

Learning Lessons and Looking Forward: A Statement on Proposition 8

Today we stand with our allies throughout the state and beyond with deep disappointment in the California Supreme Court's decision to uphold Proposition 8. This is the most recent instance in a long history of painful legalized violence and discrimination directed at oppressed people--in particular people of color, imprisoned people, LGBTIQ people, women, people with disabilities and HIV/AIDS, youth, and immigrants. We are saddened by this decision, and profoundly disturbed that civil rights can still be decided by popular vote.

In the months following Proposition 8's passage in November, we witnessed both inspiring resistance to state-sanctioned discrimination as well as the disheartening use of homophobia, racism, and classism on multiple sides. We at Community United Against Violence (CUAV) have documented increased incidences of anti-LGBTIQ violence, harassment, and misinformation from law enforcement, the organized religious right, and individual supporters of the proposition, as well as racist and classist scapegoating and epithets from its opponents. These responses illustrated a painful lack of trust and shared vision, as well as deep legacies of "divide and conquer" tactics, within and across our communities.

Both the decision and the ensuing backlash need to be understood within the broader climate of hostility towards LGBTIQ people, people of color, low-income people, and immigrants, particularly low-income and immigrant LGBTIQ people of color. The reality of LGBTIQ communities is that we are disproportionately poor, homeless, unemployed, without healthcare, and subject to arrest and imprisonment. Although we all deserve to have our relationships fully recognized and valued, the vision of marriage equality that has emerged in recent years is far too narrow to truly address the needs of LGBTIQ people who are most vulnerable to violence. For most of us, access to affordable housing, universal healthcare, employment with a living wage, and freedom from imprisonment and police violence are the struggles that will transform the basic conditions of our lives. Importantly, these struggles also represent powerful opportunities for us to join with poor people and people of color, both LGBTIQ and non- LGBTIQ, throughout the world.

As we prepare to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots in just over a month--that historic rebellion by queer people against the police that sparked a movement--we are reflecting on the course of our struggle, both victories and losses. At CUAV, we know firsthand that loss is a profound opportunity to grow and transform. With all of the sadness and rage caused by this ruling, we have a chance to use this loss to return to our powerful roots and build a shared vision for racial, economic, gender, and sexual justice focused on the root causes of injustice in our lives.

Despite the many gains made by our communities and movements in recent decades, we remain embroiled in much of the same violence that we were resisting back in June 1969. But at the same time we now have hosts of vibrant organizations across the country waging strategic struggles to build power and win victories alongside some of the most vulnerable queer and transgender people fighting for their lives--from Atlanta to Durham to Brooklyn to San Antonio to San Francisco. In this era of budget cuts and economic crisis, now more than ever is the time to invest in this local work and in each other, and our commitment to a movement that can hold all of us. The stakes are far too high, the wounds too deep, and our desires too beautiful to accept anything less.

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You are not alone. If you or someone you know is experiencing harassment, violence, or abuse, call our 24-Hour Safety Line at (415) 333-HELP (4357), or visit our website at www.cuav.org.