

It's easy boys and girls... if someone offers to limit your right to marry whomever you choose, take a tip from us and ...

Just Say "No"

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Love and War

How is Proposition 22 breathing new life into politics as usual?

We're in the news again. It must be time for an election. Like clockwork: leap year, summer Olympics, elections, and through it all there's around-the-clock coverage of "gay" this and "gay" that. Look, Melissa and Julie are on *Larry King Live*. Did you hear? CNN says that McCain thinks he has gaydar! Isn't that cute?

And like clockwork, the Religious Right has gone to its secret vault and dusted off its other Bible—The Gay Agenda, a checklist of evil calculated to bring western civilization to its knees (so to speak). The joke is that our community can't agree on anything, including how to be the fifth horseman of the apocalypse. Military service, outing, sex, politics, and of course, marriage: we haven't agreed on what we want or how we'll get there, let alone constructed a master list. Over the years, ideological differences have led us to create hundreds if not thousands of little projects, each pursuing its own goals. That's not a bad thing: we are storming the castle from all sides. But it does mean we rarely work together on big issues—like hate crimes or poverty—and sometimes we work at cross-purposes. As a result many of us eschew politics altogether. That's not all bad, either: we need artists, too. In the end, though, this approach make us less a part of a larger community and more like tenants in an imaginary ghetto, where our only common experience is dodging bullets. Along comes Proposition 22 (its gang name is "The Knight Initiative"). Six months ago it was a small-time pusher on the outskirts of the playground. It has become public enemy #1.

What is it about this diminutive and (everyone agrees) redundant piece of legislation that has captured our attention and galvanized us in the pursuit of a common goal? As with all things political, the answer may be moot.

It is not likely that we are drawn to what

Prop 22 is, a piece of legislation that adds "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California" to state law. California has had a similar law on the books since the 1970s. It's hard to imagine we would spend much energy to defeat something that already exists.

The answer could simply be that Prop 22 is gay-bashing. Propaganda aside it's hard not to see that. If there was an initiative that said Only citizens of the United State are valid and recognized in California, we'd see it for what it is. Right? Okay, so maybe it's not that clear to the average voter, which may also explain why some in our community are asking what the big deal is.

Maybe it's because, if enacted, the only way to negate it will be via another ballot election or by being challenged and overturned in the courts. The legislature and the governor can't just vote and sign it out of existence, but there is a good chance the courts would overturn it. Prop 22 is a clear violation of the US Constitution's "full faith and credit" clause, which says (among other things) that every state is obliged to recognize the marriages performed in every other. For example, in some states it's legal to marry at 16, while in others you can't marry until you're 18—full faith and credit says both marriages are legal in every state. So if Vermont makes gay marriages "valid and recognized" in their state, the other 49 have to at least recognize those marriages, even if they don't allow them to occur in their own backyards. We could go to Vermont, get married, and California would have no choice but to offer us the same advantages, and disadvantages, of any other married couple. This is, in fact, the stated reason Prop 22 was drafted—to close that loophole. A state, however, can't override the US Constitution. So that doesn't answer the question, either. The law already exists and the courts will overturn it (which negates our need to put it on the ballot again), so why are we pouring so much energy into defeating it?

Perhaps it's because there's something more going on here than meets the eye. On



its surface, Prop 22 is just another gay-bashing, but there is a less obvious impact to its being on the ballot: it will bring conservative voters to the polls. Whether or not this was an intentional outcome is a matter of conjecture because the other side isn't talking and besides, it is the ends and not the means the No On Knight campaign has to address to win. This kind of collateral damage is evident only to seasoned politicians, so it's unlikely the average Joe or Jane has even seen it, let alone acted on it.

Whatever the reason, and most likely it's a combination of different things, we have come together. Even anti-marriage (of any kind) advocates are on board. Regardless of the outcome on March 7th, and whether we want to admit it or not, we do owe Sen. Knight and his followers a debt of gratitude. For better or worse, it is often the way in politics that we find our common ground in a common enemy, and with a revitalized "them" there is a revitalized "us." That is more than any legislation can take away.

How We'll Win

Grass roots is the politics of hearts and hands

Old fashioned grass roots politics means pressing flesh, kissing babies, and making the other guy look bad. How is that different from today's mega-campaigns? In grass roots politics,

you have to mean it: there are no second takes and no soft money to help you recover from a dip in the polls. Local campaigners knock on doors, sit at phone banks, and they always look like they were taken out of the dryer before the buzzer went off—it's a hard life. But the rewards are sweet. Ammiانو didn't win the San Francisco mayor's race, but he upset the apple cart by pulling together a campaign in less than six weeks with not even a quarter of the money Brown was spending, and forced a run-off as a write-in candidate. That's power. A lesser man would have given up. It's a good thing grass roots campaigning is so challenging—it weeds out the weak.

One of the other ways grass roots politics is set apart is that things happen quickly. Events are planned and executed in days rather than months, volunteers come and go as frequently as soundbites, and the stars rise and fall like, well, falling stars. No sooner did the No On Knight headquarters hire Leslee Hamilton to coordinate Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Mateo, and Santa Clara County efforts than she was reassigned to the state office and someone new was hired. And anyone can be a star in grass roots politics. There are internal squabbles, of

Monterey County No On Knight Coordinator Matt Friday (right) and his partner, Bruce Carlson. Photograph by mark krikava for Manifesto.

Full Disclosure

I hate it when I read something I'm assuming is "news" (read: impartial), only to discover that the publication has some vested interest in the story. So you know: *Manifesto*: has endorsed the No On Knight campaign, we're donating a full page ad to the local effort in next month's edition, and we've volunteered to take photos for their web page. We're not impartial and we're not pretending to be. If you'd like to see an argument in favor of Prop 22, read another newspaper.