

# Human Liberation

A heterosexual Black Indian muses on gay marriage.



**M**arriage is an agreement between loving adults, to provide for the continued maintenance of the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical health of at least the pair bond, as well as children, elders, and other kin; and of course, property.

Traditions of incorporating sexual minorities as a valued and integral part of society existed on this continent and in Africa, long before white people came to either place, to suppress those practices on racist and Biblical grounds. As a Black Indian (Yoruba-Choctaw), raised as a Liberation Theologist by my Southern Black Baptist preacher grandfather, I am moved to write about some of the historical, cultural, economic and human right issues raised by the issue of gay marriage. Africans continue to practice many different kinds of marriage, so did indigenous peoples on this continent.

As an Indian I note that in 117 indigenous North American languages there was a word for a third gender. Known generically today as *two-spirited*, that term denotes a sacred, revered, and useful place in indigenous societies that the English acronym GLBT does not. Two-spirited people could freely love each other as citizens of their respective nations. Respect for two-spirited people waned under the influence of the conquistadores and their war dogs, as well as the Puritanical English who, among other things, burned them at the stake. (Hence the term *faggot*, a piece of firewood.) This suppression was perpetrated against Indian people centuries before Hitler and his death camp pink triangles.

**T**he black lesbian poet Audre Lorde noted in her book *Sister, Outsider*: "On the West Coast of Africa, the Fon of Dahomey still have 12 different kinds of marriage. One of them is known as 'giving the goat to the buck,' where a woman of independent means marries another woman who then may or may not bear children, all of whom belong to the blood line of the first woman. Some marriages of this kind are arranged to provide heirs for women of means who wish to remain 'free,' and some are lesbian relationships. Marriages like this occur throughout Africa, in several different places among different peoples. Routinely, the women involved are accepted members of their communities, evaluated not by their sexuality but by their respective places within the community."

That this type of marriage would be supported by traditional African versions of Christianity would not surprise an African liberation theologian. We (that list includes Nzingha, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass) believe Ieshua (Jesus) was an African, and Christianity was born in an African context, with a message both encouraging human liberation from all kinds of bondage, and reconciling superficial differences in an underlying spiritual unity. That his words could be used by both liberator and oppressor, racist and reconciler, is testimony to their power. White supremacists justify their beliefs using the King James Version of the Bible. Depicting a white Jesus, it has been interpreted to say that God forbids interracial marriages as unnatural because the races should be separate (God cursed black people, thus justifying slavery and white racism). A similar justification is used to condemn homosexuals and gay marriage as also being against the laws of nature. Before Columbus, racism and heterosexism were against the laws of nature here.

**L**ike it or not there is a connection between the civil rights struggle of people of color and so-called sexual minorities. (Though to be sure, many Oregon black gays and lesbians feel gay marriage is a "white" issue, because "they ain't rushing to marry us." Interracial relationships are probably even rarer than among heterosexuals for similar racist reasons). Sexual minorities have long been part of black civil rights movements. Suppose Bayard Rustin had not organized the March on Washington, would Martin Luther King Jr. have a holiday named after him? Given Langston Hughes' James Baldwin, Marlon Riggs, Audre Lorde's contributions, shouldn't they be legally happy with the people they loved?

Huey P. Newton was a revolutionary who called for heterosexual Black Panthers to assist the women's and gay liberation movements, because their struggles were legitimate freedom struggles. Yeshua / Jesus was a revolutionary of love who did not focus on who was what color, or who slept with who, or who loves who. He was concerned with (as ya'll should be concerned with) feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and keeping people from stoning other people, and lovin' yo' neighbor as yourself. Didn't say except if they're of color or gay.

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Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern as a twice-trounced, out-of-office, balding, aging, liberal peacenik. Talk about poisoning the well before the reader caught a glimpse of what McGovern had to say in a supposedly objective news article.

About 10 years ago, I wrote a letter to the *R-G* detailing the abysmal environmental and safety record of Wildish Sand and Gravel Company. (The Wildishes and Bakers have been buddies for many years). Don Robinson, the editorial page editor, refused to print my letter unless it included material he inserted that put it well over the word limit and that considerably weakened my criticism. Reluctantly, I agreed.

Although readers are currently fed way too heavy a diet of George Will, William Safire, Paul Greenberg, and other oily neocon cheerleaders, the *R-G's* editorial-page fairness, news coverage, and quality of writing have significantly improved. Associate Editor Jim Godbold, quoted in Alan Pittman's "News Ethics" article (*EW* 5/27), should be applauded for his candor and professionalism. His concern for ethical standards led me to reflect on how Eugene's locally owned daily newspaper under the leadership of Jackman Wilson, Paul Neville, Godbold, and others has improved over the years — and to realize, compared to other newspapers and despite its imperfections, what a gem it is.

*Jerome Garger  
Yachats*

## SEEING RED

The cornerstone of our democracy is our First Amendment Right to free speech and the right to demonstrate our opposition to government policies threatening our fundamental freedoms. In the current political climate, active protest against the war in Iraq, cuts in vital programs here at home, and the systematic dismantling of our Constitution and Bill of Rights is labeled unpatriotic. It makes me so angry, I'm seeing red.

During WWII Norwegian and Danish women wore red caps so everyone could see that the majority opposed what the Nazis were doing.

Now, a new effort to protest the Iraq war by wearing red on Friday has begun. I can't take credit for the reemergence of this idea, but I hope thousands of you feel as I do and will join in this protest. Imagine the impact of a Sea of Red every Friday in every corner of America.

*Ellen Hyman  
Eugene*

## REALLY LISTENING

As a mediator who supports peaceful solutions to conflict, I would love to see a more kindhearted tone in *Eugene Weekly's* articles and editorials. For example, I felt disappointed when I read the Slant column regarding "rumors flying like crazy about [mayoral candidate] Nancy Nathanson's future." Although I've never resonated with Nathanson's platform, I perceived your tone as mean-spirited or punitive. I would rather have seen you recognize a fellow human for her best intentions, and empathize with the pain of losing a race that she had undoubtedly cared deeply about.

In contrast, I felt energized by Kitty Piercy's letter. She spoke of "capitaliz[ing] on our talents and respect[ing] our differences, where we really listen to each other." I wish *EW's* writing could show more respect

for those differences. Would you consider a journalistic approach that shows equal regard (if not equal coverage) to all, including those who represent the conservative side? When language expresses judgment, criticism, or blame, it reinforces a sense of "us versus them" where "we" are right or good, and "they" are wrong or bad. In my experience, this way of thinking invites divisiveness and argument, rather than promoting amicable dialogue toward a mutually acceptable resolution.

A newspaper's editorial voice has the potential to discourage members of opposing factions from really listening to one another. By adjusting your style, I imagine you could not only expand your readership beyond "the choir" but you might inspire Eugene to develop into a kinder, stronger, and more unified community.

*Lisa-Marie DiVincent  
Eugene*

## TRUE HERO

Army Spc. Joseph Darby is the first person to solidly blow the whistle on the Bush/Cheney/Rumsfeld/Ashcroft pro-torture policy. All four of these immoral war criminals should be impeached so that the world will know that the U.S. has officially repudiated their fascist tactics of bombing, invading, occupation and torture. Until this drastic action is taken, the world will know that the government of the U.S. is not worthy of support by any of the other peoples of the world. It is wonderful to know that a person like Joseph Darby exists in our armed forces, a person who has the conscience and conviction required to tell the truth about dastardly deeds of many of his fellow soldiers, as prompted by their superiors in the chain of command. There is now hope that reforms will be put in place so that Iraq will be the last small nation attacked by a large nation overstuffed with mass death weapons. Joseph Darby has been true to his country in the best possible way.

*Bob Saxton  
Eugene*

*LETTERS POLICY: We welcome letters on all topics and will print as many as space allows. Please limit length to 250 words, keep submissions to once a month, and include your address and phone number for our files. E-mail to editor@eugeneweekly.com (please put "letters" in the subject line), fax to 484-4044, or mail to 1251 Lincoln, Eugene 97401.*

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