

## Fighting hate with love: Utah finally does the right thing



**BARB GUY**

So Utah has a hate crimes law. It took us 15 years and about 15 different champions to get one.

Some concessions were made, like excision of the very language that often denotes a hate crimes bill: a list of populations victimized by crimes of hate. The list - race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and gender - hit some sticking points, so a decision was made to chuck the list in favor of getting the bill passed. After all, most states already have a hate crimes law.

Here in Utah we seem to enjoy being the last ones to do the right thing. We were tardy in creating a state holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In fact we were dead last at actually naming the day for the great man. First we called it Human Rights Day; only later did it become Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

As with Dr. King's holiday, the hate crimes bill endured years of tweaking before it could become law. Maybe in the same manner, the hate crimes law will some day list the populations the bill's sponsors had in mind. But it doesn't really matter. We've got the law.

Timing is an interesting thing. My e-mail inbox sometimes has a remarkable sense of ironic juxtaposition. This past week I received three messages nearly simultaneously. First, an announcement. Second, a petition. Third, an invitation.

The announcement heralded Gov. Jon Huntsman's signing of the hate crimes law. Local groups are happy. People are grateful to the bill's sponsors, to those who were willing to compromise and to the governor. It's a time to celebrate and a time to honor the dear, late Pete Suazo along with Frank Pignanelli, David Litvack, Alicia Suazo, Patrice Arent, Jackie Biskupski, Duane Bourdeaux, Karen Hale and Scott McCoy. These legislators finally got the job done.

Second, the petition. It's about a fun-sounding event at the University of Utah called Discover U Days, a springtime party to showcase the U. The petition notes that businessman and "Brokeback Mountain" squelcher Larry Miller has been

asked to give the keynote address. This kind of kills the festivity for some people.

The petition says the invitation is a direct violation of the university's mission statement which promises that everyone is welcome to fully participate in campus life. Many people affiliated with the U. think there are better choices for a speaker at an event designed to build campus pride and community goodwill.

I never have understood why some folks are so disturbed by gay and lesbian people. Or Jewish people, or any of the other groups on the list that got chucked out of Utah's hate crimes bill.

On a Web site called hatecrime.org there's a chart that compares today's anti-gay speech to Nazi anti-Jewish speech. It's an interesting exercise. I worry a little about perpetuating the arguments by even listing the categories here, but I think the comparison is an apt one. It demonstrates that discrimination is discrimination and that language can be manipulated to encourage hatred of any group.

Here is a partial list of the arguments: [Jewish people/gay and lesbian people] control everything, are richer and more educated, are diseased, are criminal, are abnormal, are

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perverted, are pathological, threaten children, threaten Christians, are sneaky and are part of a larger tide that's after "us."

That's crazy talk. No matter whom you're talking about.

The third item in my inbox, the invitation, is for another U. of U. event, the annual Days of Remembrance Holocaust commemoration. The Holocaust, now there's a hate crime. As part of the observance, U. students, faculty and staff, as well as members of the community, are invited to wear six-pointed stars made of yellow cloth to show that Jews and non-Jews are united in solidarity.

I'm always touched by this kind of demonstration. Instead of fighting hate with hate, a groundswell of love.

Like the people who crafted the hate crimes bill, officials at the U. may decide that something needs to be chucked in order to make Discover U Days the U-affirming event they intended it to be. I don't know how you uninvite a keynote speaker, but the petition is asking them to try.

If Larry Miller does speak, maybe the best thing is to welcome him into an atmosphere of love. Maybe on the day Miller visits, folks on campus will wear pink triangles as a loving gesture to honor the struggles of gay and lesbian people.

*We will not degrade ourselves with hatred.* Dr. King said that. He said everything well.

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*Barb Guy is a regular contributor to these pages.* © Salt Lake Tribune.