



by Jere Keys
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I've been reading a book that every single member of the progressive political movement should be reading. *Don't Think of an Elephant* by George Lakoff. I wouldn't usually

use this space to promote a commercial product like a book, but really—go get this one. It's a fairly easy read, isn't very long, but contains the best and most practical political advice I've seen in a long time.

The focus of the book is on understanding how language and philosophical frames affect the way people vote. Lakoff provides an astute analysis of conservative ideology stemming from the model of a strict father family.

That's where Lakoff and I part ways a little bit. I don't think his analysis of conservative philosophy being rooted in a strict father model of government is wrong, I just perceive it differently. Where Lakoff sees conservative ideology coming from the notion that a father must punish his children to make them learn discipline and self-reliance, I see schoolyard bullying.

I vividly remember an experience in elementary school when our class bully had me pinned down in the snow in the playground outside my South Ogden grade school. He'd managed to get control of one of my arms, and he forced me to hit myself over and over again as he repeated, "Stop hitting yourself, faggot."

Everyone in my class had to follow his rules when we played at recess. Not because he was smarter, or better at the games, or even more popular. We played by his rules because he was bigger. It's not so different with conservative politicians.

Take, for example, the court system. It used to be that the courts were like recess monitors. They kept their eye out for trouble on the playground and kept things safe. Oh, sure, they let us fight our own battles in minor disputes, but when things got out of hand, they would step in and protect the little guys from being hurt or excluded. The role of the judicial branch is and always has been to protect the rights of the minority from the tyranny of the majority. Some matters—such as our founding principals of being created equal, the right to pursue happiness, and the liberty to make free choices—are too important to be left up to the majority vote of the people.

But like a schoolyard bully, the radical right is now claiming that the playground monitors are picking on them. When the courts step in to prevent the big guys from pushing the little guys around, the big guys feel that the natural "might makes right" order has been fundamentally upset. So we get a ludicrous concept like "activist judges" being promoted.

Another argument I've heard from the right wing is that the queer community has brought this anti-gay legislation on itself for pushing "an agenda." Talk about blaming the victim! (Whack! "Stop hitting yourself, faggot.") This schoolyard bully rationale (they brought it on themselves) is unworthy of serious consideration in a country founded on the ideals of liberty and justice for all.

I dream of an America where not just the victims of radical-right bullying stand up to the bully, but where everyone who *could* be picked on, everyone who finds this behavior distasteful, and everyone who believes in cooperation, fairness and equality will stand together against the bully.

Might doesn't make right. No one deserves to be attacked by someone more powerful. And no one should accept the bully tactics of the radical conservative agenda as part of the American ideal.

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Freedom from Discrimination

It took New York 31 years to pass a law protecting queer people from discrimination. 31 years of constantly putting legislation forward, cutting deals, getting promises, and begging the state legislature to act. 31 years.

The bill (commonly known as SONDA—Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act) finally took effect in 2003, making New York the 13th state to pass a law to protect gay and lesbian people from discrimination in areas such as employment, education, credit, housing, and access to public accommodations.

As of today, six states ban some form of discrimination based on both sexual orientation and gender identity. An additional 10 state have protections for sexual orientation alone. Utah is not one of them.

Congress has failed to pass a nationwide Employment Non-Discrimination Act every year since 1994, with little hope for the immediate future. Even should the federal ENDA pass, it doesn't address issues such as discrimination in housing, education, and access to public facilities.

The point we're trying to make is simple. If it took New York 31 years to pass state laws banning discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, how long is it going to take Utah? And shouldn't we be getting started on this?

We're encouraged that BYU-Hawaii worked together with queer rights advocates to help come up with housing nondiscrimination law and transgender workplace protections in the rainbow state. We think this bodes well for the beehive state. Surely, we can come up with a nondiscrimination law that will not scare the Mormons.

But we have to start trying. If we don't make our voices heard and our desires known, then we might as well give up hope that things will ever change.

Salt Lake Metro encourages our political leaders—Scott McCoy, Jackie Biskupski, Gregory Bell, David Litvak, and others—to introduce non-discrimination laws in the next legislative session.

Salt Lake Metro additionally encourages our political action groups—such as the Stonewall Democrats, Equality Utah, Human Rights Campaign, and Log Cabin Republicans—to make non-discrimination a priority.

Salt Lake Metro also encourages our social and support organizations to start spreading the word that we need to rally together on this issue. From The Center to the Royal Court, we need to start talking about how discrimination affects our lives beyond "the marriage issue" and we need to collect the stories of people who have been persecuted by discrimination. We need to let Utah know that not having these protections in law is hurting real people, hurting all of us.

America is a country that believes all people are entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Discrimination challenges all of those at a very basic level. Housing discrimination threatens the health and safety of our lives. Unequal access to public accommodations takes away our freedom to participate in a free society. Discrimination in employment, credit and education are very real and fundamental stumbling blocks in the pursuit of happiness.

It's time all fair-minded people demand that discrimination be stopped wherever and however it appears.

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