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Luis F. Mancheno

VOX

Roger Williams University School of Law

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Newsroom

June 23, 2016

Vox: Mancheno '13 on Orlando

"America is a haven for gay immigrants like me. Don't let Orlando change that." Luis Mancheno '13 in Vox, on his visceral reaction to the Pulse nightclub shooting.

<http://www.vox.com/2016/6/23/12012644/gay-immigrant-orlando>

From VOX: "America is a haven for gay immigrants like me. Don't let Orlando change that" by Luis F.

Mancheno



June 23, 2016: I came to this country fleeing persecution for being gay, for being too femme, a faggot, a "maricón." I came to the United States hoping to find safety, away from all of the violence and hate I lived with in Ecuador. On the day of the Orlando shooting, I was reminded that the United States is still not that place for me, or for anybody like me.

The weekend of the shooting was supposed to be a weekend of celebration for me. On the Friday before, eight years after I arrived in this country, I became a United States citizen. It was a moment of pure triumph for me, finally seeing the rainbow after a huge storm. [...]

The night after my naturalization ceremony, on my first full day as an American citizen, I went out with friends to a gay party for Brooklyn pride. Pride has a very special meaning for me — it is how I celebrate my survival. As I was getting ready, I decided to put on eye shadow. With no shame, I left my apartment and started strolling the streets of Brooklyn in makeup.



I noticed how people looked at me while I walked. Some people laughed, others made faces of disgust, and others just couldn't stop staring. I felt uncomfortable and bothered by it, but since it was pride and I had just become a United States citizen, I felt empowered and unafraid. I kept my makeup on and continued to walk to the club.

I felt liberated when I walked in. I always do. I felt as if the walls of the club would protect me from all judgment, and that I had arrived somewhere where I could be myself. I was surrounded by glittery drag queens and sexy go-go dancers. Hundreds of other queer people like me had come together that night to dance and celebrate pride.

I danced unapologetically and freely. While I danced, Edward, Stanley, Luis, Juan, and hundreds of other members of my community were also dancing, at a different club a couple of hundred miles away. Like me, they were probably dancing to the Latino icons I love, like Thalía, Paulina, and Selena. If I had been there, I would have danced and twirled with them as we celebrated being different and having survived.

I survived that night. They were not as lucky. They were killed by an American monster who apparently hated us for being different. I could have been killed, too, if this monster would have seen me that night. He would have shot me for being a faggot who kisses other men, puts on makeup, and dances like a femme.

On Sunday morning when I found out about the mass murder at Pulse, I kept picturing me dancing at Pulse; me being shot. Suddenly those same fears I had felt when I lived in Ecuador came rushing back.

Consumed with fear, I was fixated on the news, as leaders and politicians made statements about this tragedy. All I was hoping was to find consolation and support from them, but to the contrary, I realized that the killer was not alone in wounding our community. [...]

The United States is still a much better place than hundreds of other countries when it comes to protecting the rights of the LGBTQ community. It is not, however, a completely safe place for me or my kind. Orlando painfully reminded us of that.

We have a duty to remain better than others at protecting these rights, and it is our duty to keep expanding, and not limiting, those rights. Let's be truly American and open our doors to all the tired, to all the poor, to all the gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer of the world who are escaping death in their countries.

Anything short of it would be to betray the lives of the 49 who died believing they were free in this country.

Luis F. Mancheno is a clinical teaching fellow at the Immigration Justice Clinic of the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. He received his JD from **Roger Williams University School of Law**. Following graduation, Luis worked for three years as an immigration attorney for the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project in Arizona and the Bronx Defenders in New York, providing representation to asylum seekers and detained people facing deportation proceedings. He was born and raised in Ecuador and was granted asylum in the United States in 2009.