Karate Kid

Is boy being helped or used by Christian right?

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That question came up in February when the Rutherford Institute, a law firm that has represented "AIDS is God's wrath" fundies and antigay ministers -- announced it would represent 12-year-old Michael Montalvo. The PWA, whose mom and sister died of AIDS, is suing a Colonial Heights, Virginia karate school that kicked him out in the interest of safety, charging a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. James Radcliffe, owner of the USA Bushidokan karate center, explained: "There's definitely a risk involved. Kids' lips and noses bleed." A federal judge upheld the expulsion, and the decision is being appealed by Rutherford. Last fall, the firm seized the spotlight when it took on Paula Jones' sexual harassment suit against the prez.

Rutherford's founder, John Whitehead, told *POZ*, "The flavor of this case caught my eye: He didn't go out and contract HIV -- he got it from genetics or whatever." So are only "innocent AIDS victims" eligible for his help? "We're considering an AIDS discrimination case of an openly gay man," replied Whitehead, whose direct-mail appeals up to last year display a history of antigay diatribes and opposition to safer-sex education and condom distribution in schools. Whitehead also told *POZ* he hopes the Montalvo case will give him "a voucher" within the AIDS community: "People with AIDS haven't wanted to be represented by us. Give me some time. You'll see."

See a PR stunt, according to Chip Berlet, of Political Research Associates, a Boston think-tank that monitors the right wing. "Taking the Montalvo case is a well-crafted scam by Whitehead to cover his tracks," he said.

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