

# Pride committee, community groups still trying sort out June 8 march flap

by Fred Kuhr  
Bay Windows staff

Since this year's Boston Pride Day celebration brought over 150,000 people into the city on June 8, the local gay and lesbian community has been divided over two incidents involving nudity that occurred during the parade.

"The fault lines in the community's foundation are starting to crack open," according to Dena Lebowitz, chair of the Lesbian and Gay Political Alliance of Massachusetts. "Old debates are resurfacing about sex and what it means to be sex-positive, and how far we should push the envelope."

The controversy began during the parade when a man on stilts was spotted flashing members of the crowd along the route.

Also, two women on a bed were seen simulating sex acts.

None of those participants had registered with parade organizers.

Although no criminal charges have been filed, reaction from within the gay and lesbian community on both sides of the issue has been strong.

"Any faction that felt that these antics were the most effective use of the political process was ... naive," said Michael Greene, president of the Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights Lobby. "They owe us an apology."

Lebowitz disagreed. "For a community that relies so much on an industry of sex, it's hypocritical to be against women who were actually expressing a political message," said Lebowitz.

Both Greene and Lebowitz did agree, however, that the Pride parade should focus more on politics.

"We should use Pride Day to fight for the equality and fairness that we deserve," said Greene. "But that won't happen by just gathering one day a year, talking nice to each other, and having pretty floats." Greene added that to "ignore that part of the political process is a shame."

"The spirit of Pride has been deadened ... by a desire to assimilate in ways that exclude political expression," said Lebowitz. "Pride Day is our best opportunity to be political with the whole community."

Although people did take note of the incidents during the parade — many on-lookers booed the lesbians and the man on stilts — the events were then given greater exposure by conservative columnist Joe Fitzgerald in the Boston Herald.

"It's high time someone with a public platform calls that debauchery exactly what it is," Fitzgerald wrote in the June 11 issue, "which is evil, sick and wrong."

A media onslaught by local newspapers and television stations followed.

"The media is really bashing us to death with this," said Boston Pride co-chair Sabrina Taylor. "I've been saying to the straight press that there are so many different sides of [our community]... They are focusing too much on [these incidents], and they're not getting it."

Taylor explained that as an African-American lesbian, she understands how the media can misrepresent a particular group with negative images.

"[The media] is only there for the scandal that perpetuates the stereotype," said

Taylor. "It's very sad that the straight media has chosen to focus on this aspect of [the parade] rather than all the good we do."

"There has been far too much attention paid to an exception, a minority, compared to the vast majority of marchers," said Arline Isaacson, co-chair of the Massachusetts Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus.

"Joe Fitzgerald has focused on a few participants as though they represented the entire parade," Isaacson added. "That is patently absurd."

Greene, however, does not fault the media.

"If we came together to talk about important issues, like marriage and hate crimes, [the media] wouldn't have issues like these to report on," said Greene. "So what did [the media] have to report on? Women on a bed and a man on stilts."

Although Taylor said she is disappointed with the media, she is also disheartened by the community's reaction.

"We have to remember that we are one family, one community," she said.

When asked if the community is spending too much time talking about the incidents, she responded, "No, we need to deal with this."

Pride co-chair Gregg Fraker admitted, however, that "there are better issues" for the community to be discussing.

Although Taylor said that Pride's "signature statement is that everyone is welcome," she admitted that the organization could do a better job of getting that message across to the community.

"[The women on the bed] did not register because they didn't think we would have welcomed them," Taylor said. "We need to find a better way to be all-inclusive."

"I hope that we can learn to be respectful of everyone's point of view," added Fraker. "and come out a little more unified."

Sue Hyde, local organizer for the Washington, D.C.-based National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, is not optimistic about Pride's goal of inclusion.

"Splintering is not what I would prefer," said Hyde, "but the Pride Committee is in a bit of a box."

In order to get corporate sponsors and the money that comes from such sponsorship, according to Hyde, the Pride Committee must maintain its non-profit corporation status. However, that status restricts how political the events can be.

Hyde said that Pride Day activities have become "less about what activists want to see and more about what corporate sponsors want to see."

Steve Tierney, who served as one of Pride's two grand marshals, said that he does not agree with those critics who say that Pride is not political.

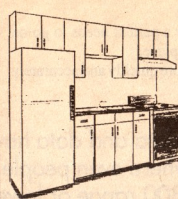
"To have 150,000 people out for the purpose of celebrating gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender lives is political," he said.

Tierney also said that the incidents did not offend him because the people involved did not represent him.

"Well, I'm not a banker and the Bank of Boston was there. That didn't offend me. I'm not a lesbian mother and [lesbian mothers] were there. Sexuality is just one more way of expressing ourselves, and it makes people uncomfortable," he said. ▼

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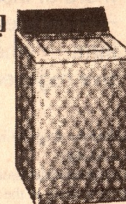
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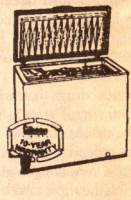
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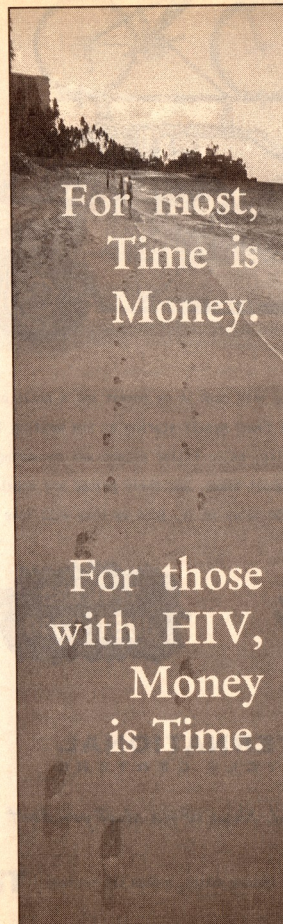
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