

Gay marriage has nothing to do with Drag Queen Story Hour

Don't make the Respect for Marriage Act about more than my right to marry



by Bruce Bawer

The main reason why I lined up in the pouring rain to vote for Bill Clinton in 1992 was that he'd campaigned as a gay-friendly candidate. It wasn't just his promise to allow gays to serve openly in the military. It was that he talked about gays as if we were human beings and not demons – fully equal to our heterosexual brothers and sisters.

Back then, for gay Americans, every new election cycle meant one thing for sure: we'd have to gird ourselves for a fresh round of gay-bashing by presidential hopefuls. Clinton seemed to promise a new era in politics, when our very existence

would no longer be an issue.

Well, Clinton won the election. And four years later he signed the Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA.

“Defense” as in *defense from us*. DOMA defined marriage as the union of a man and a woman; it banned federal recognition of same-sex marriages; and it denied states the right to recognize same-sex marriages contracted in other states. (At the time, to be sure, same-sex marriage was not legal in *any* state.)

DOMA also made it illegal for gay Americans to sponsor their non-American partners for green cards. It was because of this provision of DOMA that I moved in 1999 to Norway, where my new Norwegian boyfriend and I entered into a domestic partnership – on the basis of which I was able to obtain residency. (In 2009, when Norway became the sixth country to permit same-sex marriage, we upgraded.)

In 2003, Massachusetts became the first US state to recognize same-sex marriage. Others followed. In 2013, in *United States v. Windsor*, the US Supreme Court overturned the section of DOMA that banned federal recognition of same-sex marriages; two years later, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Court ordered all states to recognize such marriages. DOMA was effectively dead.

Many conservatives were livid. They argued that marriage, under the US Constitution, is a state, not a federal, matter, and that the question of same-sex marriage should therefore be decided by voters in state-by-state referenda. True enough, except that when it comes to matters like residency visas for Americans’ foreign spouses, marriage *is* a federal matter.

In any case, the furor died down soon enough. Indeed, with amazing rapidity, the issue seemed almost to disappear. Today, about 70 percent of Americans support same-sex marriage. But after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* – handing the

otherwise bereft Democrats a terrific issue in the last election – Democrats warned that *Obergefell* was now also in play. Hence the [Respect for Marriage Act](#), which effectively digs up the corpse of DOMA and kills it all over again, and which President Biden (who as a senator voted for DOMA in 1996) signed into law Tuesday afternoon.

Like *Obergefell*, RFMA has been criticized on the right. Some have simply dismissed it as superfluous, suggesting that warnings about *Obergefell*'s vulnerability were overblown. Others warn that RFMA will strengthen the hands of gay couples who, for example, might want to sue Catholic adoption agencies for rejecting them as clients.

But some conservatives have simply embraced RFMA as an excellent opportunity to malign gay people after a long dry period. Admittedly, the bill came along at a time when so-called LGBT activists have provided the right with a great big juicy gay target: namely, the rapid spread throughout the country of “family-friendly” drag shows, at which toddlers are taught to twerk, and Drag Queen Story Hours, at which men in giant wigs, garish make-up and lewd attire read to schoolchildren about “gender affirmation.”

Back in the 1990s, most advocates for same-sex marriage, myself included, were political moderates, conservatives or libertarians. We saw marriage as a way of bringing gays in out of the cold – making them fully acknowledged members of society, encouraging them to form families and be solid citizens. All of which was anathema to the self-styled “queer” left, whose enmity for marriage – that bourgeois convention – rivaled that of the anti-gay right.

Over time, to be sure, as marriage proved to be a winning cause, the queer left claimed it as its own. But while those of us who'd first campaigned for it were ready to lay down our weapons after *Obergefell*, the queer left wasn't. They're not reformers, after all; they're revolutionaries. So when

transgenderism came along, they happily re-branded the gay-rights movement as a militant crusade to undermine reality itself.

While trans activists, then, pushed gender confusion on younger and younger kids, leftist gays concocted those “family-friendly” drag events – which, by striking directly at childhood innocence, couldn’t be more at odds with the spirit of same-sex marriage.

How depressing it was, then, to tune in to Tuesday’s RFMA signing ceremony and hear Kamala Harris refer not once but twice to “LGBTQI+” Americans; to hear Biden (always a pragmatist on this issue) described as a gay-rights hero; to hear Biden himself talk about Brittney Griner as if *she* were some kind of hero; to hear him cheer “gender-affirmation” surgery on children – believe it or not – as an act of love (and what does *that* have to do with same-sex marriage?); and to discover that one of the VIP attendees at this cynical Democratic Party pitch for gay votes was a drag queen called Marti Cummings who’s one of the leading perpetrators of those appalling Story Hours.

For many Americans, I know, same-sex marriage itself represents a mockery of a sacred institution. I’m sorry they feel that way. All I can say is that for me – a gay American who, because of DOMA, left my country to live with the man whom I met (coincidentally) exactly a quarter-century ago on Wednesday, and who’s eternally grateful to Norway for enabling us to remain together all these years – the real mockery is the White House’s linkage of my cherished right to marry with the obscenities of Drag Queen Story Hour and the surgical mutilation of children.

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