

Queer Kids of Queer Parents Against Gay Marriage!

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It's hard for us to believe what we're hearing these days. Thousands are losing their homes, and gays want a day named after Harvey Milk. The U.S. military is continuing its path of destruction, and gays want to be allowed to fight. Cops are still killing unarmed black men and bashing queers, and gays want more policing. More and more Americans are suffering and dying because they can't get decent health care, and gays want weddings. What happened to us? Where have our communities gone? Did gays really sell out that easily?

As young queer people raised in queer families and communities, we reject the liberal gay agenda that gives top priority to the fight for marriage equality. The queer families and communities we are proud to have been raised in are nothing like the ones transformed by marriage equality. This agenda fractures our communities, pits us against natural allies, supports unequal power structures, obscures urgent queer concerns, abandons struggle for mutual sustainability inside queer communities and disregards our awesomely fabulous queer history.

Children of queers have a serious stake in this. The media sure thinks so, anyway. The photographs circulated after San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom's 2004 decision to marry gay couples at City Hall show men exchanging rings with young children strapped to their chests and toddlers holding their moms' hands as city officials lead them through vows. As Newsom runs for governor these images of children and their newly married gay parents travel with him, supposedly expressing how deeply Newsom cares about families: keeping them together, ensuring their safety, meeting their needs. These photos, however, obscure very real aspects of his political record that have torn families apart: his disregard for affordable housing, his attacks on welfare, his support for increased policing and incarceration that separate parents from children and his new practice of deporting minors accused – not convicted – of

crimes. As young people with queer parents we are not proud of the “family values” politic put forth by these images and the marriage equality campaign. We don’t want gay marriage activism conducted in our name – we realize that it’s hurting us, not helping us.

We think long-term monogamous partnerships are valid and beautiful ways of structuring and experiencing family, but we don’t see them as any more inherently valuable or legitimate than the many other family structures. We believe in each individual and family’s right to live their queer identity however they find meaningful or necessary, including when that means getting married. However, the consequences of the fight for legal inclusion in the marriage structure are terrifying. We’re seeing queer communities fractured as one model of family is being hailed and accepted as the norm, and we are seeing queer families and communities ignore and effectively work against groups who we see as natural allies, such as immigrant families, poor families, and families suffering from booming incarceration rates. We reject the idea that any relationship based on love should have to register with the state. Marriage is an institution used primarily to consolidate privilege, and we think real change will only come from getting rid of a system that continually doles out privilege to a few more, rather than trying to reform it. We know that most families, straight or gay, don’t fit in with the standards for marriage, and see many straight families being penalized for not conforming to the standard the government has set: single moms trying to get on welfare, extended family members trying to gain custody, friends kept from being each other’s legal representatives. We have far more in common with those straight families than we do with the kinds of gay families that would benefit from marriage. We are seeing a gay political agenda become single-issue to focus on marriage and leave behind many very serious issues such as social, economic, and racial justice.

How the marriage agenda is leaving behind awesome queer history.

We're seeing the marriage equality agenda turn its back on a tradition of queer activism that began with Stonewall and other fierce queer revolts and that continued through the AIDS crisis. Equality California keeps on sending us videos of big, happy, gay families, and they're making us sick: gay parents pushing kids on swings, gay parents making their kids' lunches, the whole gay family safe inside the walls of their own homes. Wait a second, is it true? It's as if they've found some sort of magical formula: once you have children, your life instantly transforms into a scene of domestic bliss, straight out of a 1950's movie. The message is clear. Instead of dancing, instead of having casual sex, instead of rioting, all of the "responsible" gays have gone and had children. And now that they've had children, they won't be bothering you at all anymore. There's an implicit promise that once gays get their rights, they'll disappear again. Once they can be at home with the kids, there's no reason for them to be political, after all!

Listening to this promise, we're a bit stunned. Whoever said domesticity wasn't political? Wasn't it just a few years ago that the feminists taught us that the personal is political? That cooking, cleaning, raising children and putting in countless hours of physical, emotional, and intellectual labor should not mean withdrawing from the public sphere or surrendering your political voice? After all, we were raised by queers who created domestic lives that were always politically engaged, who raised kids and raised hell at the same time. What makes Equality California think that an official marriage certificate is going to make us any less loud and queer? Oh wait. We remember. It's that sneaky thing about late liberal capitalism: its promise of formal rights over real restructuring, of citizenship for those who can participate in the state's economic plan over economic justice for all. Once you have your formal rights (like a marriage license), you can participate in the market economy and no longer need a political voice. Looking around at the world we live in, we're unconvinced.

We're also seeing another alarming story surface: If gays are ready to get married and have children, the AIDS crisis must be over! Gay men shaped up after AIDS hit, or at least the smart ones did. Those responsible enough to survive realized that they wanted children, and promptly settled down into relationships that were monogamous and that, presumably, carried no risk of HIV contraction. Come on. We reject all the moralizing about parenthood, responsibility, and sexual practice that goes on in this story. Besides the obvious fact that the AIDS crisis is not over, in the US or abroad, we realize that parenthood and non-monogamy aren't mutually exclusive. The gay marriage movement wants us to believe that you need a sperm donor or an adoption agency to have children, but we know that there are more ways to make queer families than any of us can imagine. We refuse the packaged and groomed history that writes out the many HIV+ individuals in our lives and communities who are living healthily, loving in monogamous and non-monogamous relationships and raising children. We challenge our queer communities to remember our awesomely radical history of building families and raising children in highly political, inventive, and non-traditional ways.

How marriage equality fractures our community and pits us against our strongest allies.

We believe that the argument for gay marriage obscures the many structural, social, and economic forces that break families apart and take people away from their loved ones. Just for starters, there's the explosion in incarceration levels, national and international migration for economic survival, deportation, unaffordable housing, and lack of access to drug rehabilitation services. The argument for gay marriage also ignores the economic changes and cuts to social services that make it nearly impossible for families to stay together and survive: welfare cuts, fewer after school programs, less public housing, worse medical care, not enough social workers, failing schools, the economic crisis in general.

We choose solidarity with immigrant families whom the state denies legal recognition and families targeted by prisons, wars, and horrible jobs. We reject the state violence that separates children from parents and decides where families begin and end, drawing lines of illegality through relationships. We see this as part of a larger effort on the part of the state to control our families and relationships in order to preserve a system that relies on creating an underclass deprived of security in order to ensure power for a few. We know that everyone has a complex identity, and that many queer families face separation due to one or more of the causes mentioned here, now or in the future. We would like to see our queer community recognize marriage rights as a short-term solution to the larger problem of the government's disregard for the many family structures that exist. As queers, we need to take an active role in exposing and fighting the deeper sources of this problem. We won't let the government decide what does and does not constitute a family.

The way that the marriage agenda phrases its argument about healthcare shows just how blind it is to the needs of the queer community. It has adopted marriage as a single-issue agenda, making it seem like the queer community's only interest in healthcare is in the inclusion of some members of two person partnerships in the already exclusive healthcare system. Health care is a basic human right to which everyone is entitled, not one that should be extended through certain kinds of individual partnerships. We know this from queer history, and if we forget it, we will continue to let our community live in danger. The question of universal healthcare is urgent to queers because large groups of people inside our communities face incredible difficulty and violence receiving medical care, such as trans people who seek hormone treatment or surgery, people who are HIV positive, and queer and trans youth who are forced to live on the street. Instead of equalizing access to health care, marriage rights would allow a small group of people who have partnered themselves in monogamous

configurations to receive care. If we accept the marriage agenda's so-called solution, we'll leave out most of our community.

Perhaps because the gay marriage movement has forgotten about the plurality and diversity of queer communities and queer activism, it has tried to gloss over its shortcomings by appropriating the struggles of other communities. We reject the notion that "gay is the new black," that the fight for marriage equality is parallel to the fight for civil rights, that queer rights and rights for people of color are mutually exclusive. We don't believe that fighting for inclusion in marriage is the same as fighting to end segregation. Drawing that parallel erases queer people of color and makes light of the structural racism that the civil rights movement fought against. The comparison is made as if communities of color, and black communities in particular, now enjoy structural equality. We know that's not true. We would like to see a queer community that, rather than appropriating the narrative of the civil rights movement for its marriage equality campaign, takes an active role in exposing and protesting structural inequality and structural racism.

Rather than choosing to fight the things that keep structural racism intact, the liberal gay agenda has chosen to promote them. The gay agenda continually fights for increased hate crimes legislation that would incarcerate and execute perpetrators of hate crimes. We believe that incarceration destroys communities and families, and does not address why queer bashings happen. Increased hate crimes legislation would only lock more people up. In a country where entire communities are ravaged by how many of their members get sent to jail, where prisons are profit-driven institutions, where incarceration only creates more violence, we won't accept anything that promotes prison as a solution. Our communities are already preyed upon by prisons – trans people, sex workers, and street kids live with the constant threat of incarceration. We believe that real, long-term solutions are found in models of restorative and transformative justice, and in building communities that can positively and profoundly deal with

violence. We challenge our queer communities to confront what we are afraid of rather than locking it up, and to join members of our community and natural allies in opposing anything that would expand prisons.

The gay marriage agenda also supports the expansion of the army, seemingly forgetting about all of the ways that the army creates and maintains violence and power. The gay marriage agenda fights to abolish the “don’t ask don’t tell” policy, promoting the military’s policy and seeking inclusion. We’ve thought long and hard about this, and we can’t remember liking anything that the US military has done in a really long time. What we do remember is how the military mines places where poor people and people of color live, taking advantage of the lack of opportunities that exist for kids in those communities and convincing them to join the army. We think it’s time that queers fight the army and the wars it is engaged in instead of asking for permission to enter.

Marriage doesn’t promise real security.

As the economy collapses, as the number of Americans without a job, without healthcare, without savings, without any kind of social security net increases, it’s easy to understand how marriage has become an instant cure-all for some. Recognizing that many in our community have lived through strained or broken relationships with their biological families, through the darkest days of the AIDS epidemic in the United States, through self-doubt about and stigmatization of their relationships, we understand where the desire for the security promised by marriage comes from. However, we see the promotion of gay marriage as something that tries to put a band-aid over deeper sources of insecurity, both social and economic. With marriage, the state is able to absolve itself of responsibility for the well-being of its citizens, as evidenced by the HRC’s argument that with gay marriage, the state could kick more people off of welfare. If the HRC got its way, the queers who do not want, or are not eligible for, marriage would be even less secure than before. We’re frightened by the way

the marriage agenda wants to break up our community in this way, and we're committed to fighting any kind of politics that demonizes poor people and welfare recipients. We challenge our queer communities to build a politics that promotes wealth redistribution. What if, rather than donating to the HRC campaign, we pooled our wealth to create a community emergency fund for members of our community who face foreclosure, need expensive medical care or find themselves in any other economic emergency? As queers, we need to take our anger, our fear, and our hope and recognize the wealth of resources that we already have, in order to build alternative structures. We don't need to assimilate when we have each other.

We're not like everyone else.

Everywhere we turn, it seems like someone wants us to support gay marriage. From enthusiastic canvassers on the street to liberal professors in the academy, from gay lawyers to straight soccer moms, there's someone smiling at us, eager to let us know how strongly they support our "right to marry," waiting for what should be our easy affirmation. And there seems to be no space for us to resist the agenda that has been imposed upon us. We're fed up with the way that the gay marriage movement has tried to assimilate us, to swallow up our families, our lives, and our lovers into its clean-cut standards for what queer love, responsibility, and commitment should look like. We reject the idea that we should strive to see straight family configurations reflected in our families. We're offended by the idea that white, middle-class gays – rather than genderqueers, poor people, single moms, prisoners, people of color, immigrants without papers, or anyone whose life falls outside of the norm that the state has set – should be our "natural" allies. We refuse to feel indebted or grateful to those who have decided it's time for us to be pulled out from the fringe and into the status quo. We know that there are more of us on the outside than on the inside, and we realize our power.

We write this feeling as if we have to grab our community back from the clutches of the gay marriage movement. We're frightened by its path and its incessant desire to assimilate. Believe it or not, we felt incredibly safe, happy, taken care of, and fulfilled with the many queer biological and chosen parents who raised us without the right to marry. Having grown up in queer families and communities we strongly believe that queers are *not* like everyone else. Queers are sexy, resourceful, creative, and brave enough to challenge an oppressive system with their lifestyle. In the ways that our families might resemble nuclear, straight families, it is accidental and coincidental, something that lies at the surface. We do not believe that queer relationships are the mere derivatives of straight relationships. We can play house without wanting to be straight. Our families are tangled, messy and beautiful – just like so many straight families who don't fit into the official version of family. We want to build communities of all kinds of families, families that can exist – that do exist – without the recognition of the state. We don't believe that parenting is cause for an end to political participation. We believe that nurturing the growth, voice and imagination of children as a parent, a family and a community is a profoundly radical act. We want to build networks of accountability and dependence that lie outside the bounds of the government, the kinds of networks that we grew up in, the kinds of networks that we know support single-parent families, immigrant families, families who have members in the military or in prison, and all kinds of chosen families. These families, our families, work through our collective resources, strengths, commitments, and desires, and we wouldn't change them for anything.