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Targeting the Schools—Gay Activists and the Day of Silence

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Started in 1996, the Day of Silence originated at the University of Virginia, where 150 students participated in the first observance. As the GLSEN Web site explains, The Day of Silence has become the largest single student-led action towards creating safer schools for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.”

GLSEN claims that nearly 100 colleges and universities participated in the second Day of Silence, held in 1997. This year, organizers claim over 4,000 colleges and high schools as participating institutions. To date, the largest Day of Silence action was held in 2002, when Gray Davis, then-Governor of California, issued a proclamation declaring April 10, 2002 to be an official Day of Silence in his state.

Organizers of the Day of Silence see themselves as leading a protest movement, like those that emerged in the 1960s. In the “Organizing Manual” published by GLSEN, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]—made famous during the civil rights movement—is cited as a precedent and inspiration for this act of homosexual advocacy.

The theme is “direct action organizing,” and the goal is explicit. As the manual explains, “Organizing is our ability to change our communities: to identify problems and develop solutions, to bring people together, to plan strategies and campaigns, to hold elected officials and corporations accountable to the communities they serve. It is rooted in the power of people. Individuals working together as a group and/or community have the power to bring about change.”

In typical protest fashion, the Day of Silence calls for students to demonstrate their political advocacy by organizing together. In this case, the protest action takes the form of silence, as students are encouraged to hand out cards indicating that the reason for their silence is the oppression of homosexuals. The message, also printed on stickers and t-shirts, is straightforward: “Please understand my reasons for not speaking today. I am participating in the Day of Silence, a national youth movement protesting the silence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, and their allies. My deliberate silence echoes that silence, which is caused by harassment, prejudice and discrimination. I believe that ending the silence is the first step towards fighting these injustices. Think about the voices you are not hearing today. What are you going to do to end the silence?”

As the manual makes clear, “The Day of Silence Project is about more than being silent for a day.” The goal is political action and the kind of consciousness-raising by which such groups hope to change minds and influence public policy. In this case, many of the minds they target are very young.

Why the protests? Organizers claim that the climate in many schools is hostile to homosexuality. Thus, “Students might be forced to hide their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression because they fear physical or verbal harassment. They might be made invisible by school curriculum that makes no mention of LGBT people and events. Or

your school might simply be a place where students, teachers, and staff could learn more about diversity and acceptance. Regardless of what situation you find yourself in, the Day of Silence is an effort that can raise awareness on these issues, prompting people to talk and think about them.”

Participation in the Day of Silence “enables participants to show, in a highly visible way, everyone they encounter, that they support LGBT rights.” Of course, organizers are seeking to do far more than consciousness-raising. They are pushing for the explicit inclusion of lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual persons in the school curriculum, and an effective endorsement of homosexuality at every level of the school’s life.

In taking their cue from the protests movements of the 1960s, the organizers of the Day of Silence attempt to claim the mantle of the civil rights movement for their effort to normalize homosexuality. The organizing tactics and strategies suggested in the GLSEN manual represent merely an updated methodology for political protest and action. The group calls for schools to adopt anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies for homosexuals and to address “the exclusion of LGBT people and history from the curriculum.” It doesn’t stop there.

Day of Silence organizers suggest that the energy of the protest can be channeled into other events, including a “Night of Noise,” that would bring together performance artists, musicians, poets, and others ready to push the agenda.

In terms of the Day of Silence itself, the GLSEN Web site offers tactics to use in convincing principals and other school administrators to support or allow the protest. If necessary, students are urged “to plan a campaign to influence the decision-maker.” These tactics appear to be working, as more and more schools participate in the protest. This year, organizers claim participation from all 50 states and Puerto Rico, embracing at least 450,000 students.

The rapid expansion of the Day of Silence program is one indication of the speed with which the homosexual rights movement has advanced across the political landscape. In just one decade, the Day of Silence has spread from one university to over 4,000 institutions. This represents a vast wave of social change, bringing a moral revolution in its wake.

GLSEN, the organization sponsoring the event, became a national organization only in 1994. The group first launched a “Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual History Month” and began pressing for the inclusion of homosexual concerns in school curricula. It then expanded its scope to include direct action movements in schools, programs to “educate” teachers about gay concerns, and public awareness campaigns to shape public opinion.

GLSEN has been highly successful, and many schools and school systems allow the group to review curricula and even train teachers. GLSEN knows that those who control the agenda and curricula of the schools will shape the worldview of the coming generation.

Make no mistake. GLSEN is targeting our children with its Day of Silence program. Are those who oppose this agenda willing to speak out?

