

California shop owner murdered over LGBTQ pride flag by fascist gunman

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On August 18, 27-year-old Christian-fascist Travis Ikeguchi, of Cedar Glen, California, murdered Laura Ann Carleton, a 66-year-old mother of nine and a small business owner, for flying a rainbow pride flag in support of LGBTQ rights outside her clothing store, Mag. Pi. According to the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department, after murdering Carleton, Ikeguchi fled on foot and shot at deputies' vehicles before they returned fire. He was pronounced dead at the scene by medical staff when they arrived.

Shannon Dicus, the Sheriff-Coroner for San Bernardino County, said that prior to the shooting "the suspect made several disparaging remarks about a rainbow flag that stood outside the store." Ikeguchi also shouted a number of derogatory homophobic slurs at Carleton, who was straight, before killing her.

Laura "Lauri" Carleton is survived by her nine children as well as her husband. Her daughter, Ari Carleton, posted on Instagram that her mother's slaying was a hate crime and that it was not the first time one of her mother's rainbow flags had been torn down. Ari said her mother "always responded by putting up a bigger one. Our family is broken. We have a long road ahead of us as we navigate this new reality without our loving matriarch."

There has been an outpouring of grief from friends, neighbors, celebrities and broader sections of the population. On Instagram, film director Paul Feig posted a picture of him with his deceased friend writing, "Anyone using hateful language against the LGBTQ+ community has to realize their words matter, that their words can inspire violence against innocent loving people. Let's all keep moving forward with tolerance and love. Let's not let Lauri's tragic death be in vain."

Citing public records, the *Independent* reported that Ikeguchi is the son of David Jay Ikeguchi, 63, a "35-year veteran state trooper with the Florida Highway Patrol based in Orlando." Following his parents' divorce in 2018, Ikeguchi frequently wrote violent and disparaging posts on social media targeting police.

The murder of Carleton is just the latest manifestation of right-

wing violence incited, cultivated and inspired by ex-president Donald Trump and the Republican Party. Seeking to divide the working class and lay the groundwork for further attacks on democratic rights, Republicans have made anti-LGBTQ demagoguery and laws restricting gender affirming care, drag shows and sex ed a central tenet of their far-right agenda.

A tracker maintained by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has recorded 494 "anti-LGBTQ bills" proposed in the 2023 legislative session across all 50 states, virtually all sponsored by Republicans. Of these bills, some of which ban gender-affirming care, 78 have already become law, while 197 are classified by the ACLU as "advancing."

In his campaign speeches and on his Truth Social media account, Trump frequently rails against transgender people and promises that he alone will defend American children from "sick Marxists" and their "gender ideology." The ex-president was one of only 19 people that Ikeguchi followed on his Twitter/X account. Reflecting the influence of the fascist rhetoric espoused by right-wing elements, Ikeguchi's social media accounts on Twitter/X and Gab are dominated with Christian fanaticism, anti-abortion zealotry, antisemitism, racism, anti-LGBTQ and anti-vaccine conspiracies.

On June 18, Ikeguchi retweeted a viral video of vaccinologist Dr. Peter Hotez getting stalked at his home by two fascists who were encouraged by podcaster Joe Rogan and Democratic presidential candidate, antisemite, and anti-vaccine advocate, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. The next day, Ikeguchi retweeted a post praising fascist Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni for her defense of the "traditional family."

In addition to RFK Jr., Ikeguchi frequently retweeted Republican operative and convicted felon Dinesh D'Souza, as well as Tom Hoefling, the founder and leader of a small far-right anti-abortion nationalist organization called America's Party. Ikeguchi made hundreds of posts in June on his Twitter/X social media account, but stopped completely on June 28.

While Ikeguchi expressed many of the same fascistic beliefs of Trump and the Republican Party as a whole, he frequently

attacked Trump from the right for his tepid support of LGBTQ people in the 2016 election and over the January 6 coup, which Hoefling, Ikeguchi and America's Party view as a violation of the US constitution.

Following the shooting, Sarah Kate Ellis, the chief executive and president of the LGBTQ media advocacy group, the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), released a statement that read in part, "No one should feel unsafe or be attacked for who they are or for simply supporting the LGBTQ community, Lauri's murder is the latest example of how anti-LGBTQ hatred hurts everyone, whether they are LGBTQ or not."

Carleton is one of more than 350 people that have been attacked by anti-LGBTQ elements, such as neo-Nazis and Proud Boys, in the United States this year according to a June report by GLAAD and the Anti-Defamation League.

On August 17, one day before Carleton's killing, *Court Watch News*, reported that a Las Cruces resident, Michael David Fox, was charged with "interstate threatening communications" after he left a voicemail threatening to kill Texas Democratic Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. This violent threat was one of nearly 20 targeting elected officials this year that Court Watch News claims were "never in the news."

According to the criminal complaint against Fox, in the May 18 voicemail, Fox called the African-American congresswoman "a tranny and a pedophile," and that he was "going to put a bullet in your f***ing face." Interviewed by FBI agents at the end of May, Fox claimed that he was part of the "Q Movement" and that there was a "plan" to eradicate all transgender people who he claimed were running the government.

As inequality widens and American democracy further degenerates, such threats and attacks in the US have been steadily increasing. According to the Justice Department, in 2021, (the last year for which they provide statistics,) there were 7,262 hate crime incidents involving 9,024 victims. Since reporting is done on a voluntary basis, except for federal law enforcement agencies, this figure is a vast undercount.

While the majority of hate crimes target a person's race, ethnicity or ancestry, there were 1,127 hate crimes against people because of their perceived sexual orientation in 2021, with many of these incidents specifically focused on the display of the rainbow flag. One of the deadliest mass shootings in 2022, which was perpetrated by the grandson of a coup-supporting Republican California assembly member, occurred last November at an LGBTQ-friendly nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on the "Transgender Day of Remembrance."

This past June, the Human Rights Campaign declared a

national state of emergency for the LGBTQ+ community in the US, with its president, Kelley Robinson, stating that, "LGBTQ+ Americans are living in a state of emergency. The multiplying threats facing millions in our community are not just perceived—they are real, tangible and dangerous."

The Republicans and the ruling class in general are desperate to keep the working class from uniting in a common struggle against them and the capitalist system they defend. To this end, Republican politicians attempt to blame all societal ills on minorities and immigrants in order to protect their wealthy ruling class backers, degrade the level of political discourse and deflect from the growing class struggle, both in the United States and internationally.

While Democrats posture as defenders of LGBTQ rights, they do so on an extremely narrow and limited basis, promoting identity politics in order to obscure the fundamental class division in society. In the face of increasing attacks against LGBTQ people, Democratic politicians, beginning with Joe Biden, have remained silent while their "friends across the aisle" stoke violence against LGBTQ people on a daily basis while at the same time seeking to outlaw their right to exist.

In the face of rising political violence in the US, the Republicans and Democrats have overseen a vast expansion of the US military. For over 30 years, the United States has been continuously at war. Many people, including Ikeguchi, have lived their entire lives with the US government at war. This level of official violence, coupled with declining living standards, healthcare and education, carried out over the course of an entire generation, cannot but have had a devastating impact on the consciousness of countless individuals.

While an assortment of Democratic Party politicians have spoken out about this latest heinous episode of right-wing violence, their words are betrayed by their actions. By politically promoting the Republican Party, a cesspool of cultural backwardness, anti-scientific quackery and insurrectionists whose leaders no longer recognize any election they lose as legitimate, the Democrats actively facilitate these attacks.



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