



# The Queer Foundation Scholar

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## Publication Awards: Epistle and Essay

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### Right Now

By **Anthony Gómez**  
Pomona College

Hey,

This time last year I was sitting at our dining room table in our small apartment. According to everyone on the outside, I was at an all time high. I was accepted into an amazing college, had an incredible internship, and was going to end my high school career with a flawless GPA. I had the perfect boyfriend, the best of friends, and had it all figured out. I should have been happy... but I wasn't. This time last year, while sitting at that table, I was fuming. Tears were flooding my face. My gut was a boiling inferno. My mind was a whirlwind of confusion. *Am I not good enough?* I thought. *I do all these amazing things, but she is still ashamed of me.* I tried so hard to make you proud. Yet no matter how hard I tried, you weren't pleased because of one thing: I am gay. I was incensed by your inability to look past my sexuality. I could not believe that you, the one person who was supposed to be there, no longer was. This time last year, I was tired of trying. This time last year, I was over the pain. This time last year, I was one tear shy of hating you.

You want to know what is so great about all of that? It is all in the past. *Now* I am sitting on

my bed and although we are miles apart, I feel your love and support as if you were sitting here next to me. I no longer cry tears of frustration and pain. Mom, I am happy again. You opened yourself up to me. You joined support groups and began to explore the world through my eyes. Now you go to meetings to support homeless LGBTQ youth and take part in the fight to gain marriage rights. Now you openly accept who I am and are proud of me.

I know that I am incredibly fortunate. Too often, sexuality transcends everything else about a person and their parents cannot overcome it. I know it is difficult to do so. It is a process that requires immense patience, internalization, and understanding. Yet you took the time and effort to do so anyway. You opened yourself up to complete strangers for help, completely trusting them to guide you and me back to the relationship we once had. For that, I could never doubt your love for me.

This change happened just in time. When school suddenly became arduous, you were there to push me onward. When that so-called "perfect" boyfriend became not so perfect, you were there to wipe my tears and mend my broken heart. Throughout the growing pains that came with college life, you were there to keep me on my feet and ensure I had a beaming smile on my face.

However, I have one last favor to ask of you. Please tell the world of our story. Scream it

at the top of your lungs from the highest peak. Let the world know that it is possible to conquer the adversity we endured just last year. Let them know that no matter what kind of queer their child is, that they are still their child. Let the world know so that I am not the only one to feel the joy that I feel right now.

Love Always,

Anthony

## About the Authors

**Anthony Gómez** is a sophomore at Pomona College, majoring in psychology and minoring in Spanish. He currently conducts research at Patton State Hospital on the criterion validity of psychological assessments. This summer he will be at Caltech on a research fellowship, conducting research in neuropsychology. Anthony holds a job on campus at the Queer Resources Center, partakes in Advocates for the Survivors of Sexual Assault and in the Pomona Student Union. He also dance the Claremont Colleges' hip-hop dance team, the Reverb. Anthony hopes to pursue his doctorate in clinical neuropsychology, eventually delving into a career in research and clinical work.

**Javon Smith** is a junior at DePaul University, pursuing a degree in English/secondary education. The recipient of a State of Illinois Golden Apple Scholarship, he is committed to teaching in a poor school district for at least five years. Javon is well known to readers of *The Queer Foundation Reader*, several of his poems having appeared in two previous issues

## To Sin as a Sinner, to Pray as a Prayer

By **Javon Smith**  
DePaul University

The DePaul Praise Team leader expelled me from the group on account of my sexuality. He suggested that I have not spiritually matured, although he never bothered to ask me a single question, or remember my name. They just kicked me off; without warning, and without executive notice. I had a hard time believing in God after that. For a long time, I just wanted to scream, “I am abstinent!” Why bother? They could not hear me over the incredible decibels of their primary biblical teaching limiting themselves to what they have been told.

Through constant faithfulness to my God and my beliefs, I have internalized the “Gay vs. God” syndrome, an intrapersonal conflict between religious and sexual identities. Developing the syndrome caused me to scrutinize normative biblical interpretation to prove whether it is easier for Christian Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals to continue in atheism or celibacy. First, I decided to dissect the American Christian view. Then, I introduced myself to the topic of atheism. Finally, I found that many normative American Christian views are antithetical to Jesus’s teachings. In America, “Rather than read the testimonies of faithful LGBT people, the findings of reputable scientists, or the histories of LGBT people around the world, many people are content or rest undisturbed in their ignorance” (45).

In the land of dichotomies, I have always felt the need to choose. Jay Michealson articulates my innermost feeling by stating “...In heated agreement that it is either ‘gay rights’ or traditional religion, the Constitution or the Bible. Pro-gay folks can’t see how anyone could be opposed to equality, while opponents can’t see how anyone could change thousands of years of tradition... Worse, the conflict is an eternal one as well—inside each of us who has ever wrestled with sexuality and religion” (xiii). H i s b o o k , God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality

analyzes the American Christian view in that there are not many ideas of why gay people are supposedly wrong for being who we are after the procreative argument.

Author Gordon Lynch stated his once firm approach to homosexuals, saying "...I believed that while God deeply loved gay men and lesbians, He also condemned gay sexual acts and so a life of celibacy was the only valid Christian option for them." (18) Lynch, the author of Losing my Religion? Moving on from Evangelical Faith now refers to his former ideal as very, "John Scott-like." Many people do believe that gay people are natural in our sexuality, but we should not "practice homosexual acts" as they are forbidden by God.

The difference between me and millions of Americans is that I know that I am not God. I mean, I am aware that, as adults, all citizens are equally capable of making rational decisions. In short, I cannot tell people what to do or how to live their lives. One man spoke on his intrapersonal battle with one other sin: lying. He states "I was certain that religion and homosexuality were incompatible, because I had been taught that way...So I lied... Somehow, I believed that all this lying was in the service of God." (41) He was married, but found it more socially acceptable to hide closeted and lie than to be free and love.

Other views many American Christians hold may accord with Horace L. Griffin's words claiming, "Although the church as a whole is firmly against the prosperity of gay men, some people find certain beliefs applicable in their personal conceptualization on homosexuality. A common ideal is for the Christian to 'love the sinner, hate the sin.'" "Many find this perspective illogical...With sexuality being an inextricable part of one's being, the popular saying has as much success in reality as loving brown-eyed people while hating brown eyes" (Griffin 63). This is unsound and unstable social positioning for it leaves in no one's favor. Neither the gays nor the Christians accept this appeal for social integrity. Even worse, when the sinner is the self the love is hard to find.

Normally, American Christians depend on two scriptures to support their opinion.

Leviticus 18:22 states, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind". Homosexuals would be lynched for committing a sin and a crime, currently and historically. One author states, "As a consequence of this Christian teaching, all of the New World colonies established sex laws condemning homosexuality as a crime punishable by death" (Griffin 35). John Winthrop, the first governor of the New England colonies, strongly advocated the death of anyone who engaged in sex with the same sex and contributed to the "monster" image that would eventually become associated with homosexuals in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Griffin 35).

In America, we love to rely on one person to dictate what we do or say. If preachers preach it, it must be valid. For instance, even churchgoers who cannot find Genesis 19:1-29 in the Bible are vaguely familiar with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and have typically concluded, with little or no investigation, that the story is about God's destruction of two cities because of the wickedness of homosexuality. But real lesson of the story is that God abhors sexual violence, not homosexuality (Griffin 25). They do not understand that the story was recorded with explicit disdain toward rape or sexual violence, not homosexuality (Cobb 88).

Reading the Bible from a scholastic perspective opens doors to knowledge. "Finally, Jesus' silence on homosexuality in all four Gospels ought to make African American Christians think twice before they assume homosexuality is the great sin that the majority of black and white churches declare it to be" (Griffin 66).

Two authors tackle the first two chapters of Genesis. Dr. Horace L. Griffin and Jay Michealson both do not understand why the Adam and Steve statement is so overused as it proved nothing more than the fact that Americans are apt to memorize a cliché than learn facts. "Genesis 1 and 2 beautifully image the "one fleshness" of marriage as the reunion of an original binary sexual whole" (Gagnon 89). There has been a constant evolution of marriage and its relationship with the law. "Laws prohibiting slaves, interracial couples, and most

recently, lesbian and gay couples from marrying are all examples of a peculiar moral reasoning expressed at various periods that such arrangements violate God's intentions for the races of humankind" (Griffin 15).

Gays are leaving the church. And it seems no one has a problem with this but me. I want us to not turn from God, but rather turn from the ignorance of people. Nevertheless, members of the LGBTQIAAP community are finding alternative routes of faith or atheism. Madalyn Murray O'Hair, infamous for being single handedly responsible for removing prayer and Bible recitation from public schools in 1963, states "I do not believe there is a god, or any gods, personal or in nature, or manifesting himself, herself, or itself in any way. I do not believe there is such a thing as heaven, or hell, or perdition, or purgatory, or any other stages in between" (38). People turn to nature because the supernatural is scarring.

In my research, I have found one quiet conundrum; Murray states "An atheist loves his fellow man instead of a god." (39). If God is love, how does an atheist love without having a divine connection? One of many questions, because, in its simplest state, I feel that atheists have been affected by believers or belief systems, be they religious or not, in an unfulfilling way similar to the way gender and sexuality non-conforming peoples are.

So, I pose the question: Is Atheism easier when an individual identifies as a homosexual? The answer, from my perspective is 'yes.' This is only due to the amount of ridicule, disrespect, and ultimate invisibility in the church and with fellow Christians. In reaction to my constant bouts against normative Christian assumption, I dabbled in Atheism. I found that just as much as atheists do not believe in God, they do believe in people. Murray states "An atheist believes that a deed should be done instead of a prayer said. An atheist strives for involvement in life and not escape into death. He wants disease conquered, poverty banished, war eliminated" (40).

As far as the Bible is concerned, author Jay Michealson states, "In a purely academic context, all readings are equal and may be judged solely on their merits. But our reading of

scripture takes place in a context in which children are killing themselves because of the myth of 'God versus Gay'" (58). The perpetuation of the God or Gay dichotomy has caused the fact that, as Lynch states, "... According to current statistics, fewer than half of LGBT people are living open today" (7).

I want to end on author Jay Michealson speaking about a friend named Gareth. He states, "One part of Jesus' teaching that I take particularly seriously is his idea that you will know about the nature of a person's character by the fruits of their lives. The 'fruit' of Gareth's life suggests to me that the path he is pursuing is a spiritually and morally healthy one. Yet, this evidence would be rejected by some people in the Church purely on the basis of his sexual orientation" (19). The deficiency of American Christians actually focusing on Christ's teachings causes the 'Gay vs. God' phenomena. Desmond. That is the name of the Praise Team leader that kicked me off the ministry team in college. Chris. Jeffrey. Those are the names of the people that have kicked me off of ministries before, but I continue to thrive and stay strong, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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## From the Executive Director

Nine years ago the idea behind the Queer Foundation took hold—the idea that young queer writers can have an effect on their schools and their communities by

- \* being out, proud, and activist,
- \* having a social conscience,
- \* being willing to fight discrimination against queers,
- \* being committed to social change,
- \* believing in organization, and
- \* being of good will.

Since its start-up year, The QF, as it has come to be known, has held eight English essay contests for high school seniors, touching the lives of countless individuals throughout the United States and abroad. The group of those affected includes the high school seniors themselves, who prepared thoughtful essays and courageously submitted them in the stiff competition for Queer Foundation Scholarships, and additionally

- \* teachers, friends, and family members who supported them in their effort;
- \* readers who found their openness challenging to ingrained ways of thinking and behaving;
- \* fellow LGBTQA students who found their own experiences reflected in and hopes validated by the essays of The QF Writers; and
- \* former contest participants, some of whom are contributors to this quarterly newsletter, whose further creative endeavors incorporate the ideals of The QF.

The QF's Effective Writing and Scholarships Program, the primary focus of which is the essay contest, promotes writing that is effective in the sense of able to change (or at least challenge) readers' opinions, attitudes, or behavior. Additional program ideals are originality, accuracy, and objectivity.

I invite you to judge for yourself the essays of The QF Writers that you will find at [www.queerfoundation.org](http://www.queerfoundation.org) and also their pieces that appear regularly in the pages of this quarterly newsletter. Please let me know your opinion as to (1) how they measure up to the ideals of the Queer Foundation's Effective Writing and Scholarships Program and (2) the value of the program in general. I look forward to hearing from you.

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# From the editor's desk . . . .

## Willa Cather's *Paul's Case*.

If you are going to be in the Washington D.C. area between April 20<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, you might consider attending the world premiere of *Paul's Case*, a one-act opera based on Willa Cather's short story *Paul's Case. A Study in Temperament*. For information on dates, tickets, etc., see:

<http://www.urbanarias.org/performances/pauls-case/>

*Paul's Case* is the story of an alienated, overly sensitive (read "gay") teenager in Pittsburgh who feels comfortable only when he works as an usher at the opera. Unlike at home or school, people there seem to appreciate him and he can escape into the magical world he sees on stage. Carefully planning a real escape, he steals money, takes the train to NYC, and for a few days lives in luxury at the Waldorf Astoria. When the money runs out he contemplates returning home, but instead chooses to take his own life. You can read the story here:

<http://cather.unl.edu/ss006.html> .

## More on breeding wars.



● Paris. Nov. 2012. Conservatives protest against the government's plan to legalize marriage and adoption equality. "France needs children, not homosexuals" (trans. of the above banner) is about as explicit as can be. France, of

course, doesn't really need more children since the population continues to increase thanks to continuing immigration and a higher birthrate among immigrants—and that's the rub.

Ever since Napoleon used several hundred thousand young men as just so much cannon fodder, the French have feared that they would disappear as a people and a culture. That fear only intensified after WW I and WW II. As elsewhere in Western Europe and the U.S., it's the white birthrate that has dropped below the replacement level. The result: right-wing politicians like Jean-Marie Le Pen and his daughter Jeanne have long used that fact to paint a portrait of the death of civilization. This time, with Prime Minister Hollande promising to make marriage and adoption equality a reality, former Pope Benedict XVI and the French bishops joined the "End of French Civilization" chorus.

Xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, and anti-feminism (and in the case of Le Pen, anti-Semitism as well) all get wrapped up into one goal: to produce more "white" Christian babies. Bogus 19<sup>th</sup> c. European concepts of race and culture are still alive and well in Europe as they are here. Luckily, the extreme right continues to see its percentage of the votes decrease. As a result, the lower house of Parliament recently approved PM Hollande's marriage and adoption equality bill by an overwhelming majority, and the Senate will likely follow suit in April. That spurred the opposition to stage an even larger protest in Paris on March 24, 2013, busing many in from the traditionally more conservative rural parts of France.

● Several recent polls suggest a hardening of anti-gay attitudes in Russia. Roughly 5% of Russians apparently want homosexuals to be executed. More than a third want homosexuals to be forced to live apart from society, perhaps once again in Siberian gulags. A voter-approved initiative measure in St. Petersburg (it must be voted upon two more times before it actually becomes law) and now being considered by the Duma will, if enacted, force LGBTQIA people back into the closet. Any

public display of homosexuality (read, any sexuality other than the male-female “norm”) in public that can be viewed by minors would be subject to fines of up to roughly \$16,200.00. The law would clearly eliminate activities from Pride parades to holding hands in public.

Once again, we’re dealing with a breeding war, this one against time. Russia’s population is decreasing. The birthrate is below the replacement level, and life-expectancy has also been decreasing since the end of the Soviet Union. Having been invaded twice from the West and much earlier in its history overrun by Eastern invaders, Russia is in no mood to encourage immigration to offset the decreasing population. By some estimates, the current population of roughly 140 million will decrease by as much as 50% in 35 years. How will the nation defend itself against China, its centuries-old nemesis, or even nations on its southern flank which have burgeoning populations? Reduce the population by half, and invasion won’t have to involve war. Ghost towns and villages will become common throughout most of the nation’s southern and eastern flanks. PM Put in’s recent decision to prohibit Americans from adopting Russian children was tied to that fear.

There are other reasons why Russia’s population is decreasing, not the least of which are political and economic systems that are so corrupt that very little (if any) of the nation’s immense wealth filters down to the middleclass, let alone the poor. Family planning, of course, had long been encouraged by the Soviet regime, but now many heterosexual, middleclass couples are deciding not to have children because they simply can’t afford to.

As happened in the Soviet Union in 1934, it’s easier to blame homosexuals for the decreasing population and not the ineptitude and greed of the ruling class.

- On a positive note, a few nations with increasing populations appear to be increasingly tolerant of their sexual minorities. We’re seeing an increase in Pride parades, Pink Shirt gatherings, and queer flash mobs in much of Southeast Asia. I would not have imagined a gay film festival in Mumbai a decade ago, but the gay

community’s film festival in 2012 attracted participants from all over India. And even if the event in this short video was staged, it speaks volumes about the increased level of support among young Vietnamese:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkVVRyMWtQc> .

## LGBTQIA or LGBTQQIAA?

I found this article in the *NY Times* informative:

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/fashion/generation-lgbtqia.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=4&smid=fb-nytimes&\\_&\\_](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/10/fashion/generation-lgbtqia.html?pagewanted=1&_r=4&smid=fb-nytimes&_&_)

## American Evangelicals in Uganda

- *God Loves Uganda* (2013) is a powerful documentary directed by Roger Ross Williams. Williams, Black and gay, traveled to Uganda to investigate what certain evangelical Americans were doing to bring their religious beliefs to Africa. What he found was not Africa, but evangelical America or, at least that part of evangelical America that is extremely homophobic, that has turned the central African nation into a nation of “Christians” quick to spout hatred toward homosexuals. As Williams noted in an interview at the Sundance Film Festival this past January, “I went to Africa to find Africa, but what I found was America.” Well, perhaps not America, but the most hateful part of America. Only pressure from

the U.S. and Europe, which provide Uganda with a fair amount of foreign aid, may keep the regime from enacting its “kill the gays” bill. For trailers for *God Loves Uganda*, see:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cy\\_HRqCo4pay](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cy_HRqCo4pay)

Scott Lively, who recently took credit for convincing legislatures in Russia and Lithuania to consider anti-gay legislation, denies he had anything to do with spreading his hatred to Uganda. Of course, Ugandan gay activists are suing him in U.S. federal court for endangering their lives.

## Smiling on Fred Phelps, Sr.

What more can we ask for? The house pictured in the column on the right is now a Peace center supporting the LGBTQIA community in Topeka. It is across the street from the Westboro Baptist Church compound, so Phelps and his followers (mostly family members) will see the colors of the Rainbow flag every day.



If you want to know more about Fred Phelps, Sr., start with the comments of Mark Phelps, who left home in 1973 (the day he turned 18) and never went back. Mark (no relation to the Olympian swimmer) wrote this piece over 20 years ago:

<http://www.rickcross.com/reference/westboro/westboro8.html>

He also gave several interviews, such as this one:

<http://www.rickcross.com/reference/westboro/westboro3.html>

## The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

- **Jack Andraka** is a very remarkable young scientist, who just happens to be openly gay. [http://thenewcivilrights\\_movement.com/standing-on-the-right-side-of-history-16-year-old-jack-andraka-is-the-edison-of-our-times/news/2013/03/23/61683](http://thenewcivilrights_movement.com/standing-on-the-right-side-of-history-16-year-old-jack-andraka-is-the-edison-of-our-times/news/2013/03/23/61683)

- Most of us are familiar with **Zach Wahls**, the now 19 year old who last year testified before the Iowa legislature against legislating an anti-gay bill; while praising his lesbian moms. Wahls, an Eagle Scout, has since been dedicated to getting the Boy Scouts to change their gay exclusion policy and, apparently, Scouts for Equality, which he founded, has collected more than 90,000 signatures from scouts and their parents. Wahls isn't the only heterosexual lad whose testimony on behalf of the LGBTQIA community has gone viral. **Matthew Lannon**, age 12, testified before a Senate Committee in Rhode Island, making a passionate plea for the Senate to allow his two moms and his two dads, and other gays and lesbians in the state, to marry.

- When **Jacob Rudolph** came out as gay at a high school awards ceremony, he received a standing

ovation, and the video of his coming out comments quickly went viral.

Rudolph, who defines himself as bisexual, was testifying in favor of a bill that would prohibit reparative therapy for minors in New Jersey. Governor Christie subsequently stated that he wasn't certain that reparative therapy was harmful, but several days later he backpedaled somewhat. Was he put in a bind by an 18 year old?

- I'm guessing that Portland, OR, is not the only city in the U.S. to offer its transgender employees health insurance coverage for transitioning. But Portland's Grant High School may be the first public high school in the nation to reassign six single-stall restrooms as unisex.

But then, an Arizona legislator introduced a bill that would fine people if they use a public restroom other than that designated by the gender on their birth certificate. Seems the man may be facing a recall effort.

- A West Virginia newspaper recently published a voice mail screed that was so offensive I won't reprint even part of it, save to say that the male caller demanded that homosexuals, Italians, Puerto Ricans, Jews, and Catholics all be executed, and at least one other person in town who agreed with him subsequently allowed himself to be quoted in the same newspaper.

More disappointing to me were the milk toast replies of those who wrote the newspaper disagreeing. It suggests how difficult it is to stand up to the haters when they are or are perceived to be the majority.

Of course, what can we expect when we have people in Congress and in state legislatures with similar ideas?

## For our QF Scholars

Remember June 15, 2013, is the deadline for my receipt of submissions for this year's Publication Awards. We will again have four \$500.00 awards. If you did not receive submission requirements (via email) or you want another copy, contact me or Dr. Dial.

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