

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

The Human Rights Campaign and Metropolitan Community Church appear determined to press ahead with their plans for a Millennium March on Washington, D.C., on April 30, 2000, despite concerns of past march organizers and leaders of many other gay organizations, some of whom are planning their own millennium demonstration, a coordinated "50 State Action" that calls for marches on each respective state capital and other state-based lobbying actions in March 1999 under the theme, "Equality Begins at Home."

From the cheery press releases regularly sent out by the Millennium March on Washington 2000 Inc. touting the 10,000 rooms already reserved in D.C. for the march and encouraging people to enter a logo and T-shirt design contest, one can assume the D.C. event is already a done deal. The only question is how successful it—as well as what presently appears to be a competing effort, the 50 State Action—will be.

It's unfortunate that so much time and focus is being placed on organizational matters at a time when the gay and lesbian community should be concentrating in a more fundamental way on the direction the movement will take in the next century. Whether we lay the groundwork or not, dramatic shifts can be expected, if judged only by the past few years. Catalysts for those changes include the advances in AIDS treatment, the shifting of the AIDS pandemic to other minority communities, a growing public acceptance of gay men and lesbians as a legitimate minority group, recent legal victories like the U.S. Supreme Court ruling striking down Colorado's anti-gay Amendment 2 and impending court decisions like *Baehr vs. Miike*, which is expected to legalize same-gender marriage in the state of Hawaii.

The list of questions to consider is endless:

At what point will the effort to "mainstream" the gay community conflict with attempts to broaden the "queer coalition" to include virtually every group that differs from the mainstream due to sexuality or gender identity?

How do you balance the fight for sexual freedom, a bedrock element of the gay-rights movement, with the desire for the most effective AIDS prevention measures? Do AIDS activists walk one way, sexual freedom fighters another?

And, if the gay community lessens its focus on AIDS and begins dealing with other issues like cancer and aging, is that a positive sign of

moving beyond one personal tragedy, or a negative sign of not caring because the gay community no longer feels the greatest impact of AIDS?

Does winning mainstream acceptance mean further marginalization of the fringe members of the gay community? Will Dykes on Bikes permanently join NAMBLA members on the sidelines of gay pride parades? Will those leading the march for gay marriage today be leading the charge to close down the neighborhood bathhouse tomorrow?

And must gays and lesbians forgo public approval of their hard-earned rights until other minority groups are similarly embraced by the mainstream? If gay men and lesbians have reached the point where a majority of society is ready to acknowledge their right to equal treatment in most areas, must they put that acceptance on hold until the pendulum also swings in favor of the transgendered and bisexuals?

These are all difficult issues to resolve, but they will be raised increasingly as we continue to broaden, or narrow, the "queer" umbrella. Consider, for example, the Los Angeles-based Spectrum Institute which is undertaking a crusade, spearheaded by veteran civil rights attorney Thomas F. Coleman, to do away with gays-only domestic partner benefits programs offered by public and private employers.

The Spectrum Institute, which works to eliminate marital status discrimination and to protect personal privacy rights, certainly sounds a likely candidate for membership under the "queer" umbrella. But this current crusade has left some gay and gay-friendly organizations like the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund and the American Civil Liberties Union scrambling to decide how to respond. (See story on page 13.) Equality across the board is a wonderful and lofty goal, but how do you tell the gay man or lesbian who does not have the right to marry that they have to forgo domestic partner benefits because of a philosophical obligation to a straight man or woman who can marry if he or she chooses?

The millennium presents an opportunity for major reassessment. Gay organizations across the board should be using the little time we have left to hold intensive meetings and community discussions on the future of the gay movement. Marches, on Washington or elsewhere, only represent the first step. But, if we can't come together in taking even that step, it bodes ill for the future.

FRONTIERS NEWSMAGAZINE OUTLOOK

June 12, 1998