

# Balls & Chains

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**I VIEW MARRIAGE** like going to the toilet: people may need to do it but why do they need to publicize it?  
 —Charley Shively

**IF STRICT MONOGAMY** is the height of all virtue, then the palm must go to the tapeworm, which... spends its whole life copulating in all its sections with itself. Confining ourselves to mammals, however, we find all forms of sexual life—promiscuity, indications of group marriage, polygyny, monogamy. Polyandry alone is lacking— it took human beings to achieve that.  
 —Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*

editorialized (August 2004). “They short-sightedly think that signaling that they are sexually exclusive— ‘married’— they will distance themselves from those queers that give decent gay people a bad reputation.”

How can a movement for equality, let alone liberation, be pushing for something that will only benefit some citizens (couples) at the expense of others (singles)? All the arguments in favor of marriage ring hollow, and mask an agenda that has nothing to do with equality or fair treatment, let alone liberation.

**Approval, not liberation**

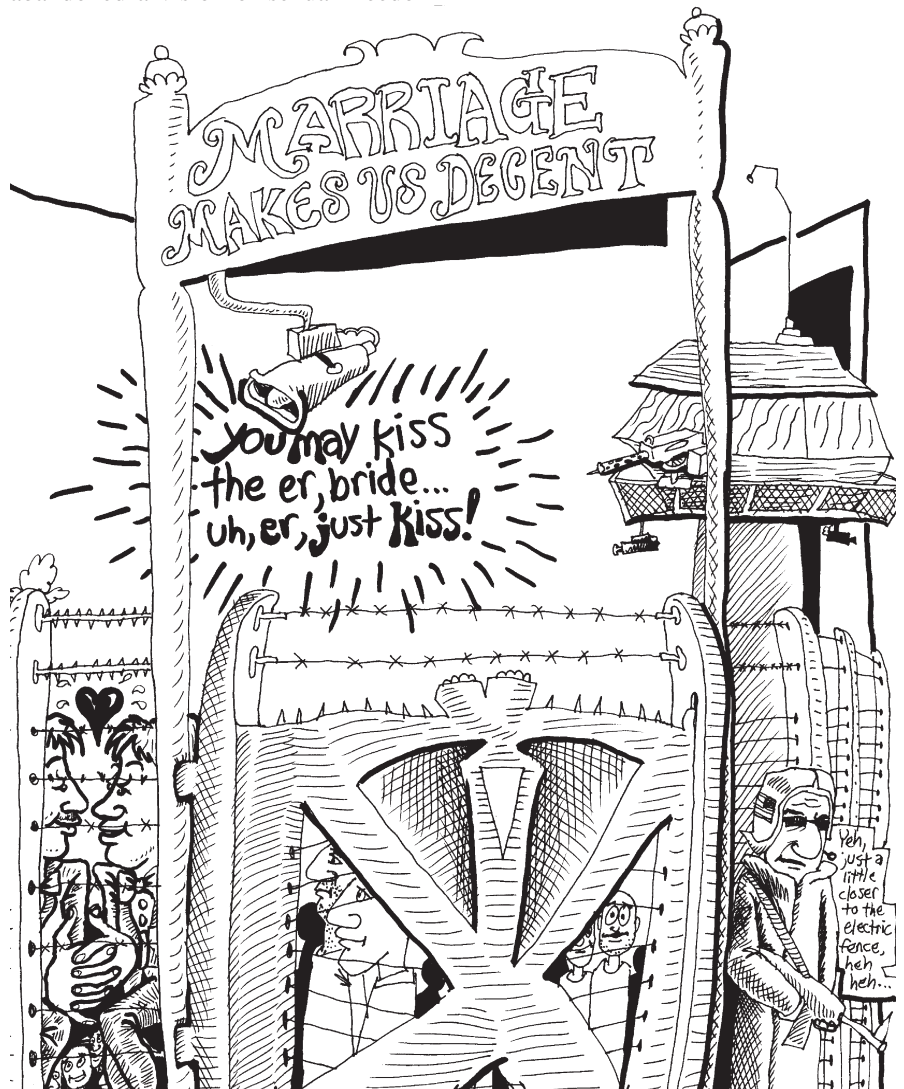
The gay/lez movement long ago abandoned a vision of sexual freedom

It’s been a year since G.W. Bush was reelected on the coattails of anti-gay-marriage bigotry. Time for a second look, David Thorstad contends, at the marriage sellout

**T**wo Toronto women were among the first to tie the knot after a June, 2003 court decision legalized same-sex marriage in Ontario. They had lived together for ten years, but decided to divorce after only five days of wedded bliss. They couldn’t divorce, however, until the Canadian Divorce Act could be amended to allow for same-sex splitups. No doubt gay divorce lawyers were lining up, if they were not already in the forefront of the gay marriage crusade from the start.

Despite a certain *schadenfreude* and amusement at the predicament of this pair, the embrace of marriage by many same-sexers, as well as liberals, and even most left-wing groups, raises questions about the way the gay agenda is set. It also shows that the gay movement has become just another conservative, conventional, accommodationist interest group that seeks special privileges for some at the expense of others. With so many sex radicals dead of AIDS or old age, it is perhaps not surprising that an assimilationist mentality has taken over.

“Many gay marriage proponents seem less interested in genuine equity than they are in the respectability they believe marriage confers,” *The Guide*



●● Why are current mainstream gay organizations working to strike a bargain with straight society that will make some queers less equal than others?... Marriage has no more place in efforts to achieve equality than slavery or the divine right of kings. At this juncture in history, wouldn't it make more sense for us to try to figure out how to relieve heterosexuals of the outdated shackles of matrimony?

—Jim Eigo

and liberation. Instead, the more respectable and well-off (and, generally, white) among us are being ushered into a “place at the [hetero] table,” urged to purge sex radicals, pederasts, and liberationists, join the military to kill Third World babies for Wall Street, clean up our image, and present gay liberation as no threat to the heterosexual dictatorship. Instead of fighting for freedom from state interference and repression, the movement seeks to strengthen state control over our lives, even going so far as to campaign for thought-crimes laws (a.k.a. “hate crimes legislation”), and ape one of the least successful hetero institutions. Despite the immense social infrastructure put in place to shore up hetero marriage (welfare, myriad tax breaks, social approval of uncontrolled breeding, family subsidies, family courts, newspaper sections devoted to couplings and bizarre wedding rituals, state-sponsored damage control following childrearing fuckups, and so on), half of marriages fail.

The center-staging of couples is the most misguided— and discriminatory— aspect of the marriage campaign. The American Civil Liberties Union, for example, has brought suit in Wisconsin to extend medical benefits to same-sex couples on the grounds that it is discriminatory to provide benefits only to hetero marrieds. (Same-sexers cannot marry in Wisconsin, so this is a couples issue, not a marriage issue.) But who pays for those benefits? Single people, who themselves are denied the very medical benefits they are required to subsidize for couples, whether gay or straight, whether married or not. This exposes the hypocrisy of the campaign for gay marriage. Apparently, it didn't occur to the ACLU (or the Human Rights Campaign, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and others who are pushing for marriage and special treatment for couples, or the Greens who uncritically support the ACLU's suit) that health care ought to be a right of all citizens, regardless of their copulations and cohabitations. Yet virtually no gay/lez groups agitate for a single-payer health system that would extend health care to all, regardless of who they fuck or live with. Instead of reaching out to

singles, both gay and straight, gay groups seek to turn them into second-class citizens, mere money pits for special privileges for state-approved couples. Rather than struggle for a better society for all, they advance piecemeal demands that in no way challenge the fundamental inequities of society, and that, if accepted, will actually multiply those inequities. This is not only shortsighted, it is shameful.

Some say that the focus on couples is only a first step toward extending such benefits to all. But who decided that couples had more rights to health care than the singles who are expected to pay for it? Who decided that couples should be given priority? Who decided that some should have more rights and

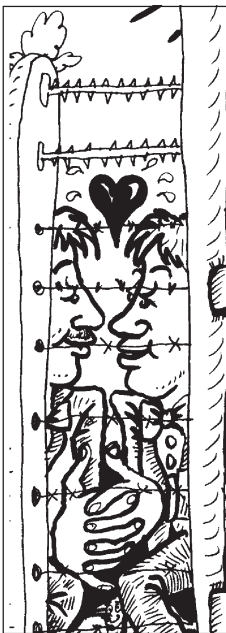
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**'All the arguments in favor of marriage ring hollow, and mask an agenda that has nothing to do with equality or fair treatment, let alone liberation'**

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social benefits than others? This was not decided through any democratic process, or by any national convention, let alone a debate in the gay/lez press (which, for the most part, has smothered debate). When the National Gay Task Force was founded by Bruce Voeller in the mid-1970s, it announced that it would be an elitist group that no longer would have to suffer through democratic debates like those in New York's Gay Activists Alliance. That elitist mentality seems to have inspired the way marriage was thrust to the forefront.

The marriage crusade got going in 1993 when Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund took on a Hawaii case that laid the groundwork for the present battles. NGLTF and HRC jumped on the bandwagon, and the rest is history, including the backlash that has only gained steam with the resounding defeats last November in the eleven states that approved constitutional amendments against same-sex marriage. The obvious conclusion is that gay groups





should stop seeking special privileges for some same-sexers at the expense of others; they should focus on exposing laws and special privileges favoring hetero married couples and that discriminate against all others, including same-sex couples and gay and straight singles. They should dump their elitist advocacy of marriage, which only alienates people and isolates same-sexers further, and instead focus on fighting to get the state out of citizens' bedrooms and to limit state control over our lives.

The gay movement should be fighting for freedom for all sexual relationships between consenting persons, an end to heterosupremacy, equal treatment of all citizens before the law, the state, and society, regardless of their conjugal or marital status.

Marriage should be a personal, private matter. The state should have no interest or involvement whatever in advancing or favoring coupledness (married or not). All citizens should be treated the same, regardless of their personal status.

Sadly, the gay movement today pursues nothing more than minor tinkering with an unjust system. This has nothing to do with sexual liberation— which used to be the movement's focus. Instead of the Gay Liberation Front slogan "Do you think homosexuals are revolting? You bet your sweet ass we are!" nowadays the message is: "We're loving couples just like you. Welcome us into your great society, your churches, your war machine, your phoney-baloney political fraud (one party with two right wings, as Gore Vidal has aptly described it), give us your stamp of state approval. We're not promiscuous hedonists like those gay men now dead of AIDS or perverts who have sex with youths. We're respectable, predictable,

reliable, and conventional. We're patriotic; we can't wait to serve in your increasingly hated military. We are Family."

### Alternatives?

After last November's defeats of gay marriage at the polls, the Human Rights Campaign announced a retreat from its marriage crusade. According to the *New York Times* (December 9, 2004), Steven Fisher, HRC's communications director, said the group would henceforth stress "communicating the struggles of gays in their families, workplaces, churches and synagogues": "When you put a face to our issues, that's when we get support," Fisher said. "We're not going to win at the ballot box until we start winning at the water cooler and in the church pews." HRC would, however, hew to its strategy of seeking special privileges and rights for couples, he said, including Social Security survivor benefits, hospital visitation privileges, and tax breaks for gay couples.

This bankrupt approach is reflected in arguments that marriage will resolve real injustices, such as denial of hospital visitation rights to partners and friends, inheritance, and so on. But such injustices can better be resolved in ways that have nothing to do with marriage, and in fact, marriage itself is irrelevant to such matters in many real-life circumstances (e.g., elderly unmarrieds living together; interdependent friends; dependent but unmarried kin; adults and minors, whether gay or straight, living together). Changes in the law could extend such rights to "domestic partners" of all kinds (as New York State did last year), not just ersatz married wannabes. Contracts could be used to resolve some such matters. In the long run, public education and agitation may be the most effective approach. An insightful Op-Ed piece by Don Browning and Elizabeth Marquardt in the *New York Times* (March 9, 2004) concluded that "Tax benefits, legal adoption, welfare transfers, and more refined and accessible legal contracts should all be used to meet these needs— but not the institution of marriage itself." The gay/lez movement seems more intent on winning benefits

●● **Monogamy is hardly normative in the male, particularly in youth. The marriage issue, however, is a great boon for homophobes because it lets them sidestep all the things that should be set right, from sodomy laws in various states, to discrimination in the workplace. Also marriage makes people think of God, who is so very important to our poor, bamboozled folks.**

**The founders (and I) wanted God thrown out the window at Philadelphia, but the crazies breed like chiggers and he keeps slithering back in. He now dominates so much of radio and TV. Until a stake has been driven through the heart of monotheism, the US will never come within a continuum of civilization. That suits them chiggers real fine.**

**—Gore Vidal,  
Southern Voice  
(Atlanta),  
January 13, 2000**

●● We don't need to make marriage easier. We need to make divorce easier.  
**—José María Covarrubias,**  
 late Mexican gay activist

●● What I call freedom from marriage is a very precious thing. But now come the lavender family-value types with giant cookie cutters to slam us all into and chop off anything that doesn't conform to their banal vision. We need to continue to craft ways that people who wish to consider themselves kin can do so... but not at the expense of single people.... Between the gay right wing and the other right wing— what about cock-sucking, clit-licking, butt-fucking homos who want to practice homosexuality? The hell with waxed fruitism. Of course the straight liberal thing these days is to endorse marriage for the gays— so much for the feminist analysis of that institution.  
**—Bill Dobbs**



for a few same-sexers than on reforms that would serve a useful social purpose. Why, for example, doesn't it fight for emancipation of minors legislation, which is sorely needed in some states? Minnesota, for instance (despite its liberal reputation), lacks such a law, yet gay groups don't seem to care. They are too busy lining up at the public trough for state funding for programs to "protect" young people (including from others of their own kind who are too far on the other side of the age of consent), rather than to liberate them. As Harry Hay was fond of saying, "Mother knows best." For many underage youth, gay-identified or not, who are victims of violence and abuse by their parents, such a legal reform could make a real difference in their lives. Marriage, however, is irrelevant, and didn't prevent the abuse they suffered.

Why are gay groups not trying to achieve useful reforms that would benefit millions of people, both gay and straight, without the legal entanglements and encumbrances of marriage, not to mention its philosophical, political, emotional, and legal downsides? The right wing accuses homosexuals of seeking "special privileges," and when it comes to the marriage issue, the right wing is right, though for the wrong reasons. The heterosupremacists want to hang on to their own special privileges, built into society at all levels. Instead of combating heterosupremacy, the gay establishment wants to extend the same privileges to one subset of same-sexers. Instead of combating the unjust institutions of hetero society, it seeks to join them. Dead radical gay liberationists must be turning over in their graves.

### What is marriage?

Gay marriage advocates say that marriage is a "right" and their "basic human rights" are being violated by not being given state approval for their couplings and cohabitations. But not only is their advocacy dragging gay liberation down to a low common denominator of conventionality and conservatism, their very concept of marriage is conventional.

In March 2005, California Superior Court Judge Richard Kramer declared that the state's ban on same-sex marriage violated the "basic human right to

marry a person of one's choice." Huh? I wondered if the "person of my choice" could be my underage boyfriend. Marriage in Siwa Oasis in Egypt, for instance, has always involved both adult hetero marriage and marriage between a man and a boy, with the dowry for a boy being higher than that for a girl, perhaps because a boy is considered capable of more serious productive labor, hence more valuable. Marriage has always been a matter of property rights and wealth. That's why the age of consent was originally set at ten for a girl in England: that's the age she was considered marriageable. Only with our assimilationist and unimaginative gay/lez groups has marriage become a matter of "love" and "choice" (though not with

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**'Who decided that couples had more rights to health care than the singles who are expected to pay for it? Who decided that couples should be given priority? Who decided that some should have more rights and social benefits than others?'**

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ten-year-olds, presumably).

Marriage is based on monogamy, which, as Engels noted, plays only a minor role in the mammalian heritage (he was wrong about polyandry, which is practiced among wolves as well as bees). Humans are not birds. The higher up the phylogenetic scale one goes, the less one finds monogamy. That makes marriage based on monogamy an artificial and unnatural institution, which no doubt explains why it is such a failure. The push for marriage "rights" is a political ploy that runs counter to biology, anthropology, history, evolution, and common sense. It is an issue designed to advance a political goal: respectability and acceptance by straight society of some same-sexers at the expense of others.

Bush expresses the conventional



Christian view: "Because marriage is a sacred institution and the foundation of society, it should not be redefined by activist judges." But if marriage is "sacred," why do so many Christians split up? Furthermore, marriage was never the "foundation" of Native American society, and to this day the Christian concept of marriage does not mirror Indian realities. More than 64 percent of Minnesota's most traditional Ojibwe village, Pone-mah, are single. Of course, many are young. How relevant is the middle-class gay marriage crusade to such people?

Some marriage advocates go so far as to compare their efforts to the civil rights struggles of blacks. That is absurd hype that trivializes the civil rights movement. Marriage advocates also have thrown out the compelling critiques of marriage developed by feminists. Even most leftists have jumped on the marriage bandwagon uncritically. "We must argue and fight for everyone to be involved in the battle for gay marriage," opined Adam Tenney in the Communist Party's magazine *Political Affairs* last January. That coming from a party that, since Stalin's day, had characterized homosexuality as a perversion and a bourgeois vice similar to drug addiction, something that would be eliminated under socialism. Even Trotskyist groups, since the 1970s the most supportive of gay liberation on the left, are for gay marriage. Most don't even temper their support for the (bogus, in my view) "right" to marriage with a critique of the marriage institution itself. Perhaps this support for marriage, as well as for same-sexers joining the imperialist military, is a (misguided) attempt to restore relevance to a largely uninfluential left.

It is no doubt discriminatory to prevent same-sexers from marrying or joining the military if they wish. But don't portray these as worthy or progressive causes, or ask me to mourn if

●● Why should formally committed couples, straight or gay, enjoy special privileges in the first place?

Married couples can receive thousands of dollars in benefits and discounts unavailable to single Americans, including extra tax breaks, bankruptcy protections and better insurance rates....

Advocates for gay marriage have exposed a huge blind spot: married-only benefits also discriminate against America's 86 million unmarried adults. Contrary to popular belief, marriage penalties are far outweighed by marriage bonuses. The concerns of single Americans are urgent and deserve attention. Next time you're filling out a form that asks you to check the box next to 'married,' 'single,' 'divorced,' or 'widowed,' ask yourself this: why should it matter?

—Shari Motro,  
*New York Times*,  
January 25, 2004

**'The gay movement should be fighting for freedom for all sexual relationships between consenting persons, equal treatment of all citizens before the law, the state, and society, regardless of their conjugal or marital status. Marriage should be a personal, private matter. The state should have no interest or involvement whatever in advancing or favoring coupledness (married or not). All citizens should be treated the same, regardless of their personal status. Sadly, the gay movement today pursues nothing more than minor tinkering with an unjust system'**

same-sexers are killed invading another country. People need to take control over their lives, not uncritically follow agendas set by self-appointed elites.

The feminist demand that the state "Take your hands off my body!" now seems applicable to some gay groups, who have become cheerleaders for increased state control over our lives. Like most things, this probably comes down to money. As Malcolm X said, "When they lay those dollars on you, your soul goes." ▼

*David Thorstad is a former president of New York's Gay Activists Alliance, a cofounder of New York's Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, a cofounder of NAMBLA, and coauthor of THE EARLY HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT (1864–1935)*