



Lambda Legal's "Courting Justice" campaign shows that the pen is mightier than the sword with cartoonist Mikaelah B. Reid.



According to a Zogby survey conducted last July, 77 percent of Americans can identify two of Disney's Seven Dwarfs, but only 24 percent can name two of the nine U.S. Supreme Court justices. Seventy-four percent were able to name Larry, Moe and Curly of the Three Stooges, while only 42 percent were able to identify a different, crucial set of three: the legislative, executive and judicial branches that make up the federal government. These results, of course, made for amusing headlines, but the message for

Lambda Legal was clear — there is a significant gap in basic knowledge about the judicial system and we need to engage people with entertaining and understandable materials to bridge that gap.

Lambda Legal launched the "Courting Justice" campaign in 2005 to educate lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, those affected by HIV and the general public about the legitimate and proper role of courts in our country to decide civil rights claims. The "Courting Justice" campaign also aims to protect fair-minded judges from political attacks and to advocate for fair and impartial courts at both the state and federal level. I came onboard as the Judicial Independence Program Associate after working in private practice and seeing first-hand how critically important fair and impartial courts were for my clients.

It's not surprising that many people are not yet engaged in the fight to protect the independence of the judicial branch. Some people have never had reason to be in court, and unless you're someone who watches these issues closely, you may not be aware of the proper role of the courts, let alone the attacks on fair courts that threaten us all.

With that in mind, Lambda Legal developed the "Life Without Fair Courts" project. The project has two parts: an alternate reality cartoon series, written and illustrated by Mikhaela B. Reid, and a contest (see "Life Without Fair Courts" Contest 2007). For the series, we picked

# LIFE WITHOUT FAIR COURTS



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## “Life Without Fair Courts” Contest 2007

### The “Courting Justice” campaign aims to protect fair-minded judges from political attacks and to advocate for fair and impartial courts at both the state and federal level.

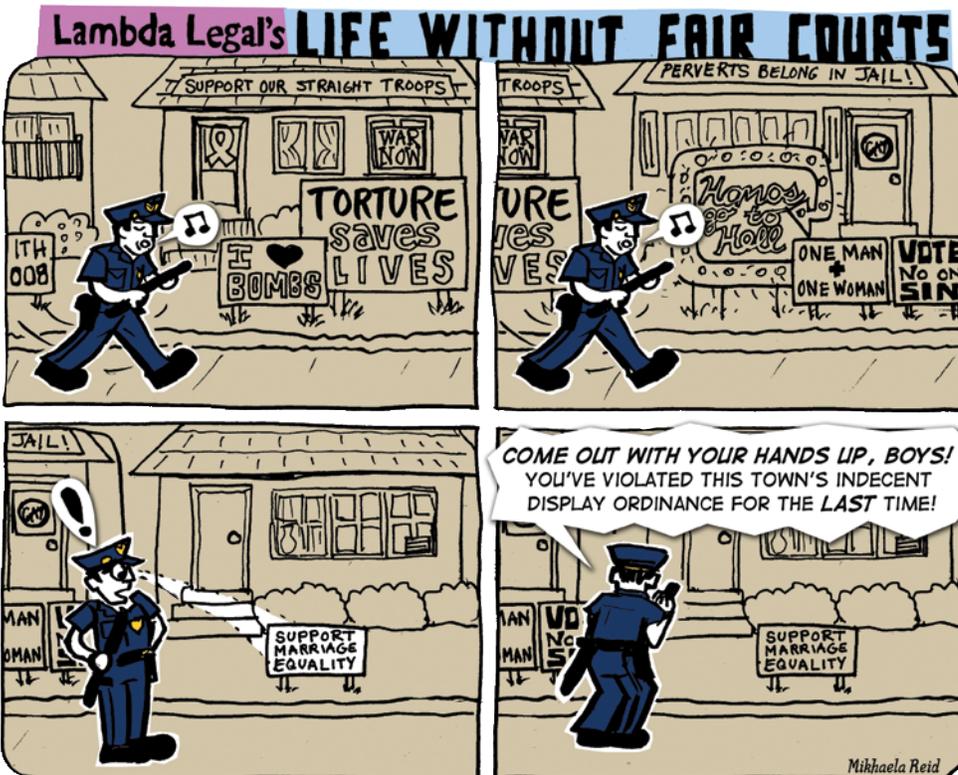
several landmark cases — some of which at the time they were decided led to heavy criticism and attacks on the judicial branch. The series illustrates how our country might look today if the court had bowed to political attacks and popular opinion and not stood firm in its duties to be accountable to the U.S. Constitution and serve as a check on the other two branches of government.

Additionally, Lambda Legal has partnered with Prism Comics, a nonprofit organization for LGBT comics and cartoonists, to host a nationwide graphic art contest — **deadline is March 15!** We are inviting people to submit personal artistic interpretations of what their own lives would look like without fair courts. A panel of editors at the *Advocate*, DC Comics and Lambda Legal’s cartoonist Mikhaela B. Reid will judge the submissions and select five finalists. The public will then

be able to vote online for the winning entry. The winning artist’s work will be profiled in the *Advocate* magazine as a part of its media sponsorship of the contest.

Almost daily, Americans are bombarded with anti-court rhetoric — often spinning off LGBT civil rights cases. Fair courts proponents have staved off these attacks before, but we are facing battles once again. Take *Brown v. Board of Education* for example, decided in 1954 in favor of desegregating state public school systems. At the time, there was public outcry against the decision, which lawmakers denounced as a “flagrant abuse of judicial power,” calling it a “clear invasion of the prerogatives of the legislative branch.” Compare that to a recent quote from a New Jersey lawmaker vilifying the state’s supreme court for its decision in *Lewis v. Harris*, Lambda Legal’s marriage equality case:

continued on page 16



Protect Your Rights Stand Up For Fair Courts [www.lambdalegal.org/courtingjustice](http://www.lambdalegal.org/courtingjustice)

Lambda Legal and Prism Comics, with media sponsor the *Advocate*, have joined forces to present the “Life Without Fair Courts” contest. We’re looking for your best creative depiction of what your life would look like without fair courts and why fair and impartial courts are so important to our system of justice. Any two-dimensional, color or black & white visual creation that can be printed and contained within a 6-by-9-inch page may be submitted.

#### Who May Enter:

U.S. residents, age 18 or older.\*

#### Deadline:

Submissions will be accepted (electronically or postmarked) beginning Jan. 16, 2007, and ending Mar. 15, 2007, 11:59 p.m. EST.

#### Where:

All entries must be submitted to Lambda Legal, c/o Fair Courts Contest, 120 Wall Street, Suite 1500, New York, NY 10005 or electronically via [faircourtscontest@lambdalegal.org](mailto:faircourtscontest@lambdalegal.org).\*

#### Selection method:

A panel of celebrity judges — Joan Hilty, Editor, DC Comics; Phil Jimenez, Freelance Illustrator and Comic Book Artist; Mikhaela B. Reid, creator of the Lambda Legal series “Life Without Fair Courts”; George Stoll, Art Director, the *Advocate* — will judge the submissions and narrow the field to five finalists. Online voting through Lambda Legal’s website will then determine the prizewinners.

#### Prizes:

**FIRST PRIZE:** national exposure of winning art and artist in the *Advocate* magazine and the *Advocate.com*

**SECOND PRIZE:** \$150 shopping spree through Comic Shop Locator Services

**THIRD PRIZE:** \$50 shopping spree through Comic Shop Locator Services

\*Some restrictions apply. See official rules and entry form at [www.lambdalegal.org/courtingjustice](http://www.lambdalegal.org/courtingjustice).

# Q&A

Q & A WITH MIKAELAH B. REID

## 1. How did you get involved in the "Life Without Fair Courts" project?

In high school, I was the editor of my school paper and the president of my gay-straight alliance. Some homophobic kids were writing "Fagets" [sic] on our posters and harassing our group members, so I decided to respond with a comic strip editorial. I've been drawing LGBT-themed political cartoons ever since, both for Boston's *Bay Windows* newspaper and for my weekly self-syndicated strip, *The Boiling Point*.

The courts have always been central to the fight for justice and equality. Back in 2003, I did a series of strips on sodomy laws, starting with "Practical Uses for Sodomy Laws" (they make great pickup lines, for example) and ending happily with "Sodomy Law Funnies" featuring a couple celebrating their long overdue rights. The fine folks at Lambda Legal were looking for a cartoonist for the "Courting Justice" campaign and my work caught their eye.

## 2. Why do you think the "Courting Justice" campaign is important?

It's more than just important; it's critical. To a lot of people, law and the courts seem vague, abstract, wordy, confusing, arcane and convoluted. Cartoons are a lot more accessible and fun to read than your average legal brief. So the idea of the "Life Without Fair Courts" cartoon series is to show the real-life impact of key court decisions on our daily lives by imagining they had never happened. What would life be like without *Brown v. Board of Education*? What would life be like without *Lawrence v. Texas* if you lived in fear of the police busting down your door for having sex with your girlfriend?

Whenever radical conservatives don't like a ruling, they make noise about "activist judges" going against "the will of the people." But the will of the people isn't always right, and it's the job of the courts to interpret laws and the Constitution and to protect minority rights, not to reflect popular bigotry.

## 3. How do you feel that members of the creative community (like yourself) make a difference in the world?

Art is a powerful thing. Powerful art and music can cut through the noise and connect people to a message in a way that words alone often fail to do. People react to cartoons in a more visceral way than plain text. Good political cartoons can inform readers, make them laugh (or cry), let them know they're not alone in their beliefs, and call them to action — all at the same time.



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"It is almost an obscenity that the [New Jersey] Supreme Court would seize unto itself the power to order the legislature to create legislation... That kind of activism requires a reply. This is not a government of appointed justices."

One attack on the courts by lawmakers on the federal level has been the introduction of a bill that would strip the judiciary of its jurisdiction to hear cases involving the free exercise of religion, the right to privacy (including any case involving sexual orientation) or equal protection as it relates to marriage. Congressional subcommittees are currently reviewing the bill. While this particular bill is obviously extreme, our communities must be ever-vigilant against these corrosive attacks on the judiciary. Lambda Legal's "Courting Justice" campaign will continue to educate our communities and the public about judicial independence and press for fairness on the bench. What lies beneath the humor of the "Life Without Fair Courts" project is Lambda Legal's steadfast commitment to a fair and impartial judiciary — and that's no joke.