

USA : What's Next for the LGBT Movement ?

mardi 2 juillet 2013, par [DUGGAN Lisa](#), [HOLLIBAUGH Amber](#), [METZ Tamara](#), [VAID Urvashi](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 27 juin 2013).

Be Transformative, Not Transfixed !

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The Lethe-soaked question of what comes after the marriage cases ignores the reality that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people's lives are not yet free, equal or secure, even with the positive outcome of these Supreme Court decisions.

Here's a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of the LGBT movement in the US ; and from that, a possible blueprint for the work ahead.

Strengths : A compassionate and mobilized base of millions of LGBT people, their families and friends, most of whom vote progressive, some who volunteer, fewer who give and all who support equality and justice. Young people's attitudes trend strongly for equality. Legal and social service groups are brilliant and innovative. A vibrant infrastructure of grassroots groups is active on issues regarding trans people, people of color (POC), youths, seniors, immigrants, criminal justice and HIV/AIDS.

Weaknesses : The queer movement is focused on formal legal gay/lesbian equality only and still does not address the economic, racial and gender-based inequities affecting low-income LGBT folks, transgender people, people of color (POC), women and others in queer communities. Large parts of the US (the South, Midwest and Southwest) are zones without rights. Very few people actually give time or money to queer organizations and LGBT advocacy groups ; this over-weights the influence of a few funders. Mainstream parties "handle" rather than support us—the Democrats see us as an ATM ; the Republicans, as a punching bag. LBT women's issues are absent from the mainstream movement's agenda. The leadership of the queer movement is aging, and there's still not enough investment in young leaders and POC leaders.

Opportunities : Twenty-nine states with no LGBT rights protections are exciting sites for new work. A global movement is active and creative on sexual orientation and gender identity issues. Investment in young queer leaders and emerging institutions presents exciting chances to build a politics that is not single issue. Immigrant rights and trans organizing provide solutions for how to address the interaction of sexuality, gender, race and poverty. Opportunity exists to solidify an electoral coalition of youth, women, Latinos, African-Americans, progressive men, labor, environmentalists and LGBT people into a progressive voting bloc for the next five decades. Faith-based organizing in every denomination creates great leaders, new frames and a base of support. Social media is a queer space of organizing and movement building.

Threats : The religious, cultural, economic and political right that targets LGBT people, women's economic, reproductive and sexual freedom and is organized around a racialized notion of national culture. A religious liberty framework is being deployed to undermine all civil rights laws. Social

policy retrenchment as economic conditions worsen hurts millions of our people, and requires stronger alliances to forestall. Like what happened with abortion rights, the demobilization of donors and volunteers post-marriage is a risk. Over-criminalization, the national security state and over-policing harm the lives of many in LGBT communities (trans, immigrant, POC, sex workers, youth, HIV+ people, urban-based).

So what should we do now ? First, reframe the LGBT political and legal agenda to positively address the life chances and lived experience of every queer person. Second, build infrastructure, coalitions and political strategy to advance LGBT people's interests in the Southern and Midwestern US. Third, create a political strategy with allies (labor, POC, women) to win and secure progressive outcomes in key states over the next two decades. Fourth, put massive amounts of funds into developing the leadership of young progressives—queer and straight. Fifth, create a specific anti-fascist infrastructure of social media, legal, research and watchdog groups to expose and defeat the right wing culturally and politically.

In sum, the work ahead for queers is to be transformative, not transfixed.

Beyond Formal Equality

Lisa Duggan is a professor of social and cultural analysis at New York University.

Confused ? Spinning around from outrage to glee to WTF ? Progressive Supreme Court watchers have good reason to be perplexed. During the past few days we have been stunned, if not surprised, by the stream of awful decisions flowing forth from SCOTUS including the erosion of the right to remain to silent, a further weakening of affirmative action and the evisceration of the Voting Rights Act. Then we greet two happier decisions eroding legal discrimination against same-sex couples in the DOMA and Proposition 8 cases. What's going on ?

It's tempting to chalk up these split decisions to a divided court in general, and the quirks of one Justice Anthony Kennedy in particular, or to understand these results as the uneven ups and downs of overlapping social movements. Neither of these assessments is wrong. But there is a broader context that we must consider if we want to create a broad and effective movement for social and economic justice.

Since the 1980s, US public policy has moved in a more or less coherent direction—toward the deregulation of corporations, the privatization of social welfare, the strengthening of the security and surveillance functions of the state. While maintaining the formal legal equality won by social movements during the 1960s and '70s, policy-makers have undercut the substantive, though limited, redistribution of political and economic power accomplished in the US since the 1930s. For instance, rather than continue affirmative steps to democratize public education from pre-school through college, governments at all levels have eroded access in myriad ways, by raising tuition, narrowing curricula and privatizing schools. We still have a public education system open to all, but the experience of schooling is increasingly unequal across divides of race and class. We are barely maintaining the basic right to early-term abortion, but this and other reproductive rights are also increasingly eroding via differential access to reproductive healthcare.

This is the context within which to grasp the logic of the recent Supreme Court decisions. The undermining of affirmative action and the frontal attack on voting rights are based on the formal legal neutrality of supposedly color-blind policy. Such formal equality leaves the history of racism and the current reality of persistent wide racial disparities out of the frame. The decisions on DOMA and California's Proposition 8 move haltingly toward very limited formal legal equality for same-sex conjugal couples. Marital privilege in general is maintained. Myriad historical and current sources of

queer social and economic misery are not addressed—homeless queer youth, elder poverty and isolation, transgender healthcare. Looked at this way, this stream of decisions is basically consistent despite the flip-flopping role of Justice Kennedy.

The implications for the future of LGBT social movements are clear. Sure, when legal inequalities are eroded (the two same-sex marriage cases did not fully eliminate formal inequality) there is cause for celebration. But the history of civil rights struggles in the United States shows us that formal legal equality does not provide more resources, greater political power or better lives. Too often, legal equality is an empty shell that hides expanded substantive inequalities. To move forward toward a better world for queers we need to form broad alliances for the achievement of real social justice : Get money out of politics, fight for universal social benefits (healthcare, child care, retirement) not tied to marriage or employers, expand the power of working people, demand government transparency, go to the root causes of persistent racial inequalities, endorse sexual and gender freedom. Queer people are affected by all of these issues, not only the last ones. We can't be the mostly single-issue movement that our major organizations have been. We don't lead single-issue lives.

What's Next ? Disestablish Marriage !

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With the Supreme Court's rulings yesterday, my sister, Naomi, and her wife, Jennifer, celebrated their fourth wedding—to each other—in a decade. The first was in the backyard ; second, at City Hall in San Francisco ; third, in a California county clerk's office ; and now, in the eyes of the federal government. Finally !

The rulings mark a real victory for justice. As long as the government doles out marital status and uses it to distribute benefits and privileges, our commitment to freedom and equality demand that marriage be available to same-sex couples. Full stop.

What next ? Disestablish marriage. Get the state out of the business. Abolish the legal category.

Even as we savor the victory for civil equality this week, we should start to push for disestablishing marriage. Freedom, equality, and the health of our liberal democratic polity depend on it.

Liberty would benefit in at least two ways.

First, we all know the “‘m’ word” matters. “Civil union” distinguishes. But “marriage” carries with it the weight of eons of different cultures' meanings. This history gives the label supersized ethical authority. So when a country clerk confers “marriage,” she's participating in a practice aimed at changing the self-understanding of the couple and the conferring community. Like it or not, the weight of the tradition makes her more priest than government bureaucrat. But wielding this kind of ethical authority, in conferring state approval to a particular kind of relationship, she crosses a line that liberals have long seen as essential to protecting freedoms of thought and conscience. Getting the state out of marriage would benefit these liberties in ways that people on both sides of the same-sex marriage debate should appreciate.

Second, in American constitutional tradition, marriage has long served to justify protecting the freedom of intimate association. Our rights to be left alone in our reproductive and sexual lives are rooted here. But all sorts of intimate relationships need this protection. Get rid of marriage as the proxy for deserving relationships, and those who are not married—fast becoming the majority—benefit.

Disestablishing marriage wouldn't mean an end to marriage. Au contraire ! It would help marriage and by extension all who gain from its special—moral—powers. The state is, or should be, a legal, not an ethical authority. When it serves as the controlling authority in marriage, with its awkward hold on the ethical side of the institution, actually threatens to undermine the institution's moral sway. Get the state out of the business, and let couples (and groups, for that matter) marry under the auspices of what are for them real ethical authorities. In these hands—of their church, their family, their urban tribe, their garden club—the power of the status to transform would be invigorated. Imagine state-sanctioned bar mitzvahs. Oy !

Does the argument for abolishing marriage imply that the state should get out of our intimate lives altogether ? No. Leaving marriage to civil society is no different from leaving the control of baptism to the church. In neither case do we assume that the state thereby withdraws from its role in protecting the vulnerable and promoting equality. What we do assume is that the best way to secure liberty and equality in a diverse society is for the state to be concerned with regulating action, not expression or thought. And when it does step in, it should be only to the extent necessary to protect other citizens from harm, or to guarantee a reasonably fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation.

So, even if the state no longer participates in marriage, it still has an important role to play in supporting intimate caregiving relationships, a k a families very broadly defined (i.e., from Golden Girls mates to traditional marital units). None of us can survive without the physical, emotional and social attention of others. And intimate care, the unpaid sort paradigmatically exchanged in families, is uniquely consonant with human particularity and dignity. The catch : while it is essential and mutually enriching, intimate care is also risky—especially in our globalized, capitalist context. In instrumental terms : by using her fixed resources—time, money, paid or unpaid leave from work—on others without guarantee of return, the caregiver reduces her ability to protect herself against the normal vagaries of life and thus increases her vulnerability to them. Such is the risk of caregiving. Any society that wants this labor to be done well and its benefits and burdens distributed justly needs to offer some insurance against this risk. In the United States, state-sanctioned marriage is central to our insurance scheme.

But this arrangement conflicts with our commitment to liberty, equality and even the health of marriage itself.

So let's get rid of marriage and create an intimate union status expressly tailored to protecting intimate care in its various forms. This would shift the focus of public discussion from interminable disagreement about the definition of marriage to questions about the importance, nature and distribution of intimate care. Exposing the real costs and benefits of caregiving would increase the likelihood that our policies would address the real needs of all families. Disparate levels of support for civil union and same sex marriage suggest that when we disentangle support for families from marriage we have an easier time doing the right thing by our fellow citizens. These changes would be good for families, good for diversity, good for gender equality and thus good for liberal democratic politics.

So, congratulations newly rewedds ! When you're finished celebrating, let's keep working for a more perfect union and get the state out of marriage.

After Marriage—What ?

Amber Hollibaugh is the executive director of Queens for Economic Justice.

Gay marriage is a done deal. It's only a question of how many barriers remain and how long it will

take to have gay and lesbian marriages legally recognized in the United States. I don't mean that the ramifications of these decisions aren't significant, or that any homophobic discrimination is okay. It's not. But the struggle of these last fifteen years has already transformed this country's understanding of homosexuality ; the two Supreme Court decisions come on the heels of that extraordinary sea change.

But I remain as troubled as I have been throughout all the years of this battle for gay marriage. I keep asking, Is this the issue that truly captures who we are and what we most deeply need ?

If we win marriage, will this give us a victory that impacts us as profoundly as the oppression we experience ? Will marriage make us equal ? Will marriage make us normal ? Do we want to be normal ? Does the right to marry capture our vision and the priorities we believe are the heartbeat of the ongoing fight for LGBTQ justice and inclusion ?

To me, it doesn't.

Every day I work to make queer poverty and economic inequality visible, to shed light on the reality of LGBTQ economic struggles, to make who we are as queer people evident and seen—in all of our class and race and gendered complexity. I work to reverse the bitter myth that we are mostly guys, mostly wealthy, mostly white. We aren't. I have never fought to be normal. And I am not trying to create an equality movement in a world driven by profit margins and global human desperation.

We need to build a queer, radical, social justice movement that focuses on the differences in how we live our sexual orientations and gendered identities when we are poor and queer and working class and in communities of color. A movement that assumes this is who the majority of us are ; and this determines our political agenda.

I want a LGBTQ movement that queers the reality of Walmart line jobs, sex work and homeless shelters. That centers our worldview on queer economic survival. That recognizes LGBTQ lives shaped by capitalism and the ways in which that twists and forms our erotic expression and desire—as we try to survive.

These are the issues that drive a majority of the LGBTQ community, in my life : a majority rarely seen—and rarely asked to anyone's table.

So, first, I think we need to build an agenda that isn't practical. An agenda based on vision.

Vision isn't practical. Vision is fueled by the dreams we bring to our aspirations. Vision drives the urgency and passion behind those everyday steps we take in our fight for justice ; it is the yet-to-be-feasible idea ; it is the bold leap of heart and intellect into an unknown future. It is our stubborn refusal to give up the possibility of living in a world where human beings may dwell without penalty or punishment, without paying a horrible price for what they are and who they love.

Our answers to these questions will tell us much about the substance of our vision. They will tell us whether we have decided to put up a careful fight in a small world with a narrow plan designed to achieve a limited success, or whether we have decided to go for broke. I am building a movement that asks us to go for broke.

What if we said that no one, not a single one of us, would get traded for socioeconomic access or the achievement of short-term legal goals ? What if we began to really talk queer—beyond identity categories ? What if we decided to build and lead a movement to transform this nation—a movement to make this country a global partner instead of a bully ? What if we began to help build hope ?

What if we said to everyone : here is what this queer movement is doing next :

We are queering Living Wages and Affordable Healthcare and Transgender Justice and Getting Old Queerly and Total Immigration Access and HIV Activism and Ending Incarceration and the Possibility of Dangerous Sexual Desires.

We need to create a movement that says : *Join us. Dream with us. Dare with us. Go for broke. Change the world.*

What if that was our queer vision, for what we do next ?

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P.-S.

* From The Nation on June 27, 2013 - 2:00 PM ET :

<http://www.thenation.com/blog/175015/whats-next-lgbt-movement#ixzz2XtfcpQF3>