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|| LETTERS ||

Disturbed by "Gays first, then illegals"

In my eons as an activist, I have rarely, if ever, written publicly to criticize a colleague, but I couldn't remain silent after reading Jasmyne Cannick's disturbing piece on immigrants and gay rights ("Gays first, then illegals," April 4, http://www.advocate.com/letters_detail_ektid29282.asp). Cannick's framing of the current national debate over immigration as an "us versus them," pitting two overlapping communities against each, could not be more wrong-headed.

For one thing, gay people -- both citizens and non-citizens -- have a direct stake in both immigration fairness and ending anti-gay discrimination. Denied the freedom to marry, same-sex couples are deprived of the family reunification goals and options that modern immigration law has generally favored. Gay people in bi-national relationships, or gay immigrants seeking to live or remain in America, should not be forced to choose between their partner and their country, between remaining a citizen or becoming an "outlaw." There is nothing inconsistent about standing both for justice for immigrants and for the freedom to marry; in fact, the human beings involved are often one and the same.

And, not just as a gay person, but as an American, I see the need to stand up against hostile or unfair policies. Like many Americans, I am the grandchild of immigrants. I believe in our country's historic promise of pluralism and welcome. I have grave concerns about punitive measures, which to my mind include even a "guest worker" approach that, if not a speedy and reliable route to citizenship, would create a large group of disenfranchised, politically powerless second-class residents.

We gay people are already experiencing a right-wing campaign to amend constitutions so as to deprive us, a minority, of access to the political process and deny us equal rights. The last thing America needs is another such assault on minorities in this country. And the last thing the LGBT movement for social justice needs is a false either/or that pits us against our allies and, indeed, ourselves.

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