is in a sense comparable with the KKK's antipathy toward *kikes*, *niggers* and *outsiders*, though perhaps with more inbred revulsion.

The OCA is not a unique phenomenon. It is only one of a rapidly proliferating movement of evangelical nativist fascism that is exemplified by white supremacist hate groups. Jews, blacks and gays are their major targets (also feminist women),



DAVID SUTER

which is not to say they don't bash anyone who is different from themselves.

A cartoon of a few years ago commented on an earlier controversy about homosexuals teaching in schools. The cartoon shows a child staring at Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates and Plato who sit on a park bench reading newspaper want ads. This might well be an imminent portrait of the loss of remarkable minds and talents the OCA is demanding be removed from open society and revoked of their rights as citizens. AIDS has deflected much of the nation's cultural treasury by killing many of its most gifted writers, actors, dancers, musicians and artists.

The OCA's draconian mandates would remove from Oregon the remaining best and brightest who practice sexual freedom from the most basic protections of civilization. "We must scrupulously guard the civil rights and civil liberties of all citizens, whatever their background," Franklin Delano Roosevelt said. "We must remember that any oppression, any injustice, any hatred, is a wedge designed to attack our civilization."

And we must also remember Oregon's Bill of Rights, which says that "no law shall be passed granting to any citizen or class of citizens privileges, or immunities, which upon the same terms, shall not belong to all citizens." Stated thus, it is the OCA that is petitioning for special rights — the right to discriminate against other citizens.

Sacrificial genocide has never resolved the crises and upheavals of history. Adolf Hitler aroused the passions of war defeated Germany with myths of superiority and hatred of Jews. The OCA is raising the swastika of persecution of homosexuals, attempting to implement ethnic cleansing through popular vote. It is speculative if the 20th century will be remembered because Gandhi lived in it or that Hitler was its worst citizen, his dark legacy exemplified by genocidal fascism implicit in such supremacist cults as the OCA. Gandhi himself might not have approved of homosexuality; there is reasonable evidence he would have disapproved of its persecution.

This is our choice. And it swings on the proposition that it makes no difference whether you like someone or approve of a person's habits and attitudes. You are not entitled to interfere into the rights of others.

If this is a fair interpretation of a few constitutional amendments, how is it that the OCA claims to be upholding traditional American values? To the contrary, dispossessing a courageous group of people who have long struggled to emerge as a respected and equal part of society would be a large move in the direction Hitler trod more than half a century ago. The hatred he called up from the human psyche continues its pervasive sickness among us, and if we succumb to purging unpopular or convenient scapegoats for our troubles, it should not be surprising that other undesirables will also be removed. Perhaps as has been suggested elsewhere, eventually even ourselves.

This is a rewrite of articles that appeared in the April 1992/October 1994 *NCTE*, which were the years OCA got its antigay measures on the Oregon ballot.

DEMOCRACY BEGINS AT HOME

"... Whilst the parties of man cram their tenets down all men's throats whom they can get into their power, without permitting them to examine their truth or falsehood, and will not let truth have fair play in the world, nor men the liberty to search after it; what improvement can be expected? What greater light can be hoped for in the moral sciences?"

—JOHN LOCKE

Democracy began in 508 BC when the citizens of Athens overthrew a Tyrant and set up a government of the people. *Democracy* is a Greek word meaning 'rule of the people'.

Unfortunately the Tyrant came back with an army and executed the more prominent democrats who ousted him. He took back the government and ruled as a tyrant until he died. This was a setback to political freedom at its dawn, yet as our revolutionary ancestors demonstrated two centuries ago, the idea of democracy is persistent and frequently prevails over tyrants and outlives them.

Democracy is a pragmatic compromise between the yearning for freedom and the urge to frustrate it. It is an elaborate though inherently fragile system of concessions between diverse and disparate ambitions and ideologies represented by a variety of economic and political classes, despite an enshrined myth that a democracy is a classless society. The irony is that democracy is better able to tolerate class differences than any other system of government.

The only possible survival for a democracy is to establish and sustain a balance between its conflicting factions and allow none of them to gain such power as to be capable of suppressing or ravaging the rest.

So long as no particular interest is powerful enough to fully and finally overwhelm its varied rivals, nor any alliance capable of singleness of purpose long enough to accomplish that end, a tacit respect for the laws and terms of constitutional democracy is maintained. At rare moments an idea that might accidentally resemble social justice is sometimes enacted as law of the land, although opposing forces waste little time in their attempts to overturn whatever might be to their disadvantage.

Democracies are themselves compromises between dreamlike edens of anarchy, socialist collectives of workers' paradises in which individual liberties are usually forfeit as are most worldly possessions including food and shoes, and aristocracies of one shape or another that rule through tradition and privilege for the single purpose of their own comfort, which is historically at the expense of large masses of impoverished citizens who are obliged to toil and obey. Democratic governments are most often inspired by rising classes of bourgeoisie whose general outlook is liberal and progressive yet seldom naïve about the affairs of business and government. The political suffrage of the democratic public is channeled by powerful political/economic interests to stifle possibly contagious outbreaks of populism.

Democracies face periodic crisis when ideological concerns lose patience with legislative or judicial processes. Powerful, often retrogressive and reactionary forces rise at times of rapid social transformation, which also generally include more than usual excesses of corruption as well as strained economies. When ideologies rigidify into implacable positions that despise workable compromise the likely result is civil violence, which might erupt on a skinhead scale yet

quickly escalate into savage extremes such as an earlier American experience (1861-65) or the recent Balkan and Rwandan butcheries. (A distinction should be made between violent reprisals by an uncompromising government and uncompromising violence by a rapacious minority determined to undermine and overthrow government.)

The current political climate in the USA is incendiary, which is reflected by condescending political parties and politicians that attempt to placate extreme rightwing ideologies and religious zealots who manipulate the democratic process to ultimately depose it. Proto/fascists who are determined to wrest power have tapped into the old leftist/liberal/populist tactics of grassroots organizing and ballot initiatives to promote laws that deny basic citizens' rights to anyone disagreeable or threatening to them. Their grim and vengeful vision of apocalyptic subordination excludes diversity, intelligence and imagination, and blames the nation's problems on such interesting and rather progressive citizens as feminists, gays and lesbians, blacks, Hispanics and recently arrived world immigrants who hope for the future rather than cling to noxious images of the past. These dismal-souled Millenarians intend that those who have never enjoyed the fruits of liberty and prosperity, few and bitter as they are, shall never reach the tree. It might be argued that such reactionary and grossly unjust attitudes are based on fear, but the fear, prejudice and absolutism they inculcate should not be lightly dismissed if democracy is to continue as the country's fundamental structure and ideal.

Democracy evolves. Like nationalism, capitalism, socialism and communism, it is no more than part of a process of human development that is always evolving into something else. Ideas, which are usually expressions of concern that people have about the welfare of others, develop into ideologies that separate them as enemies. Ideologies do not usually translate well into reality except they often make it appalling by the fervor with which they are promoted. Governments generally violate their charters, and no matter how they wish to be considered, are most often oppressive to their populations and aggressive with their neighbors. Political rights or liberties hardwon by one generation are usually eroded by successors who take them for granted without realizing how rare, necessary and fragile they are.

The history of an age is not about solutions to problems but of the struggle between several possible solutions and the manner in which seekers for certain answers are deflected by others working for other answers. Capitalism, communism, fascism, any and all *isms*, are constantly reforming, overlapping and separating, and inherent within all of them are the human factors of power, avarice, corruption, violence and asininity. No system is foolproof, and like every other organism each moves toward decay. The farther in time a form of rule or ideology moves from its founders the less recognizable its foundations. Murray Kempton once wrote that the bearers of political myth of every era seem to carry in their hands the ax and the spade to execute and enter the myth of every previous era.

Human beings cannot escape history is the Marxist idea; but human beings make their own history. Freedom and equality, like love, begin at home.

We might remember Judge Learned Hand: "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it."

—MICHAEL McCUSKER

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