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OPINIONS

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Gay Marriage Promises Heartache for Democrats

by Nicholas von Hoffman

Thank you, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, for making sure George W. Bush gets re-elected. I suppose, Judicial Court, there was nothing else you could do but make your ruling when you made it. Nevertheless, you have kicked the Democrats in the shins, and the resultant bruise is not going to go away any time soon.

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Personally, I couldn't care less whether or not gay marriage is made legal. For a cynic like myself, a ruling outlawing all marriage of more than one person to him or herself would have been welcomed. Such a ruling would have required a mischievous imagination of the kind that seldom makes its way into the law courts. So Heather's two mommies are going to get hitched—and should this union cause Heather to scratch her little head, she's probably used to being puzzled by the (as they say) "nontraditional" components of her little nuclear family.

If what the pollsters tell us is correct, almost two-thirds of the population is opposed to same-sex marriage, although they are O.K. on same-sex barbershops. Assuming that the polls are correct, their conclusions are even more depressing for the opponents of George, because it's supposed to be the people under the age of 30 or so who support gay marriage—the people who don't vote very often, as



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contrasted to the 60 percent majority who do.

Do the Democratic candidates backtrack and try to wiggle-waggle into some kind of position that will keep the anti-gay-marriage hornets from stinging? It's a neat trick if they can do it. Howard Dean was the first into the field with his distinction between a "civil union" or "contract" or whatever and a "marriage." It's fine with me, but I have my doubts about how well it goes over with the people sitting in the pews of the Baptist and Catholic churches.

There are not many promising answers for Democrats on handling this issue. One would be to lay low and hope it blows over. Fat chance. The Republicans are not letting it drop off the TV screen. We can anticipate that they will booby-trap the campaign with references to it. If Mr. Dean is the nominee—something the G.O.P. apparently is praying for—he will get it with both barrels, since he's the only governor in the United States to sign a civil-union bill. The friends of gay marriage will do more damage to the Democratic cause than its enemies. Gay political groups take joy in sticking themselves in the faces of people who they know find them repugnant. A standard gay political tactic is to moon the bourgeoisie. It may actually work over an extended period of time, but it won't in the next election. It will, however, energize the Republican base. It will make sure that every last homophobe in every last swing state will march to the polls, eyes glinting with a steely righteousness.

It also may discourage an important part of the Democratic base from doing the same. Those sympathetic pro-gay tone poems which appear in *The New York Times* have been known to drive important elements in the Democratic base right up the wall. As evidence, I offer part of a communication from Hugh Pearson, an African-American journalist, to the newspaper once called the Old Gray Lady, which has now turned into a frisky, dangerously with-it babe. Mr. Pearson wrote that comparisons between slavery and the debate over gay rights "would be laughable were it not also so disrespectful of African-American history." A *Times* story which equated escaped slaves fleeing to Canada with gays going to Canada to be married was "completely ridiculous," Mr. Pearson wrote, asking if "there are any hound dogs trailing" the gay lovers on their way north. "Stop insulting African-Americans with ridiculous comparisons," he concluded.

Caucasian Democrats, whether or not they agree with anything Mr. Pearson says, should note that his opinions are not rare among African-Americans, and that they will not be jumping up and down to vote for Democratic candidates who make a big hoo-ha in favor of gay marriage. Not being allowed to marry another person of your gender is unequal treatment, but where on the list of injustices at home and abroad is a sensible person going to put this one? Not near the top, I venture.


Given what the Democrats have going against them in this upcoming campaign and what the Republicans have going for them, it would be a mistake to believe that the

carrying-on of the gay and lesbian lobby will be what takes the Democrats down to defeat. Their often obnoxious, in-your-face arrogance might take the D's down in a close election, but, realistically, the credit for the Democrats' impending destruction must go to the hundreds of millions of G.O.P. campaign dollars, the unseen mobilizations of corporate power, the lava flows of propaganda issuing forth from the think tanks onto the TV screens and op-ed pages, the ever-growing subservience of the ever-more-insecure middle class to promptings of the American plutocracy.

In the struggle for the nomination, Richard Gephardt has come up with a lesbian daughter. Time was when such a relative would have been hidden in the attic, but we are fast coming to the point that a gay or lesbian child may be *de rigueur* for someone running for high office. The young woman doesn't seem to be as much of a drag on Mr. Gephardt's chances as Mr. Gephardt is himself, but then all the candidates look more like mud scows than speedboats. Not that a couple of them might not make decent Presidents. The fact is that nobody looks Presidential until he or she is the President. If you do not yet have the job, you do not look as though you can handle it. Once you've got the job, you look as though you can, because we then have a positive need to believe that you are more able than you may be.

All the Democratic contenders look less able than I hope they are thanks to the debates, which are little more than pie-throwing contests. The format is calculated to show off all the candidates at their worst. Who wouldn't look like a jackass when asked: "In one minute, please explain what you would do about the deficit. The others here on the platform each will have 20 seconds to rebut you"? The candidates would do themselves and the process a favor if they would rebel and seize control of the debate format. They can't, of course: They have no more control over that than over the vagaries of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. Then again, who can say? Perhaps those thousands of gay Caucasian couples, returning joyfully from Canada with wedding bands on their ring fingers, will skip merrily to the polls and make the difference in expelling George W. Bush from the White House.


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