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QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking, Volume 3, Number 3, Fall 2016, pp. 151-153 (Article)

Published by Michigan State University Press



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The mendacity and political maleficence of anti-gay factions was on full display the day after 49 people, most of whom were queers of color, were gunned down in a haze of 202 bullets at Pulse nightclub. Conservative lawmakers, armed with the best spin that NRA money can buy, insisted that the massacre was an attack on “all Americans” without a single mention of GLBTQ people. Queers were publicly evacuated from the now routine exercise of collective mourning that follows mass shootings, events so commonplace that they now constitute a genre of presidential address. Appropriating the shooting for nationalistic purposes, underscored by a healthy dose of racism, Governor Rick Scott declared, “This is an attack on our people. An attack on Orlando. An attack on Florida. An attack on America. An attack on all of us.” U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, himself dogged constantly by the gay press for his rumored youthful proclivities, likewise relayed, “Our prayers are with those injured and killed early this morning in horrifying act of terror in Orlando.” Rubio would go on to deliver remarks to the American Renewal Project, an anti-gay organization whose members advocate conversion therapy and warn that GLBTQ people are terrorists goaded by a perverse “militant homofascism.” Mike Huckabee, who excites his base by stigmatizing people with AIDS and championing so-called religious freedom bills, extended his noxious thoughts and prayers by telling followers, “Please join Janet and me in praying for the victims of the Orlando attack and their families.” Even lawmakers who could muster the nerve to utter the words “gay,” “lesbian,” and “trans” could not help but participate in the erasure. Former Massachusetts senator Scott Brown told one media outlet, “I classify them as Americans, and it was an attack against all Americans, not just one particular

class or type of American.” A reporter for *Slate* noted disapprovingly that “not a single congressional Republican who tweeted about the shooting mentioned LGBTQ people.”¹ This emphasis on loss void of a queer subject did not abate. A month after the shooting anonymous sources at the FBI told media outlets there was no evidence that the shooter was actually anti-gay.² The epistemology of the closet was resurrected with fervor, speaking the experiences of GLBTQ people without the inconvenience of any actual queer voices.

Of course, GLBTQ people recognize these erasures for what they are. When an arson fire at the Upstairs Bar in New Orleans killed 29 people in 1973, both the mayor and governor refused to mention the crime in public. A persistent feature of the AIDS crisis has been the abnegation to recognize generations of queers lost to the disease. The silence holds in the resistance to acknowledge the omnipresent murder of trans people of color, which is unmistakable with even a quick glance at hate crime statistics. Even as the Stonewall Inn is declared a nation monument, it took police two decades to recognize that one of its heroes, Marsha P. Johnson, was murdered. Rehearsing these familiar scripts of trauma and political malpractice may feel redundant or insensitive. But the refusal of so many public figures to acknowledge the preponderance of these losses as GLBTQ losses is staggering in its historical echo. How does one push back against lawmakers like Florida’s Attorney General Pam Biondi, who fought for years against GLBTQ equality but stood shocked as CNN’s Anderson Cooper suggested she contributed to an atmosphere that enabled murder? How do we address politicians such as Tennessee state representative Andy Holt, who used the occasion of these queer lives lost to hold a fundraiser and offer AR-15s as door prizes? How do we respond to calls for blood donations when many of the victims would not have been able to give?

I’ve been thinking of what it would like look to create a new Names Project, one that outlines the perpetual loss of GLBTQ people, captures the anguish of life for queer people of color, and that resists the duplicity of political gradualism. I’ll not pretend to know if such a project would adopt the squishy sentimentalism of the AIDS Memorial Quilt or the global digital footprint of the “It Gets Better Project.” But the violence that befalls scores of GLBTQ people promises that the map would be voluminous, unnerving, and culturally asymmetrical. It would travel peripatetically and promiscuously, engaging the risky political maneuvering of issues such as gun violence, inequality, misogyny, and heterosexism. Such a project might include the many people murdered in front of their partners, such as Rebecca Wight and Fred Mangione; lovers killed alongside one another, such as Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill, Gary Matson and Winfield Mowder, Julio Anderson Luciano and Isaac Ali Dani Pérez Triviño; it would capture the murder of trans people of color too numerous to name

like Fred Martinez, Nizah Morris, Emonie Spaulding, Ruby Ordeñana, Stacey Brown, Ebony Whitaker, and Nahkia Williams. It would recount the struggles of 15-year-old Lawrence King, shot in the back of the head by a classmate and Ronnie Antonio Paris, a 3-year-old boy murdered by his father for fear he might be gay. Silence is a multiplicitous form of violence, requiring reflection about the perils of queer immigrants and the dangers confronted by GLBTQ activists, the precarity of sex work and the gravity of homelessness. It would address the ubiquity of white nationalism and the persistent abuse of religion. To be sure, a focus on individuals might have little impact in an age where violence is so pervasive that we now use city names to stand in for collective grief: Newtown, San Bernardino, Aurora, Charleston, and now Orlando.

It took me fewer than 30 minutes to locate and record 202 names for such a mnemoscope: one for every bullet fired in Orlando. Such a project would no doubt be imperfect and incomplete. But it might also be one way among many to confront the convenient silences of opportunistic politicians and begin to move forward yet again.

NOTES

1. Mark Joseph Stern, "Republicans are Erasing LGBTQ People from Their Own Tragedy," *Slate*, June 12, 2016, accessed July 23, 2016, http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2016/06/12/republican_are_erasing_lgbtq_people_from_their_own_tragedy.html.
2. Adam Goldman, "FBI Has Found No Evidence that Orlando Shooter Targeted Pulse Because it was a Gay Club," *Washington Post*, July 16, 2016, accessed July 19, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/no-evidence-so-far-to-suggest-orlando-shooter-targeted-club-because-it-was-gay/2016/07/14/a7528674-4907-11e6-acbc-4d4870a079da_story.html.

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