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felons. Using this logic it is easy to imagine why same-gender couples could be categorically deemed unworthy of acceptance into the "sacred" institution of marriage.

The *Lawrence* decision also paved the way for San Francisco's recent endeavors into the same-gender marriage issue. Mayor Gavin Newsom took the nation by surprise when he ordered the County Clerk's office to begin issuing marriage licenses to same-gender couples on February 12. The Mayor defended his actions, which run contrary to the California's Defense of Marriage Act, by saying that "California's Constitution is clear: discrimination is immoral, it is illegal and it is antithetical to our most cherished values: liberty and freedom."

The on-going battles in San Francisco and Massachusetts have certainly alarmed

conservatives, who have kicked up their campaign for the Federal Marriage Amendment, which would constitutionally deny same-gender couples to the right to marry, into high gear. The amendment would need support of two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress before it could be sent to the states for ratification. Whether or not the amendment has the support it needs in Capitol Hill to pass is unclear, but President Bush's recent endorsement of the legislation has undoubtedly added fuel to the fire. If the amendment does manage to leave Washington, it would face a lengthy ratification process by no less than three-fourths of the states. Although exactly three-fourths of the states, or 38, have a form of legislation or a constitutional provision outlawing same-gender marriage, it does not

necessarily follow that these same states would be as willing to tamper with the United States Constitution. However, these numbers are cause for alarm. National and State LGBTIQ interest groups are appropriately rallying members and allies to action. The NGLTF's Executive Director Matt Foreman even went so far as to equate Bush's support for the amendment as "a declaration of war" against LGBTIQ Americans.

Though the future for marriage in America remains murky, it is quickly becoming clear that the battle for marriage equality will dominate the national dialogue on LGBTIQ-related issues for some time. What happens in San Francisco and Massachusetts will not be the end of the story. Whatever the outcome, it is sure to have a tremendous impact on the future of the LGBTIQ socio-political movement for decades to come. •

### "What exactly are we fighting for?" from page 9

or a group of any size or mix of sexes: One man and four women, one woman and two men, etc."

How entirely absurd. As if there is a sizeable body of individuals fighting to secure the right of three or ten or thirty-six people to marry. And yet by creating this amalgamation of "others," and mixing the idea of same-gender civil marriages in with the idea of polygamy, these fundamentalists are doing what they love to do best: depicting any subgroup of people outside of "proper" Christian identity as deviant and equating consensual adult same-gender relationships with adultery or incest.

What this really boils down to is one of the most basic tenets of American politics, the indispensable separation of Church and State. Proponents of the Federal Marriage Amendment attempt to paint the institution of marriage as a scientific certainty. The Family Research Council, a key supporter of the Federal Marriage Amendment, describes marriage as, "a fundamental human institution that predates the law and the Constitution. At its heart, it is an anthropological and sociological reality, not a legal one. Laws relating to marriage merely recognize and regulate an institution that already exists."

Charming. Unfortunately, it's also nonsense. Nothing even remotely resembling the modern conception of marriage ever existed as anything but a social construction. The concept of a union between a man and woman was invented by human beings, not nature. It is therefore ridiculous to say that extending these rights to same-gender couples

is defying marriage's natural boundaries. Simply put, the Federal Marriage Amendment is aiming to integrate Christian doctrine into the Constitution, which is founded on a principle of the separation of church and state. At its core, it is not only an assault on a subcategory of the American citizenry, but also a threat to Americans who hold dear the ideals of liberty, equality, and justice.

So where does this leave those of us who identify as LGBTIQ or are otherwise committed to fighting for LGBTIQ rights? At first, the issue might seem deceptively simple. We must continue to push for advances such as the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling to strike down the ban on gay marriage. Our goal could be defined as working toward the legal recognition of same-gender marriages. After all, these are our rights and our loved ones we're talking about.

And yet there is a need to look at the bigger picture. Much of the dialogue concerning same-gender marriage is focused on the rights and privileges that marriage entails. This focus is appropriate because it is true that married couples enjoy benefits that non-married couples do not – including insurance policies and adoption rights. By denying same-gender couples the right to marry, they are being denied, albeit indirectly, many other rights. But should marriage entail those rights in the first place? Should people be forced to marry to gain access to rights, such as hospital visitation, that are completely unrelated to this institution? It seems that the fight for same-gender marriage is more complicated than many admit. Should we be allowed to marry? Yes. Should we – rather,

should *anyone*, be forced to marry to share in rights only granted to married couples? I would argue, no.

We must ask ourselves why it is that marriage is so compulsory in American culture. It is evident that the traditional conception of marriage is largely steeped in sexism. In historically being denied the means to financial autonomy, women *needed* to enter into marriage to survive. In doing so women were expected to relinquish independence. Today marriage generally connotes a more mutual partnership, but we cannot ignore the sexism in which this institution is rooted. Indeed many glaringly sexist elements of marriage persist to this day, such as the practice of women giving up their surnames. When asked why this persists most men and women will likely defer to the amorphous concept of "tradition." But traditions do not shed their historical meanings over time. Without radical change, marriage will remain an integral part of a system that defines women as second-class citizens.

We do not need to abolish marriage. But now that the LGBTIQ community has become so invested in issue, we need to know exactly what we are fighting for and why. To believe that legalizing same-gender marriage would diminish the need for a movement is dangerous. For those who choose to forego marriage, the compulsory role of marriage and the exclusive rights it entails remain problematic. We cannot ignore these facts. And furthermore, we must expand our vision of marriage to one not just inclusive of same-gender couples, but to one that is freed from all oppressive elements. In my mind, this is the only vision that is worth fighting for. •