

# Landmark Marriages

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rate but not equal.

"When African Americans say the gay rights issue is not a civil right issue, I know that it is. For me, it's fighting all the battles and I think it's compounded, being interracial and being a lesbian couple," said Haywood.

Multnomah County has had a domestic partner registry since September 2000. More than 500 couples, some same sex and some opposite sex, have registered as domestic partners.

According to Basic Rights Oregon, a nonprofit agency dedicated to protecting equal rights for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the transgender community, "only marriage provides the same full legal protections to same-sex couples and their families as are afforded to opposite-sex couples."

"Marriage offers more than 1,000 federal and 500 state legal protections and rights, such as hospital visitation rights, inheritance rights and security protection for their children," according to literature from the organization.

"We've never had a commitment ceremony because we felt very strongly that we wanted the legal recognition," Bolyard said. "I'm not going to have a ceremony that's just fluff. I live in the United States, in the state of Oregon and I think it's a pretty big civil right issue. We don't have the same equal rights as heterosexual people and that's not right."

Aside from the legal benefits and civil recognition of a real marriage, Haywood

has another reason for wanting to marry.

"I believe in marriage, and I think family is important," she said. "I grew up with a background in love and marriage. My parents have been together for 35 years and Jamie's parents have been together even longer."

The couple says they absolutely plan to raise a family and consider adopting children someday.

Since their wedding last week, which was performed by Rev. Glenna Shepherd, pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church, the Defense of Marriage Coalition has filed a lawsuit to stop same-sex marriages in Multnomah County.

The conservative group says commissioners violated the Public Meetings Law by not opening the issue to a public discussion but their request for an emergency injunction to stop same-sex marriages was denied, Monday. As Oregonians await a formal opinion about same-sex marriages from Attorney General Hardy Myers, the hundreds of same-sex couples don't know if their marriages will stand, legally.

Bolyard and Haywood say they are up for the challenge.

"People haven't even gotten the race issue yet, so I don't think they're going to understand this totally in one day or one year," Haywood said. "This is going to be an uphill battle and we would not have gone down there (to the county building) if we weren't ready to face the challenges."

Bolyard added, "I hope it stands, but if it doesn't, we'll be right here, trying to do something about it."

*We don't have the same equal rights as heterosexual people and that's not right.*

— Jamie Bolyard, one many who got married last Wednesday



Jamie Bolyard (left) and Abby Haywood discuss their whirlwind wedding the day after receiving a marriage license from Multnomah County.

# Rights over Gay Marriage Divides

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blacks."

The Rev. Joseph Lowry agrees that American blacks should clearly sympathize with the gay community's fight for rights.

But Lowry, who founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with Martin Luther King Jr., said the sheer weight of U.S. history precludes too close a comparison.

"Homosexuals as people have never been enslaved because of their sexual orientation," he argued. "They may have been scorned; they may have been discriminated against. But they've never been enslaved and declared less than human."

Another issue is that of choice, said D'Army Bailey, a marcher with the armed Deacons for Defense and Justice and a founder of the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis.

"I don't have a choice to be black and, therefore, had to be faced with the human rights battle from birth," said Bailey, a judge in Memphis.

Keith Boykin, a gay, black man, scoffs at the notion that sexual orientation is a choice. But even if it were true, he said, that's not the point.

"I don't think that the black civil rights

movement is identical to the gay civil rights movement, but I don't think it really matters," said Boykin, president of the New York-based National Black Justice Coalition.

"I actually think that's a diversion. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter which group is most oppressed or whether they are identically oppressed. What matters is that no group be oppressed."

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, while supporting "equal protection under the law" for gays, called comparisons to the violent battles of the civil rights movement "a stretch."

"Gays were never called three-fifths human in the Constitution," he said during a recent appearance at Harvard Law School. "They did not require the Voting Rights Act to have the right to vote."

As a minister, Lowry of the SCLC said he is "in the valley of prayer on the issue of gay marriage." But, as a black man who was deeply involved in the struggle for equal rights, he is willing to "err on the side of inclusiveness, and not exclusion."

"I'm going to follow Jesus and say, 'Whosoever will, let them come,'" he said. "And I'm going to extend rights to all of God's children. And if I'm wrong, God will have to judge me."

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