

After Orlando shooting, focus on ISIS and terrorism distracts from real issues, UB queer history expert says

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In the aftermath of the shooting rampage in a gay nightclub in Orlando, the dialogue has focused around terrorism, ISIS and radicalization. But that is a deliberate misdirection, says Jonathan Katz, University at Buffalo associate professor of visual studies, who was one of the first full-time American academic to be tenured in gay and lesbian studies.

"This was an American killing Americans because they were queer and that has not been forcefully articulated," says Katz, who founded the Harvey Milk Institute, the world's largest queer studies institute. "What we are trying to do here is camouflage the root of the problem, which is a long history of violent political rhetoric and homophobic policies by Republican officials and their conservative allies.

"The ISIS thing is a distraction and it allows this tragedy to be reconfigured into a political argument against terror, instead of looking at the long legacy of anti-gay violence in this country that has itself been stoked and promoted by the Christian right. The cause of our current violence is more likely to be found in this country than the Middle East."

Katz highlighted the fact that this was hardly the first act of mass homophobic murder in America. What happened in Orlando was simply part of the pattern.

"We are still a profoundly divided nation, and there is a large cohort in

this country that does not see the death of gay people as a national tragedy," Katz says. "The discussion of ISIS is a deliberate misdirection and an attempt by the Right to make the unpalatable defense of gay people more to their liking by rewriting it in patriotic terms."

The conversation should shift away from terrorism and ISIS, and toward this country's long history of anti-gay violence, as well as the need for gun control, he says.

"We need to look at why we are allowing American citizens to legally purchase assault weapons. Trans-people are killed in this country on a regular basis just because of their mere existence," Katz says. "What happened in Orlando is part of the pattern of anti-[gay violence](#) in the U.S. We cannot allow this tragedy to be used by our enemies in ways that obscure its cause. We have a homophobia problem in this country, and that should be the focus."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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