

Beyond the Marriage Industrial Complex

By Revolutionstar Experience (Ingrid Rivera & YK Hong)

Bush tells us that a real relationship is between a man and woman who are married. He believes in it so much that he is spending \$1.5 billion for poor people of color to jump on the legitimacy bandwagon.

Many gays/ same-sex couples believe in marriage as well. They believe in it so much that they have created campaigns, developed organizations and dedicated resources to this one issue. Is there a conflict within the Gay movement on marriage?

We ask ourselves the following: Is a relationship only between a man and a woman? Is it solely an interaction between two people? Does a relationship have to equal marriage? Does a relationship equal love, sex and/or friendship?

One of the wonderful things we love about the LGBT community is that we dare to step outside of heterosexist boundaries. We struggled for so long to define ourselves outside of these boundaries. Thousands have and continue to be harassed, beaten and killed for our existence outside of these boundaries.

Often our own families and friends have disowned us because of this fight for self-determination. We have been thrown out into the streets and we have often found ourselves alone and isolated.

But we, as a wonderfully resilient group of people, began to create our own relationships, our own kind of families. We have redefined kinship and pulled ourselves out of isolation.

In the past, queer people have been experts at finding solutions outside of the tools we were given. We created our own movement, our own ideas of sex and sexuality, and our own words and language. We never needed anyone to legitimize our existence as queers, we never needed any laws to tell us it was okay to have sex, we never needed anyone to tell us our relationships were healthy and profound.

In the same breath, we say that was then. Some would say things have changed, some way we've evolved.

Of course we are still being denied and isolated from family and friends and ultimately we are still a resilient people, but now we are a new generation of queers.

But we're sorry to say that we feel LGBT folks have lost some of that creative edge on restructuring or redefining things for ourselves as queers. If this is what evolution looks like, then we are afraid for our movement. Evolution is supposed to be a gradual change into a progressive state of being.

But we find ourselves pursuing constructed images of happiness, choice and freedom that some believe can be attained through a quick jaunt to city hall. We are assimilating into the very structure many of us fought to separate ourselves from quicker than the

time it took us to reconstruct our minds to accept that we were different. We are being distracted from our decades of struggle by a quick fix for so-called equality.

Now we want what we are told to want. Since when did queer folks do what we were told to do, want what we were told to want? We want it so bad because we're told we can't have it. Or maybe we want it so bad because they don't want us to have it. Is that reason enough? Have we really thought about what we are getting into?

Have we taken a moment to think about how queers and Bush are reflecting the same image? This image of Marriage. Specifically, marriage as a cure-all.

One of the primary focuses of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act, or what many know now as welfare reform, is to promote the creation of and maintenance of two-parent families and households through marriage. The Healthy Marriage Initiative is simply another bullet point to a grand plan that has been in the works for centuries.

When we examine the government's Healthy Marriage Initiative closely, we notice how even within poor communities and communities of color, those who marry have more access to rights (such as housing, job training, financial aid, social services and child school enrollment) than poor folks and folks of color who do not seek marriage. This creates a hierarchy of access, value, and status amongst our own, hence continuing the harmful effects of divide and conquer.

On one end we have Bush telling poor folks, folks of color, that our family structures, whatever they may consist of, are unstable and unhealthy, and that they can only be legitimate families if there is a husband and wife with children. Single mothers and other nontraditional family structures pose a direct threat to the Conservative Right's sense of family. For the Right, the nuclear family is the tool for instilling "family values" and for reinforcing sexism, homophobia, religious and other oppressions. These are weapons of control and power.

Bush's Healthy Marriage Initiative is the "cure" for illegitimate children and single mothers. Specifically targeting poor women on welfare, because of the belief that single parent households are the root of poverty, he is basically trying to shift poor women from one source of "dependency" to another, to men.

Bush has completely ignored the fact that research, time and time again, has proven that poor women need training, that poor women need skills building, and that poor women need a "no-guilt" support system. What they need is a true safety net.

And at the other end we have the queer community fighting for the right to get married.

Why do gay people want to marry? Some say it is their right. Some say it is to get rights. Others say they should have the choice. Others say it's to symbolize their true love. And still others say they want equality.

Is it equality when marriage penalizes those who cannot or do not get married? Is it a choice when there is a threat to trans and intersex folks to identify as the same sex, or

one of the two sexes? Is it a choice when some folks may be forced to have their biology, anatomy, and physical space invaded to determine if they are eligible for these "same-sex/gay" marriages? Is it really a choice if you don't get married, you don't get these rights? Will a marriage license make your emotional commitment any stronger? Is it equality when we are seeking our worth by mirroring ourselves in the image of the community that has oppressed us for so long?

Why do we fight so furiously in a battle that will save some but blatantly leaves many of our own community behind? Are we thinking ahead, or are we just following the crowd?

This seems ironic since queers have spoken out openly against Bush's Healthy Marriage Initiative. In this case, queers don't believe that marriage will cure all poor women on welfare. We don't believe marriage will provide the "long-term" security that, say, education may provide.

So why do we think that marriage will provide security for same-sex couples? **ARE THESE THE SAME VOICES?**

We all know there is no separation of church and state. Yet, why do we seek our rights through a religious ceremony, ritual and symbol that are controlled by the state? And what of all of the capitalist markets that are preying on us, using us and gaining power precisely to use against us?

To the authors, gay marriage is a bandaid, short-term solution to issues faced by the community. We are being distracted, and are expending our money, time, energy and resources on the marriage issue, when there are homeless queer youth who have nothing to eat, queer immigrants who need more than just a marriage certificate to have the right to work, speak their own language and preserve their cultures, trans and queer folk are being murdered at alarming rates, there is a lack of education around sex or HIV/AIDS in schools, and the prison and military industrial complex are brutalizing queer folks.

These are all struggles of which our people, queer people of color, have been at the forefront. We have, for so long, fought against the agenda that has been shaped for us by the media, the Religious Right, and the state, yet here we find ourselves rushing to the altar of marriage.

Let's think big, as we have historically been known to do. Why not seek a solution for everyone and not just some of us? Surely our struggle is for the liberation for us all. We must think strategically about alternatives rather than simply reacting. We are indeed being reactionary. We need to map out a long-term strategic plan of what we want our world to look like for everyone and how we're going to get there together.



We, the authors, want our queer community, specifically our queer people of color community, to think beyond the marriage industrial complex, beyond institutions, beyond that which we have been told. We want you to think of all the issues that affect us, as they are ultimately all connected. We must be aware that dismantling one oppression will not dismantle all of them, and fighting for one issue alone will not bring liberation to us all. Rights for some do not mean rights for all.

We want you to think beyond the structures that we see before us and find creative ways to struggle past them as a whole people. After all, we have always been a resilient, imaginative, and persistent people. The survival of our struggle depends on our willingness to think strategically, long-term and collectively.

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