

As Charles Dickens wrote,

**"it was the best of times,  
it was the worst of times."**

**F**or the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender community, it certainly has been the best and the worst of times since we last gathered to celebrate Pride. In the last year, the pace of legal and social change has been nothing short of staggering.

- In late June of 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its 6-3 decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* that struck down all remaining sodomy laws on the books.
- In August of 2003, the Reverend V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire was elected as the first openly gay bishop of the Episcopal Church.
- New Mexico added sexual orientation to its non-discrimination laws, bringing the total number of states that protect gay, lesbian and bisexual citizens to 14. Efforts continue in several other states, including Delaware, Illinois and Washington.
- Two states, California and New Mexico, added gender identity to their non-discrimination laws. A total of four states now ban discrimination based on gender identity.
- California and New Jersey passed statewide domestic partnership laws, giving same-sex couples many of the same benefits and recognition as heterosexual married couples.
- A growing number of cities and counties enacted non-discrimination laws and domestic partner benefits. One city, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, became the first jurisdiction ever to enact domestic partner benefits through a public vote.
- The reality TV trend jumped on the GLBT bandwagon this year with a vengeance. A gay couple, Chip Arndt and Reichen Lehmkuhl, won "The Amazing Race 4" on CBS. "Boy Meets Boy," a gay dating show on Bravo, showed viewers that the differences between gay and straight men are not that great. And, of course, the Fab Five from Bravo's "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" became pop culture icons.
- And perhaps the biggest breakthrough of the year came in Massachusetts, where the Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the state must allow same-sex couples to legally marry.
- Since the Massachusetts decision, San Francisco opened the

floodgates and issued marriage licenses to nearly 4,000 same-sex couples. Other jurisdictions in New York, New Mexico and Oregon also began to issue marriage licenses. At the time of this writing, all such efforts have been suspended except in Oregon pending court review. Legal challenges to marriage laws are underway in New Jersey, California, Arizona and Indiana.

As a year-end political cartoon put it, 2003 was "off the Kinsey Scale." And it appears that the year ahead will continue that trend.

But none of this good news comes without bad news.

- The backlash against the Massachusetts marriage decision has led to consideration of a federal Constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriages, civil unions and domestic partnerships. President Bush has indicated that he will support the amendment. **For the first time in our nation's history, the Congress will consider and the President will support a Constitutional amendment that would enshrine discrimination in our Constitution.**
- More states continue to pass laws or amend their state constitutions to ban same-sex marriage. Ohio was the most recent at the time of this writing. The Massachusetts legislature has begun the process of amending the state constitution to overturn the court decision.
- An effort to overturn Florida's adoption law that bans gay men and lesbians from adopting children was rejected by a federal judge. Currently, Florida prohibits gay and lesbian adoption, Mississippi prohibits adoptions by same-sex couples, and Utah prohibits adoption by anyone who is not married.
- Hate crimes continue to plague our community. In Washington, DC, alone, five members of the transgender community were brutally murdered in the last 18 months.
- We continue to live in the shadow of HIV/AIDS. Across the nation, the number of gay men becoming HIV-positive continued to increase.
- And we continue to see people zealously opposed to our free-



dom resorting to more extreme measures to deny us our rights, to make us feel inferior, and to suppress the dreams and aspirations of new generations of GLBT Americans.

Clearly, we still face enormous challenges on the path to full equality.

In this election year, it is absolutely vital that we, as a community, flex our political muscle. We must register, we must vote, we must work to turn out the vote, we must donate to friendly candidates, and we must speak out for our rights!

Any candidate who wants the backing of the GLBT community should support the following:

- **"NO" on the Federal Marriage Amendment.** This un-American amendment would defile the Constitution and deny equal rights to every gay and lesbian American for decades to come.
- **The Employment Non-Discrimination Act.** ENDA will finally end discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment.
- **Repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."** GLBT people should be able to serve their country in the armed forces freely and openly. The witch hunts, the harassments and the violence must end.
- **The Permanent Partners Immigration Act.** This bill would provide same-sex partners of U.S. citizens and same-sex partners of lawful permanent residents the same immigration rights that legal spouses of U.S. residents enjoy. Until same-sex marriage is fully legal, we must have equal treatment for international same-sex couples. The United States remains the only western democracy without such recognition.
- **Full Funding for HIV/AIDS Research, Treatment and Prevention.** We must demand increased funding for HIV/AIDS treatment and social support services. We must demand increased funding to find a vaccine and a cure for HIV/AIDS. And we must demand funding for scientifically

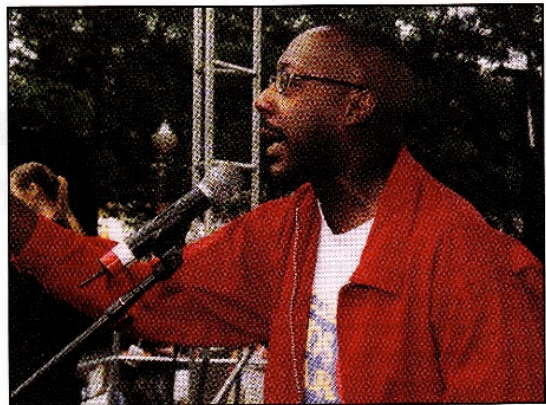


Photo: Denise Watkins

proven HIV prevention methods.

- **Increased Funding and Reporting of GLBT Health Issues.** The GLBT community's unique health care concerns should receive equal treatment from the government and health care providers.

Yes, "the best of times and the worst of times." Clearly, we stand at a turning point in the struggle for GLBT equality.

For those of us who have been in this struggle for a long time, we can see more good than bad at the moment. We are winning more and more victories. And our support among the younger generations who will lead our country throughout this century is tremendous and growing.

Throughout the more than 30 years of the GLBT civil rights movement, progress has always been achieved when we stopped hiding and started standing up for ourselves.

But we cannot let up now. Our goal of a healthy community with full legal and social equality is within our grasp.

And, one day, we will be able to look back on the first decade of the 21st Century as the beginning of the end of the bigotry and hatred that has kept us second-class citizens throughout history. ★

*Cornelius*

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