

### **Silencing of Context: Gareth Henry in Rights Today (Script)**

Welcome to an alternative audio guide for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights limited edition, Pride Tour. I know you were ready for some quality queer content when you signed up for this, why else would you be navigating through kiosks, computer banks, and a confusing elevator system in search of the queers amongst a sea of heterosexuals? Worry not, the queers are here, and I'm going to point out a few in order to explore how the museum intentionally frames queer lives, experiences, place, and nation. Now let's begin.

[Sound: Ambient music]

You've made it all the way to the last stop on the tour, the *Rights Today* gallery. As you gaze across the colourful banners of current human rights defenders, search for the green-themed Gareth Henry Banner hanging towards the exhibit's entrance. You'll see a melancholic portrait of Gareth paired with a few sentences of text. At the top you'll find a quote from Gareth himself. It reads, "I've been a victim of homophobia and at time paralyzed by fear. I decided to take a stand and do what's right" (wall text). A small fabric panel describes Gareth as a "rights defender for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people [in] Jamaica and Canada" (wall text). You may be able to gather aspects of Gareth's experience and current activism from these descriptors and quotes, yet overall, we're missing a lot of information.

Feminist and museology theorist Jennifer Tyburczy offers the term 'exhibitionary silences' to describe the meaning held in what is not being said (21). Or in other words, what assumptions, commonly held knowledge, or artificial constructions of racialized and sexualized identities are relied upon in order to produce meaning in silence. What is left out, what stereotypes or superficial imaginations of people and place are reinforced in the silences of the banner? Let's think this through.

As viewers, we are told through Gareth's own experience that homophobic violence is still prevalent. We are given two countries that Gareth's activism has been present, Jamaica and Canada. Now consider the geopolitical representation of these two places, keeping in mind, that these are fairly surface-level understandings of complex social locations.

[Sound: Wedding bells]

After the 2005 legalization of same-sex marriage, Canada began to present itself as a gay safe-haven despite documentations of homophobic and transphobic violence, particularly against queer and trans, Black, Indigenous people of colour. In April 2006, *Time Magazine* branded Jamaica "The Most Homophobic Place on Earth." Despite legal changes and activism pushing for an intersectional understanding of how socioeconomic status and gender identity influence queer Jamaican experience, this violently homophobic branding continues to be regulated most commonly in Western media.

If we think of these oversimplified narratives of Jamaica and Canada, where might one place the homophobic violence that Gareth speaks to? The country that has branded itself as a gay safe-haven, or the country that has been branded by outside media outlets as rabidly homophobic? The reality is, homophobic violence is occurring in both places, but the museum stays silent in documenting Canadian queer experience that isn't celebrating the legalization of same-sex marriage. It is in these silences, that the museum upholds stereotypical and watered down understandings of homophobia and queer activism in both Jamaica and Canada. The Gareth Henry banner presents an opportunity for a self-critical reflection of homophobic and transphobic violence occurring in Canada, but instead of explicitly naming this violence, the museum relies on the age-old imperialist narrative that maintains Canada as the benevolent

peacekeeping nation. So what if we named and placed the homophobic violence in Canada instead of side-stepping away from acknowledging it.

[Sound: Streetscape]

The Toronto book and web-based project Marvellous Grounds seeks to create communities and creative spaces built for and around queer and trans, Black, Indigenous people of colour. To physically map these spaces, Marvellous Grounds offers an interactive map to name sites of QTBIPOC grief, rage, and historic gathering and meeting places. What if a similar digital system was installed in correlation to Gareth's banner? As viewers, we could be invited to scroll through a map of Canada that place specific incidents of homophobic, transphobic, and racist fuelled violence enacted upon QTBIPOC folks. Would this paint a more accurate image of a supposedly gay-friendly nation? Would this more responsibly name the disproportionate rate of violence enacted on Black transfeminine bodies? Instead of alluding to the assumption that Canada is immune to homophobic violence, let's specifically name and place it in order to initiate conversations that need to be happening around QTBIPOC resilience and resistance.