

# JOHN LAWRENCE & TYRON GARNER

John Lawrence

b. 8/2/1943

d. 11/20/2011

Tyron Garner

b. 7/10/1967

d. 9/11/2006

## LEGAL ACTIVISTS

*“When somebody is wronged and they don’t stand up for themselves, they’re going to get wronged again.”*

– John Lawrence

**Garner addressed the significance of the case by saying, “I’m not a hero. But I feel like we’ve done something good for a lot of people.”**

John Geddes Lawrence and Tyron Garner were defendants in the landmark Supreme Court case *Lawrence v. Texas* in which laws prohibiting same-sex sodomy were declared unconstitutional. The 2003 decision, based on the right to privacy, legalized consensual same-sex intimacy.

John Lawrence was raised in a rural town on the coastal plains of Texas. After serving four years in the Navy, Lawrence returned to Texas. He worked as a medical technologist in the Houston area, where he met Tyron Garner, an African-American blue-collar worker.

In September 1998, Garner spent the night at Lawrence’s apartment. Responding to a disturbance complaint, police entered the apartment and witnessed the couple having sex. The two men were arrested and charged with violating the Homosexual Conduct Law. The statute made it a misdemeanor to engage in “deviant sexual intercourse” with a member of the same sex. Those convicted were required to register as sex offenders. After pleading no contest, Lawrence and Garner appealed the conviction and challenged the statute’s constitutionality.

Lawrence and Garner were represented by Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund (Lambda Legal). After five years, Lawrence and Garner’s appeal was heard by the U.S. Supreme Court. In a 6-3 decision, the Court struck down sodomy laws. In the majority opinion, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote that a law prohibiting sodomy “demeans the lives of homosexual persons” and, under the equal protection and due process guaranteed by the 14th Amendment, could no longer be upheld.

Following the decision, both men led private lives. Although they were no longer a couple, they remained friends. They are remembered through a fellowship program in Garner’s name, established by Lambda Legal. The fellowship supports law students interested in LGBT issues within the African-American community. In one of his few media interviews, Garner addressed the significance of the case by saying, “I’m not a hero. But I feel like we’ve done something good for a lot of people. I kind of feel proud of that.”

June 23, 2013, marked the 10th anniversary of the historic decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*. The case laid the groundwork for the Supreme Court decision in *United States v. Windsor*, which held that the Defense of Marriage Act was unconstitutional.



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