

# letters

Art Director: Eric Galt  
 Art: mountain@medias.org  
 Copy Editor: Euan Best  
 Classifieds: Sandy Beeks  
 Classifieds: mountain@medias.org

## How Do We Fight Slander and Lies?

The popular wisdom about anti-lgbt hate media is usually "it's best to just ignore it." When I encountered some anti-gay propoganda this weekend a different thought occurred to me and I want to put it out in the community to see what others think about it.

I was attending the all-day Translating Identity conference at UVM. Maybe I had the reaction I did because as the LGBTQA Services Coordinator on campus I feel a little protective of the lgbtqa, activist students on campus and I knew how hard they worked to put this amazing conference together. In any event, students who were responsibly working at the conference had pulled the brochures in question off of the cars parked along University Terrace. As I read the brochure and thought about these amazing students, I felt angry. I didn't respond with my usual, cynical annoyance, I wanted to find an effective way to fight back.

The title of the brochure was "Homosexuality: THE TRUTH: Questions and Answers About Homosexuality." Here are a couple of samples of the questions and answers: "Don't individuals have a constitutional right to engage in homosexual acts?" The brochure offers the argument: "Homosexual acts, such as sodomy, were always illegal under American common law and were once rightly referred to with such words as beastly and filthy" [these words in italics]. The answer to another question "But if homosexual acts are recriminalized won't the government be peeking in people's windows and breaking down their doors to catch them 'in the act'?" suggests that "incest and child molestation is often done 'in the privacy of one's own home'; but very few people would want to decriminalize those acts."

It gets better — the brochure poses the question, "But what is wrong with adopting a 'live and let live' attitude toward the homosexual community? After all, they are only hurting themselves, right?" The writer of the brochure responds by alleging that "homosexuals... account for at least one-third of all child molestation," and provides lots of information about all of the diseases we are spreading. One of my favorite sentences in this section: "Some Nazi death camp survivors have estimated that up to 20 percent of the guards were homosexuals who raped inmates, especially boys. The infamous Ludwig Tiene is just one example of such a guard." In answer to the question "But aren't homosexuals born that

way?" the text reads "Most serial killers do not remember when they first had thoughts of killing; most rapists do not remember when they first contemplated raping; but no one suggests because of that, rapists and murderers were born that way!" The footnote to this statement lists the examples of "Jeffrey Dahmer, Donald Harvey, John Wayne Gacy," etc.

The "facts" the brochure presents are all footnoted to Dr. Paul Cameron and the various articles he has written for the Family Research Institute. The brochure itself is published by Wisconsin Christians United. Whether I am just feeling protective of the young adults I work with here at UVM, or whether I'm fed up, my question is, when does this kind of material cease being free speech and move into the area of libel or slander? I think, personally, I'm ready to join a class action lawsuit to bring consequences to bear for the lies these individuals and organizations feel free to promulgate against me and all the other members of our community. I don't know what the best legal strategy might be, whether the target would be the organizations who print the material or Dr. Paul Cameron himself, and I don't know the formal legal definitions and precedents, but I'm wondering if it's time to fight back.

**D.V. Brauer**  
 LGBTQA Services Coordinator  
 University of Vermont

**Another Reason to Invade Iraq**  
 I found the article by Mubarak Dahir "Why Protesting the War is A 'Gay' Issue." And in general, the rather elitist Burlington anti-war protesters with signs "Lesbians and Gays against the War" and "Lesbians Against Boys Invading ANYTHING" (LABIA) — very interesting and entertaining. But, if we're protesting raging war against Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the Taliban and Al-Qaida in Afghanistan SOLELY on the Gay Human Rights issue, then I would like to ask the RUI? Board of Directors and Vermont GLBTQ community this:

We all saw those horrendous images of the kneeling Afghan women being executed for "adultery" during a soccer match's half-time. Wanna guess how openly gay women and men would be treated in these oppressive extremist Islamic regimes? Would you as a gay person rather live under a murderous dictatorship like Iraq or live freely in an open democratic society found in the United States and Europe? Pretty simple answer, huh people.

We have seen lesbian and gay communities flourish after their former

oppressive regimes in Russia, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia fall and establish a Free Open Democracy. And I am positive that our gay Iraqi brethren are yearning to be free from an evil monster like Saddam, to begin a new life in a free, open, proud Iraq.

Thank you American and British troops — go liberate and free Iraq!

**Michael Sebastian Luna**  
 Fletcher

## PRI, not NPR

In "Smokin' Sedaris" by Ernie McLeod (April, 2003), reference is made to "... NPR's *This American Life*..." National Public Radio (NPR) has *nothing* to do with either the production or distribution of this very popular program. *This American Life* is produced by WBEZ/Chicago Public Radio and distributed to public radio stations nationwide by Public Radio International (PRI). We would appreciate a correction.

FYI: Public Radio International and National Public Radio are the two major distribution services for public radio. Individual public radio stations can be affiliates of both PRI and NPR, selecting programming offered by each. Public radio is a generic term, while Public Radio International and National Public Radio refer to specific distributors. Visit the PRI website: [www.pri.org](http://www.pri.org)

**Linda Sue Anderson**  
 Executive Assistant, Public Radio International

*Please accept our apologies for allowing that confusion to be promulgated among our readers. And thanks for the clarification. — EB*

## Don't Smoke

Before you publish another retro article/picture glorifying addiction, disease and death, perhaps you should see what's happening in the real world.

The idea that smoking is oh-so-cute is not just "politically incorrect," it's prehistoric. Have you been in the mountains too long? Or maybe you've just forgotten the disproportionate number of LBGT dying of tobacco-related diseases, Philip Morris' unqualified support for Jesse Helms and RJR's "Project SCUM."

Glorifying their products plays right into their hands. You should be ashamed. See: [www.tobacco.org/articles/category/gay/](http://www.tobacco.org/articles/category/gay/):

"In San Jose, California, a hard hitting ad campaign aimed at the LGBT community is underway. The

'Cigarettes are My Greatest Enemy' campaign ... 'I didn't survive gay bashing so I could die from lung cancer. I had to stop smoking,' one ad says."

"Lisa Maurer, coordinator of the center, will discuss how tobacco companies target the LGBT community and ways people can quit or cut back smoking at a lecture and video screening tonight. The program, called "Selling Out: How LGBT People Have Become Targets of Big Tobacco," will be presented at 7:30 p.m. in Williams 221 as part of National LGBT Health Awareness Week.

"Big tobacco companies advertise in LGBT magazines, using symbols like the rainbow and words such as 'pride' and 'freedom,' Maurer said. She said the tobacco companies call their initiative Project Subculture Urban Marketing or Project SCUM."

**Gene Borio**  
 New York City

*While I share your passion about the dangers of smoking tobacco (my father died of lung cancer at age 45, when I was 16), nothing we ran 'glorified' tobacco use. Our story "Smokin' Sedaris" by Ernie McLeod in our April 2003 issue simply made use of one identifying characteristic of the monologist and humor writer to give readers a flavor of his outré sensibilities. We're all adults here — just because Sedaris smokes and we mention it, I don't think members of the audience or our readers are going to rush out and buy a pack — or a carton. Thanks for sharing the information for those who would like to read more about tobacco marketing to the lgbtq communities. — EB*

## Religious Homophobia in Schools

Does anyone reading this remember how terribly horrible it was to be considered gay in junior high school? Pretty crappy day-to-day existence if my memory serves me well. Now what if you were out of the closet and tried to open people's minds by openly discussing your sexuality with your peers? I feel it would take someone unbelievably strong and brave to even consider such a task.

Believe it or not, such a person exists, in of all places, Arkansas! A 14-year-old gay male named Thomas Mc Laughlin and his parents have sued the Pulaski Arkansas School District due to the lengths they went to silence Thomas. He was told he was "abnormal and an abomination," told not to ever discuss his gayness with other students, and even forced to read the bible aloud

as a punishment. The school immediately dropped all punishments, now & future, to have the case dropped. However, we all know it will not stop. Not with Thomas or the possibly thousands of other GLBT youth that are forced to attend Jacksonville Junior High in Jacksonville, Arkansas.

The leader of this bashing was Ms. Linda Derden, one of Thomas' teachers, who is a self-proclaimed follower of Christ. She would tell Thomas to read his Bible to find proof of his "abnormality" and was named in the ACLU suit as the teacher who made Thomas read the Bible aloud as punishment. She denies this, saying that she and God know the truth. Well, I too am a follower of Christ and I believe he loves me, Thomas, and you! Probably equally to or maybe even a little more than Ms. Linda Derden, an educator, paid by the state to teach children. I did not know that teaching hatred was part of ANY junior high school's curriculum.

So ... are you as pissed off about this as I am? Good! Now, please pick up your phone and call Ms. Linda Derden at her home number [phone number withheld] and tell her about it. If, for some reason she should change her number, call her son Scott at [number withheld] and ask him to let Mom know how you feel. And if you really want to let it all out, please contact the school that employs such a person: Jacksonville Junior High, 201 Sharp Drive, Jacksonville, AR 72076 (501) 982-1587. If you follow up on this and make a call or write a letter, thank you. If you do not, shame on you!!! This young man is braver and stronger than any of us ever were at his age and he deserves our help, and our respect.

**Jeff Carver**  
 Orlando, FL

*I've read about this case in other gay media. Your fervent support is awesome, though I don't think that telephonically harassing a homophobe will change her mind. Perhaps, for those so inclined, a message of hope that her deity will forgive her for the hate she holds for one of the deity's creations and for the damage she inflicted would be effective. In addition to concern for Thomas, the issue here should be the continued and increasing blurring of the separation of church and state. — EB*

**Correction:** A photo of Catie Curtis in last month's issue was mislabeled. We apologize for the error.

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